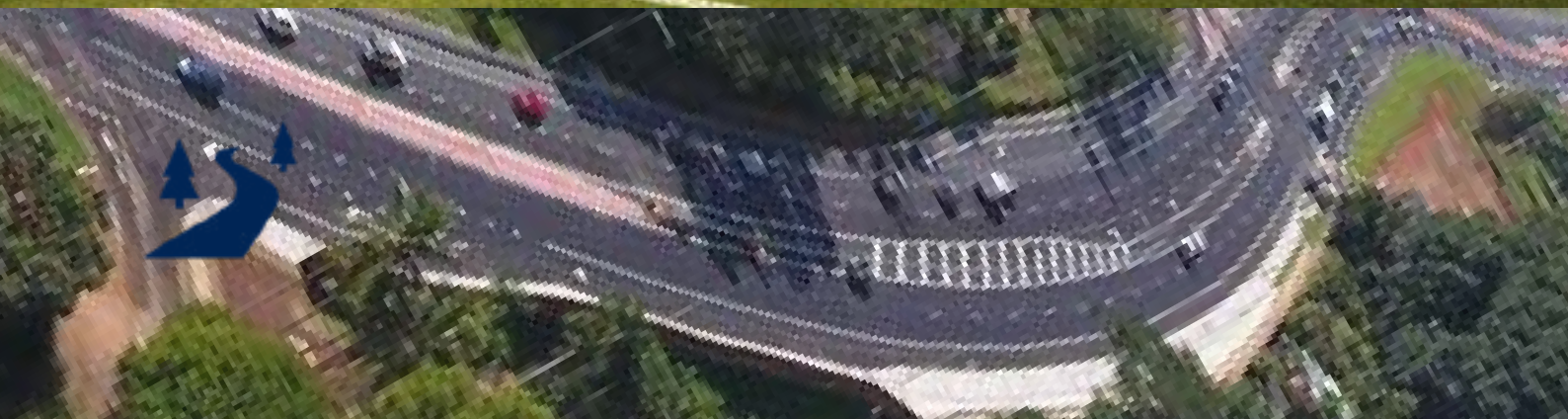




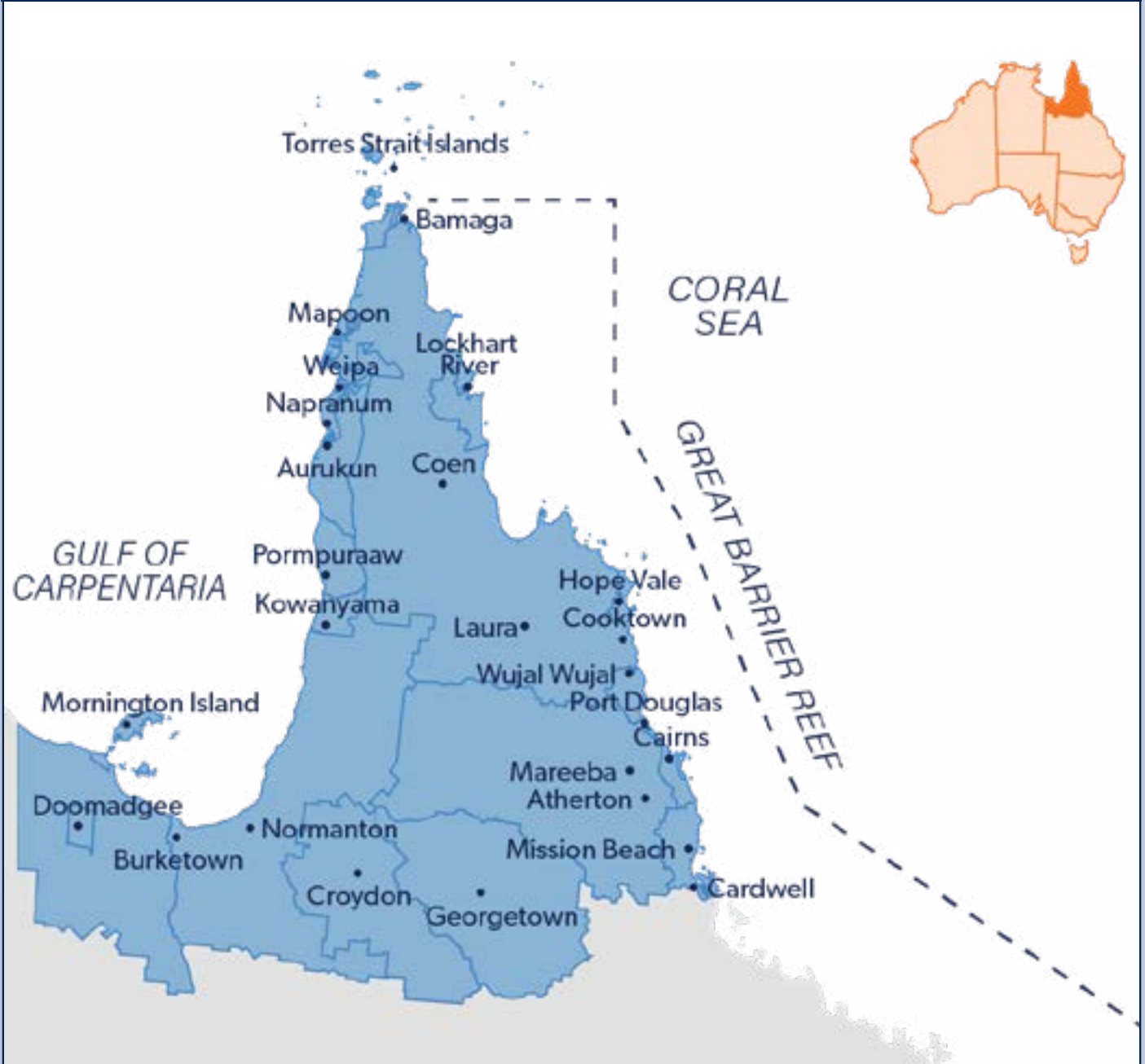
**ADVANCE  
CAIRNS**  
THE COMMITTEE FOR  
TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND

