

EASTERN RIVERINA

Regional Economic Development Strategy

2018 – 2022



VISION

The Eastern Riverina is a well-connected, innovative and vibrant place, which is viewed as an appealing place to live due to access to the education, culture and health services of a city with all the benefits of a rural lifestyle and is recognised as a leader in the transport and logistics, manufacturing, defence, agribusiness, health care and social assistance sectors.



Developed with the support of the NSW Government as part of the Regional Economic Development Strategies program to assist local councils and their communities in regional NSW.



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, rather than a comprehensive list of all potential projects. Adoption of these projects will 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, this 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 in planning their future economic activities, particularly councils, communities and local businesses. 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 Sensing Value on behalf of the Region, was formed in collaboration with the Wagga Wagga City, Coolamon Shire, Junee Shire and Lockhart Shire Councils, key stakeholders and the broader regional community. It benefited from economic-analytical assistance from the NSW Government’s Centre for Economic and Regional Development (CERD).

It is presented in two documents, the ***Eastern Riverina Regional Economic Development Strategy 2018–2022*** which allows the reader to quickly and easily determine key content, while the accompanying ***Eastern Riverina Regional Economic Development Strategy – Supporting Analysis 2018–2022*** details the Strategy methodology, evidence and 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 Eastern Riverina Regional Economic Development Strategy 2018–2022 the Strategy sets out a long-term economic vision and associated strategy for the Region’s economic development for the four local government areas (LGAs) of Wagga Wagga City, Coolamon Shire, Junee Shire and Lockhart Shire (the Eastern Riverina Region, or Region). It builds on the Region’s endowments, economic strengths and specialisations to guide investment over the next four years; as well as taking account of regional risks.¹ Economic principles suggest that endowments and specialisations play a key role in regional economy development.²

The Strategy aims to leverage the Region’s endowments: its key strategic location with freight and transport routes to five capital cities; liveability and lifestyle appeal; natural resource endowments for food production purposes; major infrastructure including hospitals, airports and intermodal hubs; strong local institutions and businesses across a variety of sectors; and good educational institutes and a skilled local workforce. These endowments are the basis of the Region’s current and future specialisations in transport and logistics, health care and social assistance and agribusiness. These endowments and specialisations were identified through data analysis and subsequently informed and confirmed through community consultation.

The Strategy, which builds on the Region’s endowments and its demonstrable economic strengths and specialisations – which will be the drivers of the regional economy into the future – aims to ensure long-term sustainable development for the Region through a number of priorities. These are primarily sector-specific strategies, although it also includes a more general strategy that cuts across each of the sectors:

- Leverage the Region’s strategic location by developing the Transport and Logistics and Manufacturing sectors
- Support and grow Agribusiness
- Support the expansion and growth of the Health Care and Social Assistance sector
- Upskill the workforce and drive innovation and entrepreneurialism
- Improve utilities, energy and telecommunications
- Increase efforts to attract new residents and visitors supported by improved amenity offerings.

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

While the order of these strategies reflects current opportunities to be leveraged or issues to be addressed, each priority should be considered as part of a holistic package that will be important for the overall growth of the regional economy into the future.

This Strategy is the culmination of collaboration between the councils of Wagga Wagga City, Coolamon Shire, Junee Shire, Lockhart Shire, their respective communities and the NSW Government’s Centre for Economic and Regional Development (CERD).

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).

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

Background

The Region's boundaries and its constituent LGAs are shown in Figure 1. The Region sits on the Murrumbidgee River.

