


Local Housing Action Plan

Mareeba Shire Council

January 2024





Mareeba Shire Council acknowledges
the traditional owners and custodians
of the land and pays its respects to
elders past, present and emerging:

Bar Barrum People

Djabugay People

Djungan People

Ewamian People

Kowanyama People

Kurtijar People

Muluridji People

Tableland Yidinji People

Tagalaka People

Wakaman People

Western Yalanji People

Photo source: Mareeba Shire Council

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Introduction

This Local Housing Action Plan (the Plan) is developed through a joint initiative involving the Queensland Government, Mareeba Shire Council and the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) to respond to a range of immediate, emerging, and longer-term housing challenges in the Mareeba Shire.

This is an iterative process that does not intend to duplicate existing Council actions or actions under the *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027* or *Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025*. It seeks to identify opportunities, consider an agreed response, develop targeted actions on key priorities and enable ongoing review of effort to adapt and respond to changing need.

This Plan aims to:

1. **Develop agreed priority actions** to respond to housing need in the local government area.
2. **Establish strong foundations for longer-term housing responses** to assist housing and homelessness outcomes in the local government area into the future.
3. **Incorporate existing information and plans** that assist with developing responses to housing need and acknowledge work already completed by the Council, state agencies, private and not-for-profit organisations.
4. **Facilitate targeted interaction between all parties through agreed actions** to ensure a focus on deliverables and projects that can improve housing responses in the short and longer-term.

Figure 1: The Local Housing Action Plan Iterative Process



Approach and methodology

This Plan provides an overview of key community and housing characteristics, and emerging issues related to housing in the community and identifies a targeted initial set of priority actions to respond to housing need. It has been developed through a review of a range of supporting documentation including:

- Council's planning scheme and relevant, strategies, reports and plans.
- Regional infrastructure plans.
- Statistical data from the Queensland Government Statisticians Office, including Census and other data sets such as building approvals, rental market data and housing approvals.
- Housing needs data from the Department of Housing, other state agencies, and research houses as required.
- Queensland Government housing documents, including *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027* and *Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025*.
- Other local data and information, including survey responses from stakeholders in the housing sector.

Emerging issues and opportunities, key challenges and potential responses have been developed from the review of a range of data sets, anecdotal feedback, and preceding engagement opportunities with Council and other stakeholders.

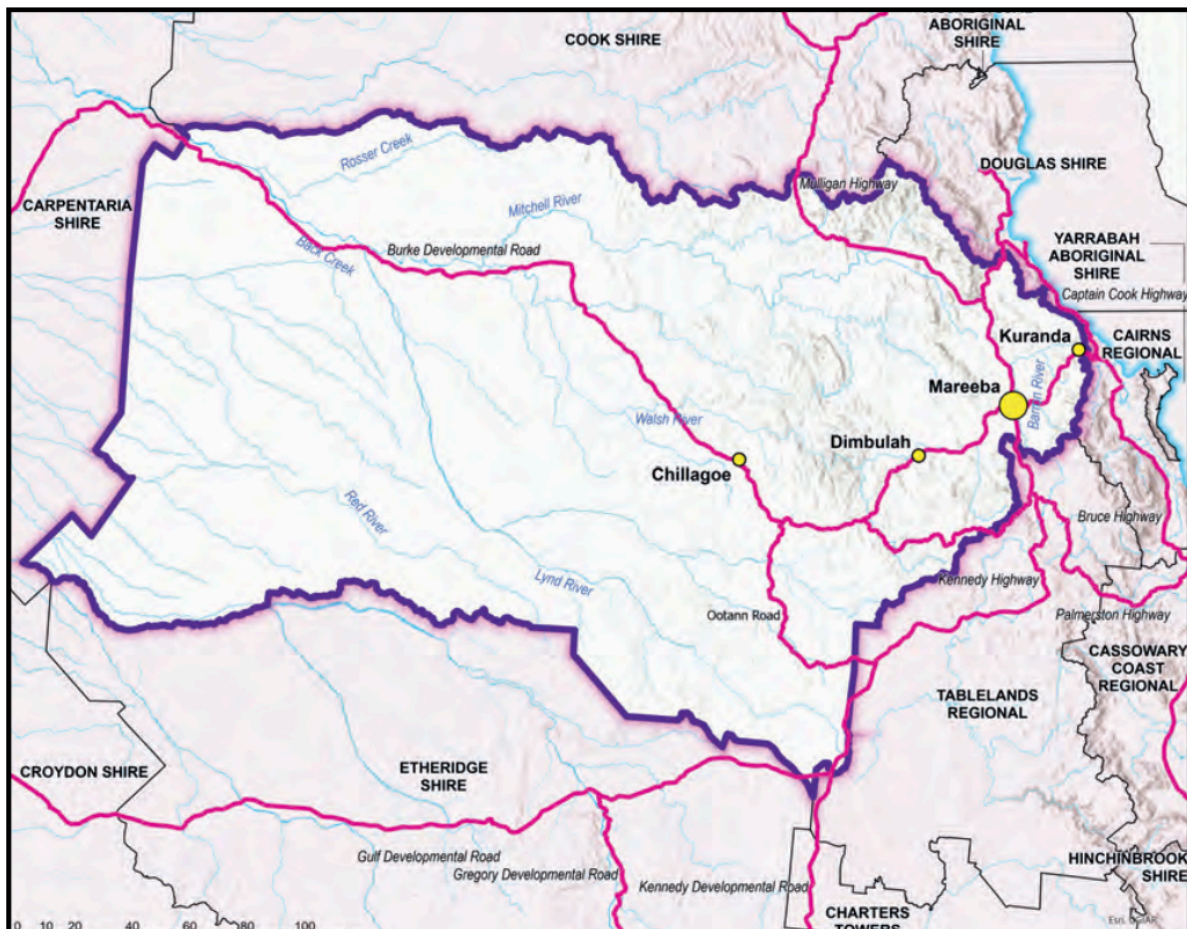
About Mareeba Shire

Mareeba Shire is home to over 22,800 residents, spanning 53,457 square kilometers with significant ecological diversity including rainforest, wetlands and savannah bushland.

Mareeba is the main commercial and administrative centre, a short, one hour drive west from Cairns and where more than half the population live. It is also the gateway to the Atherton Tablelands, Cape York and other Gulf destinations. Other smaller and more rural communities include Kuranda, Koah, Speewah, Biboohra, Mt Molloy, Julatten, Mt Carbine, Mutchilba, Dimbulah, Irvinebank, Watsonville, Petford, Almaden and Chillagoe.

Mareeba Shire is one of the largest fruit producing regions in Australia, bringing seasonal workers to the area to work on coffee plantations, mango and avocado farms, as well as sugar cane fields and orchards. Although the agriculture industry continues to sustain the shire's economy, the tourism sector has grown in recent years, seeing more visitors to the area.

Figure 2: Mareeba Shire Council Local Government Area



How this Plan aligns with Council's strategic directions

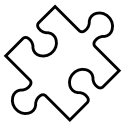
Mareeba Corporate Plan 2021-2025

Council's Corporate Plan 2021-2025 sets the strategic direction for the local government authority. It includes performance indicators for measuring Council's progress in achieving its vision for the future.

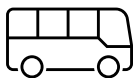
Council's vision is for a **growing, confident and sustainable Shire**. Current strategic priorities to achieve this vision are:



Financial sustainability: a council that continuously operates in a cost-effective manner while managing council's assets and reserves to ensure a sustainable future.



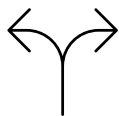
Community: an informed and engaged community which supports and encourages effective partnerships to enhance the liveability of the shire.



Transport and council infrastructure: the provision of quality services and infrastructure for our growing community that is planned and managed using sound asset management principles.



Economy and environment: a resilient economy that promotes and supports the shire's natural assets and local industry and encourages investment while preserving and future proofing for generations to come.



Governance: sound decision making based on effective frameworks and clear strategic direction to achieve regulatory compliance while delivering affordable levels of identified services within the Shire.

The Mareeba Community Taskforce

The Mareeba Community Taskforce is a joint initiative of the Mareeba Chamber of Commerce and Mareeba Shire Council, initially formed to assess the economic and social impacts of the coronavirus pandemic and develop long-term plans for the region's recovery.

The Taskforce now continues to promote Mareeba's prosperity and wellbeing, and coordinates positive community actions and outcomes by:

- Bringing business, government, and community representatives together to identify gaps, priorities, solutions, and opportunities.
- Supporting and coordinating local actions to improve economic growth and community wellbeing.
- Coordinating actions for advocacy at all levels of government and industry.

The Taskforce identifies affordable housing as a key priority, alongside improved healthcare services, improved transport connectivity, attracting and retaining a skilled workforce, and improved community safety.

