



TOWNSVILLE AND NORTH WEST QUEENSLAND

Strategic Regional Plan: Summary

2026-2031



An Australian Government Initiative



Regional
Development
Australia

A Strategy for Regional Growth

Townsville and North West Queensland is a region of more than 278,000 people, across 14 LGAs and a \$36 billion economy, with the scale and capability to help power Australia's future.

Driven by critical minerals, renewable energy and nationally significant industries, a \$40 billion project pipeline is set to create jobs, investment and new opportunities across the region. However, delivery is not guaranteed, with workforce shortages, housing constraints and infrastructure pressures emerging as key risks.

RDA TNWQ's 2026–2031 Strategic Regional Plan provides a clear and coordinated path forward to address these challenges, align stakeholders and ensure growth is sustainable, inclusive and shared across the region.

This is a call to action to work together, invest with purpose and ensure the region is positioned to deliver on its full potential.



North Queensland

Anchored by Townsville, this is the region's primary service, logistics and defence hub, supported by strong agriculture, manufacturing and industry.

North West Queensland

A powerhouse for beef production, critical minerals and renewable energy, playing a critical role in Australia's energy transition.

Western Gulf Region

Rich in natural resources and culture, with strengths in mining, fisheries, agriculture and First Nations tourism.

” Together, these subregions form one connected economy, with diverse strengths, shared opportunities and a critical role in Australia's future.

Our Vision

Our committee's vision is for a prosperous, sustainable, cohesive and liveable region.

Our Purpose

RDA facilitates and advocates for sustainable economic development by collaborating with regional stakeholders.

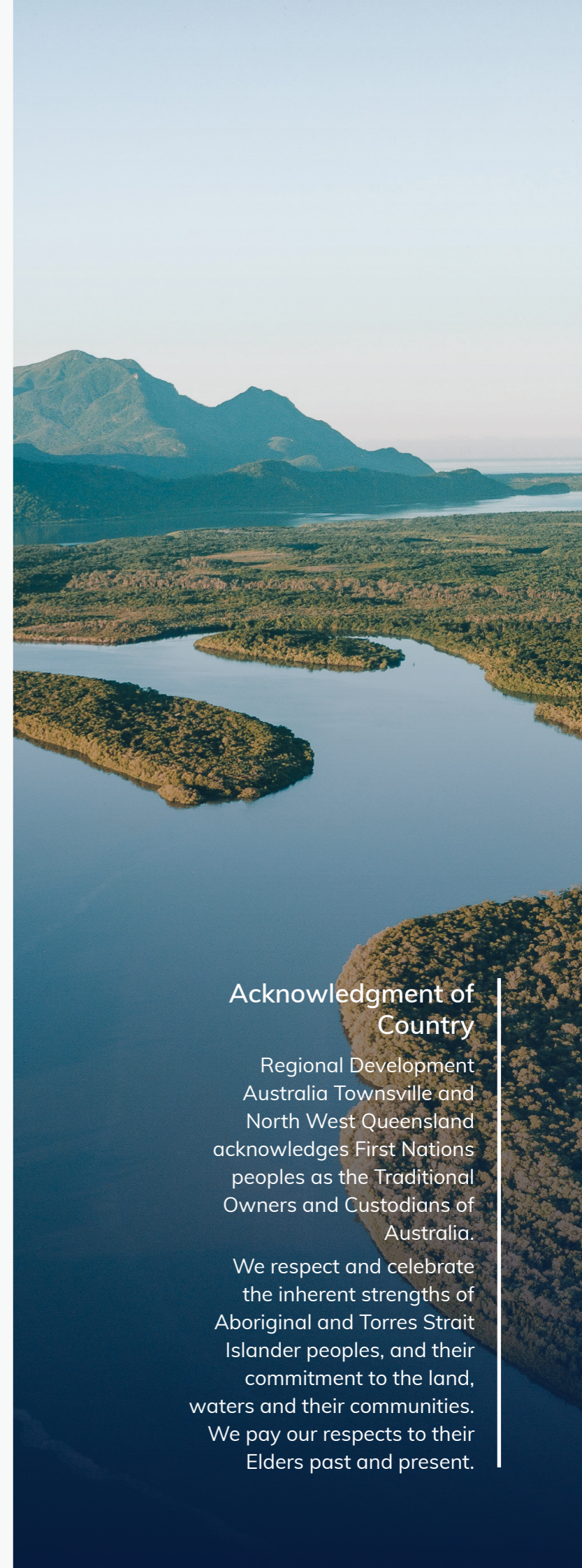
Our Committee

- Debra Burden, Chair
- Maria James
- Anthony Curro
- Cr Peta MacRae
- Cr Pierina Dalle Cort
- Rachel Cliffe
- Heidi Turner
- Kallum Cotterell
- Neil O'Brien

Acknowledgment of Country

Regional Development Australia Townsville and North West Queensland acknowledges First Nations peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Australia.

