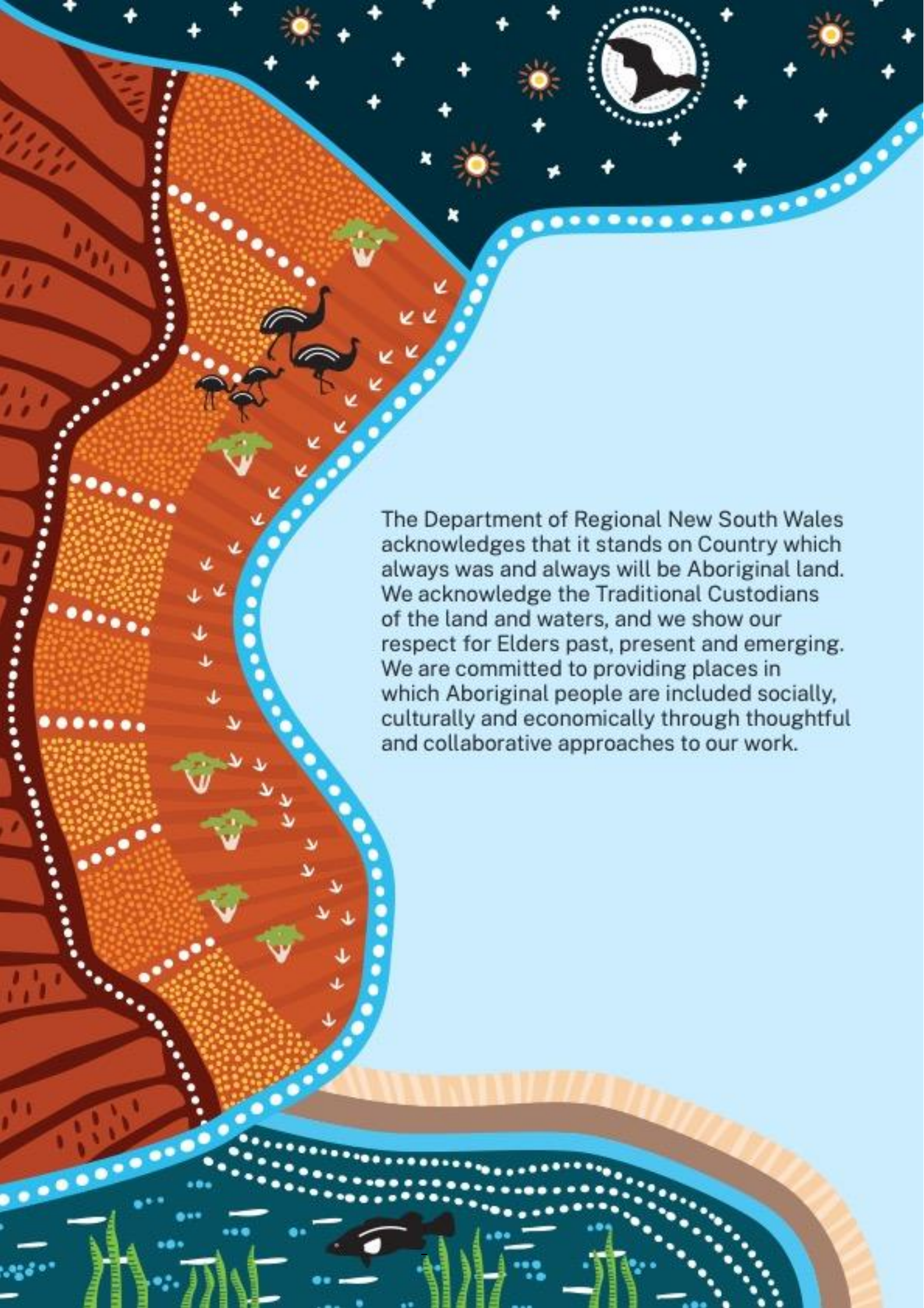


Wingecarribee Regional Economic Development Strategy – 2023 Update





The Department of Regional New South Wales acknowledges that it stands on Country which always was and always will be Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters, and we show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging. We are committed to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work.

