

# Coffs Coast

## Regional

### Economic Development Strategy

2018-2022

#### Vision

*A region of well-connected, inclusive and prosperous communities, with the capacity to attract new residents and visitors through its balance of lifestyle, environment and opportunity; underpinned by a diverse economy driven by tourism, agriculture, health, aged care, professional and creative industries.*



# 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 as helping to capitalise upon other economic opportunities.

This Strategy, prepared by Corview on behalf of the region, was formed in collaboration with the Coffs Harbour City and Bellingen 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).

The Strategy is presented in two documents, the **Coffs Coast Regional Economic Development Strategy 2018-2022 (the Strategy)** which allows the reader to quickly and easily determine key content, while the accompanying **Coffs Coast Regional Economic Development Strategy 2018-2022 Supporting Analysis (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](mailto:CERD@dpc.nsw.gov.au).



# Introduction

The **Coffs Coast Regional Economic Development Strategy 2018-2022** (the Strategy) has been developed to facilitate long-term economic growth opportunities across the Region's specialised sectors, in particular through leveraging its strengths as a hub for high quality population services and lifestyle, fine produce and products, natural beauty and variety of vibrant, quiet and active places.

This Strategy takes a new approach to strategic economic planning by using the functional economic region concept to understand the Region's endowments, specialisations and core competencies to guide investment over the next four years.

In this Strategy, the Coffs Harbour City and Bellingen Shire Councils form the Coffs Coast Functional Economic Region (the Region) because of the economic linkages they share across their administrative boundaries. People who work in the Region typically live in the Region: a quarter of Bellingen workers commute to Coffs for work and only 11.5 per cent of the resident workforce travel to another region for work.<sup>1</sup>

The Coffs Coast is a community of more than 85,000 situated on the North Coast of NSW, centred on the Regional City of Coffs Harbour. Other urban centres include Bellingen, Dorrigo, Urunga, Sawtell, Emerald Beach and Woolgoolga.

This Strategy emphasises the distinctive and unique strengths of the Region. Economic principles suggest unique strengths provide regions with sustainable economic advantages,<sup>2</sup> so regional development policy should focus on these sectors to increase their performance and Gross Regional Product (GRP).

Coffs Coast's endowments are: its natural beauty from beaches, islands, rivers, valleys, rainforest, hinterland and plateau; plentiful fresh water, rich soils and sub-tropical climate; location between Sydney and Brisbane on the Pacific Highway; health and education infrastructure; range of institutions; Aboriginal heritage and historic townships; and its diverse workforce and cultures.

These endowments are the basis of the Coffs Coast's specialisations in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing; tourism-related areas like Accommodation and Food Services, Retail Trade and Arts and Recreational Services; Professional and Technical Services; Education and Training, Health and Residential Care. They also support the potential for the Region's emerging specialisations in Creative Industries, Transport and Manufacturing.

The Strategy, which builds on the endowments, specialisations and core competencies, aims to:

1. Grow the year-round visitor economy by further diversifying and promoting offerings and connecting businesses in the sector

2. Support Health Care and Social Assistance, tourism and professional and creative services industries by accompanying regional skills attraction and relocation programs with affordable housing supply

3. Assist the development of emerging Agriculture industries in the sustainable, digital and for purpose economy to further build a clean, green and lean image

4. Manage needs of Health Care and Social Assistance; Education and Training and Manufacturing through a Regional Precincts and Activity Centres Masterplan and Investment Program; and rezoning for industrial and commercial land use.

The Strategy builds on specialisations derived from its endowments and also takes into account regional risks and how they might be addressed.

This Strategy is the culmination of collaboration between the Bellingen Shire and Coffs Harbour City Councils, their respective communities and the NSW Government's Centre for Economic and Regional Development (CERD). Implementation will be overseen by an Economic Advisory Panel of the Council's General Managers, drawing on staff and stakeholders as appropriate.

# Background

Coffs Coast was home to over 85,000 people in 2016, and the population has grown strongly since 2001. The Region covers 2,777 square kilometres and a diverse range of landscapes along the North Coast of NSW. The major urban centre of the Region is Coffs Harbour, along with the smaller inland centres of Bellingen and Dorrigo, and number of coastal townships including Urunga, Sawtell, Emerald Beach and Woolgoolga. The Region's first peoples are the Gumbaynggirr nation.

Bellingen Shire is predominantly rural area, with 53 per cent of the land in the shire covered with either State Forests or National Parks. Coffs Harbour is a regional city, serving as the Region's main activity hub.

The economic origins of the Region lie in fertile soils, timber and transport. Today, primary production remains important to the Region, centred around blueberries, but the natural environment has become a setting for a much broader range of activities. The success of the Region in drawing in new residents over time means the Region today supports a highly diversified economy, with high quality health and education services alongside specialised agricultural production.

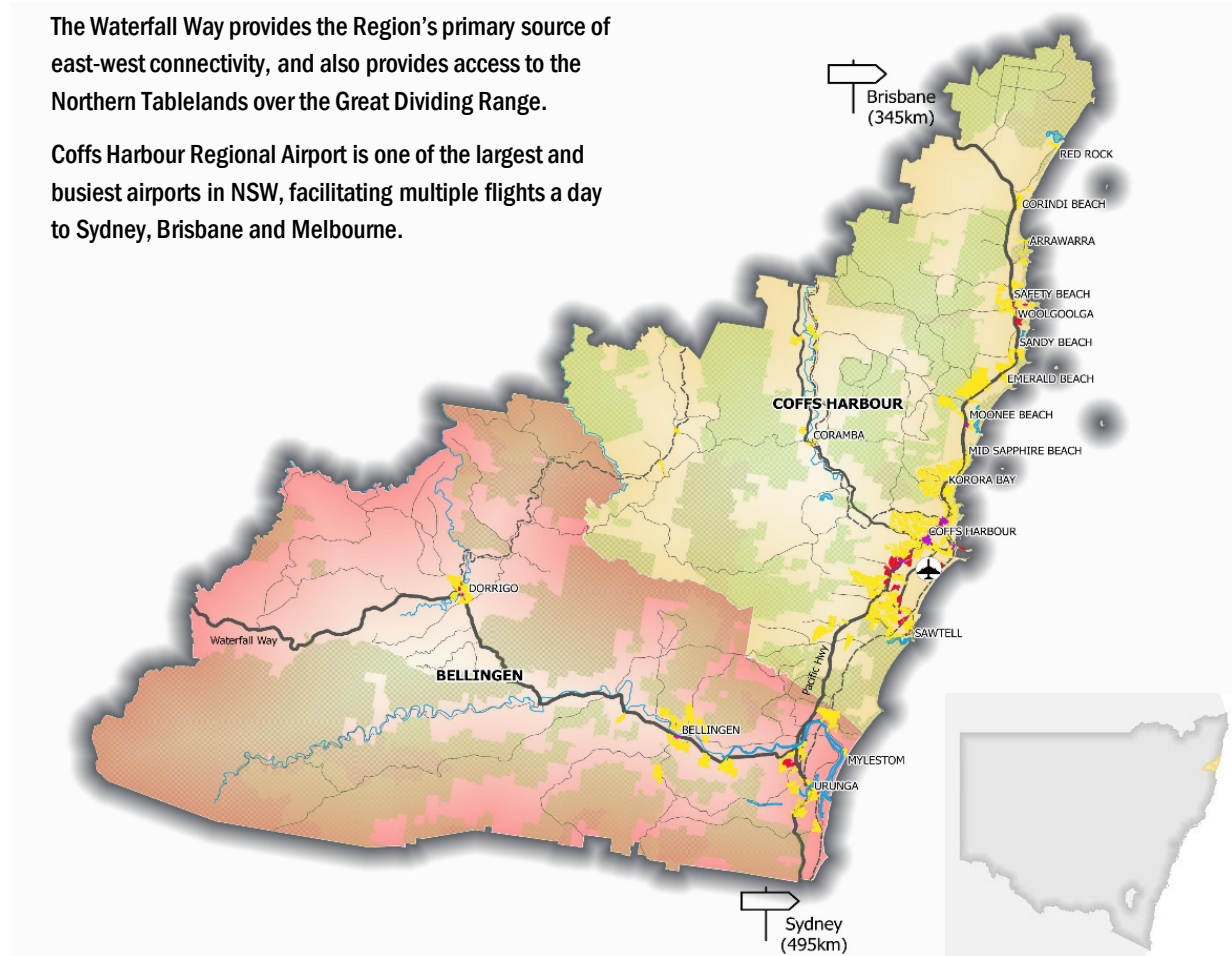
Population projections suggest the Region is likely to continue to attract large numbers of new residents, creating the opportunity to continue to grow its internal markets and specialised services.

