



Draft Far North Queensland Regional Plan 2025

Summary of changes since 2009

Rusty's Markets, Cairns. Supplied by Tourism and Events Queensland

Statutory regional plans are long-term strategic documents that contextualise state interests outlined in the State Planning Policy (SPP) on a regional level. Regional plans guide the long-term growth of communities by ensuring a sufficient supply of land for housing and economic growth, including land for industry and agricultural uses. They coordinate land use planning with existing and future infrastructure, ensuring that new development supports economic growth, protects environmental values and scenic amenity, and maintains the viability of key resources areas.

The draft FNQ Regional Plan 2025 proposes to allocate all land in FNQ into one of three regional land use categories 2025:

- > Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area (RLRPA)
- > Urban Footprint
- > Rural Living Area (RLA)

In doing so, it provides a framework for delivering efficient regional growth, economic diversification and the protection of FNQ's natural assets, landscapes and productive rural areas.

In the context of the current housing challenges, one of the primary drivers underpinning the review of the FNQ Regional Plan 2009 is to ensure that planning is responsive to population growth and housing demand. The review also focuses on amending key policies in line with current and emerging priorities.

Draft FNQ Infrastructure Plan 2025

Regional infrastructure plans have a long-term 20-year outlook identifying strategic economic and social priorities, and infrastructure priorities for the region to guide state infrastructure planning and investments, in partnership with other levels of Government and industry, where possible.

Integrating regional infrastructure plans and statutory regional plans is the Queensland Government's approach to combining land use and infrastructure planning. The draft FNQ Infrastructure Plan 2025 has now been updated to align with the strategic intent of land use policies being developed within the draft FNQ Regional Plan 2025.

Including the draft FNQ Infrastructure Plan 2025 in the draft FNQ Regional Plan 2025 will ensure that infrastructure and land use policies are consistent and complimentary within FNQ, reinforcing its role in guiding infrastructure delivery and land use decisions and leading to greater outcomes in the development sector.

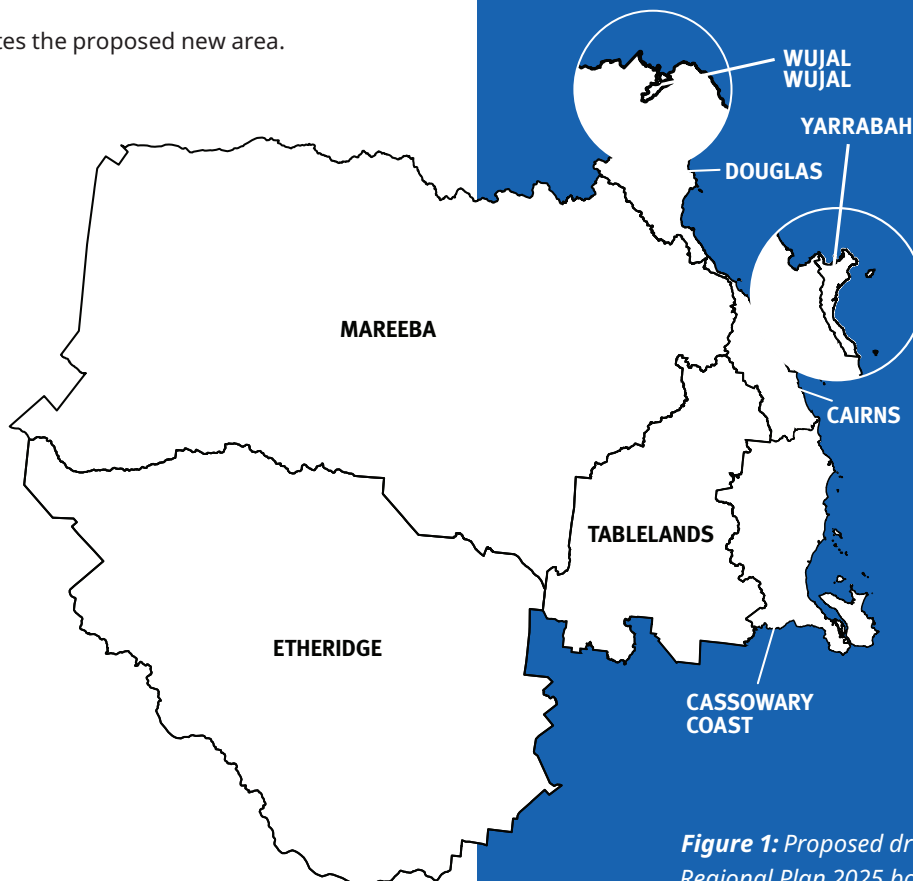


By identifying future infrastructure requirements and guiding state investment, the plan helps ensure that infrastructure delivery keeps pace with growth and supports regional economic and social outcomes. It also informs the Queensland Government Infrastructure Pipeline (QGIP) and agency-level planning. The QGIP demonstrates the Queensland Government's commitment to statewide and regional priorities through a regularly updated pipeline of planning investment and proposals.

