CAIRNS REGIONAL COUNCIL

Cemetery Strategy
2023-2033

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Cairns region is growing with an expected population of 236,593 by 2041. The city is also becoming increasingly diverse, with growth in most diversity categories occurring between the 2016 and 2021 censuses.

This increase in population and diversity will add pressure on Cairns Regional Council's (Council) cemeteries and their service provisions, meaning that a coordinated approach to the management, design and operation will be required in order to meet current and future needs.

236,593
EXPECTED POPULATION BY 2041

The maintaining and managing of cemeteries are a key service that Cairns Regional Council provides to the community and has done so for over a century. There are five active cemeteries across the region:

- Cairns Cemetery (Martyn St)
- Forest View Cemetery
- Gordonvale Cemetery
- Nelson Road Cemetery (Babinda)
- Old Babinda Cemetery
- **32 Total Ha**

These locations total 32 Ha, with each cemetery at a different level of capacity. While the population growth of Cairns is increasing, the annual total of burials and ash placements has remained consistent over the last five years.

However, increasing community diversity is resulting in new cultural expectations, while a lack of site planning, dated reservation procedures and inconsistent cemeteries practices are constraining the capacity of the cemeteries.

There is also a variety of options and services provided at each cemetery, providing a different level of service to the community. The lack of standardised operational guidelines has led to **inconsistent standards across Council's cemeteries** over the years, requiring the staff of the day to use their best judgement to deliver a service to the community.

Historically, through traditional burials, Cairns cemeteries have been considered as a final resting place for the community. For the past five years, the number of burials and ash placements per annum have remained steady, while the number of deaths recorded have increased. This differs from observed national trends, where the number of burials has decreased. This Cemetery Strategy has **reviewed local and national trends,** and benchmarked Council's current operations against other similar Councils across Queensland. This method helped to **identify gaps and areas that require consideration.** These findings were then considered against the consultation findings from key community, cultural and religious groups in order to provide a **clear and concise position for the planning and operation of Council's cemeteries.**

The Cairns Regional Council Cemetery Strategy 2023-2033 sets out nine principles that will guide the development, management and operations of Council's cemeteries. These principles are supported by a prioritised 16-point action plan to guide the implementation of the strategy, ensuring that Council is able to deliver best practice services that meet the needs of our diverse community and maximise land use opportunities.

1 INTRODUCTION

Cemeteries are essential community assets, imbued with significant heritage, social and environmental values. Council owns and operates five active cemeteries within the region.

With an existing population of 164,000 people and a strong population growth forecast for the future, it is important that the cemeteries are managed efficiently and effectively to ensure they meet the needs and expectations of the community.

In 2022, Council's Cemeteries unit was transferred from the Regulatory Services Area to the Community Business Unit within the Community Spaces branch. Prior to the transfer, consultants were engaged to identify what opportunities and issues exist across the cemetery network. This formed the base line for this strategy development.

This strategy aims to provide direction for the management, operation, and maintenance of Council cemeteries for the next 20 years. It presents a vision and supporting principles which have guided the development of an action plan to meet the vision of the strategy.

The strategy was developed using the following methodology in order to ensure the views of the community were considered in the development of the vision, principles and action plan.

2 CURRENT SITUATION

2.1 CAIRNS DEMOGRAPHICS

Cairns is a vibrant and multicultural region with an increasing population. The 2021 census highlighted significant changes to the makeup of the Cairns community.

236,593

The population of Cairns is expected to grow to 236,593 by 2041 (an increase of 69,650).

15.6%

of the population is aged over 65.

8.6%

of the population have a long-term health condition, which includes mental health conditions.

More people identified as having Aboriginal or Torres Strait Ancestors, with an increase of more than 15,000 people.

All previously identified places of ancestry increased, except for Irish, New Zealand, and Korean ancestry.

There is still strong European ancestry in Cairns.

Those who identified as a member of a religion decreased by 8,000 people.

Cairns has a higher death rate compared to the rest of Queensland (5.8 deaths per 1000)[1]

[1] *Deaths, Australia, 2021 | Australian Bureau of Statistics (abs.gov.au)*

2.2 CEMETERY TRENDS AND STATISTICS

Although there has been a general trend towards fewer burials as a proportion of the population, the number of burials in Cairns has remained steady over the past five years, with approximately 250 burials per year. A similar trend has been seen with ash placements with approximately 70 placements per year since 2017.

It is important to note that not all deaths that occur in Cairns result in a placement at a Council cemetery. Initially one in three deaths resulted in a placement in a Cairns cemetery, however over the past five years this has decreased to one in every four deaths, while less than one in 10 deaths result in an ash placement. This indicates most residents are farewelling their loved ones via other means including the spreading of ashes, burials at other cemeteries in other local government areas, or at the Cairns Crematorium Funeral Home and Memorial Garden.

The table below details this trend, and the burial trends across the five cemeteries.

Table 1: Burials per year by cemetery

Year	Deaths	Burials	Percent of total deaths	Cairns	Forest View	Gordonvale	Babinda	Nelson Rd
2021	1100	251	23%	121	91	29	3	7
2020	1018	266	26%	128	87	29	5	17
2019	1044	247	24%	115	83	38	0	11
2018	874	258	30%	111	105	26	5	10
2017	956	287	30%	139	92	29	9	18

Overall, there has been a decline in the use of Council cemeteries in proportion to the number of deaths in the region. National trends indicate that there has been an increase in the number of ash placements at cemeteries, however this is not reflected at Council cemeteries, as detailed below:

Table 2: Placements as a proportion of deaths

Year	Deaths	Total Placements	Burials	Ash Placement	Proportion of total Placement
2021	1100	325	251	74	29.55%
2020	1018	335	266	69	32.91%
2019	1044	321	247	74	30.75%
2018	874	340	258	82	38.90%
2017	956	359	287	72	37.55%

Although there has been a decline in the number of placements in Council cemeteries there has been an increase in the number of site reservations since 2020. There has been a year on year increase since 2019. Furthermore, the 2022 figures have significantly eclipsed those of 2021, as detailed below:

Table 3: No. of Reservations

Year	No. Reservations
2017	101
2018	86
2019	79
2020	134
2021	147
2022	186

Anecdotally, this increase in reservations is due to a combination of reasons, including:

- Sense of urgency – people have identified that less sites are available.
- People wish to reserve a site close to family members, or someone they know that has already reserved a site.
- People wanting to reduce the burden on loved ones and have reserved a site ahead of time.
- There is an increased multicultural community within Cairns, including faiths where burials are the preferred option of placements which may be increasing the number of reservations.