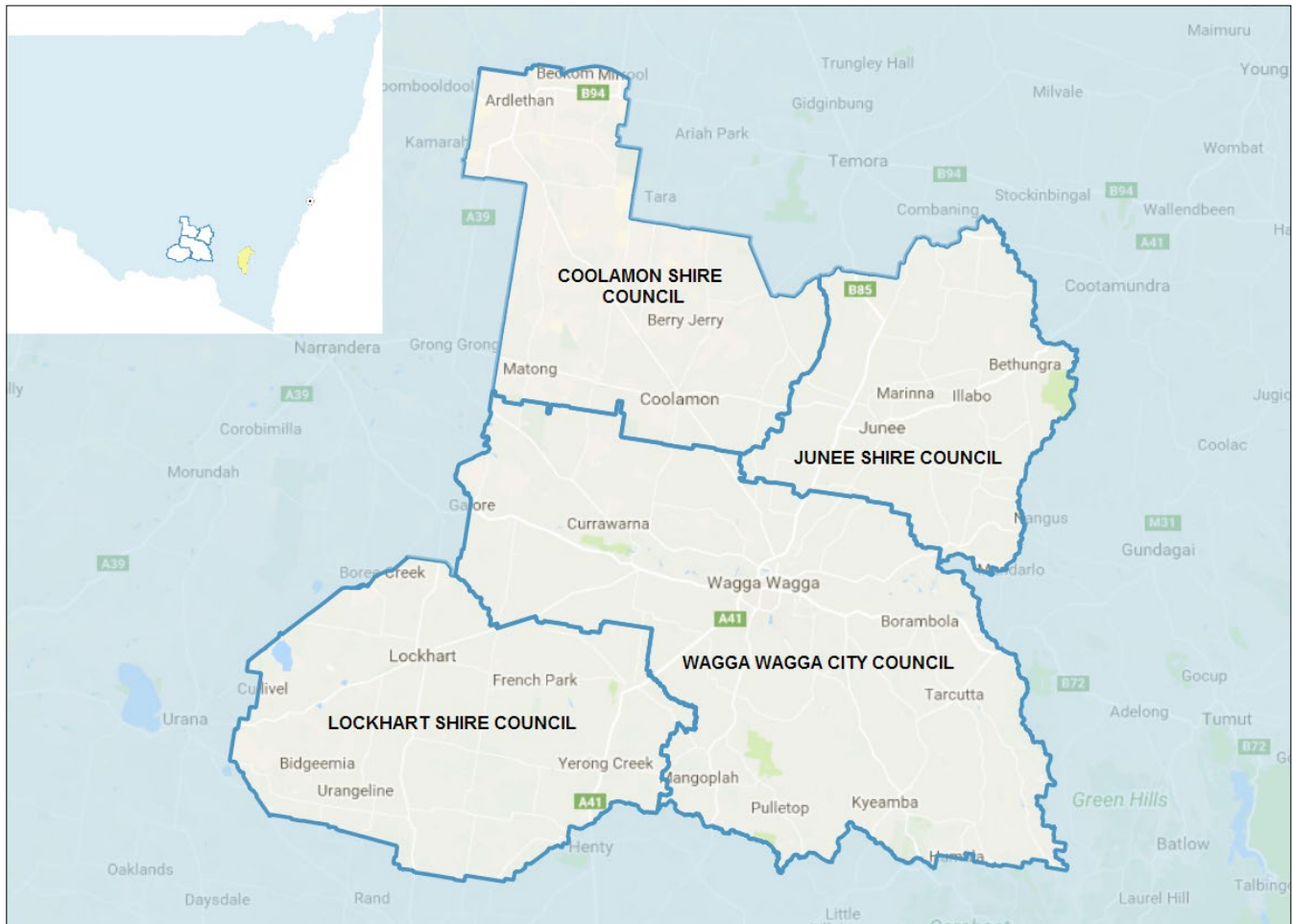


FIGURE 1: Eastern Riverina Region boundaries

In 2016, the Region was home to 78,123 people, with 62,385 of those people living in Wagga Wagga City. Worker movements in the Region are characterised by significant movement between the LGAs signifying a high degree of economic interdependency, with Wagga Wagga acting as the major employment centre for the Region. Based on their levels of self-containment³, more than half the workers living in Coolamon and Lockhart, work outside their resident LGAs, while 40% of workers in Junee work outside the shire. This movement of workers, combined with economic and industry linkages, forms the basis for considering the four LGAs as a single functional economic region.

Demographically, the Eastern Riverina has a noticeably higher proportion of young workers aged between 15 and 29 years old compared to the state average, as well as a lower proportion of retiree-aged individuals than the state average. This is highly atypical of a regional area and appears to be driven by a significantly younger demographic in Wagga Wagga, potentially due to the presence of institutions such as Charles Sturt University, the Army and RAAF bases, and to a lesser extent, the higher proportion of younger people in Junee. Over the next 15 years, Wagga Wagga is expected to

³ Self-containment describes the proportion of residents who are employed within the LGA in which they live.

continue to grow steadily at an average annual rate of 1.0% p.a., which will have also implications for the wider region as Junee, Coolamon and Lockhart offer complementary accommodation options to Wagga Wagga's city offerings⁴.

Trends in employment in the Region's industry sectors are shown in Figure 2.

Health Care and Social Assistance is the Region's major employing sector, having significantly increased over the past 15 years (see Figure 2 below). This is potentially due to continued growth in the 65+ years demographic in the Region, particularly in Coolamon, Junee and Lockhart, while Wagga Wagga acts as a regional hub for services. As of 2016, the four largest employing sectors in the Region are all service sectors: Health Care and Social Assistance, Public Administration and Safety (likely due to the considerable Defence sector), Retail Trade and Education and Training.

Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing (predominantly Sheep, Beef Cattle and Grain Farming) has a major role in the regional economy, particularly outside of Wagga Wagga; although employment numbers have declined since their high in 2001 despite a recent increase between 2011 and 2016.

Employment declines in the sector are consistent with broader trends seen across Australia, but the sector's trends suggest future employment growth potential.

Manufacturing remains a major sector in the Region, leveraging strong linkages to both production-side resources from local farmers, as well as good access to markets as a result of the strategic location of the Region, access to natural gas pipelines and a strong Transport and Logistics sector. While tourism employment is not formally captured in the same manner as other sectors by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the importance of the industry can be seen in the high number of workers employed in the Accommodation and Food Services and Retail Trade sectors.

Ultimately, economic indicators represent one aspect of the approach to identifying key sectors. The sectors of specialisation within the Region can be identified using this employment data in conjunction with other sources: such as community consultation and online surveys, as well as other indicators like sector value-added, exports and imports (which can be found in the *Eastern Riverina Regional Economic Development Strategy – Supporting Analysis 2018–2022*).

