Consultation report
Far North Queensland Draft Regional Plan 2025 and State Planning Regulatory Provisions (Regional Plans)

Planning for a stronger, more liveable and sustainable community

A report on submissions received in response to the release of the Far North Queensland Draft Regional Plan and State Planning Regulatory Provisions (Regional Plans).

October 2008
Not government policy
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Executive summary

This consultation report has been prepared to assist the Planning Minister to consider public feedback on the Far North Queensland Draft Regional Plan 2025 and the Draft State Planning Regulatory Provisions (Regional Plans).

The purpose of the consultation process on the draft regional plan and draft regulatory provisions was to raise awareness of the regional planning process and the issues confronting the region. It was designed to encourage active participation in the planning process and to provide an opportunity for members of the community to give informed and considered input. The public feedback received during the consultation process will assist with the finalisation of the regional plan and regulatory provisions as it provides local knowledge and insight into existing community values. This process will help guide Far North Queensland's sustainable growth over the next two decades.

Before finalising the regional plan and regulatory provisions, the Planning Minister will consider this report, the outcomes of stakeholder consultations, recommendations of the Regional Coordination Committee, and advice from government agencies.

The consultation report summarises the issues identified in the submissions received and establishes a platform for potential changes to the draft regional plan and regulatory provisions. Any recommendations within this report have not been considered by government in detail and cannot be considered as Queensland Government policy.

The analyses of submissions received, and feedback from stakeholder consultation, identified a number of planning issues that may have strategic implications for the future of the Far North Queensland region—see chapter 5. Further targeted stakeholder consultation on the strategic policy issues detailed within the report will take place and the outcomes of this additional consultation will be considered in finalising the planning policy outcomes for the Far North Queensland region.

1. Background and purpose

Far North Queensland (FNQ) is one of the fastest-growing urban regions outside the south east corner of the state. With a current population of 220,000 residents—and projected growth of greater than 100,000 new people over the next 20 years—governments and communities face significant challenges to manage this growth in a way that balances development with the local lifestyle.

The Queensland Government announced in 2006 that it would develop a statutory regional plan for the region to meet these challenges. When completed, the Far North Queensland Regional Plan 2025 (FNQ 2025) will provide a regulatory planning framework—that carries a range of powers—to manage FNQ's anticipated high population growth and protect its unique environmental features.

The FNQ 2025 and Draft State Planning Regulatory Provisions (Regional Plans) (SPRP) were released for public comment by the Premier Anna Bligh and the Deputy Premier and Minister for Infrastructure and Planning Paul Lucas on 9 May 2008, to give the community the opportunity to have their say.

The draft regional plan recommended that growth management of the region be achieved through the designation of an Urban Footprint to control urban sprawl and out of centre growth. The Urban Footprint—0.5 per cent of the region—would provide a 20-year land supply, ensuring housing affordability in the region. However, the bulk of the region—99.4 per cent—would be designated as a Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area, protecting areas of significant environmental value (such as the World Heritage Areas) and natural resources for primary production, tourism, extraction and mining, through a minimum subdivision size. Rural living areas (RLA)—
0.1 per cent of the region—would also be designated to limit further rural residential development in the region, minimising state and local government exposure to the higher infrastructure and delivery costs associated with this form of development, fragmentation of rural lands and conflict between residential and rural uses.

The draft regional plan was gazetted by the Deputy Premier, as Planning Minister, in accordance with section 2.5A.13 of the Integrated Planning Act 1997 (IPA).

The Department of Infrastructure and Planning undertook a comprehensive community engagement and communication campaign to ensure that as many stakeholders as possible could participate in the plan's development. The views received through the consultation and submission processes will be considered in finalising the regional plan and SPRP. When finalised, the regional plan will be the second statutory plan developed in Queensland and will support the Queensland Government's blueprint for the future Toward Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland initiative.

This report has been prepared by the Department of Infrastructure and Planning to provide an overview of the submissions received on the draft regional plan and draft SPRP during the consultation period, which concluded on 8 August 2008. More than 960 submissions were received, demonstrating the effectiveness of the community consultation program and reflecting the high levels of interest from community and industry in the development of the region's future.