We respect and celebrate the inherent strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and their commitment to the land, waters and their communities. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.



Our Region at a Glance

Community & Housing

Growing, diverse, and vibrant regional centres

Total Population
278,000
Forecast ~300,000 ('36)



35.6 years
Median Age

2.6 persons
Average Household

12.5%
First Nations Population

108,000
HOUSEHOLDS



MEDIAN HOUSE PRICES

- 📍 Townsville ~\$390K
- 📍 Mount Isa ~\$300K

1.2%
Rental Vacancy



Regional Strengths



Natural Resources

Globally significant critical minerals, renewable energy potential, productive agricultural land and iconic natural assets



Strategic Location

Northern gateway to Asia-Pacific with established ports, rail and freight corridors; key defence hub



Industry Expertise

Deep capability across mining, agriculture, defence, health and manufacturing, supported by strong education and R&D



Economic Diversity

Multi-sector economy providing resilience and supporting emerging industries



Community Liveability

Connected communities with strong leadership and affordable lifestyle advantages



First Nations Heritage

Rich cultural knowledge and growing opportunities in economic participation and partnerships for major projects

Regional Challenges

WORKFORCE SHORTAGES

Skills and labour gaps across construction, health, trades and emerging industries

ENVIRONMENTAL RISK

Exposure to cyclones, floods and climate impacts

ECONOMIC TRANSITION

Shift to net zero and evolving industries requires investment and adaptation

SERVICE GAPS

Limited access to housing, healthcare, education and services in remote areas

FIRST NATIONS PARTICIPATION

Barriers to employment, training and economic opportunity remain

NATURAL RESOURCE PRESSURES

Balancing growth with environmental and cultural protection

INFRASTRUCTURE CONSTRAINTS

Ageing and disconnected transport, energy and water systems

COST OF DOING BUSINESS

Freight, energy, insurance and capital access impact competitiveness

Economic Strength



\$36.3Bn
Gross Regional Product

MAJOR EXPORTS

- 📦 Minerals (copper, zinc)
- 📦 Livestock (beef cattle)
- 📦 International Education

LARGEST CENTRES

- 📍 Townsville (183K)
- 📍 Mount Isa (18.5K)
- 📍 Cloncurry (3.2K)

Regional Workforce

144,000 Jobs
66.9% Participation
3.8% Unemployment

TOP INDUSTRIES BY EMPLOYMENT

Healthcare	21,237 FTE
Public Service	14,599 FTE
Construction	10,673 FTE
Mining	7,765 FTE
Agriculture	5,239 FTE

Education & Skills

56%
workforce has Cert III or higher

REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES

- 📍 James Cook University
- 📍 CQUniversity

Major Project Pipeline



Strong, future-focused major project pipeline

CRITICAL INDUSTRIES

- ⚡ Renewable Energy
- ⚡ Mining
- ⚡ Infrastructure
- ⚡ Advanced Manufacturing

<\$40 Bn

~90 projects valued at \$40 billion underway or planned (March '25)



Our Opportunity

Global and national shifts are reshaping industries, investment, security and workforce demand.

For Townsville and North West Queensland, these trends align strongly with the region's strengths, creating opportunities to grow industries, attract investment and strengthen long-term economic resilience.

Global and National Push for Decarbonisation & Renewables

Global transition to net zero is accelerating demand for renewable energy, transmission, hydrogen and biofuels

Critical Minerals Demand

Surging global demand for critical minerals is positioning the region as a key supplier and processing hub

Defence & Regional Security

Increased national defence investment is strengthening the region's role as a northern defence hub and creating supply chain opportunities

Supply Chain Resilience

A shift towards sovereign capability and onshore production is increasing the importance of regional manufacturing and logistics

Inflationary Pressures & Construction Costs Escalations

Rising costs across infrastructure and housing are driving the need for innovation and improved productivity

Workforce Transformation

Changing skills needs and increased competition for labour require more coordinated workforce planning and development

Natural Resource Management - Protecting Environment & Heritage

Stronger environmental expectations are increasing the focus on sustainable land, water and biodiversity management

First Nations Economic Development

Greater inclusion and partnership is creating First Nations opportunities, employment and enterprise across the region and within major project scopes

Tropical Health & Innovation

Growing global demand for tropical research and solutions positions the region as a leader in health, agriculture and environmental innovation

Our Regional Priorities



Our region is entering a period of significant growth and opportunity requiring focus on the fundamentals that support jobs, industry and liveable communities. This plan sets out eight key priorities for fostering sustainable and inclusive growth and identifies key actions to support regional success.



