

Cassowary Coast
REGIONAL COUNCIL

CASSOWARY COAST ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

2023-2033

DRAFT

NOT GOVERNMENT POLICY



Acknowledgement of Country

Cassowary Coast Regional Council (the Council) acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and seas on which the Cassowary Coast community is located, the Mamu, Djiru, Girramay, Gulngay, Warrgamay, Jirrbal and Bandjin Peoples. We wish to acknowledge our respect for their current and emerging leaders and those in the dreaming. We thank all First Nations People for the contributions they make in building this community.

Acknowledgement of Engagement

The Council would like to thank all stakeholders that were involved in and supported the development of the *Cassowary Coast Economic Development Strategy 2023-2033*. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Economic Development Advisory Committee with representation from:
 - Innisfail CANEGROWERS
 - Tully CANEGROWERS
 - Innisfail District Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Tourism
 - Tully Chamber of Commerce
 - Cardwell Chamber of Commerce
 - Cassowary Coast Tourism
 - Cassowary Coast Banana Growers
- Advance Cairns
- BNI Cassowary Coast
- Djiru Warrangburra Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC
- Girramay People Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC
- Giringun Aboriginal Corporation
- NBN Co
- Ports North
- Queensland Government Departments and Agencies including:
 - Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training
 - Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning
- Regional Development Australia – Tropical North

The Council extends its recognition and appreciation to over 100 community members and businesses for their participation in the stakeholder and industry engagement process that forms the foundation of this document.

Drafting Note: Stakeholder engagement is ongoing.

Disclaimer

While every effort has been made to ensure information in this Plan is current and factual, the Cassowary Coast Regional Council makes no representation to any person or organisation with regard to the completeness or accuracy of the data or information contained in this document and, to the extent permitted by law, disclaiming all liability for any loss or damage (including indirect, special or consequential loss or damage) incurred by any person or organisation arising from the use of, or reliance upon, the data or information contained herein.

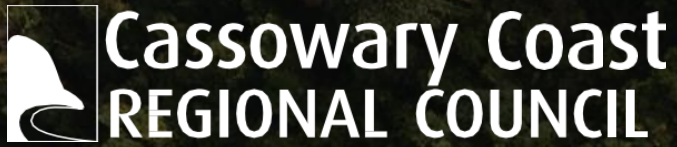
Table of Contents

No.	Section	Page
	Message from the Mayor	4
	Executive Summary	5
1	Introduction	8
2	Our Cassowary Coast	12
3	Investing In Our Future	19
4	Economic Development Strategy	24
5	Priority Industries and Projects	30
6	Measuring Outcomes and Success	42

Message from the Mayor, Mark Nolan

This page has been intentionally left blank and will be presented in the final strategy.

DRAFT
NOT GOVERNMENT POLICY



Executive Summary



Economic Development Strategy 2023-2033

Offering an enviable lifestyle, an abundance of business and investment opportunities, a solid economic base built upon agriculture and tourism, and a resilient and innovative community, the Cassowary Coast has a strong future. However, a new economic path must be established to combat the challenges of shifting population scale and demographics and volatility in regional economic performance.

Positioned between the two largest population centres in Northern Australia, Cairns and Townsville, and maintaining a base of high quality infrastructure assets, there is significant potential for the Cassowary Coast. The Cassowary Coast Regional Council (the Council) and key industry stakeholders are focused on leveraging this potential and are committed to the vision of growing a **stronger, resilient and more sustainable economy** that will create jobs, attract investment and will deliver greater prosperity for the region in the future.

The economic vision for the region is underpinned by the following goals:

- 1) A Sustainable and Resilient Economy** – We will grow a strong economy that supports traditional industries, encourages innovation and prioritises measured diversification to ensure a resilient future. This growth comes with an unwavering commitment to environmental and social sustainability to protect what makes the region unique.
- 2) Attractive Place to Invest and Do Business** – We will position the region as a destination of choice for businesses to establish, operate and invest, that is underpinned by a commitment to growing a vibrant business community and delivering a high quality workforce, infrastructure and services.
- 3) Vibrant and Prosperous Communities** – We will grow our population by providing high quality community infrastructure and services, attracting families, workers and migrants to relocate to the region to support our industries and businesses.

The **Cassowary Coast Economic Development Strategy 2023-2033** (the EDS or the Strategy) provides a comprehensive and contemporary overview of the region and proposes priorities and actions that are expected to place the region in a position of strength for growing the economy. Developed through a comprehensive stakeholder consultation process, the document presents a roadmap to achieving the economic vision and goals, and provides transparency to industry and community stakeholders regarding the approach being adopted in the process.

The Council, in collaboration with the independent Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC), will play a lead role in implementing the Strategy. The Council and EDAC will prioritise and action the recommendations outlined in the Strategy as a means of facilitating economic activation and growth of the community.

CASSOWARY COAST ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2023 - 2033

OUR 2033 VISION

Growing Stronger Together

Together, grow a strong, sustainable and resilient economy that positions our region for a prosperous future.

OUR 2033 GOALS

Sustainable and Resilient Economy

Attractive Place To Invest and Do Business

Vibrant and Prosperous Communities

PILLARS

PILLAR 1

Advocacy and Collaboration

Strong Economic Leadership
Industry, Government and Community Engagement
Tropical North Queensland Collaboration

PILLAR 2

Sustainability and Innovation

Leading Environmental Stewardship
Business and Industry Sustainability
Environmental Entrepreneurship

PILLAR 3

Workforce Development

Workforce Definition and Strategy
Worker Attraction and Retention
Education and Research Partnerships

PILLAR 4

Industry Planning and Prioritisation

Strategic Industry Planning
Infrastructure and Project Prioritisation
Funding and Financing Strategy

PRIORITY INDUSTRIES

Agribusiness and Food

Transport and Logistics

Aquaculture

Tourism

1

Introduction



Encompassing the townships of Innisfail in the north and Tully, Mission Beach and Cardwell in the south, the Cassowary Coast has a long history of growth and economic prosperity. While in recent times the region has faced its share of challenges, the unwavering ambition and resilience of the community has seen the Cassowary Coast triumph against adversity.

