



**Cairns Alliance of Social Services (CASS)**

**SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON NORTHERN AUSTRALIA**

**Due Date for Submission: Monday 17 February 2014**

## **BACKGROUND TO THE INQUIRY**

The Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia was appointed by the House of Representatives on 21 November 2013 and the Senate on 4 December 2013.

The Committee invites interested persons and organisations to make submissions addressing the terms of reference by **Monday, February 17 2014**.

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Committee to consider policies for developing the parts of Australia which lie north of the Tropic of Capricorn, spanning Western Australia, Northern Territory and Queensland, and in doing so:

- examine the potential for development of the region's mineral, energy, agricultural, tourism, defence and other industries;
- **provide recommendations to:**
  1. enhance trade and other investment links with the Asia-Pacific;
  2. establish a conducive regulatory, taxation and economic environment;
  3. **address impediments to growth; and**
  4. **set conditions for private investment and innovation;**
- **identify the critical economic and social infrastructure needed to support the long term growth of the region, and ways to support planning and investment in that infrastructure.**

The Committee to also present to the Parliament its recommendation for a white paper which would detail government action needed to be taken to implement the committee's recommendations, setting out how the recommendations were to be implemented, by which government entity they were to be implemented, a timetable for implementation and how and when any government funding would be sourced.

The Committee is due to present an interim report to Parliament on the activities of the Committee as soon as practicable after **30 May 2014**, with particular reference to the outcomes of public hearings held across Northern Australia, and any specialist knowledge emanating from the public submissions process. The Committee is due to deliver its final report and recommendations to the Parliament on or before **6 July 2014**.

CASS' submission addresses the following item from The Committee's Terms of Reference:

- **Identify the critical economic and social infrastructure needed to support the long term growth of the region, and ways to support planning and investment in that infrastructure.**

## **1. Introduction:**

The Cairns Alliance of Social Services (CASS) was formed in 2004, to bring social and human services together to be *a voice for social change, develop our skill base to better serve our community and enhance our cooperative capacity*. Refer to Appendix 3 CASS Identity Statement.

CASS currently has representatives from some 39 non-government and government social and human services organisations contributing to its wider mission. On 14 January 2014, a special CASS meeting was held for services to provide information to Sen Jan McLucas about the potential impacts of Northern Australia development on community life and persons living in Far North Queensland. The group also considered the social infrastructure needed to support the long term growth of the region and provided recommendations about attending to the social costs of development. This report is divided into six (6) sections:

1. Introduction
2. Limitations of this report
3. Potential impacts of development on persons and communities at the site of development/s
4. Recommendations
5. Conclusion
6. Appendices:
  - a. Appendix 1 - Social and Human Services Sector Context
  - b. Appendix 2 - FNQ Profile
  - c. Appendix 3 - CASS Statement of Identity

## **2. Limitations of this report:**

This report focuses solely on human and social services sector responses to the planning of development in Northern Australia. It does not relate to the education, health and environmental sectors per se. These sectors also need to be consulted about the impacts of development on their constituents. Appendix 2: Social and Human Services Sector Context in the FNQ region, contains 'brainstorming' information and data, not yet disaggregated, and was included as it may also be useful to the readers of this report.

## **3. Potential impacts of development on community and people at the site of the development:**

Participants identified several potential impacts of development on people and communities which relate to the human and social services sector. These included:

- The stress placed on already limited housing resources/stock and the potential for development to displace residents and tourists through the ability of developers to pay higher rents and housing costs
- The influx of men who migrate with the development without partners may increase the vulnerability of women and girls (rape, sexual abuse, domestic violence)
- The rate of sexually transmitted diseases may increase
- There may be increased drug and alcohol issues due to the development workforce being dislocated from family and friends; working conditions which require long hours; and increased salaries
- Relationship breakdowns
- Increased gambling and issues arising from problem gambling
- Increased racism and race based attacks
- Increased homophobia
- Increased anxiety, depression and other mental health issues may arise specifically as a result of the above
- Increased competition for scarce human and social services resources (“hard” and “soft”) between particular population groups
- People remaining in the area after the development ceases and the increased competition they provide to long-term residents in employment, housing, skills training (etc)
- The social costs to persons and communities when a development project ceases (such as lack of ongoing employment)
- Social and economic cost of damage/wear and tear to established infrastructure (roads, rivers and streams, environment, playgrounds (etc).
- From an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community perspective, it could mean that access to traditional foods etc for people not just in rural and remote areas, but across the region, would be gone. The implications for those families are frightening to think about, eg loss of cultural practices and finances. Any Environmental Impact Study would need to consider these factors carefully

Typically, it is the human and social services sector that provides services to deal with the above impacts. Appendix 1 provides a brief snapshot of the Social and Human Services Sector Context and issues in the FNQ region.

