

Inquiry into e-mobility safety and use in Queensland

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Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into E-Scooter and E-Bike Safety

Submitted by Cairns Regional Council – June 2025

Cairns Regional Council (Council) appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the Parliamentary Inquiry, through the State Development, Infrastructure and Works Committee (the Committee), into E-Scooter and E-Bike Safety.

While Council does not currently permit the storage and/or hiring of shared commercial e-scooter or e-bike hire services on Council-controlled land, we recognise the increasing prevalence of e-mobility device use across the region and the broader safety and regulatory implications for our community.

We acknowledge the potential benefits of e-mobility, particularly in supporting low-emission transport alternatives, offering affordable travel options, and improving connections in urban areas. However, these benefits must be balanced with the significant safety, enforcement, and regulatory challenges currently being experienced at the local level.

Our submission is focused on the following five key areas:

1. Review of Changes to Importation Processes (2021 Reforms)

(Relevant to Terms of Reference 4 & 6)

Prior to 2021, legal importation of e-mobility devices required approval from the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (DITRDCA). Following the introduction of the Determination under the Road Vehicle Standards legislation, devices not classified as “road vehicles” (including e-scooters and e-bikes) no longer require import approval.

In Council's view, this reform has inadvertently created a regulatory gap. The removal of mandatory scrutiny by Australian Border Force has enabled the importation of high-powered, non-compliant devices. These are now entering the market as seemingly “legal” e-bikes or e-scooters, without appropriate classification or oversight.

Council supports calls from the Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) and other stakeholders for a reconsideration of the 2021 Determination, including:

- Reinstating import controls or mandatory checks on non-road vehicle devices;
- Requiring basic certification to demonstrate compliance with Australian safety and power standards before point of sale.

Without national alignment on importation and classification, state and local governments will continue to struggle to manage unsafe or illegal devices once they are already in circulation.

2. Stricter Helmet Enforcement and Consistent Messaging

(Relevant to Terms of Reference 2, 5 & 7)

Despite legal obligations in Queensland for riders of e-scooters and e-bikes to wear helmets, compliance remains low - particularly among younger users and recreational riders. In the Cairns region, Council officers and community members have observed widespread helmet non-compliance, often in high-traffic public areas such as the Cairns Esplanade and around major school corridors.

To improve safety outcomes and reinforce public confidence, Council recommends a multi-pronged approach:

- Visible enforcement patrols in known hotspots, undertaken in partnership with Queensland Police or authorised officers;
- Clear and consistent education campaigns, promoted through schools, social media, retailers, and tourism channels;
- Policy mechanisms to encourage helmet sales alongside e-mobility purchases, ensuring riders are equipped from the start;
- A review of the current fine structure, especially for youth riders, to explore more educative or restorative enforcement models that balance behaviour change with accountability.

Council strongly supports embedding helmet safety into the broader narrative of personal responsibility and rider education - especially as these devices become more integrated into daily life and transport habits.

3. Improved Oversight of Device Use by Students and School-Aged Riders

(Relevant to Terms of Reference 2, 5 & 7)

E-scooter and e-bike usage among school-aged children is increasingly common in Cairns. Many students use these devices to travel to and from school or for after-school recreation. However, Council is aware of growing reports of unsafe or illegal behaviour, including riding on roads without helmets, carrying passengers, or operating non-compliant devices that exceed legal speed or power limits.

Council is not aware of current clear guidance from education authorities or transport regulators on how schools should manage or communicate expectations around e-mobility device use to their students.

Council believes more structured oversight is required in this area to ensure student riders are using these devices safely and legally. Key suggestions include:

- The development of a coordinated approach between the Department of Education and Queensland Police to develop shared guidance on acceptable use of e-mobility devices, including:
 - Minimum age and helmet requirements;
 - Prohibited devices (e.g. those that exceed speed thresholds or are illegally modified);
 - Storage and parking guidelines on or near school grounds.
- Active travel education programs tailored to students, highlighting the rules of use, consequences of unsafe riding, and the broader impact on pedestrian safety. These could build on existing road safety education delivered in schools.
- Schools could also work with local police to run occasional awareness or periodic compliance and education visits by police at drop-off and pick-up times, helping embed safer behaviours and parental awareness.

Younger users are more vulnerable to injury and less likely to understand legal obligations. Without stronger oversight and consistent messaging, unsafe practices may become embedded from a young age.

4. Investment in Public Education and Rider Awareness

(Relevant to Terms of Reference 1, 4, 7 & 8)

One of the most significant challenges facing both regulators and councils is the knowledge gap around what is legal, safe, and appropriate when it comes to using e-scooters and e-bikes. This includes confusion over:

- Where devices can and cannot be used (e.g. roads vs footpaths);
- What size, speed and power limits apply;
- Which safety equipment (helmets, lights, brakes) is mandatory;
- What modifications make a device non-compliant or illegal;
- How to dispose of old devices or batteries safely.

Cairns is a regional city with a strong tourism economy, and many visitors arrive with their own devices or hire them from private providers. Seasonal residents, grey

nomads, and international visitors may all be unaware of the laws around these devices.

Council recommends there be a consideration into a state-led communication strategy, designed to:

- Engage retailers and online sellers to provide plain-English safety and compliance information at the point of sale;
- Provide easy-to-understand materials in tourism offices, retail outlets, libraries, and schools;
- Launch statewide campaigns using social media, roadside signage, and public space installations to reinforce safe riding behaviour;
- Use of digital platforms and QR codes to direct riders to a simple, centralised information hub;
- Target messaging to priority audiences – including youth, parents, renters in high-density housing, and visitors.

A well-informed user base will not only reduce dangerous behaviour but also ease the burden on enforcement officers and build public acceptance of e-mobility as a viable transport option.

5. Risk of Fire and Battery Safety in Private Ownership

(Relevant to Terms of Reference 3)

There is increasing national and international concern around the fire risks associated with lithium-ion batteries used in e-scooters and e-bikes. Devices that are poorly manufactured, second-hand, or modified are understood to be particularly at risk of overheating during charging.

In multi-dwelling buildings or high-traffic tourism accommodations, these risks are amplified. Additionally, Council is not aware of any uniform standard or inspection requirement for second-hand or imported e-mobility batteries, making the risk difficult to quantify and manage.

Council recommends:

- A review of battery and charging safety standards, with consideration of Australian certification requirements for e-mobility devices and batteries;
- Public education around safe charging and storage practices;
- Consideration of e-waste pathways for end-of-life devices and batteries to support safe and legal disposal.

Proactive guidance and risk management in this space will help avoid the types of high-profile incidents that have already occurred in other jurisdictions and reinforce user trust in safe device ownership.

Conclusion

Cairns Regional Council is committed to supporting safe, sustainable, and well-regulated transport options. While shared device schemes do not currently operating on Council-controlled land in our region (only through private arrangements), private e-mobility device usage is on the rise and presents clear challenges for safety, compliance, and education.

Council encourages the Committee to consider:

- Closing the national regulatory gap created by changes to importation approvals;
- Strengthening helmet enforcement and awareness campaigns;
- Providing better guidance and oversight of youth riders;
- Investing in statewide education initiatives that reflect the reality of device use in regional and tourism-heavy communities; and
- Recognising battery risk as an emerging public safety issue requiring attention.

Council welcomes future collaboration with state agencies, education providers, and enforcement authorities to develop shared guidance that improves safety outcomes for all users of e-mobility devices in Queensland.