

# NORTH QUEENSLAND REGIONAL PLAN

The plan at a glance



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# The plan at a glance

## What is the North Queensland Regional Plan?

The North Queensland Regional Plan (NQ Regional Plan) is a 25-year strategic, statutory planning document for the local government areas of Burdekin, Charters Towers, Hinchinbrook, Palm Island and Townsville.

It has been prepared to support the established and emerging industries in the region and to address changes expected to occur within the region. These changes include a growing and ageing population, shifting economic and employment patterns, impacts from climate change and continued technological advances.

The NQ Regional Plan:

- articulates the vision of the region for lifestyle improvements and economic growth
- capitalises on major strategic improvements
- identifies future economic opportunities
- allows local government and communities to address region-specific issues and develop a planning framework to respond to challenges and opportunities
- provides direction for local government in preparing local planning schemes
- informs major planning and funding documents developed by all levels of government.

## What the plan aims to do

The principal aim of the NQ Regional Plan is to determine how land use and infrastructure planning can best support economic growth and population change in the region over the next 25 years and beyond. This will be achieved by enhancing the social, economic and environmental systems that support the region's liveability.

More specifically, the NQ Regional Plan will achieve this aim by:

### Strengthening:

- established industries and the already diverse regional economy
- support for local governments on key infrastructure projects in the region
- the regional network of important environmental areas and corridors from country to coast
- the role of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in planning decisions and capitalising on the breadth of local knowledge about regional landscapes and seascapes
- public passenger transport in Townsville and between key centres of economic activity (including health and knowledge precincts)
- the impetus to provide greater housing diversity, supporting North Queensland residents and promoting opportunities for aging-in-place
- key elements that contribute to the liveability of the region and help attract new populations.

*Sunrise, Charters Towers*





### Enabling:

- new local jobs in established and emerging growth industries
- greater opportunities for diverse high-quality tourism offerings, including events, self-drive tourism and Indigenous cultural heritage tourism
- greater opportunities for smaller-scale, nature-based tourism and community development and recreation in and around national parks and protected areas
- the benefits of relevant commitments outlined in the Townsville City Deal to be extended across the entire region
- greater investment certainty for major projects in the region.

### Identifying:

- future economic opportunities for North Queensland
- regional priorities to inform future updates to the State Infrastructure Plan
- more efficient patterns of development to put an end to Townsville's urban sprawl, thereby reducing cost pressures on infrastructure provision and services
- improved design outcomes for neighbourhoods and buildings to increase the liveability of the region while taking into account changing climatic influences
- investigation areas for the location of new renewable energy developments
- suitable land supply for industry across the region to support emerging opportunities and economic development into the future.

### Protecting:

- areas of high-value agricultural production from non-agricultural land uses
- strategically important environmental areas from land uses that would have irreversible impacts
- the Great Barrier Reef from intensification of land uses that would result in further negative impacts to water quality

- established and future residential living areas from conflict with new resource activities
- communities from the impacts of natural disasters while building resilience to natural hazards.

## Regional vision

*North Queensland thrives as a diverse, liveable and progressive region in the tropics, set around the capital of northern Australia.*

For the vision to be realised, the NQ Regional Plan identifies the following four regional goals:

## Regional goals

North Queensland be a leading economy in regional Australia.

The region maintains a rich and healthy natural environment.

Create liveable, sustainable and resilient communities that promote living in the tropics.

Infrastructure networks support a safe, connected and efficient North Queensland.

# Vision: Building a regional vision for North Queensland

North Queensland thrives as a diverse, liveable and progressive region in the tropics, set around the emerging capital of northern Australia.

It is essential that the North Queensland region takes control of its future and becomes its own vehicle for change. Very few places in regional Australia are more capable than the North Queensland region of doing just that and setting themselves up for future prosperity.

Strategically located, with a diverse economy and high-quality natural assets, the North Queensland region already has many of the building blocks in place to respond to global trends and further cement itself as a leader in Queensland and Australia.

These competitive advantages indicate that future prosperity in the region likely requires evolution, rather than wholesale transformation.

Building on previous visioning work over the past few decades, the following regional vision is to take the North Queensland region forward over the next 25 years: North Queensland thrives as a diverse, liveable and progressive region in the tropics, set around the emerging capital of northern Australia.

*Palm Island*



# Goal 1: A leading economy in regional Australia

North Queensland has built and maintained a strong and diverse economy with sustained economic growth supporting an increase in population and major infrastructure. The annual gross regional product (GRP) of the region is estimated at \$16 billion.

The region has competitive advantages in its proximity to the Asia-Pacific, a skilled workforce and key infrastructure already in place. These advantages provide an excellent position from which to capitalise on broader economic trends and opportunities, to become a national economic leader over coming economic cycles.