# 2026-2027 FEDERAL BUDGET SUBMISSION



# ABOUT

## ADVANCE CAIRNS' FOOTPRINT



## ABOUT CAIRNS AND FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND

Spanning an area of 380,000km<sup>2</sup>—larger than Japan—our advocacy footprint includes 26 local government areas from Cardwell to the Torres Strait and west to the Northern Territory border. With a population of more than 300,000 and counting, this is Queensland's largest and most diverse region, and northern Australia's economic engine.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## MARINE

### CAIRNS MARINE PRECINCT COMMON USER FACILITY



The Federal Government continues to partner with the Queensland Government to **expedite delivery** of the critical Cairns Marine Precinct Common User Facility.

## HOUSING

### SECURING CAIRNS HOUSING FOUNDATION PLAN



The Federal and Queensland governments make a joint commitment of \$150 million each toward essential trunk infrastructure required to unlock Stage 1 of the Mount Peter greenfield housing area in the Cairns Southern Growth Corridor.

## SPORT

### CAIRNS COMMUNITY, DEVELOPMENT AND HIGH PERFORMANCE CENTRE



The Queensland Government matches the Federal Government's commitment of **\$15m** for a joint commitment of \$30m (50:50) towards capital funding of the Cairns Community, Development and High Performance Centre at West Barlow Park.

