

Northern Rivers

Regional Economic Development Strategy 2018 - 2022

Vision

*A region of diverse communities,
environments and specialisations,
working together to improve its
places, produce and products.*



Preface

The NSW Government has assisted local councils and their communities to develop 37 Regional Economic Development Strategies across regional NSW. Each strategy is designed around one or more local government areas that form a functional economic region as defined by economic data and community input. While the strategies have been developed using consistent methodology, each is a product of detailed data analysis and local community consultation to ensure ownership through a 'bottom-up' process: it sets out a vision for the region, the strategies, and early stage actions required to achieve the vision.

Regional Economic Development Strategies articulate a framework for identifying actions crucial to achieving the regional vision. Projects listed within this Strategy should therefore be viewed as example projects that have emerged from the initial application of the framework. Adoption of these projects would be subject to further evaluative processes.

The power of the Strategy is its ability to be used on an ongoing basis to identify additional high value projects over time. By complementing existing funding processes, these strategies present new opportunities to strengthen and increase investment in regional development across NSW.

Importantly, the Strategy should be viewed as the first stage of a process that will assist those with an interest in the economic development of the Region, particularly councils, communities and local businesses, in planning their future economic activities. It provides a vehicle for engaging the community in a 'conversation' about regional needs and priorities, assists in bringing together key stakeholders and mobilising resources, and in so doing, can facilitate faster access to dedicated NSW Government funding, such as the Growing Local Economies Fund, as well helping to capitalise upon other economic opportunities.

This Strategy, prepared by Corview on behalf of the Region, was formed in collaboration with Ballina Shire, Byron Shire, Kyogle Council, Lismore City Council, Richmond Valley Council, key stakeholders and the broader regional community, which benefited from economic-analytical assistance from the NSW Government's Centre for Economic and Regional Development (CERD).

It is presented in two documents:

- **Northern Rivers Regional Economic Development Strategy 2018 - 2022 (this document)** which allows the reader to quickly and easily determine key content, while the **Northern Rivers Regional Economic Development Strategy 2018 - 2022 – Supporting Analysis** details the Strategy methodology, evidence and the strategy development process.

For further information about the Regional Economic Development Strategies Program please contact CERD on (02) 6391 3025 or CERD@dpc.nsw.gov.au





Introduction

The **Northern Rivers Regional Economic Development Strategy 2018-2022** (the Strategy) has been developed to facilitate economic growth across the Northern Rivers (the Region), a widely diversified lifestyle, production and creative services hub.

Past strategies have been based on simple administrative areas – like council boundaries or regional groupings of Councils. While the objective of this Strategy is similar to previous local strategies – to support economic development for social advancement across the community – it takes a new and distinctive approach to strategic economic planning, by using the concept of a Functional Economic Region (FER).

In this Strategy, the Ballina Shire, Byron Shire, Kyogle Council, Lismore City Council, Richmond Valley Council form the Northern Rivers FER (the Region) because of the economic linkages they share across their administrative boundaries. People who work in the Region typically live in the Region, with only 10 per cent of the resident workforce traveling to another region for work.

Fundamental to this approach are the distinctive and unique strengths of the Region. Economic principles suggest unique strengths provide regions with sustainable economic advantages, and so they should be points of focus for regional development policy.

The Northern Rivers' unique strengths were identified through review of:

- the Region today – considering both the Region and its localities for their demographics, infrastructure, institutions and economic structure and opportunities

- endowments - key features of the natural environment, built environment, geography and society specific to the Region or location
- specialisations - the relative composition of resources and activity that lend the Region an advantage in certain economic activities
- stakeholder consultation – ‘on the ground’ feedback on local economic conditions and forward-looking assessments of opportunities, issues, gaps and risks and initiatives to help shape the future.

The Strategy also takes into account regional risks and how they might be addressed.

In this Strategy, the Northern Rivers is shown to have an exceptionally diverse economy. Its key endowments include its coastal, riverine and hinterland amenity; access to South East Queensland; and generally excellent quality infrastructure.

These endowments underpin the attractiveness of the Region to both people and businesses. Areas of specialisation span a multitude of industry sectors, such as Tourism, Agriculture, Food Manufacturing, Health, Education, Retail and a range of professional and business enabling services.

Local consultation revealed an increasing trend in the number of ‘creative professionals’ (in fields like scientific research, design, information media, arts, architecture, advertising, consulting and management) living in the Region, which increases the innovative potential of its businesses and connects them with expertise found in major capital cities.

These strengths suggest strategic imperatives to:

1. develop its Engines of Growth through better connections to external markets
2. grow tourism activity across the Region consistent with the directions of the North Coast Destination Management Plan
3. foster the development of emerging industries and specialisations, such as Creative Professionals
4. continue to grow the population and internal markets like health, education and retail
5. develop the services precincts of the Region by extending current models of collaboration and partnership.

This Strategy began with its guiding vision for the Region’s future.

Next we establish the composition and defining economic characteristics and strengths of the Region today.

Finally, the strategic imperatives suggested by the analysis and stakeholder feedback are established, supported by detailed strategies and actions against the implementation themes.

This Strategy is the culmination of collaboration between the councils of the Region, their respective communities and the NSW Government’s CERD.

Background

The Northern Rivers is made up of five councils, spanning from a western agricultural hinterland (Kyogle and Richmond Valley, Casino), through its services hub (Lismore) to coastal communities (Byron, Ballina and some easterly sections of the Richmond Valley).

Two other LGA's, Tweed Shire and Clarence Valley, are often also part of a broader Northern Rivers' administrative grouping, but have been identified as separate regions for economic development purposes.

The Northern Rivers is the home of the Bundjalung Nation, its first people, and offers a wide diversity of environments from beaches, rainforests, rivers and hinterland.

Home to just over 150,000 people, the Region lies 650 kilometres north of Sydney, and 135 kilometres south of Brisbane.

The Region's economic beginnings lie in the timber trade. Over time, development has seen expansion into agriculture and tourism, which has led to growth in population and business services.

The Region lies at the crossroads of key transport links connecting NSW and Queensland. Its major road links are the Pacific Highway, Bruxner Highway and Summerland Way.





Ballina acts as the Region's main airport with daily services to Newcastle, Melbourne and Sydney. Lismore Airport provides services to Sydney and Grafton.

While beyond the Region, the Gold Coast International Airport provides an important alternative for connections to domestic and overseas markets.



