



## **STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2029**

## **BACKGROUND**

The Cassowary Coast River Improvement Trust (the Trust) is responsible for an area which comprises over 120 kilometres of coastline, with four major river catchments that connect to the Great Barrier Reef Lagoon: Johnstone, Tully and Murray Rivers and Liverpool Creek. The area includes rainforests of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and has extensive floodplains and wetland systems, and due to coastal connectivity, is susceptible to coastal hazard associated with climate change.

Rainfall varies across the Trust area, from 2300 mm average annual rainfall in the southern Cardwell area, central area Tully receiving around 4000 mm annual rainfall, and the northern area of Innisfail around 3600 mm per year.

Due to the tropical climate and high rainfall, the Trust area experiences major flooding almost annually. Prolonged wet seasons are common, extending from November to April. The Trust has invested in flood mitigation measures such as levees, flood gates, bank protection, and improved drainage systems.

## **LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK**

The Trust is established under the *River Improvement Act 1940*. The objects of the Act are to provide for the responsible management of river catchment areas through—

- a) planning for and implementing measures that improve the protection, health and resilience of rivers and their catchments; and
- b) repairing, and preventing damage to, rivers and their catchments; and
- c) restoring natural resilience to flooding and cyclones in rivers and their catchments; and
- d) protection of water security; and
- e) improving water quality and river system function in rivers and their catchments.

## **GOVERNMENT OBJECTIVES**

The new Statement of the Government's Objectives for the Community (the Objectives), under the *Financial Accountability Act 2009*, were tabled in the Legislative Assembly on 14 March 2025 by the Honourable David Crisafulli MP, Premier and Minister for Veterans.

The new Objectives reflect the Government's vision for Queensland's future through:

- Safety where you live
- Health services when you need them
- A better lifestyle through a stronger economy
- A plan for Queensland's future.

The fourth objective – “A plan for Queensland's future”, particularly conserving our pristine environment that draws visitors from across the world, improving water security, is most relevant to the work of the Trust.

Planning for Queensland's future, by building the roads and infrastructure needed for a growing population – including a safer Bruce Highway, putting more teachers in safer schools and preparing young Queenslanders for the future, conserving our pristine environment that draws visitors from across the world, improving water security, and delivering a world-class Olympic and Paralympic Games that leaves a positive legacy for Queenslanders.

Implementation of the Trust's Strategic Plan enables these objectives to be met.

## **VISION STATEMENT**

Healthy and resilient rivers and their catchments in the Trust's area that limit sediment and nutrient run-off to the Great Barrier Reef.

## **FUNCTIONS & ROLE**

The Trust is a statutory body constituted in 2013 following the merge of the former Cardwell Shire and Johnstone Shire River Improvement Trusts and operates in accordance with powers under the *River Improvement Trust Act 1940* and Regulation.

Trust responsibilities include:

- Participation with the community, traditional owners and other natural resource management groups to achieve healthy and stable catchments and river systems, with a strong focus on improvements to water quality entering the inner lagoon of the Great Barrier Reef to meet the objectives of the Reef 2050 Plan;
- Undertaking works to repair flood damage to the bed and banks of rivers and streams in urban and rural areas;
  - including to protect community infrastructure and public assets and
  - minimize loss of productive agricultural land;
- Planning, implementing and maintaining flood mitigation works of community benefit;
- Regulating activities with the potential to result in erosion to the banks of rivers or to worsen flooding;
- Assisting with community recovery following major natural disaster events such as flooding and cyclones;
- Maintaining resilient catchments to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

## **FINANCIAL CAPACITY**

The Trust receives funding from the following sources:

- Annual Precept - Cassowary Coast Regional Council
- State and Federal Grant Subsidy programs
- Landowner contributions towards individual projects
- Partnerships - Other NRM bodies
- NDRRA funding - where available for essential public asset repairs.

## **TRENDS**

Financial and other trends are likely to significantly impact the future performance of the Trust, making it difficult to balance environmental sustainability, regulatory compliance, community needs, and available resources to ensure the long-term viability of stream restoration efforts in the Trust's area.

Regulatory approval costs:

- Obtaining regulatory approvals for stream restoration projects can be a significant expense and time delay. Currently, obtaining State Agency Referral Agency (SARA) pre-lodgment advice for proposed works is delayed by months, making it difficult to deliver projects on time and within budget.
- Changes in environmental regulations or increased scrutiny on ecological impacts may lead to higher costs associated with obtaining permits and complying with environmental standards.
- There is limited waiver of regulatory approval costs for Trusts, which due to increasing environmental regulation, make some projects unviable. In some instances, the cost of

approvals exceed the actual works. The Trust requests the State reconsider the cost of approvals for Trusts where works are for a public benefit.