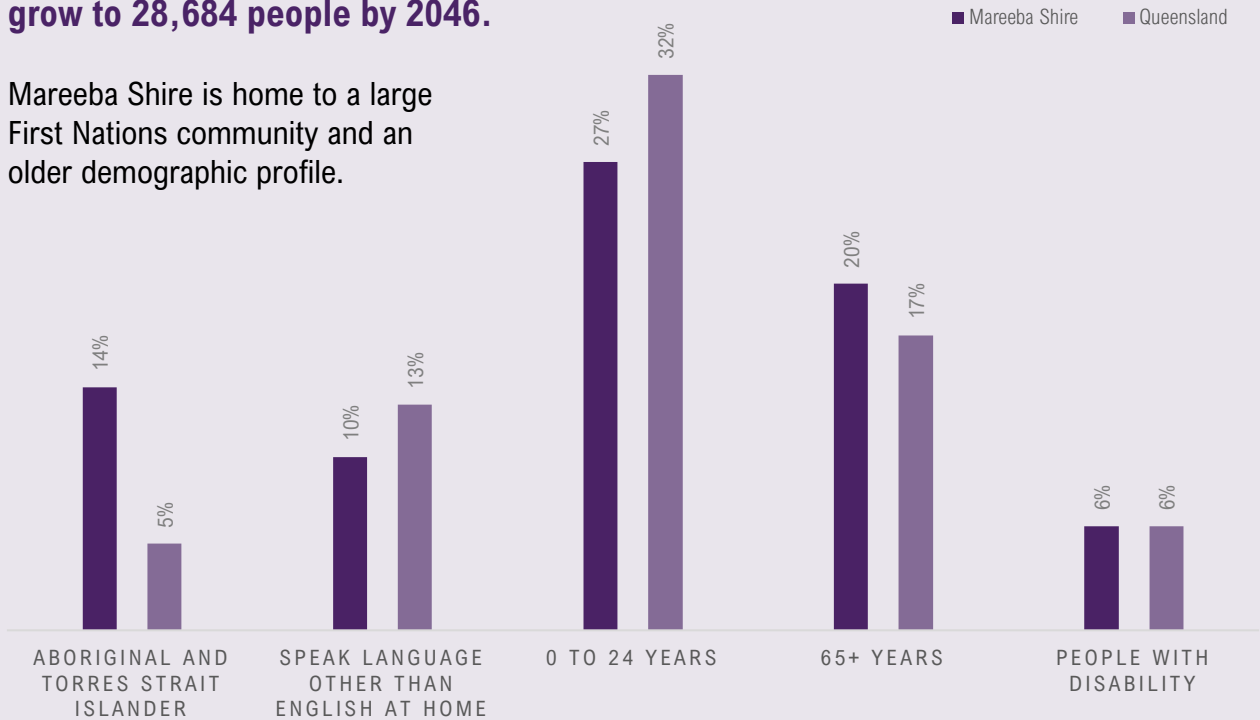


Snapshot

The following describes key population, demographic and housing trends in Mareeba Shire. All data is ABS Census data, 2016-2021, unless specified otherwise.

In 2021, there were 23,170 people living in Mareeba Shire, and this is forecast to grow to 28,684 people by 2046.

Mareeba Shire is home to a large First Nations community and an older demographic profile.



There is a high proportion of low income households. The median household income is \$1,259 per week, which is around \$400 lower than statewide average.

23% earn less than \$499 per week

2% earn more than \$3,000 per week

30% earn \$500 to \$999 per week

6% unemployment

Key workers underpin the Mareeba Shire local economy. Major local employers include:

17% agriculture, forestry and fishing

8% education and training

13% healthcare and social assistance

8% retail trade



There are approximately 7,836 private dwellings in Mareeba Shire, and this number is forecast to grow to 11,530 by 2046.

Housing availability is scarce across the Mareeba Shire. In October 2023, the residential vacancy rate for Mareeba, Arriga, Bibohra, Chewko, Paddys Green localities was just 0.4% (SQM Research 2023).

There is minimal housing diversity. Separate houses are the most common dwelling type, representing 90% of all private dwellings.

More smaller dwellings are needed to support our shrinking households and ageing population.

Although median weekly rental prices remain below the state average, **rental prices have been increasing in the past 12 months.** In September 2023, median rental prices were:



\$420 3 bedroom house
\$30 increase from September 2022

\$500 4 bedroom house
\$30 increase from September 2022



\$220 1 bedroom flat
\$15 decrease from September 2022

\$340 2 bedroom flat
\$20 increase from September 2022

Housing stress is higher than the statewide average, with 32% of rental households and 13% of households with a mortgage contributing more than 30% of their incomes toward housing.

Wait list times for social housing are on the rise, indicating increasing demand and insufficient stock. The average waiting time has increased from 10 months in 2017 to 26 months in 2023 (QCOSS 2023).

Responding to Mareeba Shire's population shifts and housing trends, the focus areas of this LHAP are:

- Increasing housing supply and diversity
- Increasing access to and affordability of worker housing
- Increasing social housing supply and supports for at risk community members
- Housing to meet the ageing population





Dancers perform at the 2023 Mareeba Multicultural Festival

Photo credit: Mareeba Shire Council

Local government area characteristics

Demographic characteristics

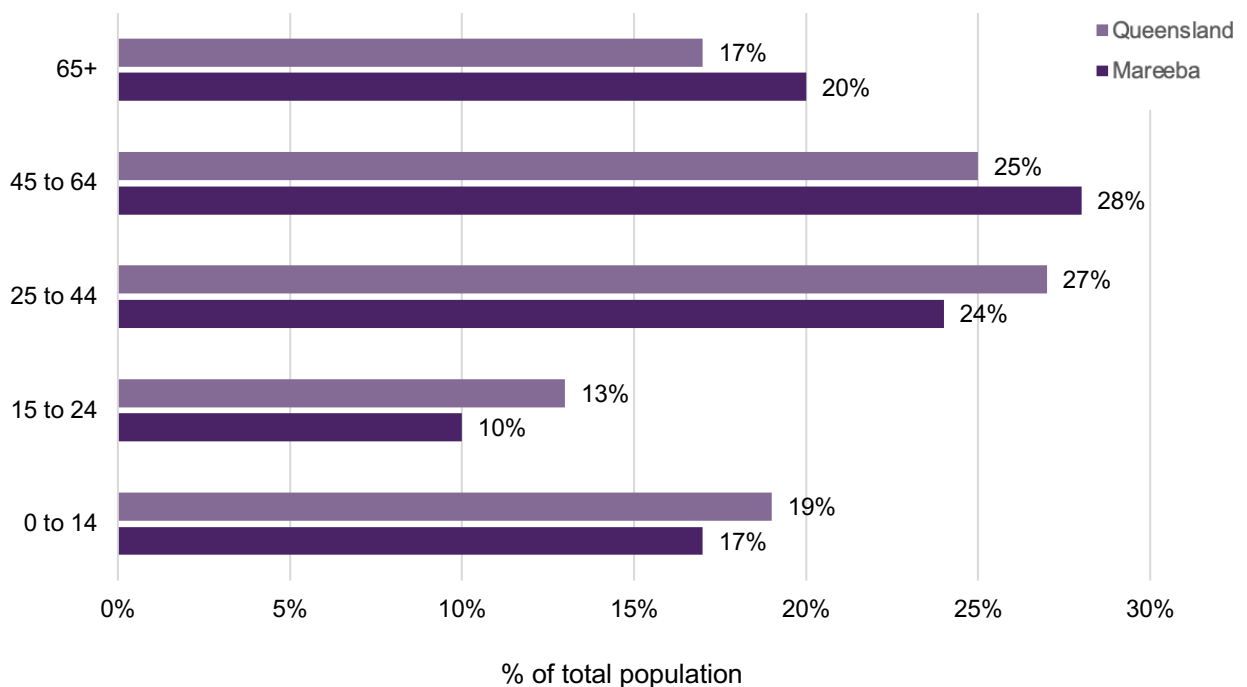
Population

In 2021, Mareeba Shire was home to 23,170 residents. Using an average annual growth rate of 0.9%, the Queensland Government Statisticians Office (QGSO) projects that the population will increase to 28,684 persons by 2046, seeing an additional 5,514 people living in the LGA.

Age

The median age in Mareeba Shire is 43 years, reflecting an older population when compared to the Queensland median (38 years). As shown in **Figure 3**, people between 45 to 65 years make up the largest age group in Mareeba Shire. There is also a higher proportion of people above 65 years in the Mareeba Shire (20%) when compared with Queensland (17%). There is a smaller proportion of children and young people, between 0 to 24 years, living in Mareeba Shire (27%) than Queensland (32%).

Figure 3: Age breakdown of persons in Mareeba Shire and Queensland, 2021 (Source: QGSO, 2023)



Household composition

In 2021, there were 7,836 households in Mareeba Shire. As shown in **Figure 4**, one family households are the dominant household composition, at 67%. This is followed by lone person households, representing 27% of households in Mareeba Shire.

In Mareeba Shire, there were approximately 5,600 families in 2021. As shown in Figure 5, 46% of total families were couples with no children, followed by couples with children (35%) and one-parent families (17%).

Over the last 15 years, the household composition of the shire has remained relatively stable. The proportion of couples without children has risen by 0.6%. Similarly, lone-persons households have increased slightly since 2011 (+0.3%).

