

# Recovery Plan

2023 Tropical Cyclone Jasper  
and Associated Rainfall  
and Floods



**Cook Shire**  
COUNCIL

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## Recovery Definition

Recovery is defined in the Queensland Recovery Plan as:

*“...the coordinated process of supporting disaster-affected communities’ psychosocial (emotional and social) and physical wellbeing, reconstructing physical infrastructure, economic and environmental restoration (including regeneration of the natural environment, associated infrastructure, heritage sites and structures, and the management of pollution and contamination).”*

Disaster recovery requires a collaborative, coordinated, adaptable, and scalable approach. Responsibility for delivery is shared among all sectors of the community, including individuals, families, community groups, businesses, and all levels of government.

## About this Plan

This plan provides an overview of the recovery activities carried out in the Cook Shire following Tropical Cyclone Jasper and the associated flooding in December 2023. It is informed by individual action plans developed by each of the Local Disaster Recovery Sub-groups:

- Human and Social
- Economic
- Environment
- Infrastructure - Building and Roads and Transport

The Recovery Plan is a living document that will be updated as needed to respond to changing circumstances.

## Cook Shire Local Disaster Management Group - Local Recovery Group (LRG)

Successful recovery and resilience building depend on clear and robust governance arrangements. This Recovery Plan is designed to enable a collaborative, coordinated, and locally led approach. This ensures that all relevant agencies, stakeholders, and recovery partners work together to facilitate recovery planning and coordinate the delivery of necessary recovery services, activities, resilience strategies, and infrastructure.

Under the Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements, the Cook Shire Local Recovery Group (LRG), a sub-group of the Cook Shire Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG), will oversee delivery of the Recovery Plan.

# Recovery Narrative

## About our Community

The Cook Shire, located in Far North Queensland, occupies 80% of Cape York Peninsula and spans approximately 106,073 square kilometres, making it the largest LGA in Queensland by land mass. The Shire's population is approximately 4,761 (ABS 2023), resulting in a low population density of about 0.04 persons per square kilometre.

The Shire includes a diverse range of environments from tropical rainforests and coastal areas to remote outback landscapes. About half of the Shire's population live in

Cooktown, on the banks of the Endeavour River, with the remainder spread between the smaller population centres of Laura, Lakeland, Coen, Ayton, Rossville, Marton, Portland Roads and offshore islands including Lizard Island. Cooktown is the main administrative centre and a focal point for cultural and economic activities. The Cook Shire shares its boundaries with 10 of Queensland's 16 Indigenous Councils.





## Overview of Tropical Cyclone Jasper (2–18 December 2023)

Severe Tropical Cyclone Jasper peaked as a category 4 system in the Coral Sea before crossing the Far North Queensland coast, near Wujal Wujal, about 120 km north northwest of Cairns, at 8 pm on Wednesday, 13 December 2023 as a category 2 cyclone. The region south of the centre extending to Port Douglas experienced the strongest winds with wind gusts estimated to 130 km/h. Once Jasper had crossed the coast it weakened fairly quickly as it moved inland, decreasing to below tropical cyclone intensity by 12 am on Thursday, 14 December 2023.