Richmond
Valley
Council

Regional Dashboard – 2016 Census

		Ballina	Byron	Lismore	Kyogle	Richmond Valley
	Estimated 2016 residential population	42,626	32,790	44,054	9,072	23,164
	Population growth rate between 2001 and 2016	+11.4%	+8.4%	+3.6%	-2.4%	+10.9%
	Unemployment rate 2016	5.9%	6.5%	7.8%	8.7%	7.7%
	Personal weekly median income 2016	\$601	\$596	\$550	\$460	\$491
	Top three industries by employment 2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Health Care and Social Assistance 2. Retail Trade 3. Education and Training 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Health Care and Social Assistance 2. Accommodation and Food 3. Retail Trade 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Health Care and Social Assistance 2. Retail Trade 3. Education and Training 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agriculture 2. Health Care and Social Assistance 3. Retail Trade 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Manufacturing 2. Health Care and Social Assistance 3. Retail Trade



Snapshot of Population, Economy, Industry and Opportunity

Production & Income by Sector

The figure on the next page presents a key ‘roadmap’ to understanding economic opportunity in the Region. It reflects the income split between workers and businesses in each sector (blue and orange bars) and how much each industry contributes to regional production (the stacked height of the bars).

The figure shows the Northern Rivers economy is widely diversified. Six industries stand out, together making up more than 50 per cent of the economy. Wages and salaries account for about two-thirds of the Region’s income. Eight sectors provide employee income of about \$200 million or more.

Business income in the Northern Rivers is concentrated in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, Construction, Financial and Insurance Services, Manufacturing and Retail Trade. Together, these sectors make up more than half of the Northern Rivers’ business income.

In analysing the Region’s economic features, it can also be useful to group similar industries together to allow review and comparison of some of their common underpinning economic drivers. One useful classification of activities is:

- “Engines of Growth” - activities linked to external markets and opportunities beyond the bounds of the Region, like tourism, agriculture and manufacturing
- “Enabling Industries” - markets within the Region providing key support services to Engines of Growth businesses, like utilities , administrative support services and creative professionals
- “Population Serving Industries” - markets serving the people and communities of the Region, including activities like health, education and retail.

Relative to the structure of NSW’s regional economy overall, output and employment in the Northern Rivers is significantly overrepresented in health care, education, utilities, tourism related activities like accommodation and property services, construction and administrative and support services.

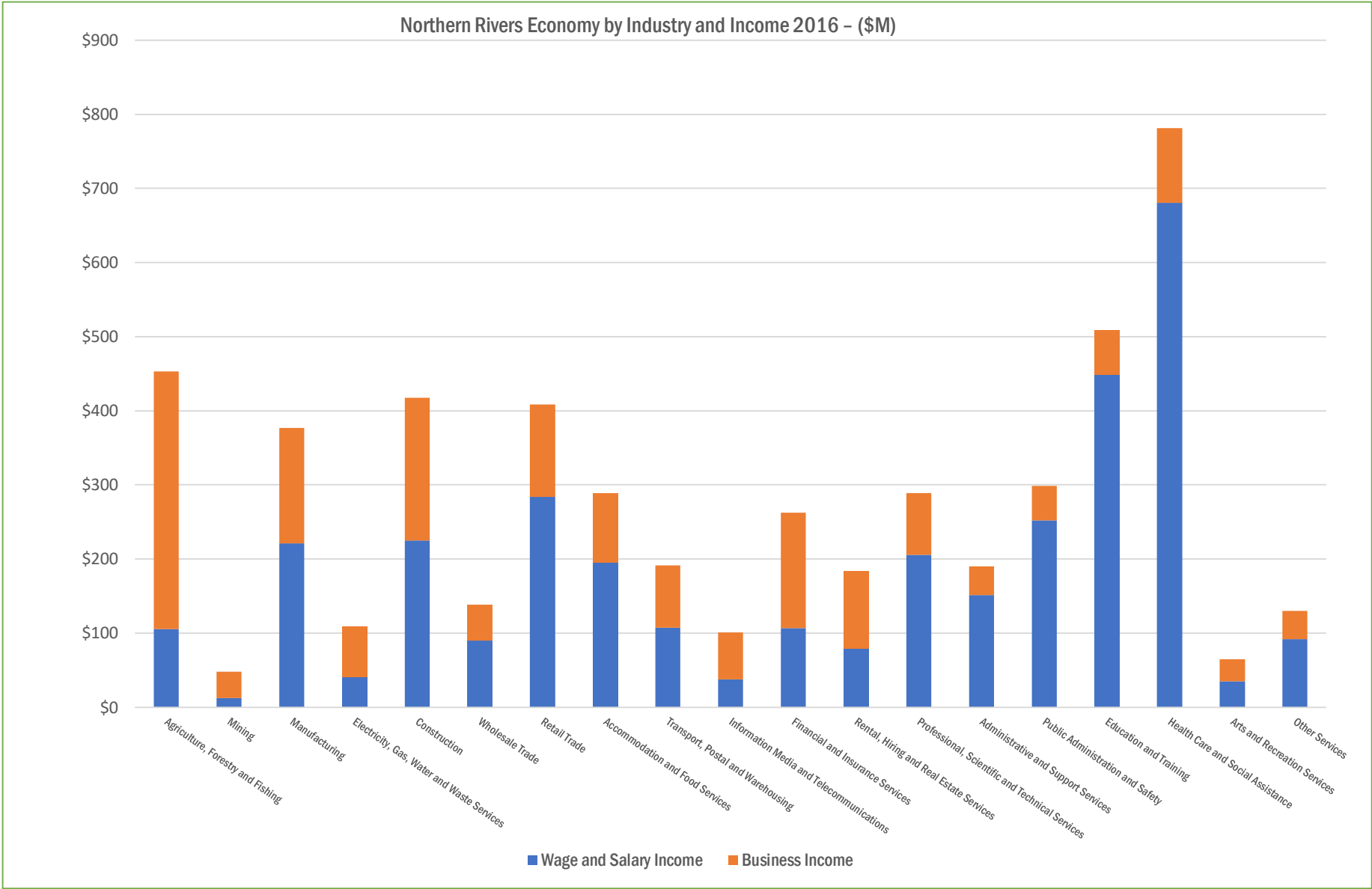
In reflecting on the largest, most productive sectors, it is notable that the ‘top six’ include two Engines of Growth, Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing and Manufacturing. This demonstrates that while the Region’s specialisations are most clearly oriented towards its internal markets, this is supported by traditional ‘Engines of Growth’ activities.

The CERD has also produced an Input Output table for the Northern Rivers regional economy. The CERD analysis shows the Region is a net importer, with exports estimated at \$1,949 million and imports estimated at \$2,438 million.

The Northern Rivers’ leading export industries are Manufacturing, Accommodation & Food Services (Tourism) and Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing. Construction and Manufacturing are the leading industry sources of demand for imports for production processes.

These sources of strength reflect a large, sophisticated economy, with extensive population and visitor-facing advantages, supporting the attractiveness of the Region. Inward migration, sustained over long periods of time, have grown the Northern Rivers’ internal, community-focused markets and increased labour supply and the potential for specialisation across a range of activities.