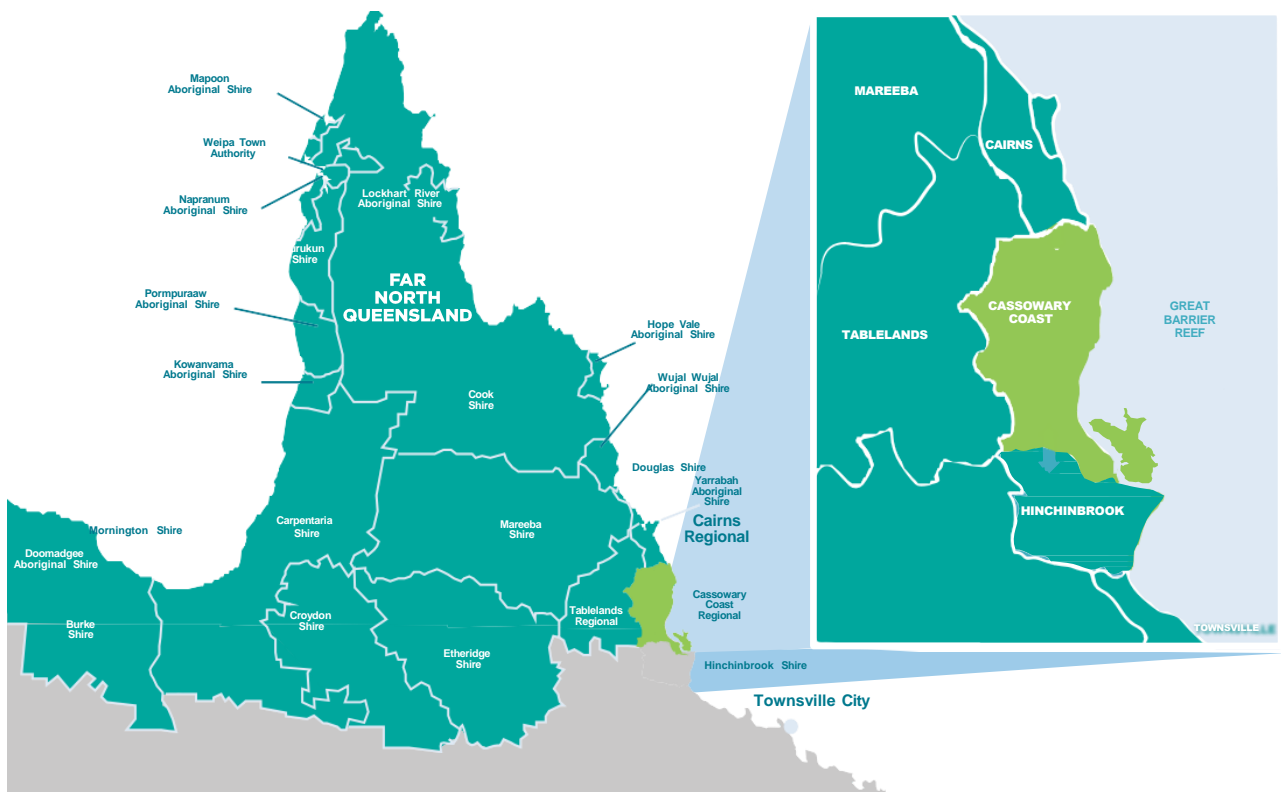


A naturally unique region with diverse communities, the Cassowary Coast has an established economy that supports over 3,000 micro, small and medium sized businesses. An attractive lifestyle, abundance of business and investment opportunities, and affordable living have been drivers to past population and economic growth.

The Cassowary Coast Regional Council (the Council) is focused on continuing the region's recent growth trajectory and is committed to growing a **stronger, resilient and more sustainable economy** that will create jobs, attract investment and deliver greater prosperity for the Cassowary Coast.

The **Cassowary Coast Economic Development Strategy 2023-2033** (the EDS or the Strategy) provides a comprehensive and contemporary overview of the region and proposes priorities and actions that are expected to place the region in a position of significant strength for growing the economy into the future.

This document presents a roadmap to achieving the objective of growing a **stronger, resilient and more sustainable economy**, and provides transparency to industry and community stakeholders regarding the approach being adopted in the process.



As the preceding strategy, *Tropical Futures 2016*, concludes, it makes sense to periodically reassess the region's economic future amid evolving domestic and global environments, and identify opportunities and priorities that will lead the region to greater prosperity.



Developing the Strategy

The Strategy reflects the collective effort and input of many stakeholders in the Cassowary Coast. This has been supported by a comprehensive research process and evaluation of broader domestic and global market trends, regional priorities, and Government planning and policy priorities and initiatives.

A robust consultation process was undertaken with key industry, Government, community and Traditional Custodian stakeholders to inform the priorities and opportunities for the region.



Value of the Strategy

The Strategy strives to go beyond what is considered 'business as usual' economic growth and seeks to identify opportunities that will 'shift the dial' in terms of job creation, investment attraction and diversification, and the delivery of overall prosperity for the region. A growing economy will provide benefits for the whole of the Cassowary Coast community.

As an industry and community led initiative, the Strategy reflects the agreement on priorities and has support from both public and private sector stakeholders. The Strategy is intended to provide greater certainty and direction for Government, investors, businesses and community members alike.



One Coast: Cassowary Coast

Council's overall vision and mission for the region are encapsulated within the *Corporate Plan 2021-2025*. As the primary strategic document, the Corporate Plan provides a framework for decision making and policy setting in relation to the Cassowary Coast region and informs the EDS.

OUR VISION

We aspire to *provide great experiences, deliver value and create a sustainable future for our community*. Delivering outcomes that embrace value in everything we do is fundamental to a vibrant and prosperous community that 'loves the place we live' and is summed up in our vision statement - '*One Coast: Cassowary Coast*'.

OUR MISSION

We are committed to delivering great service and value, economic growth, opportunity, prosperity and a relaxed lifestyle.

CASSOWARY COAST REGIONAL COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN 2021 - 2025

COMMUNITY

OUR PEOPLE

INFRASTRUCTURE

OUR BUILT ENVIRONMENT

ECONOMY

OUR FUTURE

REGION

OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

ORGANISATION

OUR TEAM

CASSOWARY COAST REGIONAL COUNCIL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2023 - 2033

Council's Role in Economic Development

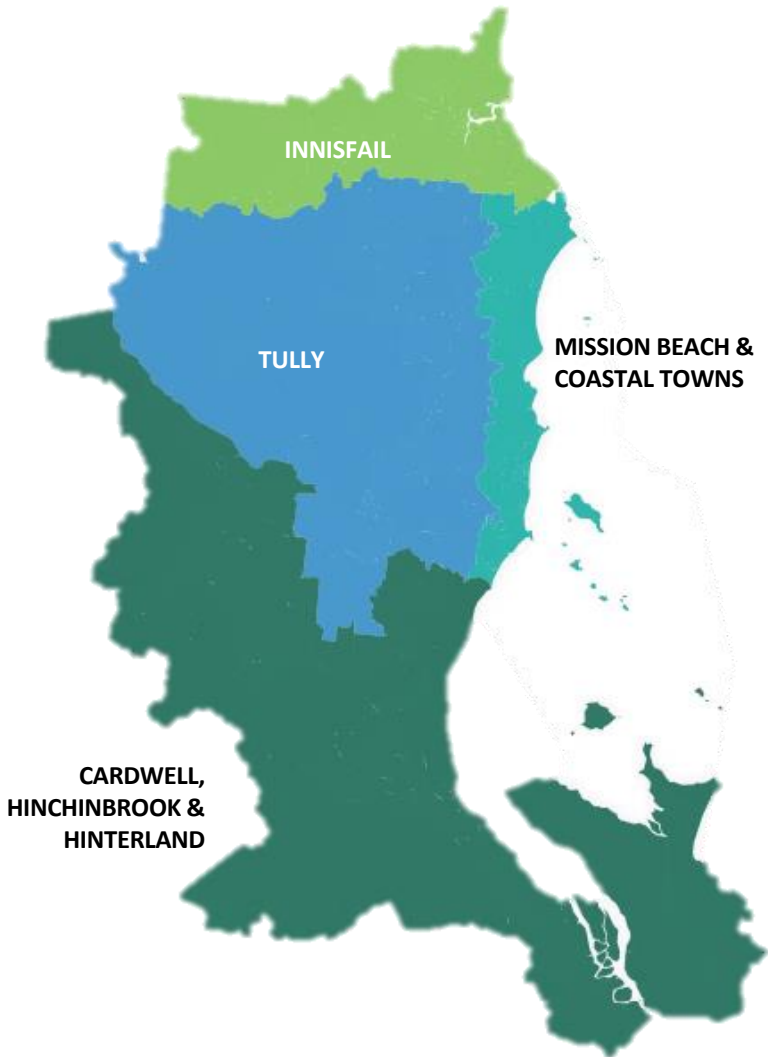
The Council, in collaboration with the independent Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC), will play a lead role in developing and implementing the Strategy for the economic development of the region. The Council and EDAC will prioritise and action the recommendations outlined in the Strategy as a means of facilitating economic activation and growth in community prosperity.