Published by the Department of Regional NSW

Title: Wingecarribee Regional Economic Development Strategy – 2023 Update

First published: February 2023

Acknowledgements

The Department of Regional NSW would like to acknowledge the significant contribution of many stakeholders in the Wingecarribee region to the development of the 2023 REDS Update, with particular thanks to staff from Wingecarribee Shire Council. The Department of Regional NSW also acknowledges the assistance provided by PricewaterhouseCoopers and ProjectsJSA to help deliver the 2023 REDS Update project.

On Country – Artwork by Mumbulla Creative

"On Country" captures the many different countries located within the Department of Regional NSW footprint. Only part of the image is shown on the Acknowledgement of Country page. The regions included in this partial image are detailed below.

The Far West region of NSW is represented by red earth plains, mallee scrubs and an abundant emu population. Freshwater countries are referenced by the expansive network of rivers stretching through the regions. The Riverina Murray region is represented by the roots of a river redgum on the banks of a river, and a large Murray Cod can be seen in the river. The night sky features as it plays an important navigational and story-telling role in traditional life.

Cover image: Autumn at Bendooley Estate, Berrima. Photo credit: Destination NSW.

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1. Executive summary

Changes in the Wingecarribee region since 2018

In 2018, the NSW Government developed Regional Economic Development Strategies (REDS) for 38 Functional Economic Regions (FERs) across regional NSW. Since publication, regional NSW has endured shocks including bushfires, floods, COVID-19 and the mouse plague, and significant new economic opportunities have emerged. The 2023 REDS Update provides an updated evidence base to guide governments in making policy and investment decisions to enhance resilience and drive sustainable, long-term economic growth in regional NSW.

The Wingecarribee region has seen significant investment delivered since 2018, with additional projects in the planning or delivery stages



Continued focus on planning work associated with development of the **Southern Highlands Innovation Park**.



\$14.6 million invested to reactivate the heritage railway loop line between **Picton and Colo Vale**.



\$124 million invested to redevelop the **Bowral and District Hospital**.



More than **\$8 million** invested to refurbish the **Bowral Memorial Hall**.

The Wingecarribee region has seen steady population growth since 2018, accompanied by low unemployment and an upwards trend in job vacancies



The region recorded **3.9% population growth** between 2018 and 2021.



Housing vacancy rates were **2.1%** in August 2022, with **median house prices** having increased by **54%** since 2018.



The proportion of the population **over 55 years old** has increased by **0.5 percentage points** since 2018.



The **unemployment rate** was **2.3%** in **June 2022**, well below the state-wide benchmark, with job vacancies reaching an all-time high of **1,284** in August 2022.

Wingecarribee key industries have remained resilient despite challenges, with agriculture, health care and tourism continuing to drive economic growth



Manufacturing

- 1.3% Year on Year (YoY) growth from 2011-2020

\$255 million in Gross Value Added (GVA) in 2020

1,566 Jobs supported in 2021



Agriculture

+ 6.5% YoY growth from 2011-2020

\$112 million GVA in 2020

718 Jobs supported in 2021



Health care

+ 5.4% YoY growth from 2011-2020

\$261 million GVA in 2020

3,230 Jobs supported in 2021



Tourism

+ 3.8% YoY growth from 2011-2020

\$374 million visitor spend in 2021

4,441 Jobs supported in 2021

Key themes from local consultation

Stakeholders from the Wingecarribee region highlighted housing supply, increased collaboration across government and industry and resilience as key priorities for the region.

Housing availability and affordability



Stakeholders highlighted a need to address current housing shortages and affordability challenges to ensure that the housing market does not impede efforts to attract workers to the region.

Greater collaboration



Collaboration between neighbouring councils and businesses was highlighted as a priority going forward to help drive regional outcomes, foster productive partnerships, expand the capabilities of small local business, and build resilience in the community.

Building resilience



Recent shocks have brought the need to build principles of resilience into policy, programs and projects to the forefront of many stakeholders' minds.

