

# Mareeba

## SHIRE COUNCIL

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Mareeba Shire Council is located in Far North Queensland, covering an area of 53,645 sq km, extending west from Cairns to two-thirds the way across Cape York. The shire contains a remarkably diverse range of landscapes and vegetation as it incorporates four of the state's bio-geographical regions, incorporating parts of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area to the east, the Einasleigh Uplands to the south, the Gulf Plains to the west and the Cape York Peninsula bioregion to the north.

The altitude of the Tablelands region moderates the tropical climate which means that Mareeba Shire enjoys cool, dry winters and warm, wet summers. During winter, daily minimum temperatures rarely fall below 15°C, while in summer the daily maximum temperature rarely exceeds 35°C.

Mareeba, with a town population of 7,816, is the main commercial and administrative centre and lies 64km south west of Cairns (ABS 2011 Census, Usual Residents). Most of the shire's remaining population reside in and around smaller towns and districts including Kuranda, Koah, Speewah, Biboohra, Mt Molloy, Julatten, Mt Carbine, Mutchilba, Dimbulah, Irvinebank, Watsonville, Almaden and Chillagoe. Approximately 2,300kms of sealed and unsealed council managed roads connect communities and rural properties within the shire and beyond to form an extensive passenger and freight road transport network (Dept of Local Govt, Community Recovery & Resilience: 2006/07).

The Mareeba Shire regained its former status as a stand-alone local government after being de-amalgamated from the Tablelands Regional Council on 1 January 2014.

Forced amalgamations in March 2008 saw the Shire amalgamated with the other Tablelands shires of Atherton, Eacham and Herberton, however, a successful referendum in March 2013 gave the green light from the Queensland State Government for the de-amalgamation

The economy of the Shire relies heavily on agricultural production including a large range of animal industries and production of both tropical and subtropical crops.

A summary of Council's road assets is as follows:

Unsealed	1,660 kms
Sealed	640 kms
Major Culverts	154
Concrete Causeways	74
Bridges	82

### Day Labour Delivery of NDRRA Works

The NDRRA events up to and including the 2010 NDRRA event were traditionally delivered by day labour across the former Tablelands Regional Council from 2008 to 2010 and by Mareeba Shire Council pre the 2008 amalgamation. In delivering the 2010 NDRRA event approved works, it was determined by Tablelands Regional Council that in order to deliver the approved program within the required timeframe, it would be necessary that a combination of day labour delivery and contract delivery models would be required.

The approved 2010 NDRRA program for Tablelands Regional Council was for an amount of \$49 million. Delivery of the program was achieved for an expenditure amount of \$39 million based on the combined delivery model of day labour and contract.

The adopted delivery model for contract NDRRA approved works for the years 2010 (part), 2011, 2012 and 2013 for Tableland Regional Council for pavement restoration works has been on the following lines:

- Submissions made to the approving authority under the NDRRA guidelines
- Approval received from the approving authority for works for a particular event
- Road restoration works documented on the basis for a package of roads (based on geographical location on the Tablelands), with two (2) contracts tendered for each package:
  - actual restoration works
  - Principal supplied gravel for each road as required

This delivery model was able to allow local Tablelands contractors tender competitively for the works, particularly knowing that any required gravel was to be supplied by the Principal. Tendered rates obtained under this delivery model were extremely low resulting in high value for money outcomes across the programs. It is considered that the adopted delivery model has been very successful.

Where this contract model lags is in the western part of the Shire - west of Chillagoe. The need for quick and urgent attention to the extensive gravel road network in this area is paramount, not only for emergency purposes, but also for access requirements for primary producers (cattle stations) to transport stock and supplies. In these circumstances, the use of experienced day labour teams is critical as rapid response to restoration works can be achieved economically, effectively and reliably. Mareeba Shire Council has an experienced day labour workforce in this area who are extremely conversant with local conditions, available suppliers and plant contractors. To mobilise a contractor for such works can take several months, taking into account required inspections, documentation, statutory tendering periods and Council reporting. During this period, in a significant number of locations, suitable construction water is lost resulting in additional costs for water cartage. Additionally, the ideal time to undertake restoration works on the gravel roads west of Chillagoe is immediately post the wet season environment when residual moisture conditions are relatively high.

It is considered imperative by Mareeba Shire Council that a day labour response to restoration works in such locations west of Chillagoe to the Shire boundary with Carpentaria Shire Council be available in order to meet the expectations of the residents as well as the travelling public in these semi-remote areas.

### Emergent Period

An issue for Mareeba Shire Council is the time set for response during an emergent period following declaration of an event.

The period for emergency repairs following declaration of an event is sixty (60) days. Following many events, Council officers are unable to access many sections of the Shire to assess any required emergency response due to these areas being flooded. This is of particular relevance in the western area of the Shire as the extensive river system can receive several significant rain events that continually close roads and prohibit access.

Flexibility is sought in these circumstances in order to allow day labour crews access to assess and undertake emergent repairs when flood waters recede.

### Insurance

The concept of local government following through with non-traditional insurance products for roads is unacceptable to Mareeba Shire Council and cannot be supported. The use of any form of insurance in such circumstances would be untenable for Council given its extensive road network, the nature of the roads themselves (significant kilometres of gravel roads) and the nature of the events experienced across the vast area of Mareeba Shire.