Population, Economy, Industry and Opportunity Snapshot



Source: Cadence Economics, www.cadenceeconomics.com.au



Population Profile

The Northern Rivers has a very large population base relative to other NSW regions. The scale of population means that the internal markets of the Region tend to be larger, deeper and more diversified than is typical for regional NSW.

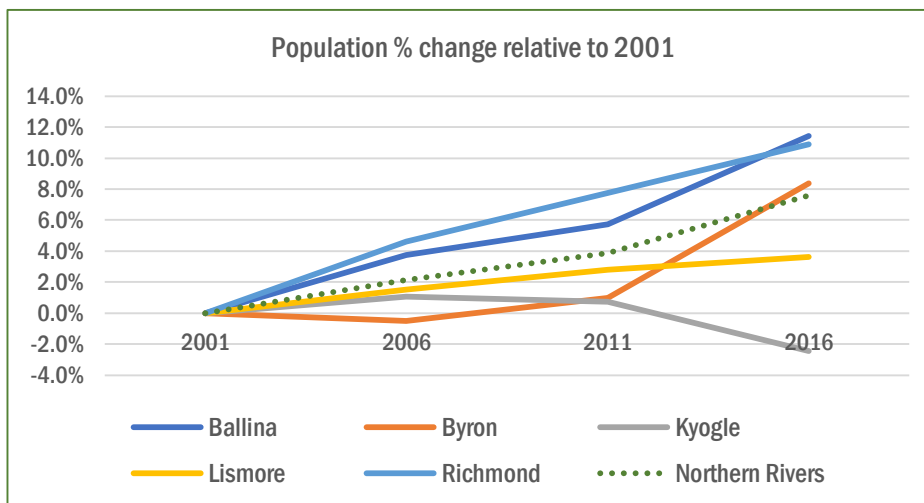
The composition of the Region's demographic profile from the 2016 Census reflects a relatively high number of dependents in the Northern Rivers compared to the NSW community. An older, more dependent profile implies greater demands on the local working age population relative to NSW as a whole, especially in providing late-in-life services like health.

The Northern Rivers' prospects for growth are underpinned by its ongoing success in attracting new residents. The Region's population increased by 8 per cent between 2001 and 2016, below the rates of population growth for NSW and regional NSW. Most locations in the Region have seen growth, with the highest rates in Ballina and Richmond Valley.

More than 14 per cent of the Northern Rivers' 2016 residents lived elsewhere five years previously, reflecting substantial migration into the Region over time. Demographic analysis shows the Northern Rivers is particularly successful in attracting residents from Victoria, Queensland and overseas.

Most people moving into the Region are of young or prime working age – a total of more than 11,500 people in this category in the five years to 2016. However, a significant share of new arrivals are of late working age or older, implying rising demand for age-related services.

	Northern Rivers	NSW	Regional NSW
Age Dependency Ratio (>65 / 15 64)	33.6%	25%	34.8%
Youth Dependency Ratio (<15 / 15 64)	28.1%	28.4%	28.4%
Dependency Ratio	61.7%	53.4%	63.2%
Proportion of Young Persons (<15/all)	17.4%	18.5%	18.5%
Proportion of Old Persons (>65/all)	20.8%	16.3%	21.1%
Median Age 2016	44.5	38	42.5



5 Year Migration by Age Group for North Coast Regions (% of total)

Location	Youth	Young & Prime Working Age	Late Working Age & Older
Northern Rivers	2,836 (13.6%)	11,573 (55.7%)	6,340 (30.5%)
Hastings Macleay	2,444 (14.0%)	7,966 (45.6%)	7,045 (40.4%)
Coffs Coast	2,333 (16.1%)	8,005 (55.1%)	4,193 (28.8%)
Tweed Shire	2,389 (13.1%)	8,634 (47.2%)	7,217 (39.5%)
Clarence Valley	1,009 (13.8%)	3,198 (43.8%)	3,085 (42.3%)
Nambucca Shire	456 (13.5%)	1,522 (45.0%)	1,409 (41.7%)

Source: 2016 Census; Corview analysis.

Population Projections

Demographic projections imply the Northern Rivers will sustain its social, environmental and economic attractiveness over time.

The NSW Department of Planning and Environment estimates that by 2036, the Northern Rivers' population will be around 171,000 people, or more than 15 per cent above 2016 levels.

The median age group is projected to increase to 45-49 over time. This suggests Northern Rivers can expect to cater to older demographics in its population and labour force over time.

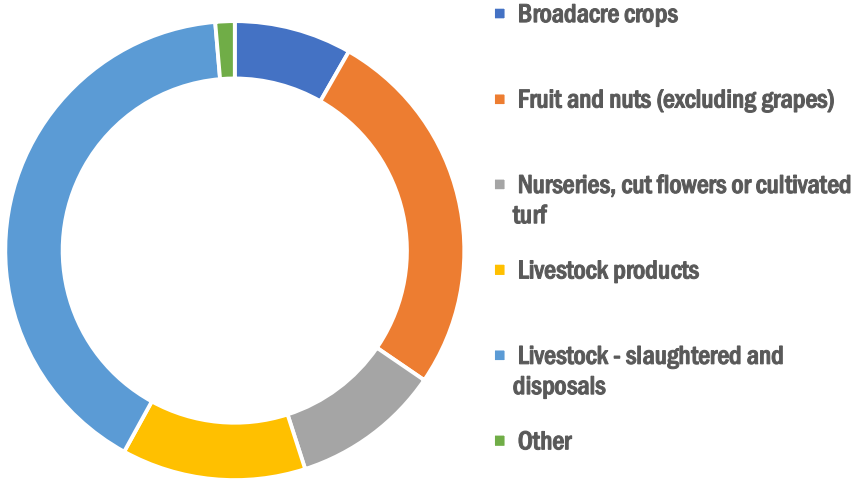
These forecasts are based on past migration and population patterns, and do not directly account for policies, opportunities or constraints that could change the rate of population growth realised in the Region over time.

Given the economic diversity that large and sophisticated markets have lent to the Region, key points of focus for economic development and this Strategy will be to ensure that factors impeding investment are addressed, and enabling investment measures are developed and invested in over time.



Agricultural Production

2015-16 Value of Agricultural Production



Kyogle and Casino are the Northern Rivers' agricultural hubs

There is significant agricultural activity across the Region. Kyogle and Casino are the primary hubs, focused on cattle, milk and poultry (inland) and cane growing around Evans Head.

The Ballina and Lismore regions have similar strengths in macadamia and sugar cane production, as well as distinctions (nurseries in Ballina; milk, cattle and poultry production in Lismore). While not as great as elsewhere, Byron Shire still produces significant macadamia, nursery, cattle and milk output.

