

INVEST IN THE WEST

IT PAYS DIVIDENDS!



Projects, Policy & Program Priorities for the
Western Queensland Alliance of Councils

**2022 FEDERAL
ELECTION**

INVEST IN THE WEST

IT PAYS DIVIDENDS!

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

The Western Queensland Alliance of Councils acknowledges our traditional custodians and we pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past, present and emerging. We are committed to honouring Australia's First Nations people, their unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.



**WESTERN
QUEENSLAND**
ALLIANCE OF COUNCILS

A united voice for all of Western Queensland

1 DOING MORE FOR QUEENSLAND AND AUSTRALIA

We back ourselves; we're good at what we do. We could be better than good; we could be great given improved tools for the job. We have unique needs, but we always deliver for Queensland and Australia even with our small population. Our community and economy require a different perspective, one that meets the desire of a region passionate about growth.



Our industries make a massive contribution to the Queensland and Australian economies – three times more per head than the rest of the State. Western Queenslanders know how to make things happen working in partnership with government and industry creating opportunities through innovation and hard work. And we can do so much more through a long term strategically focused approach to removing the barriers that are holding us back. We have a plan to make this happen so we can do more for you.

*Invest in the West,
It pays dividends!*

–Mayor Tony Rayner,
Longreach Regional
Council



WE COULD DO MORE FOR QUEENSLAND AND AUSTRALIA THROUGH:



1.1 A WESTERN QUEENSLAND PRODUCTIVITY PARTNERSHIP

Set for success, a visionary once in a generation partnership to ‘change the game’ in Western Queensland. A collaboration that binds together community, industry, local, state, and federal government; that gives clarity for investors, the community, and Western Queensland growth. A productivity partnership that allows planning, policy, and funding to stretch beyond election cycles.



1.2 INVESTING IN OUR INDUSTRIES

From our proven agricultural, resources, fishing and tourism industries, through to our developing manufacturing and renewables sector. A strong and long-term commitment to our industry needs is vital so we can continue to play our part in growing the economy. Given the chronic workforce shortage in Western Queensland, further investment in skills capability development and regional migration programs are needed.



1.3 MINIMISING THE IMPACTS OF NATURAL DISASTERS

Our communities are used to dealing with natural disasters. However, as weather events become more severe and more frequent, having access to early warning systems (for storms and floods) becomes crucial to managing and minimising the impacts on our community, our businesses and our visitors. By investing in additional weather radars and flood warning infrastructure and improving the operation and maintenance of the system we can minimise the frequent disruption to our productivity, our supply chains and our workforces – meaning we can do more for Queensland and Australia.



1.4 LETTING US INNOVATE

We have solutions to so many pain points in Western Queensland. Back us, create a dedicated fund and let us seek to pilot new ways of working across all our sectors. Let us lower costs, lower carbon, seek growth and deliver even greater value back to Queensland and Australia.

PROJECTS, POLICY AND PROGRAM PRIORITIES TO ACHIEVE THESE OUTCOMES

Install a BOM Weather Radar at Normanton to improve weather forecasting and reporting in the Lower Gulf.

Install a BOM Weather Radar at Thargomindah or another appropriate location to improve weather forecasting and reporting in far South West Queensland.

BOM, in conjunction with relevant State/Territory agencies, local government and other system operators, conduct a review of the governance, operation and maintenance arrangements of the weather forecasting and flood warning infrastructure network aimed at ensuring a robust and reliable system is in place to safeguard the community at all times.

Increase the Local Government Financial Assistance Grants (FAGs) as a proportion of Commonwealth Tax Revenue to 1.0% over the forward years. This is across both the general purpose assistance grants and identified road grant components. We seek this increase with no reduction to any other existing local government funding or grant program.

Funding for the continuation of the Longreach Pastoral College and its development as an innovation hub in support of the agricultural, manufacturing, and renewable industry sectors in the Central West.

Make the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program (LRCIP) permanent and amend Phase 3 of the LRCIP Guidelines to allow project planning studies and detailed design as eligible expenditure.

