

CASTLEREAGH

REGIONAL ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
2018–2022

Incorporating Gilgandra Shire Council and Warrumbungle Shire Council



VISION:

A sustainable region that successfully builds on its natural, economic, **and** cultural features and resources to create growth opportunities for the community that enhance the economy and lifestyle of the region.





Images Courtesy of Destination NSW



Images Courtesy of Destination NSW



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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 and future projects would be subject to further evaluative processes.

The power of the Strategy is its ability to be used on an on-going 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, and assists in bringing together key stakeholders and mobilising resources. In so doing, it can facilitate faster access to dedicated NSW Government funding, such as the Growing Local Economies Fund, as well as help to capitalise upon other economic opportunities.

This Strategy, prepared by Balmoral Group Australia Pty Ltd (BGA) on behalf of the region, was formed in collaboration with Gilgandra and Warrumbungle Shire Councils, 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, Castlereagh Regional Economic Development Strategy 2018–2022 (this document) which allows the reader to quickly and easily determine key content, while the accompanying Castlereagh Regional Economic Development Strategy - Supporting Analysis 2018–2022 details the Strategy methodology, evidence and the strategy development process.

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



INTRODUCTION

The Castlereagh Regional Economic Development Strategy 2018-2022 (the Strategy) was developed to identify economic development opportunities that capitalise on the endowments and specialisations of the Region while considering regional aspirations and risks. The Castlereagh functional economic region - which includes a resident population of approximately 14,000 people – is composed of the Gilgandra and Warrumbungle local government areas (LGAs). The townships of Gilgandra and Coonabarabran are the main urban centres of the Region, followed by, Dunedoo and Coolah.

The Strategy aims to leverage the Region's endowments, such as:

- Australia's first Dark Sky Park, with multiple observatories operated at Siding Spring Observatory by various research organisations such as the Australian National University, CSIRO and international universities, making it an area of cultural and scientific significance.
- Distinctive natural amenities, the Warrumbungle and Coolah Tops National Parks, and the Pilliga Nature Reserve, each of which support important tourist and specialist industries.
- Its historical and cultural significance, as the homelands of the Gamilaroi, Weilwan and Wiradjuri people.
- Its location on Newell, Oxley, Golden and Castlereagh highways.
- Inland Rail track construction – one of the biggest infrastructure projects the Region has seen and poses a rare opportunity.
- Renewable energy resources

and many more.

The Strategy seeks to provide a framework for prioritising the realisation of key economic opportunities, which will help to mitigate the effects of population decline and significant events, such as the 2013 Wambelong Bushfires and Brigalow Assessment on the Pilliga forestry industry. In seeking to address key regional risks and issues, including the lack of industry diversity (with only Agriculture a specialisation), the Strategy identifies the core building blocks to develop a sustainable regional economy.

This process successfully identified several core strategies to achieve a prosperous economic future. For each strategy, primary action steps and infrastructure priorities have been identified,

as well as appropriate implementing parties for lead, support and stakeholder roles. A concerted focus and effort will be required to achieve all of the outcomes. At the same time, considerable vetting of each aspect of the recommended strategies has determined that the strategies are viable and compatible with available resources, and promising opportunities to leverage Castlereagh's Region strengths.

This strategy aims to:

- Boost key industries' access to market and labour
- Invest in water and energy utilities infrastructure
- Develop and enhance the regional lifestyle
- Develop and promote a broad event and destination profile
- Build support for local businesses

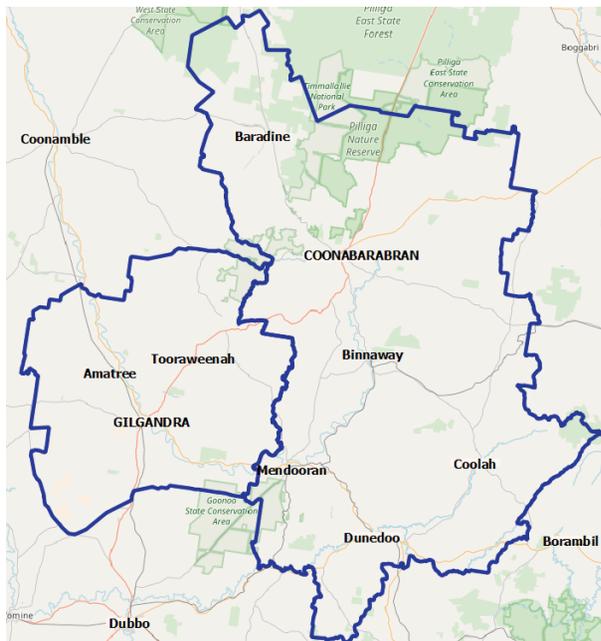
The Strategy also takes account of regional risks and how they might be addressed.

This Strategy is the culmination of collaboration between the Gilgandra Shire Council, Warrumbungle Shire Council, their respective communities and the NSW Government's Centre for Economic and Regional Development (CERD).

BACKGROUND

The Castlereagh functional economic region (land area of 17,216km²) (Figure 1) is located approximately 5.5 hours by car North-West of Sydney and is composed of Gilgandra and Warrumbungle LGAs. It is located just west of the Great Dividing Range. It extends almost 100 kilometres from the Great Dividing Range to the boundary of the Dubbo-Narromine-Wellington region (Central Orana functional economic region). The townships of Gilgandra and Coonabarabran are the urban centres of the Gilgandra and Warrumbungle Shires, respectively.

