Queensland is experiencing the most sustained period of economic and population growth in its history.

In shaping the 2008-09 Budget, the Government has chosen to build tomorrow’s Queensland today.

The State’s prosperity is generating unprecedented demand for housing, healthcare, schools, transport, other essential services and vital infrastructure throughout Queensland’s regions.

The Budget delivers massive injections of funding to our public hospitals and healthcare system. It funds the biggest capital works program in the State’s history.

It increases services to the regions and delivers vital long-term social and economic infrastructure for the benefit of all Queenslanders.

A centrepiece of this Budget is tax cuts to help Queenslanders purchase their first home.

Queensland’s success is built on the success of our regions, from the fast-paced expansion of the south-east corner to the agricultural heartlands, the booming hubs of mining activity and the vibrant growth of coastal areas.

This document sets out the Government’s investment commitment to address the changing needs of the Far North Queensland region.
Every five years the Census provides a snapshot of Australian society. It measures many characteristics including our age and birthplace, language spoken and religion, if we need assistance to perform everyday activities or to participate in community life and the work we do (paid or unpaid) and how we get there.

What did the 2006 Census reveal about your community? Take a look below for a snapshot of life in the Far North Queensland region.

**The work we do**
Policy advisers, sales representatives, administrative officers, food and beverage supervisors, machine operators, project managers, nurses, teachers, carers – Far North Queensland residents work in a diverse range of jobs. Census data shows 11.6% of people living in the Far North Queensland region are employed in the retail trade industry, while public administration and safety accounts for 10.7% of employment. Accommodation and food services (9.7%) healthcare and social assistance (9.3%) and construction (9.9%) are the other major employment industries in this rapidly growing region.

**Our qualifications**
Far North Queensland’s strong population growth has brought with it an increase in the number of skilled workers. Almost 66% of people living in our region now hold “beyond” school qualifications – an increase of 13.5 percentage points compared to 1996 Census results (see graph). Of these qualifications, 19.4% are degree or higher, 11.9% are advanced diploma or diploma and 38.1% are certificate level. Over 30% of Far North Queensland residents who identified with having a ‘beyond’ school qualification did not indicate the level of education received.

**How much we earn**
We’ve certainly noticed an increase in the cost of living over the years, and as it rises so too does our income. At the time of the 1996 Census, the median weekly household income for the Far North Queensland region was $576. In 2006 the median weekly income for households in our region was $842 – that’s 46% more than we earned 10 years earlier1.

**Household projections**
Families come in all shapes and sizes and between now and 2026 we can expect to see a lot more of them. But what type of family will occupy most Queensland homes? For the last decade most Queensland households have consisted of couples with children. However household projections forecast that, over the next decade and beyond, the make-up of homes throughout our State will dramatically change.

Throughout our State an ageing population, declining fertility rates among younger couples, and baby boomers becoming ‘empty nesters’ will result in the number of couples without children and lone person households taking over as the most common types.

Take a look to the right to see how households in the Far North Queensland region are likely to change between now and 2026.

**The national Census telling it like it is**
Covering an area of 273,160 square kilometres or around 16% of the State, Far North Queensland is home to just over 6% of Queensland’s total population. Over 253,7001 Queenslanders now call the Far North Queensland home – that’s 2.5% more than the year before2.

Coastal towns, secluded beaches, untouched rainforests, and of course expansive areas of reef make this region sought after for its quality and unique environment. Add to this an international airport, the economic hub of Cairns, worldclass educational facilities and a vibrant and diverse economy consisting of tourism, agriculture, fishing and mining and it’s easy to see why more and more people are choosing this region in which to work, live and play.

The Queensland Government recognises the role Far North Queensland has played in increasing our State’s prosperity and sustaining its economic and social growth.

This Regional Budget Statement highlights the Government’s commitment to the region and its people.

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Healthy individuals and communities

We are committed to improving and sustaining the health and wellbeing of all Queenslanders by investing in infrastructure and services that will strengthen our public health system, promote healthier lifestyles and enhance confidence and safety in our communities.