2

Our Cassowary Coast



The Cassowary Coast is a unique region that features a blend of towns and rural and coastal communities. The region covers an area of approximately 4,700 square kilometres, spanning south from the township of Innisfail, through Tully and Mission Beach to Cardwell.



One of the few places in the world where two extraordinary World Heritage Areas (WHA) meet – the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) and the Wet Tropics.



We are the gateway to the greatest tropical rainforest in the world.



4,702km²

Area



120km

Coastline



1,200km

Roads



48%

Wet Tropics WHA



18,817

Rateable Properties



3,124mm

Average rainfall

Residents' Perspectives of the Cassowary Coast

“

The Cassowary Coast has the possibility to be a unique and prosperous region. I am excited to experience the journey of economic development in our region and encourage more business growth and employment for our youth.

“

[I am excited for] developing aquaculture's full potential in this beautiful part of the world.

“

I find the landscape and its diversity one of the Cassowary Coast region's stand out characteristics. From the reef to the rainforest and everything in between, it matches or surpasses what most other regions have to offer.

ECONOMIC FOUNDATIONS

The region's **Gross Regional Product (GRP)** has recovered strongly since the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing by approximately 17% from 2019/20 to 2021/22. The GRP of \$1.7 billion is only 5% below its recent peak in 2011/12.

Micro, small and medium-sized businesses make a significant contribution to the region's economy, accounting for approximately 96% of all businesses that operate in the region.



\$1.7b

GRP in 2021/22



3,257

Local Businesses



17%

GRP Growth from 2019/20



96%

Micro, Small and Medium Sized Businesses

Sources: .idcommunity (2023). Cassowary Coast Regional Council | Economic Profile; CCRC (2023). Corporate Plan 2021-2025.

FUTURE POPULATION AND WORKFORCE

The Cassowary Coast is facing the challenge of a slowing population growth rate coupled with an aging demographic. In the absence of structural economic development and investment attraction, this trend is likely to continue.

POPULATION (2021)

29,525



POPULATION (2046)

31,599

PERSONS AGED 15-64 (2021)

17,696



PERSONS AGED 15-64 (2046)

17,298






Source: Queensland Government Statistician's Office (2023). Queensland Government population projections, 2023 edition: Local Government areas snapshot.

KEY INDUSTRIES IN THE CASSOWARY COAST

The region's economy is underpinned by the **agriculture, forestry and fishing industry (primarily raw sugar and banana production)**, which accounts for 35% of total economic value add and 23% of total full-time equivalent (FTE) employment in the Cassowary Coast (see below).

In comparison, the next top three industries, including health care and social assistance, manufacturing and construction, collectively account for 22% of the region's total value add and 34% of employment.

To ensure future prosperity of the region's economy it is critical to support the traditional industries, such as agriculture, but to identify opportunities to enhance the level of economic diversity in the region and to grow new industries that will support and complement the economic foundation of the Cassowary Coast.

KEY INDUSTRIES 2021/22		
INDUSTRY	VALUE ADD CONTRIBUTION	JOBS (FTEs)
 AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY & FISHING	\$517m	2,547
 HEALTH CARE & SOCIAL ASSISTANCE	\$117m	1,206
 MANUFACTURING	\$111m	998
 CONSTRUCTION	\$92m	772
 TOURISM ¹	\$50m	797 ²
TOTAL	\$1,461m	10,972

1: Tourism in Australia is not reported as a single industry and reporting generally takes in a number of sectors and industries.

2: Total employment (direct and indirect) created by tourism.

Source: .idcommunity (2023). Cassowary Coast Regional Council | Economic Profile.

We are a region like no other, with expansive natural attractions, strong and diverse Indigenous cultures and longstanding industries that have fostered a resilient community focused on opportunities. The future of our region will be built upon these distinctive foundations that set us apart.



ECONOMIC FOUNDATION

The Cassowary Coast region has a long history in agriculture and tourism. Today these industries still underpin the economy and the community. The ideal climate, coupled with the expansive natural assets, position these pillar industries for further growth into the future. Industry diversification will improve the resilience and sustainability of the region, while prioritisation of our environmental stewardship will be paramount.

DIVERSE COMMUNITY

With over 11% of the population comprising of Indigenous and/or Torres Strait Islander People, and being home to a multicultural community, the region has a unique cultural landscape. This landscape creates the bedrock for a stronger, ambitious and more resilient community. The benefits to the economy from this diversity extend across innovation and entrepreneurship and fosters potential opportunities in industry diversification.

STRATEGIC TRANSPORT ASSETS

The region is strategically located on the Bruce Highway between Townsville and Cairns, and is connected to the Atherton Tablelands and the Cape via the Palmerston Highway. With access to the national rail network, a major deep water port and an expanding airport, this strategically important transport infrastructure is unique and provides a strong foundation for future growth.

NATURAL OPPORTUNITIES

The economy of the region, has been shaped by the region's natural attractions, such as the GBR, the Wet Tropics, Dunk and Hinchinbrook Islands and the waterways and waterfalls. With the rapid global shift towards environmental sustainability coupled with a growing demand for nature based experiences, the Cassowary Coast is well positioned to leverage these strengths to further grow opportunities in the region.

ENVIABLE LIFESTYLE

The Cassowary Coast has a tropical climate and location with plenty of sunshine and waterways, incredible biodiversity and a relaxed, healthy lifestyle. From weekend reef trips to rainforest hikes and authentic Indigenous cultural experiences there is something for everyone. Coupled with affordable living and global connectedness, the Cassowary Coast is desirable on many levels. These lifestyle offerings result in unsurpassed liveability, that in turn enhance the attractiveness for businesses to operate, invest and diversify.

NORTHERN CONNECTIONS

Centrally located between the two largest population centres in Northern Australia, Cairns and Townsville, the Cassowary Coast is also in geographical proximity to many of Australia's largest trading partners in South East Asia. The region has ease of connection through the Cairns and Townsville airports and seaports to locations domestically and around the globe.