Figure 4: Household composition in Mareeba Shire and Queensland, 2021 (Source: QGSO, 2023)

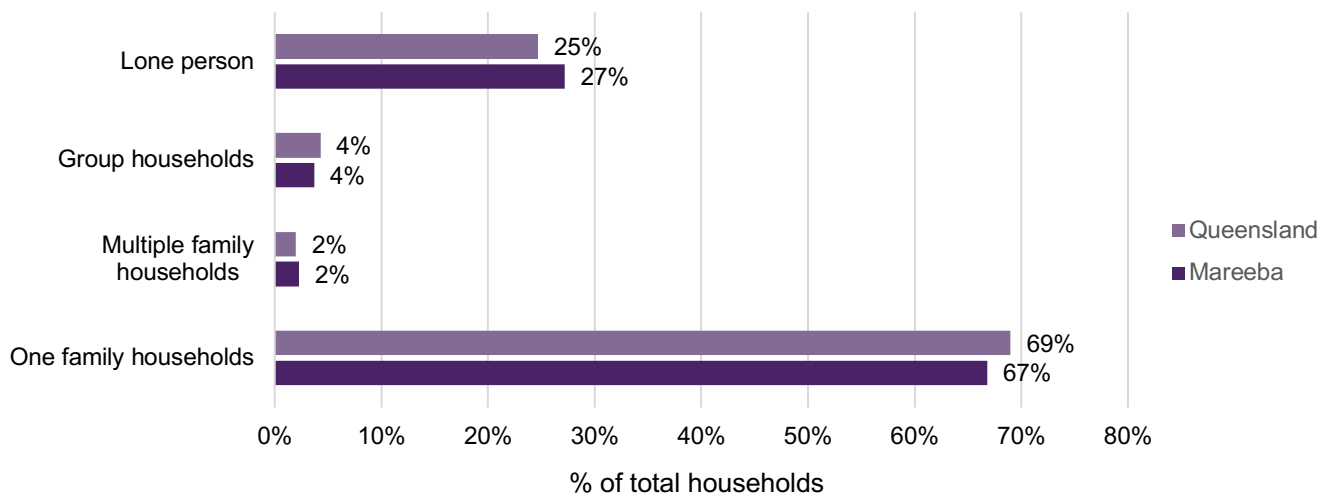
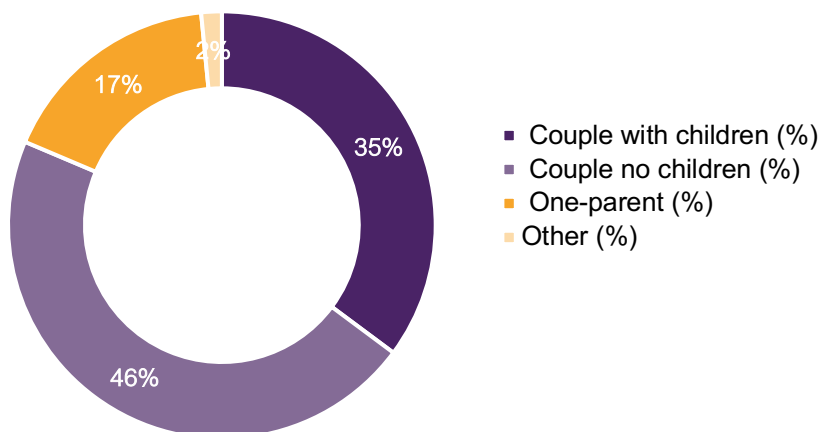


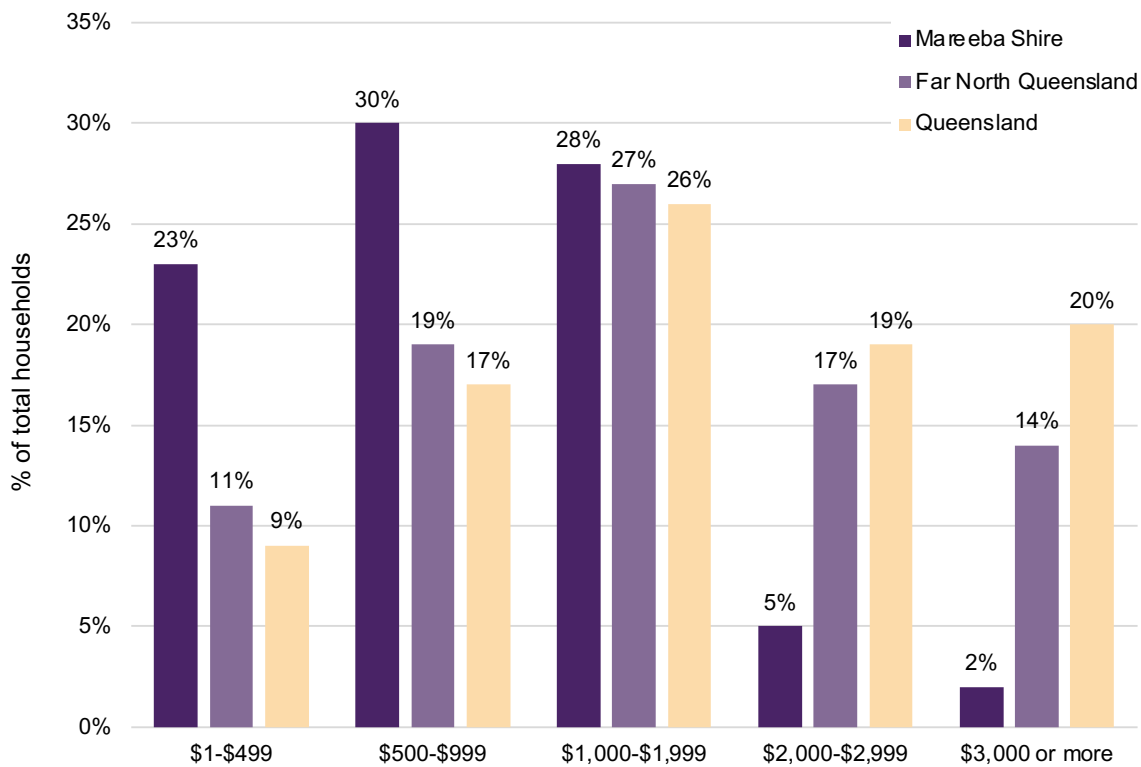
Figure 5: Family composition in Mareeba Shire, 2021 (Source: QGSO, 2023)



Income and employment

The median household income is \$1,259 per week, which is lower than the Queensland average, at \$1,675. As shown in **Figure 6**, there is a significantly higher proportion of low income households in Mareeba Shire compared to Queensland and Far North Queensland averages, with 23% of households earning less than \$499 per week, and 30% earning \$500 to \$999 per week.

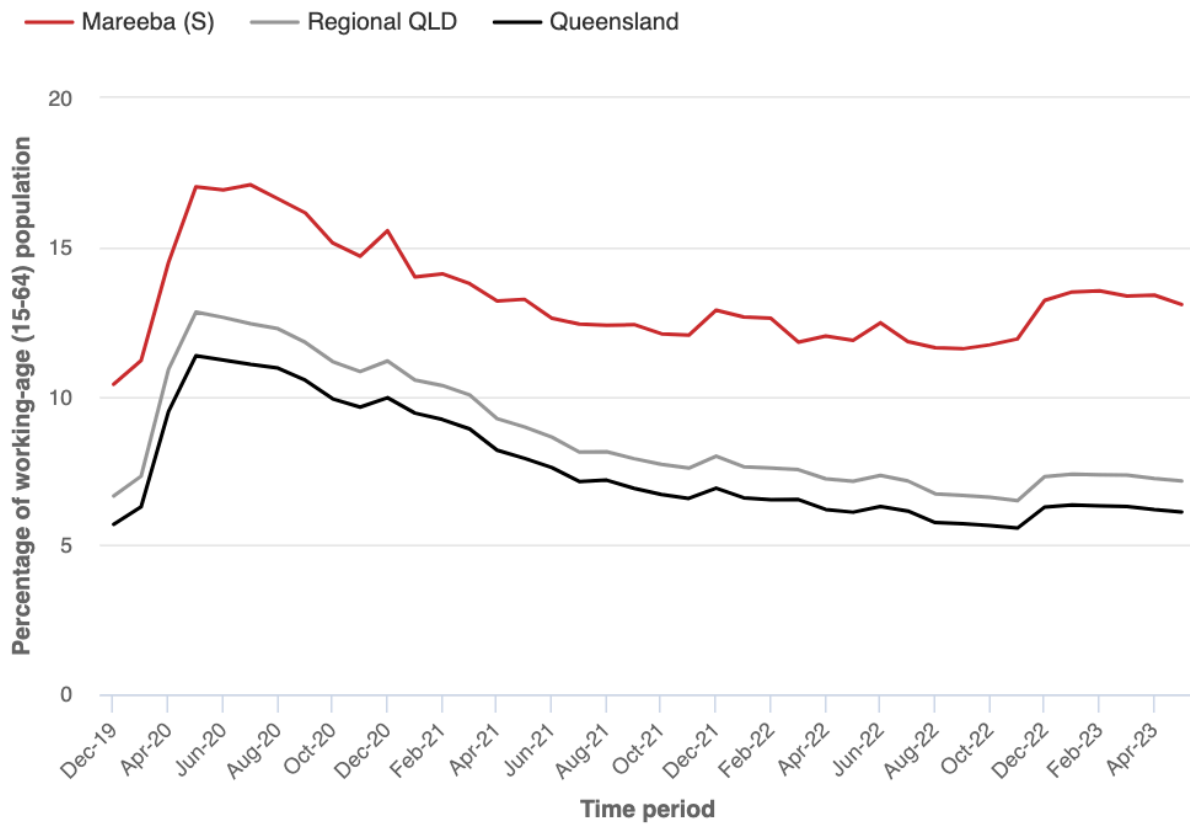
Figure 6: Household weekly income distribution in Mareeba Shire, FNQ and Queensland (Source: ABS Census, 2021)



In Mareeba Shire, 50.8% of persons over 15 years old were active in the labour force. This proportion is lower than Queensland (61.6%). In 2021, the unemployment rate was 5.9%, which is slightly higher than Queensland, at 5.4%.