As part of the Government’s continued commitment to meet the growing needs of the community, in 2008-09, spending on health infrastructure and initiatives in Far North Queensland will include:

- $24.2 million to commence the Cairns Hospital redevelopment estimated to cost around $450 million
- $18.6 million to complete the Weipa Hospital redevelopment
- $8 million to continue the $15.8 million new primary health care centre at Yarrabah, due for completion in 2009
- $7.6 million to continue the Cairns Hospital’s Emergency Department expansion
- $5.4 million to continue building the $39 million Chronic Disease and Prevention Management Centre on Thursday Island.

Initiatives in Far North Queensland to enhance community safety through investments in police and emergency services infrastructure projects include:

- $7.5 million for a new 24-hour police station and watchhouse at Mareeba
- $6 million to replace the ambulance stations at Yarrabah, Tully and Weipa
- $3 million for improvements to helipads at Innisfail, Cooktown, Wujal Wujal and Thursday Island
- $2.6 million to operationalise the new Cairns-based helicopter
- $2.4 million for a replacement police station at Port Douglas
- $900,000 to extend the current Thursday Island Police Station
- $300,000 to replace the police station and residential accommodation at Ravenshoe
- $300,000 to replace the ambulance station and residential accommodation at Douglas
- $3 million for improvements to helipads at Innisfail, Cooktown, Wujal Wujal and Thursday Island
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- $2.4 million for a replacement police station at Port Douglas
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- $300,000 to replace the police station and residential accommodation at Ravenshoe
- $300,000 to replace the ambulance station and residential accommodation at Douglas

Building infrastructure

Planning and delivering the infrastructure needed to provide essential and efficient services to our rapidly growing communities – now and in the future – is one of our key priorities. The Government’s commitments to Far North Queensland in 2008-09 include:

- $11.5 million for the Home and Community Care initiative
- $6.4 million to support people with a disability through a range of programs
- $3.6 million over four years to establish new residential care and therapeutic facilities to accommodate young people with complex and extreme behaviours
- $2 million for short-term and time-limited respite support for families of people with a disability
- $2 million to complete the Marlin Coast Neighbourhood Centre in Cairns
- $1.8 million over four years to establish additional out-of-home care placements for children in care.

Regional development

Regional development is at the heart of Queensland’s economic future and the Government is laying the foundation for future economic growth and prosperity for all Queenslanders by responding to the growth needs of the region.

In 2008-09 we will deliver the following key infrastructure and regional development initiatives in Far North Queensland:

- $36.7 million to upgrade the Innisfail TAFE to deliver a high-tech integrated education precinct
- $7.2 million to seal a 15.7-kilometre section of the Peninsula Developmental Road between Lily Creek and Carols Crossing (south of Laura)
- $5.7 million to seal two sections (a total of 9.5 kilometres) of the Peninsula Developmental Road between Carols Crossing and Crocodile Gap (south of Laura)
- $1.5 million to extend the boardwalk and foreshore promenade to the south of the Clifton area of Cairns.

In addition the region will also benefit from $18.2 million for 25 accommodation units for government employees in Weipa.

Far North Queensland will also be in the spotlight when the Regional Sitting of Parliament is held in Cairns from 28-30 October 2008.

Economic growth

Queensland’s economic growth is supported by rising productivity and increasing labour force participation. The Government remains committed to expanding the productive capacity of the Queensland economy through initiatives that develop infrastructure, promote education and training and facilitate research and innovation. Commitments to Far North Queensland in 2008-09 include:

- $58.7 million to provide over 3.5 million hours of vocational education and training including $1 million to provide additional trades training places as part of the Queensland Skills Plan. This is expected to create an additional 1,040 training places in Far North Queensland by 2010
- $50 million to improve flood immunity on the Bruce Highway between Corduroy Creek and Tully High School, with Australian Government funding
- $24.4 million to continue construction of a bridge and approaches at Mulgrave River, south of Cairns, with Australian Government funding

The Queensland Government is committed to improving the health of all Queenslanders and to meeting the growing needs of the community. In 2008-09, $24.2 million will begin construction of the $450 million Cairns Hospital redevelopment. Above: bird’s-eye view of the proposed hospital.
Helping Queenslanders under financial pressure

With household budgets under increasing stress from rising interest rates, higher rents and mounting grocery and fuel prices, the Government is committed to taking the pressure off Queensland families. Each year the Government offers relief to many Queenslanders through discounts, rebates and subsidies to help improve their access to, and meet the cost of, a range of services including discounted rail and taxi fares, reduced car registration costs, exemption from the community ambulance levy and cheaper electricity bills. In 2008-09 these concessions are estimated to have a total value of around $1 billion. However the Queensland Government recognises more and more families are ‘doing it tough’ and is acting on its commitment to help Queenslanders make ends meet.