Initial analysis of the submissions identified that the draft regional plan was generally well-received by the community. However, there are specific issues that have traditionally polarised community sectors that will need to be further negotiated to ensure the best possible outcomes for the region. The major issues that are identified in this report will be the focus of targeted consultation forums with key stakeholders and submitters in Cairns during the last week of October 2008.
1.1 Far North Queensland Draft Regional Plan 2025

The Far North Queensland planning region covers Cairns, Tablelands and Cassowary Coast regional councils, Yarrabah and Wujal Wujal Aboriginal council areas, and World Heritage listed areas of the Wet Tropics Rainforest and the Great Barrier Reef.

The draft regional plan was developed to respond to the specific needs of FNQ and addresses regionally significant matters, such as the region’s vulnerability to climate change and managing urban growth.

Regional plans are the only state instrument that integrate and reconcile Australian Government, state and local interests within a geographic area. The draft regional plan represents a shift from responding to growth issues, to proactively managing growth for the long-term ecological and economic sustainability of the region.

The regional plan will be the key vehicle for the state, in collaboration with regional councils and local communities, to realise desired planning and development outcomes.

The development of the draft regional plan was governed by underlying regional land use planning principles including:

- protecting regional landscape and rural production values
- recognising the causes of climate change and building resilience to its impacts
- consolidating urban growth and land use efficiency
- facilitating growth in Mount Peter Master Planning Area
- promoting a dynamic, robust and diversified economy
- maintaining and enhancing the tropical character through land use planning and innovative design
- limiting growth pressures on the coast
- planning for emergency situations
- integrating land use planning with infrastructure planning.

1.2 Draft State Planning Regulatory Provisions (Regional Plans)

The draft SPRP was prepared under Chapter 2 Part 5C of IPA as a stand-alone document to complement and provide regulatory support to the draft regional plan.

The provisions came into effect when gazetted on 9 May 2008 and aim to regulate certain land use and development in the region. The draft SPRP also outlines aspects of development that may not occur in stated locations.

They remain in force until the final SPRP is gazetted and comes into effect—or until a decision is made by the Planning Minister not to make such provisions for the region.

1.3 Far North Queensland regional planning process

The regional plan is prepared in accordance with Chapter 2, Part 5A of IPA that provides the legislative basis for the plan and sets out the procedures to be followed in developing, approving and amending the plan.

The Planning Minister established a Regional Planning Advisory Committee (RPAC) under the provisions of IPA to provide advice on regional planning in FNQ and develop the regional plan. The RPAC became a Regional Coordination Committee (RCC) under IPA upon designation of the FNQ region in the Integrated Planning Regulation 1998 on 6 March 2008.

The RCC has representation from elected representatives from state and local government, state government agencies and key stakeholder groups.

A technical working group made up of government and industry technical experts provided advice to the RCC and the Department of Infrastructure and Planning in developing the draft regional plan.
Table 1. Regional Coordination Committee membership—pre and post 15 March 2008 local government elections

**Pre local government elections**
Chair: Paul Lucas, Deputy Premier and Minister for Infrastructure and Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position/Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desley Boyle MP</td>
<td>Minister for Tourism Regional Development and Industry, State Member for Cairns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren Pitt MP</td>
<td>Minister for Main Roads and Local Government, State Member for Mulgrave</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Jason O’Brien MP</td>
<td>State Member for Cook</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Steve Wettenhall MP</td>
<td>State Member for Barron River</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Mike Berwick</td>
<td>Mayor, Douglas Shire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Jim Champman</td>
<td>Mayor, Atherton Shire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Kevin Byrne</td>
<td>Mayor, Cairns Shire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Joe Galeano</td>
<td>Mayor, Cardwell Shire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Vince Mundraby</td>
<td>Mayor, Yarrabah Shire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Robert Blanckensee</td>
<td>Chairman, FNQ Area Consultative Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Jeremy Blockey</td>
<td>President, Cairns Chamber of Commerce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Keith Noble</td>
<td>Director, Growcom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Allan Dale</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer, Terrain Natural Resource Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr John McIntyre</td>
<td>Director, Destination Development Tourism Tropical North Queensland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Russell Butler</td>
<td>Traditional Owner representative, Aboriginal Rainforest Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Mark Buttrose</td>
<td>Fisher Buttrose Architects Pty Ltd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof Scott Bowman</td>
<td>Professor, James Cook University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Liesl Harrold</td>
<td>Regional Liaison Officer, Office of Economic and Statistical Research</td>
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**Post local government elections**
Chair: Paul Lucas, Deputy Premier and Minister for Infrastructure and Planning