Wingecarribee REDS - 2023 Update strategies and enablers

Strategies	Enablers
<p>Enhance the liveability of the Wingecarribee region.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan for a diverse range of housing by supporting council to implement its Local Housing Strategy, prioritising the provision of development ready land and exploring opportunities for increasing density through infill development. • Support forward planning for the provision of essential enabling infrastructure including water, sewerage, digital infrastructure and transport connectivity for access to markets and education.
<p>Facilitate the development of agriculture as a key strength and enhance the visitor economy based on food, wine, and events.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work collaboratively with the local agriculture and tourism sectors to explore opportunities to expand the range of tourism attractions, events, and experiences capitalising on the region’s agricultural specialisation.
<p>Grow the education, health, and aged care sector.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a pipeline of local skills capacity by collaborating with local government, industry and educational providers to attract additional education providers and enable development of an appropriately skilled local workforce in priority sectors.
<p>Strengthen the region’s manufacturing base and monitor opportunities associated with the emerging Southern Highlands Innovation Park (SHIP).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate across government on the development of the Southern Highlands Innovation Park to ensure adequate service provision and infrastructure to attract innovative businesses in sectors including advanced manufacturing, professional and technical services, and research and development.
<p>Support the resilience of small businesses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore options for improving access and connectivity via road and rail to improve supply chain resilience.

2. About the 2023 REDS Update

In 2018, the NSW Government and local councils developed a series of REDS for 38 Functional Economic Regions (FERs) across regional NSW. FERs are made up of one or more Local Government Areas (LGAs) that work together to create smaller economies with strong economic links.

Supporting the *20-Year Economic Vision for Regional NSW*, the REDS set out a place-based vision and framework for economic development for each FER. The REDS identify each FER's endowments, industry specialisations and key vulnerabilities and opportunities, and outline economic development strategies and actions to leverage these strengths.

Since 2018, regional NSW has endured many challenges including drought, bushfires, floods, COVID-19 and the mouse plague. At the same time a range of broader state-wide trends and actions continue to change the economic landscape across regional NSW, including digital transformation, increased remote working and the shift towards net zero. These challenges and trends have altered the landscape of economic development in many regions and created new opportunities for growth.

The 2023 REDS Update provides an updated evidence base to guide governments in making policy and investment decisions to enhance resilience and drive sustainable, long-term economic growth in regional NSW. The objectives of the update are to:

1. **Highlight progress:** reflect on significant initiatives and investments that have supported progress against the key strategies and actions in the 2018 REDS.
2. **Capture major changes:** identify and assess the impacts of major changes to regional economies since 2018, including the effect of recent 'shocks' such as bushfires, droughts, floods, mice plagues and the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. **Identify strategic opportunities:** identify key strategic opportunities and vulnerabilities for engine and emerging industries, as well as any changes to local endowments.
4. **Set the foundation for the future:** review, affirm and/or adjust the 2018 strategies, including consideration of new strategies to meet emerging priorities, to ensure they remain relevant.
5. **Identify key enablers to guide future action:** develop a non-exhaustive list of priority enabling actions that will support the 2023 REDS Update strategies.



Figure 1: The historic Peppers Craigieburn country estate in Bowral. Photo credit: Destination NSW.



Figure 2: A couple enjoying a romantic getaway at Centennial Vineyards, Bowral. Photo credit: Destination NSW.

3. About the Wingecarribee region

The Wingecarribee FER is in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales and is located between Sydney, Canberra and Wollongong. As shown in Figure 3, the region covers the Wingecarribee Local Government Area (LGA). The main towns of the LGA include Bowral, Moss Vale, Mittagong and Bundanoon.

Total area covered (km ²)	2,700
Population (2021)	52,456
Size of the economy (2020)	\$2.883 billion
Total employment (2021)	23,639

Source: ABS (2021) Estimated Resident Population, REMPLAN (2020), ABS Census (2021).