#### **4. Recommendations**

In order to mitigate against negative impacts of development, CASS recommends that:

1. Governments recognise that any influx of people brings with it additional strain on health and social infrastructure /services
2. Social services are included at the beginning of the development planning process rather than when an issue is raised
3. Northern Australia agreements in relation to any development are inclusive of the social and human services sector and be conducted regionally rather than centrally from Canberra
4. Large corporations offset their human and social costs by investing in societal infrastructure such as housing and transport infrastructure prior to any employee movement into an area and that these resources revert to the community at the end of a development project
5. Developers commit to a dollar amount cost towards meeting the social impacts of their development and that this money be distributed and administered locally
6. A regional economic participation program is developed that is capable of creating alternate livelihood pathways - enabling vulnerable community members and others that are underrepresented in the workforce and who are unable to engage in current employment pathways to move toward financial independence.
7. Existing departments in FNQ eg Immigration, Human Services are expanded in line with emerging needs and that Northern Australia policy work is conducted regionally rather than centrally from Canberra
8. Action research be engaged with the human and social services sector when Northern development projects begin so that data can be collected in order to ascertain a true costing of social impacts. (Research findings can then be compared and contrasted across regions and this data can be used for future projections into the psycho-social cost of development for persons and communities. If JCU already has data, then this be made available for projections of social costs and if they have a robust instrument for this data collection, that this be utilised).

## **5. Conclusion**

CASS welcomes the opportunity to engage with the three tiers of government, the Committee on Northern Australian and businesses through the Chamber of Commerce. It supports the development of FNQ in securing sustainable jobs and economic security for people and communities in the region. As outlined above, CASS is fully aware of the potential for both positive and negative outcomes of such development. To this end CASS believes it is essential for the development drivers and implementers to be fully engaged with the social services sector. CASS stands ready to act in this capacity, along with other social service providers in rural and remote areas to ensure that all people in FNQ have the opportunity to participate meaningfully in their community and that no-one gets left behind.

## **6. Appendices**

Appendix 1: [FNQ Profile](#)

FNQ is comprised of five sub-regions with differing population health and infrastructure capacities: Tablelands; Cape York; Cairns; Cassowary Coast; and Torres Strait. While the Cairns and hinterland region have generally acceptable communications infrastructure, regional and remote areas suffer from a range of telecommunications limitations and geographic barriers that limit the effective and efficient provision of social services. In addition, remote areas of FNQ include a number of sub-regions considered some of the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas in the country.

The population has a higher proportion of males than females and is a comparatively young population compared to that across Queensland and nationally. Cairns and Innisfail (within the region) are two of the fastest growing local government areas (LGAs) in the state. *Source: Office of Economic and Statistical Research, Office of the Government Statistician Queensland.*

It is a diverse region comprising urban centres and more rural and remote sites. Human and social services are well developed in urban areas such as Cairns, but are less developed and accessible to people, the further the location from the urban site.

The Far North Statistical Division covers more than 15 per cent of Queensland with a population of 278,000 people. Of this population, over 54 per cent live in the Cairns urban area, 35 per cent in the Douglas/Cassowary Coast and Tablelands area and only 11 per cent in the Gulf, Cape and Torres area. The population is expected to grow to over 328,000 by the year 2031.

At the time of the 2006 Census, there were 33,118 persons who stated they were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin, or 14.3 per cent of the total population, whilst 15.2 per cent of persons stated they were born overseas.