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<td>Warren Pitt MP</td>
<td>Minister for Main Roads and Local Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Jason O’Brien MP</td>
<td>State Member for Cook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Steve Wettenhall MP</td>
<td>State Member for Barron River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Val Shier</td>
<td>Mayor, Cairns Regional Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cr Bill Shannon</td>
<td>Mayor, Cassowary Coast Regional Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cr Tom Gilmore</td>
<td>Mayor, Tablelands Regional Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cr Desmond Tayley</td>
<td>Mayor, Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cr Percy Neal</td>
<td>Mayor, Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Robert Blanckensee</td>
<td>Chairman, FNQ Area Consultative Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Jeremy Blockey</td>
<td>President, Cairns Chamber of Commerce</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Keith Noble</td>
<td>FNQ Agricultural Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Allan Dale</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer, Terrain Natural Resource Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr John McIntyre</td>
<td>Director, Destination Development Tourism Tropical North Queensland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prof Scot Bowman</td>
<td>Professor, James Cook University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Liesl Harrold</td>
<td>Chair, Regional Managers Coordination Network</td>
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Development of the regional plan

Development of the regional plan is occurring in five stages:

4. Preparation of final regional plan—in progress.
5. Gazetted and release of the final regional plan by the Planning Minister.

1.4 Consultation on the draft regional plan and draft SPRP

The process for development of the draft regional plan under IPA specifies that a minimum public consultation period of 60 business days is required. Following this, the Planning Minister must consider every properly made submission and consult with the RCC to finalise the regional plan. IPA then requires the Planning Minister to finalise the regional plan either:

a) as provided for in the draft regional plan as published
b) to include any amendments the Planning Minister considers appropriate.

The draft regional plan was released for public consultation on 9 May 2008 for 65 business days, closing on 8 August 2008.

Before approving the final regional plan, the Planning Minister must be satisfied that the regional plan identifies the desired regional outcomes, and includes policies and actions to achieve these outcomes. The regional plan must also identify the desired spatial structure of the region, including a future regional land use pattern and provision for infrastructure to service future developments. This will guide local governments when preparing priority infrastructure plans and provide a framework for local and state governments and other entities to prioritise infrastructure plans and investments.

The regional plan must also identify key regional environmental, economic and cultural resources to be preserved, maintained or developed and identify the ways in which this will be achieved.

The minimum public consultation period for the draft SPRP under the IPA is 30 business days. However, the consultation period was set to 65 business days so that the consultation period aligned with that of the draft regional plan. On completion of the consultation process for the draft SPRP, the Planning Minister must adopt one of following three strategies:

a) finalise the SPRP as provided for in the draft SPRP
b) include any amendments that the Minister considers appropriate
c) decide not to make a SPRP.
2. Consultation program

An extensive consultation program was undertaken by Department of Infrastructure and Planning regional officers to inform the community about the content of the draft regional plan and draft SPRP and to gather views and opinions on the development of the final regional plan. A structured program was implemented over the three month consultation period—between May and August 2008—and involved a range of approaches including:

- the launch of the draft regional plan and SPRP by the Premier, Anna Bligh and Deputy Premier and Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, Paul Lucas in Cairns on 9 May 2008
- distribution of 2000 free hard copies of the draft regional plan and draft SPRP and CD-ROM containing all information relating to the plan to local councils, offices of Members of Queensland Parliament, Queensland Transport customer service centres, TAFE and James Cook University, state agencies, libraries and mailed to the public on request
- distribution of an information brochure to households in the region that included the dates and locations for information sessions
- lodgement of gazettal notices in the Queensland Government Gazette
- placement of advertisements in metropolitan and regional newspapers promoting the consultation sessions
- promotion of the consultation process on the Consult Queensland website
- public information sessions and community forums held throughout the region
- a youth forum that was developed to ensure young people were engaged in the process
- briefings held with regional councils and the Wujul Wujul and Yarrabah councils
- complementary meetings held by other state government agencies on aligned issues
- development of material for the Department of Infrastructure and Planning website which included fact sheets, electronic versions of the draft plan and SPRP, an interactive mapping tool and a submission form and information on how to lodge a properly made submission. The Department of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>19 May 2008</td>
<td>Cairns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 May 2008</td>
<td>Mareeba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 May 2008</td>
<td>Youthspeak workshop—attended by school students from the region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 May 2008</td>
<td>Cardwell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 May 2008</td>
<td>Tully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 May 2008</td>
<td>Innisfail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 June 2008</td>
<td>Atherton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 June 2008</td>
<td>Ravenshoe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 June 2008</td>
<td>James Cook University public lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 June 2008</td>
<td>Mossman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 June 2008</td>
<td>Chillagoe</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Infrastructure and Planning website received 15,023 visits with more than 6,300 copies of maps downloaded.