#### Machinery costs:

- The cost of machinery and equipment needed for stream restoration, such as excavators, specialised tools, and suitable operators, is subject to tight market conditions, high demand, and high fuel prices. The Trust expects the current difficulty in engaging suitable machinery and operators at a reasonable price and timeframe to worsen into the future.

#### Costs of materials:

- Stream restoration projects often require various materials such as quarry material, plant stock for revegetation, and erosion control materials. Fluctuations in material prices due to supply chain disruptions, market demand, and regulatory changes are increasing project costs.
- The Trust requests the State consider a waiver of quarry material royalties where the works are for the public benefit.

#### Contractors and labourers:

- Availability of contractors, skilled labour, and professional services for stream restoration works are impacting project timelines and costs. Current shortages are resulting in higher costs and project delays.
- The Trust requests the State consider increasing its contribution to reflect the current “cost of living” situation.

#### Climate change impacts:

- The Trust expects that climate change will affect stream restoration projects by altering precipitation patterns, increasing the frequency of extreme weather events like floods and cyclones, and impacting vegetation growth. These changes will necessitate adjustments to project designs and increase costs for adaptation measures.

#### Funding and Grants:

- The availability of government funding, grants, and community support plays a crucial role in financing stream restoration projects. Changes in government priorities, budget allocations, and eligibility criteria for funding programs affect the trust’s ability to secure financial support.
- The Trust requests the State consider increasing funding commensurate with the increased costs listed above, particularly with the likely increased frequency and severity of natural disasters with a changing climate.

#### Community engagement and stakeholder collaboration:

- Engaging with local communities, stakeholders and Indigenous groups is essential for successful stream restoration projects. Costs associated with public consultations, community programs, and collaborative initiatives will be considered in future project budgets, and as an element in future Annual Works Programs.

#### Technological advances:

- The Trust is currently reviewing advancements in technology, such as remote sensing, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and drone technology to improve efficiency and accuracy in project planning, monitoring, and assessment. However, adopting new technologies will require initial investments and training costs. The Trust is currently assessing funding capability to invest in technology which may reduce general operational costs, but any savings gained are likely to be lost due to aforementioned factors.

## **KEY CHALLENGES**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Response</b>
Flooding and prolonged periods of wet weather	Delays with implementation of on-ground works and projects approved under AWP's	Reschedule projects to drier period of year
Financial constraints	Inability to carry out an adequate level of stream bank restoration work	Program and prioritise urgent projects and encourage landowners to contribute.  Lobby State and Federal Governments to provide and maintain an adequate level of grant funding towards Annual Works Programs.
Declared Natural Disaster Events - Asset Damage Repairs Changes to Funding (DRFA (NDRAA previously)) Guidelines	Funding restricted to restoration of "Essential Public Assets" excludes Rural Industries and urban communities.  Decline in level of maintenance / restoration of a significant number of Trust assets.	Government representations
River management plans are over 20 years old and no longer fit for purpose	Allocating funds for river restoration works based on plan priorities may no longer be best practice	Seek additional funds from State and Federal Governments to update the Trust's river management plans, and regularly review and amend as required thereafter.

## **RELATIONSHIPS**

The Trust relies on strong operational relationships with its stakeholders (local government, government agencies, traditional owners, natural resource management organisations) and the community in the delivery of its programs and objectives.

## **PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES**

- To be a lead agency in river management
- To raise awareness of riverine management issues
- To undertake projects which improve the health of stream banks, waterways and riparian lands and the health of downstream waterways and inner lagoon of the GBR to meet the objectives of the Reef 2050 Plan.
- To ensure decision-making regarding allocation of Trust funds is based on contemporary best-practice guidelines and management plans.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN**

### **1. Develop and maintain strong partnerships with stakeholders and the community**

#### **Strategy**

The Trust will actively engage with stakeholders and the community in the development and

implementation of works programs and to ensure any concerns are addressed and priority projects delivered.

Actions:

- Partner with key agencies in the delivery of stream management works
- Interact/support other local bodies and agencies with similar interests
- Improve community understanding of problems facing the region's rivers and streams and accept not all demands can be met
- Encourage and influence others to take up their responsibilities.