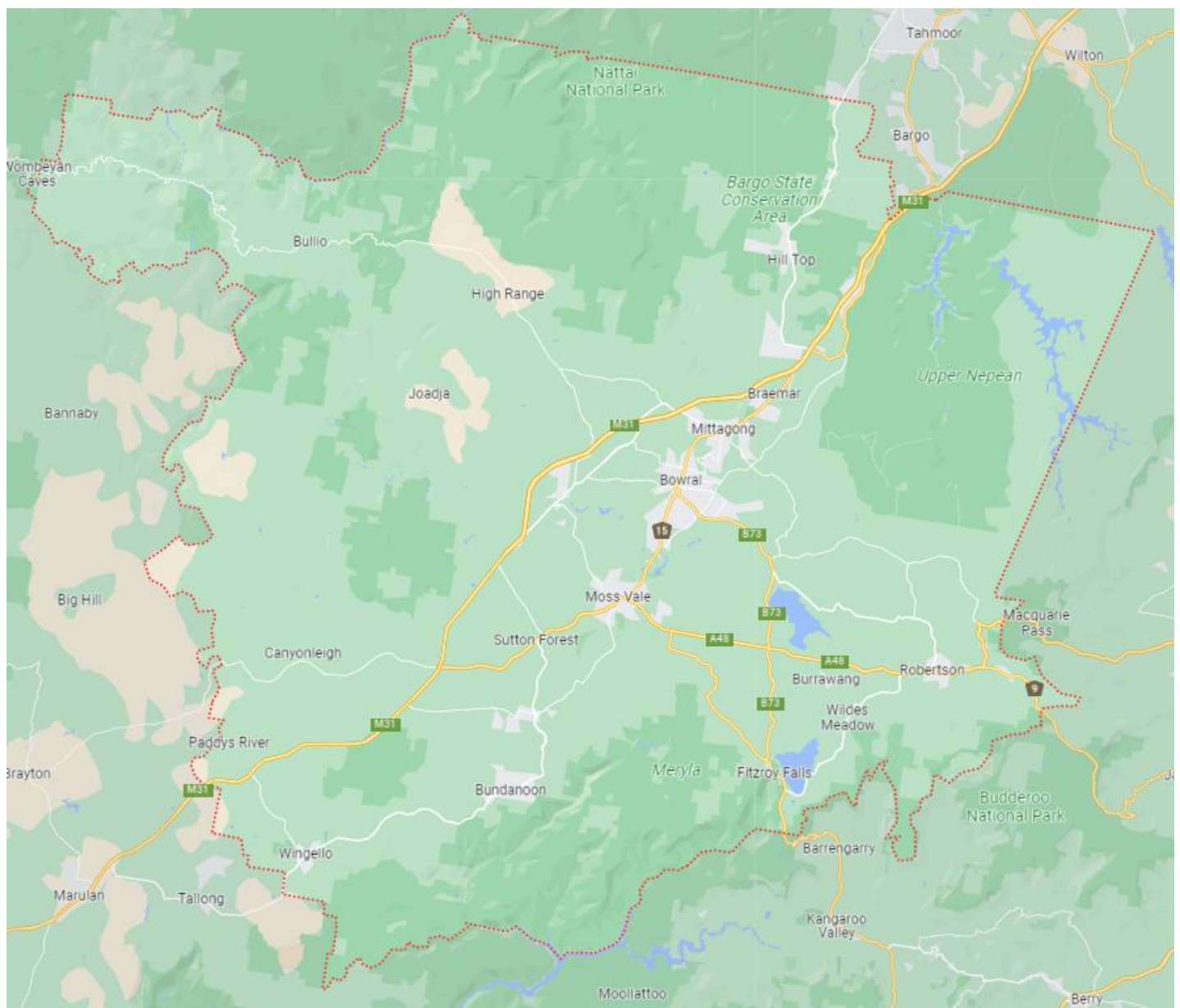


Figure 3: Map of the Wingecarribee Functional Economic Region. Map data ©2023 Google.






4.2018 Wingecarribee region REDS and 2020 Bushfire Addendum

In the 2018 Wingecarribee REDS, the region identified four key strategies to deliver a vision of achieving sustainable economic development, with a region that is highly attractive to residents and businesses and underpinned by a high degree of liveability.

