

Cairns Climate Change Strategy 2030 Feedback Submission

Feedback on the strategy vision and Council's climate commitments:

COUNCIL'S STRATEGY VISION

We strongly support Council's vision for 2030 to be a leader in mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change. We support embedding climate change risk and considerations throughout its organisation and operations, and we hope this embedding of risk is present in future planning approvals for proposed developments in coastline areas of high inundation risk. Council's support for a Smart Green Economy is in line with CAFNEC's objective to promote a sustainable economic recovery plan post-pandemic and we are looking forward to the introduction of jobs in innovative, green sectors in our region.

We strongly support Council's prioritisation of a healthy natural environment, working with nature to maintain a thriving and adaptive natural environment. We hope this prioritisation includes protecting essential habitats for endangered species such as Spectacled Flying Foxes, and in approval procedures for development proposals that affect vital ecosystems, including mangroves and salt marshes. In Council's efforts to sequester carbon to offset unavoidable emissions, we hope the importance of mangrove ecosystems are not overlooked as they sequester more carbon than any terrestrial forest type. We also support Council's objective to partner with Traditional Custodians in maintaining our natural environment, and hope Council ensures that partners will be remunerated for their traditional knowledge.

CAFNEC supports Council's vision to build resilient, informed, low emissions communities through information provision and support. In addition to informing communities, we hope Council also incorporates measures to hear and listen to community concerns about climate change. CAFNEC has been gathering data from community members living in suburbs vulnerable to climate-related coastal hazards since early-2021 and is happy to share this with Council.

COUNCIL'S COMMITMENTS

1. Net zero emissions for council operations by 2030

Strong support for this objective to reach net zero emissions for council operations by 2030 (if not sooner).

2. Council electricity supplied from 100% renewable energy

CAFNEC supports this objective but hopes that Council will ensure its renewable energy sources based on best practice for nature. In other words, ensuring Council is not supporting any energy developments that come at an unacceptable cost to nature, meaning:

- It is not on the site of, directly adjacent to, or directly impact Matters of National Environmental Significance and Matters of State Environmental Significance;
- It does not reduce or remove threatened species habitat;
- It does not adversely impact aquatic ecosystems or water sources.

Further, renewable energy development must result in positive outcomes for our community, meaning:

- It should not be developed on good quality agricultural land;
- It should not result in a decline in the proportion of state ownership of power generation in Queensland;
- It should not be approved without well established and agreed Community Benefit schemes.

3. *Prepare council and the community to adapt and prosper in a changing climate.*

We support this commitment.

4. *Support community progress towards Queensland's emissions reductions target of 30% below 2005 levels by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2050.*

With Council committing to net zero for its own operations by 2030, we would like to see a stronger commitment for Council to support community progress to net zero by 2030 as well, rather than accepting Queensland's target. As was stated in the Strategy's Policy Landscape summary, regions like Far North Queensland that have high exposure and vulnerability to climate risks should consider the social and economic impacts of delayed emissions reductions, as well as the advantages of a proactive economic transition prior to 2050. We hope Council considers supporting the community in reaching net zero by 2030 instead of 2050.

Feedback on the objectives and actions listed under our 6 focus areas of: Community, Industry, Energy, Transport, Built Environment, and Natural Environment.

COMMUNITY

Progressing to net zero emissions communities

As previously stated, we would like to see the Council commit to supporting the community in reaching net zero emissions by 2030 rather than Queensland's target of 30% by 2030. We acknowledge that some climate change impacts are unavoidable due to past and current emissions and thus adaptation and building resilience are essential. However, within the focus area of Community there appears to be an uneven distribution of actions favouring adaptation over mitigation. Mitigating further climate impacts through a rapid reduction of community emissions is also essential for our vulnerable region, and we hope Council considers placing more weight on the importance of supporting and facilitating community emission reductions in the final Climate Strategy.

While it may not be in the capacity of Council to directly influence community electricity use or transport decisions, there are other measures that Council can take to help the community to reduce their emissions. For example, kerbside organic waste collection to encourage proper sorting of organics from landfill waste would significantly reduce the carbon footprint of households with high food waste levels. With the replacement of the Bedminster Alternative Waste Treatment facility on the near horizon, this focus on reducing fugitive emissions from landfill and waste processing is an opportunity that should not be overlooked.

