



NORTHERN TERRITORY
**PLANNING
COMMISSION**

TOWARDS AN AREA PLAN FOR THE COOLALINGA / FRED'S PASS RURAL ACTIVITY CENTRE



*Stage 1
Consultation Report*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Having introduced the Litchfield Subregional Land Use Plan into the Northern Territory Planning Scheme in July 2016, the Northern Territory Planning Commission is now continuing the work of developing a planning framework for the Coolalinga/Freds Pass Rural Activity Centre by preparing an Area Plan for the locality. The Subregional Plan introduced Land Use Concept Plans for Litchfield’s four Rural Activity Centres, including Coolalinga/Freds Pass (Figure 1). To assist in drafting options for the Coolalinga/Freds Pass Rural Activity Centre Area Plan, the Planning Commission endorsed a Communications Engagement strategy. The engagement strategy identified that the Area Plan would be prepared in three stages.

Stage 1 community consultation commenced on Monday 8 May 2017 and closed on Friday 9 June 2017. Stage 1 was an opportunity for the community to participate in the planning process by contributing to the development of a vision to meet the future needs of Coolalinga/Freds Pass. It was also an opportunity for the Commission to work alongside the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics to address long-term traffic management issues in the locality.

The purpose of this report is to summarise key themes identified by the community during consultation. The feedback received will assist the Planning Commission in developing draft options for the Coolalinga/Freds Pass Area Plan.