Regional plan boundary

A key change in the draft FNQ Regional Plan 2025 is the proposed inclusion of Etheridge Shire LGA into the FNQ region.

Figure 1 indicates the proposed new area.



Summary of key changes

The draft FNQ Regional Plan 2025 maintains fundamental elements of the FNQ Regional Plan 2009, such as the regional growth pattern, but makes key changes that respond to evolving opportunities, challenges and needs, and the broader planning framework.

The draft FNQ Regional Plan 2025 proposes a regional vision for 20 years and beyond, focused on maintaining its lifestyle and liveability through targeted growth.

Figure 1: Proposed draft FNQ Regional Plan 2025 boundary

Planning framework changes

Since the FNQ Regional Plan 2009 commenced under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997* (IPA), the statutory, state planning policy and mapping context has evolved considerably. This includes the introduction of the:

- > State Assessment and Referral Agency (SARA) in 2013
- > *Regional Planning Interests Act 2014* (RPI Act)
- > Sustainable Planning Act 2009 (SPA) and, subsequently, the current *Planning Act 2016* (Planning Act)
- > SPP in 2017

On 26 October 2012, the FNQ Regional Plan 2009 State Planning Regulatory Provisions were repealed. This meant that the regional land use categories were no longer regulatory but retained as policy in the FNQ Regional Plan 2009.

Population Growth

The projected growth rate for FNQ has been slowing over the last 15 years (down from 1.8 per cent in 2009 to one per cent in 2023).

The FNQ Regional Plan 2009 planned for a projected population of 277,621 by 2021 and 311,411 by 2031.

The population of FNQ is now forecast to grow from 264,550 in 2021 to a range of between 341,360 and 378,340 people in 2046. This translates to an average annual growth rate of one per cent, a growth rate that has held steady for the past 10-15 years.

Regional Land Use Categories

The regional growth pattern from 2009 is largely retained in FNQ with some major and minor changes in specific locations.

Major changes include:

- > new RLUC area in the Etheridge LGA
- > addition of employment land in Cairns South State Development Area (SDA) to the Urban Footprint
- > inclusion of areas zoned under local planning schemes for Community Facilities, Emerging Community, Industrial, Low Density residential, and Tourism in the Urban Footprint, where adjacent to the Urban Footprint
- > changes to represent areas under local government growth strategies

- > changes to reflect existing development
- > inclusion of Rural Residential land in the RLA

Minor changes include:

- > realign RLUC to the updated Digital Cadastral Database (DCDB) in FNQ. The DCDB is the digital map of property boundaries across Queensland and includes the legal boundaries of lots, roads and reserves.
- > fix minor and administrative mapping errors in the RLUC.

Resource activities (areas of regional interest)

The draft FNQ Regional Plan 2025 has been updated to reflect the RPI Act. The RPI Act aims to manage the impact of resource activities and regulated activities on identified areas of the State that contribute, or are likely to contribute, to Queensland's economic, social and environmental prosperity. Under the RPI Act, an Area of Regional Interest (ARI) can be identified in a regional plan. This includes Priority Agricultural Areas (PAAs), Priority Living Areas (PLAs) and Strategic Environmental Areas (SEAs).

A resource activity or a regulated activity cannot be carried out in an ARI unless a person holds or is acting under a Regional Interests Development Approval (RIDA) for the activity or is being undertaken in accordance with a relevant exemption under the RPI Act. A RIDA provides approval for carrying out of a resource activity or a regulated activity in an ARI. A RIDA is subject to an assessment of the extent of the expected impact of the resource activity on the ARI.

More information about the RPI Act and RIDA is available at: <https://www.planning.qld.gov.au/planning-issues-and-interests/areas-of-regional-interest>.