FIGURE 1: MAP OF CASTLEREAGH REGION



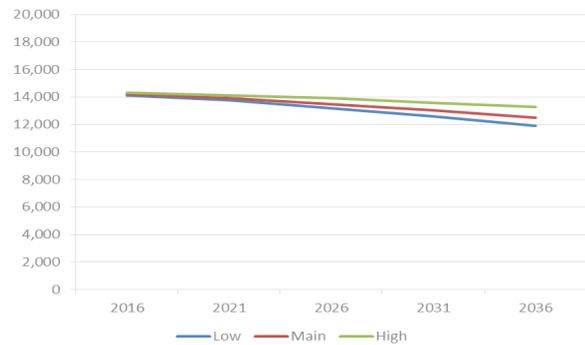
Source: NSW Government Spatial Services and Google OpenStreetMaps.

According to the ABS, the estimated residential population of Castlereagh was 13,850 in 2016; this was a 4% decrease from the 2011 population of 14,413. Figure 2 shows the Region's low, main and high population estimates for the twenty years to 2036. These were produced by NSW Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) and take into account fertility rates, life expectancy, and net migration. Between 2016 and 2021, the population of the Castlereagh region is expected to fall between 2.5% and 1.4%. Over the 2016-2036 period, the Castlereagh's population is projected to decline to 12,500 with an annualised fall of 0.6% per annum under the main estimate, which would place increasing pressure on core services. In comparison, over the same period, the projected rate of growth

(per annum) for regional NSW and the whole of NSW is 0.6% and 1.2% respectively, considerably higher than the Castlereagh region. In combination with an aging population, this will be a significant barrier to maintaining economic sustainability and access to a suitable workforce in the future.

The projections illustrate that active regional economic development will be necessary, and collaborative leadership and action is required to ensure that the Region has a sustainable population in the long term. These actions will contribute to achieving long term economic sustainability and prosperity.

FIGURE 2: CASTLEREAGH POPULATION PROJECTIONS

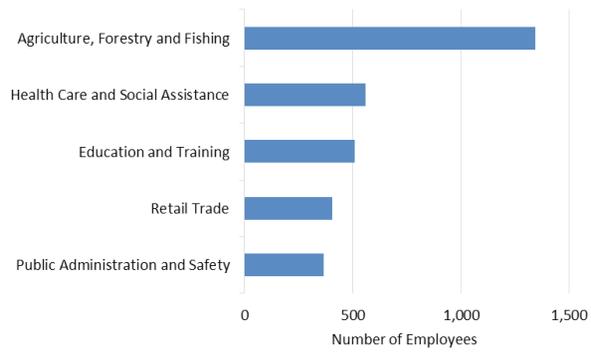


Source: Department of Planning and Environment (DPE).

Figure 3 provides a snapshot of the regional economy composition by employment. The Castlereagh economy is dominated by Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, followed by Health Care and Social Assistance, Education and Training, Retail Trade, and Public Administration and Safety. In combination, these industries represent 69% of all employment in the Region.

Despite the importance of these sectors to the local economy, each of them has experienced significant fluctuations in employment during 2001-2016. Agriculture declined from 1,646 workers in 2001 to 1,268 in 2011, while increasing to 1,345 in 2016. However, these general trends mask other patterns; for example, while mixed cattle-sheep-grains farming has experienced an overall decline in employment, there has been an increase in those working in specialised beef or sheep farming.

FIGURE 3: MAJOR EMPLOYMENT SECTORS



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016).



Image Courtesy of Destination NSW

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”¹.

A region seeking to encourage economic development should concentrate on factors that enable the growth of endowment-based industries. Endowments can lead to opportunities from which commercial and industrial interests may leverage and develop specialisations.

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

Natural Endowments – The natural endowments of the Castlereagh Region provide the foundations for its dominant industries, agriculture and tourism. These include the Warrumbungle Mountains, Coolah Tops, the Pilliga, and the Castlereagh and Talbragar Rivers and their tributaries. The unique geology and biodiversity of the Region represents a special endowment and assets for growing the Region’s economy. However, these assets must also be managed sustainably, and are vulnerable to various risks. For example, the Wambelong bushfire in 2013 destroyed 55,000ha of national park and prime agricultural land, leading to setbacks in employment and productivity in the Region’s engine industry, agriculture and future growth industry, tourism.

Water Security – The Castlereagh River and its catchment is an unregulated system with no major water storages. As a result, flows are highly variable and the river bed often appears dry. The Timor Dam has faced numerous water usage restrictions during dry and hot periods. Rainfall patterns vary significantly across the Region and a number of towns are reliant on bore water infrastructure. Investment is required in order to support future growth due to the number of bore, treatment plants, and other water infrastructure reaching their end of life.

However, the Region has three large untapped aquifers. Little research and exploration has been completed on these aquifers in the past. Examining these aquifers may present major opportunities for the Region.