Continue Federal funding programs for tourism projects and initiatives with targeted funding to support further development of tourism infrastructure in rural and remote areas.

Funding and regulatory support to grow regional manufacturing capability through emerging industries and value added processing for existing industries, namely the proposed:

- Barcaldine Renewable Energy Zone, and
- Blackall Wool Processing Plant.

Establish a Western Queensland Productivity Partnership based on:

- Long term, steady state funding to avoid the 'boom' and 'bust' cycle of grant programs.
- Allocative funding models that provide funding certainty and simple administrative arrangements.
- 'Place based' and regionally focussed policies and programs recognising the unique characteristics of Western Queensland.
- Recognition that local decision-making best reflects community priorities and will provide better value for money.



2 MOVE TO MORE, IN WESTERN QUEENSLAND

Australia is on track for substantial population growth in the coming decades, with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) forecasting growth of up to 19 million additional people by 2056 – a 75 per cent increase. Whilst our capital cities and outer suburbs continue to struggle with population growth, regional communities (i.e. Western Queensland) have huge potential to offer residents a life filled with time, space, career opportunities and meaningful community connections!

The Regional Australia Institute suggests that one out of every five people living in our capital cities is considering a move to regional Australia. We want to embrace this trend and welcome new people to our communities – our very sustainability rides on it. To ensure success, we need new incentives such as attractive zonal tax rebates and available housing stock.

WE COULD DO MORE FOR QUEENSLAND AND AUSTRALIA THROUGH:



2.1 RE-INVIGORATING REGIONALISATION

Let Western Queensland thrive by a genuine incentive package to relocate individuals, families, small businesses, and public sector² jobs to Western Queensland. Clear evidence from Infrastructure Australia¹ (Strengthening Smaller Cities and Regional Centres) now indicates the Federal Government must act. Reviewing zonal tax rebates and FBT arrangements may provide opportunities (amongst others) to achieve this goal.



2.2 SUPPORTING REGIONAL HOUSING SOLUTIONS

Housing challenges facing communities in Western Queensland are multifaceted and will require the collective efforts of all levels of government and the private sector. Create a new class of incentives that enables new home builds but allows for the purchase of existing stock for first homeowners, keeping people motivated to stay in the region, recycle and update homes and build new stock.

Successful Regionalisation will be driven by long term private sector investment across small, medium and large businesses enabling economic growth and diversification. Place based incentives including relocation grants and taxation reform will kickstart the rebirth of our communities with population growth so that we can do more for you.

- Mayor Jack Bawden, Carpentaria Shire Council



1. <https://movetomore.com.au>

2. <https://wqac.com.au/housing-study>

PROJECTS, POLICY AND PROGRAM PRIORITIES TO ACHIEVE THESE OUTCOMES

Establish a new Regional Home Guarantee Scheme applicable to households looking to build or substantially renovate a home in rural and remote regions where sale prices are significantly lower than average build costs.

Establish a new Regional Homebuilder Scheme (or other rural/remote housing fund) supporting the construction of new and purchase of existing homes in rural and remote communities.

Establish a revised remote area taxation system, including taxation incentives for small businesses to move to Western Queensland and renewed zone rebates and FBT arrangements.

Renew investment in skills capability development policies and programs and promoting working holiday visas to meet current and emerging industry needs.



Jobs are vacant and families are struggling to find accommodation. Bank lending practices requiring large deposits have strangled investment in new housing holding back economic and community growth. Federal housing policies are designed for metropolitan and major centres and need to be remade to stimulate the housing market in rural and remote Australia. We have a plan to grow our populations so that we can do more for you.

- Mayor Andrew Martin, Blackall-Tambo Regional Council

3 GROWING MORE FOR YOU

Our landscapes are diverse, productive, and extremely sensitive. We balance these priorities every day in growing the food and fibre that feeds and clothes Australians; keeps families employed and earns massive export dollars. As global trends and changing weather patterns impact our business operations, we need continuous investment to ensure we can grow more for you through better resource planning, use and recovery.