The region covers a total area of 273,157.4 square kilometres or 15.8 per cent of Queensland's total area. *Source: RDA Far North Qld & Torres Straits Regional Profile* Refer also to Appendix 2 *Table: Key population characteristics of FNQ.*

Far North Queensland is the third most disadvantaged area in Queensland according to the ABS' Index of Relative Social Disadvantage with an overall weighting score of 945. There is considerable variation amongst the sub-areas within the region, with a number considered some of the most disadvantaged areas in the country: 35 percent of the population of Far North Statistical Division were in Quintile 1: the areas comprising the bottom 20 percent according to disadvantage rankings in the region. A number of these areas are in the Torres Strait Islands or are areas with a primarily Indigenous population.

People in FNQ and communities are renowned for their strength and resilience in adversity. FNQ is also renowned for the beauty of its environment and the lifestyle this affords its residents. There are well-developed educational, health and social services. There are also well developed police, court and administrative services (etc).

Nonetheless, FNQ communities present with unique and complex demographics. The region has a significant population based in rural and remote areas. The specific needs of these clients include:

- Access issues; need for clients to be able to physically and geographically access services, requiring a service model which effectively reaches into remote areas as well as addressing transport issues
- Tailored service models and models of care, taking into account the realities of geographic isolation and implementing appropriate pathways, referrals, partnerships and communications to support access and continuity of care
- Attracting and retaining staff; meeting workforce supply needs in remote areas is a challenge which must be addressed
- Housing; meeting needs for short and longer term affordable accommodation
- Vocational training and employment opportunities required
- Adult education, numeracy and literacy and life skills

Vulnerable Groups and their issues include:

*Child protection:* in the FNQ Region, between 2011-2012, a total of 10,089 intakes were received equating to 9% of the state total of 114,503. Of these 10,089 intakes, 8,394 were Child Concern Reports and 1,695 were notifications. The number of children subject to ongoing intervention increased by 6.2 per cent from 10,327 as at 30 June 2011 to 10,963 as at 30 June 2012 and has grown 32.7% since June 2008. The increase is due to increasing numbers of children entering the system as well as children staying in the system for longer. The number of children living in out-of-home care in Queensland as at 30 June, 2012 was 8,482. In FNQ, there were 910 children living away from home. There is a high representation of Indigenous children in the Child Protection System. Source: Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services.

*Unemployment:* a relatively high unemployment rate dependent on factors such as seasonal fluctuation and disasters: Labour data shows a declining unemployment rate at 7.5 per cent on an annual average basis, ranking the Far North labour force region 10th highest unemployment in the country. In November 2013, the unemployment rate for Queensland was 5.9% and 5.6% for Australia.

*Domestic and Family Violence:* in the FNQ Region, between 2010-2011, a total of 2,213 domestic violence protection order (DVPO) applications were made equating to 9.9% of the state total of 22,346. Cairns Magistrates Court is the 7<sup>th</sup> busiest court in Queensland in relation to DVPO applications at 903 with the front runner being Southport with 2,353 DVPO applications, followed by Beenleigh, Brisbane, Townsville, Ipswich and Caboolture. Source: Magistrates Court of Queensland Annual Report 2010-2011, Department of Justice.

However, domestic and family violence is notoriously under-reported to both police and courts. Many victims never come forward, but many do attend various support services.

Figures from just one service, the Cairns Regional Domestic Violence Service, a specialist service funded by the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, reports that 1,269 adult victims of domestic and family violence were clients of the service in 2012-2013. There was also a 5% increase in the number of recorded sessions with clients accessing the service from 5,964 in 2011-2012 to 6,271 in 2012-13. In addition, adult clients referred to the service via the SupportLink referral process by Queensland Police Service amounted to 436. The number of children and young people accessing the service for counselling was 80. Source: Cairns Regional Domestic Violence Service Annual Report 2012-2013.

*Young people:* Factors such as high rates of suicide, alcohol, drugs, petrol sniffing and chroming, the increased prevalence of mental illness, neglect and abuse, homelessness and disengagement from school are just some of the factors that mitigate against vulnerable young people in the region. These factors are compounded by additional

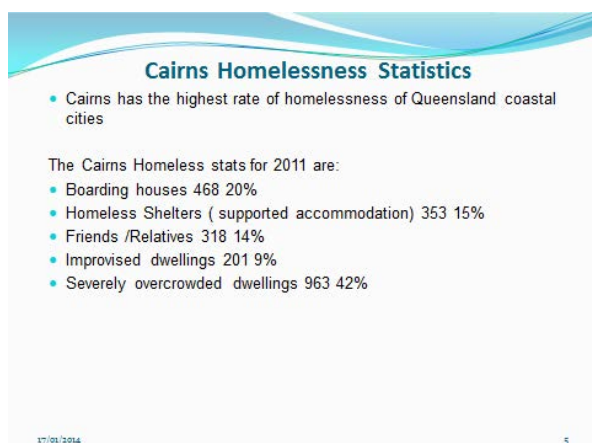
factors among young people from Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, in particular those from rural and remote areas where there are limited services.