JobSeeker rates help to measure socio-economic disadvantage. In May 2023, there were 1,865 JobSeeker and Youth Allowance recipients, representing 13.1% of Mareeba Shire residents between 15 to 64 years old. As shown in **Figure 7**, the JobSeeker rate is higher than Queensland and Regional Queensland, however the rate has been decreasing since June 2020.

Figure 7: JobSeeker and Youth Allowance rates (Source: Department of Social Services, 2023. Presented by .id Community Profile)



Migration

The 2021 ABS Census measures migration into a community by understanding the usual place of residence both one-year and 5-years prior to the Census. This information can provide insight into local property markets due to the rate of turnover and demand that occurs as people move in and out of a community.

There has been less community migration in Mareeba Shire when compared to Queensland. Just 11.8% had a different address 1 year prior to the 2021 Census and 31.3% had a different address 5 years prior to the Census. This is less than Queensland, which measured 17% and 44.8% respectively.

Cultural background

Around 3,260 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples live in Mareeba Shire. This represents 14.3% of the total population of Mareeba Shire, which is significantly higher in comparison the Queensland average at 4.6% and the Far North Queensland region with 11.2%.

Around 3,865 Mareeba Shire residents were born overseas, representing 16.9% of the total population. This is smaller in comparison with Queensland, at 22.7%. The top countries of origin are:

- United Kingdom (3.2%)
- Italy (2%)
- New Zealand (2%)
- Germany (0.9%)
- South Africa (0.6%)
- Papua New Guinea (0.6%)

More than 30 languages are spoken in Mareeba Shire. The most common languages other than English include:

- Italian (2.9%)
- German (0.8%)
- Mandarin (0.7%)
- Australian Indigenous languages (0.5%)
- Afrikaans (0.5%).

Since 2016, there has also been an increase in people speaking Malay, Punjabi and Thai.

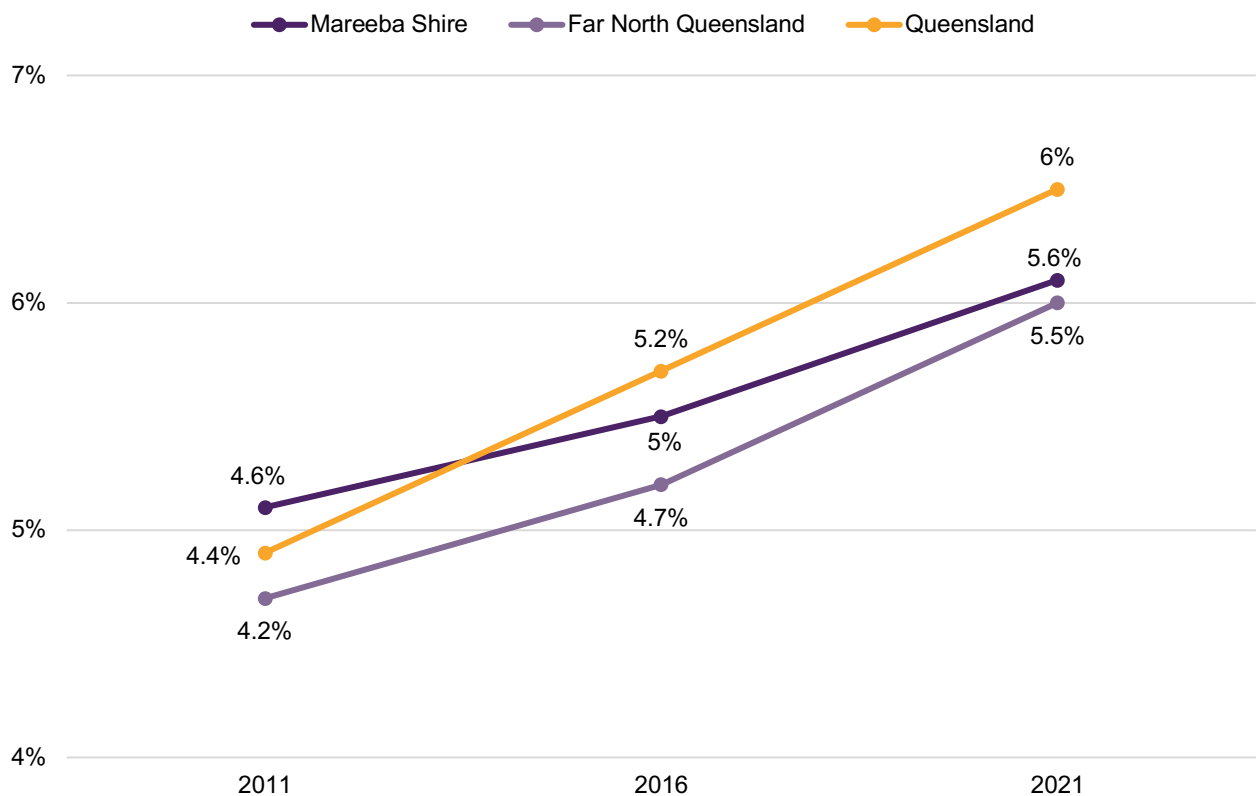
People born overseas are continuing to settle in Mareeba Shire. While 69% of Mareeba Shire residents born overseas came to Australia over 10 years ago, 14.1% arrived in Australia between 2016 and 2021.

Health and wellbeing

Approximately 1,270 people, or 5.6% of the total population, live with disability and require support in daily life. As shown in **Figure 8**, the proportion of people with disability in Mareeba Shire is continuing to increase, however remains lower than the Queensland average.

In addition, 27.6% of the Mareeba Shire residents live with at least one long-term health condition, with the most common being arthritis, mental health condition, asthma, diabetes and heart disease. There is a lower proportion of people with long-term health conditions in Mareeba Shire compared with Queensland (32.9%).

Figure 8: Percentage of population with disability in Mareeba Shire, Far North Queensland and Queensland (Source: ABS, 2021)



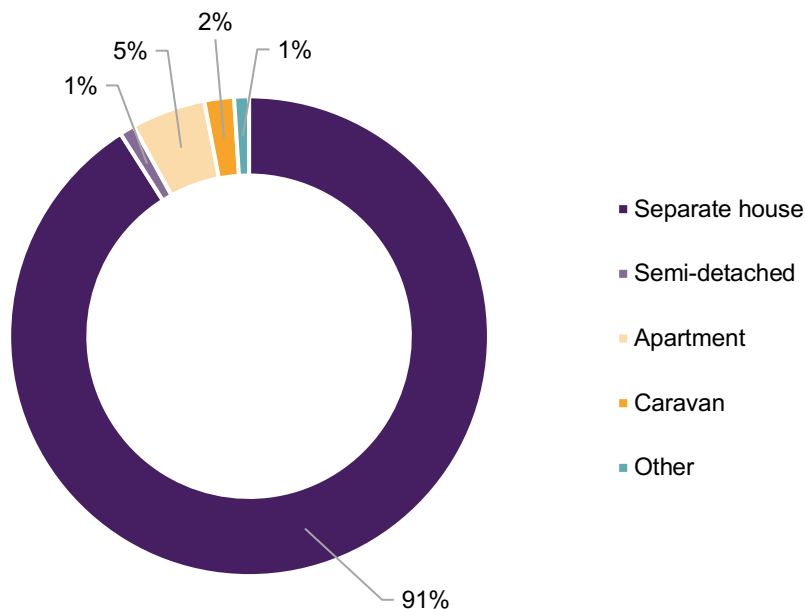
Housing characteristics

Dwelling type

Most dwellings in Mareeba Shire are separate houses, representing 91% of all private dwellings. As shown in **Figure 9**, there were smaller proportion of apartments (5%), caravans used as dwellings (2%), and semi-detached dwellings (1%).

This shows there is minimal housing diversity stock in Mareeba Shire, presenting an opportunity for future stock to respond to changing population composition and need, such as the increasing proportion of lone person households.