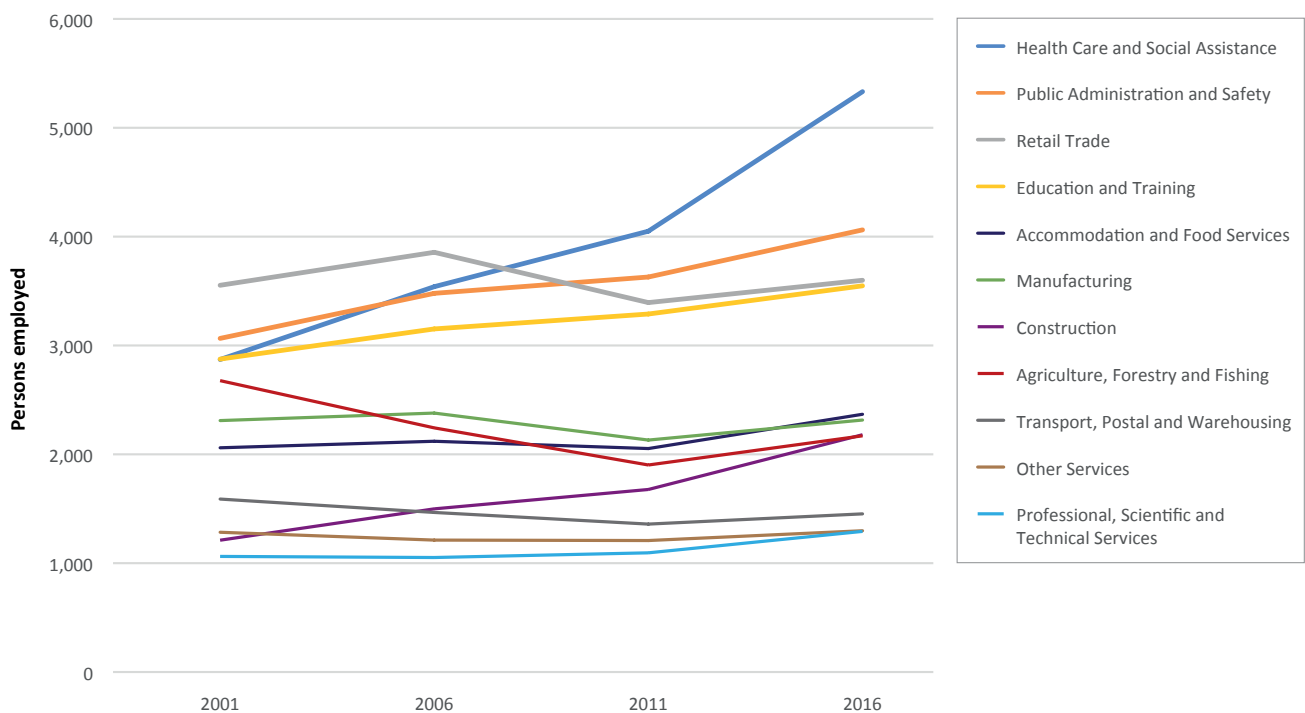


FIGURE 2: Employment in the Region, 2001–2016

Source: ABS 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016 Census

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 as quoted in the City of Wagga Wagga Economic Snapshot

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 each region. The CERD in its *Regional Economic 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.”⁵

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



⁴ Regional Economic Growth Enablers Report (2017), Centre for Economic and Regional Development

TABLE 1. Endowments of the Region identified through analysis and community consultation

<p>Location</p> <p>The Eastern Riverina is located along highly strategic transport routes between Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Brisbane and Adelaide, with connections via road, rail and air to each of these cities and the major Australian sea ports. This creates a natural comparative advantage for the transport and logistics sector in the Region, which in turn can act as an enabler for sectors such as Manufacturing and Agriculture.</p>	<p>Transport and logistic infrastructure</p> <p>The Region’s strategic location means a number of major freight routes run through the Region, both by road and rail. This includes assets such as the Hume Highway, Olympic Highway, Sturt Highway, as well as intermodal facilities at the developing Riverina Intermodal Freight and Logistics (RIFL) hub and the QUBE Harefield Intermodal facility. The Region also sits on the inland rail corridor, which enables freight rail linkages from Brisbane to Adelaide.</p>
<p>Liveability and lifestyle appeal</p> <p>The scale of Eastern Riverina allows access to a number of services, lifestyle, amenity and culture that would be expected of major metropolitan cities, but with a lower cost of living and housing and shorter commutes than in the metropolitan locations. This provides a point of comparative advantage as a potential migration destination for those looking to move out of the major cities of Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne.</p>	<p>Natural resource endowment</p> <p>The Region has a significant land endowment and sunshine exposure that provides the basis for comparative advantages for the highly productive agricultural enterprises in the Region. These benefits flow on to food manufacturing businesses in the Region who source many of their inputs from local producers. The Region also contains a number of key environmental endowments such as the Murrumbidgee River, The Rock Hill Nature Reserve and Galore Hill.</p>
<p>Public Sector Administration facilities</p> <p>The Army and RAAF bases and Junee Correctional Facility provide a stabilising presence for the wider economy, as they are not dependent on macroeconomic factors. As a result, they create a relatively consistent source of demand for local goods and services that allows the Region to be more economically resilient in times of downturn, as well as acting as a source of local skilled workers for the wider region and driving the Public Order and Safety Services sector.</p>	<p>Health care infrastructure and services</p> <p>The Region contains a number of assets that can benefit the Health Care and Social Assistance sector, including the Wagga Wagga Rural Referral hospital, as well as a wide range of SMEs that provide complementary healthcare services which form the basis of a health precinct in Wagga Wagga. Coolamon, Junee and Lockhart also have their own hospitals and health care districts which service their significant retiree populations.</p>
<p>Education infrastructure</p> <p>The Region is home to a range of education facilities, most notably the Charles Sturt University campus at Wagga Wagga, as well as campuses of UNSW and the University of Notre Dame. The Region is also home to a number of vocational institutes such as the TAFE NSW campus at Wagga Wagga and the Australian Airline Pilot Academy at Wagga Wagga Airport. These institutions offer courses responsive to local industry needs and provide pathways for young people to continue training and upskilling while remaining in the Region.</p>	<p>Wagga Wagga Airport</p> <p>Wagga Wagga Airport is a major regional airport with daily connections to Sydney and Melbourne. This provides a significant access corridor to the Region, and planned expansion of services and facilities are expected to increase the appeal of the Region for visitors, businesses and potential new residents. The airport is also home to the Regional Express Heavy Maintenance Base and the Australian Airline Pilot Academy.</p>
<p>Human capital</p> <p>The Eastern Riverina Region has a highly skilled labour force, with a higher proportion of individuals with bachelor’s degrees and above qualifications compared to the Regional NSW average. This suggests that the Region is not only training more highly qualified individuals, but that it is also successfully keeping them within or attracting others to the Region. The Region also has a significant indigenous population (Wiradjuri country), with a number of places of important cultural heritage located across the Region. Efforts such as the course offering in Wiradjuri Language, Culture and Heritage at CSU reflect the importance of indigenous heritage as part of the Region’s identity.</p>	<p>Local institutions and strong leadership</p> <p>The Region is well supported by an array of education, health, tourism and business institutions, with mature relationships and unified objectives. These institutions include joint organisations such as REROC and RDA Riverina, chambers of commerce and community groups such as the Committee4Wagga and Women in Business, as well as an active Aboriginal Land Council representing the Wiradjuri people in the Region.</p>