- preparation of 1:50,000 sets of regulatory maps available for sale
- establishment of a free-call number to answer public enquiries, with departmental officers fielding thousands of phone calls and emails during the consultation period.

Eleven public information sessions, attracting more than 679 people were held by the department in the region.

Eight formal speaking engagements and presentations to key stakeholders were also conducted by officers of the Department of Infrastructure and Planning to explain the draft regional plan and draft SPRP.

The communication and consultation approaches were complemented by the provision of information directly to residents by regional councils, state agencies and key interest groups who held complementary meetings relating to the draft regional plan and draft SPRP.

### Table 3. Key stakeholder and local government consultation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Briefing/information sessions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 May 2008</td>
<td>State agencies and local government planning and development assessment staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 May 2008</td>
<td>Planning consultants and practitioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 May 2008</td>
<td>Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 May 2008</td>
<td>Cairns Regional Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 May 2008</td>
<td>Technical working group and advisory panel members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 May 2008</td>
<td>Cassowary Coast Regional Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 May 2008</td>
<td>Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 May 2008</td>
<td>Tablelands Regional Council</td>
</tr>
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</table>
3. Submission review process

3.1 Evaluation and response to issues
A detailed submissions review and evaluation process was established to:

- consider all properly made submissions in an objective, equitable and fair manner
- provide guidance and advice to the Planning Minister and the RCC in preparing the final FNQ regional plan and SPRP
- enable the Planning Minister to comply with the requirements of IPA.

In evaluating submissions, the approach used is to identify common issues across the submissions, then evaluate the various viewpoints presented on an issue-by-issue basis.

An assessment process was established that incorporated consideration of regional policy issues, future urban needs, specific development submissions and individual landowner requests for consideration of map changes.

The strategic issues are described in detail in section 5 of this report.

3.2 Response to submitters
A letter of acknowledgement was sent to all submitters (individuals and organisations) who lodged a properly made submission during the consultation period, notifying them of the department’s receipt of their submission. All submitters will receive a copy of the finalised plan and SPRP, when completed by the Queensland Government.

3.3 Community response
The community response to the draft regional plan and draft SPRP was significant, with 967 formal submissions received. These submissions included 4634 requests for changes to the boundaries of the regional land use categories. The quantity of submissions suggest that the consultation achieved a high degree of community awareness of regional planning issues and was successful in providing individuals and organisations with the opportunity to express their views.

Of the 967 submissions received, 68 per cent were from private individuals. The remainder were from community, business, commercial and other professional organisations. One hundred and fourteen duplicate submissions processed were not included in the formal count.

Under IPA, only submissions that are properly made must be considered when finalising the regional plan. Schedule 10 of IPA stipulates the requirements for submissions to be considered properly made. However, all submissions that were made within the consultation period—including those not properly made according to Schedule 10 of IPA—have been considered.

The 967 pieces of correspondence received comprised:

- 943 properly made submissions including:
  - 330 pro forma letters, covering a range of issues. Most focused on the regulatory provisions, particularly Urban Footprint boundary and boundary realignments specifically at Innisfail, Tully and Bramston Beach
  - 14 submissions in the form of petitions, on Welcome Pocket proposed aged-care facility, Bramston Beach urban footprint and desire for improved transport facilities
- 24 that did not constitute a properly made submission.

Some submissions were received in the form of petitions signed by a number of people. These were treated as properly made submissions and were registered under the name of the person submitting the petition.
Submissions were considered to be pro forma letters whenever a template document or a standard set of words were used, which had been signed by individuals or on behalf of organisations.

