

Far North Queensland Regional Water Capability Plan - Plan Summary

2024 to 2034



Foreword

I am pleased to introduce the FNQROC Regional Water Capability Plan. This comprehensive, long-term plan, supported by Jobs Queensland and Queensland Water, identifies opportunities for our member councils to improve capability in the key areas of people, systems, data, and processes. By focusing on both individual and collaborative efforts, the plan aims to enhance the operational capacity of councils and foster regional partnerships.



The plan's purpose is to guide policy reform, align regional strategies, and inform investment decisions that reflect local needs and priorities. It outlines a series of scalable, strategic initiatives and actions across short-, medium-, and long-term timeframes, providing a clear roadmap for sustained capability building.

This is an exciting opportunity for stakeholders to work together to implement the plan, strengthening the existing capability and capacity of our region and I encourage everyone to support this important initiative.

Cr Angela Toppin AM

Mayor of Mareeba Shire Council
FNQROC Chair



Tablelands Regional Council

Executive Summary

The water and wastewater sector in regional areas, particularly in **Far North Queensland (FNQ)**, is currently grappling with significant capability challenges that hinder the effective delivery of safe and reliable services. These challenges stem from a complex interplay of internal and external factors, which restrict the operational efficiency of service providers and their ability to meet the needs of the community.

The **Regional Water Capability Plan**, developed for the **Far North Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC)**, is aimed at addressing the pressing capability challenges faced by water and wastewater service providers across FNQ. The region's unique geographical diversity, coupled with aging infrastructure and rapid population growth, exacerbates the difficulties in service delivery. As demands evolve due to regulatory changes and heightened customer expectations, it becomes increasingly critical to enhance the operational effectiveness of these services.

Covering an expansive area of **252,542 square kilometres** and serving a population of over **289,000**, FNQ's vastness presents unique challenges in managing and delivering water and wastewater services. The existing systems are under significant pressure, necessitating a strategic approach to improve operational efficiency and ensure the safe and reliable provision of these essential services.

The **Regional Water Capability Plan** serves as a vital strategic framework for the region, designed to enhance the operational capacity of service providers. It aims to foster collaboration among member councils, drive regional partnerships, align strategies, guide policy reform, and inform investment decisions that reflect local needs and priorities. The outcomes of the Plan consist of a series of scalable and achievable strategic initiatives and actions, categorised into short, medium, and long-term horizons. While the Plan does not provide immediate solutions, it serves as a comprehensive guide for sustained capability building across FNQ.

Recognising the diverse capacities and contexts of FNQROC member councils, the strategic initiatives have been crafted to be both scalable and achievable, ensuring that they deliver holistic value to the region. The development of the Regional Water Capability Plan involved a thorough, multi-step process aimed at addressing capability challenges through four key steps:

1. **Understanding On-the-Ground Issues:** Engaging with local stakeholders to identify specific challenges faced in service delivery.
2. **Conducting Workshops to Socialise Key Findings:** Facilitating discussions to validate findings and gather insights from various stakeholders.
3. **Performing Options Analysis:** Evaluating potential solutions to address identified capability gaps.
4. **Defining Implementation of Agreed Solutions:** Outlining a clear path for executing the selected initiatives.

The **Queensland Treasury Corporation (QTC)** played a crucial role in the initial phases, contextualising the capability challenges faced by FNQROC member councils. The current phase (development of this Plan) focuses on options analysis and stakeholder engagement, which will inform the final steps necessary to plan, resource, and implement the agreed strategic initiatives.



Extensive engagement with FNQROC member councils was integral to the development of the Regional Water Capability Plan, ensuring that it reflects their unique needs and priorities. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of ownership and commitment to the proposed initiatives. Key stakeholder engagements conducted during the development process included:

- **Future State Definition Workshop:** Aimed at validating current state findings, collectively defining the desired future state, identifying barriers, and exploring opportunities for regional collaboration.
- **Optioneering Workshop:** Focused on refining developed options for collaboration, assessing their feasibility, relevance, and scalability.

A systematic approach was employed to identify the capability gaps between the current and desired future states of water and wastewater service delivery in the region. The QTC's current state assessment provided a baseline, highlighting the existing service delivery landscape in FNQ. The Future State Definition workshop validated these findings and helped define the desired future state, while also identifying barriers to capability building.

Informed by the gap analysis, an initial set of **eighteen options** was developed to address the identified capability gaps. Feedback from the FNQ Water Alliance during the Optioneering workshop was instrumental in refining these options, leading to the consolidation of related initiatives and the transformation of some into specific implementation actions under broader initiatives. This process ensured alignment with the operational contexts and capacities of FNQROC member councils.

Following the incorporation of workshop insights and broader industry analysis, the initial eighteen options were distilled into a final set of **eleven strategic initiatives**, each accompanied by corresponding implementation actions. These initiatives are designed to effectively guide member councils in executing the overall strategy.


The proposed strategic initiatives to enhance the capability of service delivery across FNQ include:

-
- **1 Establish Common Operating Systems, Platforms, and Tools**
Standardising processes to improve efficiency.

 - **2 Regional Water Data Sharing**
Facilitating collaboration through shared data resources.

 - **3 Standardized SOPs, Work Instructions, Templates, and Processes**
Creating uniformity in operations.

 - **4 Standardized Water and Wastewater Asset Design and Specification**
Ensuring consistency in infrastructure development.

 - **5 Strategic Awareness of Water and Wastewater Service Delivery**
Enhancing understanding of service delivery dynamics.
-



6



Prudent and Efficient Water and Wastewater Services in FNQ

Promoting sustainable practices.