Bananas are Australia's largest horticultural industry and are the highest selling supermarket product.

CASSOWARY COAST BANANA INDUSTRY

The Cassowary Coast is the primary banana growing region in Australia.

With cultivation focused on the agriculture areas surrounding Tully and Innisfail, the banana industry is a significant driver of economy activity and employment within the region. The industry also supports a range of related industries such as transport, accommodation and manufacturing. It is for this reason, that there is an imperative to continue to support and nurture the industry going forward.

The potential for the industry to continue to contribute to the region's economy and future prosperity is high. However, to achieve this potential the industry must transform and adapt to the shifting environmental regulations and the ongoing biosecurity challenges faced. To secure a long and resilient future for the industry, the investigation and implementation of future opportunities to diversify revenue will be critical. This could be achieved through the integration of circular waste solutions, production of bioproducts (e.g. banana paper and fibre) and operational optimisation through the adoption of emerging technologies.

\$417 MILLION

Total production value of banana's in
2020/21

1,324 PEOPLE

Approximate industry employment in
2020/21

3

Investing In Our Future



Our 2033 Vision



Growing Stronger Together

Together, grow a strong, sustainable and resilient economy that positions our region for a prosperous future.

The vision for our region acknowledges the value of our established industries and seeks to support their growth, while also promoting sustainable diversification both within and beyond these industries. Ensuring the protection of the environment and embracing the uniqueness of our communities will attract people, businesses and investment to the region, laying the foundation for a ***stronger, resilient and more prosperous future*** for all.



Our 2033 Goals



Sustainable and Resilient Economy

We will grow a resilient economy that supports our traditional industries, encourages innovation and entrepreneurship, fosters environmental stewardship and leverages the region's natural characteristics to ensure the region can withstand economic challenges into the future.



Attractive Place To Invest and Do Business

We will be a destination of choice for businesses to establish, operate and invest by establishing the infrastructure, workforce and services that will deliver thriving business environment.



Vibrant and Prosperous Communities

We will be a stand out location for people to live, work and visit. In doing so, we will grow our population by providing high quality community infrastructure and services, attracting families, workers and migrants to support our key industries and businesses.

Our Guiding Principles

The principles outlined below embody the core values identified by industry stakeholders and the community as vital for evaluating and prioritising investments and initiatives. These guiding principles will underpin future decision making in relation to economic development activities.



Environmental Stewardship

We will maintain an unwavering commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainability.



Recognition and Advancement of Traditional Custodians

We will develop pathways for greater recognition and participation of Traditional Custodians in the economic future of the region.



Liveability

We will enhance the attractiveness of the Cassowary Coast for people to live, work and visit.



Innovation and Digital Advancement

We will adopt technological advancements and embed a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship within the Council, industry and community.



Connectedness, Collaboration and Cohesion

We will facilitate greater engagement and collaboration between the Council, industry, State and Federal Government and the community.

TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS' HOLISTIC VIEW OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In conjunction with 'Recognition and Advancement of Traditional Custodians' as a guiding principle, the engagement process with Traditional Custodian stakeholders confirmed the importance of considering Traditional Custodians' holistic viewpoint of economic development.

Traditional Custodians consider economic development to encompass social and cultural considerations, with the understanding that economic progress should not come at the expense of cultural heritage and social cohesion.

For Traditional Custodians, sustainable economic development must align with and preserve cultural practices, connections to land and traditional knowledge systems. Economic development entails creating opportunities that empower Indigenous communities, respect Traditional Custodians' spiritual relationship with land, and ensure the continuation of cultural identity. By integrating social and cultural considerations into economic development, Traditional Custodians prioritise holistic and intergenerational well-being, fostering a balanced and harmonious approach to progress that honors their heritage and enriches their present and future lives.

Traditional Custodians' holistic viewpoint must be considered in the development of the region's economy and when evaluating and prioritising investments and initiatives.

Image Source: Shutterstock.



4

Economic Development Strategy



The Strategy encompasses those activities that are required to achieve the economic vision and goals for the region. The pillars underpinning the Strategy will provide a clear pathway, outlining the specific actions and initiatives required to drive economic development in the Cassowary Coast.



Pillar 1 – Advocacy and Collaboration

KEY THEMES

- ▶ Establish strong economic leadership to promote the region, drive strategic initiatives and advocate for Cassowary Coast’s priorities at regional, state and federal levels.
- ▶ Facilitate genuine engagement and collaboration between Council, industry, Government and the community to facilitate action or agreed priorities.
- ▶ Work with regional Local Governments and advocacy groups in Tropical North Queensland to contribute to, progress and deliver regionally beneficial initiatives and projects.

RATIONALE AND PURPOSE

Strong and effective leadership is critical to achieve the vision and goals in the Strategy. A focus on advocacy and promotion of the Cassowary Coast at a regional, state and federal level to raise awareness of our vision, priorities and opportunities, will be a primary enabler of achievement of economic development in the region. Effective advocacy may influence policy and investment decisions that have the potential to positively impact the region’s goals and aspirations, and may also secure the necessary funding to support the projects, services and assets that are agreed priorities.

Genuine engagement and collaboration are keys to harnessing the collective expertise, resources, and opportunities for economic development on the Cassowary Coast. Fostering collaborative partnerships within and outside the region, may unlock a broader knowledge base, new funding sources, and specialised expertise that will support strategic initiatives. These collaborations facilitate the exchange of best practices, the sharing of innovative ideas, and the identification of synergies that maximise the region’s economic potential.

Engagement with other local Government areas in Tropical North Queensland will facilitate a more unified approach to the conceptualisation, design and delivery of projects and initiatives that benefit the whole region. Such collaboration may also unlock collective benefits in terms of promotion and advocacy to ensure a strong regional identity is developed and the collective voice of Tropical North Queensland is heard by policy and decision makers.

KEY INITIATIVES

- Support economic leadership in the region and establish a culture of accountability that will facilitate a step change in economic outcomes for the Cassowary Coast.
- Develop a comprehensive industry and community engagement plan to drive collaboration among economic stakeholders.
- Strengthen the local chambers of commerce to support the implementation of economic initiatives and priorities.
- Establish a business mentoring program to encourage further growth and development of industry leaders and emerging businesses.
- Play an active role within regional advocacy and economic development groups to contribute to, and benefit from, advocacy campaigns for the broader Tropical North Queensland region.
- Develop dedicated campaigns targeted at raising awareness of the identity of the Cassowary Coast and the many attributes that make it an attractive place to live, work, invest and do business in.

Pillar 2 – Sustainability and Innovation

KEY THEMES

- ▶ **Commit to safeguarding the region's natural assets within the Cassowary Coast and continue to be a leader in environmental sustainability.**
- ▶ **Encourage and incentivise businesses and industry participants to implement environmentally sustainable practices through innovation and adoption of technology.**
- ▶ **Foster an environment that encourages entrepreneurship focused on leveraging the rapid global movement towards environmental sustainability and decarbonisation, and to unlock new economic opportunities for the region in this space.**

RATIONALE AND PURPOSE

The Cassowary Coast is renowned for its natural assets, including pristine rainforests, coastlines and diverse ecosystems. Focusing on sustainability safeguards protects these unique attributes and ensures their availability for future generations. Access to, and the enjoyment of, the natural environment significantly contributes to both economic success and enrichment of the community's lifestyle.