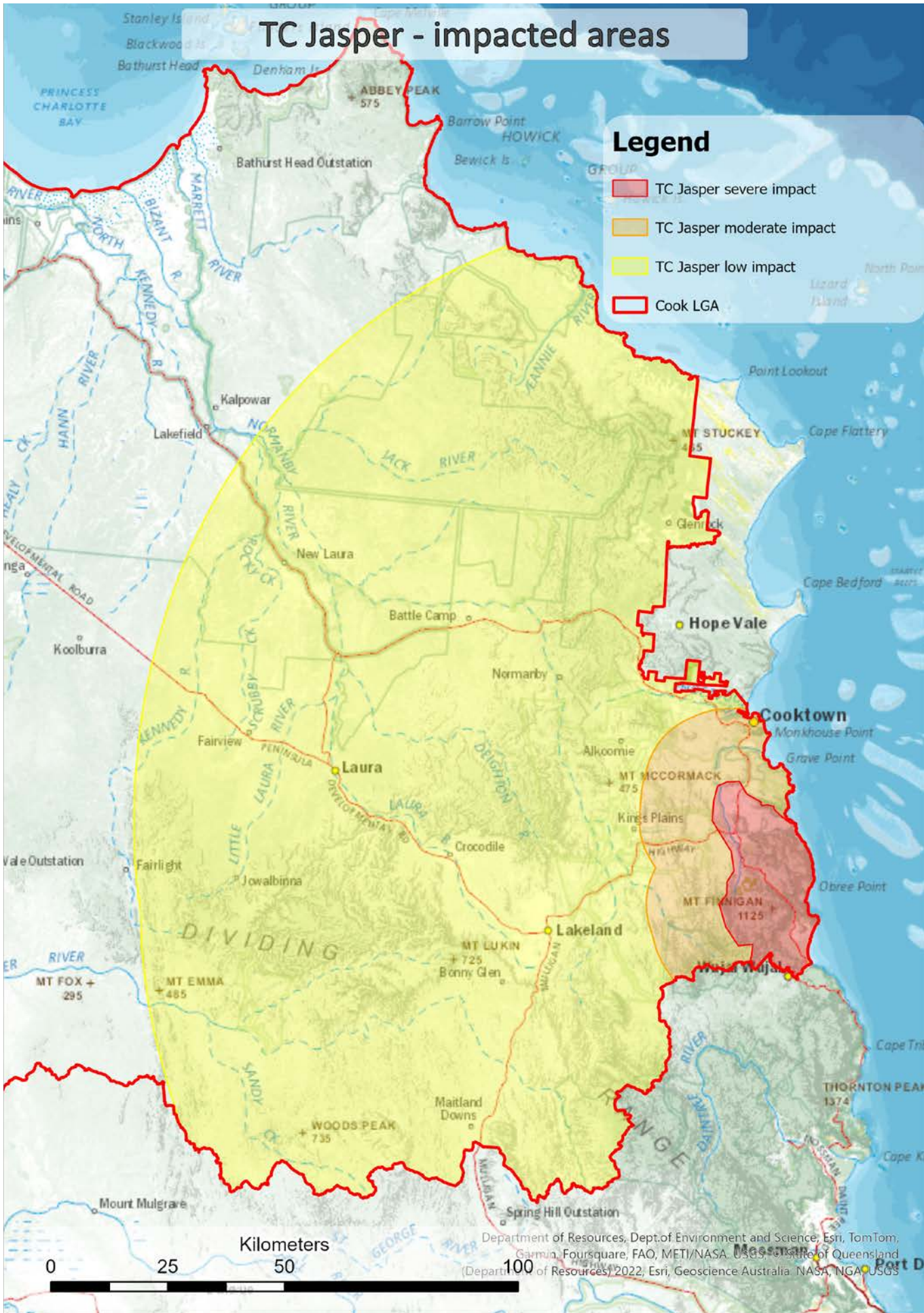
Ex-tropical cyclone Jasper was initially expected to continue out to the Gulf of Carpentaria but stalled over Cape York Peninsula for the next several days. A surface trough developed over the weekend of 16–17 December, extending from ex-Jasper eastward across the north tropical coast into the Coral Sea. Moist northeasterly winds from the Coral Sea converged along this near-stationary trough with easterly winds strengthened by a building ridge in the Tasman Sea. As a result, heavy to intense rainfall fell over the north tropical coast area. This rainfall fell in river catchments that were already saturated due to earlier rainfall from Jasper's landfall and produced widespread flooding in the region.

Impacted areas included Lakeland, Laura, Cooktown, Poison Creek, Marton, Quarantine Bay, Endeavour Valley, Mt Amos, Helenvale, Rossville, Ayton, and the Bloomfield River Valley, including Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire and Degarra in Douglas Shire. Due to extremely limited meteorological and hydrological monitoring networks in these areas, measuring rainfall and river heights was challenging. Local residents in the most severely impacted areas reported totals exceeding 3000mm before rain gauges were overwhelmed.

Extreme weather caused significant landslides and record flood levels across Endeavour River, Bloomfield River, Gap Creek, Wallaby Creek, Mungumby Creek, Trevathan Creek, Annan River, Laura River, and associated tributaries. This resulted in considerable human, social, economic, road, infrastructure and transport impacts across the region. Lakeland and Laura were isolated for three days with highways and airstrips inaccessible. Mt Amos, Helenvale, Rossville, Ayton, and the Bloomfield Valley experienced extensive isolation both during and after the event. Helenvale and Rossville were isolated for eight days, while Ayton and the Bloomfield River Valley were isolated for 15 days due to significant road damage from landslides. Many individual properties also experienced periods of isolation as waterways rose and fell.