7



Establishing Regional Market Buying Power for FNQ

Leveraging collective purchasing to reduce costs.

8



Driving Change in Water and Wastewater Grant Funding

Advocating for improved funding mechanisms.

9



Building Capability in Risk-Based Decision Making Across FNQ

Enhancing decision-making frameworks.

10



Building Maturity in Asset Management and Planning Across FNQ

Strengthening asset management practices.

11



Building and Sustaining a Strong Water Workforce for FNQ

Fostering workforce development and retention.

The Regional Water Capability Plan underscores that sustainable capability improvements will emerge from enhanced regional collaboration among FNQROC member councils. By sharing resources, learning from one another, and working collectively, the councils can uplift their capabilities, advocate for broader policy change and investments where they add value and ensure the reliable delivery of water and wastewater services, with support and enablement from Government, key industry bodies and the broader market.

Implementation Roadmap

		Financial year commencement:					
		FY25	FY26	FY27	FY28	FY29	FY30+
Initiative 1: Establish common operating systems, platforms and tools	1.1 Establish common business requirements	1.1					
	1.2 Prioritise business requirements	1.2					
	1.3 Map existing tools and platforms		1.3				
	1.4 Identify ICT network, governance and cyber security requirements		1.4				
	1.5 Identify opportunities to leverage existing contractual or market arrangements			1.5			
	1.6 Undertake a market sounding exercise			1.6			
	1.7 Find best value opportunities for common operating systems			1.7			
Initiative 2: Regional water data sharing	2.1 Define user needs and requirements	2.1					
	2.2 Design dashboard information requirements	2.2					
	2.3 Develop common data and information extract tools		2.3				
	2.4 Investigate options and functional requirements		2.4				
	2.5 Establish an underlying data and information sharing agreement			2.5			
Initiative 3: Standardised SOPs, work instructions, templates, and processes	3.1 Identify, define and agree extent of SOPs, work instructions, templates and processes	3.1					
	3.2 Prioritise development of agreed templates	3.2					
	3.3 Implement program of template design and development		3.3				
	3.4 Ensure engagement and incorporation of FNQROC Council needs and requirements			3.4			
	3.5 Establish online repository for regional water templates			3.5			
Initiative 4: Standardised water and wastewater asset design and specification	4.1 Define common asset types	4.1					
	4.2 Agree / determine common asset types and scenarios		4.2				
	4.3 Establish baseline design, standards and 'out of the box' price estimates		4.3				
	4.4 Literature / market review for best-practice design codes and standards			4.4			
	4.5 Baseline efficiency and cost outcomes				4.5		
	4.6 Link and align to regional / shared market buying power				4.6		
	4.7 Build and integrate outcomes and agreed asset design and specifications				4.7		
Initiative 5: Strategic awareness of water and wastewater service delivery	5.1 Establish a Regional State of Water and Wastewater Pack	5.1					
	5.2 Establish custom State of Water and Wastewater Packs for each Council		5.2				
	5.3 Establish templates for the State of the Water and Wastewater approach		5.3				
Initiative 6: Prudent and efficient water and wastewater services in FNQ	6.1 Establish and co-create a scope of works	6.1					
	6.2 Integrate findings from the Urban Water Risk Assessment into scopes of work	6.2					
	6.3 Appoint advisory / consulting partner for prudency and efficiency assessment		6.3				
	6.4 Deliver relevant findings to FNQ Water Alliance			6.4			
	6.5 Deliver individual Council findings				6.5		
	6.6 Advocate for State Government support of alternate delivery models					6.6	
Initiative 7: Establishing regional market buying power for FNQ	7.1 Identify priority procurement categories common to FNQ Councils	7.1					
	7.2 Establish a commercial framework and model for further shared procurement		7.2				
	7.3 Undertake market testing and sounding			7.3			
	7.4 Agree and negotiate commercial and cost sharing principles			7.4			
	7.5 Identify a priority procurement category				7.5		
Initiative 8: Driving change in water and wastewater grant funding	8.1 Establish an overall cost and risk profile	8.1					
	8.2 Establish a 'no regrets' funding position and model		8.2				
	8.3 Collaborate with LGAQ and QLD Water Directorate and establish advocacy strategy			8.3			
Initiative 9: Building capability in risk-based decision making across FNQ	9.1 Seek subject matter expertise to build a risk approach and framework	9.1					
	9.2 Establish a Water and Wastewater Risk Toolkit for FNQROC Councils		9.2				
	9.3 Establish initial risk assessments against risk categories and tolerances			9.3			
	9.4 Support FNQ Water Leaders in working with risk			9.4			
Initiative 10: Building maturity in asset management and planning across FNQ	10.1 Identify common challenges and capability improvement areas	10.1					
	10.2 Establish a risk-based / prioritised approach to asset management and planning		10.2				
	10.3 Identify resourcing needs for improvement pathways			10.3			
	10.4 Establish indicators and tools to measure effectiveness and improvement				10.4		
	10.5 Complete a detailed asset planning and maturity assessment					10.5	
Initiative 11: Building and sustaining a strong water workforce for FNQ	11.1 Develop regional workforce planning framework, tools and templates	11.1					
	11.2 Establish a shared resourcing / shared services model			11.2			
	11.3 Establish and implement a Water and Wastewater Attraction Strategy and Plan			11.3			
	11.4 Map water and wastewater technical and operational			11.4			
	11.5 Undertake a market analysis and benchmarking		11.5				