*Disability Services:* in the FNQ region, access to services varies markedly between the Greater Cairns Region and the Atherton Tablelands, Cassowary Coast, Douglas, Cape York and Torres Strait regions. There is no disability supported housing in Cape York north of Mossman or in the Torres Straits, In-home Disability Support is only available in two communities in Cape York (Wujal Wujal and Hopevale). There is no In-home Disability Support in the Torres Straits. Disability Support for Community Access for people living in their homes is limited to Thursday Island, Horn Island and Cooktown. This chronic lack of disability support services in these areas results in hardship in both the Indigenous communities and the towns of Cape York. People with disabilities are forced to leave their homes, their traditional lands and seek support in Cairns or other cities further south in Queensland to be able to live with dignity. They are cut off from familial and community supports due to the high costs of airfares from these regions. Individual Advocacy for people with disabilities is limited to residents of Cairns, the Atherton Tablelands and Yarrabah; those living outside these areas are at greater risk of abuse and exploitation.

#### *Homelessness:*

- The Infrastructure Australia report (State of Australian Cities 2013) was produced by the Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure and Transport. The report has sourced its homelessness data from: 'ABS 2012, Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2011, cat. no. 2049.0, Canberra'.
- The definition of homelessness that has been applied within this ABS report is the ABS definition, as follows: "A person is homeless if they do not have suitable accommodation alternatives and their current living arrangement:
  - is in a dwelling that is inadequate, or
  - has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable, or
  - does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations."
- The unit of analysis used is the Cairns Statistical Area 4 (Cairns SA4) region, which goes from Mareeba in the west, to Cape Tribulation and Bloomfield in the north to Cardwell in the south.
- The figure of 2,303 homeless persons is comprised of the following:
  - Persons who are in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out – 201
  - Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless – 353
  - Persons staying temporarily with other households – 290
  - Persons staying in boarding houses – 468
  - Persons in other temporary lodging – 28
  - Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings – 963
  - Total of all homeless persons – 2,303
- 2011 ABS Census data related to the Cairns State Electoral Division (SED) when compared across 2001, 2006 and 2011 (the last 3 census data captures) is as follows:
  - 2011 - "Improvised home, tent, sleepers out" = 122
  - 2006 - "Improvised home, tent, sleepers out" = 234
  - 2001 - "Improvised home, tent, sleepers out" = 293

#### **Cairns Homelessness Data:**





Over many years, social and human services have developed to deal with these complex social issues, and have demonstrated a solid history of developing the policies, processes and structures, to address them, thus Cairns is a logical site as a base for human services coordination across Far North QLD. Any developers to this region, therefore, do not need to build a new social and human services sector to deal with emerging and ongoing social problems; however they do need to bear the social costs of their development (as outlined above in Section 3), since the human services sector will not be able to bear this cost on its own, due to:

- The lack of increase in funding for social and human services in our region over a number of years; in some situations more than 15 years
- Recent and ongoing funding cuts to this sector by the current State government including the threat to health promotion and other education programs
- Lack of compacts between State and Federal governments which means that there is no back up when State governments reduce or cease funding to the human services sector
- Existing services are not currently receiving adequate funding for current cohorts of the population let alone being able to serve an increased population
- The lack of necessary housing stock and other “hard” resources (such as a mental health unit for young people; lack of certain health and medical facilities eg rehabilitation and de-tox facilities, crisis accommodation etc.
- Regional centres miss out on funding and services due to geographical distances eg Tablelands/Cassowary Coast in relation to Cairns, and Cairns in relation to Brisbane and Townsville
- No appropriate data tracking system of changes/needs or collaborative data

Due to the above factors, this sector largely has the ability only to be reactive rather than proactive, and in light of development to this region, this needs to change with the sector to become a major partner at the development negotiation table.