Renewables – The Region has abundant solar and wind energy resources. Solar projects have been successfully implemented in the Region and other renewable projects have reached various phases of development and approval. The 1000MW Liverpool Ranges wind farm was approved in 2018, and will be the largest wind farm in Australia. These investments can lead to significant opportunities for exploring the potential for further investment in projects within the Region and link to supporting local industry.

HUMAN FEATURES

Culture – The Region benefits from a significant Indigenous cultural heritage belonging to the Gamialroi, Weilwan, and Wiradjuri people and hosts several Aboriginal Conservation Areas. A vibrant and modern profile of community events such as the Dunedoo Bush Poetry festival, ArtUnlimited, Cooee Heritage celebrations, agricultural shows outdoor concerts and country race meetings are sources of local pride for the **Region**.

Skills and Training – The Region is serviced by TAFE Western at the Gilgandra campus and TAFE New England at the Coonabarabran and Dunedoo Campuses. They offer courses on aged care and social assistance, reflecting the importance of the industry to the Region. However, they do not offer courses on trade skills. Apprentices must travel to campuses outside the Region to access these education pathways. The TAFE Connected Learning Centre at Coonabarabran offers wider educational opportunities for students, taking advantage of developments in telecommunications technology. Greater investment in high-speed internet may reduce the need for apprentices to leave the Region and expand the range of courses on offer.

¹Regional Economic Growth Enablers Report (2017), Centre for Economic and Regional Development.

²DPI, Water Sharing Plan for the Castlereagh River Unregulated and Alluvial Water Sources; Background Document 2016

INSTITUTIONAL AND INDUSTRY FEATURES

Tourism – The Gilgandra and Warrumbungle Visitors Centres provide an introduction to natural and cultural assets of the communities, building on the nature based tourism opportunities of the Region. This Region is home to three national parks (The Warrumbungles, The Pilliga and Coolah Tops) and several Nature Reserves and Aboriginal Conservation Areas.

Astronomy – The Warrumbungle National Park was recently designated as Australia's first Dark Sky Park and is overlooked by Siding Spring Observatory, Australia's premier optical research facility. Coonabarabran, billed as the 'astronomy capital of Australia', provides a source of cultural and scientific capital. However, research institutions remain siloed from the economy as a whole, based primarily in universities and facilities outside the Region.

Economic Development and Networking – Warrumbungle and Gilgandra Shire councils are active in regional economic development, and are members of the Orana Regional Organisations of Councils. Council staff are also members of the Economic Development Officers Network. The Orana Small Business Advisory Service is based in Dubbo and operates a periodic business bus to townships in the Castlereagh region.

The Coonabarabran Chamber of Commerce is the only incorporated business networking group

in the Region- however, within the communities of Baradine, Mendooran, Binnaway, Dundedoo, Coolah and Coonabarabran, there are numerous 'unofficial' business groups and associations that are active in the Region promoting their members.

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Location – The Castlereagh Region's location on the Newell, Oxley, Golden and Castlereagh highways represents an opportunity to capitalise from high traffic flows. Its proximity to the regional centres of Dubbo, Tamworth, and Mudgee, and closeness to Sydney (5.5 hour drive) relative to other regions makes it an attractive destination for potential business, visitors and residents.

Freight – The RRegion is strategically located halfway between Melbourne and Brisbane on the Newell Highway. The Region is already serviced by rail to Sydney and the eastern ports and the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) is currently planning the Inland Rail project through the Region. Road traffic corridors towards major ports and rail intermodals are expected to become significantly important to the Region. Although the Region's access to highways are an endowment, capitalising on it requires investment in enabling infrastructure, such as bypasses, truck stops and service stations. Maintenance of and improvement of key local roads is also important to improve connectivity. Maintenance of and improvement of key local roads is also important to improve connectivity.



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.³

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 Castlereagh Region Strategy.

When analysing regional economic development strategies, different sectors and specialisations can be categorised as engine industries, enabling industries, and population serving industries. In the context of the Castlereagh region, agricultural industries are its only significant engines of growth. These categories can be defined as:

- Engines of growth – industries well-linked to external markets and bring money into the Region (e.g. agriculture)
- Enabling industries – industries that support engine industries (e.g. engineering and manufacturing)
- Population serving industries – industries that support people in the Region (e.g. education & training and health care & social assistance)

In the context of the Castlereagh region, agricultural industries are its only significant engines of growth.

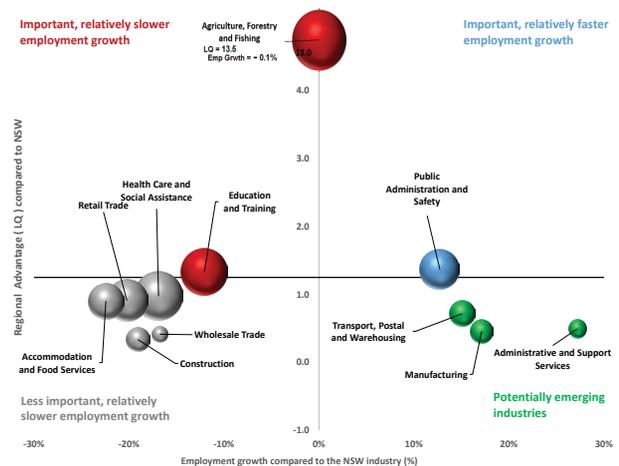
Figure 4 charts selected industries in the regional economy in 2016, where:

- Industries with a larger 'bubble' employed more people.
- Industries further above the horizontal line are more specialised when compared to NSW (LQ greater than 1.25⁴), industries below the line are less specialised when compared to NSW.