On top of the existing concessions, the 2008-09 State Budget sees the implementation of a major housing affordability strategy that will provide relief for Queenslanders who are buying or renting their homes.

The Government will also spend $570 million in 2008-09 in further relief as it tackles the rising cost of fuel by ensuring all Queenslanders receive the full 8.354 cents per litre fuel subsidy.

Closing the gap with Indigenous communities

The Queensland Government, in partnership with the Australian Government, is committed to closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians through innovative programs such as:

- $13.5 million to improve the reliability and supply of water services including $4.6 million to upgrade the Tinaroo Falls dam spillway
- $6.5 million to redevelop Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE’s Cairns campus
- $5.1 million for employment and training assistance for 402 people.

Housing affordability

The Queensland Government is committed to improving housing affordability for those Queenslanders hardest hit by the current economic environment.

In addition to the substantial tax relief to be introduced by the Government in 2008-09 for first home buyers, low-income families and individuals in Far North Queensland will receive housing services and support including:

- $13.8 million to construct, purchase and upgrade public housing dwellings involving purchasing or completing 28 homes and committing to a further 13 homes
- $400,000 for community housing programs and services to address crisis and long-term housing needs.

Education and early childhood development

Giving every child every chance to learn in the best possible environment is a priority for the Government. This is reflected in our 2008-09 commitment to the Far North Queensland region of an additional $5.1 million for school maintenance programs and further capital works investment in schools, including:

- $16.6 million to complete stage three of Redlynch State College
- $7.7 million to complete stage three of Isabella State School
- $5 million to start stage three of Western Cape College, Weipa
- $3.4 million over two years to complete the Cairns Early Years Centre
- $2.7 million to subsidise construction of the $6 million multipurpose facility at Kowanyama State School.

Prevention and early intervention

The Queensland Government is focused on developing and supporting prevention and early intervention strategies or initiatives that are targeted to disadvantaged areas, individuals and/or population groups.

In 2008-09 the Government will commit:

- $3.5 million to support Far North Queensland families, including early intervention programs to improve the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children and their families
- $1 million over four years for a Family Intervention Service which will strengthen child protection services by providing direct support to families in their own home.

Managing climate change and protecting the environment

In 2008-09 the Government will allocate $30 million for new climate change initiatives from the proceeds of the Queensland Climate Change Fund. The fund’s first major initiative will be the ClimateSmart Home Service which will provide Queenslanders with tools to monitor and reduce their energy use to deliver savings in household electricity costs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In Far North Queensland, the Government’s environmental commitments include:

- $8.4 million for the day-to-day management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park
- $500,000 to complete the MaMu Canopy walkway at Wooroonooran National Park
- $450,000 to implement the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan to halt and reverse the decline in the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef
- $341,000 to redevelop the new Laura Ranger Base at Lakefield National Park.

Unemployment rate(a)

1994-95 to 2006-07

(a) Data based on an un-smoothed series.

Source: DEEWR, Small Area Labour Markets – Australia.
Strong economic growth maintains record low unemployment

- Economic growth in Queensland is forecast to strengthen to 4¼% in 2008-09, outstripping the nation for the 13th year in a row.

- With jobs growth again outpacing the nation, the unemployment rate is estimated to fall to a 34-year low of 3¾% in 2007-08 and remain there in 2008-09, taking it below the national rate for the fifth consecutive year.

Strong finances

- A General Government operating surplus of $809 million is forecast in 2008-09.

- The State’s net worth is budgeted to grow from $123 billion at 30 June 2008 to over $140 billion by 30 June 2012 – reflecting Queensland’s position of holding the strongest balance sheet in the nation.

- Interest expenses in the General Government sector is budgeted at just 1.5% of revenue in 2008-09.

Competitive taxes

- Queensland maintains its competitive tax status, with taxpayers in other states and territories to pay an average of $274 more state tax each than Queenslanders in 2008-09.