The Region is 495 kilometres north of Sydney and 345 kilometres south of Brisbane. The Pacific Highway is the primary source of north-south connectivity, and is the key source of access to South East Queensland and metropolitan markets to the south.

The Waterfall Way provides the Region's primary source of east-west connectivity, and also provides access to the Northern Tablelands over the Great Dividing Range.

Coffs Harbour Regional Airport is one of the largest and busiest airports in NSW, facilitating multiple flights a day to Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne.

The Region's relative accessibility from major metropolitan markets makes it a popular tourist destination and stopover for local and state visitors, interstate traffic and international visitors.



# Population Profile

The Coffs Coast population increased by around 17 per cent between 2001 to 2016, and has triggered growing demand for population services.<sup>3</sup> This is lower than rates of growth in Sydney (+21 per cent) over the same period, but higher than for regional NSW (+12 per cent).

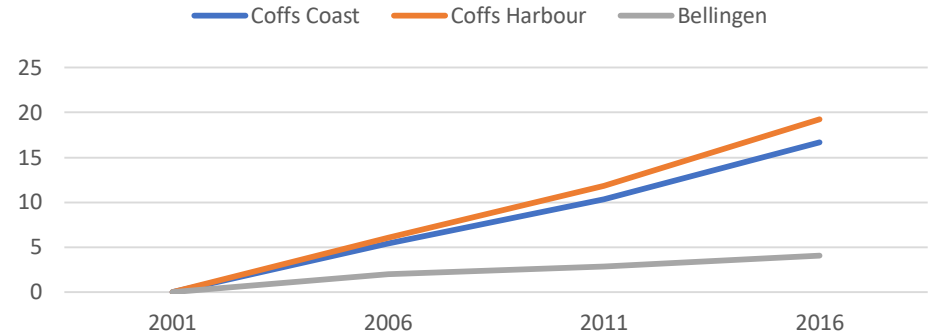
The implications of strong population growth for regional economic development of the Region is potential agglomeration effects from increased economies of scale. Projections for future growth are discussed on the next page.

More than 14,000 Coffs Coast residents from the 2016 Census lived in another region in 2011. Leading sources of migration were metropolitan NSW (2,900 people), regional NSW beyond the North Coast (2,800), Queensland (2,300), overseas (2,200) or elsewhere on the North Coast (1,900).<sup>3</sup> Proportionate to the population, the Coffs Coast had the greatest success of any region on the North Coast in attracting people from overseas, with one driver of this being the concentration of Sikh Indian families in the Woolgoolga area who form part of the blueberry-growing hub.<sup>4</sup>

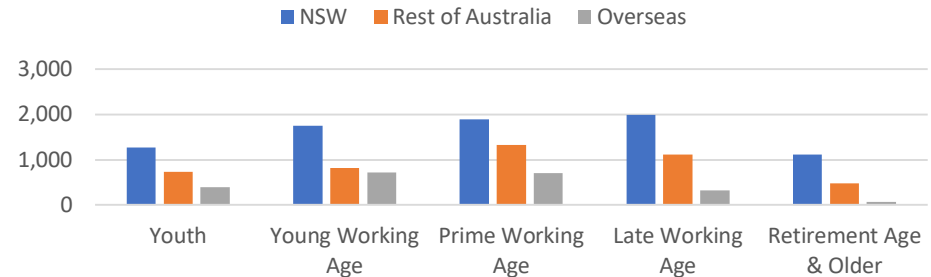
The Region not only attracts retirees, but importantly it is also successful in attracting 'Prime Working Age' and 'Late Working Age' demographic, and is also attractive to younger workers. These numbers include a high proportion of couple families with children; attracting a greater number of workers with required skills can further build the local economy.

Older members of the population are generally overrepresented in regional areas, with the Coffs Coast no exception to this trend. This implies a higher demand for aged care services than typical for the State overall, with a median age being about 5 years older than the State average.

Population % change relative to 2001



Migration into Coffs Coast 2011-2016



	Coffs Coast	NSW	Regional NSW
Age Dependency Ratio (>65 / 15-64) - %	35.6	25.0	34.8
Youth Dependency Ratio (<15 / 15-64) - %	30.1	28.4	28.4
Dependency Ratio - %	65.7	53.4	63.2
Proportion of Young Persons (<15/all) - %	18.2	18.5	18.5
Proportion of Old Persons (>65/all) - %	21.5	16.3	21.1
Median Age 2016	43.5	38	42.5