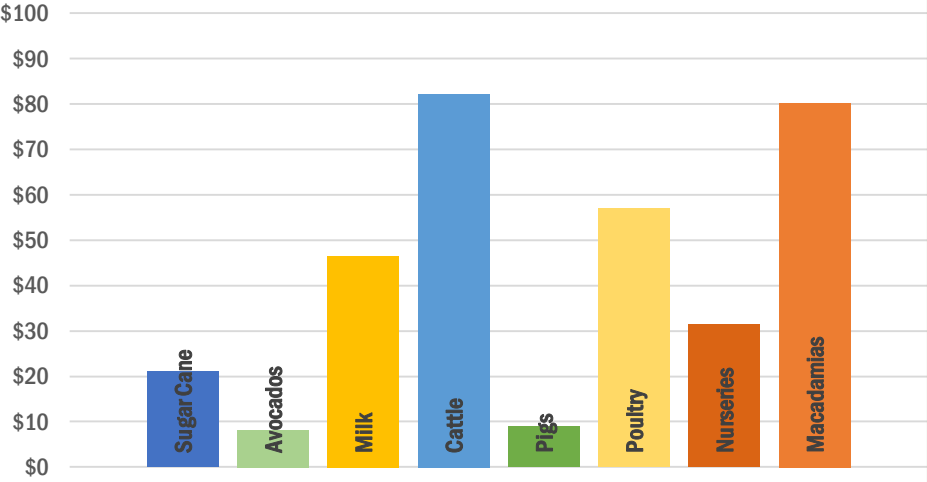
Cattle, macadamias, poultry and milk are the Northern Rivers' leading commodities

54 per cent of production related to livestock and livestock products.

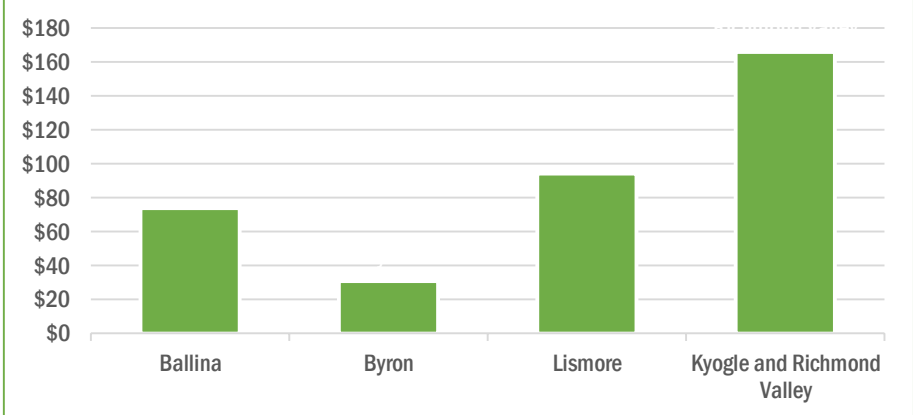
Cattle is the top commodity of the Northern Rivers, with a 2015-16 production value of \$82 million, followed by macadamias (\$80 million), poultry (\$57 million) and milk (\$47 million).

Caution should be exercised in drawing conclusions from this data, taking into account climatic and cropping variations of the given year.

2015-16 - Major Commodities (\$M)



2015-16 Agricultural Production by Location (\$M)



Data source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Value of Agricultural Commodities Produced 2015-16 (7503.0) Note the available data does not precisely match LGA boundaries. The available SA2 boundaries have been used to match LGA boundaries to the extent possible.



Endowments

Endowments are strengths that a regional economy possesses and can capitalise on. Economic principles suggest that endowments play a key role in the economic development of regions. The CERD in its Regional Economic Growth Enablers Report (2017) found that:

the future of individual regional economies is inexorably linked to their natural endowments and attempts to retain or establish industries without an underpinning endowment are unlikely to succeed.

A region seeking to encourage economic development should therefore focus on factors that enable the growth of endowment-based industries, as well as building local leadership and institutional capacity and capabilities to better enable businesses and public agencies to capitalise on the opportunities a region's endowments present. Endowments can lead to opportunities from which commercial and industrial interests may leverage and develop specialisations.

Physical or geographic endowments

Riverine and hinterland amenity – the amenity of the Richmond and Wilsons rivers and hinterland areas are a prime source of appeal attracting visitors and potential residents to the Region.

Coastal amenity – Byron Bay, Ballina and surrounds showcase the coastal offerings that the Northern Rivers are famous for.

Proximity to South East Queensland – the Northern Rivers can easily access the growing markets and opportunities over the border in South East Queensland. About 3.5 million people call South East Queensland home today, projected to rise to 5.3 million over the next 25 years.

Arable land – soils and climate provide the Region with distinct advantages in producing high value agricultural products.

Built endowments

Ballina Airport – Ballina Airport provides an enviable level of air service among regional centres, with plentiful connections to major metropolitan markets.

Pacific Highway – the Pacific Highway serves as the Northern Rivers' principal source of connectivity to major metropolitan markets and gateways.

Lismore Base Hospital – the Level 5 Hospital provides the major referral hospital for the Region, incorporating allied health services.

North Coast Rail Line – the North Coast Railway is the Region's only rail link offering freight and passenger movements to domestic markets.

Bruxner Highway – The Bruxner Highway provides the key source of east-west connectivity within the Region and access to and from markets further inland.

Gold Coast Airport and Precinct – While beyond the boundaries of the Region itself, an international standard airport an hour or so up the Pacific Highway offers the Northern Rivers further connections to major metropolitan markets, as well as into Asia.

Summerland Way – the Summerland Way is the key source of north-south linkage in the Western region, essential to integrating much of Kyogle's LGA. Summerland Way also provides an alternative connection to the Pacific Highway for connecting to other regions and markets.

Private capital equipment – a range of private investments across different sectors including Agriculture, Accommodation, Tourism and Manufacturing support considerable productivity within the Region.



Endowments

The Northern Rivers' endowments support a large, sophisticated Region with an enviable balance of diverse economic opportunities and natural and cultural environments. That balance is proven to be of great appeal to a wide range of people, as reflected both in the profile of visitors to the Region and also its sources of inward migration, drawing heavily from across the states and from overseas. The opportunities for further increases in the productive potential of these endowments will likely continue to expand over time, as its internal markets gain greater depth and further sophistication.

Nonetheless, the Northern Rivers' degree of economic success will be determined by its ability to manage key risks facing the Region. The primary risk is the potential for resource conflict between its rising diversity of stakeholders. Foremost among these is land use conflict, with examples already evident of the development of traditional industries compromised by concerns and consequences on newer activities and community members.

There are also conflicts relating to the use transport networks, with network constraints in other areas forcing integration of freight and commuter traffic on the Bruxner Highway. Additionally, while the councils of the Region demonstrate laudable degrees of partnership and teamwork to identify regional risks, their constituencies are very distinct in some respects, and their current unified institutional strength could easily diminish over time through parochialism.

Institutional endowments

Local Councils – the local councils organise themselves very effectively and advocate for their communities well.