WE COULD GROW MORE FOR YOU THROUGH:



3.1 REDUCING GREEN AND RED TAPE

Reduce the legislative complexities delaying development and growth, especially under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 so we can deliver more.



3.2 CARING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Continue the focus on drought resilience through the future drought fund and empower us to achieve improved agriculture and natural resource management (pest and weed) practices. We want to play our part to minimise carbon through sustainable and adaptive practices, but we need a pragmatic approach that is not just urban focused.



3.3 PROVIDING SAFE AND SECURE WATER SUPPLIES

Establish a long-term vision and improve government coordination and investment in our water resources by providing financial support for our region shaping water projects. 'New approaches are needed to managing water infrastructure to cope with the pressures of climate change and population growth'³ and through a renewed National Water Initiative Agreement better plan and service the unique and changing needs of our rural and First Nations communities.

3. Page 421 https://www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-09/2021%20Master%20Plan_1.pdf



Our agricultural sector powered on during the pandemic and will be the mainstay of our economy providing food and fibre for local, national and international markets. Investment in new water infrastructure will enable greater diversification into horticultural and broad acre farming increasing self reliance in food production. Invest in the West so that we can grow more for you.

– Mayor Jane McNamara, Flinders Shire Council



PROJECTS, POLICY AND PROGRAM PRIORITIES TO ACHIEVE THESE OUTCOMES

Establish a dedicated funding Program to support Councils develop Net Zero Strategies.

Expedite the renewal of the National Water Initiative (Agreement), with a particular focus on:

- Ensuring access to a basic level of service
- Governance of regional and remote services
- Monitoring and reporting on regional and remote service quality
- Helping communities deal with adjustment pressures resulting from policy induced reductions in water availability.

Continue to implement the recommendations in the 'Samuel Report' (Oct 2020) related to green tape reduction under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, especially those relating to creating single touch environmental approvals).

Ensure continuation of federal Pest funding programs to local government at current funding levels – at a minimum, current examples include:

- Established Pest Animals and Weeds Management Pipeline program
- Communities combating pest and weed impacts during drought program
- Prickly Acacia Weed Management program
- National Landcare Program

Develop a strategic management framework for the emerging carbon farming industry which supports (at a minimum):

- A balanced approach to growing the industry, whilst protecting important agricultural areas across Queensland's regions.
- Best practice by landholders through awareness of Commonwealth, State and local government legislative requirements and council planning schemes.
- An adaptive approach to managing the cumulative and social impacts of multiple projects within communities.
- Improved communication and transparency whereby local governments are formally notified of carbon farming projects proposed within their local government area.

Fund and enable the:

- Cloncurry Cave Hill Dam
- Richmond Irrigation Project
- Gilbert River Agriculture Project
- Flinders River Irrigation Projects:
 - » The 15 Mile Irrigated Agriculture Project Stage 2
 - » The Hughenden Irrigation Project – HIPCo.

4 TRANSPORTING MORE FOR YOU

Our landscapes are diverse and productive. From paddock to plate and paddock to port, our transport networks carry the products that keep Australians fed, clothed, and earning export dollars. Our transport network is vast and in need of significant upgrades. We need better planning, better coordination, and structured steady state funding so we can keep producing and transporting more for the nation.



WE COULD TRANSPORT MORE FOR YOU THROUGH:



4.1 INVESTING IN OUR ROADS

Our regional roads network is vital to our success and sustainability. However, our roads are subject to frequent flooding and in many parts, are unsafe for the travelling public, our tourists, and our truckies. We've identified our Western Queensland Priority Roads Network as a basis to prioritise investment. We now need dedicated, targeted, and consistent funding to keep our supply chains open, tourists exploring further than before and transport operators profitable. We need a new and timely approach to identifying 'Roads of Strategic Importance' and a framework to coordinate investment across all levels of Government.