It is also important to note that not all reservations will lead to actual placements due a wide variety of reasons. This trend is seen nationwide and is evident across the Cairns cemeteries. Consultants engaged by Council noted that nationally **it is expected that 40% of reserved sites will not be used.** There are over 3,000 sites that are reserved across current cemeteries, with almost all (95%) being reserved earlier than 2022. The table below shows by decade, the number of sites that have been reserved but not yet used. This shows that reservations are not an accurate reflection of expected burials, with records showing active reservations as early as 1920.

Decade	Reservations	Proportion of total (unused)
2020-2023	390	12.8%
2010-2019	788	25.9%
2000-2009	364	11.9%
Pre-2000	1506	49.4%

2.3 LAND AVAILABILITY

Cemeteries are a unique land use, as they are expected to be a permanent resting place for the deceased. As such it is important that the planning, design and ongoing management of these facilities is undertaken with careful consideration.

Council is the main provider of cemeteries in the Cairns region. Council operate five active cemeteries, encompassing a total of 32 hectares of land and approximately 3,000 sites remaining based on the current planned supply. These include:

Cairns Cemetery (Martyn St)
16.00 Ha

Forest View Cemetery
4.66 Ha

Gordonvale Cemetery
3.82 Ha

Nelson Road Cemetery (Babinda)
2.37 Ha

Old Babinda Cemetery
5.91 Ha

Within our existing sites there is land available for expansion at Forest View Cemetery, Gordonvale Cemetery and the Nelson Road Cemetery, in Babinda. Forest View has a masterplan that was completed in 2021 and adopted by Council that provides an **additional 2,628 burial plots.** This equates to approximately one additional plot per 6m^2.

Although there are no additional planned sites at other cemeteries, there is approximately 6,400m^2 of land at Gordonvale Cemetery that is yet to be developed, and 50,000m^2 available at the Nelson Road Cemetery. Based on one plot per 6m^2 there is **space for an additional 12,000 burial sites and associated infrastructure.**

Based on the current rate of burials of 250 per year, the additional plots would extend overall **capacity to 2060.** This additional capacity is primarily at the Nelson Road Cemetery, which can accommodate more than 8,000 additional plots.

Consideration also needs to be given to the impact that the **closure of Cairns Cemetery** will have on the other sites, mainly Forest View Cemetery. There are an average of 120 burials per year at Cairns Cemetery, which would need to be accommodated at other cemeteries, most likely Forest View Cemetery, accelerating the rate at which it would reach capacity.

2.4 CURRENT SERVICE PROVISION

Across the five cemeteries, there are a range of services that are provided. The existing burial and ash placement options are generally in keeping with other Australian cemeteries. The table below details the options available at each cemetery.

Cemetery	Columbarium	Lawn beam (plaque)	Lawn beam (headstone)	Memorial (Monument)	Mausoleum
Babinda Cemetery	✓			✓	
Nelson Road (Babinda) Cemetery	✓	✓	✓		✓
Gordonvale Cemetery	✓	✓		✓	✓
Forest View Cemetery	✓	✓			✓
Cairns Cemetery (Martyn St)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Council's cemeteries are all non-denominational, meaning that people can be buried in any available plot within the cemetery. This is the most common practice throughout Queensland as it provides the greatest flexibility in cemetery planning and ensures greater choice is available to more community members.

2.5 OPERATING PROCEDURES

Cemeteries are currently managed by the cemetery team, a separate sub-unit of the Community Business Unit which is part of the Community Spaces Branch within the Lifestyle and Community Directorate. The administration of cemeteries occurs through a business support arrangement within Council's finance department.

There is only one private provider currently operating in Cairns, the Cairns Crematorium Funeral Home and Memorial Garden. This facility comprises a crematorium and memorial garden, located adjacent to the Forest View Cemetery.

Cultural Practices

Cemetery operations currently provide for various cultural practices where possible and safe to do so, including for Jewish, Islamic, and Hmong practices. Council does not currently provide dedicated sections for specific cultural groups, however there are groupings within the cemeteries of common beliefs and backgrounds through the bulk reservation of sites. Currently there is a reservation grouping belonging to the Jewish community and another belonging to members of the Islamic community at Forest View Cemetery.

Like most cemeteries in Australia, there are also war graves of service men and women who gave their lives as part of their service in the Australian Defence Force. These graves are maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and are across all cemeteries in Cairns, except for Forest View.

External Contractors

Cemetery operations are supported using external contractors including stonemasons, excavators and landscapers for the provision of memorials, monuments, grave digging and landscaping services.

Policy and Guidelines

The current local regulatory and policy framework which informs Council's cemetery operations and practices includes Local Law No. 7 (Human Remains and Cemeteries) 2016 and the Adornment of Graves Policy. The purpose of the Local Law is to regulate the appropriate treatment of human remains, in line with relevant standards and legislation.

The Adornment of Graves Policy sets out procedures and rules relating to acceptable adornments on sites at all Council cemeteries. This policy is critical to cemetery operations, particularly with respect to regulating adornments that are considered unsafe, damaged, or have the potential to become projectiles during a severe weather event (e.g., Cyclone).

A review of the current operating and management policy has identified that a more robust overarching policy position is required for our cemetery operations. A new Cemetery Policy will be developed, to include the intent and principles of the current Adornment of Graves Policy, as identified as Action 1 in the attached Action Plan.

Council uses various application forms to support the operation of the cemeteries, ensuring the Policy and Local Law can be implemented. These forms include:

- Application for interment into grave or mausoleum
- Application for inurnment of ashes (definition of inurnment in this instance is keeping cremated remains in a wall or grave site)
- Application to fit plaque, headstone or vault
- Application to reserve grave, mausoleum, niche or Memory Garden
- Request for portable shelter over grave
- Surrender of grave or memorial site reservation
- Application to pay balance on site reservation

There is no public facing document which sets out internal administration procedures associated with the reservation, administration and operation of Council cemeteries.