Further, an increased population needs also to be met by an increase in social/health service structure and the information outlined below offers suggestions as to how this may be met and additional information collected, in no particular order at the time of writing, at the meeting that may be considered by the sector itself, government and developers:

- Community fund similar to the Gambling Community Benefit Fund
- New construction funded by government has a requirement to provide a percentage towards the social services needs in FNQ
- More people = more jobs = more training
- Develop mechanisms for intra-regional job swapping to enhance local skills
- Quota of local jobs
  - Including for vulnerable groups and investment in young people entering the workforce
- Growth = increased GDP
  - Increased GDP = money
    - Money = jobs, housing, raw materials
      - Raw Materials = young people needing services such as training, transport & ATODS
- Learning from effects and growth patterns within other regions such as Chinchilla
- Utilising community renewal programs
- Social impact assessment
- Awareness programs(health promotion)
- Ability to measure social change and needs
  - Access previously collected data
- A government department within the region to collect data and distribute
- Support Link referral system to community services has potential to capture data
- Utilising previously created data hub through JCU to capture data
- Creation of community hubs (centre) include all aspects of needs i.e. social services, sports/rec, Centrelink

- Look outside of human services to provide hubs such as CQU, Malanda Rural Technology Village, Flexi-schools
- Ensure community centres are located in new suburbs
- Hub and Spoke concepts including mobile vans
- A variety of service delivery options are required potentially with increased mobile access
- Improve community based public transport
- Improve community capacity to respond to emergent needs
- Address shortage of facilities for an elderly, higher needs population
- Micro-enterprises to support remote communities
- Linking through technology to reduce communication difficulties
- Applying different formulas for regional funding compared to central location areas:
  - Needs based assessment linked with funding and that all communities are not seen as the same ie unique and specific impacts and requirements needs to be attended to.
  - Creating a sense of community empowerment and ownership with local communities given a level of control over proposed developments
- Develop capacity management tools such as 'Switched on Coffs'
- Government to change its priorities eg to nation building priorities
- Web based mapping of services for service users to access up to date information
  - Learn best practise from tourist providers
- Community development and capacity building
- Approaching big businesses that deal with social ventures
  - Areas within the region to be pilot sites for creating social ventures

### **Burden of Disease –FNQ Medicare Local (FNQML) Data (2013).**

#### **Health Status:**

- Compared to Queensland, the FNQML region has higher rates of hospitalisation
- Higher rates of communicable diseases
- The Chronic Disease of most concern is diabetes type II with significantly higher rates of mortality across the Health and Hospital Services as compared to Queensland
- Mental Health represents a concern within the region with high rates of suicide mortality compared to the rest of Queensland eg Cape York HHS 30.3% higher than the norm
- Higher rates of avoidable hospital admissions particularly in children under 5 years

The majority of the Far North's residents are in an unhealthy weight range. Nationally, the 2011-12 statistics range between 49-79% of people being overweight or obese depending on the region. FNQ region's rate is 63% so we are on the higher end of the scale. In other words almost 2 out of 3 FNQ adults are overweight or obese and we know that this increases their chance of developing or managing a chronic illness.

### **DATSIMA - Diversity Figures (2011 Census Data) and ABS Data**

Migration was a major factor in population growth in Queensland in the last decade, contributing to significant linguistic (220 languages), cultural (220 ethnicities and nationalities) and religious (over 100 faiths) diversity.

In 2011, 20.5 percent of Queenslanders stated they were born outside of Australia. In 2011, 36.2% of Queenslanders were either born overseas or have a parent that was born overseas. Of this group, almost half arrived in Queensland between 2000 and 2011, highlighting the growth of new and emerging cultures and populations (NEC). This growth also emphasises the fact that a large proportion of Queensland's overseas-born residents are at the inception of their settlement and 'acculturation' experience.

Data related to the (top 10) LGA areas of relevance to Northern Australia planning process (DATSIMA, 2011):

- **Cairns** (LGA) 20.2% (31,598 people): Top 4 overseas countries of birth – England (4.2%); New Zealand (3.4%); PNG (1.3%) and Japan (1.0%).

10.9% or 17,069 people spoke a language other than English at home, with Japanese highest at 1.3%.