An ARI under the RPI Act is a new aspect included in the draft FNQ Regional Plan 2025. Each ARI is shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Areas of Regional Interests changes in the FNQ Regional Plan 2025

ARI	Change
PAA s	PAA's have been identified across FNQ under the Planning Act (non-resource activities) and the RPI Act to prioritise agriculture and ensure the co-existence with resource activities. New PAA's have been identified at Cardwell-Cairns, Tablelands, Mossman, Gilbert River and Mareeba-Dimbulah.
PLA s	PLA's have been identified across FNQ, to ensure population-supporting assets and amenity are protected and prioritised over resource activities. FNQ urban areas that are generally equal to or greater than 200 people and are likely to experience growth over the next 25 years, are protected by a two-kilometre buffer. PLA's give communities, via their Local Government, a say on proposed activities, with all resource activity proposals in PLA's requiring public notification. PLA's do not identify a future growth pattern and do not have any effects under the Planning Act.
SEA s	The RPI Regulation 2014 identifies the Gulf Rivers SEA and the Hinchinbrook Island SEA. The Gulf Rivers SEA is in two regional planning areas and will be reviewed as part of a broader land use prioritisation program at the landscape/inter-regional scale. The Hinchinbrook Island SEA is highly protected as a National Park and its designation as an SEA is proposed to be removed through this regional plan review process to avoid duplication.

Regional plan structure

Key changes have been made to the document's structure, length and text to make it more user-friendly, highlight key aspects and ensure its contemporary relevance. A new section, 'how to read this plan', has been included in the draft FNQ Regional Plan 2025, along with improved explanation of the purpose of each component of the plan.

Table 2 outlines the changed components and the corresponding component from the FNQ Regional Plan 2009.

Table 2: Key component changes

FNQ Regional Plan 2009	Draft FNQ Regional Plan 2025
Vision (20 years)	Vision (20+ years)
Strategic directions	Regional and Local Government context
Sub-regional narratives	
Regional land use pattern	Regional growth pattern and resource activity (new)
Desired regional outcomes	Policy outcomes and strategies
Objectives	
Land use policies	
Priority actions	
Implementation, monitoring and review	Delivery

There is also a more targeted focus on five themes instead of the eight in FNQ Regional Plan 2009.

Table 3 outlines these changes.

Each theme in the draft FNQ Regional Plan 2025 provides further dimension and clarity on the future sought for FNQ. Themes include several outcomes (what is needed) which are to be delivered through the corresponding strategies (how to get there). Where required, strategies are expressed spatially or are aligned to specific LGAs.

Table 3: Key theme changes

FNQ Regional Plan 2009 (desired regional outcome)	Draft FNQ Regional Plan 2025 (theme)
Urban development	Housing
Natural environment	Ecotourism and Biodiversity
Regional landscapes and natural resources	
Economic development	Thriving Economy
Strong communities	Healthy and Liveable Communities
Infrastructure	Infrastructure (draft FNQ Regional Infrastructure Plan 2025)
Water management	
Transport	



Photo supplied by DHLGPPW

Changes under each theme



Not included in
FNQ Regional Plan
2009



Included in FNQ Regional
Plan 2009



New additions or
updates and
enhancements in draft
FNQ Regional Plan 2025

Housing

Housing has a stronger focus on enhancing housing supply in well-located, infrastructure-supported areas. Key changes are outlined in **Table 4** below.



Table 4: Housing changes

Strategy	FNQ 2009	Draft FNQ 2025	Change
Regional growth pattern			The regional growth pattern from 2009 is largely retained. Additions include employment land in Cairns South SDA, residential land in the Urban Footprint and rural residential land to the RLA.
Dwelling supply targets			Targets for the supply of dwellings is a new addition to meet forecast demand and changing population needs.
Rural towns and villages			Improved opportunities for rural towns and villages.
Priority Development Area (PDA)			Identification of Mount Peter Priority Development Area (PDA) to unlock new opportunities in the planning and delivery of housing, infrastructure and essential services.
Rural living area			Additional Rural Living Areas have been added.
Urban footprint			The Urban Footprint was introduced in the draft FNQRP 2009, and changes made in the final. A range of minor and administrative changes were made in 2024 and limited major changes, including the Cairns South SDA and reflecting approvals and zoning changes. A new Urban Footprint has been introduced in Etheridge Shire to ensure targeted growth that maintains viability of rural and regional towns and communities.

Thriving Economy

Thriving Economy focuses on FNQ's capacity to create employment and economic prosperity.

Key changes are outlined in **Table 5** below.



Table 5: Thriving Economy changes

Strategy	FNQ 2009	Draft FNQ 2025	Change
Economic growth and diversification	✓	✓	There is a greater focus on growing opportunities for aviation, marine, defence, health, education, tourism and agricultural diversification.
Regional centres, precincts and sectors	✗	✓	Identification of existing and emerging regional precincts and sectors to drive economic growth and investment.
Regional activity centres	✓	✓	The regional activity centres network has been retained and expanded to include proposed new parts of the FNQ region in Etheridge Shire
Regional industrial areas	✓	✓	Regional industrial land has been updated to include the Cairns South SDA and a potential industrial area at Etheridge.
Rural economies and natural economic resources	✓	✓	Support for rural economies to diversify with a new focus on ensuring agriculture, resource activities and other uses are compatible.
Priority Agricultural Areas (PAAs) and Priority Agricultural Expansion Areas (PAEAs)	✗	✓	Identification of PAAs and potential agricultural expansion areas to ensure FNQ's agricultural sector can continue to grow and contribute to the regional economy.

