

An aerial photograph of the Maryborough Showgrounds & Equestrian Park. The image shows a large, oval-shaped arena with a blue and green interior, surrounded by a dirt track. Numerous tents, trailers, and vehicles are scattered across the grounds, indicating an event or fair. The park is bordered by dense green trees and a road. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

MARYBOROUGH
SHOWGROUNDS &
EQUESTRIAN PARK
STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2025
(FINAL DRAFT)

October 2020





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Otium Planning Group acknowledges the Australian Aboriginal, Torres Strait and South Sea Islander peoples of this nation.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which our company is located and where we conduct our business. We pay our respects to ancestors and to Elders, past, present and emerging.

Otium is committed to national reconciliation and respect for indigenous peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas, and their rich contribution to society.

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1. OVERVIEW

The Maryborough Showgrounds and Equestrian Park (MSEP) is a regionally significant facility within the Fraser Coast Regional Council area, developed on a purpose designed 105Ha site with frontage to the Bruce Highway.

The MSEP was developed by the former Maryborough City Council in order to provide services and facilities for people to participate in active recreation, sport, education, competition and entertainment activities and events. The development of the facility has been guided by a master plan (2008) and a number of precinct related sub plans and audits. Over the past 20 years the use of the facility has increased substantially.

1.1. STUDY OBJECTIVE & APPROACH

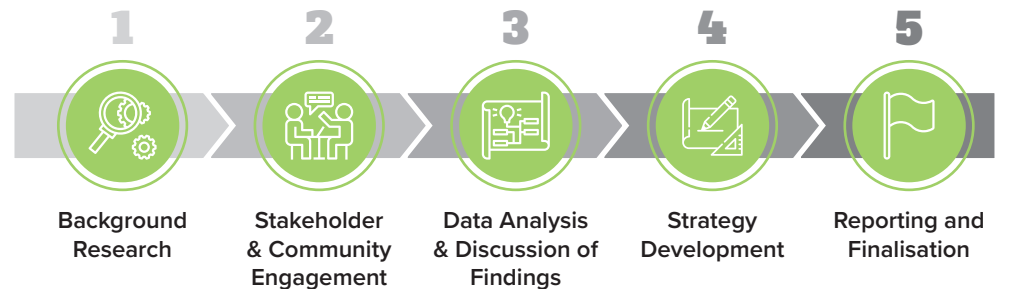
The objective of this study is to:

“Develop a five-year strategic plan for the MSEP to ensure that it is managed, maintained and developed in such a way that will effectively meet the current and changing needs of the community.”

The study approach involved analysis of current usage, management and operational performance, site inspections, background research, benchmarking of similar venues, and extensive engagement with Council officers, user groups and the Fraser Coast community.

The study approach/ methodology is illustrated at Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Study Methodology



This project received grant funding from the Australian Government – Building Better Regions Fund: Community Investment Stream Rd 3

Main Hall



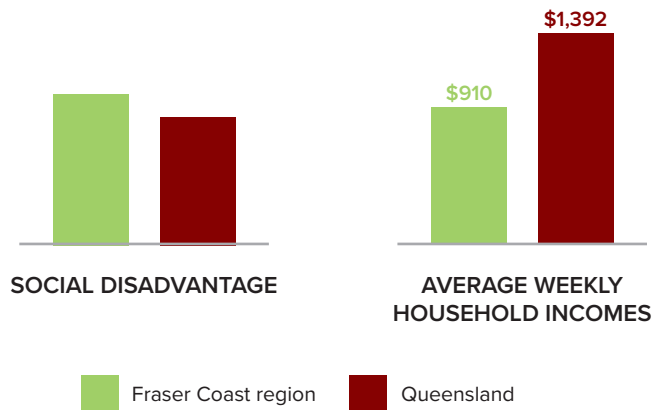
2. FRASER COAST PROFILE

POPULATION & GROWTH



¹ Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Estimated Resident Population 2018. Compiled and presented by .id, the population experts

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS



MEDIAN AGE



FRASER COAST REGION



REGIONAL QUEENSLAND



QUEENSLAND

POTENTIAL CATCHMENT PROFILE IMPLICATIONS

- Higher level of price sensitivity for event entry or membership fees
- Demand for events/ activities that appeal across the age spectrum
- Higher demand for events/ activities that appeal to, and are accessible for, older populations
- Greater demand for public transport to activities/ events
- Increased demand for sport, recreation and event opportunities due to projected population growth