Specialisations

Analysis of sector specialisations is based on the concept of Location Quotients (LQ), which provide an indication of employment concentration in industry sectors in the regional economy compared with the same industry sectors across NSW. The higher the LQ, the more specialised a region is in that industry relative to the rest of NSW.

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 Eastern Riverina Region.

Location Quotient Analysis

While Health Care and Social Assistance is the largest sector in the Region, employing 15.1% of the workforce,⁶ a more granular analysis may identify specific sectors in which the Eastern Riverina has a regional specialisation. In this analysis, key sectors fall into one of three categories:

Important sectors with employment growth greater than the state average

In assessing the LQ of the sectors in the Region, a number of sectors were identified as important sectors experiencing growing employment (coloured blue in Figure 3). These sectors are major employers as well as having a high LQ. Defence, Agriculture, Food Product Manufacturing, Medical and Other Health Care Services, Hospitals, Public Order, Safety and Regulatory Services were all sectors identified as having high LQs; and employment in each of these sectors grew at a faster rate in the Region than across NSW between 2011 and 2016, as well as growing in absolute numbers over the same period.

Potentially emerging sectors

Emerging sectors are those whose LQs are lower than the state average, but whose employment growth nonetheless grew faster than the NSW state average over the period between 2011 and 2016 (coloured green in Figure 3). In the Eastern Riverina, this includes Residential Care Services, Accommodation, Professional, Scientific and Technical Services, Road Transport and Preschool and Secondary School Education. If relative growth in these sectors continues, they could eventually develop into regional specialisations.

Important with employment growth lower than the state average

There were also a number of key sectors that had high LQs, but whose employment grew by less than the overall state industry performance for that sector (coloured red in Figure 3). Most notable of these is Tertiary Education, which declined by 17% when compared to NSW between 2011 and 2016, and declined in absolute employment. This may be due to funding cuts and restructures over period that have impacted Charles Sturt University, one of the major employers in the sector. Despite this decline, the Tertiary Education sector is expected to remain a major employer in the Region.

Figure 3 below charts selected industries in the regional economy in 2016:

- industries with a larger 'bubble' employed more people;
- industries further above the horizontal line are more specialised when compared to NSW (i.e. a LQ greater than 1.25)⁷
- 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