The entire township of Wujal Wujal was evacuated, with 293 displaced residents relocated to Cooktown's Evacuation Centre on Tuesday, 19 December 2023. Residents commenced returning to community on Sunday, 14 April 2024. Closures were seen across all major roads in the Shire. The Lakeland Aerodrome and Cooktown airport experienced forced closures due to flooding. Cook Shire Council responded to 255 requests for assistance between 17 December 2023 and 8 February 2024. The Local Disaster Management Group was active for 92 days, from 13 December 2023, until 14 March 2024. The Local Disaster Recovery Group was activated on 3 January 2024 and continues to monitor the recovery.

# TC Jasper - impacted areas



Department of Resources, Dept. of Environment and Science, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, Foursquare, FAO, METI/NASA, USGS, State of Queensland (Department of Resources) 2022, Esri, Geoscience Australia, NASA, NGA, USGS



# Damage and Impacts

## Human and Social

- Psychosocial impact including event trauma, prolonged isolation, restrictions to essential supplies and health care, loss of homes and possessions
- Houses and property destroyed/damaged
- Increased demand on emergency accommodation
- Sheds, fencing, infrastructure, machinery and vehicles on properties destroyed/damaged resulting in significant financial loss
- Immediate access to medical services
- Resilience fatigue as result of fires during dry season and early cyclone for the wet season
- Flood impacts exacerbated existing disadvantage in community
- Psychosocial impact and increased anxiety for children and young people

## Economic

- Physical damage to commercial/business buildings and supporting infrastructure
- Significant property damage limiting ability to generate income/revenue
- Major flood damage to road infrastructure causing disruption to supply and tourism
- Public perception of limited tourism opportunities
- Damage and loss to agricultural properties and primary production e.g. fencing, irrigation, livestock, infrastructure, crops, export/trade
- Environmental impact on pastures and crops caused by landslips

## Environment

- Riparian vegetation damaged or destroyed
- Extensive and unstable landslides leaching sediment into affected catchments
- Dead vegetation, natural debris and waste covering riparian zone and potentially obstructing waterways
- Exposed riparian areas and realigned waterways are susceptible to ongoing erosion
- Ground water and surface water contaminated with bacteria (faecal coliforms)
- Local walking trails and access trails are damaged and no longer safe or usable
- Affected areas, particularly those with exposed soil and reduced canopy cover, are susceptible to invasive plant spread
- Elevated risk of severe bushfires
- Increase in feral pig population
- Damage to marine environments

# Infrastructure

## Buildings

### Electricity

- Floodwaters and landslides damaged a significant portion of the electricity network infrastructure in southern Cook Shire resulting in more than 250 prolonged customer power outages from Bloomfield to Laura

### Telecommunications

- Damage to the electricity network caused prolonged telecommunication outages for both fixed and mobile service in the Rossville, Ayton and Bloomfield River Valley areas. Damage to roads prevented refuelling of backup telecommunications generators

### Water

- The Cooktown Annan water intake tower was inundated with floodwater and debris, halting water production for Cooktown for 14 days. The Bore Fields secondary water supply was used as an alternate supply at a reduced rate resulting in Level 4 water restrictions in Cooktown
- Individual water supplies across the shire were compromised. In areas where water is supplied by bore, high levels of bacteria were found in resident's water supply resulting in a lack of potable water

## Sewerage

- Cooktown and Laura wastewater treatment facilities were overwhelmed by stormwater inflow and released wastewater to the environment. Residential services were not interrupted
- Individual waste treatment systems (e.g. septic systems) across the shire were compromised

## Roads and Transport

- Extensive damage across transport network including bridges, culverts, causeways, roads and shoulders resulted in road closures and isolation of some communities
- Major landslips and washouts resulted in loss of traffic lanes and access cut-off. After emergent works roads reduced to single lanes, with traffic lights and load limit conditions in place, and safety barriers at multiple sections
- Road closures included Mulligan Highway, Shiptons Flat Road, Bloomfield Road, Peninsula Development Road, Endeavour Valley Road, Mt Amos road and a number of other local roads
- Insufficient laydown and storage areas hindered response and recovery efforts
- Cooktown Airport and Lakeland Aerodrome flooded, forcing temporary closures