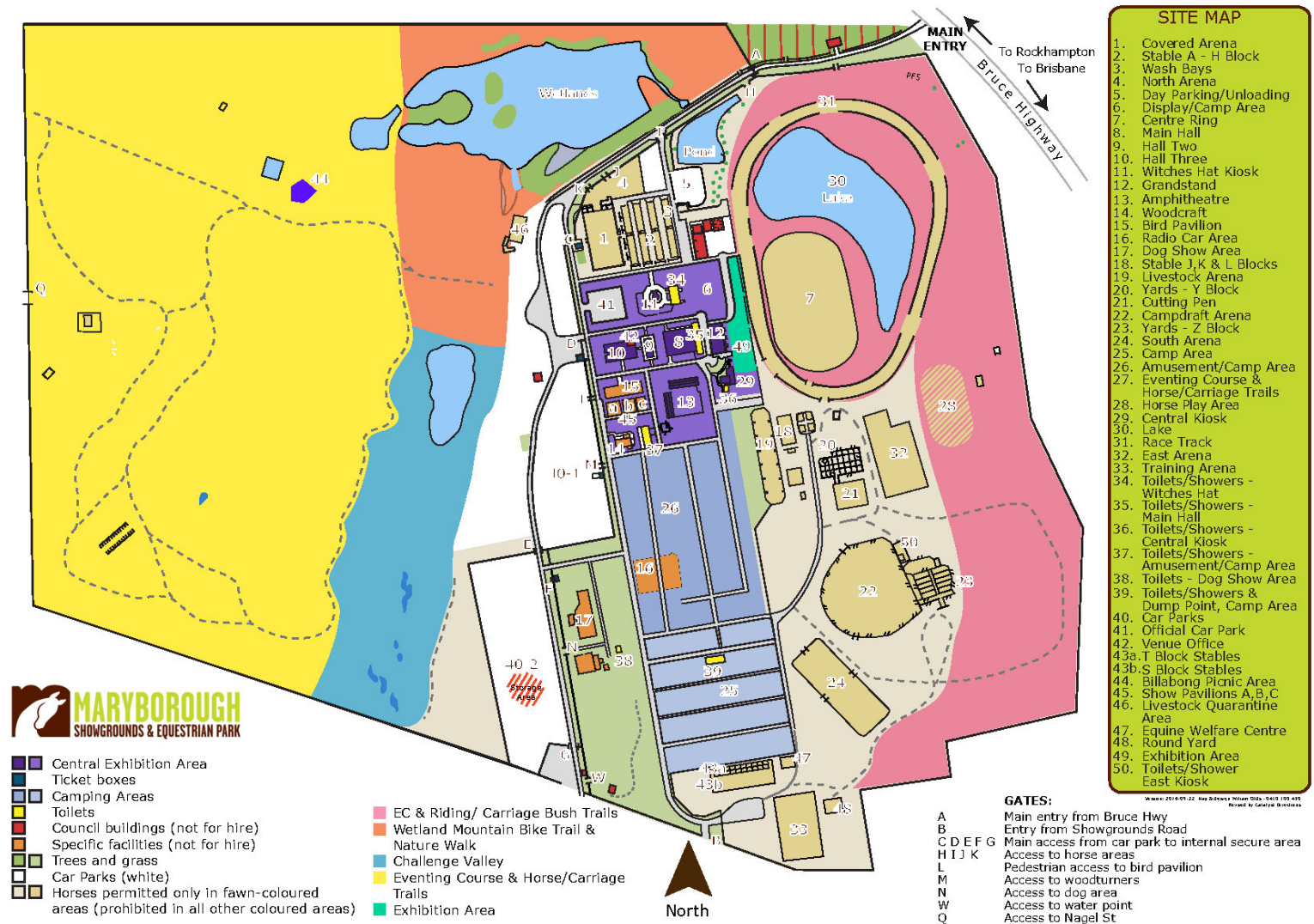
3. ABOUT THE MARYBOROUGH SHOWGROUNDS AND EQUESTRIAN PARK

3.1. THE SITE AND FACILITIES

The Fraser Coast Regional Council (FCRC) is the Trustee of the MSEP, which is a State-owned Reserve designated for 'Showground and Recreation' purposes.