The 2018 REDS focused on building on the region’s strengths in agriculture and manufacturing, education, and healthcare, while making strategic use of the region’s unique endowments to grow the visitor economy.





Following the 2019-2020 bushfires, the NSW Government developed the 2020 Wingecarribee Bushfire Impact Addendum, which offered 20 additional areas of strategic focus associated with supporting long-term recovery in the region.

2018 Wingecarribee strategies

	<p>Enhance the liveability of the Wingecarribee region.</p>
	<p>Facilitate the development of agriculture as a key strength and specialisation and cultivate the visitor economy based on food, wine and events.</p>
	<p>Grow the education, health and aged care sectors.</p>
	<p>Strengthen the region’s manufacturing base and monitor opportunities in the mineral resources sector.</p>
	<p>In addition to the core strategies articulated in the Wingecarribee region REDS, the 2020 Wingecarribee Bushfire Impact Addendum outlined a series of 20 additional short-, medium- and long-term priorities focused upon:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recovery - overcoming direct and indirect damage sustained by the agricultural, viticulture and tourism sectors. • Resilience - pursuing growth and diversification opportunities which may improve the region’s economic and community resilience.











2018 Wingecarribee specialisations

The industry specialisations below were identified as comparative advantages for the Wingecarribee region in the 2018 REDS, based on employment concentrations in industry sectors.

	Accommodation and food services
	Healthcare and social services
	Agriculture
	Manufacturing

2018 Wingecarribee endowments

Endowments recognised in the 2018 REDS spanned natural, social and infrastructure assets, with many being central to the approach of enabling economic development for the region.

Endowment	Relevant 2018 specialisation
Location, accessibility and lifestyle benefits	
Water, climate and soil	
Mineral resources	
Natural resources	
Healthcare infrastructure	
Substantial labour supply	
Local institutions and strong leadership	
Aboriginal heritage, historic heritage and villages	
Education infrastructure	
Local institutions and strong leadership	