³A regions 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).

- Industries to the right of the vertical line grew faster between 2011 and 2016 than comparable industries across NSW, industries on the left grew more slowly.

FIGURE 4: LOCATION QUOTIENTS AND EMPLOYMENT GROWTH FOR INDUSTRIES IN THE REGION



Source: DPC Data; BGA Work Product

AGRICULTURE

The Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing industry is the largest employer, exporter and the most specialised industry in the Region. Therefore, it is identified as an engine sector of the regional economy.

Despite the Pilliga offering a unique natural resource endowment to the Region, the impact of the Brigalow forestry assessment effectively removed Forestry as an engine industry of the Region's economy. The Agriculture industry as a whole also suffered a significant setback due to the Wambelong bushfire in 2013, which destroyed 1,697kms of fencing and burned 55,000km² of agricultural land and national park.

Two distinct patterns have emerged since 2001 in this sector. First, is the shift away from mixed farming operations towards Specialised Beef and Sheep enterprises. Employment in Specialised Beef Farming increased 24.2% in the five years up to 2016 to 459. Similarly, Specialised Sheep Farming increased 48.1% over the same period to 232 individuals. Combined they represent 51% of the entire Agriculture workforce. This shift has

⁴A LQ of 1.25 is identified in the literature as denoting a specialisation.

seen specialist agricultural services move in or expand operations to support the needs of these enterprises, such as studs and breeders offering high quality genetics, or specific breeds offering increased herd productivity. Producers specialising in 'Other Grain Growing' accounted for a workforce of 159 in 2016, which has remained relatively stable since 2006.

The second pattern is the reliance on the Meat and Meat Product Manufacturing sector as an export market for the Agriculture sector, representing

\$8.8 million worth of trade in 2016. Producers are dependent on transport to get products to value-adding facilities, such as Wilga Meats in Dubbo and abattoirs in Tamworth. While keen interest was registered from the business community to establish some value-adding in the Region, many recognised that the Region's key endowments rested in its significant transport networks to get goods to markets, and that investment in more value-adding should only occur if it represents real value for money.

In 2016, the Agriculture sector spent \$4.0 million on Road Transport and Transport Support Services and Storage. The closure of grain silos in the Region in recent years has contributed to increased transport and transaction costs (including road maintenance), as well as increasing the need for on-farm storage facilities. The anticipated Inland Rail network between Brisbane and Melbourne and the associated intermodal network upgrades will create opportunities to improve transport efficiency and open up new markets for farmers in the Castlereagh region and give them the opportunity to invest further in specialisation and productivity.

Stakeholders in the Agriculture industry related these trends in specialisation and transport as a response to changing market conditions. For example, as sale yards consolidate, travel distances to market increase which impacts carcass weight and therefore price. In response producers specialise their operations in order to make the most of tightening margins. Some livestock producers cited the opportunities presented by online stock auctions as a method of reducing reliance on saleyards and therefore reducing travel costs, although an impediment is the speed and durability of internet services.

TOURISM

Although not formally defined by the ABS in its own right, the effects of Tourism expenditure touch across almost every single sector in the Castlereagh economy, contributing to 10.8% of total Value Added in 2016. It is an engine sector of the economy. Three sectors in particular both drive and benefit from tourism and the flow-on effects it has throughout the economy. In 2016, Tourism expenditure accounted for 80.7% of FTE jobs in Accommodation and Food Services, 33.5% in Retail Trade, and 25.2% in the Arts and Recreation Services sectors. Combined, these sectors contributed to employing 724 individuals in the same year. However, all of them experienced declines in the 5 years following 2011, falling 16% overall. This is in contrast to the consistent increases in visitor numbers and expenditure in the Central NSW region over that period.⁵

Many tourism operators cited the effects of the Wambelong bushfire in 2013 as a key reason for this relative decline in economic activity. The fires negatively impacted the Region's considerable natural tourism endowments, which warrants additional action to reenergise the visitor economy.

HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

While not an engine industry in the region, the Healthcare and Social Assistance sector is the second largest employer in Castlereagh. The industry experienced consistent increases in the workforce since 2001 (when it employed 448 individuals), employing 561 individuals in 2016. The LQ was approximately 1.0 in 2016.

The industry relies heavily upon access to retail and wholesale trade, importing specialist goods and materials necessary for maintaining functional medical facilities. The cost of transport for these goods also represents a significant cost of doing business. Access to human capital is the next largest input into the sector, specifically the Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services, and the Employment, Travel Agency & Other Administrative Services sectors. Being able to access the people and skills needed entails considerable expenditure and coordination.