The MSEP is a large multi-purpose venue containing 35 facilities and spaces. It comprises a mix of indoor and outdoor facilities and spaces, a number of which are equestrian-use specific. It is worth noting that the venue is designated as an Evacuation Centre/ Respite Facility in the event of a natural disaster.

Consultation with the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy indicated there is native title overlay in respect of the site.



3.2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The MSEP is positioned within Council's Community & Culture Section, which is part of the Development & Community Department. The venue is managed by the Cultural Services Unit's Venues Operations Team.

The importance of the facility to the region is evident through Council's corporate and strategic planning.

- « Council has a focus for the region that centres around community connection, diverse economy and natural environment consideration and Council's Corporate Plan is supportive of emerging and major events
- « Community facilities are considered important contributors to community life and support for active and healthy lifestyles
- « Council reinforces the implementation of effective and strategic management and governance frameworks
- « The MSEP is recognised as a feature equestrian facility for the broader Wide Bay region
- « The Fraser Coast Regional Events Strategy, which is currently being reviewed and updated, recognises the MSEP as a venue capable of hosting more/ diverse range of events
- « The MSEP has considerable potential to partner with other entities to generate a broad range of adventure-based events
- « A recent Asset Management Plan has identified a number of maintenance/ condition issues at the MSEP, in particular the Main Hall which requires renewal or replacement.



Fraser Coast Home Show (Photo credit: Fraser Coast Regional Council)



3.3. USE OF THE MSEP

The MSEP had **552 use days in 2019** (whole or part of site) by 68 different groups, 31 of which were equestrian.



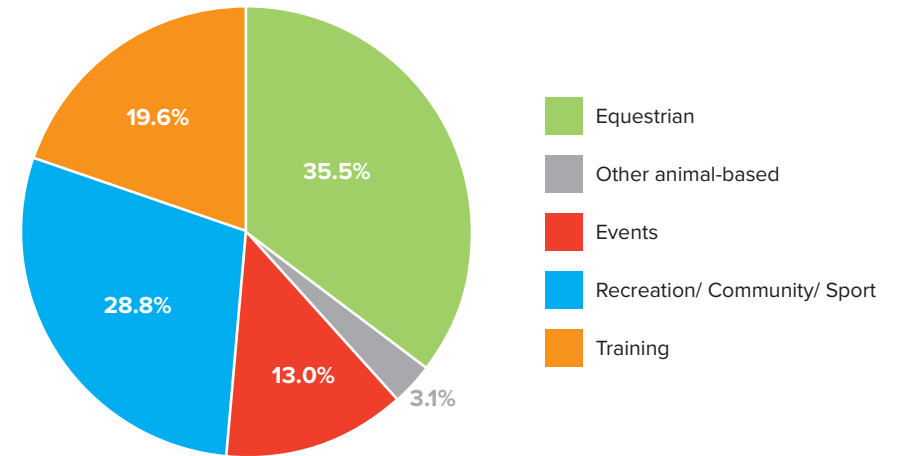
Table 1: Use days of MSEP for 2017, 2018 and 2019 by use category

USER GROUP CATEGORY	USE DAYS		
	2019	2018	2017
Equestrian	196	179	117
Other animal-based	17	19	0
Events	72	43	25
Recreation/ Community/ Sport	159	204	172
Training	108	43	53
Total	552	488	367



Thirty-three user groups were from **outside the Fraser Coast region** (144 usage days).

The total number of **usage days has increased significantly** over the last three years and equestrian uses account for the highest proportion of use (35.5%) followed by recreation/ community/ sport uses (28.8%).



While **events** comprise less than 10% of overall usage days (72 usage days) they account for an average of **44% of income** over the last three financial years and provide, by far, the largest average attendance.



Booking the MSEP is managed via the MSEP website with **on-line bookings** available for camping and equestrian facilities.