## ROADS

### NORTHERN BEACHES ACCESS

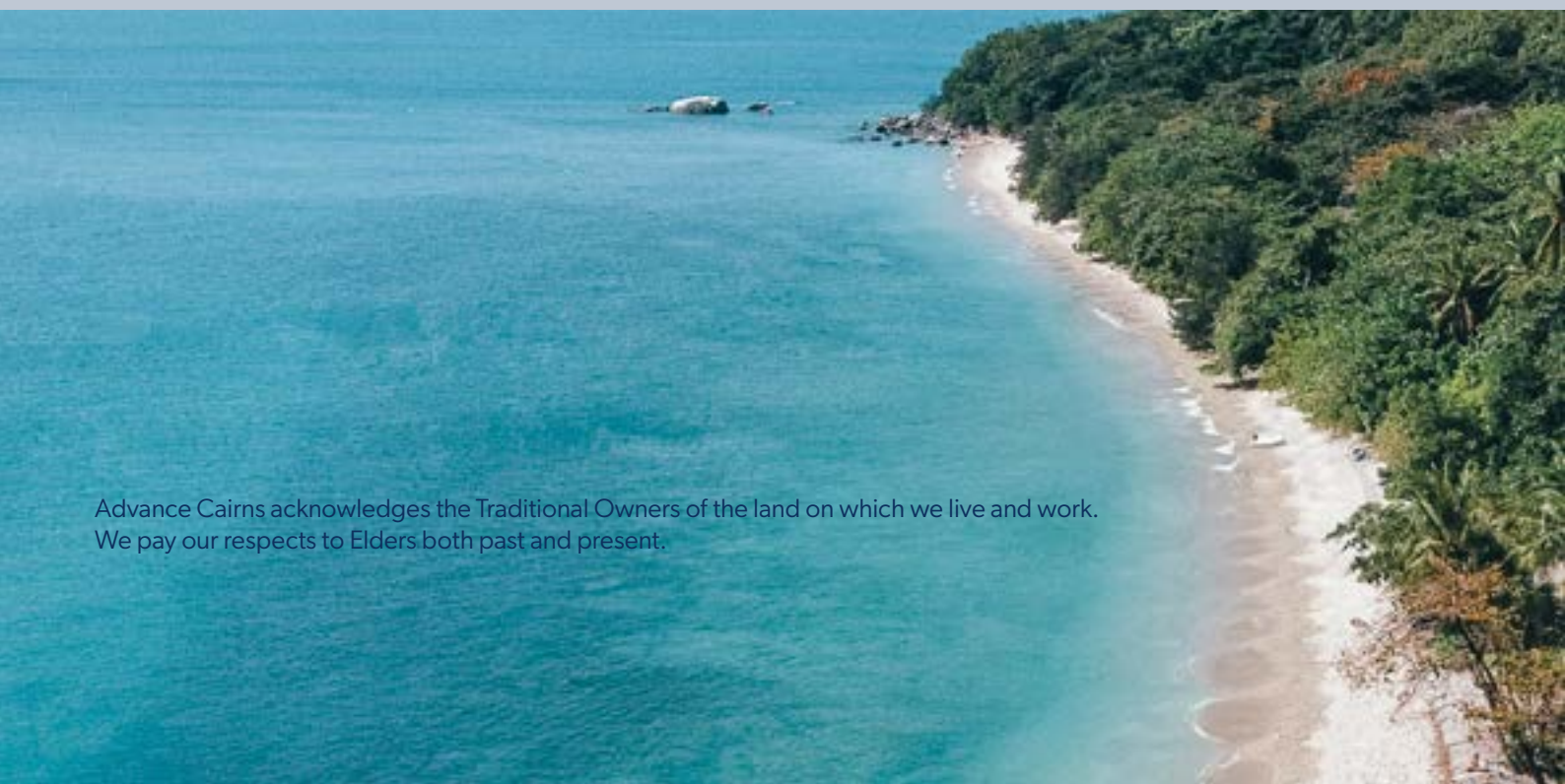


To expedite the work on the only **flood-free access route** between Cairns, the northern beaches, and the Kennedy Highway, Advance Cairns proposes that the Federal and Queensland governments combine the total investment of **\$359m currently allocated to upgrade the Captain Cook Highway** and **re-allocate** to the **Cairns Western Arterial Road (CWAR)**. This would result in a total spend of \$619m (Queensland Government \$131.8m / **Federal Government \$487.2m**) for CWAR.

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Advance Cairns acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we live and work. We pay our respects to Elders both past and present.



# FOREWORD

Far North Queensland is Australia's northern gateway and its most populous region in Northern Australia, playing a critical role in the nation's economic performance, regional resilience and strategic engagement with the Indo-Pacific.

Advance Cairns is the peak independent, non-partisan advocacy and economic development organisation for Far North Queensland. We represent the collective interests of industry, business and the community, working to strengthen the region's economy, improve liveability and ensure Far North Queensland is positioned to contribute meaningfully to Australia's long-term prosperity.

The region is home to one of the nation's most diverse regional economies. While tourism remains a significant economic driver, Far North Queensland also supports advanced manufacturing, agriculture, marine industries, construction, education, health and defence-adjacent capabilities. Sustained population growth over the past two decades has reinforced the region's importance, while also placing increasing pressure on housing, transport and enabling infrastructure.

Far North Queensland's geographic position at the top of the continent gives it growing national strategic significance. The region's proximity to the Pacific, strong people-to-people links and its role as a hub for engagement with neighbouring countries underscore its importance to Australia's economic security and regional relationships.