With that said, we strongly support the development of an emission inventory for the Cairns local government area, and the continued monitoring of the municipal emission snapshot in measuring the success of the Strategy.

Climate resilient communities

CAFNEC supports all actions outlined to achieve the objective of ensuring the Cairns community has built resilience to unavoidable climate impacts. We would like to highlight the importance of building resilience of food supply systems through initiatives to strengthen local food supply chains and improve food security. The pandemic highlighted how our existing food supply chains that send locally grown food to be packaged in southern Queensland are easily disrupted, and how local food should stay local where possible. Facilitating the resilience and independence of local food supply chains would have co-benefits for the local economy, our local farmers, our community, and the environment through reduced transport emissions.

We also strongly support the implementation of a Local Disaster Management Plan and raising awareness through disaster management programs and initiatives. Through our efforts door knocking in vulnerable suburbs to throughout 2021, we found that many community members felt their suburb lacked a “community hub”, which not only has consequences for the fragmentation of concerned community members but also implies a lack of shared space to gather when disaster strikes (e.g. heatwaves, cyclones, flooding). Therefore, Council should consider identifying spaces (e.g. community halls, sports centres, learning centres, etc.) or ensuring infrastructure exists for gathering in each suburb in times of crisis.

We support Council’s measurements for success for the focus area of Community, but community surveys are encouraged to gauge community members’ feelings of resilience and safety from climate impacts.

INDUSTRY

Transition to net zero emissions communities

We support all stated actions to transition to net zero emissions communities, and again, would like to see Council support accelerated industry progress towards net zero sooner than 2050. Our local tourism sector depends on the health of our World Heritage listed Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics Rainforest. These ecosystems are already at risk from existing climate impacts, so rapid action to reduce emissions in order to mitigate worsening climate impacts is essential for the survival of our tourism industry. Therefore, the necessary action is not to make

“progress towards Queensland’s emissions reduction target”, but to surpass Queensland’s emissions reduction target by a significant margin, and aim for net zero as soon as possible.

A leading Smart Green Economy

CAFNEC supports Council’s objective to position Cairns and Far North Queensland as a leader in the Smart Green Economy and welcomes collaboration with council and other key stakeholders to identify and progress Smart Green opportunities. We would like this reflected in shovel-ready projects and real, sustainable jobs in protecting our rainforest and reef.

CAFNEC also supports the embedding of circular economy principles in Council’s operations and in the wider community and industry. We would like to see a progress report on Council’s Waste and Resource Recovery Strategy, including outcomes for stated objectives to investigate low emission waste processing options and organic waste kerbside pickup. We encourage Council to prioritize guidance and incentives for local businesses in implementing circular economy principles and local sourcing with co-benefits for the local economy and emissions reduction.

ENERGY

Improve energy efficiency and transition to renewable energy

We support Council’s implementation of best practice energy efficiency in Council facilities and sourcing Council’s energy from 100% renewable sources. However, as mentioned above, we want Council to ensure that its renewable energy sources do not come at an unacceptable cost to nature. This is further elaborated on above in CAFNEC’s feedback to Council’s commitments.

We strongly support Council’s objective for accelerated transition to renewable energy in the region. For community transition to renewable energy, we would like to see Council to advocate for increased accessibility of renewable energy sources for Cairns residents who are not home-owners. For example, initiatives and incentives for landlords and body corporates to provide renewable energy infrastructure for renters, or community-owned renewable energy infrastructure. Existing solar subsidies only benefit a privileged subset of our local population who are homeowners, but cheap, clean energy should be accessible to all.

TRANSPORT

Accelerate transition to zero emissions transport

We support all listed actions. As mentioned in the Strategy, the transport sector offers some of the most achievable emissions reduction opportunities so we would like to see a planned timeline from Council in achieving these listed objectives as we believe achievable emissions reduction avenues should be prioritised due to the need for urgency in mitigating climate change.