Equestrian Events (Photo Credit: Fraser Coast Regional Council)



Equestrian Events (Photo Credit: Fraser Coast Regional Council)

3.4. MARKETING AND PROMOTION

Marketing of the MSEP is primarily via the site's website, which is accessible from Council's Cultural Service's website 'Our Fraser Coast'. Council's other cultural services venues are also accessible from this site, including Brolga Theatre and Convention Centre, Portside Heritage Precinct, Hervey Bay Regional Gallery, Gatakers Artspace, and The Story Bank.

In recent years the MSEP has hosted several major events including Home Show, Camping Rally, Caravan Rally, National Rodeo Finals, Fraser Coast Expo, Cuboree, R.U.M. Fest and numerous equestrian events and championships. FCRC has submitted a proposal to Scouts Queensland for the Australian Jamboree in January 2025 to be held at the MSEP. This is a major event which was last held at the MSEP in 2013.

3.5. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE, CAPITAL BUDGET AND FEES

The average cost recovery of the venue over the last three years is 31.7% with an average deficit of \$558,554. As with all venues of this type, labour costs account for the highest proportion of total operating costs (31.7%). Budgeted capital works expenditure over the next ten years is \$6.3M principally for building works, amenities, stabling and lighting.

Fees and charges are levied for equestrian facilities, livestock accommodation, camping, facilities hire, exclusive use (event area and whole site), hire bonds.

4. SHOWGROUNDS AND OUTDOOR EVENT SPACES IN AUSTRALIA

4.1. TRENDS/ OPPORTUNITIES

Trends and opportunities in outdoor event spaces (showgrounds) include:

- « Outdoor event spaces and showgrounds are **increasingly being redeveloped** as venues that support a range of community functions
- « Facilities are becoming **more flexible** so that they can provide for different user requirements as well as for a variety of types of events of differing sizes (thereby optimising use and revenue)
- « Asset management is important and designs that are **low maintenance** make the facility more viable
- « Facility managers (and Councils) are becoming more **proactive in securing events** - it is no longer appropriate to sit and wait for a booking
- « Contemporary expectations of facility quality, as well as legal and code requirements, demand a **higher standard of facility** than has been provided, or accepted, in the past
- « Storage requirements, car parking and public amenities are a key component of **facility design**
- « Importance of **green technologies** (e.g. water harvesting, solar power, energy efficient lighting)
- « Facilities that can **generate income** (e.g. activities such as caravan and camping, kiosk/ canteen to service events etc) are being sought
- « **Exhibition buildings** with large clear-span floor space that is flexible enough so that it can be divided into smaller areas to suit differing user needs
- « Consider **alternatives to fixed stadium/ grandstand seating**. Fixed seating is one of the more costly pieces of infrastructure to install and maintain and is often rarely used
- « Need to consider **resourcing of events**. Opportunities could include the attraction of various cultural events, meetings and training events, large social functions, seminars, business and commercial activities
- « Encouragement of **general community use** for informal recreation activities such as walking and cycling
- « Consideration of **shade** without impacting on event open space.
- « The global **COVID-19 pandemic** has had a significant impact on the sport and tourism sectors. United and collaborative approaches in managing the impacts and returning to activity is critical.



Schools Cross Country 2017 (Photo Credit: Fraser Coast Regional Council)