RDA TNWQ Priorities and Actions

2026-2031

Protect and Enhance Enabling Infrastructure

A strong and resilient supply chain is the backbone of the regional economy. Enhancing connectivity across roads, rail, ports, energy and digital networks must keep pace with industry and population growth and strengthen the region's resilience.

- Provide briefings to government on infrastructure risks and priorities (roads, rail, ports and freight)
- Support delivery of CopperString 2032 through stakeholder engagement and regional input
- Advocate for upgrades to the Bruce Highway, the Mount Isa to Townsville transport corridor and enhance road and port access in the gulf region
- Engage telecommunications providers to improve digital connectivity and reduce blackspots

Support Sustainable Economic Growth

The region is well positioned to develop industries aligned with national priorities in renewable energy, critical minerals, defence and advanced manufacturing. Supporting investment, reducing costs and strengthening industry capability will be critical to capturing this growth.

- Promote strategic precincts including Lansdown, Townsville SDA and critical minerals hubs
- Participate in water planning and infrastructure working groups across the North West and Gulf
- Support renewable energy development through stakeholder and community engagement
- Develop briefings to highlight regional cost pressures (energy, insurance, capital access)

Enhance Liveability and Resilience

Sustainable growth requires vibrant, affordable and resilient communities. Improving housing, essential services and infrastructure will support workforce attraction and long-term regional sustainability.

- Highlight policy recommendations to improve housing supply and affordability
- Brief government on the regional impact of high insurance costs and limited access to capital.
- Promote digital literacy initiatives in partnership with councils and providers
- Facilitate stakeholder engagement to improve disaster preparedness and response
- Promote the region's opportunities and liveability

Build a Skilled, Future Ready Workforce

Addressing skills shortages and preparing for long-term workforce transformation is a critical priority. Stronger alignment between industry, education and training is required to deliver a pipeline of job-ready workers.

- Lead development of a Regional Workforce Development Plan and Roadmap
- Host JTNQ to align industry needs with education and training pathways
- Lead targeted projects that provide training and employment pathways for underrepresented groups
- Lead a regional skills attraction initiative to promote the region nationally

Facilitate Regional Collaboration

Achieving regional outcomes requires strong partnerships and a coordinated approach across government, industry and community, supported by a shared vision and aligned priorities.

- Facilitate alignment across councils, regional organisations and industry groups
- Host regional roundtables to support information sharing and coordination
- Coordinate briefings and engagement with state and federal governments
- Lead delivery of the Annual State of the Region Roadshow

Drive Innovation and Sustainability

Innovation, digital adoption and sustainable practices are essential to maintaining competitiveness and supporting growth in emerging industries and a low-emissions economy.

- Promote and support innovation precincts such as NQ SPARK and industry hubs
- Facilitate connections between research organisations and local industry
- Support knowledge sharing and innovation uptake across sectors
- Promote the region's tropical research capability to attract investment and partnerships

Support First Nations Economic Development

First Nations peoples are critical to the region's future prosperity. Supporting business growth, employment pathways and partnerships will enable greater participation and inclusive growth.

- Facilitate training and employment pathways with First Nations organisations
- Support procurement and business opportunities for First Nations enterprises
- Connect Traditional Owners, industry and government to support development opportunities
- Promote and support First Nations led initiatives and investment readiness

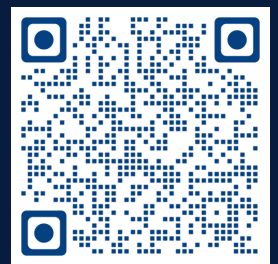
Sustainability and Natural Resource Management

Balancing economic development with environmental protection and cultural heritage is essential to long-term sustainability, resilience and community confidence.

- Contribute to regional land, water and biodiversity management working groups
- Promote sustainable practices across agriculture, mining and tourism
- Facilitate partnerships between industry, councils and NRM organisations
- Support clean technology and circular economy pilot initiatives

To explore the full Strategic Regional Plan, visit our website or scan the QR code below.

rdanwq.org.au



An Australian Government Initiative