Clean, Green, Organic Branding – the Region's Clean, Green, Organic Branding – reflecting the quality and allure of the natural environment as well as its produce – is a key source of ongoing strength for activities like agriculture, food and ecotourism.

Industry co-operatives and organisations – the business communities of the Northern Rivers are marked by particularly strong co-operatives and organisations. The strength and quality of advocacy within the Region is notable, especially through a “co-op of co-ops”, the Cooperatives Alliance.

Southern Cross University – the university is a key attractor of activity to the Region and advocates its merits and potential to outsiders.

Business Incubators and Facilitators – a range of business incubators and facilitators within the Region help generate prosperity and jobs by assisting existing businesses to overcome challenges and grow and while also aiding entrepreneurs in creating new businesses that put their innovative ideas into action.

Northern Rivers Joint Organisation of Councils – provides the Northern Rivers with a key institutional linkage between Councils. The member councils are Ballina, Byron, Kyogle, Lismore, Richmond Valley and Tweed,

State Government Agencies – State agencies play a number of key roles in the Region: as employers; as providers of key services; as leaders and facilitators; as landholders of land that may merit re-purposing; and as regulators of private sector activities.

Balance of Lifestyle, Social, Environmental and Economic Opportunities – the Northern Rivers offers, and is known for, its unique mix of lifestyle and economic opportunities, making it an appealing place to live, work and play in coastal, riverine or hinterland settings. The quality of access to major markets allows residents very broad choices in combining lifestyle with work.

Regional Development Australia Northern Rivers – RDA Northern Rivers serves as a very effective economic development strategist and facilitator of economic development. The RDA's linkages to councils, businesses and industry co-operatives and organisations across the Northern Rivers are enhanced through its role as the Secretariat of Northern Rivers Joint Organisation of Councils.

Cultural & Indigenous Heritage – the Northern Rivers has rich sources of mythology and cultural heritage. This includes the Richmond Valley, home to the origins of the Bundjalung Nation, reflected in the story of the Three Brothers, Mamoonth, Yarbirri and Birrung, and their families.



Specialisations

A simple form of analysis that can be used to gain an understanding of a region's competitive advantages is the Location Quotient (LQ) which measures the employment concentration in industry sectors within a regional economy, compared with the same sectors across NSW. The higher the LQ, the more specialised a region is in that industry relative to the rest of NSW. For the purpose of this analysis, specialisations as defined by LQs, are in turn used as a proxy measure for those sectors and industries that represent a region's true competitive advantages.*

Importantly, while LQs are used in this document for that purpose, they are only a partial measure of those competitive advantages. Hence, they have been considered alongside additional qualitative evaluations and data analysis, such as Input-Output analysis, to arrive at the findings for the Region's strategies.

The bubble chart selected industries in the regional economy in 2016, where:

- Industries with a larger 'bubble' employed more people
- Industries further above the horizontal line are more specialised when compared to NSW (LQ greater than 1.25), industries below the line are less specialised when compared to NSW
- Industries to the right of the vertical line grew faster between 2011 and 2016 than comparable industries across NSW; industries to the left grew more slowly. This value is calculated as the Region's industry growth rate less than the NSW growth rate for that industry and is expressed in percentage points (ppts).

Compared to general trends for NSW, the largest localised positive employment changes were in activities like Manufacturing; Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing; Utilities and Transport Postal and Warehousing. These changes suggest the strongest gains in relative terms relate to the Region's Engines of Growth.

The lowest employment growth related to Enabling Industries like Property Services, Information Technology and Financial Services.

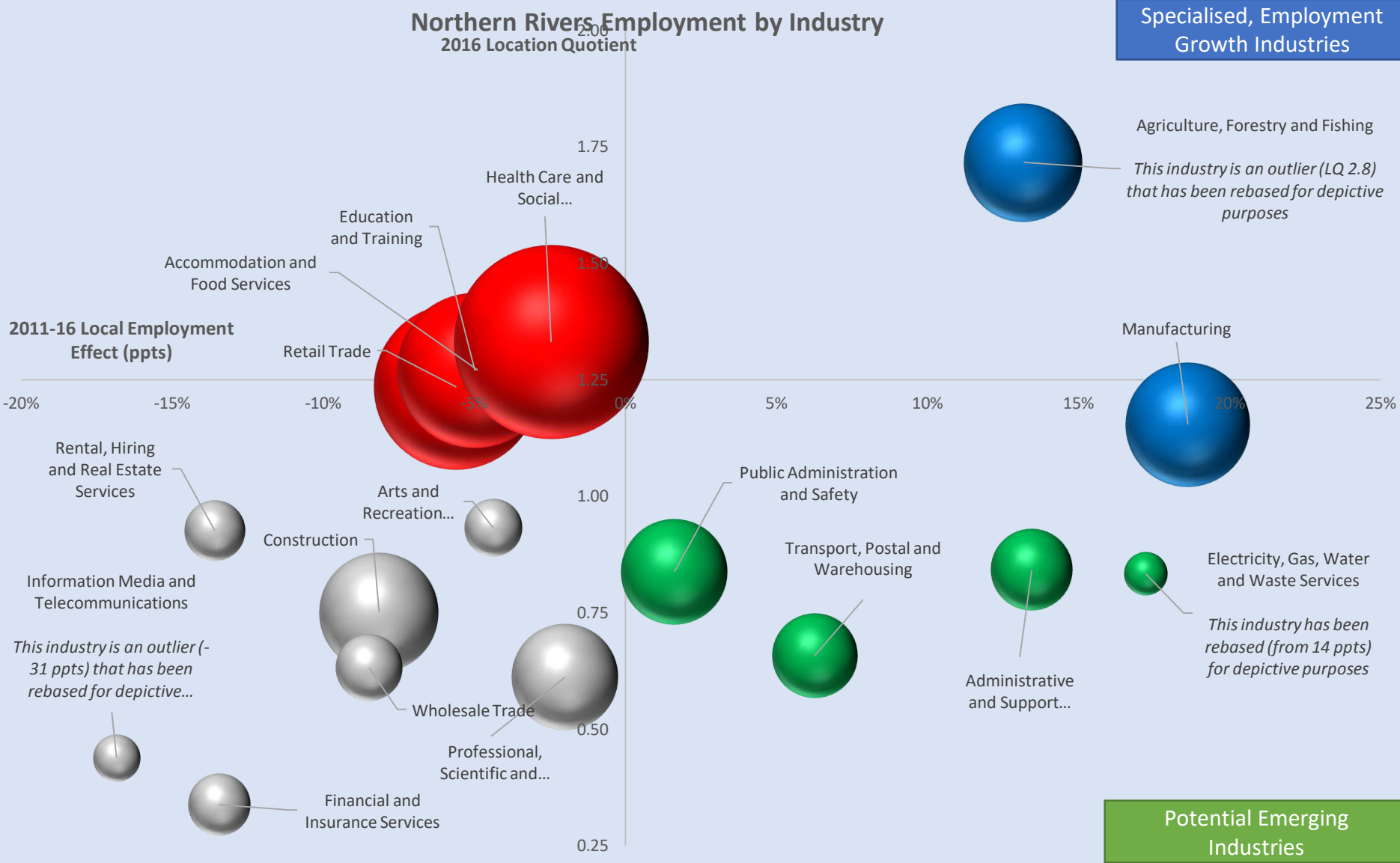
*A region's competitive advantage for an industry includes its ability to produce goods and services at a lower cost or differentiate its products from other regions, along with access to external factors which enhance business and operations/minimize risk (Stimson, Stough and Roberts, 2006).