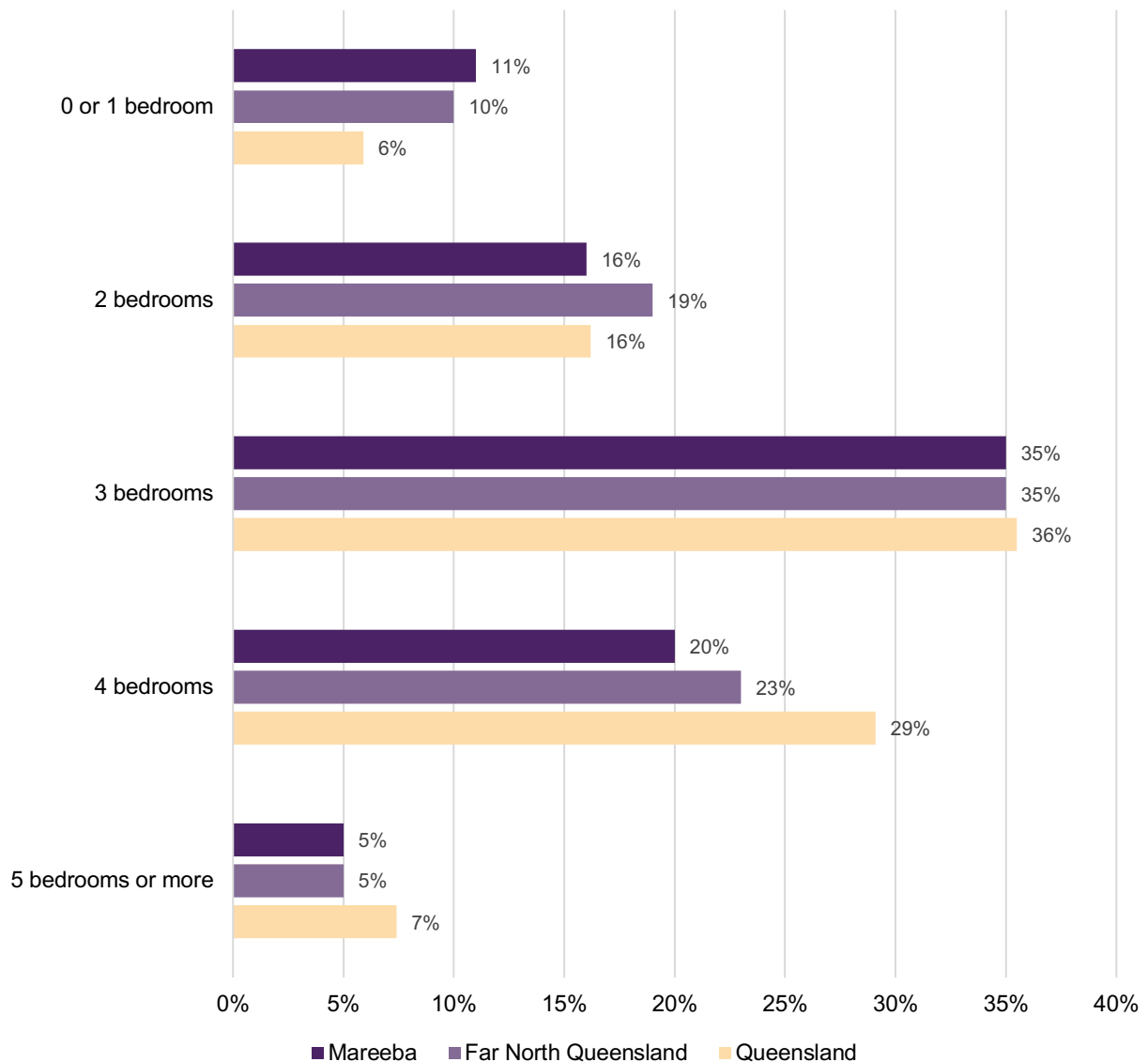
Figure 9: Percentage of occupied private dwellings by dwelling type in Mareeba Shire (Source: ABS, 2021)



Number of bedrooms

As shown in **Figure 10**, the proportion of dwellings and number of bedrooms are similar between Mareeba Shire, Far North Queensland and Queensland. However, there is a lower proportion of 4-bedroom houses in Mareeba Shire (20%) when compared with Far North Queensland (23%) and Queensland (29%).

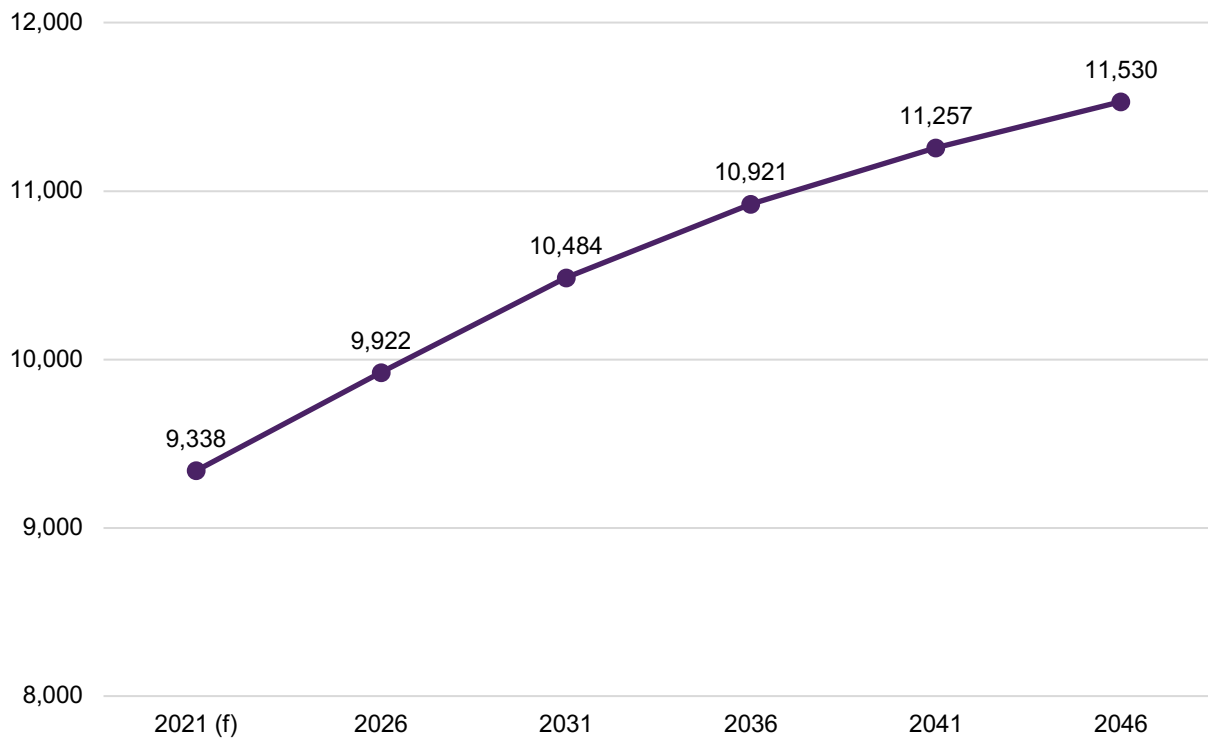
Figure 10: Number of bedrooms per dwelling in Mareeba Shire, Far North Queensland and Queensland (ABS, 2021)



Dwelling projections

As shown in **Figure 11**, the Queensland Government forecasts an additional 2,192 private dwellings in Mareeba Shire by 2046, from 9,338 dwellings in 2021 to 11,530 in 2046.

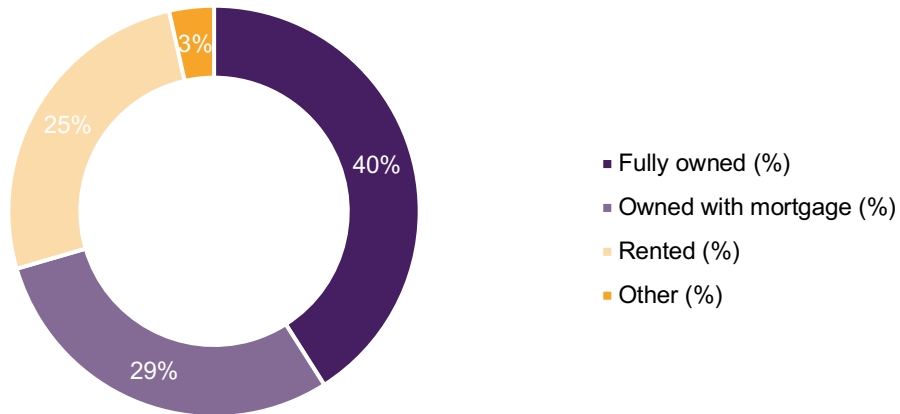
Figure 11: Number of projected private dwellings in Mareeba Shire under “medium series” (Source: QGSO Housing and Dwelling Projections, 2023)



Home ownership

As shown in **Figure 12**, current home ownership rates indicate that 69% of households own their home, with 40% fully owning their home and 29% owned by mortgage. Around 25% of households rent in Mareeba Shire, which is lower than Queensland, at 33.1%, and other council areas in Far North Queensland. More than 18% were renting privately, and 3.7% were in social housing.

Figure 12: Home ownership in Mareeba Shire (Source: ABS, 2021)



Private rental market

As of September 2023, the median weekly rental price for Mareeba Shire was \$375. This varies from \$500 per week for a 4-bedroom house to \$220 for 1-bedroom flat. As shown in **Figure 13**, rental prices in Mareeba Shire are lower for all tenure types compared to the state averages.

Although median rental prices remain lower than the state averages, Queensland Government Residential Tenancies Authority (RTA) data shows that rental prices are increasing, seeing a \$45 per week increase between September 2022 and September 2023.

The table below shows rising rental prices in the Mareeba Shire, with most dwellings seeing increasing rental prices between September 2022 and September 2023.

Figure 13: Weekly median rental prices in Mareeba Shire and Queensland, September 2023 (Source: RTA, 2023)



New rental bonds and vacancy rates

Although there has been a slight increase in the number of rental bonds, from 1,673 in September 2022 to 1,688 in September 2023 (RTA 2023), Mareeba Shire continues to see extremely low residential vacancy rates, indicating that rental demand is higher than available rental stock.

As shown in **Figure 14**, vacancies have remained low in the 4880 postcodes since 2010, reaching a 3.2% peak in December 2018. In October 2023, the residential vacancy rate was 0.4%, indicating almost no housing available for rent. This postcode includes the localities of Mareeba, Arriga, Biboohra, Chewko, Paddys Green and Glen Russell.