## Economic strengths

The primary strengths of the region's economy are agriculture, health, education, tourism, mining, manufacturing and defence industries. Through decades of investment, the region has equipped itself with exceptional infrastructure, including:

- world-class health, education and research facilities, such as James Cook University, Central Queensland University, Australian Institute of Marine Science and Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine
- mature transport networks, headlined by the Port of Townsville, which services more than 20 shipping lines that directly link to 136 ports around the world
- major industry and industry enablers, such as sugar mills, mineral refineries, power generators and cattle yards
- public infrastructure, such as the North Queensland stadium, museums and galleries, greenspace, water parks and recreational trails.

## Economic opportunities

North Queensland is presently responding to changing economic drivers. This includes the rise of health, knowledge and renewable energy-based industries and renewed growth in established industries, such as defence, manufacturing, tourism and agriculture. The region's geographical position also presents ongoing opportunities to service northern Australia and increase its reach and influence into the Asia-Pacific market.

Goal 1 of the NQ Regional Plan seeks to achieve this by:

- planning for and encouraging new industrial expansion areas (and allied infrastructure) capable of supporting growth in advanced manufacturing and other emerging industries
- ensuring the ongoing growth of Defence operations and assets throughout the region is facilitated, whilst protecting established assets from incompatible development
- improving the measures in place to protect agricultural land resources and identify new opportunities to sustainably expand this sector
- supporting long term growth of health, knowledge and research industries within the region, improving existing facilities and building the region's technical and scientific expertise
- expanding the region's unique and diverse tourism opportunities, encouraging high-quality visitor experiences and new tourism offerings
- planning for and supporting the region's renewable energy industry and emerging allied technologies, to become a national leader in green energy
- managing and facilitating mining and extractive resource activities within and beyond the region, including allied value-add industries.

## Goal 2: A rich and healthy natural environment

The North Queensland region contains an array of valuable natural environmental assets. The region relies on these assets and their continued ecological functionality to support biodiversity, healthy communities and a sustainable economy. The protection and management of the region's natural environment into the future is a critical component of the NQ Regional Plan.

The environmental policies contained in the plan are intended to complement and balance the identified economic opportunities, acknowledging that the future viability of the regional economy is inherently bound to the health of its natural assets.

### Natural assets

North Queensland contains terrestrial and marine environments of national and international significance. This includes the southern extent of the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area and the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. The region is also home to an internationally significant Ramsar wetland in Bowling Green Bay National Park.

The region's biogeography is a key natural asset as it comprises a unique convergence between four of Queensland's 13 bioregions. These bioregions, the Wet Tropics, Einasleigh Uplands, Desert Uplands and Brigalow Belt, are acknowledged as being highly productive and richly diverse, and as having high levels of rare and threatened species. Two of these regions, the Einasleigh Uplands and Brigalow Belt, are also listed on Australia's top 15 hotspots for biodiversity.

*Burdekin River, Ayr*







*Horseshoe Bay, Magnetic Island*

## Environmental challenges

Like many parts of the world, North Queensland will continue to face environmental challenges over the next quarter of a century and beyond. These challenges include biodiversity and habitat loss, impacts from poor water quality and increasing pressures resulting from climate change.

The region's biodiversity and landscape values, including key corridors and habitats, have over time, been impacted by fragmentation and degradation from development.

The health of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park also continues to face challenges. These include poor water quality from nutrient and sediment loading, and increased warming of global oceans. Important ecological functions in the region's coastal areas have also been impacted by urban development, agricultural activities and coastal infrastructure.

Climatic changes are being felt by North Queensland's biodiversity and natural habitats. The region has seen rainfall rates drop significantly over the past 15 years and this trend is projected to continue over the coming decades. This is coupled with forecasts for greater intensity and volatility of natural hazards.

## Cultural heritage

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, in particular Traditional Owners, have the longest and deepest connection with country and continue to have a shared living culture with their environment. Consequently, Indigenous cultural heritage knowledge holds important information for sustainably managing the natural environment. Incorporating this knowledge meaningfully into planning practices is essential for the continued vitality of our natural environment and shared history.

# Goal 3:

## Liveable, sustainable and resilient communities that promote living in the tropics

North Queensland is home to a diverse set of communities that have proven themselves highly resilient to change. Communities range from the expansive Townsville city, to the important regional centres of Charters Towers, Ayr, Ingham, Home Hill and Palm Island, to smaller rural and coastal settlements across the region. These communities span a diverse landscape and have unique identities, built on social, cultural, economic and environmental attributes. Supporting and enhancing the sustainability of the communities is critical to maintaining and improving the vitality and success of the North Queensland region into the future.