4.2 INVESTING IN OUR RAIL

Passenger and rail freight was once a significance presence in Western Queensland. However, following continual reforms and reviews, our rail freight services have been incrementally diminished limiting our ability to transport products to market as cheaply and as environmentally friendly as possible. We need a fit for purpose and capable rail freight network servicing our regional economies to provide a reliable, affordable, and efficient alternative to road transport.



Roads and transport services are the lifeblood of Western Queensland's agriculture, resources and tourism sectors. We are developing a long term plan for an integrated regional road and transport network to increase freight transport productivity and road user safety. Our Western Queensland Priority Roads Network will mean we can transport more for you - quickly, at less cost with greater safety.

- Mayor Shaun Radnedge, Murweh Shire Council

PROJECTS, POLICY AND PROGRAM PRIORITIES TO ACHIEVE THESE OUTCOMES

Revise the 'Roads of Strategic Importance' (ROSI) framework to ensure:

- Improved opportunities for local government engagement
- Transparency in corridor selection and development of works packages
- Regular and timely reviews and reporting of outcomes to all stakeholders.

Continue investment in roads and transport funding programs to local government at current funding levels – at a minimum. Current examples include:

- Roads to Recovery Program
- Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program
- Blackspots Program
- Bridges Renewal Program
- Heavy Vehicle Safety & Productivity Program.

Facilitate multi-lateral funding agreements between all levels of government to coordinate investment on nationally significant road corridors, such as the Outback Highway and Warri Gate Road in Western Queensland.

Support and expedite the continuation of the Outback Highway funding as outlined in the Outback Highway Investment Strategy.

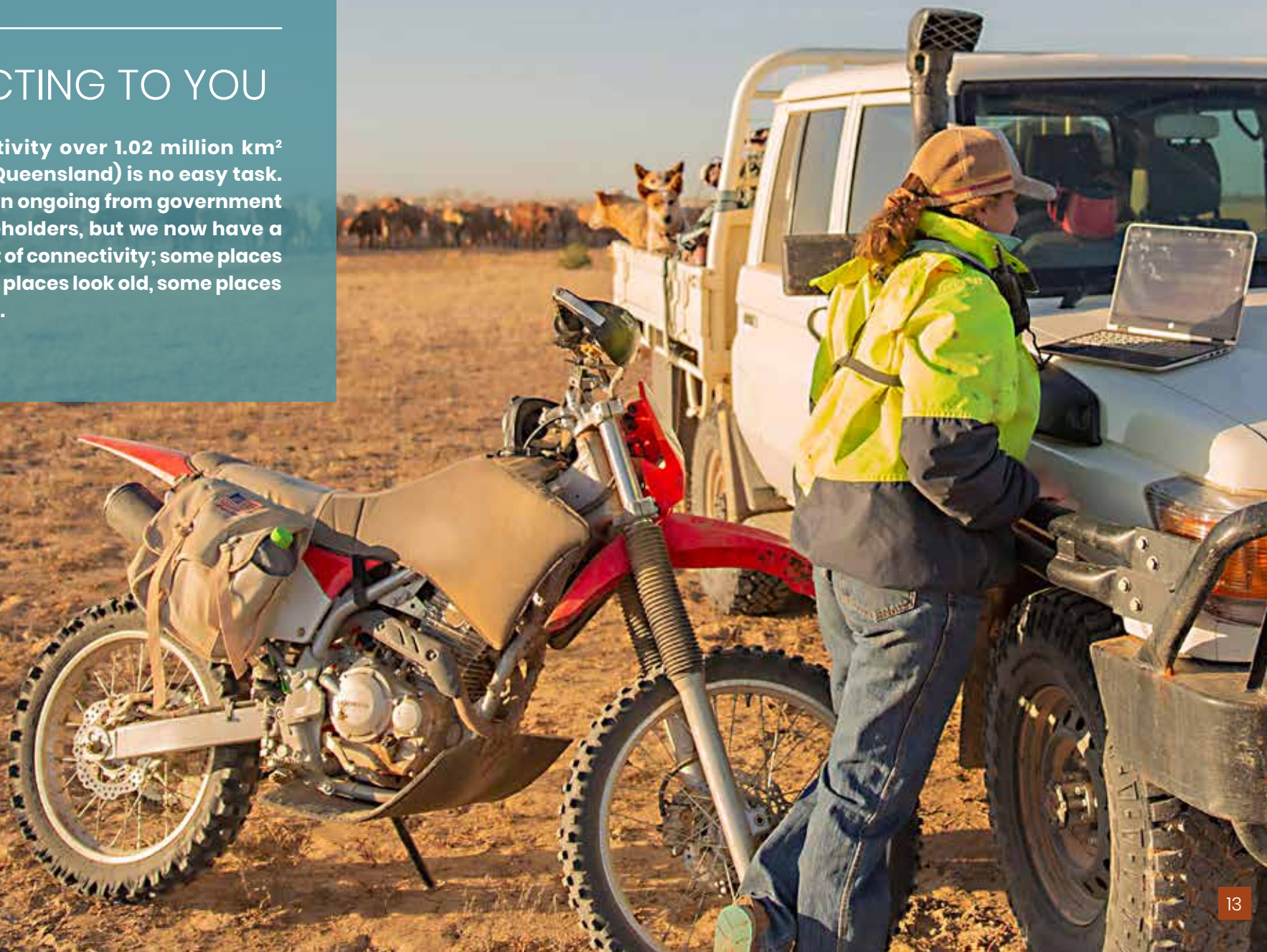
Provide \$75 million over 10 years to commit to seal the Warri Gate road from the NSW border through to Noccundra Waterhole.