Given the unique surroundings, and the importance of these natural assets to future prosperity, it is important that the region strives to be a leader in environmental stewardship and sustainability. Environmentally sustainable economic development can foster a greater alignment between our built and natural environments, positively influencing lifestyle and liveability aspects of the region.

Adoption of innovative practices and technologies will be a critical enabler for businesses and the broader industry to enhance regional sustainability. Access to the necessary digital infrastructure and high speed internet is paramount to achieve this. Importantly, businesses that embrace innovation are more capable of streamlining processes, boosting productivity, and delivering superior products and services. Additionally, the provision of digital infrastructure will attract new businesses and skilled people to the region.

Embracing sustainability as a guiding principle will prioritise the development of environmentally conscious ventures, such as in cultural and eco-tourism, and sustainable agriculture. This strongly aligns with evolving consumer demands and global trends and will broaden the region's economic base and improve industry diversification.

A stronger economy also enables opportunities to enhance the natural environment through ongoing resource management and restoration programs. With an abundance of renewable energy technology inputs through water, sun, wind and agricultural by-products, a plethora of entrepreneurial opportunities are available in the region.

KEY INITIATIVES

- Develop a common understanding of 'sustainability' and establish an agreed framework against which the region can assess and monitor its performance.
- Continue to support NBN Co in the roll out of the national broadband network (NBN) and digital infrastructure to enhance connectivity across the region.
- Partner with Government and the educational and professional development sectors to provide business support services to upskill and educate local businesses on technology and innovation.
- Facilitate pathways for Indigenous peoples to leverage their traditional ways of managing and utilising the land and sea to create new economic ventures and pathways.
- Actively support and promote industry leaders through a recognition program targeted at innovation and sustainability.
- Establish an innovation hub and taskforce to identify new opportunities, encouraging environmental management and sustainability. This will be focused on leveraging the natural assets that the region has to offer to develop new economic opportunities, such as sustainable agriculture and bio-fuels.

Pillar 3 – Workforce Development

KEY THEMES

- ▶ Define and plan the capability and capacity requirements of the region’s current and future workforce needs.
- ▶ Attract and retain skilled and unskilled workers to the Cassowary Coast to support local businesses and industry.
- ▶ Establish partnerships between Council, industry, education and training providers and institutions to facilitate workforce capability uplifts.

RATIONALE AND PURPOSE

Workforce capability and capacity have been identified as a significant risk and limitation for industry growth and development now and into the future. The creation of a strong and capable workforce is a catalyst to driving economic expansion in the Cassowary Coast and broader Tropical North Queensland region.

It is imperative that the skills and specialisations of the local workforce align with and adapt to the evolving needs of industries in the region. By clearly defining the workforce needs and providing access to training, education, and upskilling opportunities, the region will be well placed to address the current and future skill gaps. Furthermore, a focus on workforce requirements may facilitate improved retention of younger workers and foster an environment to invest in and retain highly skilled personnel.

Further, developing a versatile and skilled workforce will become increasingly crucial as the region seeks to support the continued competitiveness and evolution of traditional industries and to grow new opportunities in less mature industries in the region.

The development of knowledge and skills comes through the provision of access to high quality educational and training services. Development of partnerships with leading educational and training providers, and establishing facilities in the region that support these, is a fundamental requirement to broaden the skills base locally.

KEY INITIATIVES

- Undertake collaborative engagement with stakeholders across the region to clearly define the workforce requirements, and establish a workforce development plan for now and the future.
- Engage with the broader Tropical North Queensland regions to provide input into workforce planning and development initiatives, such as region-wide workforce and skills development plans and strategies.
- Identify short and medium term opportunities and initiatives to attract and retain skilled professionals in the region, such as advocating for the expansion of regional migration programs.
- Enhance regional education and training offerings through the provision of more educational facilities in the region, providing education that aligns to the demands of a changing economy, technology and innovation.
- Establish and leverage programs that encourage entrepreneurship within the business community and the broader workforce.
- Develop partnerships between local businesses and educational institutions to bridge the skills gap.
- Facilitate collaboration between vocational training providers and industry to offer vocational training programs and apprenticeships.

Pillar 4 – Industry Planning and Prioritisation

KEY THEMES

- ▶ Understand the global demand for the region’s goods and services and support and incentivise priority industries and to attract investment and new businesses to the region.
- ▶ Prioritise critical infrastructure and projects that will support the 10-year economic vision and objectives for the Cassowary Coast.
- ▶ Promote and position key priorities for the region for funding and other forms of support with the Queensland and Australian Governments.

RATIONALE AND PURPOSE

Strategic industry planning includes a strong focus on market demands and changes, and the identification of priority industries and projects that have the potential for the greatest economic return for the region. This level of planning will provide a clear path towards supporting and nurturing the existing business community while also seeking to diversify and develop the economy and achieve the economic vision and goals outlined within this Strategy.

Targeted industry planning will focus resources within Council, Government and industry that may be applied towards growing and developing the priority industries and projects. Industry planning will also identify the infrastructure and support services required to meet the specific needs of key industries.

It is important to clearly define those core economic development zones and infrastructure classes and projects that will be required to support the growth initiatives. Master planning, infrastructure definition and land designations within the local Government boundaries for development zones will be an important step to provide transparency and certainty to inbound investors in relation to new projects and investments. Clear definition of the supporting infrastructure requirements will also support funding requests to the State and Federal Governments for priority projects.

Definition and promotion of the priority growth industries and projects within the region will focus efforts on attracting inbound investment, and will support initiatives in relation to growing and strengthening the business community.

KEY INITIATIVES

- Establish and implement a formal engagement framework that enables the collaborative identification and advancement of priority projects and industries.
- Develop strategic industry development plans for key industries to identify actionable approaches capable of unlocking growth and development.
- Engage with strategic infrastructure asset owners (e.g. Ports North), regional authorities and advocacy groups to complete master planning and develop designated economic development zones and precincts for priority industries.
- Develop targeted promotion campaigns and initiatives to attract investment in key industries.
- Identify, prioritise and advocate for infrastructure development that supports the needs of key industries for economic development.
- For high priority initiatives, conduct feasibility investigations and business cases in relation to priority infrastructure and projects.

5

Priority Industries and Projects



Arising from an extensive stakeholder consultation process, priority industries were identified that were regarded as having the potential to deliver the 'economic step change' desired for the region. Where supported through strong leadership and planning these industries are expected to support the *growth of a strong, sustainable and resilient economy that positions our region for a prosperous future.*



Agribusiness and Food

The Cassowary Coast has a thriving agriculture, forestry and fishing industry. In 2021/22, the total value added by the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry in the region was \$517 million, primarily driven by banana and sugarcane production with contributions from the tropical fruit and vegetable growing, cattle grazing, timber production and fishing. Overall the industry also supports over 2,500 jobs and countless micro, small and medium-sized businesses.