Against this backdrop, Advance Cairns presents this submission to the Australian Government's 2026–27 Budget. The submission focuses on a small number of nationally significant, investment-ready initiatives that address immediate capacity constraints while supporting long-term economic diversification and resilience.

The submission seeks Federal support across four priority areas:

- Marine infrastructure – the Cairns Marine Precinct Common User Facility
- Housing – enabling trunk infrastructure for the Mount Peter Southern Growth Corridor
- Roads – building a resilient and flood-resistant transport route to Cairns' northern beaches
- Sport and community infrastructure – the Cairns Community, Development and High Performance Centre

Together, these priorities will support workforce growth, improve productivity, strengthen liveability and ensure Far North Queensland can continue to accommodate population growth while delivering economic returns for Australia.

Jennifer Spilsbury  
CEO Advance Cairns



# ADVOCACY HIGHLIGHTS

Advance Cairns acknowledges and thanks the Federal Government for its ongoing support for Far North Queensland and its commitment to drive growth, resilience and diversity throughout the regional economy. Support for these transformational projects below is evidence of this and we look forward to continuing to work with the government to ensure timely delivery of these projects

## KENNEDY DEVELOPMENTAL ROAD



**10.8km**  
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT  
COMMITMENT

**SECURED ROAD SEALING**

The Kennedy Developmental Road is a key strategic link from northern Australia to the southern freight hubs of Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne. The road is central to tourism, horticulture, freight and cattle movement through Queensland's north and north-west region.

From mid-2017 to 2020, under the Northern Australia Roads Program, the Department of Transport and Main Roads completed sealing 42km of the Kennedy Developmental Road (The Lynd – Hughenden). In 2018, \$50m was committed under the Roads of Strategic Importance to progressively seal a further 48km of the Kennedy Developmental Road (The Lynd – Hughenden), construction was completed in late December 2023.

Advance Cairns welcomed the Australian Government's announcement in February 2025 that the final 10.8km of the Kennedy Developmental Road will be sealed completing the White Cliffs realignment. This will be of significant economic benefit to the region, providing a direct transport corridor for primary producers to freight goods from FNQ to our southern markets faster and more reliably than the existing Bruce Highway route.

Sealing the Kennedy Developmental Road in its entirety is a priority project that will provide a year-round, all-weather route to southern markets for agricultural produce and livestock, reducing costs and increasing safety for all road users.

# CQUNIVERSITY CAIRNS CBD CAMPUS

**\$77.5M**  
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT  
COMMITMENT

**SECURED** UNIVERSITY EXPANSION



Since commencing on-campus delivery in Cairns in 2016, CQUniversity has experienced significant expansion.

Now operating across four leased sites in the city, the University requires new purpose-built facilities. As part of *CQUniversity's Community Impact Plan*, a proposal to deliver a permanent, purpose-designed Cairns CBD campus was developed in 2019. At the original proposed scope, the new campus will provide expanded research capabilities, increase course offerings and increase CQU's capacity to engage more local students, supporting higher education pathways for students from low socio-economic and/or disadvantaged backgrounds.

Through these objectives, CQUniversity aims to reinforce its commitment to the community, facilitate regional development, and provide diverse educational opportunities aligned with the evolving needs and workforce requirements of Cairns and its surrounding areas.

A bi-partisan \$27.5 million commitment to fund the second stage of the new CQUniversity Cairns CBD campus has now been made building on the \$50 million already provided at the last federal election.

The additional funding will enable the expansion of the campus to deliver critically needed allied health degrees, including a new medical imaging program, and significantly boost the region's ability to grow its own workforce by increasing the campus's capacity to service up to 6000 students across all modes of study.

Construction on the first stage of the CQUniversity Cairns campus will commence with a view to have the campus delivered in time for a Term 2, 2028 opening and student intake.



# CAIRNS MARINE PRECINCT

The Cairns Marine Precinct (CMP) is a critical enabler of the Far North Queensland economy and is central to building a sustainable, diversified future for the region. A leading maritime maintenance, repair and overhaul destination for vessels nationally and internationally, the precinct is home to a large and diverse marine sector including Defence and Border Force, a world-renowned tourism-reef fleet, commercial fishing, towage and shipping, specialist boat builders and an active cruising yacht squadron, while also playing host to superyachts and cruise liners visiting the region.