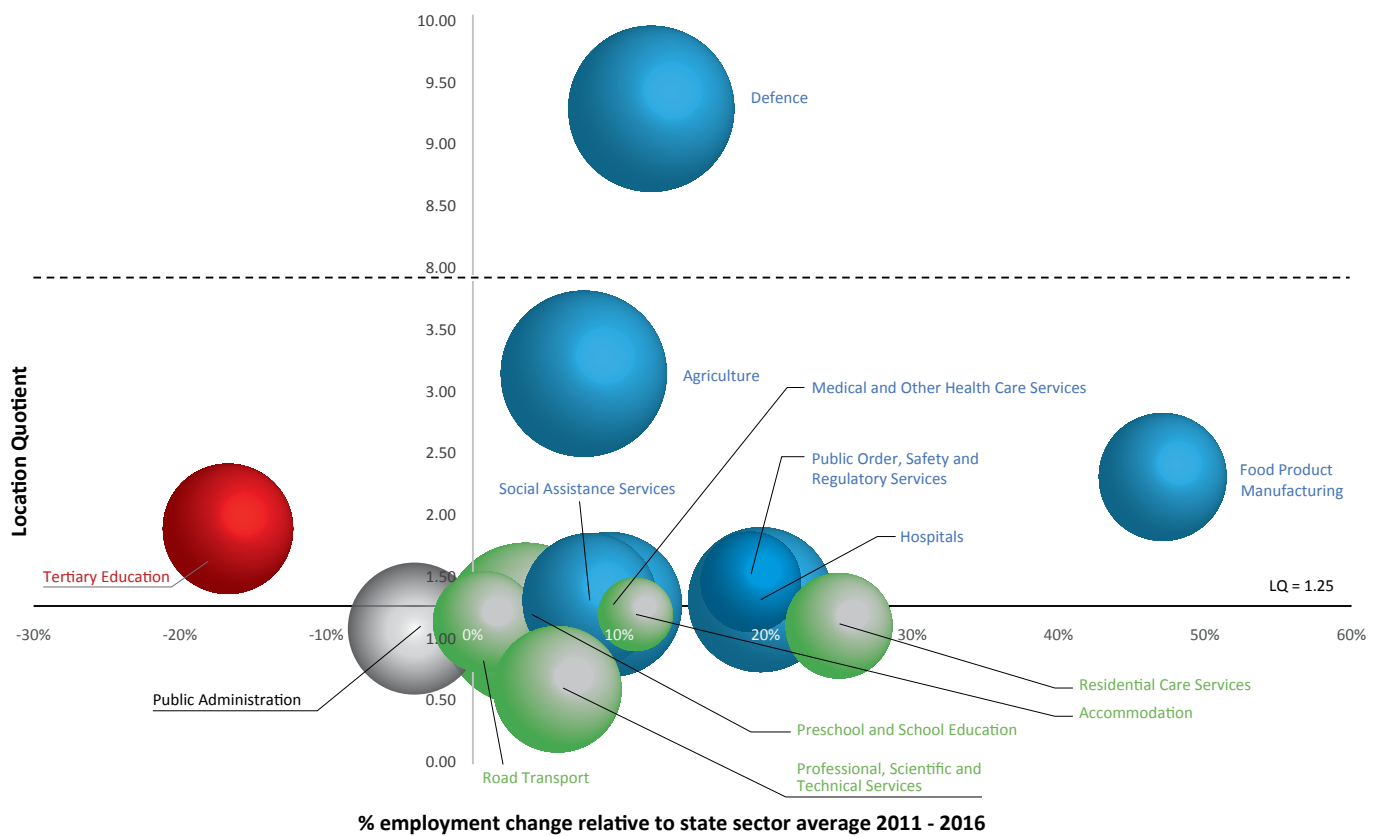
Input-Output Analysis

Location Quotient analysis can provide insights into regional specialisations, but this measure may not fully capture the impact of less labour-intensive sectors. An analysis of the value of outputs generated from industry sectors can provide another indication of economically important sectors.

The estimated Gross Regional Product (GRP) of the Eastern Riverina Region was \$4.5 billion in 2015–16. Some of the major

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016 Census data.

⁷ A LQ of 1.25 is identified in the literature as denoting a specialisation.



■ BLUE sectors are important sectors experiencing employment growth above the state average
■ RED sectors are important sectors experiencing employment growth below the state average
■ GREEN sectors are potentially emerging sectors
■ GREY sectors are supporting sectors which are unlikely to be areas of regional specialisation

FIGURE 3: Location Quotients and Employment Growth for Industries in the Region
 Source: ABS 2016 Census and Sensing Value analysis

sectors which contributed to this included (but are not limited to) Sheep, Grains, Beef and Dairy Cattle Farming (\$600.9 million), Defence (\$490.9 million), Heavy and Civil Engineering Construction (\$432.9 million), Health Care Services (\$339.0 million) and Wholesale Trade (\$339.0 million). These sectors reflect the diversity of major sectors within the Region, as well as the importance of Agriculture, Defence and Health Care from a value-add standpoint.

Major export sectors also provide an indication of a potential regional specialisations. The Eastern Riverina Region accounts for 0.9% of NSW's exports by value in 2015–16 with major exporting sectors including Sheep, Beef and Dairy Cattle (\$282.4 million), Meat and Meat Product Manufacturing (\$127.1 million), Wholesale Trade (\$94.9 million) and Road Transport (\$65.8 million). Road Transport and Wholesale Trade are notable sectors with high export values, as they reflect the major role of Eastern Riverina as part of the major inland freight corridor. Technical, Vocational and Tertiary Education Services (\$51.8 million) was also a major exporting sector, which suggests the Region acts as a major training and services hub for the wider region.

Identifying regional specialisations

Sectors which can be the engines of future economic growth include specialisation sectors or potentially emerging specialisations that have a reliance on local endowments that are traded outside the region (i.e. exported), or are servicing more than just the local population. In the Region, these include a number of sectors which are major employers and contribute significantly to value-add, such as Agriculture and Food Manufacturing, Defence and Health Care and Social Assistance.

However, while these sectors are likely to be the 'engines' of economic development in the future for the Region, one other important sector is Transport and Logistics. Despite being an enabling sector, it is acknowledged by the Region as one of the most important sectors for the Eastern Riverina, given its key strategic location along the inland freight corridor.