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 data

# Population Forecasts

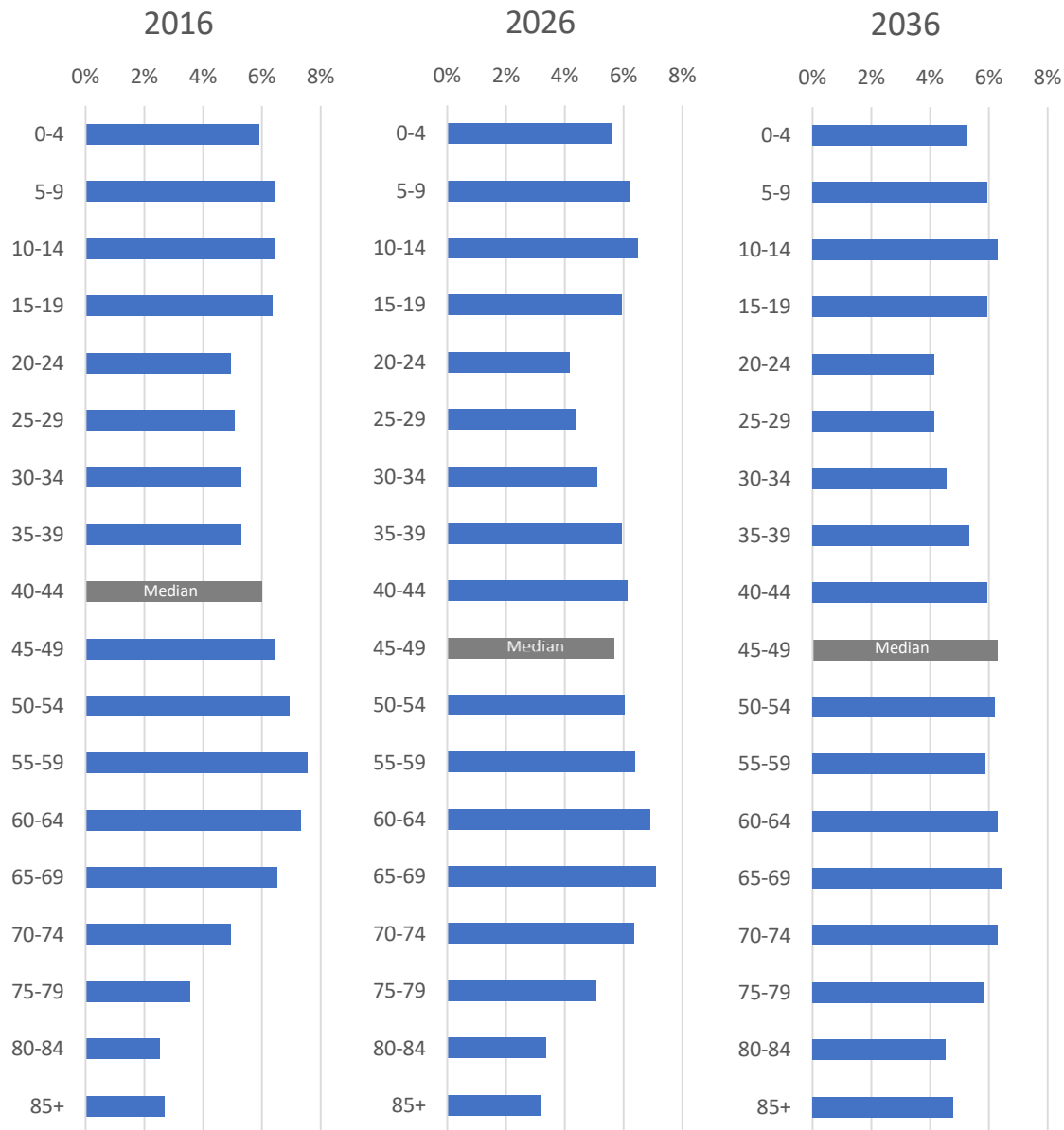
The NSW Department of Planning & Environment estimates that by 2036, the Coffs Coast's population will be around 105,500 people, approximately a quarter larger than at 2016 levels.

The rate of past and future population growth is a key driver of growth and generator of demand for population services, such as Retail Trade and Health Care. Future growth in the Coffs Coast's population implies ongoing growth in the internal markets of the Region, especially for population-serving industries. General increases in the labour pool will also increase the productive potential of the Region over time, as is implied by the '3Ps' (Population-Participation-Productivity) economic framework.

The median age group is expected to increase from 40-44 years old to 45-49 by 2026 and remain steady by 2036. This indicates that Coffs Coast 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 amount of population growth realised in the Region over time.

In practice, population increases do not occur so presumptively. Rather, they require enabling services, investments, regulations and partnerships to facilitate housing supply and population growth, and effective stewardship that make a region attractive and productive - this is the Coffs Coast's prime economic management imperative.



Source: NSW Department of Planning & Environment

# Employment History

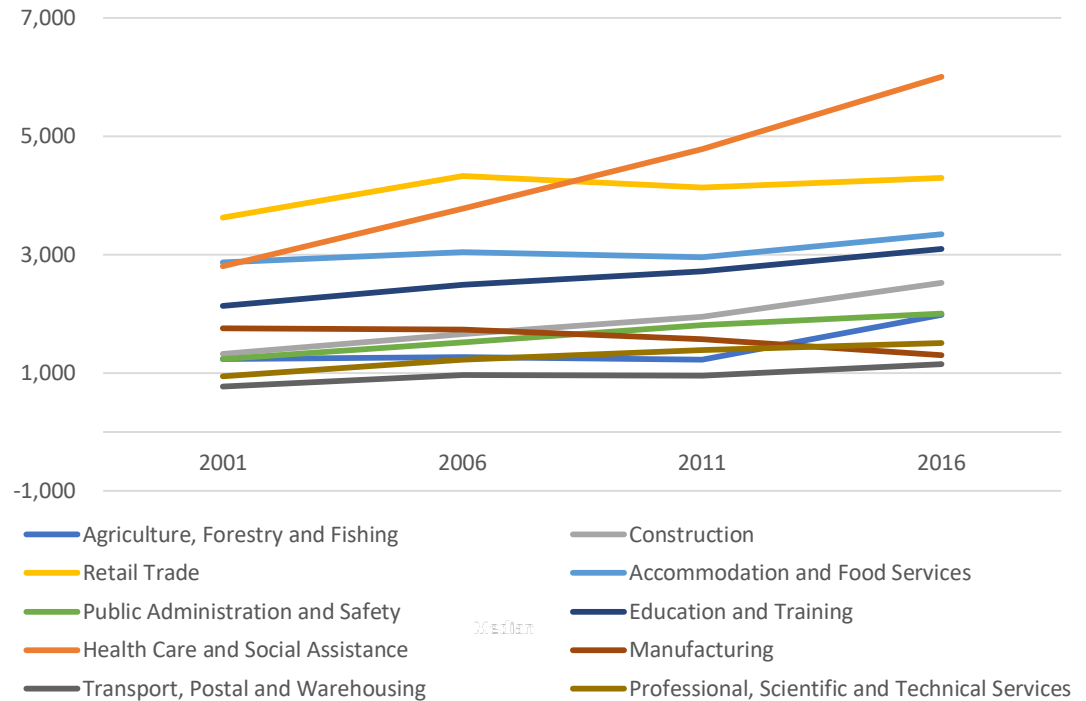
Health Care and Social Assistance is the Region's major employing sector, leveraging off one of the largest regional hospitals in NSW and the growing aged care sector. Two of the largest employing industries in the Region that reflect tourism – Retail Trade and Accommodation and Food Services – have seen constant employment levels.

There is a strong focus on Education and Training, based around Southern Cross University (SCU) and two TAFE campuses; this sector has increased at a steady rate. The Region also has a significant but quite steady Public Administration and Safety presence, including NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI).

Employment in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing has grown since 2011 due to the Region's specialisation in blueberry production. This is against the State and industry trend for reduction in employment levels as farm businesses substitute labour for improved capital and labour saving technologies.

There have been mixed fortunes in other areas significant for employment: Professional, Scientific and Technical Services has remained steady; Manufacturing has slowly fallen and Transport, Postal and Warehousing has been flat. Construction has increased slowly, however this is expected to see increased employment numbers with the pending construction of the Pacific Highway bypass.

The Region has a relatively high level of unemployment and high rates of part-time employment compared to Regional NSW and NSW.<sup>5</sup> This can be attributed to high rates of part-time and casual work available in the Tourism, Agriculture and Health industries, as well as people choosing to move to the Region later in their working life and working in a part-time capacity. It also indicates that there is additional capacity in the resident workforce that can be utilised.



	Unemployment Rate (%)	Full time (%)	Part time (%)	Away from work (%)
Coffs Coast	7.3	48.2	39.3	5.4
Regional NSW	6.6	55.2	32.8	4.8
NSW	5.9	59.2	29.7	4.8



# 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.*

## Institutional and Cultural endowments

**Southern Cross University (SCU)** – the university is a key attractor of activity to the Region and advocate of its merits and potential to outsiders.