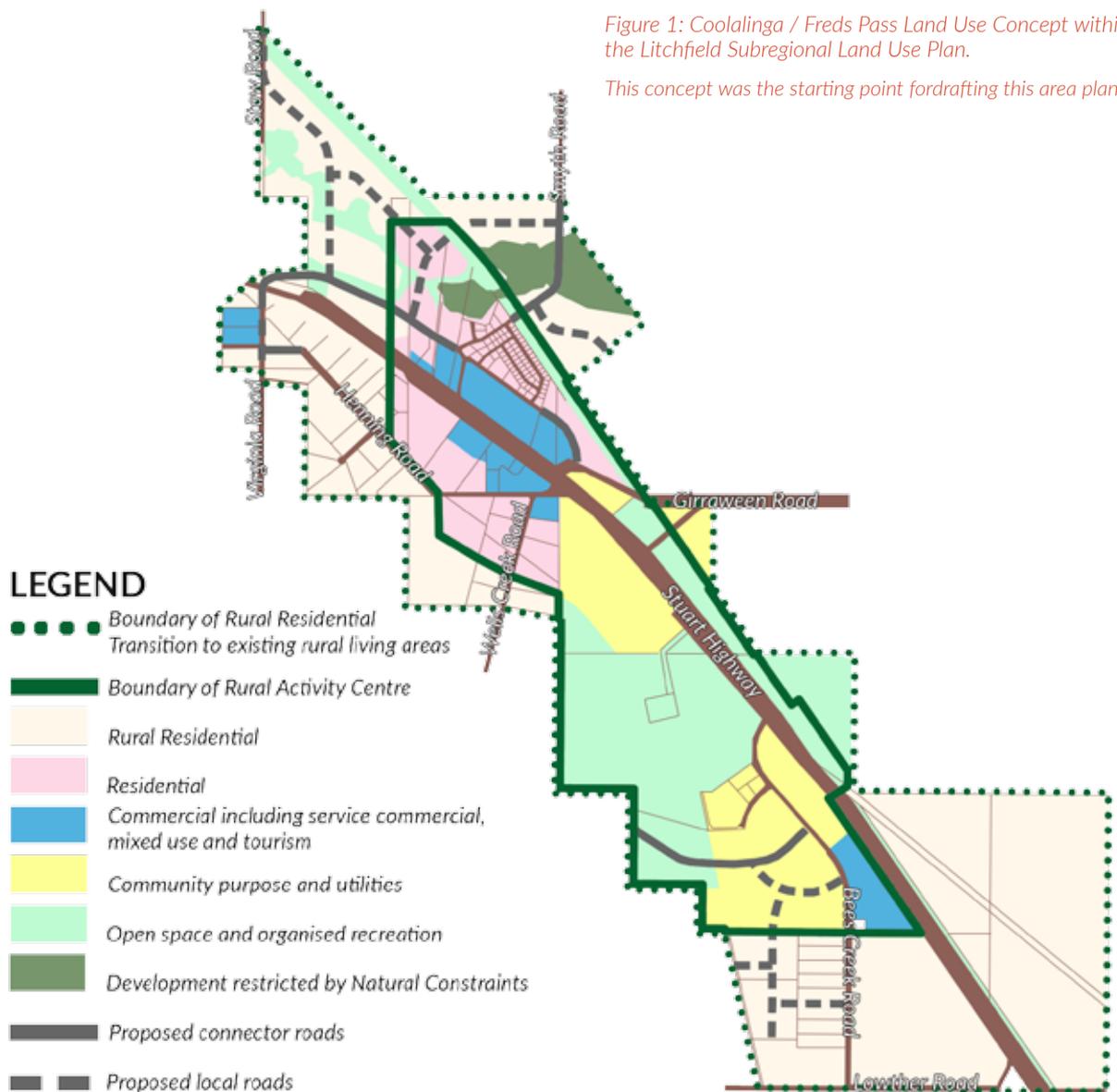


Figure 1: Coolalinga / Freds Pass Land Use Concept within the Litchfield Subregional Land Use Plan.

This concept was the starting point for drafting this area plan.

1.1 The Study Area

The Coolalinga/Freds Pass study area includes land within the localities of Coolalinga, Virginia, Howard Springs and Bees Creek, and serves the broader area of these localities. Significant investment has gone into residential and commercial development in the past few years, for example the recent opening of the Coolalinga Central Shopping Centre. While there is existing capacity for further commercial development, there is an opportunity for a moderate increase in urban and rural residential development to support existing and future commercial activities.

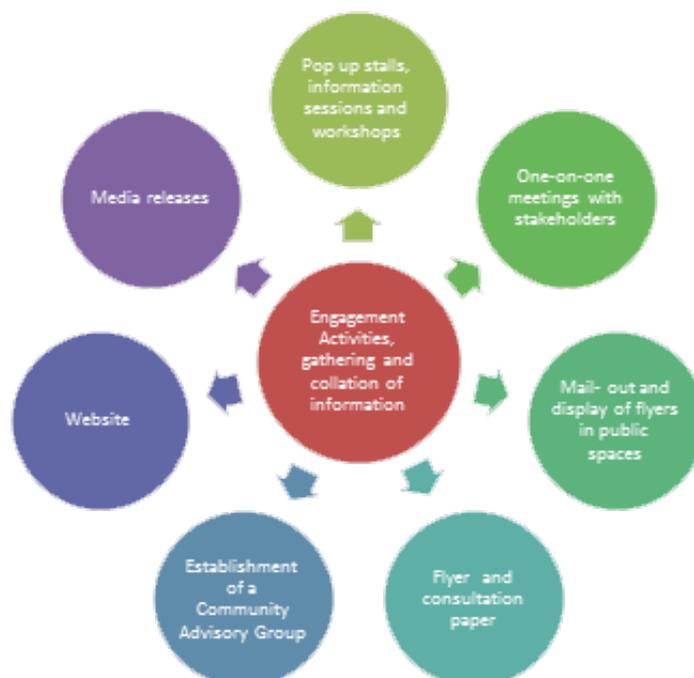
Growth in the Coolalinga/Freds Pass Rural Activity Centre will rely on the provision of reticulated services but this will be limited to the northern half of the study area as it is not economical to extend reticulated sewerage past the existing urban area. Additionally, the paperbark swamp in Coolalinga north needs to be managed for mosquito breeding and stormwater drainage purposes. Wells Creek in Coolalinga south also presents a second drainage challenge. Realisation of the Area Plan will need to be driven by landowners and the community in conjunction with a funded plan for infrastructure because the majority of developable land is privately owned.

2. CONSULTATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Stage 1 community consultation was undertaken by the Planning Commission over a five-week period from Monday 8 May 2017 through to Friday 9 June.

The engagement activities described below were used to engage with stakeholders identified in the endorsed communications engagement strategy and sought to:

- Provide clear, balanced and consistent consultation by delivering engagement opportunities through variety of feedback mechanisms to encourage involvement from all stakeholders
- Build upon the work of the Litchfield Subregional Land Use Plan to create a greater understanding of stakeholder issues and sensitivities by seeking genuine community and key stakeholder input into the Coolalinga/Freds Pass draft Area Plan, including collaborating with the Litchfield Council
- Promote improved knowledge and understanding of the land-use planning process and its role in the delivery of community aspirations for the future of Coolalinga and Freds Pass.



The first stage of consultation focused on gathering information, building an understanding of stakeholder issues and sensitivities, and providing sufficient opportunities and a variety of feedback mechanisms to encourage and allow participation from all stakeholders. Stakeholders identified included:

- Coolalinga/Freds residents
- Broader Litchfield community
- Local businesses
- Litchfield Council
- Local MLAs
- Special interest groups and community groups
- Government agencies and departments
- Industry associations and representative bodies
- Coolalinga/Freds Pass community advisory group

2.1 Land Owners/Residents

Flyers were sent to land owners within the Litchfield municipality for properties south of Howard Springs Road to inform them that work on the Area Plan had commenced and to encourage involvement in the area-planning process.

For those land owners with properties in the transition or core areas of the Land Use Concept Plan, a letter from the Chairman of the Planning Commission inviting them to attend the community workshop was provided in addition to the flyer. In conjunction with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, a number of meetings was held with key landholders within the study area.

Letters and flyers were hand delivered to residences and businesses within and abutting the transition and core areas of the Land Use Concept Plan to ensure those people most affected received the information.

A sample letter and a copy of the flyer are included at **Attachment A**.

Distribution of information and involvement of the community was also encouraged through the following community engagement activities:

- Print advertising in the NT News and the Sun Newspaper
- A dedicated page on the NT Planning Commission website, including times and dates of public displays, contact details to receive submissions and answer enquiries and an online feedback form
- Pop-up stalls at Coolalinga Central, Woolworths Coolalinga, Freds Pass Show and Freds Pass Markets
- Community information sessions
- Community workshops

2.2 Litchfield Council

Coolalinga/Freds Pass is located within the municipality of Litchfield Council.

On Wednesday 15 February 2017, the Commission briefed Litchfield Council on the project at its meeting. In addition, council has representatives on the community advisory group and council staff were included within the Project Control Group (PCG).

A number of councillors and council representatives also attended the community information sessions and workshop sessions.

2.3 Community Advisory Group

The Coolalinga/Freds Pass Community Advisory Group (CAG) is a group of rural residents who were appointed by Litchfield Council in late 2016 as an independent group to represent the views of residents.

Departmental staff met with the CAG on Thursday 9 February 2017 and briefed them about the project and their role in developing the Area Plan. In addition to attending one of the two information sessions, a number of members attended and contributed to the community workshops on Saturday 27 May and Saturday 3 June 2017.

2.4 Project Control Group

The PCG, consisting of key government stakeholders and Litchfield Council, met fortnightly between 12 October and 7 December 2016. PCG meetings primarily involved updating attendees on the progress of Tonkin Consulting's investigations on power, water, sewerage and stormwater drainage infrastructure, and the Traffic Impact Assessment. Stakeholders also had the opportunity to give feedback on the assumptions and results of these investigations and to raise any questions relevant to their respective agencies.

Although there have been no PCG meetings since December as the consultants were moving into finalising the infrastructure reports, departmental staff have participated in a number of one-on-one meetings with key government stakeholders.