# Recovery Objectives

## Human and Social

1. Community members have access to critical support and services (e.g. grocery stores, medical services and supplies, financial and psychological assistance)
2. Public Transport systems are embedded to ensure community members can access critical support and services
3. Community members not experiencing excessive stress and hardship arising from the disaster
4. Community members have access to appropriate and affordable housing
5. Community members have access to emergency accommodation to support vulnerable individuals and/or families
6. Reinforce community disaster preparedness and resilience for future events through training, awareness and community-led events
7. Local Non-Government Organisations activated and appropriately funded to deliver Human and Social disaster response
8. First Nations cultural identity upheld and significant cultural sites preserved and restored

## Environment

13. Gather data to use to map the extent of environmental damage (riparian, waterways, landslides, weeds and feral animals, fore-dunes and inshore reefs according to defined qualitative categories (e.g. moderate, high, and severe)
14. Identified sites are permanently stabilised using vegetative cover, engineered solutions or a combination of both and no longer susceptible to erosion
15. Minimise an increase in the distribution of invasive plants and animals post-event, particularly in areas revegetating naturally
16. Natural debris and waste removed from areas where it is both viable and beneficial to do so
17. Sediment load within waterways is measured and reducing annually
18. Fire threat is mitigated
19. Work with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) to ensure saltwater crocodiles are restricted to their known pre-event geographical distribution

## Economic

9. Support access to emergency assistance, insurers and industry bodies
10. Connect businesses with relevant services to ensure businesses have the ability to re-establish operations
11. Support economic development and resilience through advocacy for economic opportunities including agriculture, tourism and recreation
12. Support primary producers and agriculture sector recovery through improved and resilient transport routes to ensure ongoing market access

# Infrastructure

## Buildings

20. Identify damage to public infrastructure and telecommunication assets. Aim to prioritise restoration works and secure short-medium term funding
21. Advocate for upgraded and more resilient power and communications network throughout the shire with redundancy
22. Advocate for a shire wide resilient weather monitoring system
23. As far as practicable, ensure the Local Planning Scheme mitigates future hardship through comprehensive consideration of natural disaster planning
24. Upgrade/replace/rebuild Council's shire-wide Storm-water, Water and Wastewater infrastructure with better disaster resilience and adequate capacity to meet future demands including backup or redundancy planning

## Roads and Transport

25. Prioritise road and transport recovery works, and seek funding for priority works with an aim of betterment and future resilience
26. Resilient and protected aerodrome and aerodrome access infrastructure with adequate drainage and flood/disaster immunity
27. Identify specific locations/sites to support the emergency need for barge landing, helicopter landing, unloading points etc. throughout the shire

# Recovery Timeframes

Objectives	Short Term 2024	Medium - Long Term 2024 – 2026	Ongoing
<b>Human &amp; Social</b>	1, 5, 7	4	2, 3, 6, 7, 8
<b>Economic</b>	9, 10	11, 12	
<b>Environment</b>		13, 14, 15, 16, 19	17, 18
<b>Infrastructure-Buildings</b>	20	23	21, 22, 24
<b>Roads and Transport</b>	27	25	26



# Recovery Tasks

## Human and Social

- Connect impacted residents with community and government support
- Host community recovery information sessions at Cooktown, Rossville and Ayton
- Impacted community and sporting groups are provided information about grant funding opportunities and support writing applications
- Support and fund community-led recovery events and programs
- Engage with Traditional Owners to delivery culturally appropriate recovery activities
- Monitor ongoing resilience fatigue, social disconnection and mental health and wellbeing during recovery and request additional resources as required
- Support and advocate for access to suitable medical and specialised domestic violence services

## Economic

- Work with local service providers and/or State agencies to support business transition to pre-event operations
- Cook Shire Council and regional economic agencies work with businesses to support long-term sustainability
- Coordinate marketing and promotion activities to support local businesses
- Review of Council's Economic Development Strategy to include disaster resilience and recovery
- Establish and maintain recovery hubs