3 PRIOR WORK

Prior to the Cemetery Unit moving to the Community Spaces Branch, the Regulatory Services team engaged an external consultant to develop a draft strategy. The work completed by the consultants was comprehensive in its analysis of the current operations as well as identifying areas where improvements could be made across the cemeteries.

As part of the work that was completed, the consultants identified four specific areas that would require analysis along with specific issues and opportunities for each of the five cemeteries. The overarching areas were:

Policies and Administration

It was identified that the current policies and administration of cemeteries were not in line with best practice and without making changes, Council was limited in its ability to increase the capacity of the sites and move towards best practice. There were two key issues that were identified through the analysis. The first was the lack of an overarching policy direction to enable Council to articulate its expectations of cemeteries and how they would operate. This is currently limited to Local Law no.7 and the Adornment of Graves Policy, which did not cover all aspects of cemetery operation.

The second was the terminology that was used when communicating with the public through application forms. The language used was unclear, contained terminology that was uncommon and created a contractional relationship with limitations on the terms and conditions.

Products and Options

The draft strategy also identified that the products and offerings differed between sites. This included a lack of seating and mobile shade coverings that are expected by funeral goers. There was also an opportunity to maximise the available land to leverage features at each site. Ensuring more services were available at each cemetery would reduce the demand on services only available at a single cemetery. This should include:

- Lawn Beams with Plaque
- Lawn Beam with Headstone
- Monumental Site (Full Grave)
- Mausoleums
- Columbarium Walls
- Memorial Garden
- Natural Area Ash Placement
- Seating and mobile shelter

Pricing

It was identified that fees charged by Cairns Regional Council were lower than comparable councils and in turn did not reflect the willingness of customers to spend. These fees also did not reflect the perpetual maintenance costs associated with cemeteries. There was also a lack of published statements or documents in relation to how refunds and returns of reserved sites were handled, leading to less interest from the community.

It was also identified that due to lack of documented procedures there was a difference in cost associated with the same service across cemeteries. The consultant also identified that there was an opportunity to offer a wider fee structure to enable Council more control of supply and demand ensuring that works requiring special materials or activities were reflected in the fees paid. This included the use of alternative back fill options.

Design and Maintenance

Other than Forest View Cemetery, there has been no forward planning across the other cemeteries in relation to design and burial options to allow for more efficient use and alternate options to meet community expectation. The focus has been on more traditional options versus more current trends, such as natural burials and memorial (ash) gardens. It was identified that Council should improve the offerings available to the community.

The level of maintenance of Council's cemeteries has relied on the experience of the individual staff, with no set guidelines to support consistency relating to cemetery management and operation. The review has identified there is an inconsistent approach to operations at the individual sites. These approaches are not in line with national trends or best practice and have limited the services that Council provide.

4 RESEARCH

For the past two years a national survey has been undertaken by the University of Melbourne's DeathTech Research team[2]. The Future Cemetery Survey asked responders the following set of questions, which have been considered in place of wider community engagement:

What would you like to be done with your body after you die?

How often you visited a cemetery in the past twelve months, and for what purposes?

What activities, if any, do you think cemeteries should be used for beyond interment of the dead?

What is your attitude towards limited-tenure grave ownership?

46% High level results indicated that **cremation** was the most popular form of disposal. Even among religious respondents, cremation was the more popular option, being twice as popular as burial (46% to 22%).

7% Although the majority of respondents revealed they would like to be cremated, only 7% of those **would like to be placed in a columbarium wall** (i.e. at a cemetery). Scattering at a natural location or a meaningful place was identified to be a more popular option.

82% Within cemeteries, **lawn graves, monumental and natural bushland** options were the most common, accounting for 82% of responses (29%, 29%, 24% respectively). Headstones and plaques were the most common marker that respondents would like to use at their sites accounting for 55% and 31% respectively.

70% Younger respondents were more **likely to visit a cemetery on a more regular occasion** than older respondents, with 70% having visited at least once in the past year, compared to 41% of older respondents.

42% Respondents were asked to identify what else a cemetery should be used for **beyond a final resting place** from various options. The most common response was for them to be a final resting place only (42%); however, the respondents also noted that they could be used for the following:

1. Nature reserve for plants and animals (33%)
2. Tourism (visiting significant graves) (27%)
3. Educational talks about issues related to life and death (24%)
4. Educational talks about the communities they served.

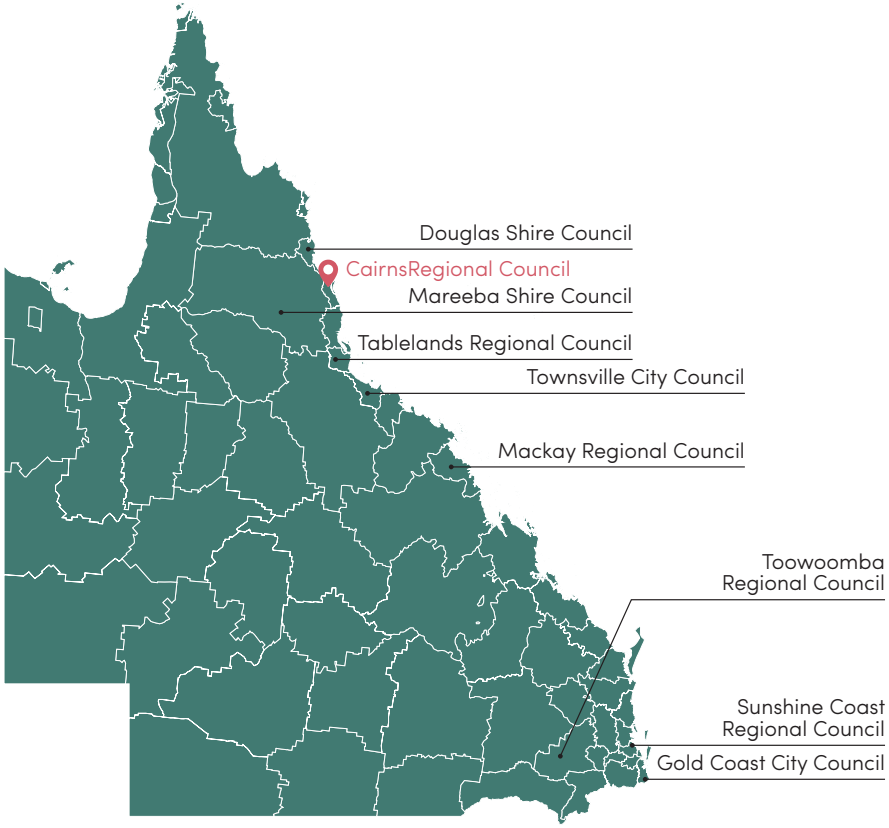
49% Finally, respondents were asked to select one of three statements that best reflect their view on grave tenure. Almost half of the respondents believed that "People should be able to choose whether to own a grave permanently or for a **limited number of years**" (49%), while limited tenure only has (14%). This indicates that most people are open to the concept of limited tenure, however, believe it should not be forced.