5. The big picture: shocks and trends impacting the Wingecarribee region since 2018

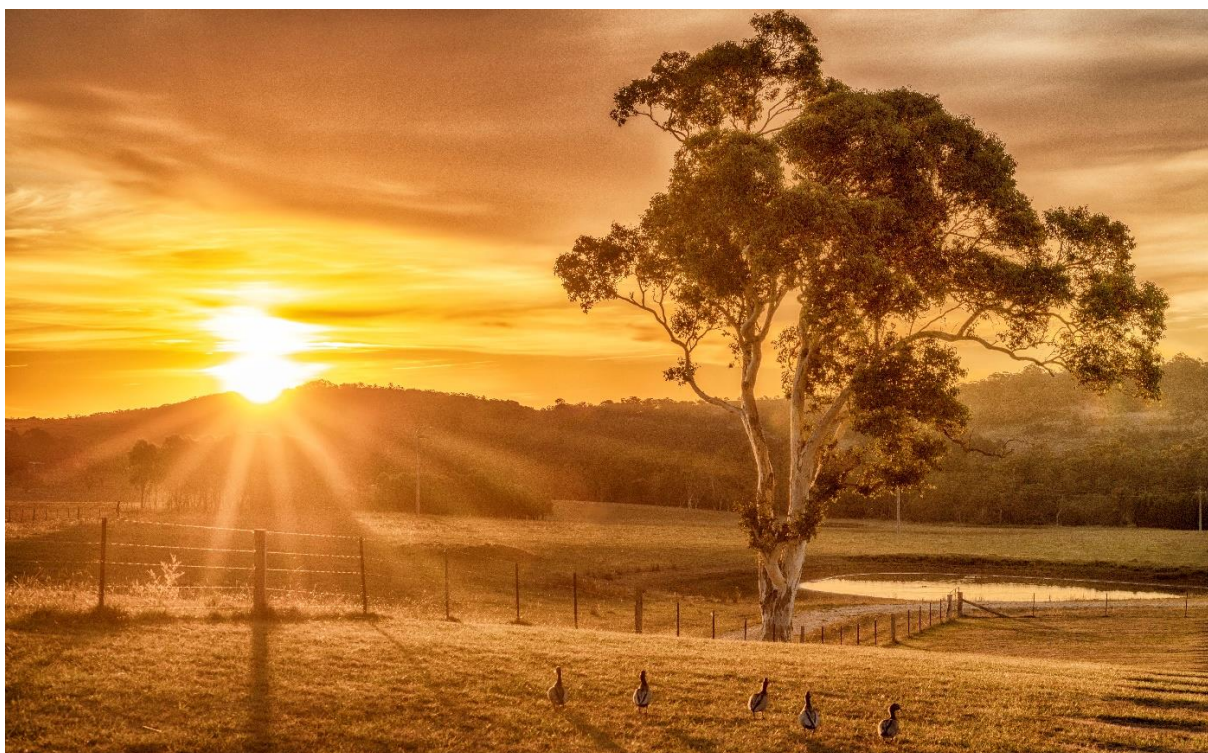


Figure 4: Sun setting over a country property in the Southern Highlands. Photo credit: Destination NSW.

Significant events impacting major industries

A sustained period of drought, followed by major bushfires, had severe environmental and economic implications for the region. From 2020, COVID-19 related movement restrictions also further challenged key local industries, in particular the visitor economy. From the period 2018 to 2022, the region had 10 disaster declarations^[1] and received \$13.61m in disaster recovery grants.^[2] Recovering from these events and enhancing both industry and community resilience have been key priorities for the region since 2018.

Drought

Like many parts of NSW, Wingecarribee endured a period of severe drought, particularly during 2018 and 2019. As shown in Figure 5, the NSW Combined Drought Indicator classified parts of the region as in severe drought in 2019.^[3]

Primary producers in the region were vulnerable to the impacts of drought, with many farmers suffering financial hardship. Livestock farmers were forced to destock, while those who kept cattle experienced feed shortages.^[4]

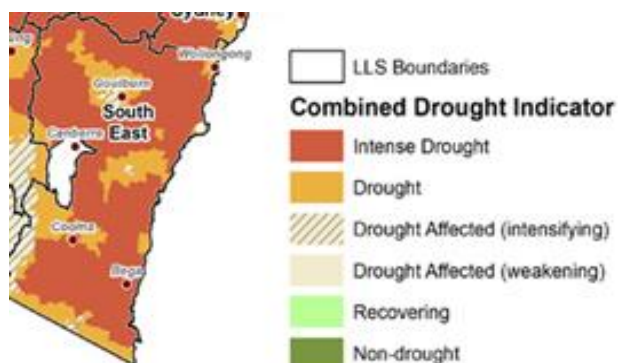


Figure 5: Combined Drought Indicator, 12 months to 31 December 2019 (Department of Primary Industries (DPI), 2022).

Bushfires

The 2019-20 bushfires had a severe impact on the Wingecarribee region, with two major fire events impacting the region in December 2019 and January 2020.

Around a quarter of the region's land mass was burnt (see Figure 6), with major impacts across multiple engine industries in the region.^[5] An estimated \$44 million of damage was incurred by the local economy, with more than 350 properties damaged or destroyed.^[6]

The region's specialisation in agriculture faced direct impacts with significant livestock and crop losses, as well as infrastructure damage. The viticulture industry suffered ongoing production losses associated with smoke taint and subsequent natural disasters.^[5]



■ Bushfire impacted areas

Figure 6: 2019-20 bushfire affected areas in the Wingecarribee region.

Enabling infrastructure for key tourist assets, such as Wombeyan Caves Road, and other natural amenities, were also destroyed.^[7] Overall, it was estimated that there was a 70% reduction in tourism visitation in December 2019 and January 2020.^[5]

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on local businesses in the region, with 51% of businesses reporting that COVID-19 negatively affected their business.^[8] Border closures triggered a skills and workforce shortage in the region as international migration came to a standstill. This along with the significant domestic movement restrictions during the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the region's tourism industry.^[9]