Most of the submissions raised multiple issues.

Many submissions included issues that would be addressed in planning documents at the local government planning scheme level rather than at the regional scale. The intent of a regional plan is to identify and address state planning interests in the context of a region’s geographical area. These regional planning outcomes can then be reflected in:

- capital works and service programs and policy making processes of state and local government
- local government policies, development assessment processes and local government planning schemes.

Many of these non-regional issues raised in submissions are valid planning concerns. Accordingly they will be considered at the strategic regional planning scale.

Four issues were identified as part of the feedback from the submissions as regionally strategic issues. The criteria for deeming an issue as significant included at least one of the following:

- large numbers of submissions raised the same or similar issues related to significant change in the policy position or underlying concepts and principles of the draft regional plan
- a significant issue that was not covered in the draft regional plan
- information fundamental to the intent of the draft regional plan
- a significant difference of opinion between submitters.

It is recommended that further clarification be sought from key stakeholders to determine the most appropriate planning outcome for the region. Overviews of the four strategic issues are detailed in section 5 of this report. This information will form the basis of further discussions with stakeholders across the region.

4. Key issues raised in submissions

4.1 Overview of submissions

The volume and complexity of issues raised throughout the consultation process reflects the challenges of planning in a region that encompasses two World Heritage Areas and where stakeholders have diverse interests.

A broad range of views were expressed in the submissions, with some issues eliciting both strong support and opposition.

Figure 3 provides a summary of the number of comments relating to various sections of the draft regional plan.

Summary of key themes arising from submissions

Infrastructure funding

There was strong recognition that the plan’s vision, strategic directions and desired regional outcomes can only be achieved if accompanied by appropriate infrastructure.

Urban growth

There was strong support for measures described in the draft plan to limit urban sprawl, promote sustainable housing and respond to challenges associated with climate change. Differing views on the preferred pattern of development were put
Figure 2. Submissions received by submitter classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous group</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commonwealth Government</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peak body</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State government agencies</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community (company, business, rural, consultant, local environmental, industry, service club)</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Need to support economic growth, including tourism

Submissions stated that mechanisms should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate economic growth, innovation and diversification. In particular, that more industrial land needs to be made available to support economic growth and that there should be a greater emphasis given to the potential for mining, tourism and agricultural industries in the region. The importance of the tourism industry was highlighted in a number of submissions, with requests for revisions to the regulatory provisions to ensure an appropriate balance between environmental protection and eco-tourism opportunities is achieved.

Subdivision and boundary realignment outside the Urban Footprint

There was differing views on the proposed approach to subdivision and boundary realignments in the Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area. Many submissions supported a more flexible approach to the proposed controls on subdivision of rural lands, rural residential development and boundary realignments. There was also some support for the maintenance of rural residential development as a lifestyle choice outside of urban areas.
In particular, there was a desire for boundary realignments, the minimum lot size to reflect the allowance for family, small lot excisions and for the type of agriculture in each area of the region to be considered when considering subdivisions.

A differing view held by a significant number of submitters supported restrictions on rural subdivisions to ensure a more compact urban form, reduce urban sprawl and allow for more efficient transport and infrastructure outcomes.

Effect of biodiversity protection on agriculture and tourism

There was strong support for ecological sustainability, and a number of submissions noted the need to balance the protection of biodiversity with economic development.

Residential dwelling densities

Mixed views were presented on the proposed increase in residential dwelling densities. Views varied depending on the regional location. While there was general support for transit-oriented developments and limits on urban sprawl, it was suggested that residential targets should be reviewed in some areas due to environmental, social and infrastructure constraints.

Housing Affordability

There was support for the plan to provide stronger statutory planning mechanisms to ensure that there is sufficient affordable housing to meet current shortages. There was also support and acknowledgement for the provision of a greater mix of housing for aged care.

5. Strategic issues and options

5.1 Biodiversity conservation

The protection of biodiversity was raised by 294 submitters. Eighty per cent of these supported the principle of biodiversity conservation and the need for policies to be strengthened. Twenty per cent of the submissions generally supported the policy in principle, but had concerns regarding map 5: (FNQ areas of ecological significance) of the draft regional plan and its impact on agriculture and tourism in the region.