[1] *https://cpb-ap-se2.wpmucdn.com/blogs.unimelb.edu.au/dist/f/423/files/2022/06/The-Future-Cemetery-Survey-2021-Report.pdf*

5 BENCHMARKING

5.1 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS IN QLD

As part of the strategy development, several local governments across Queensland were consulted to better understand how cemeteries are run, how they manage their contractors, how they engage with their local communities and the services they provide to their community. The following Councils were included in the benchmarking exercise.



A range of key findings emerged as a part of the benchmarking exercise.

5.2 RESERVATION OF SITES

Like Cairns, some councils had a significant number of sites that were reserved, and in some cases, could no longer be honoured due to access issues. For the councils where this has been highlighted as an issue, there were two approaches to improve the management of these cemeteries.

The first approach was to stop allowing reservations on all unreserved sites and only honouring those that were previously reserved.

The second approach was to ensure the policies and forms allowed council more opportunity to recover sites that have not been used in many years and are unlikely to be used. The following were some of the approaches that were used to manage plot reservations across Queensland:

- Establishing tenure on a site, such that if a reservation has not been used after a certain period, the burial right holder could request the site be reserved again for the reservation fee.
- Most councils offered a buy back system where the burial right holder could surrender the plot for a portion of the fee paid. This also fluctuated between current dollar or price at time of purchase.
- Where the burial right was not paid for, some councils requested proof that the site had been purchased and if not, request payment or return of the site to the stockpile.

Allowing reservations was the more common approach. Most councils accepted that this process would lead to some sites being unused, however the service provided a better outcome for the community. There were other practices identified that could support efficient use of the land, including cemetery design and burial right terms and conditions.

5.3 CEMETERY DESIGN

There are two general approaches to cemetery design across other local councils. The first is non-denominational sections. This approach sets out various sections based on the type of burial and ash placement (e.g., plaque on beam, monument on beam, full grave slab) and allows any person to be buried in the area of their choosing. This is the most common approach, particularly in new areas and cemeteries and ensures the most efficient use of land.

There are many existing cemeteries that have historical denominational sections that some councils have honoured however many of these councils are not planning to provide more of these spaces in new areas or cemeteries.

Many councils, like Cairns, provide services and spaces that meet the majority of needs of various cultural groups. However these take many different forms, including requiring people to purchase two plots, allowing people to remove the body from coffins and angle it within the grave, and ensuring there are spaces available within the cemetery that can accommodate various cultural practices without restricting those who can use such a site.

Anecdotally, councils were looking to incorporate the needs of the cultural groups of their community within the overall planning of cemeteries, rather than providing sections for different groups. Benchmarked councils identified that this provided a good level of equity for all community groups and allowed council to maximise space within cemeteries.

5.4 CONTRACTORS

Many of the councils that were benchmarked had strong practices in place to manage contractors who work within cemeteries. This approach was to ensure that work being done within council cemeteries was within the approved standards and the council was informed of any infrastructure that is being established in their cemeteries.

In the case of monuments and memorials, most councils would pre-approve the design of the memorial or monument and at completion ensure what was installed was in accordance with what was originally approved. This process was to ensure that there was consistency within cemeteries and what is installed meets all relevant standards.

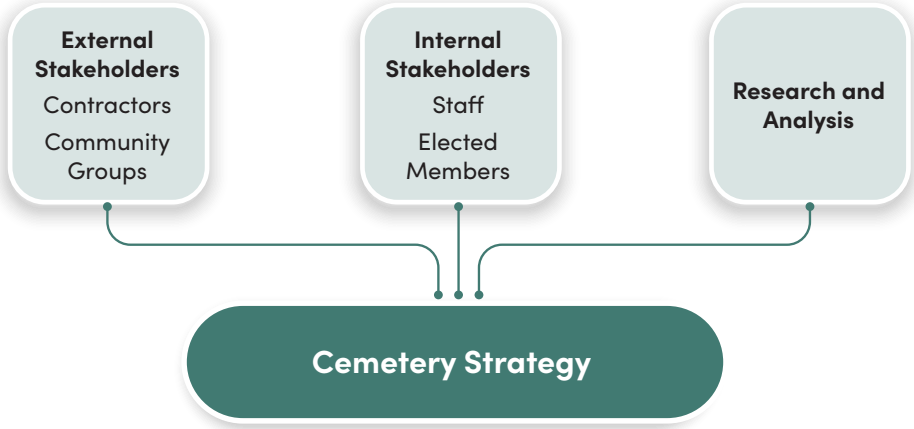
Gold Coast City Council is considering establishing an in-house monumental mason service, as they are still encountering issues with inconsistent and unsuitable monuments and memorials.

5.5 FEE SETTING APPROACH

The common approach to setting fees across the local governments that were benchmarked was cost recovery, however some variations included if the value of the land was used as part of the cost recovery. There were also differences between councils where ashes placement was set lower, so as to ensure that the community had a reasonably priced option for ash placement if they wished to do so.

6 CONSULTATION

To ensure that the Strategy was able to identify and consider the needs of all stakeholders, a range of consultation was undertaken over a three-year period. This included all consultation that was undertaken by consultants who were engaged by the Regulatory Services Team, contractors, cemetery gangers, multicultural groups and correspondence received over that period of time. This consultation was used in conjunction with the research and analysis undertaken to drive the considerations and outcomes of the cemetery strategy.