2.5 Others

NT departments, industry and community groups identified as stakeholders in the endorsed communications engagement strategy were provided with the consultation materials and an invitation to attend one of the three information sessions.

On Wednesday 3 May 2017, the Commission briefed the Member for Goyder, Kezia Purick and the Member for Nelson, Gerry Wood on the Coolalinga/Freds Pass Area Plan project. In addition to being briefed on the Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre Area Plan, the Member for Nelson, Gerry Wood, was briefed on the Coolalinga/Freds Pass Rural Activity Centre Area Plan project on Friday 24 February 2017. The Leader of the Opposition, Gary Higgins, was briefed on both projects on Tuesday 7 March 2017.

3. SUBMISSIONS AND FEEDBACK

3.1 Residents/Land Owners

Coolalinga/Freds Pass land owners, residents and users of the activity centre had several opportunities to provide oral and written feedback to the Planning Commission.

3.1.1 Submissions/Feedback Received from Information Stalls and Information Sessions

Over 310 residents visited the pop-up stalls at Coolalinga Central, Woolworths Coolalinga, Freds Pass Markets and the Freds Pass Show to contribute their ideas and aspirations for the area to staff members present. Thirty-eight residents and affected stakeholders attended the community information sessions held on Tuesday 16 May, Saturday 20 May and Thursday 25 May 2017. Sixteen residents provided written submissions. The comments received are summarised below.

- **Movement and Transport**

Regarding the local traffic environment, general comments raised related to the unplanned nature of the existing local road network and the implications that it has for traffic and road safety. Specific areas of concern include:

- Increased delays at the existing round-about at the intersection of the Stuart Highway and Girraween Road
- Increased volumes of traffic on Wells Creek and Girraween Roads causing delays for residents and an increase in traffic noise
- Increase in the number of road trains passing through Coolalinga causing delays and safety concerns for road users
- The high speed of traffic (80km/hour speed limit) travelling along Bees Creek, Lowther, Virginia and Wells Creek Roads, particularly given that these roads are narrow in sections and abut deep drains that could increase the seriousness of any accident
- Safety of access and egress to and from the caravan park.

Comments relating to long term traffic management of the Stuart Highway, the service roads, and other NT Government road infrastructure were provided to the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics as a result of the shared public consultation process undertaken by the Commission and the Department.

Improvements to accessibility around the activity centre were supported, with comments emphasising:

- The need to fix the deteriorating local road network
- A better connected local road network that will provide access for residents in Virginia to access Coolalinga south without the need for them to cross the Stuart Highway
- The lack of public transport around the rural area and to/from Coolalinga throughout the day makes it hard for the elderly, teens and those without transport to take part in casual employment and after school sports/activities
- Improved vehicle access to significant WWII sites, for example by extending Fairweather Crescent to the north-west to join onto Bowhunters Road.

Mixed views were held on the proposed Smyth and Stow Road extensions to connect Howard Springs to Coolalinga. Some felt that the proposal does not take into consideration those who live on or near Smyth Road, while others provided their support for future connections.

- **Activity Centre Boundary and Lot Sizes**

A large proportion of those engaged were satisfied with the proposed core and transition boundaries. There was a strong belief that smaller lots of no less than 800m² in the core and transitional zones would provide an affordable and low-maintenance option for new and existing residents who enjoy the rural lifestyle. There was also a strong belief that 4000m² rural residential transition lots are of a suitable scale to buffer the small core lots; however, further subdivision in the future of these lots (4000m²) could erode the rural nature of the area. Where specified, the following suggestions were provided regarding lot sizes in the activity centre:

- 800-2000m² in core area, 4000m² in transitional area and maintain 2ha in existing rural living
- 1ha or 4000m² lots would be acceptable adjacent to the transition zones
- 2000m² and 3000m² block sizes should be available for more affordable options.

A number of residents did not specify desired lot sizes but emphasised that any new development/subdivision needs to be large enough and designed to suit Darwin's tropical climate and that where land is constrained no development should occur.