What the draft regional plan said

The draft regional plan includes policies to conserve areas of ecological significance, both inside and outside the Urban Footprint, and identifies potential conservation corridors that could be revegetated in the future to create strategic links between areas of high ecological significance. The protection of these areas is intended to strengthen the resilience of flora and fauna against the predicted effects of increased development in the region and climate change impacts.

The policies aimed to manage the impacts of new urban development and are not intended to prevent existing agricultural activities or appropriate nature-based tourist attractions from taking place. It is important to note that these policies are only triggered during the assessment of a development application.
Map 2. Areas of high ecological significance
The biodiversity policies intend to ensure urban development does not diminish biodiversity values. Agricultural activities—or other activities that are currently exempt from development under Schedule 9 of the IPA—or activities that are managed under the Vegetation Management Act 1999 (VMA) would not be affected by the policies. The draft regional plan also supports the further development and implementation of environmental offsets and ecosystem services concepts.

The policies do not identify new forms of assessable development beyond those that are already made assessable through Schedule 8 of the IPA. They are intended to assist assessment managers in determining the impact of urban development as part of the assessment process. The mapped areas of ecological significance will provide local government with an information overlay indicating where such areas are located within the overall regional context. It is not intended that agricultural activities will be additionally affected by the policies, as these activities are already managed under the VMA.

Map 5 of the draft regional plan is essentially a compilation of existing data layers and includes vegetation communities already protected under the VMA. The map also identifies strategic conservation corridors that have been prepared by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The mapping was available to the public from the commencement of the public consultation process. Feedback during the public consultation period indicated that there were difficulties in interpreting some of the map details, especially when looking at individual properties. Following this feedback, Department of Infrastructure and Planning and the EPA took steps to ensure additional mapping was made available and provided specific briefings to key stakeholders.

**Issues raised in submissions**

Many people were generally supportive of the policies, but would like them strengthened to provide a higher level of protection for areas of high ecological significance, especially those that are within the Urban Footprint.

A view was expressed that the draft regional plan should include more detail on the delivery mechanisms to achieve better environmental outcomes. There was support for positive incentives to encourage landholders and developers to retain or enhance remnant vegetation, with some caution expressed about alternative approaches, such as environmental offsets, ecosystem service payment and carbon trading.

Submissions relating to Mission Beach called for stronger protection of cassowary habitat and recommended that any environmental offsets resulting from development at Mission Beach be directed back into the community, and not be redirected elsewhere.

Submissions from some sectors of the agricultural and tourism industries expressed concern about the consultation process surrounding the draft regional plan and associated biodiversity maps. The maps were prepared by state government agencies including EPA, Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries and Department of Natural Resources and Water. Some also expressed concerns about the potential implications of the policies on agricultural and tourism activities.

Some submissions from the agricultural sector expressed a desire for a further public consultation to give landholders more time to consider the biodiversity map.
### Have your say
- Should Far North Queensland’s unique biodiversity be protected through the regional plan?
- Do the draft biodiversity policies require further clarification to make clear they are only intended to apply to urban development and not impact existing agricultural uses?
- Are changes needed to the biodiversity maps to separate cleared lands proposed as future conservation corridors from vegetated areas of ecological significance?

### 5.2 Protection of waterways and water quality

The protection of waterways and water quality was raised 86 times in submissions. Eighty per cent supported the policies in principle but called for their strengthening. Twenty per cent generally supported the policy but had concerns regarding setbacks for development and impact on agriculture in the region.

**What the draft regional plan said**

FNQ contains a diverse and extensive network of waterway systems that are important to the broader community. They provide significant biodiversity, habitat, ecological connectivity, air and water purification, flood mitigation, drawcards for nature-based tourism and new residents, rural and urban water supplies, extractive resources, electricity generation, cultural heritage values, recreational opportunities, scenic amenity and sense of place.

Land use changes have significantly affected the region’s waterways over the last 200 years. Urbanisation of catchments has tended to result in increased water run-off, flash flooding, channel widening and changes to waterway migration—for example due to increased bank scouring and slumping. Many waterways have been converted to concrete drains, cleared, diverted, or filled in completely. Natural drainage systems have been replaced with less effective, less desirable artificial ones.