To ensure the Cemetery Strategy was able to consider the needs of the growing multicultural community within Cairns, a consultation exercise was undertaken. A survey was designed to better understand how the cemeteries meet the needs of the community and how our communities interact with the cemetery spaces. 14 identified groups were sent a copy of the survey on three separate occasions across a one-month period (12 October 2022 – 11 November 2022) with only four responses received.

The groups who responded were:

- The Jewish Community
- Greek Orthodox Community
- Meriam Community
- Hmong Community

The groups that responded were relatively supportive of the current operations of Cairns cemeteries. With limited response from the groups, it has been assumed that there are no considerable concerns with how cemeteries are currently operating.

The consultation that was undertaken by previously engaged consultants primarily focused on the contractors that engaged with cemetery sites, including funeral directors and monumental masons. The results of this consultation were used to develop initial issues and opportunities by consultants engaged in 2019.

As part of this strategy development, previous correspondence was also considered, including from community groups such as the Islamic Society of Cairns.

7 STRATEGIC CONTEXT

This Strategy will guide Council's Local Law No. 7, Cemetery Policy, Best Practice Management Guidelines, administration instructions and operating procedures, and has been informed by Council's Corporate Plan. Cemeteries are also governed by State legislation, including:

- Local Government Act 2009
- Land Act 1994
- Environmental Protection Act 1994
- WHS Act 2011

The diagram below details how the Cemetery Strategy will interact with State Government legislation, Council's Corporate Plan, and other Council documentation.

This policy will include the aspects of the current Adornment of Graves Policy

Endorsed

To be developed

The position and principles set out in this strategy will guide the development of a new cemetery policy, best practice management guidelines, site improvement plans, and new procedures, forms, and guidelines to ensure consistency across cemeteries and how they operate.

8 KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR COUNCIL CEMETERIES

The Strategy development has identified four key areas that significantly influence how Council cemeteries operate and the service provided to the community. The areas are:

- **Governance** – including current local laws, policies, procedures and guidelines.
- **Pricing and choice** – including reservations, return policies and general fee structure.
- **Design and maintenance** – including all abilities access and consistency across sites.
- **Communication** – including how Council communicates with all stakeholders.

Governance

Cemetery operations are currently guided by Local Law No.1, Local Law No. 7, and the Adornments of Graves policy. There is also a range of application forms available online that relate to burial and ash placements at Council cemeteries. These documents are only considered to cover some matters that relate to cemetery operations. They also inadequately create a contractual basis for the relationship between Council and the customer as they do not contain key terms and conditions.

There are no documented operating guidelines or procedures. Cemetery staff currently rely on their judgement using past practice methods and the current guideline for cemetery plaque, headstone and vault sizing to undertake day-to-day tasks. Over the years, the lack of standardised operational guidelines has led to various standards across Council's cemeteries.

There is also a need to improve the community's access to information, to ensure that they are aware of the policies and standards that Council has set out within the Local Law and the Adornment of Graves Policy.

Pricing and Cost

While Council's cemeteries offer a variety of options that align with those found in other cemeteries nationwide, the fees associated with these offerings do not accurately reflect the amount of time and resources needed to provide them.

Pre-purchasing burial rights currently allow the burial right holder to retain the right in perpetuity with many unlikely to be taken up. There are several reasons that a burial right may not be exercised, such as the burial right holder moving away from the region, changing their burial option preference, or other family members not being aware that a site has been reserved. This leads to an underutilisation of land across the cemeteries, an increase in maintenance costs and land required to support the community, and instances where Council may no longer be able to honour the agreement due to an inability to access a particular site.

The current fee structure is simple but needs to recognise the variable costs such as digging and fill requirements, locational attributes, and demand and supply trends. Benchmarking found that Council's fees are generally lower than other Councils of a similar size (Attachment A). Cemetery operations are also generally funded through general rate revenue as opposed to cost recovery through fees and charges, with the latter being considered common practice across Queensland.

Provision and Management

Delivery of cemeteries across the region has historically occurred on an as needs basis, with traditional burials the predominate form of placement. This is considered an unsustainable form of placement as these are in perpetuity and require a significant land take, which is unlikely to be recovered at any point. There is also limited opportunity for ash placement within cemeteries which is becoming increasingly popular.

The current maintenance and operating procedures have some gaps in relation to safe work practices and some cemeteries lack the appropriate amenities for funeral services. The quality of work by third party contractors (mainly monumental masons) have resulted in structural issues as well as amenity issues.

The current design of cemeteries has not considered additional opportunities for activation, in particular at Cairns Cemetery, which has a rich history of the local community and is an existing site popular with bird watchers. There is also a lack of linkages to the Botanic Gardens Lakes Precinct, which is also a popular bird watching location. Cairns Cemetery will still require maintenance to a suitable level once it reaches full capacity and how visitors can interact with the cemetery has not yet been considered.

As some of these cemeteries were established many decades ago, the level of accessibility across and within each cemetery varies. It will be important that this strategy considers the needs of visitors with accessibility requirements, as well as ensuring operational accessibility is improved.

Communication

Previous work by consultants, and consultation with Council staff and cultural groups identified that communication requires improvement. Communication with contractors is required to ensure that Council's position, expectations and policies are being met as expected. This will be critical with funeral directors to ensure there is an understanding of the agreement that is being entered into when a funeral is taking place, and with monumental masons to ensure that construction is to the correct Australian Standard.

Although there was limited uptake of engagement from the multicultural community, correspondence prior to the strategy development indicated a lack of understanding of what is currently available to the community and how the Council can accommodate the needs of the various community groups. This will be critical as cemeteries are planned under a non-denominational structure.