**Balance of Lifestyle, Social and Economic Opportunities** – the Region offers, and is known for, its mix of lifestyle and economic opportunities. The variety of choices that the Region offers allow visitors or residents to combine a generally high quality of regional services with appealing places to live, work and play in coastal, riverine or hinterland settings.

**Business and Industry Co-operatives and Organisations** – the business communities of the Region include a range of formal and informal associations.

**Local Councils** – the local councils of the Region have identified and advocated effectively for the economic priorities of their communities and have local economic strategies in place. Examples of effective collaboration between councils, include the Regional and Joint Organisation of Councils, are also evident.

**Gumbaynggirr Culture** – the Region is home to Gumbaynggirr people who share their dreamtime stories and culture.

**Breadth of Creative and Cultural Industries** – creative industries are part of the Region's knowledge-based economy and have key opportunities from technological change, particularly in digitisation and the internet.

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

## Physical and Geographic Endowments

**Coastal Amenity** – The Mid North Coast has numerous pristine beaches and islands along its coastline that are a draw card for residents and visitors alike.

**Bellinger and Kalang Rivers** – the Region's rivers, valleys and National Park provide a core part of its character as well as plentiful water.

**Dorrigo Hinterland** – Dorrigo's surrounds include World Heritage-listed National Parks, rainforest, waterfalls, walking tracks and heritage buildings that draw people to the Region.

**Arable Lands and Climate** – the hinterlands, soils, fresh water (1,700 mm/year), sun shine (average 7.5h/day) and climate provide the Region with distinct advantages in agriculture.<sup>8</sup>

**The Harbour and Foreshore Areas** – Coffs Harbour jetty and foreshore area has the potential to support highly accessible natural and built amenity within easy access of its large and growing population.

**Sydney to Brisbane Midpoint** – the Region is currently about five and a half hours drive from Sydney and four and a half hours from Brisbane; these times will reduce with highway upgrades.





# Endowments

## Built endowments

**Pacific Highway** – the Pacific Highway offers the Coffs Coast its primary source of connectivity to external markets and regions, as well as supporting movements within the Region.

**Waterfall Way** – Waterfall Way is the primary source of east-west connectivity on the Mid North Coast.

**Coffs Harbour Regional Airport and Precinct** – the airport offers Coffs Harbour an unrivalled level of air service among regional centres, with connections to major metropolitan markets like Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne; and capability to service some international flights.

**Accommodation Capacity** – the Region has many tourism operators who collectively provide considerable advantages in establishing the Region's credentials for tourism, especially in hosting events.

**Jetty Foreshores Precinct** – recent improvements to the precinct enable both greater appreciation of the area's natural amenity by residents and tourists, as well as new economic and cultural opportunities.

**Rail Line** - located on main Sydney to Brisbane route.

**Health Precinct** – Coffs Harbour Health Campus, built in 2001 and anchored by the 292 bed, major referral hospital for the Region, also incorporates a full range of allied health services.

**Sports Facilities** – the sports facilities like C.ex Coffs International Stadium and the Coffs Coast Sport & Leisure Park Precinct support both tourism and migration into the Region.

**Coffs Campus Precinct** – the infrastructure of the campus integrates SCU's teaching and research offerings with North Coast TAFE, a senior high school and technology park.

**Justice Precinct** – Coffs Harbour's Justice Precinct, a repurposed site formerly held by State Forests, integrates expanded court facilities with the Region's police command.

**Heritage** - The Region has a rich Aboriginal and European heritage. There are many significant Aboriginal sites within the Region. The Region also contains numerous towns and villages with extensive built heritage.

**National Broadband Network** – the NBN provides good internet connectivity in the Region.

**Bellingen Valley Precinct** - a hub of food, arts, music and monthly markets that sees over 200 stalls.



# 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 a reference region, like NSW or regional NSW. The higher the LQ, the more specialised a region is in that industry.

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 Coffs Coast Strategy.

The 'bubble diagram' on the next page 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 1.25), 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 on the left grew more slowly.

The upper right quadrant contains two (**blue bubble**) specialised, high employment growth industries, and include Health Care and Social Assistance and Agriculture Forestry and Fishing .

The upper left quadrant contains (**red bubble**) the Accommodation and Food Services and Retail Trade industries. The ratios suggest a regional advantage, notwithstanding declines in employment since 2011.

The lower right quadrant contains (**green bubble**) six potential emerging industries that have seen increases in employment above that of NSW and can indicate emerging specialisations. These include Transport, Postal and Warehousing and Wholesale Trade reflecting the Region's endowment of being located at the mid-point of a major freight route between Sydney and Brisbane. The growth in Administrative and Support Services and Public Administration and Safety is driven by the strong population growth. Manufacturing in food, wood products and metal fabrication has developed a strong local base and is experiencing job growth above industry and State trends.

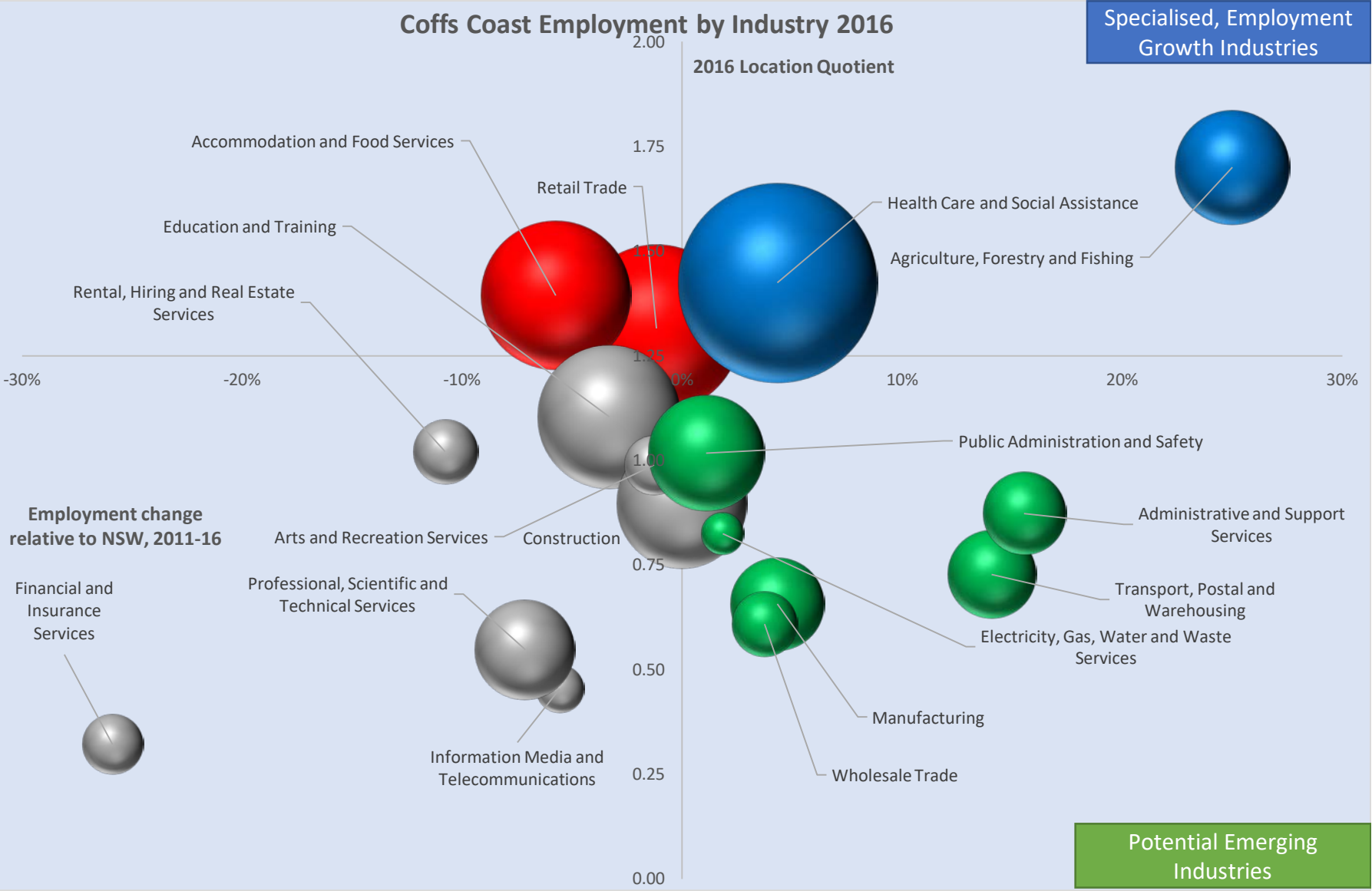
The lower left quadrant contains (**grey bubble**) industries with falling employment compared to NSW and no specialisation. Education and Training, Construction and Arts and Recreation have shown reasonable local growth, and consultation revealed strong future growth. It is expected that Construction will grow with the Pacifica Highway bypass, Arts and Recreation Services will be further bolstered by emerging creative industries and a strong tourism sector and Education and Training will continue to grow in line with projected population growth.

