

NORTHERN PRIDE RUGBY LEAGUE LTD
ABN 74 155 633 903



Moore Family Sports House Barlow Park, 251-269 Severin Street, Parramatta Park



(07) 4046 0500



admin@northernpride.com.au



PO Box 5, Westcourt QLD 4870



www.northernpride.com.au

PRIDE ANNOUNCE COWBOYS INVESTMENT

Kenfrost Homes Northern Pride secures long-term future through landmark partnership with North Queensland Cowboys

Kenfrost Homes Northern Pride Rugby League Club has announced a landmark strategic partnership with the North Queensland Toyota Cowboys. The new operating model will secure the Cairns-based club's long-term financial and organisational future. It will also protect the Northern Pride's vital role in Far North Queensland rugby league and strengthen pathways connecting local players, coaches and communities to the game's highest levels.

From 1 November 2026, the North Queensland Cowboys will take on a greater governance and operational role at the Northern Pride. Representatives of the Cowboys will join a restructured five-member Board, while the club will receive increased resourcing, financial security and administrative support. This is a Northern Pride decision, made strategically, responsibly and from a position of strength.

Northern Pride Chair Kym McPhee-Smith said the Board had approached the decision with a clear responsibility to protect the identity, culture and foundations that have made the Northern Pride such an important part of Far North Queensland.

"The Northern Pride is financially and organisationally strong because of the loyalty of our members, sponsors and community. However, the operating landscape for Queensland Cup clubs continues to evolve. Our responsibility as a Board was to secure the club's future on our own terms, rather than allow that changing landscape to make the decision for us."

"Our focus throughout this process was on what best protects the Northern Pride people, our pathways, our history and our identity, while giving the club the security and support to keep growing. We believe this partnership achieves exactly that."

Under the new model, the Cowboys will hold three seats on the restructured five-member Board. The Northern Pride will nominate the remaining two members. Ms McPhee-Smith will continue as Chair, providing leadership continuity and a strong Northern Pride voice at the Board table.

Garreth Smith, who has led the club as CEO, announced earlier this year that he would leave the Northern Pride. He will continue to lead the club through the transition until his departure on 31 October.

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"This is a really proud moment for the Northern Pride. This decision recognises the strength of the club we have built, the people who have contributed to it, and the role the Pride plays across Far North Queensland. We are not walking away from what makes the Northern Pride special, we are protecting it and creating the conditions for it to become even stronger," Smith said.

Beyond the boardroom, members, supporters and the broader community will notice little change. The Northern Pride will remain headquartered in Cairns and will retain its existing logo and playing colours. Day-to-day operations will also continue largely as they do today. Hostplus Cup Head Coach Sam Williams and BMD Premiership Head Coach and Pathways Manager Colin Wilkie will continue in their roles.

All current staff, players and volunteers will retain their positions. The football relationship between the two clubs will continue under the existing Affiliation Agreement, which runs through to 2028.

The partnership was welcomed by North Queensland Toyota Cowboys Chief Executive Officer, Micheal Luck, who said the investment reflected the Cowboys' long-standing commitment to Far North Queensland.

"The Northern Pride has built something very special in Far North Queensland, and our commitment is to support and strengthen that foundation for the long term," Mr Luck said. "Far North Queensland has always been an incredibly important part of the Cowboys family, the region has produced more players to wear the North Queensland Cowboys jersey than any other area within our footprint, and the connection between our club and the communities of Cairns, the Cape and Torres Strait runs deep."

Together, the two clubs agree that the partnership will strengthen the pathway for players, coaches and administrators from Far North Queensland. That pathway extends from local FNQRL clubs through Northern Pride's Hostplus Cup and BMD Premiership programs, and ultimately to the NRL and NRLW.

"The Northern Pride is not making this change because it is being forced to. We are making it because we believe it is the right strategic decision for the next chapter of this club," Ms McPhee-Smith said. "We can look back with enormous pride at what the Northern Pride has achieved, and we can look forward with confidence, knowing that the things that matter most will remain at the heart of the club."

The Northern Pride Board thanks the club's members, players, staff, volunteers, sponsors, supporters and community partners for their continued belief in the club. The Board looks forward to sharing further details with stakeholders as the transition progresses towards 1 November.

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