Specialisations and Shifts in Employment Over Time

Northern Rivers Employment by Industry
2016 Location Quotient





Endowments and Specialisations

The primary industry specialisations of the Northern Rivers across the 'Engines of Growth', 'Enabling Industries' and 'Population Serving Industries' groupings are summarised below.

Among the **'Engines of Growth'**, the Region's primary specialisations are in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, Manufacturing and Accommodation and Food Services (Tourism).

Key sub-industry specialisations include:

1. Sheep, Beef Cattle and Grain Farming
2. Fruit and Tree Nut Growing, Poultry Farming
3. Food Product Manufacturing
4. Wood product Manufacturing
5. Textile, Leather, Clothing and Footwear manufacturing
6. Log Sawmilling and Timber Dressing
7. Accommodation
8. Cafes and Restaurants
9. Pubs, Taverns, Bars

The Region's primary **'Enabling Industries'** are in; Transport, Postal and Warehousing, Administrative and Support Services, Professional, Scientific and Technical Services, Rental Hiring and Real Estate Services and Information Media and Telecommunications.

If the trend of creative professionals moving to the Region continues, creative industries could transition from being an Enabling Industry to an Engine of Growth.

Key sub-industry specialisations include:

1. Road Transport
2. Postal Courier Pick-up and Delivery Services
3. Building Cleaning, Pest Control and Gardening Services
4. Administrative Services
5. Legal and Accounting Services Real Estate Services and Property Operators
6. Architectural, Engineering and Technical Services
7. Creative and Performing Art Activities
8. Software and Print Publishing

Among **'Population Serving Industries'**, the Northern Rivers primary specialisations are in Health Care and Social Assistance, Education and Training, Retail Trade and Public Administration Safety.

Key sub-industry specialisations include:

1. Medical and Other Health Care Services
2. Social Assistance Services
3. Residential Care Services
4. Preschool and School Education
5. Tertiary Education
6. Supermarkets, Department Stores, Motor Dealerships, Fuel, Pharmaceutical & Electronic Goods Retailing
7. Public Administration
8. Residential Construction

Risks

Through consultation, the community contributed to the Strategy development process, including identifying issues today that may be central to the economic future. This included a range of risks that may impede the Northern Rivers from achieving its economic potential.

Addressing these risks is essential to realising this Strategy's economic Vision for the Region.

Connectivity risks:

- Despite a high standard of built infrastructure, some poorer quality transport links constrain access to markets, with freight having to travel along congested commuter routes.
- There is a perception that there is insufficient data on freight movements to properly inform transport investment decisions.
- Unreliable or limited digital coverage, capacity and reliability across the Region impedes the adoption of technology and hampers the development of emerging professional services industries.
- A lack of transport services means the communities, precincts and places of the Region are less integrated and productive than they should be.
- Road constraints damage local productivity and limit opportunities to distribute Byron visitors across the Region.

Resources risks:

- Ongoing inward migration increases conflict between 'tree-changers' and traditional agricultural, tourism and industrial land uses.
- Limited scale of some agricultural properties inhibits productivity.
- Labour shortages inhibit the degree to which the Region realises the benefits of growing demand for population services like the NDIS.
- High cost and limited reliability of energy constrains the development of manufacturing activities.

Liveability risks:

- High cost housing hampers the rate of increase in the Region's population and internal markets.
- Cultural, sporting and social infrastructure are inadequate to attract and retain families.
- Amenity for residents and productivity for businesses is hampered by limited integration in and between services precincts.
- Limitations in the housing stock mean older people leave their communities and lose their independence earlier than necessary.
- Drug use and lack of treatment options creates negative perceptions of the Northern Rivers as a place to move to.

- Finding affordable housing and appropriate work in some parts of the region can be difficult.

New Ideas Risks:

- Heavy handed approaches to regulation unnecessarily constrain opportunities.
- Slow and unpredictable development consent outcomes increase risks and make development infeasible.
- Traditional problems with intergovernmental relations (lack of coordination and blame and cost shifting) are sustained, reducing the growth potential of the Region.

Other Risks:

- Institutional – the strong institutional administrative partnerships in place today may be eroded over time by parochialism.
- Economic – slower growth across Asia reduces the market for Northern Rivers' produce.
- Environmental and societal – population growth places pressure on the local environment.

Strategy

The five Strategy elements for the Region link directly to the opportunities presented by the Region's endowments and specialisations and also aim to address some key regional risks.

The Strategy elements were derived from an analysis of the endowments that underpin the Region's specialisations, followed by examination of current industry specialisations and emerging specialisations, identified in consultation with the community and councils.

Each element is accompanied by a set of early actions, which should be interpreted simply as example actions derived from a preliminary application of the Strategy framework. It is therefore expected that there will be other actions capable of contributing to the attainment of the Region's vision that are yet to be identified. Consequently, an action's alignment with the Strategy is the primary strategic consideration, rather than it being listed in this document, and all proposed actions will be subject to further qualitative and quantitative evaluative processes.

Northern Rivers' key specialisations lie in:

- agriculture, food manufacturing and logistics chain workers in the western hinterland
- health, human services and retail in the regional hub, Lismore
- tourism, creative professionals and traditional business enabling services in coastal areas.

The specialisations suggest some key strategic imperatives:

1. develop its Engines of Growth through better connections to external markets
2. grow tourism activity across the Region consistent with the directions of the North Coast Destination Management Plan
3. foster the development of emerging industries and specialisations, such as Creative Professionals
4. continue to grow the population and internal markets like health, education and retail
5. develop the services precincts of the Region by extending current models of collaboration and partnership.





1. Develop the ‘Engines of Growth’ through Better Connections to External Markets

Strategic Context

The Northern Rivers is home to a diverse range of agricultural and manufacturing activities making the most of its rich natural endowments, mature supply chains and extensive workforce capabilities. Sophisticated industry bodies see industry players advocate effectively for their collective interests and share knowledge and capability for the broader benefit of the Region.