Between September 2022 and September 2023, there were 619 new rental bonds. As shown in **Figure 15**, new rental bond data indicates that the majority of rental accommodation is for three and four bedroom houses and two bedroom flats.

Figure 14: Residential vacancy rates for postcodes 4880, 2008-2023 (Source: SQM Research, 4 December 2023)

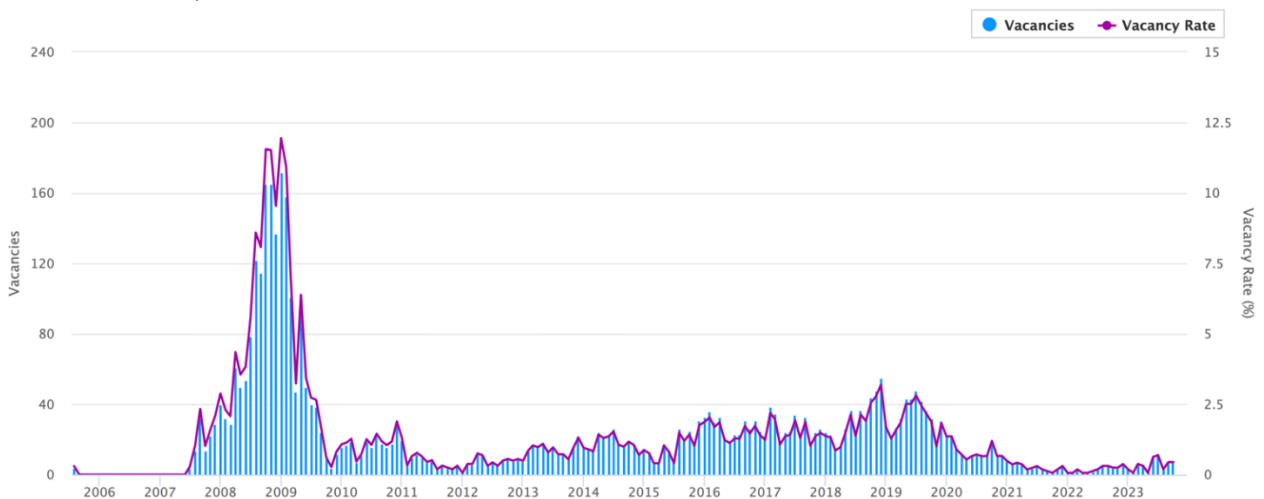
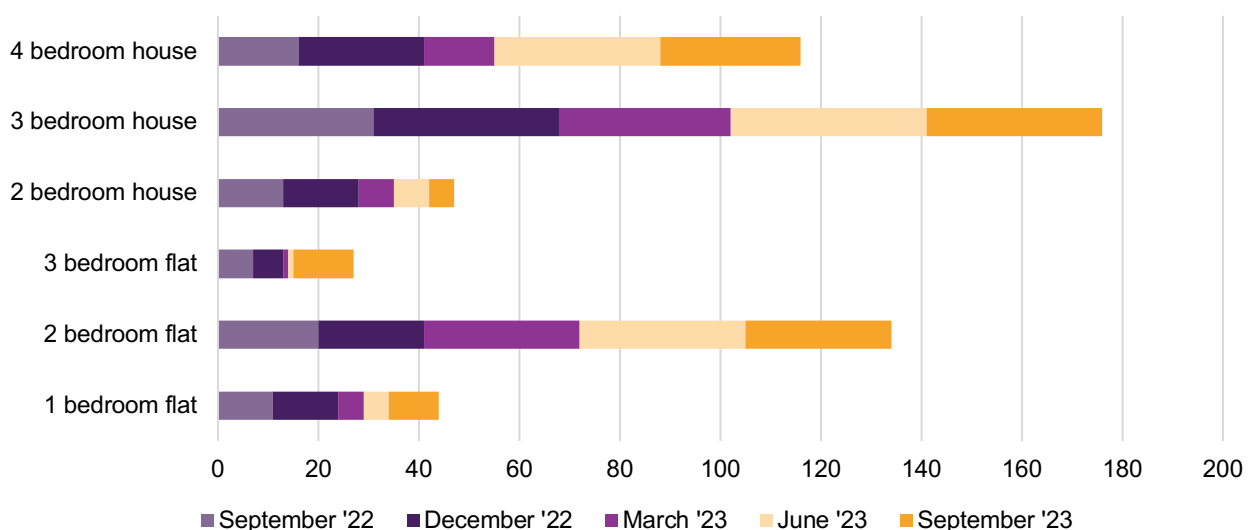


Figure 15: Number of new rental bonds in Mareeba Shire, 2022-2023 (Source: RTA, September 2023)

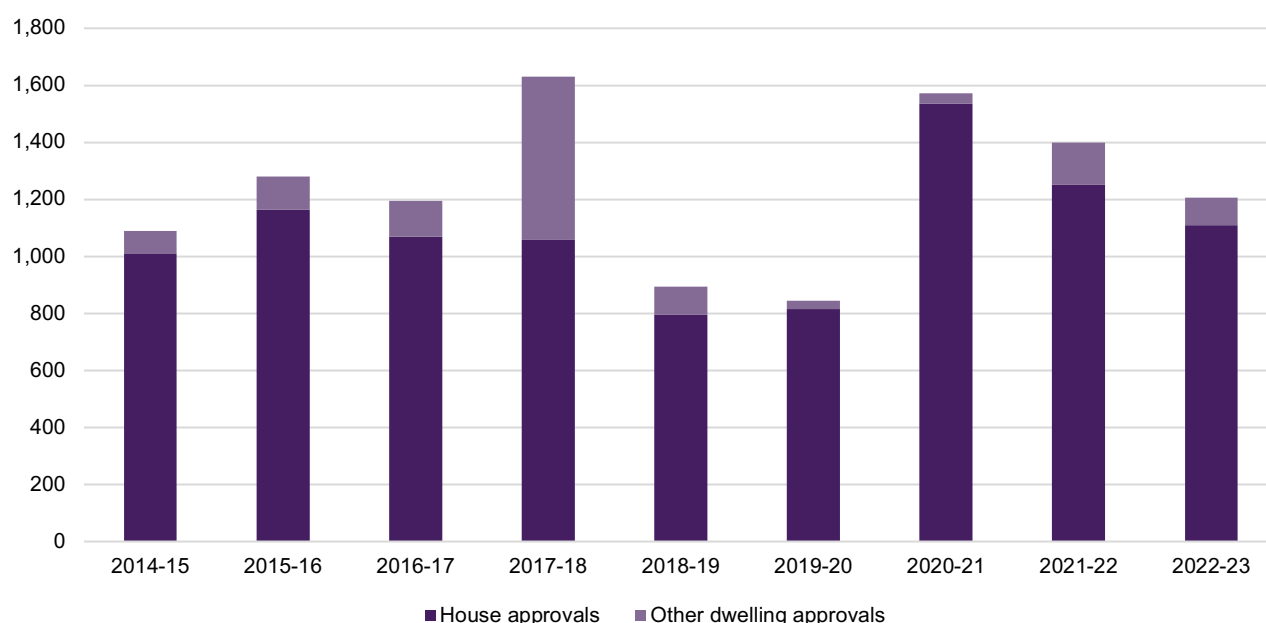


Residential building approvals

ABS Building Approvals data (October 2023) shows there were 83 residential dwelling approvals in the last 12 months in the Mareeba Shire. Of these 74 were for detached dwellings and 9 were “other” housing types (e.g. units, semidetached, townhouses).

As shown in Figure 16, there has been an overall decline in building approvals for Far North Queensland dwellings since July 2021.

Figure 16: Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils FNQROC Residential building approvals, 2014-2023 (ABS Building Approvals, 2023. Compiled by .id Housing Monitor)



Housing stress

Of the 7,836 households in the Mareeba, 919 were experiencing housing stress in 2021. This data shows that rental households are more likely to experience housing stress than households with mortgages.

As shown in **Figure 17**, rental households are more likely to experience housing stress than mortgage households. The FNQROC Housing Monitor shows that 32% of rental households were paying more than 30% of their income towards rent, and 13% of mortgage households were experiencing mortgage stress. These rates exceed the averages for Far North Queensland and Regional Queensland.

Figure 17: Percentage of households experiencing housing stress in Mareeba Shire, Far North Queensland and Regional Queensland (Source: ABS 2023. Data compiled by .id Housing Monitor).