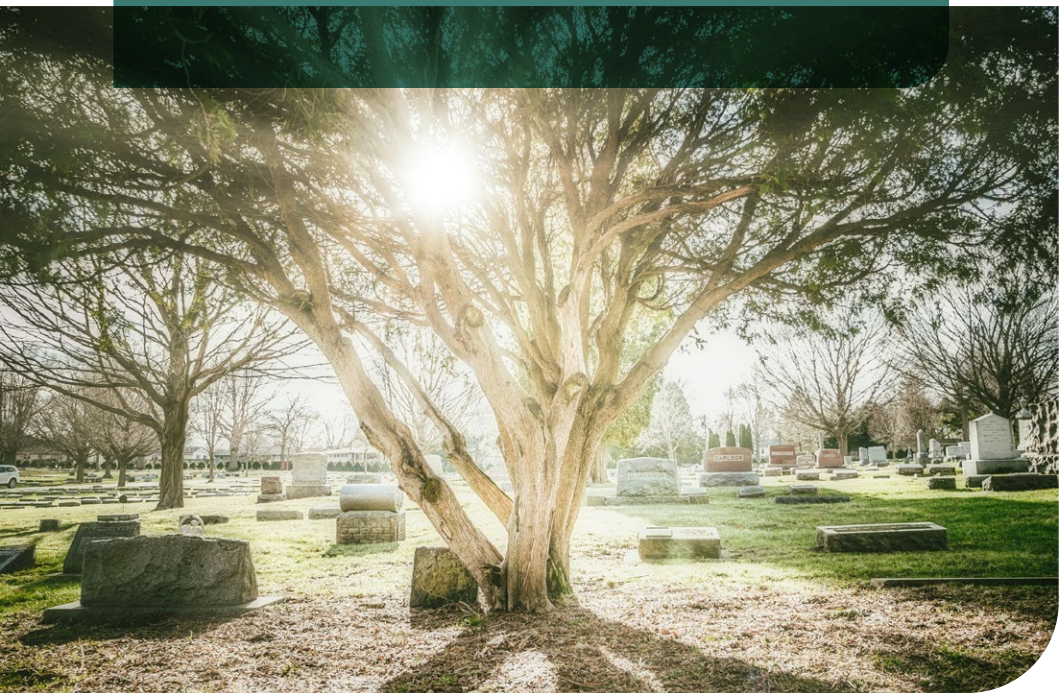
There is also a need to ensure that Council is clearly communicating the expectations, options and conditions it has placed on cemeteries to the wider community. It has been identified that the current wording on forms and the website is not sufficient to ensure that there is a clear message to customers and the general public. This extends to onsite issues as well, with insufficient signage placement, requiring staff to engage with customers at their discretion.

9 POSITION AND PRINCIPLES

Cemeteries are an integral part of the community, and it is important that Council provides them in a way that is respectful to the needs of the community, while also ensuring the land is used in a balanced, efficient, safe and well managed way.

The position of Cairns Regional Council is:

Cairns Regional Council's cemeteries will be spaces that are safe, well maintained, inclusive and respectful, and celebrate our history.



To achieve this position, the planning, management and operations of Council cemeteries will be guided by key principles:

- Cemeteries will be welcoming spaces for the community, Council staff, and contractors.
- Council operations will occur in a safe, secure and efficient manner.
- Council will endeavour to provide inclusive cemetery provisions and burial practices.
- Planning and use of cemetery land will strive to maximise the capacity of the sites.
- Cemeteries will provide a range of burial and ash placement options across all sites.
- Council will endeavour to conduct its cemetery operations in a cost-effective manner.
- Adverse impacts on the surrounding environment, businesses and residents will be appropriately managed.
- Cemeteries will provide a place to farewell loved ones, reflect and relax, and connect to the environment surrounding them.
- Cemeteries will provide a place that demonstrates and commemorates the history of the communities they represent.

10 ACTION PLAN

The Action Plan below has been developed to provide a coordinated approach to the planning, management and operations of cemeteries which are in line with the principles and vision for cemeteries in the Cairns Region.

The actions have been prioritised by:

Short
within the next 18 months

Medium
within the next three years

Long
within the next five years

Ongoing
continually reviewed

No.	Action	Implementation	Key Areas	Principles	Priority
1	Develop a Cemetery Policy	To ensure the vision and principles are implemented across the Council spectrum an overarching cemetery policy should be developed which provides a robust policy position on operating aspects of cemeteries across the region, which is in line with best practice.	Governance	1 : 2 : 3: 5 : 7	Short
2	Undertake Stakeholder Engagement promoting the adopted Strategy	Following the endorsement of the strategy, Council staff should undertake an engagement exercise with the key stakeholders, including funeral directors and monumental masons, to understand the expected outcomes and anticipated changes arising from the strategy and follow the development of the various policies, guidelines and procedures. Council should also work with these contractors to ensure their messaging reflects the expected outcomes from the community when they engage with them.	Communication	1	Short

No.	Action	Implementation	Key Areas	Principles	Priority
3	Develop a Best Practice Management Guideline for Cemeteries	A Best Practice Management Guideline should clearly specify a range of operational requirements. Its purpose is to transparently outline key aspects of the cemeteries' operational expectations to the community. The Guideline should reflect best practice measures related to cemetery activity by Council, staff, the public, funeral directors and monumental masons. The guideline should include, but not be limited to, considerations regarding: » Legislative Requirements » Policy Framework » Cemetery operations (including external contractors such as Funeral Directors and monumental masons) » Ash and Burial Rights » Placement of Human Remains » Memorials, Headstones, » Monuments and plaques	Governance	1 : 2 : 3: 5 : 7	Short
4	Update CRC Local Law No. 7 (Human Remains and Cemeteries) to refer to current Australian Standards.	As part of an overall review of the local law, update Local Law No. 7 (Human Remains and Cemeteries) to reference current Australian Standards (AS 4204: Headstones and Cemetery Monuments and AS 4425: Above Ground Burial Structures). Refer to the standard number, exclusive of the publishing year to avoid issues referencing outdated standards. The review of Local Law No. 7 should also be undertaken to ensure it represents best practice and that the local law aligns with the principles and vision within this strategy.	Governance	1 : 2	Short
5	Develop a transparent and clear refund policy	To encourage people who hold unused burial or ash placement rights to relinquish them, Council should replace the current refund policy to reduce the administration cost to Council and to ensure the community understands what they are likely to receive. To simplify the process a flat rate sliding scale based on the date of purchase should be applied. » 0-5 years since purchase – 75% of current fee » 5-10 years since purchase – 65% of current fee » 10-15 years since purchase – 50% of current fee » 15-20 years since purchase – 25% of current fee » 20+ years since purchase – 15% of current fee	Pricing : Governance	6	Short