The key elements of the Strategy in the next section relate to these identified strategic sectors.

Strategy

The Strategy for the Region builds upon the opportunities presented by its endowments and specialisations; it also aims to address some of the key risks identified in the Region. There are six elements to the Strategy. The Strategy elements were derived from analysis of the existing endowments that enhance the Region's comparative advantages, 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.

THE **SIX** ELEMENTS OF THE STRATEGIES:

- Leverage the Region's strategic location by developing the **Transport and Logistics** and **Manufacturing** sectors
- Support and grow **Agribusiness**
- Support the expansion and growth of the **Health Care and Social Assistance** sector
- Upskill the workforce and **drive innovation and entrepreneurialism**
- Improve **utilities, energy and telecommunications**
- Increase efforts to attract **new residents and visitors** supported by improved amenity offerings

Leverage the Region's strategic location by developing the Transport and Logistics and Manufacturing sectors

An assessment of the key strengths of the Region identified access to transport infrastructure, a technological focus and access to financing as factors which provide the basis for a series of comparative advantages for a number of engine sectors in the Region. The Transport and Logistics sector not only underpins the operation and performance of 'engine' sectors, including the Manufacturing and Agribusiness sectors, it also has significant potential to assist the growth of service and population-serving sectors such as Retail Trade and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services.

The Eastern Riverina also has a highly varied Manufacturing sector, with major employers contributing significant value-add and employment to the Region. The connections of this manufacturing base to the strong Transport and Logistics sector across road, rail and air provide a source of comparative advantage to the sector by providing direct access to a logistics network that can bring inputs to the Region and take goods to market efficiently and at a low cost.

With potentially transformative projects identified, such as the Bomen Business Park, continued growth and investment into the sector has been identified as a major priority to most effectively capitalise on the Region's strategic location with connections to five capital cities. Upgrades to the Wagga Wagga Airport, the major regional airport, will also improve accessibility to the Region, with implications for visitors who visit the Eastern Riverina for both business and tourism.



Infrastructure Priorities

- **Industrial assets:** investment into a range of infrastructure to support growth and unlock capacity for heavy industrial sectors, including Manufacturing and Transport and Logistics
- **Road infrastructure:** upgrades and improvements to major highways to and from the Region to reduce travel times and time to market
- **Regional airport development:** to improve access to the Region and accessibility within the Region for tourists and potential new residents

Actions

- Invest in enabling infrastructure projects for the Bomen Business Park
- Invest in infrastructure for the expansion and upgrade of Wagga Wagga Airport
- Replace the Kemp Street Bridge to accommodate inland rail specifications
- Expand rail siding at QUBE Harefield Intermodal Terminal

Support and grow agribusiness

A number of agricultural sectors in the Region have comparative advantages, including livestock and grain farming. These advantages include significant land endowments, good water security, temperate climate and access and geographic co-location to food product manufacturing businesses in the Region. Investments to support and diversify offerings that leverage off these endowments will allow the sector to continue to grow and thrive. Institutions such as the new AgriPark and AgriTech Incubator at CSU could also have significant implications for the growth of the Agriculture sector, and are included in a later Strategy – “Upskill the workforce to drive innovation and entrepreneurialism”.

The strong Transport and Logistics sector in the Region also provides a pathway to market for the sector and offers the ability to support large-scale agricultural manufacturing, both in traditional regional products and in pursuing new opportunities and ventures. Improved logistics will provide better access to markets, although this will have to be supported by proper establishment of planning frameworks and telecommunications infrastructure that allow the sector to grow in a sustainable fashion.



Infrastructure Priorities

- **Transport infrastructure:** improve the accessibility and ease of travel to, from and throughout the Region for freight vehicles
- **Road upgrades:** investment into infrastructure to realise new opportunities in the sector and realise the full economic value of land assets
- **Digital connectivity:** provide fast and reliable internet access (NBN rollout) as well as improve mobile reception in rural parts of the Region to improve efficiency of business operations

Actions

- Upgrade the rail line between The Rock to Boree Creek to increase productivity
- Investigate options to construct an ethanol refinery at Marina
- Protect agricultural and environmentally sensitive land through appropriate planning controls
- Investigate options to ensure farmers in the Region have access to required telecommunications, utilities and water infrastructure to expand and grow
- Install telecommunication facilities in council locations to enhance internet access to rural areas

Support the expansion and growth of the Health Care and Social Assistance sector

The presence of the Wagga Wagga Rural Referral Hospital and a number of day surgery options provide a major comparative advantage for the Health Care and Social Assistance sector, allowing for the provision of a number of health services that are not available in other regional locations. This endowment is also a driver behind the Health Care and Social Assistance sector's status as the largest employer in the region. High employment growth in this sector, together with the Region's growing (and ageing) population makes this a key sector for the Eastern Riverina going forward.

Given the pivotal role the sector currently has from an employment perspective, and how important the sector will be as a driver of economic growth and an enticer for new residents to the Region, priority should be given to ensure the sector is able to grow and establish itself as a regional specialisation. This will involve addressing risks identified through community consultation, such as the sustainability of supply of skilled labour to the sector.

This will primarily be done through expansion of hard infrastructure and through creation of networks to ensure medical graduates from the UNSW program in Wagga Wagga have employment pathways that motivates them to stay in the Region.