Some community members, however, expressed concern that the smaller lots within the core and transitional zones would diminish the rural amenity. Of these, some residents provided the following views on urban development:

- No further unit development and possibly no further 800m² lots. 4000m² lots should be the smallest as this allows families to have a choice
- The activity centre should be limited in growth as originally designed when Coolalinga was first developed. Most residential development in or near the activity centre should now be restricted to 1ha or 4000m² blocks
- 800m² blocks should not be allowed as they are too small.

Some residents also opposed additional commercial development within the activity centre:

- We must prevent ribbon development along Stuart Highway; commercial and urban development should be restricted to existing centres
- The rural activity centre acts as a necessary service facility to surrounding rural residents. It is important that the centre remains as a local service centre only and large-scale commercial, industrial and residential facilities will not be introduced and fragment existing centres around Darwin and Palmerston.

Some felt that the boundary of the transition area should be reduced:

- There should be no transitional zone at the southern end; instead the core should be surrounded by farming and greenspace
- The old rail corridor should be the boundary of the activity centre to the north and Sections 3254 and 33 should not be included in the activity centre.

Others agreed that the transition area should be reduced but suggested that 1ha lots could instead be developed in the following areas:

- The land along Henning Road and Bees Creek/Gulnare Road shown in the activity centre should be removed from the activity centre but zoned to allow for RR (1ha) development
- Sections 400, 1702 and 3218 should be removed from the activity centre but allowed to be subdivided into 1-ha lots in keeping with nearby developments at Sattler and the Grange.

Specific suggestions were also made by residents concerned about potential direct impacts in their locality:

- Edelesten Road should remain a cul-de-sac. Any land within Section 33 that may be suitable for subdivision should be accessed directly into Coolalinga without joining up with Edelesten Road
- Lot 1, 75 Henning Road (back of Earth Industries) should not be developed to protect the amenity of Wells Creek Road residents.

• Infrastructure

In regards to community infrastructure, a large portion of those who were consulted would be happy to have community infrastructure developed in the area. Many residents requested more bike paths and greater pedestrian connectivity to encourage safe physical activity. Additional community facilities which were requested included:

- a swimming pool
- craft centre
- community gardens
- fitness facilities
- horse paths
- more parks, like in the urban areas, for families to picnic
- education facilities
- facilities for the elderly
- further preservation of sites of heritage value, particular WWII sites
- preserving the natural environment by setting aside these areas for recreation and tourism, e.g. walking tracks with interpretive biological information about plants and animals.

In addition, the community was supportive of preserving Freds Pass and possibly expanding the reserve for future sporting needs and uses. One member of the community also suggested that land on the eastern side of Bees Creek Road should be retained for community purposes.

In regards to servicing infrastructure, there was a general interest in water infrastructure. Concerns were raised about the need to preserve ground water by alleviating water wastage as well as reducing the number of new bores by requiring new subdivisions to connect to town water.

• Environment

Comments from a number of residents recognised the importance of the environment and the need to retain open space, native vegetation and wildlife corridors.

Concerns were raised that, with increasing development around the activity centre, changes to the current landscape might have a negative impact on the environment and the natural flow of watercourses. One resident was particularly concerned that the development of Coolalinga has altered the natural drainage system of the area as "Wells Creek Road has never been wetter and the creek used to flow all year round, whereas now it only flows during the wet season".

Another resident also expressed concern about potential development of the area to the north of the activity centre, bordering on Stow Road and the old Northern Australian Rail (NAR) easement. Although some development of this area is expected, any development needs to preserve the integrity of the Brookings Creek catchment and activities should not impede streams that flow through rural lifestyle lots outside the activity centre.

One submission suggested that Section 3373 at the northern end of the activity centre has been subject to illegal dumping over the years. The submission noted that the nature of the dumped waste may influence the environmental and conservation value of the land and therefore its future use.