- **Cook** (LGA) 23.2% (963 people): Top 4 overseas countries of birth – Sri Lanka (5.3%); Afghanistan (4.5%); England (3.2%); New Zealand (2.4%).

8.5% or 352 people spoke a language other than English at home, with Guugu Yimidhirr highest at 1.8% (76 people).

In Far North Queensland, one in five residents (20.2%) was born outside of Australia and more than one in ten (11%) speak a language other than English (LOTE) in their home. Some of the key languages spoken in the region include: Japanese, Australian Indigenous Languages, Italian, German, Tagalog (Filipino), French, Korean, Cantonese, Mandarin and Hmong. Further to this, almost half of the region's residents have non-Australian ancestry. *Australian Bureau of Statistics, (2011). Census of Population and Housing. Retrieved from: <http://www.abs.gov.au/census>*

### **Focus areas for improving health needs of CALD people in Far North Queensland:**

**Data collection** – prevalence data, service-utilisation and outcomes data by birthplace, language, migration-type and region of residence. Ability to disaggregate data related to new and emerging communities.

**Health promotion**– may include education for CALD people on accessing the health care system in Australia, mental health first aid.

**Responsive health services** – may include an ongoing commitment to cultural clinical competence amongst healthcare workers in the region.

**Improved coordination between services** – resources to improve referral pathways; collaboration between key service providers; formalised monitoring

*Section 2: Limitations* – recognition of the intrinsic links and dependencies between four pillars – principles of sustainability and within context of contemporary cross cutting issues – eg: climate change.

*Section 3: Impacts* – Impacts related to dilution/absence of shared vision for region; social values; cohesion (particularly without emphasis on above).

*Section 4: Re employment section:*

Impacts of social-economic factors include stable housing, health, discrimination and family relationships (Hugo, 2011).

There are a wide range of well-evidenced and significant barriers, systemic and structural issues which affect economic and workforce participation. This can result in migrant unemployment rates generally remaining high in the early stages of a communities' settlement (up to 25%) and can take four to five years to become comparable to the Australian-born population (FECCA, 2009; DIAC, 2013).

For refugees, underemployment and unemployment remain significant early-settlement issues. The national data by the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council highlights that former refugees have far higher unemployment rates (32%) compared with other migrants (FECCA, 2009).

In regional areas barriers to participation are compounded by additional factors (DIAC, 2007) and this is arguably the case in the Cairns context.

The current unemployment rate in the Cairns region is 7% - seasonally adjusted and since last quarter - which is an improvement from 9.1% in 2012. This is compared to the national average of 6% (ABS, 2013; Cummings, 2013). The local unemployment rate for overseas born residents is estimated to be 38% (DEEWR, 2012). In addition to experiencing a currently depressed local economy and weak labour market conditions, Cairns' jobseekers are impacted by:

- Reduced options and access to mainstream services;
- the well evidenced deficiencies and limitations of mainstream employment services (particularly the JSA model) to adequately meet the needs of CALD jobseekers; and
- the fact that the region's predominant industry mix is not aligned to current Federal Government incentive schemes for employment and skills development (RCOA, 2010; RCOA, 2012; Jobs Australia, 2012; DEEWR, 2012).
- Existing services are not currently receiving adequate funding for current cohorts of the population let alone being able to serve an increased population and an increasingly diverse community (including mitigating barriers to access such as flexible delivery models, services that are culturally appropriate, and language services).



### **Our VISION**

A fair, inclusive and sustainable community that celebrates its uniqueness and diversity.

### **Our IDENTITY**

*We are an alliance of like-minded community service advocates aiming to be a conduit for sharing ideas, resources, training and events and to advocate for the common good.*

*The Cairns Alliance of Social Services was formed in 2004 by a small group of concerned and pro-active social service providers interested in working together on common issues that affect the wellbeing of the community.*

### **Our PURPOSE**

CASS exists to:

1. Be a voice for social change
2. Develop our skill base to better serve our community
3. Enhance our cooperative capacity

### **Our VALUES**

CASS shares the values outlined in the Queensland Community Services Sector Charter:

- Human rights
- Individual and community wellbeing
- Diversity
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination
- Cooperation and participation
- Excellence
- Independence