The precinct also offers education and training pathways with the Great Barrier Reef International Marine College delivering various programs to support the future maritime workforce. As the nation's northern gateway to the Pacific, the CMP, plays a key role in capacity and relationship building across the Pacific. The capacity of the precinct will also meet the increased demand to service and maintain the new army landing craft for the Australian Army as part of the investment in Defence in Northern Queensland.

## COMMON USER FACILITY

ELECTORATE: CAIRNS

The Cairns Marine Precinct (CMP) has continued to face rapidly growing demand domestically and globally, with maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) providers operating at or near capacity and struggling to meet market demand<sup>1</sup>.

Federal and state governments have committed \$387m towards the delivery of a maritime Common User Facility (CUF) to increase the capacity and capability of the CMP, allowing the precinct to capitalise on future defence and maritime industry business. Since the development of the state government's detailed business case in 2022, ownership and delivery of the project has transitioned to Ports North in late 2024, which necessitated a review into the estimated cost and scope of the project. This review subsequently identified several assumptions and estimates which were inconsistent with the requirements of the project, and required a recast of the overall project cost. This revised estimate was considerably higher than the currently committed \$387m.

Ports North is now undertaking a reassessment of scoping and cost estimates and is exploring potential private sector co-funding models to ensure the delivery of a commercially viable CUF which meets industry needs.

Providing a platform for the region's maritime maintenance, repair and overhaul sector to grow is key to the future economic diversification of the region. The Cairns Marine Precinct is poised to foster this growth, possessing competitive advantages including its geographic proximity to the Indo-Pacific, home to HMAS Cairns and one of four strategically located Regional Maintenance Centres (RMC) supported by a strong, established industry. The recent Defence announcement of a project to build more than

two dozen landing craft under Project Land 8710 for the Australian Army will see some of these vessels based in Queensland. The Cairns Marine Precinct is best-placed to homeport these vessels and provide the critical maintenance, repair and overhaul required.

*"This region is a strategic and economic centre for northern Australia and the Common User Facility is at the heart of that critical role"* – Hon Catherine King MP, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

In 2023, the *Defence Strategic Review* (DSR) observed that Australia was facing the most challenging strategic circumstances since the Second World War<sup>2</sup>. Subsequently, the *National Defence Strategy* highlighted the further deterioration of our strategic circumstances, in line with trends identified in the DSR<sup>3</sup>. Central to these documents was the importance of northern Australia – increasing the Australian Defence Force's ability to operate from Australia's northern bases and deter potential adversaries from projecting power against the nation. As Australia's most northern naval base on the eastern seaboard, HMAS Cairns plays a key strategic role in the nation's defence capability and is currently undergoing a \$240m upgrade to its facilities and deliver vital infrastructure required to accommodate the new Arafura-class Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs).

In addition to HMAS Cairns, the precinct is home to the first of four strategically located Regional Maintenance Centres

(RMC) established under Defence's Plan Galileo. RMCs are tasked with the ongoing maintenance and sustainment of multiple classes of Royal Australian Navy fleet. Australia's plan to double its surface fleet has significant impacts for Cairns which will see a 200% increase in tonnage by 2048<sup>4</sup>.

Cairns' strategic importance and longstanding status as the premier maintenance and sustainment destination for the region has also seen a significant increase in visitation from foreign Defence and border force vessels with this trend only expected to escalate. The CUF would unlock this increased visitation, supporting and strengthening Australia's strategic, partnerships, alliances and dialogues such as AUKUS, the QUAD and deepen our strong relationship with the Pacific.

The economic and strategic benefits created by the delivery of the maritime Common User Facility within the Cairns Marine Precinct cannot be overstated. A functional and commercially viable CUF is essential to meet the future capability and capacity requirements to service vessels across the maritime sector (Defence, civil, commercial and tourism).

<sup>1</sup> PricewaterhouseCoopers (2022). Cairns Marine Precinct Infrastructure Investment Detailed Business Case.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Defence, *Defence Strategic Review*, Australian Government, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Defence, *National Defence Strategy*, Australian Government, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Defence, *Plan Galileo and the Naval Shipbuilding Plan: Fact Sheet*, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Queensland Government, *Far North Queensland Draft Regional Plan 2025*, P 143.