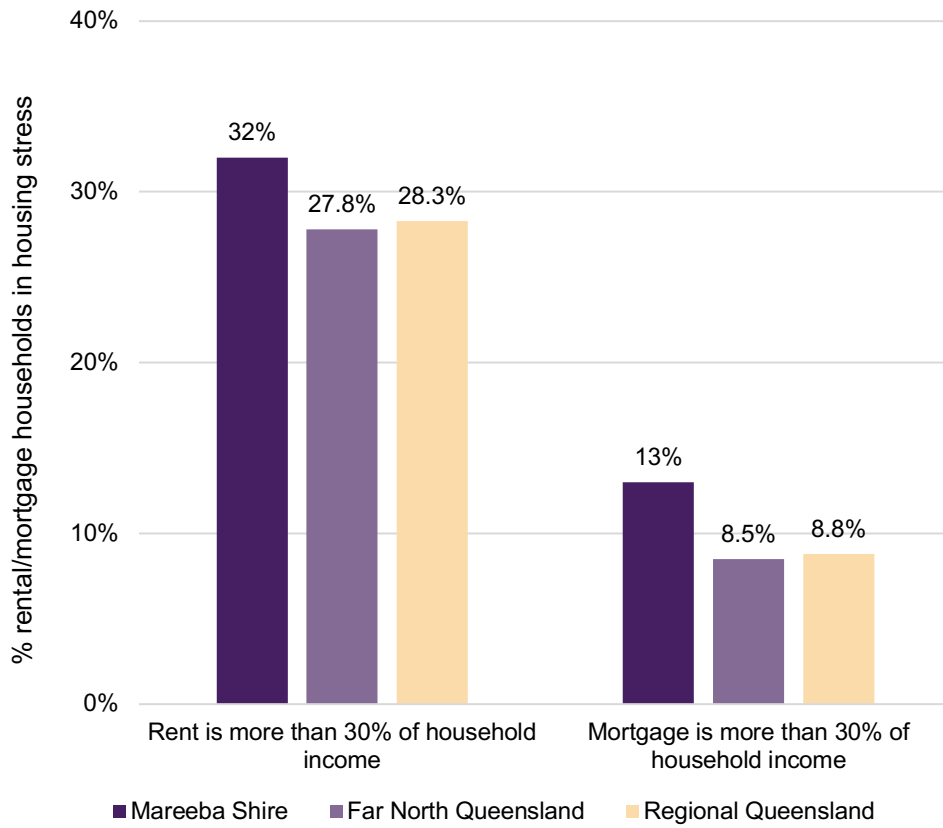




Photo source: Mareeba Shire Council

Key focus areas

Key focus areas help direct action and resources to address the most pressing housing needs and issues across the shire. These have been determined through a review of existing data and engagement with stakeholders.

In October 2023, Council conducted a targeted survey to support this Plan. A total of 21 responses were received, including from local housing providers, community support services, developers, real estate agents and key workers. Respondents were invited to comment about local housing challenges in Mareeba Shire, covering dwelling supply, unmet housing needs, and opportunities to improve housing availability and affordability. Findings from the survey are presented where relevant in the focus areas below.

Focus area 1: Increase housing supply and diversity

Mareeba's current housing supply is not meeting the needs of the shire's shifting population and household compositions. While there is an available supply of residential land, including areas zoned for greenfield development, Mareeba has seen minimal dwelling construction in recent years (see 'Residential Building Approvals' on page 24).

Together with the housing shortfall, within Mareeba's existing housing stock there is minimal housing diversity, with 91% of private dwellings being separate houses, and despite increasing percentages of single person and couple households in the past decade, 60% of dwellings have three or more bedrooms. There is opportunity for future stock to respond to current need, as well as changing household compositions.

The FNQ region, including Mareeba Shire, faces challenges in delivering new housing stock, including construction costs, access to tradespeople, materials and freight costs, alongside the increasing need to build resilient housing and cover insurance costs.

A key opportunity is to support housing diversity and growth through the delivery of secondary dwellings. From 2022, restrictions on who can live in secondary dwellings no longer apply across Queensland, enabling homeowners to rent out secondary dwellings, such as granny flats. Dual occupancy developments could help to meet housing demand, for example one- and two-bedroom units built as secondary dwellings could provide housing options for professional workers looking for accommodation in small complexes, or accessible smaller housing for older residents or people with disability.

It is important to strategically position smaller housing product close to town centres and essential services to support efficient and sustainable growth, as well as local amenity and overall liveability. Housing designs should also be tailored to respond to Mareeba's strong rural character.

Response opportunities

- Encourage government incentives for private investment in housing.
- Share information about policy settings and diverse housing options to encourage the development of new residential builds.
- Investigate opportunities to deliver a range of housing types to create a mix of housing to cater for small household compositions.
- Continue to offer streamlined charges and approval processes to support and encourage residential builds.
- Promote dual occupancy development and provide information to residents and developers about secondary dwellings and tiny houses.
- Investigate the viability of encouraging 'infill' in larger lots around town centres with ready access to essential services, especially in Mareeba and Kuranda, to increase housing diversity.

Focus area 2: Increase access to and affordability of worker housing

Workers across the skills spectrum come to Mareeba Shire to support a range of industries including farm work, infrastructure projects, and to work in the education, healthcare and social assistance sectors. ABS 2021 Census data shows that Mareeba's major employment sectors are:

- Agriculture, forestry and fishing (17%)
- Health care and social assistance (13%)
- Education and training (8%)
- Retail trade (8%)
- Construction (8%).

Some are short term workers, fulfilling seasonal jobs, ad hoc work, or short term contracts, while others relocate longer term. The below summarises the unique challenges and needs for farm and seasonal workers, and key workers including truck drivers, tradespersons, nurses, teachers, medical practitioners and other professionals.

Generally speaking, Mareeba Shire experiences challenges in recruiting and retaining workers, in part, due to the housing shortage. More housing stock that meets the needs of Mareeba's diverse workforce is needed, including affordable housing, smaller dwellings, and in areas that facilitate access to town centers and social connection.

Rural farm and seasonal workers

Mareeba Shire is one of the largest fruit producing regions in Australia, with horticulture making up 48% of the municipality's agricultural production, valued at \$175 million for the 2020-2021 financial year (Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, 2022). Some produce markets are experiencing significant expansion, with new commodities gaining a foothold and traditional industries evolving with new varieties.

This flourishing horticulture sector brings seasonal workers to the area. Previously, seasonal workers would typically be international visitors or "backpackers" who would work for 88 days to fulfil their working holiday visa requirements. Given the short timeframe, they would often camp, stay in on-site accommodation on farms or backpacker style accommodation.

The Australian Government's new Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme enables eligible businesses to hire workers from Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste when there are local worker shortages. Under the PALM scheme, farming businesses in Mareeba Shire

How can we meet the needs of the community with the greatest unmet housing needs?

"Closer regulation of the farm worker accommodation to reduce overcrowding and loss of affordable rentals from the private market, and more accountability for farm worker businesses to supply accommodation for workers."

- Survey respondent

are recruiting Pasifika workers for short-term jobs up to nine months, or longer-term roles up to four years.

The PALM scheme requires employers to support a longer stay for workers, and this has had significant impacts on local housing supply, as well as contributing to overcrowding. In some cases, large farming operators purchased existing motels, caravan parks and backpacker hostels to accommodate their labour force. In other cases, farmers have been seeking to establish on-farm workforce accommodation facilities.

The alternative to on-farm housing developments for a rural workforce is farmers purchasing or renting residential housing for rural workers. This has impacted the availability of residential housing, particularly in Mareeba. Social and recreational programs are also required to support the integration of PALM workers into local communities, as well as their own health and wellbeing.

Key worker housing

Mareeba Shire is facing a worker shortage, with challenges in recruiting and retaining workers, in part due to housing affordability and housing shortages. This includes health workers, truck drivers and builders – all essential occupations for sustaining the local economy and creating liveable communities.

While some occupation groups can afford to purchase or pay market rent in Mareeba Shire, there is insufficient supply for purchase or rent. The residential vacancy rate for the 4880 postcode, was 0.4% in October 2023 and even lower in May 2023 at 0.1% (SQM Research, 2023).

Other workers face challenges in affording housing even when working and require state and federal government subsidised housing or other supports.

Access to quality, well located, diverse and affordable housing is essential to attracting and retaining key workers in the Mareeba shire and supporting local economic growth.

What are the key housing challenges for Mareeba Shire?

“Attracting workers to the region to fill employment positions when there is a lack of affordable housing, especially for singles and families to find housing.”

- Survey respondent

Response opportunities

- Advocate to State and federal governments for statutory mechanisms or strategic approaches to support seasonal, essential and skilled workers.
- Encourage investment in rental properties.
- Develop a regional Key Worker Housing Strategy, perhaps through the FNQ Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC).
- Review state and local government land that can be developed for key worker housing.
- Support businesses to increase understanding and deliver rural farm worker accommodation.
- Support initiatives that address skills shortages in rural and regional areas.

Focus area 3: Increase social housing supply and supports for at risk community members

Across Queensland, there is high demand for social housing, and this is no exception in Mareeba Shire where the weekly median household income is \$1,249, far below the state average of \$1,675. Mareeba Shire is home to a high proportion of low income households, with 23% earning less than \$499 per week, and 30% between \$500 to \$999.

While there is increasing demand for social housing, there is inadequate supply locally. There are 426 social housing dwellings spread across Chillagoe, Mareeba, Mt Molloy, Kuranda, Koah, and Dimbulah. This includes 166 community housing properties, 118 public housing properties, and 142 Indigenous housing properties.

Social housing register data shows increasingly long wait list times (QCOSS, June 2023), with the average wait time for Mareeba Shire increasing from 10 months in 2017 to 26 months in 2023. This data also shows that for the Mareeba Shire, there is higher need from single persons, single parents with young children, older people, people with disability, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Not only is there a need to increase social housing stock, but there is demand for diverse social housing typologies to support a range of age cohorts and family compositions, as well as Indigenous families.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that existing social services in Mareeba Shire cannot keep up with demand, indicating that additional community services are needed. This includes in-home care services, support for people experiencing family and domestic violence, and youth support responses. The below summarises challenges and needs for high needs cohorts.