In addition to improving the comfort and safety of active and public transport through the mentioned strategies (planting shade trees, providing shelter, use of cool surfaces and

consideration of crime prevention through environmental design), Council should survey community members to better understand why existing infrastructure is insufficient.

An integrated and sustainable regional transport network

We support this objective but would like to see further detail on how Council is advocating for sustainable transport options. We strongly support Council's plans to improve public and active transport infrastructure, connectivity, safety, and accessibility. We would like to see measures being taken to reduce car dependency in our region.

Measurements of success are insufficient to prove success in Council's objectives to provide an integrated and sustainable regional transport network, nor the transition to zero emissions transport for the community. These objectives could be measured through community surveys on the accessibility, safety, and efficiency of available public, shared and active transport services. This would also help Council understand why public, shared and active transport services are or are not being used by the community to develop effective measures to increase uptake.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

CAFNEC strongly supports the objective of working with nature to protect and restore our city and suburbs. However, measurements for success in this focus area are again lacking measurements for all stated objectives. Particularly % of canopy cover in CBD and suburbs is an insufficient measurement of a climate resilient built environment. Suggestions for additional measurements could include: the health and ability of coastal ecosystems to reduce the threat of coastal climate hazards (e.g. sea level rise, storm surge, flooding and erosion), which could be accomplished through consultation with citizen science initiatives such as MangroveWatch. These measurements should be reflected in Council's reporting.

We also strongly support demand management initiatives to reduce water use, and want to emphasise the need for these initiatives in reducing per capita water use in our region. Proper measurement of how demand management initiatives affect community per capita water use should also be included in Council's measurements for success in this focus area.

Recent approvals of developments in areas at risk of climate-related coastal hazards (e.g. developments in Trinity Park and Clifton Beach) contradict the objective of ensuring resilience of the built environment from climate risks. Therefore we require more detail on how the Council will ensure its new Planning Strategy will not allow for the approval of risky developments.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

A protected, valued, and thriving natural environment

We request further detail on how Council plans to ensure protection of habitat for species at-risk from climate change impacts. Recent, irreversible behaviour in the dispersal of critically endangered spectacled flying foxes from their roost trees in the city contradicts this

objective. What will Council do to ensure long-term environmental protection is secured over short-term economic profit associated with urban development projects? CAFNEC welcomes collaboration with Council to identify and respond to pressures to at-risk species, especially critically endangered keystone species like spectacled flying foxes.

Carbon sequestration in our natural environments

CAFNEC strongly supports the purchase of carbon credits from local projects. Actions under this objective should include a prioritisation of carbon sequestration projects in Cairns that work to restore local ecosystems, especially mangroves. Mangroves sequester more carbon (and faster) than any terrestrial forest type and deliver co-benefits of coastal hazard protection.

For the protection of the reef, Council should also prioritise measures to reduce agricultural runoff at the source rather than filtering runoff.

Are there any areas of the Strategy you feel could be improved? If so, please share them here.

1. The Strategy is an important step forward for Council to reduce its own emissions, but detail and examples for strategies to support community emissions reduction is lacking.
2. Furthermore, as mentioned above, Council should review its “measurements for success” for each focus area to ensure each stated objective is represented in measurements and is being measured accurately.
3. A clearer breakdown of Scope 3 Emissions (accounting for 80%) of Council’s emissions would ensure efficient prioritisation of emission reduction measures. Specifically, percentages of emissions resulting from purchased goods, waste processing, construction, leased facilities, etc.
4. Some examples of what Council advocacy and support looks like in practice are lacking. For example, *how* does Council advocate for sustainable transport options? *How* does the Council support community and business advocacy for transition to renewables?

Do you have any other feedback, suggestions and comments on the Cairns Climate Change 2030 strategy?

1. We suggest Council considers the accessibility of the Cairns Climate Change 2030 Strategy text. For example, white text on light green background on page 25 [titled: industry] is difficult to read for those with visual impairments due to a lack of colour contrast. We suggest Council consults with a document accessibility expert or uses sans serif fonts, alternative text for images, and online tools such as colour contrast checkers.