Compared to general trends for NSW, Coffs Coast's areas of relative outperformance in jobs growth were in berry fruits, health, utilities, logistics and administration 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 & Shifts in Employment Over Time

Coffs Coast Employment by Industry 2016



## Specialisations

Another important indicator of economic strength is the value of production in industry sectors and the degree to which there are linkages between a region's industry sectors, which is ascertained through Input-Output analysis. The three highest value-added industries are: Tourism, Health Care Services and Construction.

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”

These are activities linked to external markets and opportunities beyond the bounds of the Region, like Tourism, Agriculture and Manufacturing.

Coffs Coast's '**Engines of Growth**' make up more than \$750 million of regional output, larger than some Regions' total output. Despite the significant scale of production, the Engines of Growth share of Coffs Coast's total output is only about 60 per cent of the share typical for regional NSW overall.

The **Tourism** sector is the second largest employer and is the leading sector in the Coffs Coast's four billion dollar economy, contributing \$498 million in Gross Value Added (GVA).<sup>6</sup> It has an important role in the Region across numerous sectors such as in Arts and Recreation, Accommodation and Food Services, Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services and Retail Trade.

**Manufacturing** contributes \$155.6 million to GVA and is the Region's largest exporter. The Region has demonstrated local strength in food, wood and metal manufacturing, despite State and industry wide trends showing declining employment.

**Agriculture Forestry and Fishing** contributes to \$162 million to GVA and is the second largest exporter after Manufacturing, with exports totaling \$146 million. The main commodities are berries, particularly blueberries, beef cattle and milk.

### “Enabling Industries”

These markets are within the Region providing key support services to Engines of Growth businesses, like Finance and Insurance Services, Professional and Scientific Services, or IT inputs.

Coffs Coast's '**Enabling Industries**' account for more than \$650 million of regional output. Enabling Industries are overrepresented in their share of Coffs Coast's output, at about 10 per cent larger than typical for NSW's regional economy.

The **Finance and Insurance Services** industry is the third highest contributor to the Region's economy with a GVA of \$296 million. This is due to high wages associated with the industry and a number of business servicing the local retiree superannuation services market.

The **Professional and Scientific Services** industry has shown steady employment growth and accounts for 4.4 percent of the workforce and contributes \$166 million to GVA.

The **Information Media and Telecommunications** industry is significantly overrepresented in the Coffs Coast economy relative to the structure of NSW's regional economy. It contributes \$86 million to GVA and \$22 million to the Region's exports. Consultation indicated that the Region has been successful in attracting IT and creative industry professionals who live locally but work globally.<sup>7</sup>



# Specialisations

## “Population Serving Industries”

These markets serve the people and communities of the Region, including activities like health, education and retail.

Coffs Coast’s **‘Population Serving Industries’** account for more than \$1.5 billion of regional output, making up more than half the regional economy. The Population Serving Industries’ share of Coffs Coast’s output is about 30 per cent larger than typical for NSW’s regional economy.

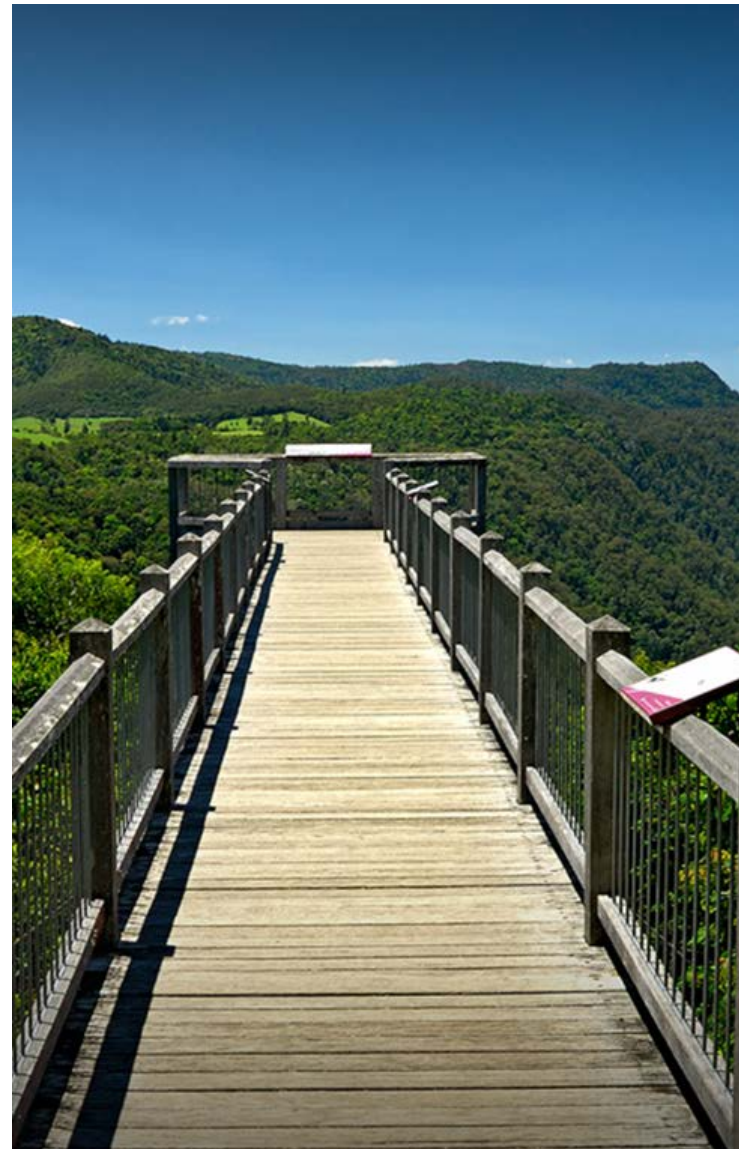
The **Health Care and Social Assistance sector** is the Region’s largest employer, employing 18 per cent of the workforce, and accounts for \$411 million in GVA. Relative sectorial size can be gauged by employment numbers with around 10 per cent of the workforce working in hospitals and medical health services, 4 percent in social assistance and 4 percent in aged care.