No.	Action	Implementation	Key Areas	Principles	Priority
6	Provide a variety of placement options where possible	To ensure that each cemetery provides a suitable and consistent level of service, the following placement options should be planned for through site management plans across each cemetery. **Lawn Beams with Plaque** » Best practice examples suggest that a lawn beam should allow interment right holders to place only a plaque upon a flat beam. » Following the use of a site, each plot can be used for up to six (6) ash placements if the site is not used for a double depth site. **Lawn Beam with Headstone** » Provide Lawn Beam areas with an option to install a memorial headstone/monument. Lawn Beams should be of a suitable size to ensure that headstones can be placed back-to-back to maximise usage. All headstones must be approved by council. » Following the use of a site, each plot can be used for up to six (6) ash placements if the site is not used for a double depth site. **Monumental Site (Full Grave)** » Provide monumental sites, which are installed by qualified monumental mason/ builder and approval is given by Council. These should be managed to ensure that there are no sites that become unused due to the constraints of other sites and is accessible. Following the use of a site, each plot can be used for up to six (6) ash placements if the site is not used for a double depth site. **Mausoleums** » Differentiate the fees for mausoleum crypts according to the level, i.e. height of the crypt row and the materials used in the structure, i.e. granite v Besser brick. » If constructing a private mausoleum, the design may need to be approved through a development application. These will require an assessment of accessibility prior to construction beginning. **Columbarium Walls** » There should be an increase in columbarium walls across the cemeteries. These areas should include seating and landscaping to encourage increased use of ash placement opportunities. » A plaque that is approved by Council may be installed.	Design and Maintenance	2 : 3 : 5 : 7	Short

No.	Action	Implementation	Key Areas	Principles	Priority
		Memorial Garden » Each cemetery should have a memorial garden that can provide opportunities for ash placements and scattering of ashes. These gardens should be well maintained and provide a welcoming and quiet place to visit. » Where ashes are placed within the garden area, a plaque that is approved by Council may be installed. **Natural Area Ash Placement** » Where a suitable area exists within the cemetery, a natural area ash placement may be established. These areas will allow customers to place ashes within the ground and where possible plant a tree. Once full these areas will continue to operate as an ash scattering area. Where possible within the existing cemeteries, Council may identify areas that will be referred to as "Natural Burial" sites. These sites will: » Be lawn beam rows with small or no identifying markers » Have a reduced maintenance schedule, where it is safe to do so » Where possible Council staff will limit the use of herbicides and pesticides » Machinery will be used to dig the plot, and provide some maintenance activities (e.g. mowing), however the customer may choose to backfill the grave by hand.			

No.	Action	Implementation	Key Areas	Principles	Priority
7	Develop supporting programs, procedures and documentation	Once the Best Practice Management Guidelines have been developed Council should develop supporting programs, procedures and documentation to ensure the guidelines can be implemented. The following areas were identified; however these are not an exhaustive list and should be reviewed annually to ensure operations reflect best practice management. **External Contractor Registration Program** To diminish risk for Council and families by ensuring that contractors are known to Council, qualified, insured and aware of site expectations. This program should outline the following: » applicability to funeral directors, masons and any other external contractors working on Council sites » how to register » restrictions on contractors who breach local law conditions (pending review of local law) and Best Practice Management Guideline » contractor registration procedure » site handover and or inspection requirements » annual update requirements **Monumental Specification Documents** To guide families and masons alike with regard to what constitutes acceptable styles, materials and specifications in differing cemetery sections. Over time consistent application will diminish the intergenerational costs of maintenance and monumental collapse/ tilting. The specifications should outline the following: » procedures for obtaining permits, including who is responsible for issuing permits. » specifications for plaques, headstones, monuments, mausolea and above ground vaults at each site » requirement to comply with Australian standards » removal of non-conforming items penalties	Governance : Communication	1 : 2 : 4 : 7	Medium

No.	Action	Implementation	Key Areas	Principles	Priority
		Funerals For good governance and diminution of risk to Council, with the conduct of funerals, there needs to be a procedure in place for: » Ensuring the correct grave or cremation memorial is used » Checking the nameplate of the coffin against the details of the deceased, on the approved Application for burial and ash placement Coffin nameplate to match with the funeral director's paperwork » Site handover between Council and the funeral director to establish legal responsibility for the conduct of related activities **Communications Protocols** » Council should articulate desired adornment practices at key points in the application process and Council's Cemetery webpage. Then reinforce this at all burial and ash placement sites. Develop a consistent staff procedure applied across all cemeteries to manage the removal of unapproved adornments on graves » Undertake a communications campaign to make the public aware of the position and the new enforcement practices. This should include the development of separate fact sheets for Council staff, contractors and the general public **Burial Right Time Limit** 1. The use of the term 'Reservations' should be discontinued to ensure that the right holder understands that they do not own the space, only the right to use the location. 2. To ensure that burial and ash placement locations do not remain unused, a right period of 25 years should be introduced after which the unused burial and ash placement right is void, and the right holder will have the opportunity to apply again, or the site returns to stock. 3. A procedure for alerting burial and ash placement right holders in relation to a foreshadowed expiration of an unused burial and ash placement right, should be developed.			

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8	Review the content, terminology and structure of application forms to ensure the contractual relationship is clear.	**Review the application forms to:** 1. Incorporate the key terms and conditions to all forms, along with reference to the Best Practice Management Guideline and its availability online, so that the Applicant can sign off that they have read and understood the terms and conditions. 2. Require the burial or ash placement right holder to sign the application form to ensure they hold the right for burial or ash placement as opposed to one of the funeral directors. To clarify the relationship between the funeral director and the right holder, provide an opportunity for the right holder to state that their chosen funeral director can act on their behalf. 3. For transparency and to create more formal documentation, once an Application for Placement of Bodily or Cremated Remains has been accepted, confirm the contract by issuing a certificate (as distinct from just writing a letter). 4. The Placement Right Permit to convey details about the associated right of the certificate holder.	Governance : Communication	1 : 3 : 4 : 6	Medium
9	Establish a buyback program	A buyback program should be carried out to increase the existing sites' capacity. The program will: » Analyse records to ascertain the rights that have not been used within 10 years of purchase » Obtain legal advice to determine if Council is able to return the site to stockpile if owner can't be contacted » Identify any sites that are unlikely to be able to be accessed for burial due to site constraints » Where possible, contact burial right holders to advise them that they are entitled to a refund » Develop a communications plan to notify the community that plots can be returned to Council for a refund based on the sliding scale If required, this program should be on a five-year cycle to ensure the number of reserved and unused sites is kept to a minimum.	Pricing and costs: Communication	6	Medium