Current climate change predictions also indicate the region is likely to be increasingly subject to more extreme flooding due to the incidence of more intense cyclones, higher summer rainfall intensity and increased flooding of low lying coastal areas. Land use planning needs to ensure that infrastructure and urban developments are located outside risk areas to avoid significant community costs and ensure waterway functions and values are protected for all future generations.

The restoration and protection of healthy, vegetated waterways will help address current declines in water quality and help achieve the objectives of the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan. There is a strong imperative to improve water quality entering the Great Barrier Reef given its World Heritage Area status and current federal and state government commitments.
Map 3. Waterways and catchments
The draft regional plan recognises the need to protect the region's waterways and improve water quality. The draft plan's biodiversity policies (section 1.1) aim to protect wetlands and waterways of high ecological significance, while the water quality policies (section 7.1) seek to prevent clearing of vegetation in riparian areas and improve water quality through best practice design, rehabilitation and management. Recommended setback distances for development adjacent to waterways are included in the explanatory notes.

The policies in the draft regional plan are intended to guide development assessment and decision-making processes for new urban developments in or in close proximity to watercourses. Existing agricultural activities will not be affected by the draft policies and there are no existing frameworks that utilise compulsory acquisition for biodiversity conservation purposes. The draft regional plan does not seek to change this status quo and does not constitute a framework to take land away from landowners.

Broad scale clearing of vegetation outside of urban areas is already managed under the VMA. The setback distances for new developments included in the explanatory notes are based on the setback distances under the VMA codes.

**Issues raised in submissions**

Mixed views were received in relation to waterways and water quality. Numerous submissions were received from conservation groups and individuals indicating that the policies were not strong enough to protect waterways and called for mandatory setback distances for development. Submissions also suggested that the setbacks should be included in the policy statement or in the SPRP, and should be much larger than those recommended in the explanatory notes. The beneficial functions of riparian areas in terms of improving water quality and providing important habitat and wildlife corridors, particularly for cassowaries, was emphasised in the submissions.

Submissions from agricultural peak bodies and individual producers expressed confusion or concern over the link to the biodiversity policies and how the policies would be implemented. Some landholders were concerned they would be forced to revegetate riparian areas on their property or that the policies would lead to a loss of land through a form of compulsory acquisition, loss of productivity due to moving from cane to trees, or a financial or management burden—management of weeds and pests in riparian areas. Voluntary mechanisms and incentives to encourage farmers to manage remnant vegetation and watercourses were preferred.

Several submissions commented on the methodology for determining setbacks—difficulty in determining stream order or the top of the high bank—or suggested that a set buffer distance was too prescriptive and did not take into account particular location specific requirements.

Other submissions raised the need for water demand management, management of acid sulphate soils, wild rivers, urban and stormwater design, water sensitive urban design, declared catchment areas, drainage boards and the water requirements of mining/extractive industries.

**Have your say**

- Do you think it is important to protect waterways and water quality in Far North Queensland?
- Should riparian setbacks continue to be included in the explanatory notes?
- Should a new approach to riparian setbacks be considered, which uses a standard formula to identify appropriate and consistent setback widths? The formula would need to take into account a combination of hydrological and environmental factors, including the height of the high bank of the waterway, allowance for increased discharge in a developed catchment, migration of the waterway and wildlife corridor requirements.
- Should riparian setback requirements only apply to urban development?
5.3 Provision of industrial land

All submissions that referred to the issue of industrial land supported the policies of the draft regional plan and recognised the need for additional industrial land in Cairns and Innisfail.

What the draft regional plan said

The availability of affordable land often leads to the establishment of new industries. Priority needs to be given to protecting and providing suitable land for future industry to promote economic diversification and growth in FNQ.

The FNQ and Cairns Region Industrial Land Demand Study was undertaken by the Department of Infrastructure and Planning to inform the regional planning process, the industrial land development activities of the department and local government planning schemes.

The draft regional plan provided for 20 plus years of supply of land for urban activities, including industry. This included identifying an area of around 250 hectares north of Thompson Road and east of the Bruce Highway near Cairns for business and industrial purposes and an area of around 363 hectares to the north-west of Mareeba for industry.