3.1.2 Submissions/Feedback Received from Workshop

Forty-one residents, including members from the community advisory group, attended the community workshop sessions held on Saturday 27 May 2017 and Saturday 3 June 2017. The workshops were opened with a brief background of the project. Due to the geographic nature and the distinct characteristics of localities within the study area, four 'precincts' or 'sub-areas' were identified to assist in refining and focusing participants' feedback during the community workshops.

- **Precinct one** is north of the Stuart Highway, extending from Stow Road down to Girraween Road and encompassing the existing urban development, Coolalinga Central and the Northern Australian Rail (NAR) corridor.
- **Precinct two** is south of the Stuart Highway and extends from Virginia Road through to the intersection of Henning Road and the Stuart Highway. It includes the Virginia local centre, Coolalinga caravan park, the Woolworths development and the northern part of Wells Creek Road.
- **Precinct three** continues south from the Henning Road/Girraween Road intersection with the Stuart Highway and includes the Power and Water Corporation's 19 Mile McMinns Pumping Station, Freds Pass Reserve, Litchfield Council Administrative Centre, education facilities and conservation-zoned Crown land on the northern side of the highway.
- **Precinct four** extends south from Freds Pass Reserve to Lowther Road and across the highway to two large parcels of privately owned land that have not yet been developed. This area is all currently zoned and otherwise developed for rural living (2 ha plus).

Representatives from each table presented a summary of their discussions.

Summary at **Attachment B**.

3.2 Government Agencies

A number of government agencies had several opportunities to provide oral and written feedback to the Planning Commission during the consultation period.

3.2.1 Department of Education

Department of Education advised in a meeting on 1 June 2016 that as the population of Coolalinga/Freds Pass grows, there will be an additional demand for education places and therefore facilities. DoE also advised that the Area Planning process would be a good opportunity to address issues of local road connectivity to address traffic congestion in Sattler Crescent, Freds Pass. This is due to two schools having access to a cul-de-sac.

3.2.2 Department of Health (Environmental Health Branch)

The Environmental Health Branch of the Department of Health advised they welcome the drafting of an Area Plan for the Coolalinga/Freds Pass Rural Activity Centre. The Department notes that the capacity of the existing reticulated infrastructure is limited to servicing existing urban and commercial development. Future urban development, as well as growth of the commercial centre, will rely upon the extension of reticulated services. Furthermore, the lack of reticulated sewerage on both the northern and southern sides of the Stuart Highway is also a major constraint for the future commercial development of the Coolalinga/Freds Pass Rural Activity Centre. The Department recommends that the Area Plan considers reticulated sewerage to commercial lots on the northern and southern sides of the Stuart Highway.

3.2.3 Department of Health (Medical Entomology Branch)

Medical Entomology advise that they support the concept of an Area Plan as there is the potential for mosquito breeding areas to impact on future development in Litchfield Shire. In terms of modification of Coolalinga swamp areas, Medical Entomology advise that they support densification around these areas provided that the areas are modified to control mosquito breeding and appropriate zoning/easements are in place. With regard to the actual modification method, if possible it is recommended that the lowest maintenance design be chosen to minimise maintenance requirements. Before rectification works begin the long-term maintenance authority should be determined.

In regards to proposed drainage infrastructure, Medical Entomology advise that all stormwater basins and their inlet and overflow drains should be appropriately zoned/have drainage easement declared to allow the maintenance authority to carry out regular maintenance. Past experience in Darwin and Palmerston should be used to determine the most suitable design for each basin.

3.2.4 Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services

Northern Territory Police Fire and Emergency Services advised that policing services in the Darwin rural area incorporating Coolalinga and Freds Pass are primarily provided by Palmerston and Humpty Doo Police Stations with support from specialist services as required. The proposed increase in infrastructure, including residential properties and population growth, increases the demand on policing services in the rural area.

NTPFES further advised that the proposed Palmerston Police Station will reduce travel demands on local police resources (currently required to travel to Darwin City), thus allowing for efficiencies and improvements in the delivery of policing services in the Darwin rural area.