**2. Maintain the physical and environmental integrity of watercourses**

Strategy

1. Gradually update the Trust's river management plans as funds permit.
2. Continue to progress and implement the priorities of the Trust's plans to accomplish the objectives of those plans. Studies have been undertaken for sections of the Johnstone, Tully & Murray Rivers, Jarra Creek and Meunga Creek.
3. Develop and maintain bank protection, bank stabilisation and stream bed improvements and levees where appropriate to reduce erosion, changes to in-stream alignment during flood events and impacts of water quality on Great Barrier Reef.
4. Encourage retention and protection of riparian vegetation areas and corridors and wetland areas.
5. Adopt an integrated, sustainable and innovative approach across the whole of catchment with the goal of improvement in water quality outflows to the Great Barrier Reef to meet the objectives of the Reef 2050 Plan.

Actions:





- Review river management plans
- Include priority works in Annual Works Programs
- Assist landowners with self-funded and subsidised works
- Promote the value of wetland areas and well-structured riparian zone vegetation and encourage landowners to protect and maintain these areas
- Continue to seek additional government funding support and maximise funding opportunities from external sources
- Work with stakeholders to plan, devise and implement equitable and sustainable river management practices.

**MONITORING PROGRESS**

The Trust measures its achievements of these strategies through the assessment against key performance indicators (KPIs). These indicators have been developed internally in respect of outcomes achieved in meeting Trust's strategies. Progress on meeting the KPIs is detailed in the Trust's Operational Plan (**Appendix 1**) and is reviewed quarterly.

Adopted by the Cassowary Coast River Improvement Trust 27/08/2024

## Cassowary Coast River Improvement Trust – Key Performance Indicators

<b>Outcome 1.1: Develop and maintain strong partnerships with stakeholders and the community</b>			
<b>Strategy 1.2:</b> Actively engage with stakeholders and the community in the development and implementation of works programs and to ensure any concerns are addressed and priority projects delivered			
<b>Activity 1</b> - Partner/support key agencies in the delivery of stream management works			
KPI Priority water quality and stream improvement and wetland projects for funding under government and trust sponsored programs identified and included in Annual Works Program.	Target 80% of budget revenue estimate	Progress - % complete 	Comment
<b>Activity 2</b> - Interact with other local bodies and agencies with similar interests			
KPI Meetings with representatives of Terrain NRM, Johnstone River Catchment Management Association, Landcare, Trust deputations, workshops WTMIP	Target 4 meetings p.a.	Progress - no. meetings attended 	Comment
<b>Activity 3</b> - Improve community understanding of problems facing the regions rivers and streams and accept not all demands can be met			
KPI Briefings and site meetings landholders, rural industry and community organisations. Media releases.	Target 20 site meetings / inspections 1 Media Release	Progress - no. site meetings/inspections no. media releases 	Comment
<b>Activity 4</b> - Encourage and influence others to take up their responsibilities			
KPI Effectiveness of relationships with others with an interest in Natural Resource Management.	Target 2 Successful Partnership Agreements / 5 arrangements generating tangible benefits	Progress - no. active partnership agreements - no. landholder agreements 	Comment




**Outcome 2.1: Maintain physical and environmental integrity of water courses**


**Strategy 2.1:** Continue to progress and implement the priorities of the Trust's strategies and action plans to accomplish the objectives of those plans. Studies have been undertaken for sections of the Johnstone River, Liverpool Creek, Tully & Murray Rivers, Jarra Creek and Meunga Creek.

**Strategy 2.2:** Develop and maintain bank protection, bank stabilisation and stream bed improvements and levees where appropriate to reduce erosion, changes to in-stream alignment during flood events and impacts of water quality on Great Barrier Reef.


**Activity 1 - Include priority works in Annual Works Programs**

KPI	Target	Progress - % of projects completed	Comment
Range of projects submitted under the Trust's Works Program 2023/24 for approval and grant allocation.	80% works completed		

**Activity 2 - Assist landholders with self funded and subsidised works**

KPI	Target	Progress - no. requests received Funding allocations provided	Comment
Provision of Engineering Services and Trust revenue/subsidy towards landholder projects.	10 - requests received, revenue expended, grant funding claimed		

**Activity 3 - Encourage landholders to protect and maintain riparian vegetation areas, corridors and wetland areas**

KPI	Target	Progress - % compliance	Comment
Compliance with existing River Improvement notices and site revegetation / rehabilitation work.	100% compliance No. of sites revegetated (new and existing)		

**Activity 4 - Continue to seek additional CCRC precept, government funding support and maximise funding opportunities from external sources**

KPI	Target	Progress - % of budget	Comment
Identify funding opportunities and continue with representations to government for improved funding towards Annual Works programs.	25% budget Funding requirements	