Beyond industry impacts, the pandemic also saw a sustained increase in income support recipients, with the number of Jobseeker recipients in the region rising by 130% from March to June 2020 and health care card recipients rising by 38%. Though the number of support payment recipients has since dropped, rates remain higher than pre COVID-19 levels.^[10]



Floods

Nine out of the 10 natural disaster declarations for the Wingecarribee region since 2018 have been associated with floods and storms, with multiple flooding events occurring across 2021 and 2022.^[11] Torrential rain in early March 2022 left substantial parts of the Southern Highlands impacted by localised flash flooding, while overflowing creeks and rivers caused many roads to close.^[11] Major damage was also sustained on the Illawarra Highway, where flooding and rain caused a major sinkhole to develop between Moss Vale and Robertson.^[12]

Further significant flooding impacted the region in July 2022, with over 300 requests for assistance to the SES over one weekend, with animals and livestock stranded due to low level flooding and substantial damage to the road network across the region.^[13]

Macroeconomic trends shaping the region’s future

Since 2018, the economic landscape of the region has been significantly influenced by macroeconomic trends related to digitisation, climate and migration. With a growing number of remote workers, the impacts of successive natural disasters and an increasing focus on the shift towards net zero, the region faces both opportunities and risks in building resilience against and leveraging competitive advantage to capitalise on these trends.

Trend	Opportunities and risks	
 <p>Digital Transformation</p>	<p>The recent COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the digital economy in Australia, with increased uptake of remote working arrangements as well as online services such as education and telehealth.^[14] As industries diversify and innovate, the need for reliable and efficient telecommunications infrastructure to support business growth, and to secure and retain a skilled workforce, will be crucial.</p> <p>In Wingecarribee, the need for further investment in digital connectivity infrastructure remains a priority, as current limitations in some areas continue to constrain the region’s capacity to fully engage with the digital economy and take advantage of the opportunities it offers.</p>	<p>Remote working and digital service provision can enable access to a greater labour pool and expand small business capacity.</p> <p>Opportunities exist to improve telecommunications infrastructure and digital connectivity to support growing and innovative industries.</p>
 <p>Changing Migration Patterns</p>	<p>The continuing spread of urbanisation has seen high levels of migration to the region, increasing the demand for metro-competitive services and infrastructure. This is evident in the population shift in 2020-21, with regional NSW gaining an additional 26,800 residents while Sydney declined by 5,200.^[15]</p> <p>Migration in combination with the largely exhausted supply of residential land in many existing areas of the region has led to increasing pressures in the housing market.</p> <p>The closure of borders due to COVID-19 had a significant impact on the region’s workforce. With international migration coming to a standstill and domestic movement restrictions in place, the Wingecarribee region experienced a skills shortage. Retaining working age residents, especially in healthcare and hospitality typically requires high-quality placemaking and amenity^[16], as well as employment opportunities that can compete other regions.</p>	<p>Accelerated population growth in the region can help increase workforce availability but has the potential to negatively impact housing affordability and availability.</p> <p>Increased population also creates greater demand for services, including health and education, which already are facing challenges with workforce shortages.</p>



Trend	Opportunities and risks	
 <p data-bbox="86 327 264 389">Towards Net Zero</p>	<p data-bbox="357 224 1062 461">The broader shift towards renewables has changed the strategic focus in Wingecarribee away from coal and mining, with the Hume Coal Mine proposal not proceeding as of 2021. Wingecarribee is also adjacent to the renewable energy ‘spine’ spanning across southeast NSW, which may provide opportunities for the region.</p> <p data-bbox="357 479 1062 716">Stakeholders have highlighted that it will be vital to monitor the impacts of major energy projects in surrounding areas, such as Snowy Hydro 2.0, so to ensure benefits are distributed equitably across the broader region, and that impacts associated with their demand for skilled labour on the workforce available in Wingecarribee is minimised.</p>	<p data-bbox="1120 224 1442 461">The shift away from coal can help support the development of a longer-term focus on building economic diversification and resilience in the region.</p> <p data-bbox="1120 479 1442 685">Major infrastructure projects in surrounding regions may absorb resources and skills from the Wingecarribee region.</p>
 <p data-bbox="86 862 248 925">Rising Uncertainty</p>	<p data-bbox="357 768 1062 974">The region has seen a succession of extreme climate events since 2018, including drought, bushfires and floods. Climate events have had significant and ongoing impacts on local infrastructure and the viability of many industries, whether through direct or indirect impacts.</p> <p data-bbox="357 992 1062 1229">As the frequency and intensity of these events are anticipated to increase in coming decades^[17], there is a need to enhance climate resilience and support climate adaptation actions in the region. Building community and industry resilience, alongside that of infrastructure will be crucial in securing the region’s future prosperity given rising uncertainty.</p>	<p data-bbox="1120 768 1442 902">Elevated risk of damage to infrastructure assets due to extreme climate events.</p> <p data-bbox="1120 920 1442 1198">Heightened risk of supply chain vulnerabilities impeding local industries, particularly in key sectors, such as agriculture and manufacturing.</p>