A key remaining constraint on these ‘Engines of Growth’ is the quality of connections to external markets. High productivity truck configurations are not feasible on extensive sections of the Bruxner Highway and Summerland Way, and poor quality local roads in some highly productive agricultural areas. Addressing these constraints can improve the efficiency of the freight task, delineate freight and passenger movements, maximise benefits to northern NSW from Inland Rail and position the Region to make the most of the burgeoning growth in demand in national and international markets for goods and produce.

Infrastructure Priorities

Investment programs for the Bruxner and Summerland Way corridor strategies and Fixing Country Roads candidate projects

Opportunities

Actions

Candidate Projects

- | Opportunities | Actions | Candidate Projects |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the efficiency of freight movements within and beyond the Northern Rivers • Realise seamless ‘farm gate to gateway’ with supply chain connections to national global markets through a better integrated local and regional transport networks • Delineate freight and passenger movements where possible • Engage the private sector to provide industry insight when developing business cases • Improve road corridor productivity and safety. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with TfNSW to progress the Bruxner and Summerland Way corridor strategies • Develop program business cases: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for the Bruxner Highway west of Lismore • Summerland Way improvements to address b-double constraints beyond Kyogle • Work with TfNSW to identify initiatives to maximise benefits to Northern NSW from Inland Rail • Work with TfNSW and industry in reviewing regional freight forecasts to account for growth in Tabulam and other regions • Identify, cost and prioritise Fixing Country Roads ‘last mile’ candidate projects • Identify key localised congestion issues affecting regional transport and logistics routes and develop business cases for improvements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summerland Way realignment and upgrade program • Western Bruxner freight productivity program • Eastern Bruxner regional connectivity program • Kyogle Town Centre Bypass • Ballina-Byron Gateway Airport Stage Three • ‘First Mile’ / ‘Last Mile’ Fixing Country Roads Investment program • Bridge Upgrades: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hollingworth Bridge • Duplication of Ballina Bridges • North Creek Bridge • Road Upgrades: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oliver Avenue – Pineapple Road • Alternative route to Bruxner Highway • Alphadale Road • Union street – roundabout • Bruxner Highway/Ballina Road interchange at Lismore • Pacific Highway - Ballina Bypass – Cumbalum Interchange. |



2. Grow Tourism Opportunities Across the Region

Strategic Context The Northern Rivers is Northern NSW’s key tourism hub, with Byron Shire the most iconic tourist destination in the Region. The Region’s appeal to visitors is largely focused on the combination of local culture and the tremendous beauty of its natural features, with millions of visitors drawn to its beaches, hinterlands and rainforests significantly contributing to the jobs and incomes of the Region’s communities.

However, the Region’s popularity with visitors is not without costs and challenges. The quality of transport infrastructure allows visitors to enter the Region relatively easily, but constraints on local roads impede the progress of visitors and locals alike. There is also the opportunity to diversify and disperse tourism activity across the Region to diminish the costs of congestion and increase benefits through longer lengths of stay. Priority measures should include upgrading Ewingsdale Road, advancing the Ballina Marina proposal, developing nature-based tourism opportunities beyond the coastline (especially in rainforest settings), using the power of its Aboriginal mythology and culture, and capitalising on its food and agritourism opportunities.

Infrastructure Priorities Ewingsdale Road upgrade program and Ballina Marina and sand bar works.

Opportunities	Actions	Candidate Projects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide enabling infrastructure to expand tourism opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance the business case for stage 1 of the Ewingsdale Road upgrade program (Byron bypass) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ewingsdale Road upgrade program, including Byron Bay Town Centre bypass
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve road corridor productivity and safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a business case for Ballina Marina and sand bar works 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ballina Marina
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the development of whole-of-region branding for Northern Rivers products and experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate opportunities to increase whole-of-region branding and marketing of products and services • Develop tourism opportunities in the Northern Rivers, focusing on coastal and inland World-Heritage sites, food and creative industries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ballina sand bar works • Food Industry Hubs in the Northern Rivers • Northern Rivers Rail Trail • Bangalow Road (Byron) upgrade.



3. Foster the Development of Emerging Industries and Specialisations

Strategic Context

The Northern Rivers has a depth and diversity of economic activity close to being unrivalled among the regions of NSW. Recent trends suggest these advantages are growing over time, with a range of emerging industries and activities beginning to flourish in the Region, supported by a range of institutions fostering business support and development. The significant increase in the number of ‘creative professionals’ living in the Region increases the innovative potential of its businesses and connects them with expertise found in major capital cities and beyond.

The Northern Rivers can take a range of steps to better cultivate the development of its emerging industries. These include providing common use infrastructure, like an Innovation Hub, improving digital connectivity, supporting changes in land use and aligning education and training more closely with current and prospective industry needs.

Infrastructure Priorities

Byron Innovation and Entrepreneur Hub and digital infrastructure.

Opportunities

Actions

Candidate Projects

- Support the expansion and accessibility of offerings at Southern Cross University Lismore
- Provide local training courses that are responsive to local industry needs
- Facilitate the development of emerging clusters, specialisations and businesses
- Provide land use zoning and enabling infrastructure to activate land use change and allow increases in production
- Connect the people and businesses of the Region to digital networks and technologies to a first-rate standard.

- Investigate opportunities to improve regional connectivity to the SCU campus
- Develop the Byron Innovation and Entrepreneur Hub
- Advocate for an innovation, entrepreneurial and enabling industry SkillsPoint in the Northern Rivers
- Extend the influence of business incubators to support small business development across the Region
- Work closely with RDA Northern Rivers and industry co-ops and associations to identify common use infrastructure investment and land use opportunities
- Investigate a regional renewable energy initiative
- Engage with NSW State Government to activate Crown Land that is identified in future land use strategies
- Develop a Region-wide digital black spots map and identify rectification projects.

- Byron Innovation and Entrepreneur Hub
- Reynolds Road Casino Industrial Precinct
- Casino Industrial Activation power supply upgrade project
- Kyogle Creativity Hub
- Lismore CBD Highspeed Broadband
- Tabulam Agribusiness Precinct
- Southern Cross Industrial Precinct (Ballina)
- Lismore renewable energy initiative.



4. Grow the Population and Internal Markets of the Region

Strategic Context

The Northern Rivers has a large population compared to most of NSW regions, supporting sophisticated internal markets, high capability, economic diversity and specialisation in enabling and population serving activities. Large markets provide advantages of scale for producers, reinforced over time by ongoing population growth.

The Northern Rivers has the opportunity to sustain ongoing economic development, but it is not without challenges. Foremost among these issues is facilitating new housing supply, including provision of key enabling infrastructure and greater diversity in dwellings. Improved community infrastructure and services can also play a secondary role in ensuring population growth does not undermine living standards or quality of life for existing residents.

Infrastructure Priorities

A potential catalogue of infrastructure projects enabling new housing supply; community infrastructure.