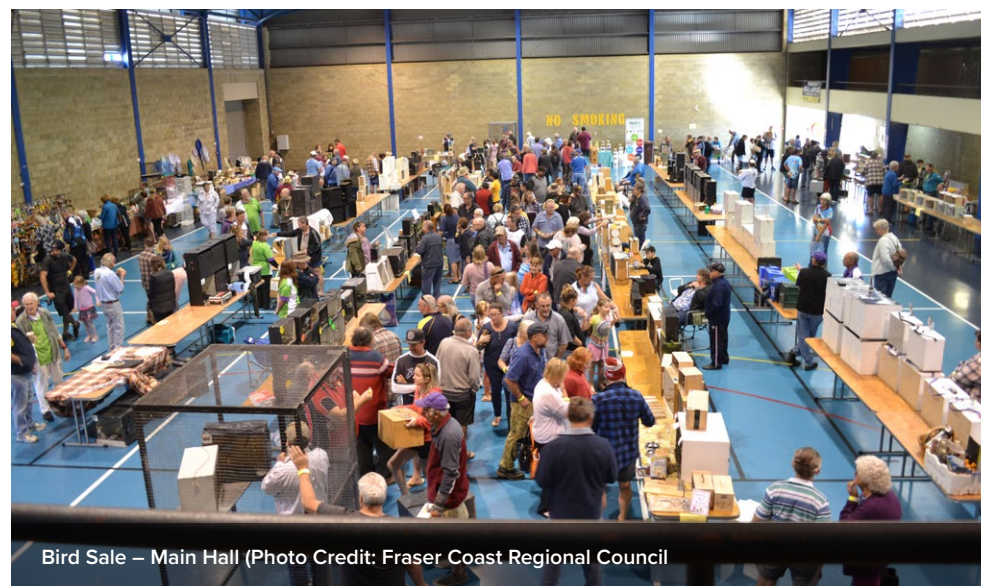


Caravan Rally (Photo Credit: Fraser Coast Regional Council)

4.2. LEARNINGS FROM SIMILAR FACILITIES

Discussions with managers of nine (9) similar venues in Queensland and NSW, all with typical showground facilities with equestrian areas, and indoor and outdoor infrastructure catering for a range of users, events and configurations, revealed a number of key management and operational learnings.

- « All venues **operate at a deficit**; some have higher cost recovery levels, some lower; salaries and wages are the highest cost item. Fees and charges structures vary significantly with each facility.
- « Few venues capture **event patronage levels** in a formal manner.
- « These facilities are managed within **Community Services or Corporate Services departments**, (or similar).
- « Most have **on-site management and maintenance staff** and are able to call on other areas of Council for additional support when required - usually by way of an internal Works Order, but some are historical arrangements for assistance in setting up for major events.
- « Some Councils have a **specific Venues or Facilities related unit or team** that provides administration, booking, and event assistance. On-site staffing at larger venues is better geared to support events/ maintenance.
- « Grounds maintenance and minor building maintenance is generally undertaken by **on-site staff**. Major building maintenance is undertaken by the **relevant department** within Council but no evidence of service level agreements or similar was uncovered. Works that are beyond the capability of internal staff are contracted to **external providers**.
- « Some have specific facility components catering for **equestrian activities** (covered arena, dressage, stables etc); some include the local/ regional racecourse or trotting track catering for races as well as training.
- « Some also have **sporting facilities** (fields and indoor sport).
- « Most venues have a number of **annual/ repeat events**. Regular user groups generally have some form of user agreement.
- « Some Councils operate an **on-line booking system**, others have a downloadable enquiry or booking form, while others operate a manual system.
- « **On-site camping** is generally permitted only for event attendees, or oversize vehicles not compatible with other venues, or vehicles travelling with livestock. For non-event camping, limits of 2-3 days are common.
- « None indicated significant plans for future expansion or development, most (but not all) have asset maintenance/ renewal programs in place, and some have plans waiting for **post-COVID-19 stimulation funding** that may be offered by the State and/ or Commonwealth governments.



Bird Sale – Main Hall (Photo Credit: Fraser Coast Regional Council)



Main Hall

5. ENGAGEMENT INSIGHTS

Extensive consultation was undertaken with User Groups by way of workshops and surveys, Council officers, and the broader community by way of an on-line survey (504 responses) and workshop with community panel representatives. The draft Strategic Plan was released for public review prior to finalising the Plan for Council approval.

Key issues to arise out of consultation with User Groups included:

- « Venue is a **valuable asset** which is very actively used for a wide range of equestrian and other activities
- « High levels of **satisfaction with customer service** from on-site staff
- « Need for **safer access** to Bruce Highway for southbound heavy vehicles
- « General satisfaction with the venue but identification of **infrastructure upgrades** (most commonly Main Hall, weather protection at southern end of covered arena, drainage, power, more lighting, additional/ upgraded stables, seating, fencing, PA system)

In terms of events/ activities, survey respondents would like to see:



Concerts/ music festivals



Equestrian events



Other events such as home/ garden/ caravan/ camping etc Expos

Public review of the draft Strategic Plan (September 2020) indicated agreement or strong agreement (76%) with the draft plan.