The Mareeba Shire area is exposed to natural disaster events from both the east coast of Australia as well as the Gulf of Carpentaria. A significant event on the coastal area in the Daintree can cause significant damage to Mareeba Shire assets in the western area due to the flood waters from the Mitchell River which rises directly behind the coastal range. Exposure to events is extreme and given the nature of the assets involved, any insurance premiums applicable to Mareeba Shire could not be met under any current or future budgets.

### Flood Mitigation Expenditure

It is suggested by the Commission that mitigation across all levels of government is more likely to be below the optimal level.

This is supported fully by Mareeba Shire Council and is evidenced by the continual re-work after each NDRRA event of the same roads. Council has evidence where it has used its own resources to construct formal floodways on creek crossings of gravel roads that are continually eroded to the extent of being completely impassable during wet season storm events. Should a program of mitigation of such extensive scouring of creek crossings on gravel roads be implemented the direct and immediate impact on the restoration expenditure following an event would be significant.

Tablelands Regional Council has availed itself (as an umbrella of Mareeba Shire Council pre de-amalgamation on 31 December 2013), of seeking Betterment Funding as offered by the Queensland Government towards the long term repair of sites that are continually repaired following repeated NDRRA events.

Tablelands Regional Council has sought and achieved funding towards four (4) projects within its area pre de-amalgamation with all projects either complete, substantiality complete or about to go to tender.

These Betterment Projects are located at:

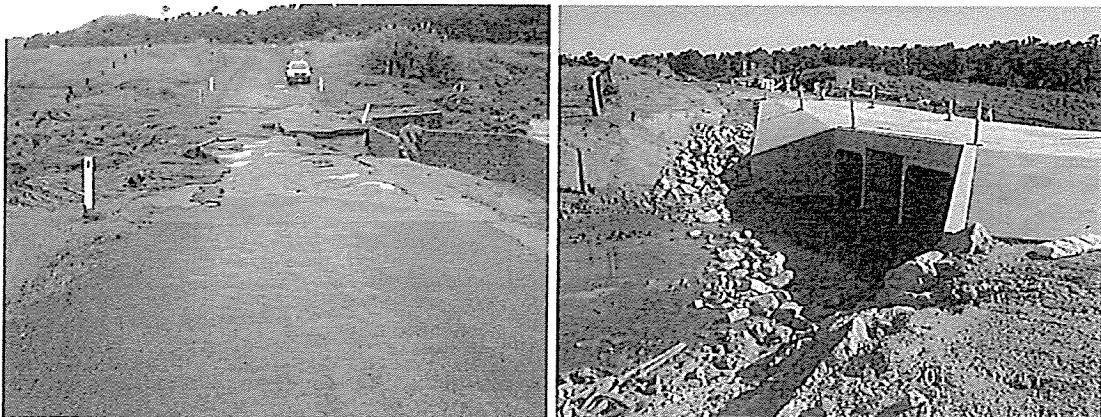
- Sutties Gap
- Boar Pocket Road Culvert
- Sandy Tate River (Ootan Road)
- Gamboola Crossing (Strathleven Road – Mitchell River)

For the purpose of applicability, the following details are provided in respect of the Boar Pocket Road Culvert Project.

Boar Pocket Road is located on the eastern side of Tinaroo Falls Dam. The particular culvert in question was damaged in each of the years of 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012. Repairs occurred to restore the asset to its original standard following each event (with the exception of 2012), when Council provided a submission to the Queensland Government that continued restoration of the existing asset was a complete waste of resources. Council in its submission indicated that it was prepared to contribute to the restoration works on the basis that a significant and more resilient structure resulted from the works proceeding.

Either based on this submission, or following other like submissions, the Queensland Betterment Program was adopted which resulted in the culvert being reinstated with a greater capacity and with a greater reduced risk of being damaged in future events.

Photos of the damaged original drainage structure and its current under construction replacement are appended to this submission.



#### Other Submissions

In reviewing other submissions to the Commission, Mareeba fully supports the comments included in the submission from the Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC) and also the submission of IPWEAQ. Time has not allowed a more fully researched submission to be provided. It is to be clearly understood that Mareeba Shire Council is not in a position now or in the future to meet the financial burdens imposed by any reductions in the Commonwealth Government commitment to the current NDRRA funding arrangements.

### **Current Situation**

In dealing with four (4) reasonably large events since 2010, it is apparent that several issues require addressing in the relationship between Commonwealth / State /Local Governments as follows:

- continual alterations in interpretation of funding eligibility
- policy changes during delivery phase of approved works following an event
- extreme frustration, particularly by Local Government, in the excessive requests and timeframes put in place for responses, to requests for information, some of which are supplied on more than one (1) occasion
- a significant lack of understanding of actual conditions in Far North Queensland and the potential for particular services to not be available
- a high unwillingness to accept that individual restoration activity rates will vary significantly across the State

Mareeba Shire Council seeks an inclusive approach in determination of policy frameworks and welcomes continued dialogue on potential alterations to the delivery methodology of NDRRA arrangements.

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