## Environment

- Measure extent of the damage across various catchments and conduct aerial assessments and review satellite imagery of the impacted catchments to identify major erosion areas, sediment run-off, debris, fire risk, weed and feral animal distribution and determine locations to be subjected to future remediation works
- Develop an assessment methodology or, adopt an existing assessment methodology, to be used by all parties involved in the recovery
- Identify an agency, organisation or contractor to develop an assessment methodology for both immediate assessment and ongoing monitoring
- Develop an information sharing agreement and between stakeholders conducting assessments
- Continued monitoring and assessment of identified areas using available data
- Annual maintenance and pre-wet season audits to identify preventative works
- Collaborate with the State to ensure environmental recovery projects aligned with this Plan are funded, prioritised and delivered effectively within the Cook LGA

# Infrastructure

## Buildings

- Advocate strongly for Cape-wide upgraded telecommunications infrastructure for better network and coverage
- Advocate strongly for Cape-wide weather recording and monitoring stations
- Understand the impacts of new flood mapping on property owners' ability to rebuild or repair and take into account in the development of new Local Planning Scheme
- Investigate, design and construct/upgrade storm-water drainage structure network ensuring adequate capacity and resilience against heavy rainfall events
- Upgrade existing facilities to build resilience for future natural disaster events
- Upgrade/improve the shire-wide aging water and wastewater treatment infrastructure to build future resilience
- Build resilient power supply network
- Ensure ongoing inspection and maintenance of upgraded facilities

## Roads and Transport

- Conduct inspection of all public roads and transport network assets
- Regularly monitor the condition status of roads and implement control strategies to maintain the critical access to communities
- Perform damage assessments, clear any blockages and perform emergent repairs to the transport network to a safe and drivable condition to allow emergency access
- Mobilisation of clean-up crews, machinery and equipment, vegetation clearing where required
- Prioritise detailed engineering investigation and design for long-term restoration and reconstruction works
- Program and complete construction works, based on available funding and priority list
- Upgrade Cooktown Airport pavement and subsoil drainage for future resilience
- Seek external funding to future-proof, build back better ageing road/transport infrastructure
- Identify specific locations/sites to support the emergency need for barge landing, helicopter landing, unloading points etc. throughout the shire





## Measures of Success

### Human and Social

- Community members have access to goods, services and facilities
- Community members have received information about available support and grants opportunities and been introduced to the various agencies
- Establishment of fit-for-purpose Local Disaster Management Centres and Recovery Hubs throughout Cook Shire
- Residents are able to return to their properties/places and use facilities

### Economic

- Access, power and water is restored to places of business
- Affected businesses are re-opened and trading
- Primary production activities restored and operational
- Economy building initiatives have been identified and implemented
- Financial assistance secured for disaster recovery and resilience building efforts

### Environment

- Minimal to no public health issues due to contaminated flood water or non-treated drinking water
- Completion of flood debris and waste removal from built and natural assets including waterways/banks, storm-water networks, walking tracks, beach access points etc. where deemed viable and beneficial
- Litter from private and commercial property cleaned and disposed of under regulation
- Various projects aligned to this plan are delivered by local stakeholders (NGOs, Traditional Owners etc.) using grant funding provided to the end of the 2026 financial year
- An ongoing monitoring and assessment methodology to describe the natural recovery has been developed and is being applied

# Infrastructure

## Buildings

- Completion of flood debris removal from community facilities
- Completion of shire-wide restoration works for resilient communications and power supply
- Prevention of flooding within buildings due to working and adequate storm-water drainage network
- Service life of critical water and wastewater infrastructure is increased
- To have clearly identified infrastructure/lay down areas to support disaster relief efforts

## Roads and Transport

- All public roads and transport corridors inspected and made safe
- Road repair to maintain access after subsequent rainfall events is quick and cost effective
- Securing funding for completion of repair and/or reconstruction of priority road and transport network improved resilience to future events
- Safe and resilient transport network re-established with linkages within, and between, state and local linkages
- Cooktown Airport pavements resistant to flood event damage and the low points on the access road are resistant to river ingress damage
- Specific locations/sites to support the emergency need for barge landing, helicopter landing, unloading points etc. throughout the shire have been identified





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