### Planning for change

North Queensland has experienced significant growth and change in population, with the region's population having increased by 30 per cent between 2000 and 2020. By 2045 the region's population is forecast to reach 340,264 people. Townsville, as the largest city in Northern Australia, is expected to see the most substantial population growth over the next 25 years, with year-on-year growth keeping pace with the Queensland average of 1.5 per cent. Accommodating and planning for an additional 104,000 residents over the next 25 years will have implications for Townsville's urban area as well as the broader region.

Without natural barriers, growth within Townsville has historically seen an extended pattern of low-density

residential development, punctuated by commercial and community infrastructure. Assisting the Townsville CBD to evolve into a more cosmopolitan and bustling urban heart, will benefit both the city and the region – and is critical to building the region's profile on the national and international stage.

Planning for growth in the regional centres is equally important. Whilst some townships and communities are only expected to see modest growth, changing demographics and lifestyle trends will need to be considered, planned and provided for.

### Responding to change

To support the region's growth, the NQ Regional Plan reinforces the need for more consolidated, efficient and sustainable urban patterns. These patterns will improve the resilience and liveability of communities and neighbourhoods, promote increased housing options and better manage the cost of living. Townsville City is expected to experience the most significant growth in the region. To manage future urban residential growth within the city, an urban area boundary has been established. The purpose of this boundary is to contain future urban residential development within the mapped area, which is identified to have sufficient capacity for growth well beyond the life of the plan.

In creating more diverse and resilient communities across the region, new residential development must be well planned and designed for to support a mix of housing types and styles, with improved access to services and infrastructure. The region will also benefit from raising the collective standard of urban design and creating more functional and attractive built form within its communities. To enhance its distinct tropical character, the design of urban environments should support more flexible buildings, streets and spaces that are capable of adapting to user needs over time.





Cotters Markets, Townsville CBD

# Goal 4:

## A safe, connected and efficient North Queensland

The continued growth of the region is dependent on efficient, reliable and resilient infrastructure and transport networks. Significant networks for North Queensland include road, rail, seaports, airports, digital communication, energy, waste and water.

### Resilience and adaptation

Infrastructure and transport networks are often critical in the coordination, evacuation and restoration of communities, before, during and after natural disasters or major events. It is therefore important that the region's infrastructure and transport networks are designed to be resilient to changing climatic patterns and intensified weather events.

Infrastructure will also need to be adaptive to the changing population, employment and lifestyle trends. Networks must be flexible and multi-purposed, acknowledging that roles, function and demand may change with time. It is important that infrastructure planning be partnered with effective land use planning.

### Technological advancement

New and emerging technologies will continue to influence how infrastructure and transport networks are planned for and operate. Decision-makers in North Queensland must remain agile and responsive to technological advances. Whilst some of these technologies are already being adopted across the region, others may require further investigation. This provides an opportunity for the region's decision makers to be bold in their planning and investment and drive future innovation or early adopter of such emerging technology.

### Connectivity

The transport infrastructure network is a critical element from a regional land use planning perspective. This includes important connections within and beyond the region, throughout Queensland and to national and international destinations. The NQ Regional Plan recognises the critical importance to identify and develop appropriate solutions to infrastructure issues within the region related to energy, water, waste and digital connectivity networks.

### Collaboration and partnerships

One of the key elements in building more adaptive and resilient infrastructure will be increased collaboration and knowledge sharing between government and industry. Increased collaboration at the planning phase will be necessary to respond to change and can best marry emergent or embryonic technological advancement, with local and regional expertise. This increased focus on collaborative planning can also allow for a more comprehensive assessment of potential challenges and demands across the life of assets.

The NQ Regional Plan supports partnership opportunities between government and the private sector to operate and deliver infrastructure.





*Students at James Cook University, Douglas*

## Delivering the NQ Regional Plan

The NQ Regional Plan has a strong focus on delivery and monitoring. Ongoing monitoring of the plan will ensure policies remain effective and relevant. It also gives flexibility to the plan, enabling it to appropriately respond and adapt to the needs of the region into the future.

In accordance with best practice regional planning, the delivery of the NQ Regional Plan considers:

- governance arrangements to guide delivery of the plan
- implementation actions that will help apply policies within the plan
- measurable targets to monitor the plan's performance over time
- relationship of delivery actions with other plans and initiatives across all levels of government.

The ongoing monitoring and measuring of the NQ Regional Plan will help determine the effectiveness of policies and in turn, help shape future reviews of the plan.