No.	Action	Implementation	Key Areas	Principles	Priority
10	Prepare a site management plan for each cemetery	Develop a site management plan for each cemetery, prioritising Cairns Cemetery and Gordonvale Cemetery. These management plans should identify: » Areas for expansion with respect to burial and ash placement options including increasing available ash disposal opportunities » Accessibility across the cemeteries for visitors and operators » Areas for service provision, including public toilets, storage, offices, material storage » Identify site constraints, including land suitability, water lines and topography » Improve amenities through landscaping opportunities	Design and Maintenance	3 : 4 : 5	Medium
11	Create a provision standard for each type of placement	To ensure that operation, maintenance and design aspects are considered a provision guide should be created for each placement option. This should include » Ensuring the maintenance needs are considered in the design and construction of each type » Identify areas where conflict between options may occur (e.g. maintenance considerations for burial areas) » Ensuring the community is aware of the maintenance that will likely occur	Design and Maintenance : Communication	2 : 3 : 4	Medium
12	Investigate alternative opportunities for the scattering of ashes outside and memorials	In line with the Acknowledgments, Memorials and Monuments Policy Council should identify locations across the region that can be considered "dedication tree" sites. These sites will provide customers with the option to purchase a tree that is planted on their behalf. Customers will be provided with the GPS location of the tree. Customers may hold an ash scattering service once the tree has been planted. Priority should be given to a location in the Northern Suburbs initially to improve equity of provision across the region.	Pricing and Choice: Design and Maintenance	7 : 8	Long
13	Implement the Community Spaces Signage Suite as required	As the signage within the cemeteries requires replacement ensure that new signage is consistent with the Community Spaces Signage Guide. This should include interpretive signage at Cairns Cemetery to enhance the information available regarding the history of the site and the history of Cairns.	Communication: Design and Maintenance	1	Long

No.	Action	Implementation	Key Areas	Principles	Priority
14	Engage with local communities to establish history of sites	Council should engage with the broader community to develop a greater understanding of the cemetery sites, including but not limited to the following: » The First Persons History of the site » Historically significant people and events within the sites » Significant environmental species (flora and fauna) within the sites	Communications	8 : 9	Long
15	Regularly engage with local industry representatives and providers.	In addition to Council's usual community engagement approaches, communication with direct stakeholders should occur. Participate in forums with industry representatives and providers, including funeral directors and monumental masons to discuss policy or procedural changes at the cemeteries, understand emerging trends and share knowledge.	Communications	8 : 9	Ongoing
16	Review cost of cemetery operations and fees and charges	To ensure cemeteries can endeavour to *"operate without loss, with fees and charges set to recover the cost of delivery"* a review of the current cost of operational tasks and administration should be undertaken to quantify the tasks and service offerings that are available in conjunction with the Finance team. Following this, a review of the fees and charges should be undertaken to set fees and charges to recover the costs of delivering services to customers, including the ongoing site maintenance.	Pricing and costs	6	Ongoing

ATTACHMENT A – INDICATIVE FEE COMPARISON

Category	CRC	Redland Bay	Toowoomba	Townsville	Gold Coast	Logan	Moreton Bay
Burial Right							
Lawn grave plaque flush	910		1,600 - 1,900		2,875 - 3,366	3,443	5,095 ≈
Lawn grave plaque Beam	910	2,750	2,000 - 2,400	2,080	2,875 - 3,366	3,443	5,095 ≈
Lawn grave headstone beam	910	2,750	3,100 - 3,500	2,080	2,875 - 3,366	3,443	5,095 ≈
Lawn grave off Tree Square			5,250 - 5,750				
Monumental grave	910	3,650	2,250 - 2,650	2,080	3,032 - 3,523	3,443	7,940 ≈
Vault in ground ≥	910	3,650	2,250 - 2,650	2,080	3,032 - 3,523	na	na
Vault above ground ≥	910	3,650	2,250 - 2,650	2,080	3,032 - 3,523	na	na
Mausoleum crypt	8,643 - 11,302	na	7,950 #	na	na	na	na
Burial							
Single	1,020	3,500	1,500	1,520	1,758	1,994	bundled ≈
Double	1,020	3,500	1,700	1,520	1,758	1,994	bundled ≈
Triple	1,020	3,950	1,900		2,616	1,994	bundled ≈
Vault	1,020		1,200		1,262		
Mausoleum	546		1,200				

Note: *Benchmarking completed for financial year 21/22*

Category	CRC	Redland Bay	Toowoomba	Townsville	Gold Coast	Logan	Moreton Bay
Ash							
Ash Right							
Lawn position		na		1000 ¥		na	na
Niches - old brick/ concrete wall	82-164	1,700	1,150 - 1,450	214	732	695	928 ≈
Niches - granite	328		na		875		
Garden	235	1,5000 - 1,880	1,000 - 3,800	935	1,106 - 3,514	1,640	1,202 - 1,630 ≈
Scatter		575	150		196	213	na
Placement							
Lawn position				195	394		
Niche	318	1,250 ≠	300	89	732	755	bundled ≈
Garden	160	2,000 ≠	300	89	374	755	bundled ≈
Grave	160	1,600	150		394	755	1109 ¥
Vault		1,800					
Plaques							
Sell plaques	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Private plaque install fee	196	680	600		209	414	na
Permits							
Monumental permit fee	86	300	175	89	282	194	215
Vault construct permit	163		BPR		537		

includes plaque and interment	≈		excludes cost of vault	≥
includes plaque	≠		position too small for grave	¥
Council construction/ building permit required	BPR		not allowed	na
private maus. requires 3 premium graves	#			

Note: *Benchmarking completed for financial year 21/22*

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