Opportunities

- Accommodate growth in a manner that balances population pressures with infrastructure delivery to maintain the lifestyle character of the region
- Diversify the supply of housing types to meet the needs of the community
- Pursue new ways of celebrating indigenous and multicultural heritage
- Improve access to cultural, sporting and recreational facilities and services in the Northern Rivers

Actions

- Develop a regional catalogue of residential lands for activation and proactively seek funding opportunities for enabling infrastructure to accelerate housing supply
- Work with the Department of Planning to assess development feasibility of different housing choices across the Region
- Link targeted precinct planning outcomes to public transport, school transport and community transport requirements
- Work with public transport, school transport and community transport to inform TfNSW reviews
- Develop an entertainment and convention centre proposal on a regional basis.

Candidate Projects

- Enabling infrastructure projects for the Housing Acceleration Fund
- Activation of residentially zoned Crown land
- Convention Centre
- Sewerage System Program – Kyogle villages
- Ballina Shire Road Network Strategy
- Regional public, school and community transport strategy
- Regional Sports Precinct



5. Develop the Services Precincts of the Region through New Approaches to Partnership

Strategic Context

Lismore serves as the Region's services hub, with many customers or workers commuting significant distances to receive or provide its high-quality offerings.

Within Lismore there are a number of distinctive precincts or clusters, including for health, education, retail, sporting and cultural facilities. Recognising the role these precincts play in the broader Region, Lismore City Council has demonstrated the leadership and foresight to implement a Partnerships Strategy that promotes collaboration across its own community, neighbouring councils and other institutions to help improve assets and services.

The opportunity for the Region is to extend the current Partnerships Strategy to the next level, accounting for whole-of-region needs and opportunities and investigating new forms of partnership with the State and Federal Governments.

Infrastructure Priorities

Partnerships Strategy Investment Program, including a Central Growth Corridor Program for Lismore.

Opportunities

Actions

Candidate Projects

- Pursue current opportunities for new forms of partnership with the State and Federal Government
- Adopt a “customer focused” approach to regulating activities, not just delivering services
- Improve and integrate precincts through effective transport connections.

- Extend Lismore's Partnerships Strategy to a whole of region, intergovernmental basis
- Work with the Department of Planning and Environment to undertake holistic precinct planning in Lismore and improve Regional precinct integration in alignment with the Central Growth Corridor Strategy
- Investigate potential harmonisation of cost and regulatory impositions
- Work with TfNSW to progress Future Transport plans for improved connectivity between Regional Cities and Centres, including public and community transport requirements and new bus and coach service improvements.

- Partnerships Strategy Investment Program, including a Central Growth Corridor Program
- NSW and QLD cross-border comparative business cost study (undertaken jointly with Tweed Shire).
- Smart Cities projects

Implementation Plan

Strategy implementation will be overseen by an Economic Advisory Panel of the General Managers of the councils of the Region, drawing on their staff and broader stakeholders as appropriate.

The effective implementation of the Strategy will involve the key stakeholders and regional community that contributed to its development, including the five councils as well as State Government agencies and local entities.

The completion of this document is intended to be the first stage of an ongoing process where new specific actions to further progress towards the Vision are identified through application of the framework.

The five council General Managers will meet regularly to track progress and liaise with the Regional Director, North Coast, NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet. These meetings could also be used to check the Strategy's progress and review against current grant opportunities.

After two years, the Advisory Panel will initiate the conduct of a formal review of the Action Plan and associated governance processes, producing a brief report card to be published as an addendum to the Economic Development Strategy.

This will also provide an opportunity to update the Action Plan for new or modified actions in view of key economic, social, environmental and policy changes.

After four years, the Advisory Panel will also begin the process of updating or refreshing the Strategy.



Northern Rivers Enablers Table

Strategies and Early Stage Actions					
Enablers	Develop the Engines of Growth through Better Connections	Grow Tourism Opportunities	Foster Emerging Industries & Specialisations	Grow the Population & Internal Markets	Develop Services Precincts Through New Approaches to Partnership
People and Skills			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate opportunities to improve regional connectivity to the SCU campus Advocate for an innovation, entrepreneurial and enabling industry SkillsPoint in the Northern Rivers Extend the influence of business incubators to support small business development across the Region Engage with NSW State Government to activate Crown Land that is identified in future land use strategies 		
Utilities			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a Region-wide digital black spots map and identify rectification projects. 		

Northern Rivers Enablers Table

Strategies and Early Stage Actions					
Enablers	Develop the Engines of Growth through Better Connections	Grow Tourism Opportunities	Foster Emerging Industries & Specialisations	Grow the Population & Internal Markets	Develop Services Precincts Through New Approaches to Partnership
Government, regulation, services and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with TfNSW to identify initiatives to maximise benefits to Northern NSW from Inland Rail • Work with TfNSW and industry in reviewing regional freight forecasts to account for growth in Tabulam and other regions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate opportunities to increase whole-of-region branding and marketing of products and services • Develop tourism opportunities in the Northern Rivers, focusing on coastal and inland World-Heritage sites, food and creative industries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with NSW State Government to activate Crown Land that is identified in future land use strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the Department of Planning to assess development feasibility of different housing choices across the region • Link targeted precinct planning outcomes to public transport, school transport and community transport requirements • Undertake a region wide review of public transport, school transport and community transport to inform TfNSW reviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend Lismore's Partnerships Strategy • Advocate for a Northern Rivers City Deal • Work with the Department of Planning and Environment to undertake holistic precinct planning in Lismore • Investigate potential harmonisation of cost and regulatory impositions • Improve connectivity between Regional Cities and Centres, including public and community transport requirements and new bus and coach service improvements.

Northern Rivers Enablers Table

Strategies and Early Stage Actions					
Enablers	Develop the Engines of Growth through Better Connections	Grow Tourism Opportunities	Foster Emerging Industries & Specialisations	Grow the Population & Internal Markets	Develop Services Precincts Through New Approaches to Partnership
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress the Bruxner and Summerland Way corridor strategies Develop program business cases: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> for Bruxner Highway west of Lismore Summerland Way Identify, cost and prioritise Fixing Country Roads 'last mile' candidate projects Identify key localised congestion issues affecting regional transport and logistics routes and develop business cases for improvements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advance the business case for stage 1 of the Ewingsdale Road upgrade program (Byron bypass) Develop a business case for Ballina Marina and sand bar works 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop the Byron Innovation and Entrepreneur Hub Work closely with RDA Northern Rivers and industry co-ops and associations to identify common use infrastructure investment and land use opportunities Investigate a regional renewable energy initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a regional catalogue of residential lands for activation and pro-actively seek funding opportunities for enabling infrastructure to accelerate housing supply Develop a entertainment and convention centre proposal on a regional basis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve Regional precinct integration in alignment with the Central Growth Corridor Strategy

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