Community engagement identified that:

- « There was a high level of interest in the study – 504 survey responses is a high response rate for social research of this nature
- « The MSEP is a very important venue for the Fraser Coast region (average importance rating 4.7 out of 5)
- « Most survey respondents are very satisfied or satisfied with the venue (83.4%). They particularly like the facilities, layout, cleanliness, availability and quality of equine facilities, and
- « The main improvements sought are stables (more/ upgraded); camping (longer stay, closer to covered arena); amenities (new/ upgraded); more shade/ seating; and parking/ traffic management (additional, more formalised, better lighting, road maintenance, and better traffic management for events)

504
survey responses

4.7★
importance rating



83.4%
satisfaction

The Community Panel workshop identified the need for:



Better marketing and promotion of events



Partnering with Fraser Coast Tourism and Events (FCTE) to create a showpiece event and generate other events



Improved public transport to events



Capitalising on the MSEP's point of difference for equestrian activities

6. KEY THEMES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Analysis of the research presents some key themes, challenges and opportunities that will influence the future vision and objectives for the MSEP.



Management and Resourcing

While the venue is highly valued by the Fraser Coast Council and the community, the management structure and resourcing of the facility is not commensurate with its level of importance to the region.



Camping

Longer stay camping emerged consistently throughout engagement. While the value of short-stay camping and event-related camping is recognised, the desire for longer stay camping is not consistent with secondary use of trust land nor with Council's commitment to avoid competition with private caravan and camping providers.



Facilities & Asset Management

The MSEP is a significant facility, presenting numerous and diverse opportunities. A number of facility condition and asset management issues and needs are evident. It will be critical that the facilities on site continue to meet community and user needs, remain up to date, flexible and are developed and maintained to acceptable standards that support the variety of uses.



Marketing and Event Potential

The importance of the venue to the region and its potential economic value was a consistent theme. Associated with this was a need for better marketing and promotion of the facility and maximising opportunities to attract a range of high profile/ higher level events to the region.



Community Value and Access

There is a strong community connection to the venue, with Fraser Coast Residents clearly valuing the existing and potential opportunities. It will be important to continue to recognise this and enhance and support community access to the facility.



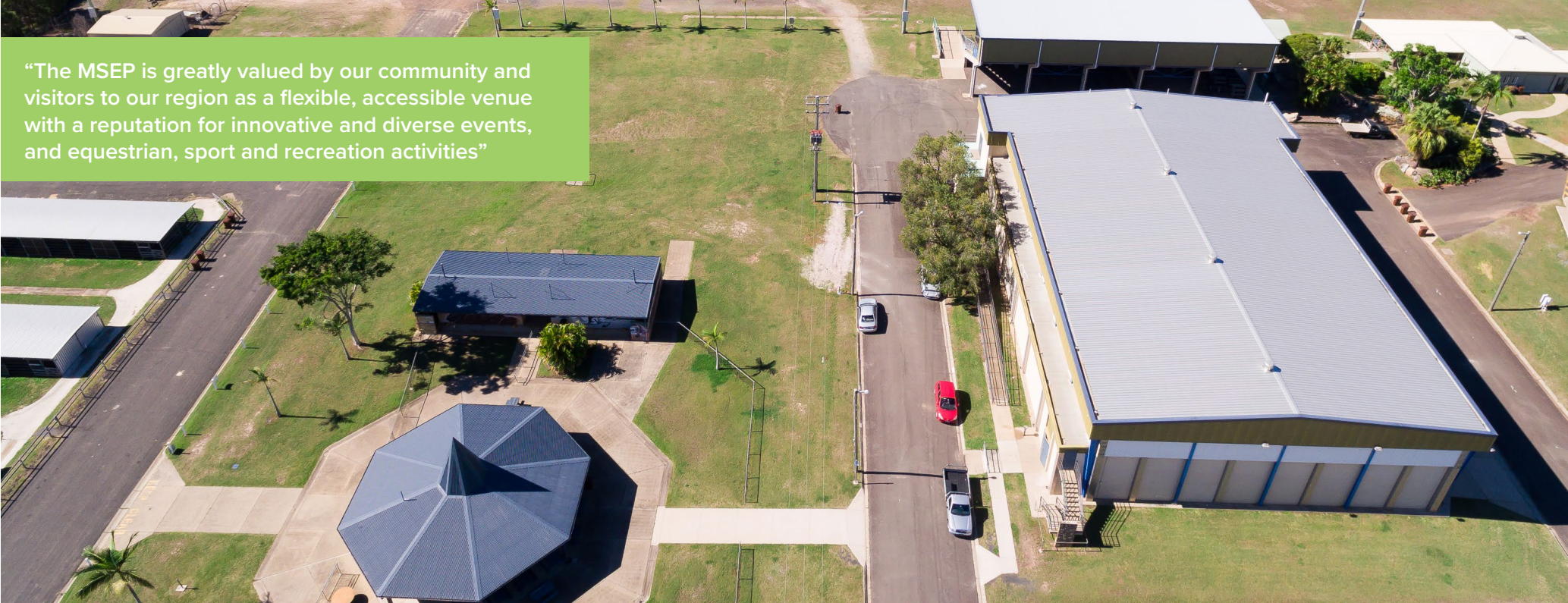
Camping Rally (Photo Credit: Fraser Coast Regional Council)