The established economic base and mature industry operators, coupled with the expansive fertile soils, favourable climate and access to major transport and processing infrastructure reinforces the importance and expected future prosperity of the industry.

Despite its historical performance, the industry faces many challenges in the form of rising operating costs, reduction and fragmentation of farming land, supply chain disruption, biosecurity and disease and commodity price volatility. These challenges must be considered as the future for the industry is mapped out.

To continue to grow the contribution of bananas and sugar to the Cassowary Coast, it is important to support the existing producers and to develop pathways, through funding, planning and infrastructure delivery, to ensure they can sustain their current operations and grow through investment and diversification.

To support this, the region must consider expansion of crop diversification and value add processing options for smaller producers (outside of sugar and bananas) to ensure that their contribution can continue to grow. Future opportunities in the agri-tourism and agri-education spaces have the potential to yield significant benefits for the industry.

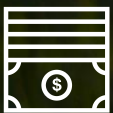
The Future of Sugarcane Production

The sugarcane industry has been a pillar of the economy in the Cassowary Coast since the late 1800s. As a significant contributor to economic activity and employment in the region, the industry is expected to continue to play an important role in driving the future growth and prosperity of the Cassowary Coast.

Whilst the industry has traditionally been founded upon the growing and milling of sugarcane, there exists an opportunity for the industry to transform to become the backbone of Australia's future bio-economy. Diversification into the production of sugarcane by-products, such as biofuels and bioplastics, is expected to enable milling operations to continue to sustainably produce raw sugar for future generations.

With the strategic shift towards sustainable energy, there is an opportunity to generate greater renewable energy through bagasse, a sugar milling by-product. With support from Government, this can support the sugarcane industry to have a long and vibrant future in the Cassowary Coast beyond traditional sugar growing and milling.

Economic Impact of the Sugarcane Industry in 2020/21



\$346 Million

Gross industry contribution



1,651 FTES

Direct industry employment



770

Estimated indirect jobs supported by the industry

Source: ASMC (2022).

MSF South Johnstone Mill Green Power Project

MSF Sugar (MSF) is an integrated grower, processor, marketer and exporter of raw sugar in Queensland. Operating 3 mills, producing over 600,000t of raw sugar, employing 500 FTEs and supporting over 630 growers, MSF is a significant contributor to the Far North Queensland (FNQ) economy annually.

As the operator of the South Johnstone Mill, MSF is faced with challenges to the mill's long term viability caused by farmland fragmentation and loss. To counter these challenges, MSF is transforming their business to enhance the future sustainability of their operations through the **Green Power Project**.

The Green Power Project involves the construction of a "green" power station that will use bagasse produced by the mill to generate 32MW of green electricity annually. The project is expected to improve the efficiency of their existing operations and may improve income diversity through the potential supply of renewable energy to the Cassowary Coast community.

Improving the financial return for both MSF and the local farming community, the project has the potential to catalyse significant economic growth in the region and generate growth in future employment. The Green Power Project is an important step to protecting a key pillar of the Cassowary Coast economy and ensuring the future contribution of the sugarcane industry to the region.

Source: MSF Sugar (2023).

“

By converting sugarcane by-products into biofuels and other renewable energy sources, the region can forge a sustainable and eco-friendly path ahead.... Our region is well-positioned to reap the long-term benefits offered by the sugarcane industry.



Tourism

The Cassowary Coast is home to pristine natural wonders, spectacular islands, reefs and beaches, ancient rainforests and rich Indigenous art and culture. With over 120 kilometres of coastline, the Cassowary Coast is one of the few places in the world where two spectacular World Heritage Areas meet – the Wet Tropics rainforest and the GBR Marine Park. The region also offers one of the greatest ranges of nature and adventure based activities in Australia, and is one of the world’s most biodiverse and unexplored destinations.

Despite the natural appeal of the region, tourism has had a fluctuating history in terms of contribution to the economy. Economic data has revealed a gradual decline in the performance of the industry since the mid 2000s, largely arising due to the impacts of natural disaster events and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tourism in the region has historically been aligned to attractions and precincts such as Dunk Island and Mission Beach. However, growing demand trends have signified an expanding interest in nature based, adventure and cultural tourism experiences. Furthermore, as the world moves on from the pandemic, domestic and international visitor numbers are starting to recover and capacity on airlines is being restored.

The opportunities for the Cassowary Coast in a recovering and future looking tourism market are significant. However, it is critical that action is taken to clearly define and promote the identity of the region, incentivise investment and revitalisation of existing attractions and identify and nurture new opportunities within the nature based, cultural and eco-tourism space. Positioning tourism as a central part of the economic growth for the Cassowary Coast is a critical step towards achieving a sustainable and vibrant economy.

Paronella Park – A Local Success Story

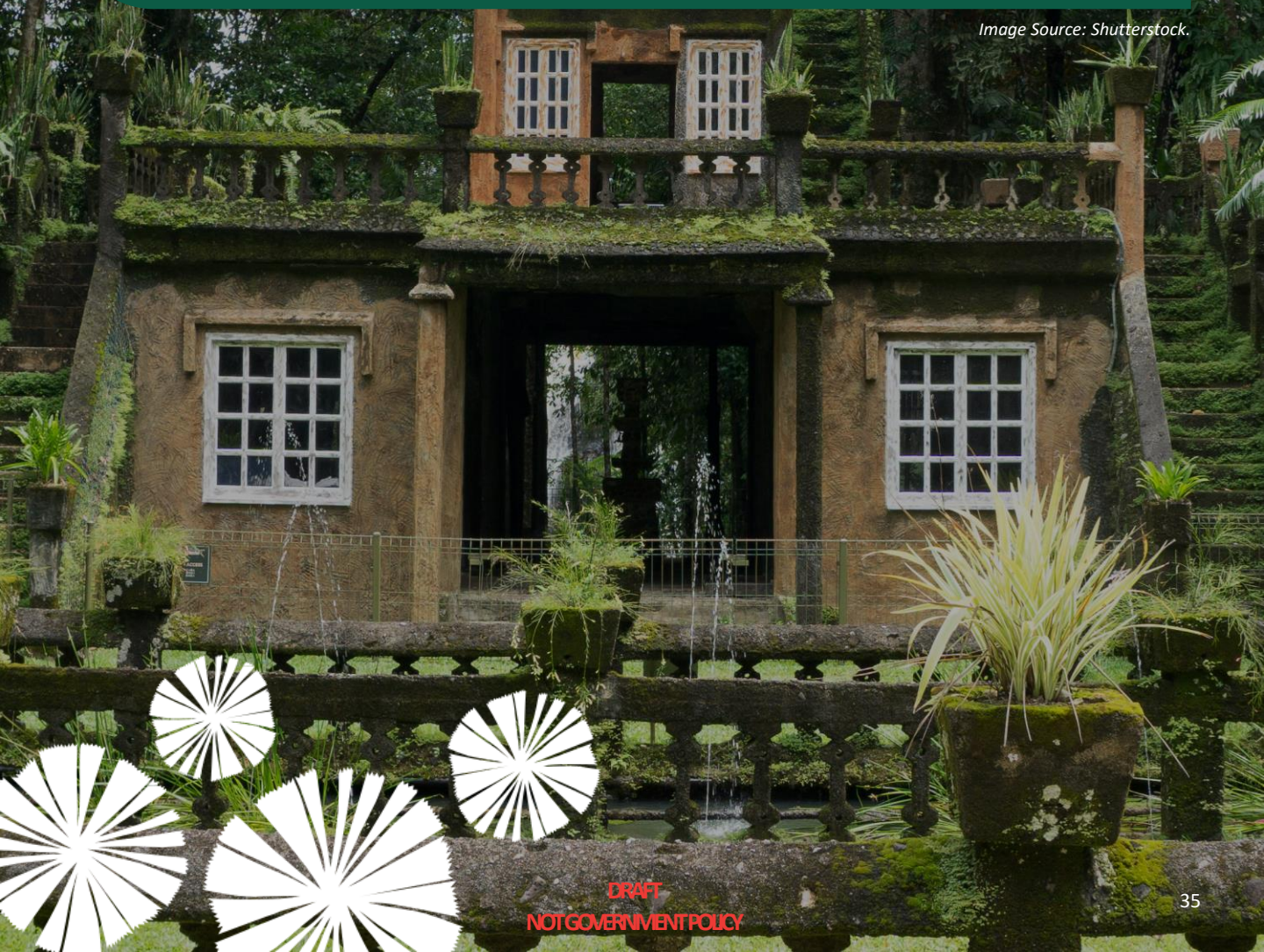
Paronella Park is a multi-award winning tourist attraction located at Mena Creek, in the heart of the Cassowary Coast. Paronella Park immerses tourists in the unique story of Spanish Immigrant Jose Paronella, who originally built the attraction in the early 1900s.