Appropriate housing for First Nations households

The Mareeba Shire region has a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (14%) when compared with the Queensland average (5%). The social housing register indicates that 66% of all social housing applications in Mareeba Shire are from First Nations people. This group has the highest demand and need of all population groups.

ABS 2021 Census shows that 3.9% of Mareeba Shire households are considered homeless and another 3.1% are marginally housed. These figures are higher than the Regional Queensland averages. According to feedback from local stakeholders homelessness in Mareeba Shire primarily manifests as “people living in severely crowded dwellings” (58%) and “people staying temporarily with other households” (21%).

There are residents with a range of different vulnerabilities in the Mareeba Shire community who require access to social housing:

- 23% very low income households (Qld average 9%)
- 20% of population are 65 years and over (Qld average 17%)
- 13.5% youth disengagement (Qld average 10%).
- 14% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (Qld average 5%)
- 5.6% live with disability (Qld average 6%)
- High socioeconomic disadvantage in Mareeba Shire, with SEIFA score of 937 (Qld average 995)

Survey respondents consider First Nations people to have the greatest unmet housing and housing support needs, pointing to a need for housing that accommodates multigenerational families and greater First Nations input into social housing design to ensure cultural appropriateness.

Crisis and emergency accommodation

There is no crisis accommodation available in Mareeba Shire, despite high rates of domestic and family violence. For example, the number of breaches to domestic violence protection orders more than doubled between 2019 and 2022 (Queensland Police Service, 2023).

Anecdotal evidence suggests women and children escaping violence in the Mareeba Shire are being housed with other family members or friends, in motels, or leave the shire to access safe and affordable housing. There is an urgent need to explore emergency and crisis accommodation models that best suit regional and rural areas, and to allocate more funding for local support services.

Survey responses suggest that cohorts of the community with the greatest unmet housing and/or housing support needs are:

- Low and very low income earners
- First Nations people
- Women and children escaping domestic violence
- Families.

Housing support for young people

Alongside growing domestic and family violence, Mareeba Shire reports higher youth disengagement (13.5%) in comparison to the statewide average (10%). The shortage of crisis accommodation is mirrored by insufficient housing supply for young people at risk or with low incomes, and in March 2023, Mareeba Shire Council urged both the Queensland and Federal Governments to fund more youth support initiatives including youth outreach and a drop-in center for young people at risk.

Response opportunities

- Continue to advocate for the delivery of social and affordable housing in Mareeba Shire.
- Improve understanding about suitable housing typologies for First Nations households.
- Improve understanding about suitable domestic and family violence models for rural and regional areas.
- Encourage more First Nations home ownership, including “rent to buy” program.
- Allocate more funding to deliver services and support sector roles, e.g. youth workers, culturally competent services, and supports for women and children experiencing domestic violence.

Focus area 4: Housing to meet the ageing population

Queensland Government's *Healthy Ageing Strategy* indicates there is increasing desire among older people to age in place, that is, continuing to live in their communities as they get older. The ability to age in place depends on multiple factors, such as the ability to access appropriate housing, transport, health services, and social connection.

Mareeba Shire is home to an ageing population, with over 20% of residents aged 65 and over. This is higher in proportion to the statewide average of 17%, and population forecasts anticipate that Mareeba's residents will continue to age into the future.

There are two nursing homes located in Mareeba and Julatten, however these facilities do not meet current local demand for aged care housing. There is a need to expand existing facilities and/or build new developments to support local needs.

Further compounding this issue is the lack of housing diversity in Mareeba Shire, with limited opportunities for people to downsize their homes. Mareeba Shire Council is one of the largest social housing providers in FNQ with 108 one- and two- bedroom units, and there remains a critical need for more social housing for seniors. In addition, there is not adequate access to health services, including in-home care, which also impacts the ability of Mareeba's older community to age in place.

How can we meet the needs of the community with the greatest unmet housing needs?

Have homes that are set up for people with disabilities or seniors, such as grab rails, ramps, easy to turn taps and door handles."

- Survey respondent

What needs to be done to improve the availability and affordability of housing?

If considering accommodation for at-risk populations like seniors, people with disability or domestic violence, then possibly apartments may be a better option for density and would allow support services to more easily service all clients in that property.

- Survey respondent

Response opportunities

- Continue to support community housing for seniors and people with disability in Mareeba Shire.
- Divestment of Mareeba Shire Council's 108 units for social housing for seniors to Mareeba Community Housing Company could create opportunities for leveraging existing social housing stock to build more social housing for seniors.
- There is an opportunity to utilise surplus funds in Mareeba Shire Council's Community Housing for Seniors program to build new social housing units for seniors in Mareeba and Kuranda.
- Investigate the reported lack of in-home care packages to support older residents to continue living independently in their own homes.

- Build adaptable housing in regional areas to allow seniors to remain in their communities, close to family, friends, and key services. This includes building one and two-bedroom low-set duplex and villa homes, to be sold at market value, with design features that facilitate ageing in place and independent living.
- Advocate for funding to deliver aged care services in Mareeba Shire.



Local residents enjoying the 2023 Mareeba Multicultural Festival

Photo credit: Mareeba Shire Council

Response opportunities

A Local Housing Action Plan enables engagement across all levels of government, and benefits from partnerships between private and not-for-profit organisations.

An initial set of tactical actions has been developed, enabling refinement through an ongoing iterative process. These actions provide for a targeted response and outcomes that will seek to either create immediate benefit or establish a foundation for the next phase of actions. More specific responses can then be determined that provide flexibility in delivery and support each of the broad areas identified.



Actions

Mareeba Shire Council with the support of the Queensland Government through the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025 is committed to engage in the delivery of its initial Local Housing Action Plan through this set of actions, developed to target immediate to longer term housing responses. This is an iterative process, and these actions and target outcomes will seek to either create immediate benefit or to establish foundations that help respond to ongoing housing need.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Land and Development	Timeline
1.1	Promote the availability of affordable land for residential development in Mareeba.	Ongoing

<input type="checkbox"/>	Planning	
2.1	Propose FNQROC investigates feasibility of Tiny Homes as viable solution to housing crisis in Far North Queensland.	May 2024
2.2	Prepare a Fact Sheet on Rural Worker Accommodation outlining factors for consideration in the development application, e.g. importance of site	Early 2024

	selection and considering impact on road network, community integration opportunities, neighbours etc.	
2.3	Amend <i>Local Law #1 Schedule 9 Establishment or occupation of a temporary home</i> to allow approval of an extension of the current 4 weeks by application to Council. The proposal is to provide the ability to approve a caravan or RV to be located in a dwelling allotment for up to 6 months in a 12 month period for occupation by friends or family with no payment made and set conditions applying.	January to September 2024

<input type="checkbox"/>	Optimisation	
3.1	Liaise with the Queensland Government regarding the outcome of the State's recent land audit and investigate development opportunities.	From January 2024

<input type="checkbox"/>	Master planning	
4.1	Consider recommending new residential subdivision developments include an integrated mix of lot sizes including smaller lots with a maximum area of 400sqm.	June 2024
4.2	Advocate for the development of a Rural Worker Accommodation and Support Strategy perhaps through FNQROC	July 2024

<input type="checkbox"/>	Supports	
5.1	Promote Secondary Dwellings and Dual Occupancy by preparing a Fact Sheet and disseminate information about Secondary Dwellings (Granny Flats) and Dual Occupancy (duplex).	July 2024
5.2	Review trunk infrastructure charges for residential development.	2024/2025
5.3	Review trunk infrastructure charging fees for secondary dwellings, duplex and multi-unit development.	July 2024
5.4	Hold an 'Open House' with the community and industry invited to share information, encourage discussion and dialogue about options to build more affordable housing of diverse types.	June 2024

<input type="checkbox"/>	People in need	
6.1	Finalise negotiations with the Queensland Government to divest Council's community housing for seniors stock to Mareeba Community Housing Company for leveraging the construction of new stock.	Completion by December 2024
6.2	Advocate to State government to consult with First Nations peoples to provide input into Indigenous housing design.	Ongoing

6.3	Advocate to State government for additional local social supports and health service delivery in Mareeba Shire.	Ongoing
6.4	Advocate to State and Federal governments to provide funding for the construction and operation of suitable crisis accommodation models in regional and rural contexts.	Ongoing
6.5	Advocate to State and Federal governments to provide funding for more residential care beds and in-home care packages for older residents.	Ongoing

<input type="checkbox"/>	Construction	
7.1	Build new social housing for seniors duplex approved by the State.	March 2023 to June 2024
7.2	Consider building a second duplex for seniors with State funding.	July 2024 to June 2025
7.3	Advocate to State and Federal governments for incentives to build more residential housing in rural and regional locations that appeal to 'Mum and Dad' investors as well as corporate investors. Consider linking incentives such as income tax and stamp duty deductions for new residential housing that meets demonstrated local needs.	From March 2024

<input type="checkbox"/>	Capital solutions	
8.1	Finalise negotiations with the Queensland Government to divest Council's community housing for seniors stock to Mareeba Community Housing Company to leverage the construction of new stock without requiring the injection of State capital.	Completion by December 2024

Next Steps

A working group of key representatives from Mareeba Shire Council and select State Government agencies will progress actions, review findings, report quarterly and develop and test next steps.