Expo (Photo Credit: Fraser Coast Regional Council)

7. VISION AND OBJECTIVES

The following vision and objectives will guide the future of the MSEP:



“The MSEP is greatly valued by our community and visitors to our region as a flexible, accessible venue with a reputation for innovative and diverse events, and equestrian, sport and recreation activities”

1

Recognise and maximise the contribution of the MSEP to the Fraser Coast community and regional economy

2

Ensure MSEP facilities are safe, sustainable, fit-for-purpose and avoid duplication

3

Ensure sound business principles and customer focus in the management of the MSEP

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

FOCUS AREA/ OBJECTIVE	RECOMMENDATION
<p>1. Recognise and maximise the contribution of the MSEP to the Fraser Coast community and regional economy</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. As part of the updated Fraser Coast Regional Events Strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> « Resource the pursuit of new events and marketing of the MSEP « Facilitate the creation of new, or pursue the acquisition of existing, non-equestrian events such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor music concerts • Festivals • Markets • Outdoor adventure-based activities (e.g. trail running, orienteering, boot camps, mountain biking) 2. Capitalise on the strengths of the venue for equestrian activities by seeking regional or higher level equestrian events/ competitions 3. Encourage informal recreation usage of the MSEP 4. Develop a branding and marketing strategy to promote the MSEP to potential new users 5. Retain the current affordable fee structure for hirers 6. Engage with Indigenous leaders to identify and acknowledge their connection to the site 7. Investigate options for improving public transport access for major events held at the MSEP. 8. Ensure the Planning Scheme does not permit residential development in close proximity to the MSEP to avoid jeopardising the conduct of existing or new events due to noise concerns. 9. Develop strategies to increase the usage of newly developed, unique and underutilised areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> « Examine partnership opportunities with commercial and community providers « Carefully examine if more formal tenure arrangements are required to activate these areas

FOCUS AREA/ OBJECTIVE	RECOMMENDATION
<p>2. Ensure MSEP facilities are safe, sustainable, fit-for-purpose and avoid duplication</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare a new master plan for the MSEP to ensure future improvements conform to an agreed long term plan and avoid ad hoc decision-making. The master plan should confirm the demand, location, concept design, and order of cost of the following elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> « Additional/ upgraded stables « Shaded seating areas « New/ upgraded amenities/ showers (including disability access) « External road entrance/ egress arrangements « Additional/ upgraded lighting « Protection of covered arena from rain « Power upgrade « PA system upgrade « Community accessibility to walking/ riding trails in and out of event times « Dedicated areas for dressage/ showjumping (but retaining ability to be used for whole-of-site events) « Upgrading of cross-country course « Car/ heavy vehicle parking « Drainage improvements (between pavilions, stables) « Provision for outdoor adventure-based activities (e.g. trail running, orienteering, mountain biking) « Retain capability for use as an Evacuation Centre/ Respite Facility 2. As part of the master plan investigate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> « The likely additional event use generated by an expansion of the existing covered arena, as recommended in the Equestrian Queensland State Facility Plan « Any design/ layout issues that need to be addressed to better enable simultaneous use of the venue for equestrian and other events « Options to improve internal movement for major events and/ or simultaneous events 3. Engage with the Department of Transport and Main Roads to resolve user group concerns about the safety of exit to the Bruce Highway for heavy vehicles. 4. Prepare a Traffic Management Plan for the venue (and specific to event types) that considers access, egress, parking and movement within the venue and identifies signage and works requirements. 5. Proceed with detailed design for renewal of the Main Hall: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> « Maximise flexibility for event/ community use « Ensure adequate height of access and floor design to enable access for heavy lifting equipment, forklifts etc. « Include any requirements for use as an Evacuation Centre/ Respite Facility 6. Implement sustainability charter at MSEP to improve recycling, reduce waste, water and energy use. 7. As facilities reach the end of their useful life, consider their replacement only if ongoing demand warrants. If demand exists, examine the opportunity to provide a larger, integrated facility that addresses broader needs and enables multi-use rather than a single-purpose, like-for-like building. 8. Progressively address other maintenance issues identified in the Asset Management Plan