In regards to roads, NTPFES advised that the undeveloped nature of the local road network and their connections to the Stuart Highway has serious implications for vehicular safety.

NTPFES also notes that pedestrian and cycle networks are inadequate and do not connect the rural area in any direct manner to the urban centres of Palmerston and Darwin cities. This can lead to cyclists and pedestrians utilising arterial roads and contributes to potential accidents and/or crashes in the area.

Service authority comments can be reviewed at Attachment C.

4 SUMMARY

Stage 1 consultation has allowed the Northern Territory Planning Commission to consult with the community on the future of the Coolalinga/Freds Pass Rural Activity Centre. This has occurred through a series of pop-up stalls, information sessions and two community workshops. Listening to the views of all stakeholders, the aspirations, opportunities and concerns associated with future development within and surrounding the activity centre have been recorded. Support for the consultation process has been very positive, with the two community workshops a highlight. Stage 1 consultation also provided an opportunity to collaborate with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics in regards to the long-term traffic management options for the Stuart Highway through Coolalinga.

Matters raised by the community through consultation include a desire to maintain the rural character and amenity of Coolalinga and Freds Pass, to address the existing and potential impacts of increased traffic and the capability of the local road network to support this, and an aspiration to increase community and active recreation facilities. Concern was also identified in regard to the impact of stormwater from development on natural drainage and waterways.

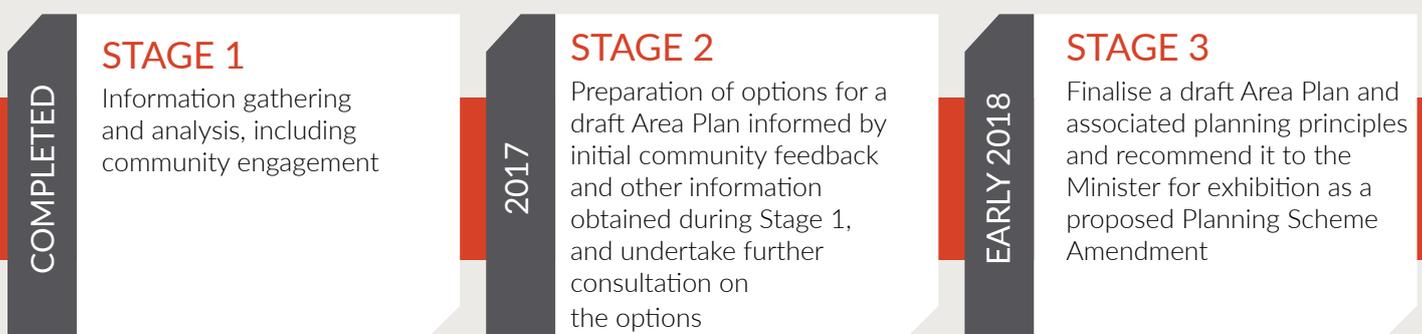
There was a high level of support for extending a shared bicycle path from Howard Springs to Coolalinga along the old North Australia Railroad corridor with the desire to increase opportunities for safe pedestrian and cycling within the rural activity centre. Further connectivity to Howard Springs and the broader rural locality by extending Smyth Road and Stow Road were also generally well supported, noting that potential environmental impacts will need to be addressed first. Many residents also identified that the Freds Pass Recreation Reserve plays an important role in providing sports and recreation facilities at a subregional and regional level and that this role should be supported and strengthened as the activity centre grows.

The key message from service authorities and government agencies is that reticulated water and sewerage will be required for any future development in the locality, particularly surrounding Coolalinga itself. Support was also expressed for the provision of community facilities and improvements to the local road network.

The development of an Area Plan for Coolalinga/Freds Pass has been largely viewed as a positive initiative that will allow government agencies to plan for the future.

5 NEXT STEPS

This report covers community consultation and engagement during Stage 1, the information-gathering stage of the development of options for a draft Coolalinga/Freds Pass Area Plan. Stage 2 consultation is due to commence in late October 2017.





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