⁵Destination NSW, *Travel to Central NSW Tourism Region, Year ended June 2017 time series*

STRATEGY

The five Strategy elements for the Castlereagh region link directly to the opportunities presented by the Region's endowments, specialisations and core competencies and also aim to address some key regional risks. This strategy builds on Castlereagh's engine industry of agriculture, while supporting other industries including Education & Training, Health Care & Social Assistance and Renewable Energy Generation. Tourism is recognised as a key endowment to grow the Region's economy, attract tree-changers and build support for local businesses. Opportunities posed by the Inland Rail development have also been captured in this strategy with support to develop infrastructure, business development assistance and removing barriers to develop suitable housing supply.

The Strategy elements were derived from an analysis of the endowments that underpin the Region's strengths, 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 the 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.



BOOST KEY INDUSTRIES' ACCESS TO MARKET AND LABOUR

TO REDUCE COST OF TRANSPORT, TRANSACTIONS, TREATMENT AND TRAINING

Agriculture is the Region's highest specialisation and value-adding industry. The agricultural industry is concentrated around Specialised Beef and Sheep Farming. These sub-industries rely on road infrastructure to get to their respective markets. The Region's endowment of being located on major transecting highways and its mid-point between Melbourne and Brisbane creates numerous market opportunities for the industry.

Despite this, one of the biggest barriers to growth identified was the high costs of transportation and the difficulty accessing internet and mobile phone services, especially as markets and value-adding opportunities move further away.

Health Care and Social Assistance is the Region's second largest employer. It too faces 'tyranny of distance' barriers and also struggles to access labour. This strategy aims to further enhance performance of the Region's largest employers through leveraging the positive elements of its geographic location while mitigating the negative elements.

Infrastructure Priorities

Logistic hubs: Establishing logistics and warehousing hubs in the major towns will allow raw materials and locally manufactured goods to be collectively sourced and transported, lowering business costs associated with travel times.

Digital infrastructure: Farmers are currently unable to engage in online stock auctions due to slow internet. If this was improved, farmers could avoid the transportation costs of having to get their stock to auction and potentially obtain better prices. Businesses in other industries can also benefit from improved telecommunications and NBN infrastructure

Mobile infrastructure: Investment in mobile phone infrastructure will allow the aforementioned industries to engage in the wider economy. Interruptions in service can result in significant costs and delays.

Help business leverage immediate and longer-term Inland Rail opportunities: In order for the Region to facilitate access to the Inland Rail, new transport infrastructure, such as refuelling bypasses, service stations and truck service stations along road corridors towards the Inland Rail intermodals, is required. Improving the condition of key local and regional roads will also help in overall connectivity.

Organisational Priorities

Telehealth: The practise of delivering specialist care via video link in areas where it is difficult to place appropriately qualified medical specialists has been established in the Region with the first outreach chemotherapy clinic in NSW at the Coonabarabran Health Service. Greater digital infrastructure provision could take this concept further and creating a Centre of Excellence for Telehealth in Coonabarabran, Coolah, and Gilgandra will boost the market the sector could service and provide better access to labour.

Distance education and Teaching: Extending on digital infrastructure delivery to support the expansion of telehealth industries, along with better digital connectivity, could improve access to education and training opportunities that is currently limited by the requirement for trainees and apprentices to leave the Region to attend TAFE classes. Travel costs for students and employers are prohibitively high and have led to a skills gap in the workforce. Co-ordinating with TAFE to allow students to complete their coursework in the Region where possible, using facilities equipped with internet video conferencing can address these issues. 'TAFE Digital' is an established blueprint for online course delivery, and additional courses could be offered as suitable digital infrastructure is rolled out. Furthermore, an opportunity exists to utilise local high schools and trade centres outside of school hours to bring courses to students in local towns.

STRATEGY OUTCOME

Investing in Transport and Telecommunications Infrastructure supports major economic clusters, promoting economic growth in the Region.

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOME

- Reduced transport costs and enhanced market access leads to economic growth in the Agriculture supply chain.
- Addressing gaps in skills and telecommunications increases activity throughout the economy.

OUTPUT

- Logistics and warehousing hubs are used by businesses to expedite transport.
- Telecommunications gaps are filled.
- Industry supply chains become more integrated.

ACTIVITIES

- Establish logistics and warehousing hubs in major towns.
- Establish programs to train apprentices in the Region.
- Invest in internet and mobile phone infrastructure.
- Invest in transport infrastructure such as bypasses, truck stops, and service stations.
- Establish the Region as a centre of excellence in Telehealth.

INPUTS

- Reserve adequate industrial land for logistics and warehousing hubs.
- Co-ordinate with aged care and allied health specialists Australia wide.
- Co-ordinate with NBN Co. and digital service providers.
- Explore additional high-speed internet services to connect business clusters (e.g. dark fibre 'points of presence').
- Co-ordinate with TAFE and the Department of Education and Training.

INVEST IN WATER AND ENERGY UTILITIES INFRASTRUCTURE

2

TO ACHIEVE A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY AND IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE REGION

Castlereagh's dry inland natural environment and poor water infrastructure make the Region prone to water restrictions. This limits future industry development. For example, growth and continued specialisation in the Beef and Sheep farming sectors is constrained by the lack of water.

However, the Region has an endowment of three untapped aquifers. There has been little previous research and exploration of these aquifers. Examining these aquifers may present major opportunities for the Region.