## OPPORTUNITY

- *Strengthen and diversify FNQ economy, building a more sustainable future*
- *Increase capability, capacity and competitiveness*
- *Protect Australia's national and geopolitical interests*
- *Solidify Cairns as a leading maritime MRO destination*
- *Boost job creation and secure future of more than 5,000 jobs supported by the Cairns maritime industry*
- *Attract investment and re-investment*
- *Supports the:*
  - *2024 National Defence Strategy*
  - *2023 Defence Strategic Review*
  - *Queensland Defence Industries 10-year roadmap*
  - *Queensland Superyacht Strategy 2018-2028*
  - *Provide critical support for the Australian Army's Land 8710 program*

## PROJECT STATUS

\$387m state and federal funding committed.

Ports North has been undertaking substantial work reviewing the scope and costs of the project as well as exploring potential private sector funding models.

The CUF design, and plans for relocation of assets required to make way for the project, is currently underway.

The Cairns Marine Precinct and CUF has been identified in the Queensland Government's recently released *Far North Queensland Draft Regional Plan* as a key strategy to support the "diversification of the region and will be influenced by maintenance and sustainment opportunities from the Royal Australian Navy<sup>5</sup>."



## RECOMMENDATION

The Federal Government continues to partner with the Queensland Government to **expedite delivery** of the critical Cairns Marine Precinct Common User Facility.



## FNQ HOUSING CRISIS

Like many communities across Australia, Far North Queensland desperately requires solutions to address the housing crisis currently being experienced, a problem made even worse in the wake of household displacement caused by ex-Tropical Cyclone Jasper. Vacancy rates across Far North Queensland are among the tightest across not only the state, but the nation – Cook (0.0%), Mareeba (0.27%), Tablelands (0.24%) and Cairns (0.76%)<sup>1</sup>. This crisis is amplified across the economy with housing a critical enabler of growth. This shortage of dwellings places additional pressures on the region’s ability to attract and retain staff across the board. Driven by a combination of factors, including population growth, limited housing supply, rising construction costs and labour shortages, Australia’s housing crisis is a multifaceted issue requiring interventions from all levels of government, the private sector and not-for-profit sector.

## SECURING CAIRNS’ HOUSING FOUNDATIONS PLAN

ELECTORATE: MULGRAVE

Cairns Regional Council is actively working to ensure there is an appropriate supply of approved land available for development within existing serviced areas in addition to the provision of incentives for community housing providers who build social or affordable housing and for private sector proponents delivering infill housing development within the Cairns City, Cairns North, Gordonvale and Babinda centres.

While addressing immediate housing needs is critically important, medium to long term planning is essential to ensure similar situations can be avoided in the future. This means taking a collaborative approach to planning and infrastructure delivery for key areas where housing and economic development will take place.

Advance Cairns welcomed the declaration of The Mount Peter Priority Development Area (PDA) on 30 July 2025. The Mount Peter PDA Interim Land Use Plan (ILUP) is now in effect and is currently guiding development assessment and early infrastructure sequencing discussions between Council, Economic Development Queensland (EDQ) and industry stakeholders.

The PDA covers approximately 2,650 hectares of land in the Southern Growth Corridor in the Cairns Regional Local Government Area. The area is bounded by the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area to the west, the Bruce Highway to the east and extends from the existing community of Edmonton in the north to Mackey Creek in the south.

The Mount Peter PDA was declared at the request of the Cairns Regional Council to provide a streamlined planning framework that accommodates the future housing needs of the Cairns region. The area is recognized as a future growth area in the *Far North Queensland Draft Regional Plan 2025*.

The Mount Peter PDA will:

- support the delivery of the *Securing Our Housing Foundations* plan to give more Queenslanders a place to call home.
- establish a streamlined framework for land use, infrastructure planning and development assessment in the area,
- facilitate the construction of the essential infrastructure necessary to support new homes and jobs and enhance liveability in the region; and
- facilitate job creation and enhance local economic development by providing homes in proximity to the Cairns South State Development Area (SDA).

### PROJECT STATUS

With the declaration of the PDA, funding for essential infrastructure is now. Independent cost analysis commissioned by Council has identified about \$450m in new and upgraded trunk infrastructure is required to facilitate the next stage of development in the Mount Peter Southern Growth Corridor.