Recognised as one of the leading tourist destinations in FNQ, Paronella Park represents a **true local success story** of residents Judy and Mark Evans, who purchased Paronella Park in 1993 with a vision to bring Jose Paronella’s dream back to life. Judy and Mark and their young family persevered through cyclones, floods and ailments, and brought Paronella Park back into the stand out attraction that it is today.

Paronella Park is now **one of the most successful tourism businesses and attractions in FNQ**, attracting over 10,000 visitors annually and providing employment opportunities to a number of local residents. The Paronella Park that exists today is a testament to the ambition and resilience of the community that exists within the Cassowary Coast.

Sources: Queensland Government (2023). Paronella Park.

Image Source: Shutterstock.





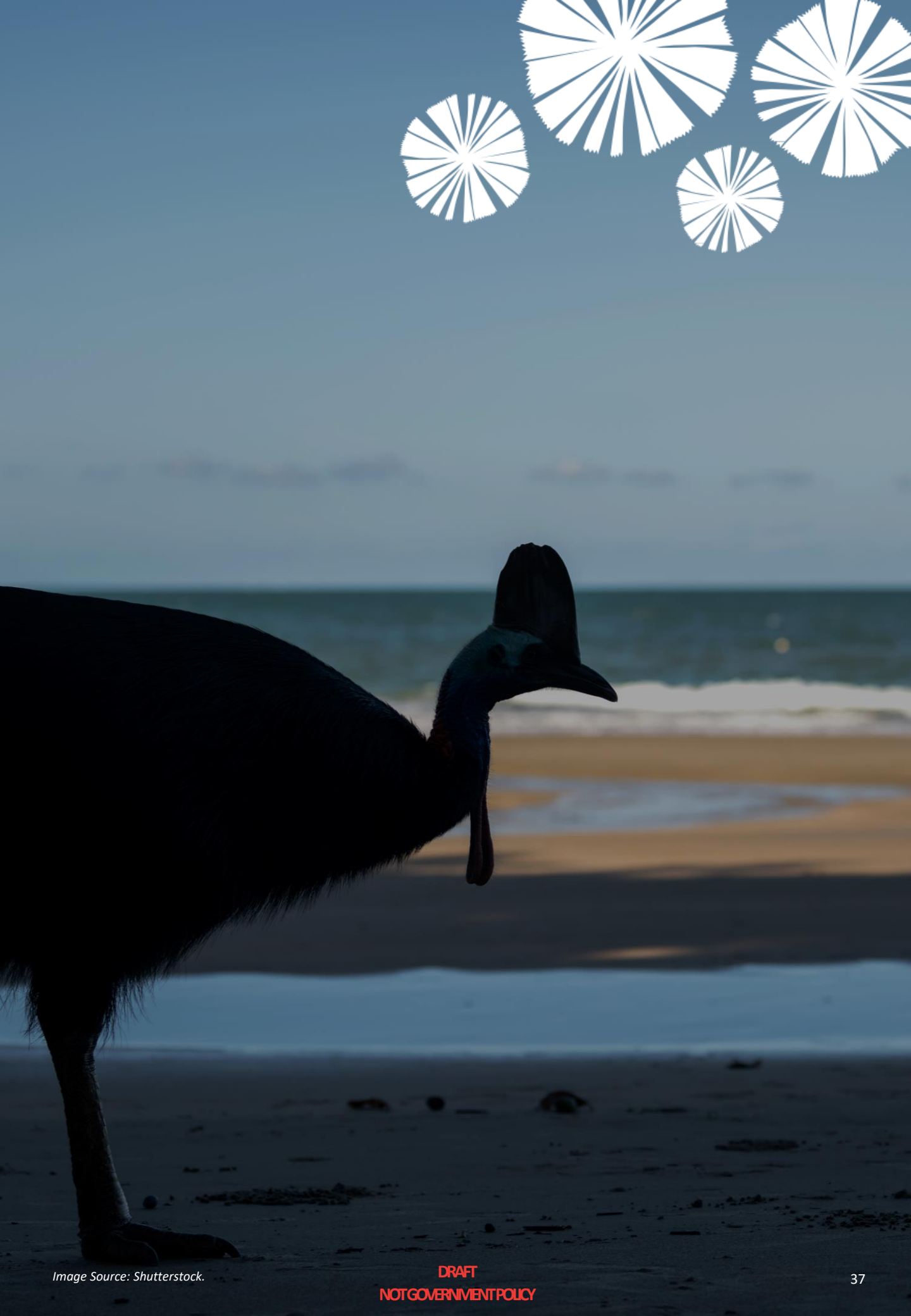
Transport and Logistics

The Cassowary Coast is supported by a well-established transport infrastructure network that includes the Port of Mourilyan, Mundoo Airport, the Bruce and Palmerston Highways and the North Coast rail line. Located strategically between Cairns and Townsville, the region is connected to major domestic trade routes and has direct access to South East Asian markets via Cairns International Airport and the Port of Townsville.

The Bruce and Palmerston Highways currently play a vital role in the transportation of goods from the tip of Cape York all the way along the eastern seaboard of Australia. Critically, this road network ensures that much of the produce grown on the Atherton Tablelands is able to be distributed to southern markets. The Port of Mourilyan is a crucial economic hub for North Queensland, facilitating the export of raw sugar and molasses from the region's sugar-growing districts. Amongst other things, these two infrastructure assets are vital to the longevity of the agricultural industry in FNQ.