There is sufficient industrial land at Mareeba to respond to important economic drivers on the Atherton Tableland such as mining and agriculture. Sufficient land is generally available outside of Cairns to meet future needs although local planning schemes may need to be amended to provide additional land parcels with an industry zoning. Further investigation may be required regarding the suitability and availability of some land already zoned for industrial purposes in Innisfail.

The bulk of the demand for industrial land will be in Cairns as the primary economic activity centre for FNQ. There is a significant shortage of land for future industrial expansion in the northern and southern precincts of Cairns. The need to provide industry and employment for a growing population will be particularly strong in the Mount Peter Master Planned Area.

Despite enough land being allocated for industry across the region there is a potential over-supply in some locations, such as Mareeba, and under-supply in other locations, such as Cairns. Concerns have been expressed there may be insufficient suitable industrial land in Cairns and Innisfail to meet medium- to long-term needs.

A shortfall occurring in Cairns depends on the utilisation of existing—zoned and vacant—industrial land and the designation of additional industrial land in the future. The degree of utilisation will depend on specific site constraints, loss of land to competing uses, such as residential and commercial, and landowners’ willingness to develop it for industry.

Have your say

- Should the regional plan ensure there is sufficient land for future jobs and employment for Far North Queenslanders?
- Should the regional plan identify current and future industrial areas more clearly?
- Should proposed industrial land provisions be strengthened to identify additional areas for investigation as future industrial land?

5.4 Subdivision and boundary realignments outside the urban footprint

Regulatory requirements relating to subdivision and boundary realignment was a recurring theme in the submissions received. Thirty per cent of submissions on this issue supported the policy to control urban sprawl and prevent further fragmentation of rural lands. Seventy per cent were opposed to subdivision controls in the draft regional plan. The minimum lot size was considered too large. It was also suggested there is a shortage of rural residential land and controls on boundary realignments are likely to stifle economic diversification especially in rural areas.
What the draft regional plan said

The draft SPRP prohibits new subdivision outside the Urban Footprint below 60 hectare lot sizes. Subdivision is defined as:
- creating a lot by subdividing another lot
- dividing land into parts by agreement—other than a lease for a term, including renewal options, not exceeding 10 years—rendering different parts of the lot immediately available for separate disposition or separate occupation
- rearranging the boundaries of a lot by registering a plan of subdivision.

Although the draft SPRP provides a number of other exemptions, they are not reiterated here.

The prohibition on subdivision—that results in lots smaller than 60 hectares—is aimed at maintaining large lot sizes to ensure the economic viability of productive rural lands and preventing residential or rural residential development outside a designated urban footprint or rural living area. This will also ensure value for money of state and local government infrastructure and delivery costs within the region.

The Queensland Government also has long-standing policies to protect good quality agricultural land. This includes its protection from incompatible rural residential development or other development that is likely to establish greater land use conflicts with agricultural activity—both current activities and possible future activities. Additionally, concern exists that rural residential development needs to be properly provided with any necessary infrastructure—for example roads, water, drainage—and is located in reasonable proximity to services without undue financial costs to the state and local government authorities.

Investigations of land supply within the region demonstrated that there is an adequate supply of rural residential zoned land in the region to meet demand over the next 20 years. The need for a further allocation of rural residential has not been demonstrated at this stage for the life of the plan. It is therefore not the government’s intention to revisit the prohibition on subdivisions below 60 hectares in the Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area.

Issues raised in submissions

The submissions reflect a diversity of views on the matter of subdivision, with both strong support and opposition expressed.

Numerous submissions contend that the prohibition on subdivision is too inflexible, and that the restriction on boundary realignment in particular, will stifle genuine agricultural activity.

Examples put forward in support of boundary realignments include:
- rearrangement of boundaries to create a rural lifestyle lot—less than 5 ha—or family lot excision
- rearrangement of boundaries where a road dissects two properties
- rearrangement of boundaries to accommodate irrigated areas under radial irrigation systems
- rearrangement of boundaries to separate productive and non-productive portions of a lot—in this instance good quality agricultural land and non-good quality agricultural land, and high ecological significance
- amalgamation of lots.

Have your say

- Should the proposed restrictions on boundary realignments be maintained through the regulatory provisions?
- Should boundary realignments be managed through a combination of regional plan policies and local government regulation?
- Should the regional plan allow boundary realignments to facilitate agriculture activities and conservation outcomes?