## OPPORTUNITY

- Unlock medium to long term housing development
- Provide fast tracked development and infrastructure delivery (road networks, public transportation, utilities etc) through a simplified planning and approval process
- Support initiatives outlined in the Queensland Government's *Securing our Housing Foundations Plan*
- Deliver diverse housing options, including affordable and social housing, to meet the needs of all residents, particularly those in lower-income brackets and vulnerable cohorts
- Formalise a collaborative approach between state and local government for planning and infrastructure delivery to ensure this takes place in a coordinated way
- Complement the existing Cairns South State Development Area (located adjacently) which is earmarked for regionally significant industrial development/employment
- Maximise potential for 'living and working locally' shortening commute times and enhancing liveability

## RECOMMENDATION

The Federal and Queensland governments make a joint \$150 million commitment each (\$300 million total) toward essential trunk infrastructure required to unlock Stage 1 of the Mount Peter greenfield housing area in the Cairns Southern Growth Corridor.

Stage 1 will enable approximately 3,800 new homes to be delivered and establish the groundwork for the long-term delivery of around 18,500 homes in line with the *Securing Our Housing Foundations plan*.



## THE LEADING DESTINATION FOR WOMEN'S SPORT IN AUSTRALIA

Cairns is ambitiously positioning itself as a vibrant hub for women's sports in its quest to become the leading destination for women's sports in Australia. This vision is part of an innovative strategy to enhance the region's profile and drive economic development through sports tourism and community engagement.

The relocation of the North Queensland Cowboys NRLW Program, along with the construction of the Cairns Community, Development & High Performance Centre (CDHPC), will help realise this vision by securing the first national women's sporting team for the Far North. This initiative will bring significant economic benefits, create jobs, and enhance community wellbeing.

Cairns Regional Council has unveiled a bold vision to position the Cairns Region as the leading destination for women's sport in Australia. The CDHPC will address the current lack of High Performance training facilities in the Far North region along with supporting the promotion and attraction of professional women's sporting teams.

## CAIRNS COMMUNITY, DEVELOPMENT AND HIGH PERFORMANCE CENTRE

ELECTORATE: CAIRNS

The Cairns Community, Development and High Performance Centre (CDHPC) is an important development for the Cairns Major Events Precinct. The Cairns Major Events Precinct is a strategic parcel of land covering an area of approximately 26 hectares located less than one kilometre from the Cairns CBD, adjacent to Barlow Park Stadium and across the road from the Cairns Showgrounds.

The precinct is comprised of a number of component parts which together, provide a strong foundation to further develop the site as a major events precinct of national significance in the lead up to the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The CDHPC at West Barlow Park

will complement the ongoing upgrades at Barlow Park and elevate Cairns' position as a hub for athletes, teams, and events.

Cairns Regional Council approved a landmark partnership with the North Queensland Cowboys in October 2025. The proposed 30-year lease to the Cowboys will enable the club to construct and operate the new facility, which will include:

- A high-performance gym and recovery/rehabilitation zone
- Medical and physiotherapy suites
- NRLW and Northern Pride locker rooms



- Education and community spaces including a lecture theatre and multimedia studio
- A café and function room
- A skills and drills field linked to the existing West Barlow Park field

The CDHPC requires capital funding of \$30m. In April 2025 the Australian Government committed \$15m. In addition, the North Queensland Cowboys will operate the facility and will commit \$10m in funding for operational and administrative costs providing a sustainable foundation into the future.

### OPPORTUNITY

The economic impact of these initiatives is significant, not only during construction but also in the future.

Construction of the CDHPC:

- \$34.7m construction boost
- \$12.5m contribution to GRP
- 89 FTE local jobs
- Ongoing operations of the NRLW team and the CDHPC:
- \$12.6m contribution to the Cairns LGA economy annually
- \$5.9m contribution to annual GRP
- 62 FTE jobs ongoing
- Cement the region's reputation as the preeminent destination for women's sport in Australia
- Build the region's reputation as a sporting and events destination (including for high performance training), thereby delivering jobs and economic growth through increased visitation
- Enhance health and wellbeing outcomes through increased community participation in a variety of sports
- Build athlete capability and capacity in the lead up to,

and beyond the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games

- Increase public amenity and activation of a key site located within close proximity to the Cairns CBD
- Enhance liveability which positively contributes to workforce attraction and retention

### PROJECT STATUS

Design for the CDHPC has been completed and is awaiting development approval.