The dry inland environment means the Region has considerable potential to capitalise on renewable energy endowments. Solar projects have been successfully implemented in the Region and other renewable projects have reached various phases of development and approval. The 1000MW Liverpool Ranges wind farm was approved in 2018, and will be the largest wind farm in Australia. These investments can lead to significant opportunities for exploring the potential for further investment in projects within the Region and link to supporting local industry.

Infrastructure Priorities

Establish deep bores and extend the height of the Timor Dam: Reduce the risks of water restrictions for towns (such as Coonabarabran) and industries reliant on water. Water security will help local councils increase the availability of industrial land for development, creating opportunities for further economic growth.

Replace end-of-life water infrastructure: A number of towns in the Region are reliant on many end-of-life bores, water treatment, reticulation, and storage infrastructure. Providing a safe and secure source of drinking, recreational, and commercial water for all of the residents and businesses in the Region will require investment into this infrastructure.

Address gaps in transmission network and support small scale renewables: The viability of the Region as a source of renewable energy has been demonstrated by the approval and construction of a number of wind and solar projects. Gaps in the current energy transmission network must be addressed to ensure that it has the reach and capacity to service future energy projects. Partnership with renewable energy farms or investment in small-scale co-generation infrastructure in partnership with local residents and businesses should be encouraged in order to lower business costs and disperse benefits into the community. Maintenance of the existing power supply network for energy reliability is also a priority.

Organisational Priorities

Explore alternative water sources (such as the three untapped aquifers) and enhance management of current resources: Reliance on a single source of water can be a major risk for residents and industry. Exploration into and monitoring of alternate water supply sources, such as groundwater, should be undertaken in order to further their development of potable and industrial water resources. Increased monitoring and maintenance of currently exploited groundwater resources will also increase confidence of supply and reduce the risk of unforeseen water shortages.

Explore future renewable energy opportunities: Where relevant, research into the feasibility of alternative energy projects should be supported to encourage further investment. Local workforce capability should be evaluated, and local businesses should be encouraged to contribute to potential projects within its capacity and capabilities.

STRATEGY OUTCOME

Increase water security and renewable energy investment to increase industry development and tap into the Region's endowment.

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOME

- Water restrictions occur less often and are reduced in their severity.
- The energy generation potential of the Region is fully realised.
- The Region is a more attractive place to live.

OUTPUT

- Increased water security to the Region's major towns and industries (like agriculture) reliant on the Castlereagh River.
- Increased investment in renewable sources of energy.

ACTIVITIES

- Increase the height of the Timor Dam.
- Replace and refurbish water treatment, reticulation and storage for towns on bore water.
- Secure a supply of water for the construction of the Inland Rail.
- Explore options for alternative water and energy resources.
- Encourage and support investment in large-scale renewable energy and small-scale co-generation projects.

INPUTS

- Resource funding to complete adequate upgrades to the Timor Dam.
- Resource funding to complete adequate upgrades to bores, water treatment, reticulation and storage.
- Resource feasibility and business cases for water and renewable energy projects.

DEVELOP AND ENHANCE THE REGIONAL LIFESTYLE



AS AN ATTRACTIVE PLACE FOR WORK, LEISURE AND BUSINESS

Along with the common regional issue of the flight of youth to metropolitan areas, the 2013 Wambelong Bushfire and the impact of the Bragalow Assessment on forestry have in part accelerated the Region's population decline in recent years. Raising the profile of the Castlereagh Region as an attractive place to work and live is vital for the economic prosperity of the Region. This strategy will undo some of the effects of these external factors and builds upon collaborations with RDA Orana to promote the Region through the "Love the Life we Live" program.

Infrastructure Priorities

Develop community-led transit opportunities within and between towns: There is a lack of public transport within and between the Region's towns, and to larger urban centres outside the Region. This service gap is particularly salient for the growing population of elderly or less mobile residents who no longer make use of their own cars. Transport options are needed and should be community-led through community carpools and ridesharing opportunities.

Facilitate the release of Crown Land for residential purposes: Survey results reported a lack of suitable quality rental properties in major towns. The development of suitable rental properties could release and make available motel accommodation (currently utilised by temporary residents such as teachers and nurses) for tourists.

Improve recreation facilities: These include parks, pools, and sporting facilities.

Organisational Priorities

Attract skilled workers into the Region: There is an opportunity to capture Inland Rail temporary workers as future permanent residents. Additionally, this strategy could attract workers to fill an identified labour market gap, such as teachers and nurses.

Encourage landlords to renovate and maintain rental accommodation: Community consultations found the approval process for renovations to current rental properties restrictive, and should be expedited to reduce the need to develop new land. This includes streamlining the zoning and development applications process so that investors are supported in developing and improving residential land, which will help to attract and retain skilled workers in the Region. Access to quality housing for lease and sale, as well as access to rural, residential, small holdings and lifestyle block estates in the Region were also expressed as a concerns.

Develop a regional tourism plan and strategy: There are opportunities to access matched funding from Destination NSW to develop a 'Regional Tourism Product Development' program, or 'Regional Cooperative Tourism Marketing' program. These programs could connect with attracting skilled workers into the Region and develop suitable tourist accommodation in strategic locations.