FOCUS AREA/ OBJECTIVE	RECOMMENDATION
<p>3. Ensure sound business principles and customer focus in the management of the MSEP</p>	<p>1. Retain the existing management model in the interim, increase resources equivalent to an additional 1.0 FTE to assist with day to day management of the facility including event bump in/ bump out. As part of any future management review of Council's larger facilities/ venues, e.g. Fraser Coast Sports Precinct, consider opportunities to develop a new management structure that capitalises on the synergies between the venues.</p>
	<p>2. Adopt a Council-wide approach to the successful operation of the MSEP by entering into an arrangement (e.g. SLA or similar) with appropriate Council departments to undertake tasks that are beyond the skills/ capabilities of on-site staff. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> « Roads maintenance « Building maintenance/ facility repairs « Vegetation maintenance
	<p>3. Preparation of budgets for these tasks should be undertaken in collaboration with the relevant department, with budgets allocated to the appropriate area (MSEP or delivery area)</p>
	<p>4. Adopt performance measures for reporting on the operational performance of the MSEP. Suggested measures include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> « Annual event patronage (require hirers to report on visitation numbers) « Number/ type of events per annum « Annual occupancy rates of areas/ facilities « Financial performance (cost recovery, deficit) « Post-event evaluation
	<p>5. Continue the policy of not issuing leases over separate areas, unless essential to activate under-utilised areas/ facilities (refer recommendation 9 in objective 1)</p>
	<p>6. Retain the current policy on short-term camping and increase the maximum period for non-event related camping to 72 hours which complies with the provisions of the DNRME policy on Secondary Use of Trust Land under the Land Act 1994.</p>
	<p>7. Issue simple, short term User Agreements for regular community user groups and separate hire agreements for commercial hirers, that incorporate a requirement to report on use and attendance as outlined in (4) above.</p>
	<p>8. Pursue external funding opportunities for venue improvements</p>
	<p>9. Liaise with DNRME on bushfire mitigation plans</p>
	<p>10. Decommission the caretaker's cottage and investigate appropriate security measures (e.g. strategic positioning of CCTV cameras) on the basis that residential use of an event facility would require additional planning approval, may not be supported by DNRME and would not be serving its intended purpose as caretaker accommodation.</p>
	<p>11. Investigate whether or not management or infrastructure changes arising out of the implementation of this Strategic Plan, or the Long Term master plan, would trigger the preparation of a Land Management Plan under the provisions of the Land Act 1994</p>

9. WARRANTIES AND DISCLAIMERS

The information contained in this report is provided in good faith. While Otium Planning Group has applied their own experience to the task, they have relied upon information supplied to them by other persons and organisations.

We have not conducted an audit of the information provided by others but have accepted it in good faith. Some of the information may have been provided 'commercial in confidence' and as such these venues or sources of information are not specifically identified. Readers should be aware that the preparation of this report may have necessitated projections of the future that are inherently uncertain and that our opinion is based on the underlying representations, assumptions and projections detailed in this report.

Accordingly, neither Otium Planning Group, nor any member or employee of Otium Planning Group, undertakes responsibility arising in any way whatsoever to any persons other than client in respect of this report, for any errors or omissions herein, arising through negligence or otherwise however caused.



National Rodeo Finals (Photo Credit: Fraser Coast Regional Council)



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