Cairns Regional Council has approved a partnership with North Queensland Cowboys with a proposed 30-year lease. Capital funding of \$30m is required to deliver the project.

### RECOMMENDATION

The Queensland Government matches the Federal Government's commitment of \$15m for a joint commitment of \$30m (50:50) towards capital funding of the Cairns Community, Development and High Performance Centre at West Barlow Park.

The North Queensland Cowboys will support the project with a \$10m commitment in operational and administrative costs ensuring a sustainable foundation for the centre well into the future.





## NORTHERN BEACHES ACCESS

The road network spanning Cairns' northern beaches is of regional significance and remains essential to Far North Queensland's future prosperity and liveability. A cohesive, effective and resilient road network between Cairns' CBD and northern beaches guarantees access to vital healthcare, education and community services in addition to resident, tourist and trade and business connectivity.

### CAIRNS WESTERN ARTERIAL ROAD, REDLYNCH CONNECTOR TO CAPTAIN COOK HIGHWAY

ELECTORATE: BARRON RIVER

The Cairns Western Arterial Road (CWAR) is central to freight, commuter and tourism traffic and supports resilience and connectivity when the Captain Cook Highway, Cairns CBD to Smithfield is flooded.

The CWAR is considered a priority infrastructure project as the road is heavily congested daily, with about 42,000 vehicles using the road each day<sup>1</sup>. Further, when the Captain Cook Highway floods in the event of a natural disaster or during wet season, **CWAR is the only flood-free access route between Cairns, the northern beaches, and the Kennedy Highway.**

Upgrading the CWAR is essential to connecting Cairns' freight routes with the region's premier areas of agricultural production (Tablelands, Cape York Peninsula, and Mossman), while also meeting demand for daily commuter traffic. At the 2020 Queensland state election, the Queensland Government pledged \$60m to upgrade the CWAR. In the 2021-22 Federal Budget, the Australian Government committed a further \$240m to upgrade the remaining single lane sections of the CWAR. Despite the initial commitment made almost four years ago and a total of \$300m in funding committed to complete the CWAR with work originally slated to begin in late 2022<sup>2</sup>, construction is yet to commence.

Advance Cairns notes that proposed work on the Captain Cook Highway is also stalled, and while both are important projects, it is essential to have at least one road commenced now.

#### OPPORTUNITY

- Contribute to the growth of the regional economy, improving connectivity
- Enhance disaster and climate resilience
- Decrease travel time while increasing network reliability and efficiency
- Improve safety
- Encourage use of public and active transport

#### PROJECT STATUS

In the 2023-24 Federal Budget, the Australian Government announced a strategic review of its investments across Australia through its Infrastructure Investment Program (IIP).

The Department of Transport and Main Roads is currently working towards meeting the Australian Government's requirements to facilitate the release of the construction funding.

In the meantime, the Queensland Government has released funding for preparation works for Section 1 (Lake Placid Road to Captain Cook Highway).

Preparation works for Section 1 commenced in late 2024.

The Queensland Government has invested \$2m to conduct a planning study and upgrade strategy is expected to be completed by mid-2026.

<sup>1</sup> Infrastructure Australia, Cairns Western Arterial Road capacity, last updated April 4, 2023, <https://www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/map/cairns-western-arterial-road-capacity>

<sup>2</sup> Mark Bailey, "Work wraps up on Harley Street intersection upgrade"



## RECOMMENDATION

To expedite the work on the only **flood-free access route** between Cairns, the northern beaches, and the Kennedy Highway, Advance Cairns proposes that the Federal and Queensland governments take the total investment of **\$359m currently allocated to the Captain Cook Highway** and **re-allocate to the Cairns Western Arterial Road (CWAR)**. This would bring a total spend of \$619m (Federal Government \$487.2m / Queensland Government \$131.8m ) for CWAR.

Advance Cairns urges the Federal and Queensland governments to work together to ensure requirements necessary for the release of the Federal Government's financial contribution towards construction funding are met as a matter of priority and, subsequently, see to the **expedited delivery** of the Cairns Western Arterial Road (Redlynch Connector to Captain Cook Highway duplication), **preventing further delays** to this critical network.



**ADVANCE  
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THE COMMITTEE FOR  
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