Leverage Inland Rail opportunities: The construction of the Inland Rail presents a significant opportunity for the Region to leverage off the initial construction phase by supplying the accommodation for staff during the training and construction phases of the project. In order to do so, land, rooms and houses will need to be resourced for accommodation. Local businesses will also need to be able to attract construction workers as customers, working cooperatively to develop and promote recreation and activities catering to this demographic. Developing the Region as a desirable place to live, work and do business will make the Region an attractive place for temporary workers who may decide to become permanent residents of the Region following their task. These new residents may help address skills shortages in important growth sectors. Coordination with ARTC will be required to plan and cater for temporary residents working on the inland rail project.

STRATEGY OUTCOME

Promoting the Region as an attractive place to live, work, and do business increases migration, promoting economic growth in the Region

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOME

- More people decide to migrate into the Region to live and work.
- More residents stay in the Region.
- Greater mobility for all residents.

OUTPUT

- Increase in the availability of places to live.
- Increase in the attractiveness of the Region as a place to live, work, and do business.

ACTIVITIES

- Facilitate development of industrial land to enable businesses to flourish in the region.
- Facilitate development of residential land to ensure an adequate supply of rental housing.
- Streamline the approval process for residential land development.
- Promote the Region's lifestyle and employment opportunities.
- Coordinate a community-led public transport strategy.

INPUTS

- Reserve adequate residential land.
- Develop a regional tourism plan and strategy

DEVELOP AND PROMOTE A BROAD EVENT AND DESTINATION PROFILE

4

TO INCREASE VISITATION AND DIVERSIFY THE ECONOMY IN THE REGION

The Castlereagh region benefits from many natural and cultural endowments, as well as a niche specialisation in star-gazing tourism. A broader events profile and improved infrastructure targeted at the Region's endowments and specialisations will support greater visitation. The strategy focuses on capitalising on the Region's significant drawcards, including the Warrumbungle Dark Sky National Park, and numerous cultural events and attractions.

Infrastructure Priorities

Address weakness in Accommodation and Food Services: Stakeholders have identified a lack of catering facilities and accommodation capacities as key weaknesses in attracting larger groups of tourists. Developing a higher quality accommodation and food services sector may attract multi-night stays and increase the profile of the Region.

Introduction of Geotourism projects: Geotourism projects can leverage off the identity of surrounding national parks. Activities may include walking, cycling, horse riding, 4WD tracks, and geotrails, which are popular with residents and visitors and can be easily established using current assets and resources.

Organisational Priorities

Develop an annual event calendar: Flagship events that serve to identify the Region should also be enthusiastically promoted. Past success has launched off Castlereagh's considerable natural and cultural endowments, such as equestrian, bush poetry and star gazing events. These must leverage off local strengths, such as the potential for the Gilgandra Speedway or Goanna Tracks to act as a drawcard for motor enthusiasts.

Promote the Region's niche specialisation of astronomy tourism: Although a relatively small market, the Region has a unique specialisation in astronomy tourism due to Warrumbungle Dark Sky National Park and the observatory. International exposure and opportunities can be generated through sister relationships with other global Dark Sky National Parks such as Death Valley National Park in the United States and Galloway Forest Park in Scotland.

Develop the Regions national parks and natural attractions: The Region should co-ordinate with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to ensure that national parks are locally managed and that the service works closely with the community.

Establish a dedicated Indigenous tourism plan: Although Indigenous culture is often proudly presented alongside other attractions, there is currently no dedicated Aboriginal Cultural Centre or Museum in the Region, and development of these should be thoroughly explored. Existing Indigenous attractions should continue to be energetically supported and promoted to visitors and locals in the Region.

STRATEGY OUTCOME

Fostering a broad offering of recreational activities enhances migration and visitation, prompting economic growth in the Region.

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOME

- The Region's tourism endowments are known.
- More people decide to visit the Region as tourists.
- Diversity in the Region's economy
- Recovery of the tourism industry after Wambelong Bushfire.

OUTPUT

- Increased capacity to host and bid for events. Event organisers can expand events on offer.
- Increased tourism opportunities.
- International exposure and greater regional identity.
- Developing higher quality services brings higher value tourists that support additional businesses.

ACTIVITIES

- Refurbish and upgrade events sites.
- Develop walking, cycling, horse riding, and 4WD tracks and Geotrails.
- Fill gaps in the annual roster of events.
- Develop the Region's national parks as tourist and recreational attractions.
- Promote and support Indigenous-led and owned ventures.
- Ensure local billboards are up to date and up to visual standards.
- Promote the Region's niche specialisation of astronomy tourism.

INPUTS

- Resource event sites, and trails suitable for development.
- Co-ordinate with events managers & tourism operators, including Indigenous communities.
- Co-ordinate with NPWS.

BUILD SUPPORT FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES

5

BY TAKING ADVANTAGE OF INLAND RAIL, INTEGRATING BUSINESSES INTO MAJOR PROJECTS AND TENDERS, AND PROVIDING BUSINESS UPSKILLING OPPORTUNITIES

The construction of the Inland Rail track is one of the biggest infrastructure projects the Region has seen and leads to significant opportunities. There are large aspirations in the community to take advantage of this rare opportunity through business tenders, housing construction workers and supporting developing businesses and operations (such as concrete mixing and fabrication).