**Construction** is the third highest contributor to the local economy, with a GVA of \$411 million. This is expected to increase with the construction of the Pacific Highway bypass.

**Education and Training** contributes \$264 million to GVA, and is the Region’s fourth largest employer. This is driven by Southern Cross University (SCU) and several TAFE campuses.

There is a strong **Retail Trade** sector in the Region, with a GVA of \$259 million. This is driven by strong population growth, and consultation revealed that it services the broader population beyond the Region with people travelling to Coffs Harbour to shop.

These sources of strength reflect a diversified economy, with extensive population and visitor-facing advantages. This underlines the Region’s ability to attract people to live or visit as a key source of its economic vitality. In addition to tourism strengths, inward migration, sustained over long periods of time, has grown the Coffs Coast’s internal, community-focused markets and increased labour supply and potential for specialisation across a range of activities.



**A range of risks impede the Coffs Coast from achieving to its economic potential. Addressing these risks is essential to realising this Strategy's economic Vision for the Region and rising to the challenge of its prime economic management imperative.**

## *Visitor Economy*

- Ageing accommodation assets are reducing the appeal of the Region.
- Additional events and attractions are needed to support a broader tourism offering
- The lack of a new Entertainment Centre in Coffs Harbour limits its attractiveness as an event destination.
- Performing arts venues across the Region are constrained. They do not adequately support the emerging creative industries or allow a range of cultural events to be hosted in the Region, in particular the ageing Bellingen Memorial Hall.
- The Coffs Coast has the endowments and industry specialisations to support a range of food, adventure and eco-tourism experiences. By not meeting market demand for these offerings it will fail to maximise visitor numbers.

## *Skills Development and Attraction*

- There is an ageing workforce and a need to retain and attract younger workers.
- It is difficult to source and train local workers to fill key operational needs of local businesses despite the relatively high unemployment rate.
- The lack of agricultural courses at Southern Cross University's Coffs Harbour campus may undermine growth in agricultural production.
- A broader range of cultural, sporting and social infrastructure and services are required to continue to attract and retain skilled workers.
- Limited new housing supply may undermine expansion of the Region's population serving markets and adversely impact skills attraction.
- Supply of land, energy, sewerage and water services is scarce (or inadequate in some cases).

## *Industry Development*

- Restricted availability of water for food production.
- Rising energy prices

- Unscrupulous blueberry producers may taint the reputation of compliant, law abiding producers. This has already been demonstrated as having a detrimental affect on the local environments.
- Freight capacity constraints on timber bridges.
- Despite the delivery of the NBN there are still telecommunication blackspots that are restricting businesses' ability to implement new web-based technologies and connect with suppliers and customers.
- Limited transport services are hampering the effective integration of the communities, precincts and places of the Region
- Enabling infrastructure to facilitate land use change is costly for both developers and councils
- Investor sentiment is hampered by a lack of resolution on key issues like water regulation and the Jetty Foreshores area.
- Public and private sector challenges associated with supporting the liveability needs of an ageing population.
- The North Coast Railway bisects Coffs Harbour and disconnects the city from the coastline.
- Dirt road connections to and from the farm gate for blueberries are hampering the safe and efficient movement of people and produce.
- The lack of pure water supply for the Bellingen Valley restricts growth and tourism.



# Strategy

The four Strategy elements for the 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.

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.

Ongoing population growth over an extended period of time has supported the Region's development. This has seen local markets for Population Serving Industries grow significantly.

These strengths inform the strategic elements:

1. Grow the year-round visitor economy by further diversifying offerings and connecting businesses in the sector
2. Enhance and support the Health Care and Social Assistance, tourism and professional and creative services industries by implementing skills development and attraction initiatives
3. Assist development of key agri-business by building on the Region's clean and green image
4. Enhance and grow the Health Care and Social Assistance; Education and Training and Manufacturing industries by the development and implementation of a Regional Precincts and Activity Centres Masterplan.





## 1. Grow the year-round visitor economy by further diversifying offerings and connecting businesses in the sector

### Strategic Context

This strategy enables the Region to cater to an increasing demand for a range of tourism experiences through more year-round tourism. The Coffs Coast has much more to offer than the Big Banana, its most famous symbol. A vision for growing Coffs Coast tourism is set out in the new Coffs Coast Tourism Strategic Plan 2020. The Region can further capitalise on its strategic location and infrastructure.

Current tourism in the Region focuses on its natural beauty and favourable climate, and has peaks associated with school holiday periods in NSW, Queensland and Victoria. It also has year-round events linked to:

- Conferences, events and weddings – key stakeholders are the main tourist resorts.
- Sports camps – Coffs Coast has successfully hosted training camps for international sporting teams, University Games and interstate knockouts.

### Infrastructure Priorities

Tourism and Cultural Infrastructure to Host Events

### Opportunities

- Attract more international visitors.
- Increase year-round tourism by making Coffs Coast an 'event' destination.
- Improve sporting and cultural infrastructure to attract more visitors and host more events.
- Improve the quality and diversity of accommodation offerings, to improve the overall appeal of the Region.
- Develop food tourism experiences such as trails for local food production sites, shared events, farmers' markets and fine dining experiences.
- Meet the existing tourist demand for adventure and eco-tourism experiences, including eco-accommodation.

### Early Stage Actions

- International Airport Feasibility Study.
- Undertake a gap analysis of existing accommodation offerings.
- Market the Region as an event destination and develop a year-round event attraction program.
- Seek investment in key infrastructure to support conferences and events, in partnership with the main tourist resorts.
- Address cultural, sporting and social infrastructure needs in parallel with the Tourism Infrastructure Program.
- Investigate opportunities for food tourism and food manufacturing across the Region, building on its clean and green image
- Work with industry through the Tourism and Experience SkillsPoint to further develop tourism offerings

### Candidate Projects

- Airport Enterprise Precinct Enabling Investment Program
- International Airport Feasibility Study.
- Regional Sports Hub at the CCSLP, Life Saving Infrastructure, athletics facilities and indoor sports
- Environmental & creative tourism experiences, including mountain bike tracks & other adventure tourism
- Dorrigo train trail experiences
- A regional Food Hub
- Bellingen Memorial Hall
- Jetty Foreshores
- Multi Purpose Indoor Sports, Beach Sports and Athletics facilities
- Environmental tourism experiences on Bellinger River and Waterfall Way
- Coffs cultural and performing arts centre
- Mountain bike tracks and other adventure tourism opportunities
- Sealy Lookout
- Dangar Falls





## 2. Enhance and support the Health Care and Social Assistance, tourism and professional and creative services industries by implementing skills development and attraction initiatives

### Strategic Context

This element assists Coffs Coast develop the Health Care and Social Assistance, tourism and professional and creative services industries by attracting the skills required for its economy to grow by combining regional skills attraction and relocation programs with affordable housing and transitioning to retirement through sea or tree change.

People working in professional and creative services often have a transition rather than step change to retirement; so relocating for part-time work and lifestyle benefits is attractive. A key driver to relocate for potential residents is availability of affordable housing on a regional basis, meaning that housing supply actions must accompany relocation programs.