Infrastructure Priorities

- **Health precinct:** investment into a range of infrastructure to increase and diversify the range of services offered by the health sector
- **Aged care facilities:** investment into infrastructure to provide capacity to meet growing demand and ageing population

Actions

- Establish a health services innovation and learning precinct hub in Wagga Wagga
- Investigate opportunities to expand the existing aged care facilities in Coolamon
- Upgrade facilities at the Coolamon Early Childhood Centre
- Develop an employment strategy to capitalise on the establishment of the Murray Darling Medical Schools Network at UNSW in Wagga Wagga

Upskill the workforce and drive innovation and entrepreneurialism

While the Eastern Riverina has a higher proportion of individuals with bachelor and higher degrees than the Regional NSW average, some sectors in the Region have identified issues with procuring workers with appropriate skills as a major risk to potential future economic growth. There could also be potential benefits to pursuing strategies that can attract skilled workers to the Region as a place to live and work, as well as providing the hard and soft infrastructure that can retain skilled talent currently residing in the Region.

Innovation and entrepreneurialism were also two areas which were identified as areas of economic opportunity. There are a range of sectors such as Agriculture, Health Care and Social Assistance, Transport and Logistics and biofuels and alternative energy (such as in the case of the Lockhart renewables retrofit) which could become future drivers of growth if cultivated properly. This could include initiatives and projects that encourage collaboration, innovative thinking and experimental business models to drive these sectors forward. The new AgriPark and AgriTech Incubator at CSU represent a major opportunity to facilitate and grow innovation activities in the Agricultural sector in the Region and put the Eastern Riverina at the forefront of agricultural technology.



Defence is another key sector for the Region, both as a major employer and as a potential source of employment for skilled labour. The development of a training hub that can leverage off the existing endowment of the Defence sector could provide an example of growing innovation activities in the Region. This could help the Region establish itself as a specialist for defence-related activities, which could drive potential growth in supporting the Manufacturing, Education and Training and Professional, Technical and Scientific Services sectors. This will require strong intergovernmental and cross-sector collaboration and forward planning.

Infrastructure Priorities

- **Innovation infrastructure:** infrastructure that provides opportunities for collaborative working, business start-ups and business incubation
- **Educational partnerships:** Opportunities to form educational and training linkages with existing sectors and employers to create new employment opportunities

Actions

- Invest in enabling infrastructure in the Riverside Stage 3 – Wagga Wagga Business Innovation Hub
- Invest in enabling infrastructure into a Defence services learning and training hub
- Investigate potential partnerships between councils, CSU, TAFEs and business chambers to seek alignment of course offerings and skills needs of employers in the Region
- Investigate options to encourage sectoral networking, particularly with innovation organisations such as AgriPark and AgriTech Incubator
- Undertake a feasibility study to investigate options of retrofitting the town of Lockhart to be 100% self-sufficient in renewable energy

Improve utilities, energy and telecommunications throughout the Region

The reliability and costs of telecommunications and energy were identified as major risks for the Region, particularly in its rural areas. This suggests that potential strategic projects that can improve the access to the telecommunications and utility networks (particularly in the case of “ready-to-go” industrial land) could have wide-ranging effects for the Region and the businesses within it.

These major issues have noticeable impacts outside of Wagga Wagga, where the reliability of essential business requirements such as water, connectivity and utilities limit the ability of businesses to continue growing at these sites. Given the importance of key “anchor businesses” at these sites, ensuring their ongoing viability and competitiveness can have significant implications for the economies of Coolamon, Junee and Lockhart.



Infrastructure Priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilities infrastructure: technology that can help provide electricity and gas to industrial estates across the Region • Water infrastructure: enabling water infrastructure to support the continued growth and expansion of both the population and businesses in the Region • Telecommunications infrastructure: investment in technology to enhance telecommunications to all parts of the Region

Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide infrastructure to enable the existing natural gas supply that runs through The Rock to be made available to industrial estates and residences in the township • Undertake initiatives to partner with carriage providers to enhance internet access in rural areas • Upgrade existing sewerage treatment plant in Coolamon • Develop the light industrial estate in Coolamon • Investigate increased resource needs from the Defence White paper (increased personnel) for the Region



Increase efforts to attract new residents and visitors supported by amenity offerings

Wagga Wagga has a strong offering of amenities and services across health care, education, business and retail. This makes the Region a desirable destination for metropolitan-based families and individuals looking to move out of cities such as Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra, by offering a range of services and experiences expected of metropolitan cities, but in a more affordable setting. Conversely, Junee, Coolamon and Lockhart have the potential to offer an appealing lifestyle with a different balance of amenity and access to a wide range of services and employment opportunities due to their proximity to Wagga Wagga. Based on estimates from the NSW Department of Planning & Environment, Wagga Wagga is expected to continue to grow steadily at an average annual rate of 1.0% p.a. to over 75,000 residents by 2031, and this is likely to offer positive growth opportunities for all the LGAs in the region⁸.

Projects that look to market the Region as a viable relocation destination are vital for maximising the relocation appeal of

the Eastern Riverina. These include the Evocities campaign for Wagga Wagga and unified regional marketing, alongside investments to improve the quality of life for residents in the Region, such as increased diversity of recreational options throughout the Eastern Riverina.