However, stakeholders identified challenges they faced when seeking information regarding development applications, tenders for local work, and professional development. An integrated strategy is required to respond to these challenges and is vital to take advantage of the Inland Rail opportunity and for future opportunities.

Infrastructure Priorities

Developing industrial land to build accommodation camps for Inland Rail construction workers: The construction of the Inland Rail presents a significant opportunity for the Region to leverage off the construction phase by supplying accommodation for staff. In order to do so, industrial land and accommodation camps must be developed.

Organisational Priorities

Make it easier for local businesses to tender for major projects: Local businesses miss out on major infrastructure and government projects due to a poor relationship between Councils and businesses. Additionally, while business owners may have the capacity to respond to tenders for work, they may not have the skills to successfully navigate the processes required. Upskilling of local businesses to become competitive for public sector tenders should be a priority for the Region.

Develop a Regional Employment Strategy: A Regional Employment Strategy will provide local businesses and workforce with the greatest opportunity to capitalise on the Inland Rail project. Improving the business ecology around local governments will assist businesses in identifying and successfully capturing opportunities when they become available. This may include encouraging local businesses to register and make use of the Local Council Tenders Website.

Address information and communications gaps: Local councils can perform a facilitating role in identifying critical supply chains in the industry, by providing a forum for accessing business expertise. Local councils themselves are large customers, and regular networking will assist in providing them with an in-depth understanding of local businesses that can be sourced to meet the community's needs.

Further the relationship between the Region's councils: Gilgandra and Warrumbungle Shire Councils already enjoy a close working relationship. Improving this relationship will enhance the general economic climate by improving the perception of support giving businesses confidence in accessing opportunities throughout the Region. Business owners also commented on the inconsistency of government service when staff changed.

STRATEGY OUTCOME

A strengthened relationship between businesses and local councils to improve the business environment and prompt economic growth.

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOME

- Local businesses and entrepreneurs have the confidence to expand their businesses and seize new opportunities.
- Accomplish a sense of a professional community among local council staff reduces staff turnover and increases job satisfaction.

OUTPUT

- Strengthened relationship between business and local council.
- The standard of service delivery provided by council improves in quality and consistency.

ACTIVITIES

- Support the development of major capital infrastructure projects through a Regional Employment Strategy.
- Assist local business to respond to opportunities from infrastructure and government projects.
- Improve Professional Development outcomes for local businesses.
- Expand and promote Business Advisory Services.
- Strengthen relationships between the Region and NSW Government Departments.

INPUTS

- Co-ordinate between Warrumbungle and Gilgandra Shire Council staff.
- Co-ordinate with the Advisory Service.
- Co-ordinate with State Government Departments.
- Reserve adequate industrial land for accommodation camps

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Strategies	Boost key industries' access to market and labour	Invest in water and energy utilities infrastructure	Develop and enhance the regional lifestyle	Develop and promote a broad events and destination profile	Build support for local business
People and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a Centre of Excellence in video treatment and training for aged care. Establish programs to train apprentices in the Region to address skills shortages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish programs to train apprentices in the Region to address skills shortages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the Region's lifestyle and employment opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote and support Indigenous-led and owned ventures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve Professional Development outcomes for local businesses. Expand and promote Business Advisory Services. Assist local business in accessing work from infrastructure and government projects through a Regional Employment Strategy.
Government, regulation and information		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore options for alternative water and energy resources. Support investment of large-scale energy and small-scale co-generation projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Streamline the approval process for residential land development. Reserve adequate land for short-term residential development. Develop a regional tourism plan and strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an annual events program that maximises visitor spend. Promote the Region's niche astro-tourism specialisation with international linkages. Coordinate with and increase resources to NPWS. Establish a dedicated Indigenous tourism plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a Community of Practice between the Region and NSW Government Departments. Streamline the approval process for industrial land and premises.
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish logistics and warehousing hubs in major towns. Develop the Region as the Orana ROC's gateway to the inland rail. Connect Industrial Parks to the NBN and service mobile phone black spots. Explore additional high-speed internet service delivery (e.g. dark fibre points of presence). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure water supply for the Inland Rail Project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate development of residential land to ensure an adequate supply of rental housing and tourist accommodation. Support funding opportunities through Destination NSW to co-develop tourist accommodation and marketing programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refurbish and upgrade events sites, pools and sporting facilities. Develop walking, cycling, horse riding, and 4WD tracks and Geotrails. Develop the Region's national parks estates and State Forests as tourist and recreational attractions. Ensure local billboards are up to date and visual standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the development of major capital infrastructure projects. Develop a permanent accommodation camp for construction workers.
Utilities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the height of the Timor Dam. Replace and refurbish water treatment, reticulation & storage for towns on bore water. 			

IMPLEMENTATION

The effective implementation of the Strategy will involve the key stakeholders and regional community that contributed to its development, including all 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. It is therefore recommended that an Advisory Committee made up of representatives from each council and other groups such as business chambers be established to progress the implementation of actions listed to implement this Strategy, apply the Strategy's framework to identify new actions to be added to the Action Plan, develop key performance indicators and evaluate outcomes. The councils also meet six monthly with the Regional Director, Western, 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 Committee 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 Regional Economic Development Strategy. This will 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 Committee will begin updating or refreshing the Strategy.



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