### Infrastructure Priorities

Enhance key amenities and water supply and sewerage works

### Opportunities

### Early Stage Actions

### Candidate Projects

- Improve linkages between key Education and Training organisations and industry; and develop pathways to link the related skill sets between industries to increase earnings potential and career development opportunities.
- Undertake forward planning to ensure the Construction, Manufacturing and Transport and Postal Warehousing industries can maximise the benefits from construction of the Pacific Highway bypass.
- Maximise the economic impact of Coffs Coast being the base for NSW's North Coast visitors to become residents: "Come for a visit, then stay for a lifetime".
- Increase the attractiveness of the Region to younger workers by offering a mix of housing options and attractive cultural, sporting and social infrastructure.

- Work with education providers to expand knowledge hubs and co-working spaces and link them to innovation and entrepreneurship programs
- Work across government and industry to develop the Region's innovation and small business ecosystem
- Develop an arts and recreation services training and business hub in Bellingen
- Investigate opportunities for 'non-competing' centres of excellence across the broader region
- Work with industry to investigate opportunities for joint training and skill attraction programs
- Undertake a needs assessment of cultural, sporting, environmental and social infrastructure
- Work with the Department of Planning and Environment to increase and diversify the supply of social and affordable housing types to meet the community's needs
- Develop a program business case for Bellingen Shire priority water supply and sewerage works
- Develop a business case for the future operations and development of the Bellingen Memorial Hall

- Bellingen Memorial Hall upgrade
- Cultural and Civic Precinct project
- Coffs cultural & performing arts centre
- Bellingen Shire priority water supply and sewerage works and coastal villages
- Enabling infrastructure to support housing supply
- Innovation Hub & Business Incubator



### 3. Assist development of key Agri-business by building on the Region’s clean and green image

#### Strategic Context

The Coffs Coast will consider and pursue a range of strategies to support the development of Agriculture, its key engine industry. Actions aim to embed sustainability and technological solutions in agri-businesses, so as to further develop innovation throughout the Region. This leverages the Region’s infrastructure endowment from being an original NBN trial site with fibre to the premises; as well as the clean and green reputation of the Region.

#### Infrastructure Priorities

Timber bridges

#### Opportunities

#### Early Stage Actions

#### Candidate Projects

- Address water supply constraints to allow increases in food production.
- Develop evidence-based balance between the benefits and risks of blueberry production.
- Use best practice in environmental rehabilitation to further build the clean and green image.
- Improve the cost efficiency of freight movements within and beyond the Coffs Coast Region.
- Leverage the Region’s clean and green image to further niche food manufacturing.
- Take advantage of renewable energy and micro grids to reduce energy costs.
- Connect the people and businesses of the Region to digital networks and technologies to a first rate standard.

- Work with industry to investigate pumping and piping infrastructure for reclaimed water for blueberries, and other development opportunities.
- Investigate the costs and benefits of increased blueberry production, including self-regulation and negative licensing regulatory models.
- Facilitate discussions between businesses, Southern Cross University and Department of Primary Industries to further blueberry research and development.
- Review regional freight and traffic forecasts to account for growth in output from fruit growing
- Develop a program business case for ageing timber bridges.
- Investigate opportunities for joint clean green marketing for the Region’s agri-business products.
- Investigate opportunities for greater use of renewable energy resources and Micro Grid Developments
- Work with the private sector to identify substandard quality in digital connections and develop a region-wide digital black spots map and identify potential rectification projects
- Advocate for rate payments by Forest Corporation to contribute infrastructure costs.
- Develop a program business case for ageing timber bridges.

- Pumping and piping infrastructure for reclaimed water for blueberries
- Water Security - Reservoirs
- Blueberry industry action plan, inclusive of licensing, freight movements and water monitoring commitments.
- Timber bridges upgrades
- Upgrade transport routes
- Micro Grid Developments (solar & hydro projects)
- Hogbin Drive amplification
- Plan remediation of Coffs Creek
- Sewerage services for coastal villages
- Reclaimed water for new developments



## 4. Enhance and grow the Health Care and Social Assistance; Education and Training and Manufacturing Industries by the development and implementation of a Regional Precincts and Activity Centres Masterplan

### Strategic Context

The Coffs Coast's economy is diversifying and can continue to do so. That can be enhanced through alternative options for land use between engines of growth like Tourism and Manufacturing; population-serving industries focused on areas like Health Care and Education; and resident and visitor accommodation. Historically, many of these industries and housing areas have shared space. Due to its recent population growth, some industries have concentrated in particular places or 'precincts', supporting the benefits of agglomeration to businesses, workers and consumers.

Maximising agglomeration benefits is strategically critical, as they are the key social return justifying the extra costs and congestion that cities entail. The North Coast Regional Plan emphasises the need to develop an action plan for Regional Cities like Coffs Harbour to co-ordinate growth. This should be extended to develop a Precincts and Activity Masterplan and Investment Program on a whole of region basis.

### Infrastructure Priorities

Regional Precincts and Activity Centres Investment Program, including services to industrial precincts

### Opportunities

#### Early Stage Actions

#### Candidate Projects

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertake holistic precinct planning to maximise agglomeration benefits of industry co-location.</li> <li>• Revitalise the Jetty Foreshores and connect it to the CBD.</li> <li>• Prioritise water supply and sewerage infrastructure to activate employment lands.</li> <li>• Maximise the benefits of the Pacific Highway bypass, by integrating traffic flows with precinct planning.</li> <li>• Use best practice planning to best support an ageing population.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek funding for Regional Precincts and Activity Centres Masterplan and Investment Program.</li> <li>• Investigate proposals for expansion of the Airport Enterprise Precinct.</li> <li>• Sustainably develop a Jetty Foreshores hub with commercial access.</li> <li>• Facilitate Manufacturing and light industry hub around intermodal facility linking airport, rail and road infrastructure.</li> <li>• Review infrastructure contributions.</li> <li>• Link targeted precinct planning outcomes to local and public transport requirements.</li> <li>• Undertake a gap analysis of requirements to better support an ageing population.</li> <li>• Investigate opportunities to re-align the North Coast Railway.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional Precincts and Activity Centres Masterplan and investment program</li> <li>• Integrated Transport Study</li> <li>• Connected Autonomous Vehicle trail</li> <li>• Connectivity Study between Coffs CBD – Jetty Precinct – Park Beach Plaza</li> <li>• Bellingen Precinct Parking Strategy and Investment Program</li> <li>• Shared Pedestrian Pathways Projects (PAMP)</li> <li>• Coramba Road (alternative connecting route between Coffs and Dorrigo)</li> <li>• Jetty Foreshores development</li> <li>• Priority water supply and sewerage works, including Raleigh Industrial Estate and seaside towns</li> <li>• Bellingen Health Precinct</li> </ul>
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# 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 like the Department of Premier and Cabinet and NSW Department of Industry as appropriate.