Ecotourism and Biodiversity

Biodiversity and Ecotourism aims to protect and enhance the unique biodiversity of the region, including the Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Areas.

Key changes are outlined in **Table 6** below.

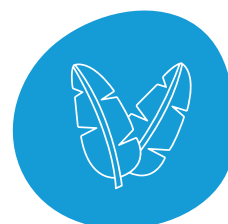


Table 6: Ecotourism and Biodiversity changes

Strategy	FNQ 2009	Draft FNQ 2025	Change
Nature-based tourism routes and destinations	✗	✓	Enhanced protections for nature-based tourism routes and destinations that support low impact development and protect ecological values.
Regional water quality	✓	✓	Updated water quality policies.
Regional landscapes and biodiversity corridors	✓	✓	Updated biodiversity corridors, greater support for long-term land use management, and further consideration of impacts adjacent to the Wet Tropics WHA.
Strategic rehabilitation areas	✓	✓	Refined strategic rehabilitation areas (SRAs) to strengthen corridor connectivity, build natural landscapes adaptation and improve resilience.

Healthy and Liveable Communities

Healthy and Liveable Communities aims to guide the region towards a future that is vibrant, inclusive and resilient.

Key changes are outlined in **Table 7** below.

Table 7: Healthy and Liveable Communities changes

Strategy	FNQ 2009	Draft FNQ 2025	Change
Community Identity and Wellbeing	☑	☑	A greater focus on enhancing a sense of regional identity and quality of life, health and wellbeing.
Urban heat	☑	☑	Higher standards for considering heatwave and urban heat in land use planning and urban design.
Natural hazards	☑	☑	Enhanced responses to improve FNQ's resilience to natural hazards over time.



Infrastructure (draft FNQ Infrastructure Plan 2025)

Infrastructure (draft FNQ Infrastructure Plan 2025) aims to support efficient and resilient transport infrastructure, energy and water security. While the draft FNQ Regional Plan 2025 retains a concise infrastructure theme, all associated infrastructure policies are now fully incorporated into the draft FNQ Infrastructure Plan 2025, which forms an appendix to the regional plan. This ensures that infrastructure priorities are clearly articulated and aligned with land use planning, while maintaining a streamlined approach within the regional plan itself.

Key changes are outlined in **Table 8** below:

Table 8: Infrastructure (draft FNQ Infrastructure Plan 2025)

Strategy	FNQ 2009	Draft FNQ 2025	Change
Region Shaping Infrastructure (RSI)	☒	☑	Introduction of Region Shaping Infrastructure necessary to realise the growth pattern and the resilient and efficient movement of people and goods.
Infrastructure Enhancing Strategies (IES)	☒	☑	Introduction of Infrastructure Enhancing Strategies which play a crucial role in enhancing regional connectivity and guiding investment.
Energy	☑	☑	Greater emphasis on supporting renewable energy where it balances impacts with community benefits.
Sustainable Water Management	☑	☑	Targeted focus on water security and sustainably managing water.
Digital connectivity	☒	☑	Enhance regional connectivity and resilience by facilitating access to reliable, high-speed telecommunications infrastructure.
Social and community infrastructure	☑	☑	Enhanced policy to support the diverse needs of communities.
Strategic link and supply chains	☑	☑	Greater emphasis on FNQ being a gateway to the Asia-Pacific, Cape York, and the Gulf of Carpentaria including the role of Cairns airport and seaport, Mourilyan seaport, and the road transport network.





Photo courtesy of Tourism and Events Queensland

Have your say

We want to hear your feedback on the draft FNQ Regional Plan 2025.

You can have your say by:

- > Talking to a planner at an online session (bookings required)
- > Talking to a planner at an in-person session (bookings not required)
- > Lodging a formal submission online, via email or post while consultation is open
- > Providing informal feedback during consultation

Consultation is open until **Monday 5 January, 2026**.

Details on how to participate in consultation are available online.

Find out more

To review the draft and find out more about how to participate in consultation or scan the QR code:



Scan here or visit
qld.gov.au/fnqregionalplan

Submissions can be sent via:

Email: FNQRPSubmissions@dsdip.qld.gov.au

Post: **PO Box 15009, City East QLD 4002**

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