- The 2008-09 Budget provides tax relief to make housing more affordable. From 1 July 2008, the home and first home transfer duty concession thresholds will be increased from $320,000 to $350,000. The first home concession threshold will be further increased from 1 September so that no transfer duty will be payable on a first home valued up to $500,000.

- Mortgage duty will be abolished in full from 1 July 2008 – another saving to those taking out home loans.

- There are also land tax cuts, including specific measures to benefit Queensland’s elderly such as exempting aged-care facilities.

- While already having the nation’s lowest pay-roll tax rate, further relief will benefit 6,800 businesses in Queensland.

The 2008-09 State Budget delivers a massive boost to health, with a record Budget allocation of $8.352 billion.

The Budget funds new hospitals and upgrades at locations across the State. Areas of increasing demand such as emergency departments and birthing services are a key focus.

There is a $100 million boost to school maintenance to deliver a record program for the next two years – part of the $6 billion Budget allocation to the Department of Education and Training. This funding includes 270 new teachers and teacher aides to meet enrolment growth and 4,250 additional trade training places to help address skills shortages.

To boost front-line services, 200 new police and 250 new ambulance officers are funded. The Budget also provides for 145 new ambulance vehicles as part of a record emergency services allocation.

A new $20 million ClimateSmart Home Service will assist Queensland households to meet the challenges of climate change.

An increase in the electricity rebate and other tax breaks will assist older Queenslanders.

With tax cuts to assist Queenslanders break into home ownership, this is a Budget focussed on the future and delivering the front-line services a growing state needs.
Government services in Far North Queensland

Babinda

QGAP
91 Munro Street
Babinda QLD 4861
E-Mail babinda.qgap@qld.gov.au
Telephone 4067 2021
Facsimile 4067 2027
Opening Hours: Monday to Friday – 10am to 3pm

Cairns

Department of Natural Resources and Water

William McCormack Place
3rd Floor 5 b Sheridan Street
Cairns QLD 4870
Telephone 4039 8431
Facsimile 4039 8145
Opening Hours: Monday to Friday – 8.30am to 4.30pm

Cairns

Department of Communities

Far North Queensland Regional Office
Cnr Grafton and Harley Streets
Cairns QLD 4870
Telephone 4039 8476
Facsimile 4039 8096
Opening Hours: Monday to Friday – 8.30am to 5pm

Cairns

Department of Tourism, Regional Development and Industry

Ground Floor
Cairns Port Authority Building
Cnr Grafton and Harley Streets
Cairns QLD 4870
Telephone 4048 1111
Facsimile 4048 1122
Opening Hours: Monday to Friday – 8.30am to 5pm

Cairns

Office of Economic and Statistical Research

Level 9
15 Lake Street
Cairns QLD 4870
Telephone 4039 8804
Facsimile 4039 8828
Opening Hours: Monday to Friday – 9am to 4.30pm

Cooktown

QGAP
172 Charlotte Street
Cooktown QLD 4895
E-Mail courthouse.cooktown@justice.qld.gov.au
Telephone 4069 5333
Facsimile 4069 5864
Opening Hours: Monday to Friday – 9am to 4.30pm

Mt Garnet

QGAP
Police Station, Garnet Street
Mt Garnet QLD 4872
Telephone 4097 9005
Facsimile 4097 9036
Opening Hours: Wednesday – 9.30pm to 3.30pm

Ravenshoe

QGAP
27-29 Grigg Street
Ravenshoe QLD 4888
Telephone 4097 6660
Facsimile 4097 6830
Opening Hours: Monday to Friday – 9am to 1pm, 2pm to 4.30pm

Weipa

QGAP
Central Avenue
Weipa QLD 4874
E-Mail courthouse.weipa@justice.qld.gov.au
Telephone 4069 9999
Facsimile 4069 9160
Opening Hours: Monday to Friday – 9am to 4.30pm

Yarrabah

QGAP
5 Noble Drive
Yarrabah QLD 4871
E-Mail yarrabah.qgap@qld.gov.au
Telephone 4056 0727
Facsimile 4056 9380
Opening Hours: Monday to Friday – 9am to 12pm and 1pm to 4pm

Other services

Smart Service Queensland
For information on all other Government services call 13 13 04 www.qld.gov.au

State Emergency Service
Telephone 132 500

13 HEALTH
Telephone 13 43 25 84