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

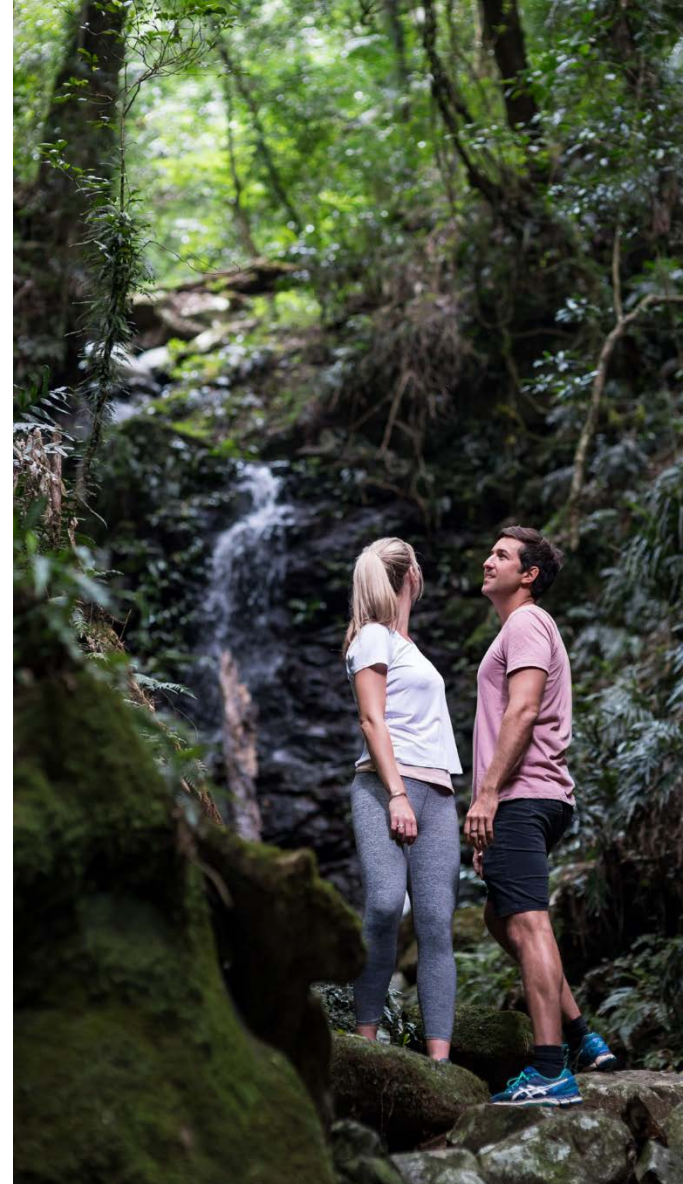
The completion of this document is intended to be the first stage of an ongoing process where new specific actions to further progress towards the vision are identified through application of the framework.

The two 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 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 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.



# Coffs Coast Enablers Table

Enablers	Strategies and key actions			
	1. Grow the year round visitor economy by further diversifying offerings and connecting businesses in the sector	2. Enhance and support the Health Care and Social Assistance, tourism and professional and creative services industries by implementing skills development and attraction initiatives	3. Assist development of key agri business by building on the Region's clean and green image	4. Enhance and grow the Health Care and Social Assistance; Education and Training and Manufacturing industries by the development and implementation of a Regional Precincts and Activity Centres Masterplan
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>International Airport Feasibility Study</li> <li>Undertake a gap analysis of existing accommodation offerings</li> <li>Seek investment in key infrastructure to support conferences and events, in partnership with the main tourist resorts</li> <li>Address cultural, sporting and social infrastructure needs in parallel with the Tourism Infrastructure Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake a needs assessment of cultural, environmental, sporting and social infrastructure.</li> <li>Work with the Department of Planning and Environment to increase and diversify the supply of social and affordable housing types to meet the community's needs</li> <li>Develop program business case for Bellingen Shire priority water supply and sewerage works</li> <li>Develop a business case for the development of the Bellingen Memorial Hall</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with industry to investigate pumping and piping infrastructure for reclaimed water for blueberries, and other development opportunities</li> <li>Advocate for rate payments by Forest Corporation to contribute infrastructure costs.</li> <li>Develop a program business case for ageing timber bridges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seek funding for Regional Precincts and Activity Centres Masterplan and Investment Program</li> <li>Progress development of the Airport Enterprise Park</li> <li>Sustainably develop a Jetty Foreshores hub with commercial access</li> <li>Facilitate Manufacturing and light industry hub around intermodal facility linking airport, rail and road infrastructure</li> <li>Review infrastructure contributions</li> <li>Link targeted precinct planning outcomes to local and public transport requirements</li> <li>Investigate opportunities to re-align the North Coast Railway</li> </ul>
Facilities and institutions		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate opportunities to 'non-competing' centres for excellence across the broader region</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate discussions between businesses, Southern Cross University and Department of Primary Industries to further blueberry research and development</li> </ul>	

# Coffs Coast Enablers Table

Enablers	Strategies and key actions			
	1. Grow the year round visitor economy by further diversifying offerings and connecting businesses in the sector	2. Enhance and support the Health Care and Social Assistance, tourism and professional and creative services industries by implementing skills development and attraction initiatives	3. Assist development of key agri business by building on the Region's clean and green image	4. Enhance and grow the Health Care and Social Assistance; Education and Training and Manufacturing industries by the development and implementation of a Regional Precincts and Activity Centres Masterplan
People and skills		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with education providers to expand knowledge hubs and co-working spaces and link them to innovation and entrepreneurship programs.</li> <li>• Develop an arts and recreation services training and business hub in Bellingen</li> <li>• Work with the Manufacturing, Transport and Postal Warehousing and Construction industries to investigate opportunities for joint training and skill attraction programs</li> </ul>		
Regulation and Policy		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work across government and industry to develop the Region's innovation and small business ecosystem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate the costs and benefits of increased blueberry production, including self-regulation and negative licensing regulatory models</li> <li>• Investigate opportunities for greater use of renewable energy resources and Micro Grid Developments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertake a gap analysis of requirements to better support an ageing population</li> </ul>

# Coffs Coast Enablers Table

Enablers	Strategies and key actions			
	1. Grow the year round visitor economy by further diversifying offerings and connecting businesses in the sector	2. Enhance and support the Health Care and Social Assistance, tourism and professional and creative services industries by implementing skills development and attraction initiatives	3. Assist development of key agri business by building on the Region's clean and green image	4. Enhance and grow the Health Care and Social Assistance; Education and Training and Manufacturing industries by the development and implementation of a Regional Precincts and Activity Centres Masterplan
Services and other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market the Region as an event destination and to develop a year-round event attraction program</li> <li>• Investigate opportunities for food tourism and food manufacturing across the Region, building on its clean and green image</li> <li>• Work with industry to further develop adventure, food and eco-tourism offerings</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan remediation of Coffs Creek</li> <li>• Investigate opportunities for joint clean green marketing for the Region's agri-business products</li> <li>• Work with the private sector to identify sub-standard quality in digital connections and develop a region-wide digital black spots map and identify potential rectification projects</li> </ul>	

## End Notes

(1) Regional Economic Development Strategies, Centre for Economic and Regional Development. ([https://www.dpc.nsw.gov.au/programs\\_and\\_services/centre\\_for\\_economic\\_and\\_regional\\_development/projects](https://www.dpc.nsw.gov.au/programs_and_services/centre_for_economic_and_regional_development/projects))

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

(3) Migration into the Coffs Coast from 2011-2016, Source: ABS 2016 Census data.

(4) The Australian, 12 February 2014, 'Blueberries a \$135m boom crop'

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/life/blueberries-a-135m-boom-crop/news-story/3b8b0b01f2d44114339568b4710777c?sv=b5b8e1cf77c7ab1f80040a246172daba>

(5) Employment History, ABS 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016 Census Data.

(6) Gross Value Added (GVA): Measures the value of goods and services produced in a region. It is a combination of wages and operating surplus.

(7) Creative Industries encompasses professions such as web designers, animators and other design professionals who can also be captured by the Arts and Recreation Services or the Professional and Technical Services ANSZIC code.

(8) Australian Bureau of Meteorology

[http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/averages/tables/cw\\_059040.shtml](http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/averages/tables/cw_059040.shtml)

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