Establish a targeted and permanent funding program for rural and remote roads, such as the pilot \$150 million Remote Roads Upgrade Program.



5 CONNECTING TO YOU

Digital connectivity over 1.02 million km² (60 per cent of Queensland) is no easy task. Support has been ongoing from government and other stakeholders, but we now have a 'patchwork' quilt of connectivity; some places look great, other places look old, some places even have holes.



WE WILL BE ABLE TO CONNECT BETTER THROUGH:



5.1 **BACKING OUR BLUEPRINT**

With minimal recourses, we've put forward a blueprint for improved regional connectivity⁴ that builds upon the Federal plans to date. Allow us to explore, through your funding and support, this model that has the potential to help all remote communities across Australia.



5.2 **SUPPORTING DIGITAL BY DEFAULT⁵**

The productivity and environmental gains of digital by default are compelling and immense. The divide between metropolitan and regional areas has narrowed but remains marked⁶. We have so much scope to play a greater role in a global digital economy. We need public sector leaders to plan for digital regionalisation opportunities that empower Western Queensland growth.



We have a Patchwork Quilt of digital connectivity in Western Queensland. Some areas are good while in others its slow, intermittent and expensive. Our plan for long term strategically focused investment to meet current and future demands to fill in the gaps has been supported by the recent Regional Telecommunications Review. We stand ready, willing and able to work with governments, industry and community so that we are better able to connect with you.

- Mayor Samantha O'Toole, Balonne Shire Council

4. Western Queensland Alliance of Councils Digital Connectivity (Blueprint) terms of reference - <https://bit.ly/WQAC-Connectivity-Blueprint-TOR>.

5. Page 278 https://www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-09/2021%20Master%20Plan_1.pdf

6. <https://www.digitalinclusionindex.org.au/key-findings-and-next-steps/>

PROJECTS, POLICY AND PROGRAM PRIORITIES TO ACHIEVE THESE OUTCOMES

Review and reform existing funding programs for digital connectivity projects with the aim of providing a more strategic approach to Federal Government investment.

Funding and program support to progress the creation of data-led communities across the central west as part of RAPAD's smart region vision.

Provide financial support to the Western Queensland Alliance of Councils to support the implementation of its Digital Connectivity Blueprint and Terms of Reference.