The expansion of the Defence personnel over the next decade within the region at the Army Recruit Training Centre at Kapooka and RAAF Wagga at Forest Hill is also expected to contribute to population growth in the region. There is also an expected injection of funds from Federal government in the Defence services in the region as referenced in the Defence White Paper.

The growth of the Defence sector, alongside strong population growth expected in the region, may also contribute to overall demand for a range of population services and amenity that the region will need to provide. This includes an increase in accommodation – both permanent and visitor – as well as amenities such as health services, schooling and utilities. It will be critical that the region is sufficiently prepared in this regard to meet the demands its future residents will place on its amenities.

A number of actions in this strategy also work alongside the strategy on the previous page “Improve utilities, energy and telecommunications throughout the Region”, which will also improve the appeal and amenity in the Region.

Infrastructure priorities	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy infrastructure: technology that can help reduce energy costs or provide alternatives to businesses and residents • Water infrastructure: enabling infrastructure to support the continued growth and expansion of both the population and businesses in the Region • Planning and strategy: the development of frameworks and strategies to further the development of the Region • Cultural assets: investment into assets and infrastructure that increase and develop the amenity and cultural offerings in the Region, including indigenous heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek funding for new targeted marketing initiatives for Evocities campaign • Review policy framework to allow for further residential and industrial development in Coolamon, Junee and Lockhart • Investigate and work in conjunction with the Defence White Paper (Department of Defence) to understand the impacts to the region on accommodation, infrastructure, local amenities • Invest in a second railway level crossing in the township of Coolamon to allow for expansion of the town • Investigate opportunities to create an equine precinct around the Coolamon Showgrounds • Increase accommodation options within the Region to ensure sufficient supply to support future population growth • Develop the Drivers Way Touring route, which includes heritage links to indigenous and colonial culture • Develop a product to market the Canola Trail

⁸ Department of Planning & Environment (2018) 2016 NSW Projections – Regional NSW Data, available at: <http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/research-and-demography/demography/population-projections>.
⁹ Defence White Paper - Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-02-26/multimillion-dollar-investment-touted-for-wagga-wagga/7202096>.

Strategy and Implementation Actions

Strategies and actions

Enablers	Leverage the Region's strategic location by developing the Transport and Logistics and Manufacturing sectors	Support and grow Agribusiness	Support the expansion and growth of the Health Care and Social Assistance sector	Upskill the workforce to drive innovation and entrepreneurialism	Improve utilities, energy and telecommunications	Increase efforts to attract new residents and visitors supported by improved amenity offerings
People and skills			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a health services innovation and learning precinct hub Establish a campus of Murray Darling Medical School at CSU in Wagga Wagga 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in enabling infrastructure for a Defence services learning and training hub 		
Government, regulation, services and information		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate options to construct an ethanol refinery at Marinna, this also adds to innovation Protect agricultural and environmentally sensitive land through appropriate planning controls Ensure appropriate and adequate resources are available to meet and enhance future agricultural opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate opportunities to expand the existing aged care facilities in Coolamon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake a feasibility study to investigate options of retrofitting the town of Lockhart to be 100% self-sufficient in renewable energy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake initiative to partner with a carriage provider to enhance internet access in rural areas Investigate increased resource needs from the Defence White paper (increased personnel) for the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek funding for new targeted marketing initiatives for Evocities campaign Review policy framework to allow for further residential and industrial development in Coolamon, Junee and Lockhart Develop a product to market the Canola Trail Investigate opportunities to create an equine precinct around the Coolamon Showgrounds Develop the Drivers Way Touring route Investigate and work in conjunction with the Defence White Paper (Department of Defence) to understand the impacts to the region on accommodation, infrastructure, local amenities
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in enabling infrastructure projects for the Bomen Business Park Invest in infrastructure for the expansion and upgrade of Wagga Wagga Airport Replace the Kemp Street Bridge to accommodate inland rail specifications Expand rail siding at QUBE Harefield Intermodal Terminal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upgrade the rail line between The Rock to Boree Creek to increase productivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upgrade facilities at the Coolamon Early Childhood Centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in enabling infrastructure in the Riverside Stage 3 – Wagga Wagga Business Innovation Hub 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop the light industrial estate in Coolamon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in a second level railway crossing in the township of Coolamon Design and construct improvements to Coolamon and Ardlethan Caravan Parks Invest and maintain cultural assets in Coolamon Shire
Utilities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Install telecommunications facilities in Council locations to enhance internet access to rural areas 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide infrastructure to enable the existing natural gas supply that runs through The Rock township to be made available to the town Upgrade existing sewerage treatment plant in Coolamon 	

Implementation

The Strategy will need to be implemented by all four councils as well as State government agencies and local entities.

It is suggested that an Advisory Committee made up of representatives from each council be established to progress the actions listed in this Strategy, identify key performance indicators and evaluate outcomes. The Advisory Committee would meet every three months and would report progress on actions to each council. The Advisory Committee could also hold six monthly meetings with the Regional Director – Riverina

Murray, 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 conduct a formal review of the Action Plan and produce 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.

After four years, the Advisory Committee will also begin the process of updating or refreshing the Regional Economic Development Strategy.



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EASTERN RIVERINA
**Regional Economic
Development Strategy**
2018 – 2022