## Catalytic Project Overview

# North Queensland Economic Development Opportunities

### Why North Queensland is the place to invest and prosper

It is an exciting time to invest in North Queensland. The region is growing and changing, with traditional industry sectors thriving and innovating, and new industries and investment opportunities rapidly emerging.

The NQ Regional Plan provides a sustainable framework for regional economic development opportunities to unlock jobs and support North Queensland's vision to become one of Australia's strongest regional economies.

The region is rich in investment opportunities as diverse as renewable hydrogen, advanced manufacturing, defence, agribusiness, mining, tourism and the high-tech health and knowledge sector.

Extensive consultation with industry, government and community stakeholders on the NQ Regional Plan identified strong economic development opportunities that capitalise on North Queensland's competitive advantages, showing the way to significant future growth.

### Power of partnerships

The NQ Regional Plan covers the local government areas of Burdekin, Charters Towers, Hinchinbrook, Palm Island and Townsville. Realising the outcomes of the regional plan will require a partnership approach to delivery.

The regional plan aims to create greater investment certainty for major projects in the region and grow job opportunities. This will enable new and traditional industries to thrive and underpin population growth.

Critical to the success of a regional economy is partnerships with key stakeholders across industry, government and the community.

Together we can capitalise on the growth, prosperity and diversity of North Queensland.

The catalytic projects will:

- shine a spotlight on the emerging and growth industries in North Queensland identified through the regional planning process
- provide potential investors with a snapshot of opportunities and actions underway
- demonstrate regional commitment across governments to drive new investment.



RAAF C17 Globemaster, T150 Airforce show, Townsville

The NQ Regional Plan aims to grow industry development opportunities to cultivate jobs in a strong economy.

North Queensland's well-established enablers of infrastructure, energy and water will facilitate these outcomes in this well-connected and resource-rich region.

Outcomes

Industry growth and job growth

Industry  
development  
opportunities

Renewable  
Hydrogen

Agriculture &  
Aquaculture

Advanced  
Manufacturing

Mining &  
resources METS

Defence

Resource  
Recovery

Tourism &  
Ecotourism

Health &  
knowledge

Export

Enablers

Infrastructure  
Energy  
Water



Townsville cruise ship terminal

NQ Regional Plan – Line of sight from a vision to catalytic economic development opportunities.

**Vision** – North Queensland thrives as a diverse, liveable and progressive region in the tropics, set around the capital of Northern Australia

**Goal 1** – A leading economy in regional Australia

**Regional outcomes and policies** – agriculture, health and knowledge, tourism, renewable energy, mining and extractive, industry, defence

**Implementation actions** – giving effect to the regional policies in a way that achieves the vision, goals and outcomes

**Catalytic economic opportunities** – project examples: defence, agribusiness, advanced manufacturing, renewable hydrogen, tourism

## Delivering for North Queensland

The catalytic project opportunities outlined below identify actions targeted at industry and regional growth.

### Unlocking renewable hydrogen potential

Position North Queensland as an attractive investment destination for globally significant renewable hydrogen industry and innovative energy projects.

### Expanding defence industries

Leverage commercial opportunities to establish North Queensland as a prime location for the development of significant defence industries, including cyber security, maintenance, logistics, training, advanced manufacturing, biomedicine and tropical health.



## Boosting agribusiness

Promote diversification and investment in value-added agricultural products that can boost productivity and global competitiveness in the North Queensland agribusiness sector.

Draw attention to the North Queensland region's potential to become a northern Australian hub for agribusiness through the connectivity of road, rail and port infrastructure, and adoption of smart and advanced manufacturing technologies.

## Promoting advanced manufacturing

Promote the region's transition to advanced manufacturing which embraces new technologies, digital connectivity, circular economy principles and global best practices in sustainability.

Improve productivity and global competitiveness through innovative products and services, such as robotics, automation and the use of composite materials, and advanced manufacturing technology.

## Advancing tourism growth

Capitalise on North Queensland's iconic natural assets, cultural heritage and vibrant lifestyle to grow the region's tourism industry through meeting visitor demand for unique regional products and experiences.

## More growth industries

Other growth industries highlighted in the North Queensland Regional Plan that support economic development include mining and health and knowledge industries. Supporting work underway includes:

- a Townsville Health and Knowledge Strategy being developed as a commitment under the Townsville City Deal
- *A Strategic Blueprint for Queensland's North West Mineral Province* (Queensland Government 2019).

## Working together to deliver

The delivery and governance approach will be tailored to the needs of each project. Wherever possible, projects will utilise existing regional governance arrangements, including the Townsville Defence Hub and Manufacturing Hub, the existing Townsville Industrial Development Board and the North Queensland Economic Development Practitioners Network.

Co-generation Plant, Victoria Mill, Ingham





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