WHO WE ARE

Western Queensland contributes massive wealth to Queensland and Australia and offers considerable opportunities to drive productivity, economic growth and workforce participation based on its traditional industries of mining, agriculture, construction and public administration as well as its emerging industries of renewable energies, new economy minerals, technology, and tourism. It does this despite confronting challenges that are typically more extreme than in other parts of Australia due to remoteness (vast distances); declining populations; social disadvantage; workforce attraction and retention issues; limited infrastructure and restricted revenue bases.

To tackle these challenges as well as promote the opportunities that abound, the Western Queensland Alliance of Councils ([WQAC](#)) was formed in July 2020. The WQAC is a collaboration between the three regional organisations of councils in Western Queensland – North West Regional Organisation of Councils ([NWQROC](#)), Remote Area Planning and Development Board ([RAPAD](#)), and South West Regional Organisation of Councils ([SWQROC](#)).

Our three bodies represent 22 rural and remote councils and cover 60 percent of Queensland's land mass from the Gulf of Carpentaria in the north to the NSW/SA/Qld border in the south.

We have come together under the banner of the WQAC to represent the views of our 22 councils on matters of common concern in the State's far west. These matters are highlighted in this Election Platform and represent the most significant region wide barriers to growth and development as well as those of specific importance to our individual regions.

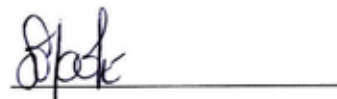
We are seeking from the parties and candidates contesting this election their commitment to supporting WQAC address these challenges as well as build on existing opportunities across Western Queensland.



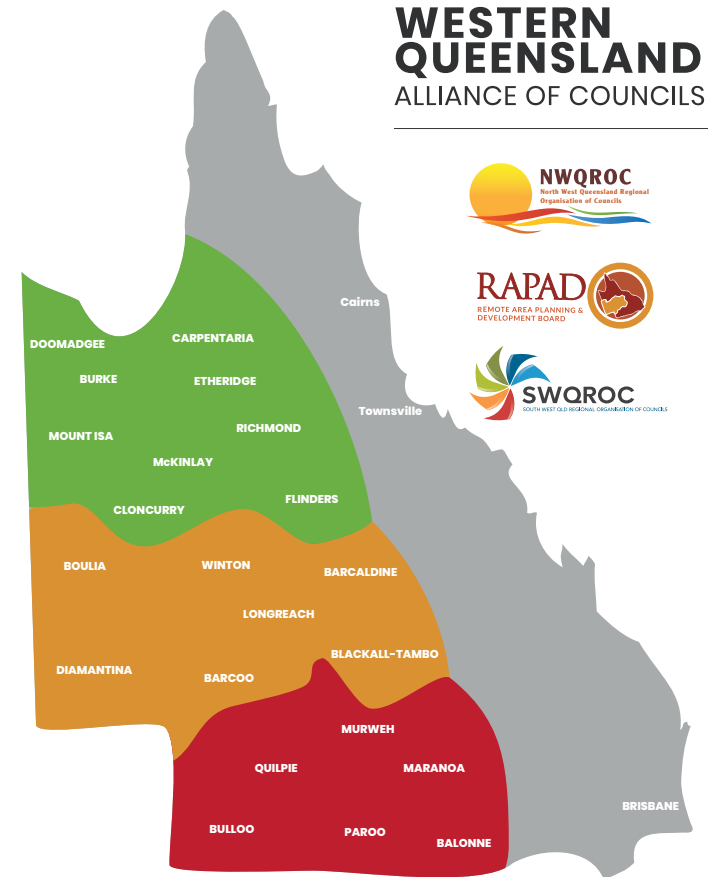
Cr Jack Bawden
Mayor Carpentaria Shire Council
Chair NWQROC



Cr Tony Rayner
Mayor Longreach Regional Council
Chair RAPAD



Cr Samantha O'Toole
Mayor Balonne Shire Council
Chair SWQROC



WESTERN QUEENSLAND ALLIANCE OF COUNCILS





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