While transportation and logistics has often been considered as an enabling industry for the region, the network of strategic infrastructure and assets and the proximity to major centres, presents a significant opportunity for the industry to be regarded as a major economic driver for the Cassowary Coast into the future. By investing in the planning, design and delivery of infrastructure enhancements, improving service connectivity through road, rail, and maritime channels, and facilitating collaboration between Government and industry stakeholders, the Cassowary Coast is well positioned to achieve this outcome.







Aquaculture

Aquaculture is well established in the Cassowary Coast and yields a significant potential to grow into the future. The region benefits from favourable climatic conditions and maintains ready access to fresh and salt water reservoirs and waterways that provide an excellent foundation to expand the current industry. To date, barramundi and prawn farming are the primary contributors to the industry in the region, with the various large-scale businesses and recognised brands operating projects.

In recent years, the global demand for premium seafood products from Australia has experienced significant growth. Additionally, due to growing restrictions on commercial fishing, particularly in and around the GBR, it is anticipated that much of the seafood supply across North Queensland will be shifted to onshore production. These changes, coupled with the Cassowary Coast's advantageous location and climate, provides a unique opportunity for the region to become a thriving hub for aquaculture.

However, to fully unlock the potential of aquaculture for the region's economic prosperity, there is a need for careful planning, management of regulations and environmental impacts and adoption of innovative technologies, to ensure the growth in the industry is able to occur sustainably.

By capitalising on its natural advantages, implementing sustainable practices, and maintaining high-quality standards, the Cassowary Coast can establish itself as a reliable and environmentally-conscious supplier of premium seafood products to domestic and international markets. This will not only create more employment and training opportunities but will also support to diversify the region's economy and attract investment and reinvestment from both new and existing businesses.

TomKat KoolPak – Environmentally Responsible Innovation

TomKat Global Solutions is a local Cassowary Coast business that manufactures a patented and environmentally responsible cold chain packaging system specifically designed for perishable products destined for domestic and international markets. Utilising the latest technologies, the packaging system is designed to provide a cost effective solution for businesses that will optimise product condition and quality during long distance transport. The packaging system utilises environmentally responsible materials, and focuses on the reduction of single use wastes that currently plague the cold chain transport industry.

The strong demand for their packaging products has led founders, Tom and Kath Long, to pursue the construction of a dedicated manufacturing facility in Kurrimine Beach in the heart of the Cassowary Coast. Once constructed the facility is expected to have the capacity to produce over two million units per year. The proposed facility will create **new employment opportunities** and will contribute to the **diversification of the region's economy**, whilst also upholding an unwavering commitment to environmental stewardship.

Having lived in Kurrimine Beach since 2005, Tom and Kath are a clear demonstration of success that may be achieved through innovation and adoption of technological advancements, without comprising on the sustainment of the surrounding environment.



Why is it important to support Queensland businesses, innovators and entrepreneurs?

Put simply, local innovation = local growth.

Source: Advance Queensland (2023). That's cool: Queensland innovators create sustainable fish boxes.

Key Projects in the Cassowary Coast

Certain priority projects have been identified that have the potential to play a transformational role in facilitating future economic expansion in the region. These projects are located on the map below, with further detail on the following page.



Key Projects in the Cassowary Coast

1 Innisfail CBD Revitalisation Project

The Council recently released a Draft Master Plan for the Innisfail CBD, which was informed by extensive community engagement and represents a significant step in the revitalisation journey for the community. Through physical improvements, events and activity, there is an opportunity to revitalise our township, encouraging people to stop, spend time and in-turn contribute to the local economy

2 Innisfail Freight and Logistics Hub

The Innisfail Freight and Logistics Hub concept considers the opportunity to capitalise on, and integrate existing high value infrastructure assets, such as Mundoo Airport and the Bruce and Palmerston Highways, to enhance the management and flow of freight across FNQ. As an early stage concept, feasibility investigations and design concepts will be required to progress the project.

3 South Johnstone Mill Green Power Project

MSF Sugar is currently investigating the potential development of a green power station at the South Johnstone Sugar Mill, which would use sugar by-products to create renewable electricity.

4 Port of Mourilyan Master Plan

The Port of Mourilyan is a deep-water port that is suitable for larger bulk trade commodities. There is a major opportunity for the Port to support growth in bulk commodity trade by leveraging existing infrastructure and the forecast growth across several industries. The development of a Master Plan, in collaboration with Ports North and industry representatives, will identify the priority infrastructure and service development required to meet the future demand growth.

5 Mission Beach Town Centre Revitalisation Project

The Mission Beach Town Centre Revitalisation Project will create a vibrant town centre, breathing life back into Mission Beach and surrounds for the enjoyment of the community and visitors

6 Dunk Island Rejuvenation

Dunk Island was purchased in 2022. The new owners have confirmed plans to rejuvenate the resort and preserve the natural beauty of the island. The project has the potential to secure new and return visitors and to generate flow-on economic benefits for Mission Beach and the broader region.

7 Tully CBD Revitalisation Project

The Council is investigating the revitalisation of the Tully CBD with an objective to encourage increased visitation to the town centre and to support the enhancement of the local business district and surrounding economy.

8 Tully Transport Precinct

As an established transport hub, with mature operators in place, opportunities exist to further enhance the infrastructure and services supporting the Tully Transport Precinct to enable growth arising from the expansion of the agricultural and aquaculture industries.

9 Cardwell Tropical Mountain Bike Trails

The Council is currently investigating the potential development of a new 94km, 26-trail mountain bike network in picturesque national park and World Heritage rainforest in Cardwell. The Project is focused on establishing the region as a 'Ride Destination', integrating the unique cultural heritage of the local Traditional Owners, the Girramay Peoples, and generating on-bike and off-bike expenditure in the township and nearby areas.

10 Port Hinchinbrook Sewerage Treatment Plant and Normalisation Project

The Cassowary Coast Regional Council is committed to realising the normalisation of Port Hinchinbrook. What this means for residents and the wider community, is the privately owned assets within Port Hinchinbrook, such as roads, bridges, culverts and sewerage, will be under the control of Council. The normalisation project will see the construction of a new sewerage treatment plant and the renewal of a pump station and effluent infrastructure, culverts and road assets.

TomKat KoolPak Manufacturing Facility

TomKat Global Solutions is seeking funding to deliver a world-class manufacturing facility in the Cassowary Coast that produces the next generation in cold chain packaging – a re-useable, recyclable and environmentally-friendly total packaging solution with applications across seafood, agriculture, pharmaceutical and any other temperature sensitive products. *Confidential site location.*

6

Measuring Outcomes and Success



Measuring Outcomes and Success

This section has been intentionally left blank and will be included in the final strategy.



1300 763 903



enquiries@cassowarycoast.qld.gov.au



cassowarycoast.qld.gov.au



70 Rankin Street, Innisfail
38-40 Bryant Street, Tully
4 Balliol Street, Cardwell