Figure 7: Berrima Courthouse Museum, built in 1838. Photo credit: Destination NSW.

6. Responding to change: Initiatives and investments since 2018



Figure 8: Dirty Janes antique market in Bowral. Photo credit: Destination NSW.

Since 2018, local councils, the NSW Government and other key organisations have delivered new and updated strategic documents and plans that help guide economic and community development in the region. These documents support the development of local enabling actions that contribute towards progress against key REDS priorities and strategies.

Strategies and plans	Relevant 2018 strategies
<p>The draft Southeast and Tablelands Regional Plan 2041 provides an overarching blueprint for supporting economic growth in the region to 2041, with a key focus on supporting investment into key engine and emerging industry sectors such as the visitor economy, renewable energy generation, sustainable agriculture and smart manufacturing.</p>	
<p>The Wingecarribee 2040 Local Strategic Planning Statement sets out a framework for council to follow to the meet economic, housing, social and environmental needs of the local community, with key strategic priorities including a focus on attracting skilled workers and new businesses to the region to drive economic growth and development.</p>	

<p>Wingecarribee 2031 is Wingecarribee Shire Council's Community Strategic Plan, which sets out a plan to achieve the goals and aspirations of the local community, so to fulfill a vision of creating a healthy and productive community, that lives and learns in harmony, is proud of its heritage and cares for the region's environment.</p>	
<p>The Wingecarribee Local Housing Strategy provides a long-term planning framework to ensure sufficient housing stock into the future and facilitate a greater mix of housing types reflective of the needs of the Wingecarribee community and the workforce.</p>	
<p>The Wingecarribee Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2022-2026 outlines pathways to ensure inclusive access to services, facilities and events for people living with disability and their carers.</p>	
<p>The Destination Sydney Surrounds South Destination Management Plan 2022-2030 sets out key priorities to drive growth of the visitor economy at a regional level, with key objectives including supporting recovery of the sector, building the region's brand, investing in world class events and facilitating growth across the tourism sector.</p>	
<p>The Southern Highlands Destination Strategy 2020-2030 sets out strategies to strengthen local agriculture, equine and tourism industries, create a vibrant and liveable place, and attract new jobs and young families.</p>	
<p>The Wingecarribee Recreational Walking Track Strategy provides a framework for the management, enhancement and ongoing maintenance of recreational walking tracks on council owned or managed land across the Wingecarribee Shire.</p>	
<p>The Draft South East and Tablelands Regional Transport Plan outlines how Transport for NSW will respond to the broader region's transport needs, and how it will plan for future challenges. Key objectives include improving public and active transport options and supporting emissions reduction initiatives.</p>	
<p>The Greater Sydney Regional Water Strategy is designed to manage the region's water needs over the next 30 years, considering existing and near-future risks to water security.</p>	
<p>The Canberra Regional Economic Development Strategy sets out actions to develop an economically prosperous region that provides high quality of life and is resilient, accessible and environmentally sustainable.</p>	
<p>The Blueprint for a Resilient South East NSW is being created by the Canberra Region Joint Organisation to build resilience through effect linkages and actions to prevent, prepare, respond and recover from future disasters and challenges.</p>	
<p>Wingecarribee Shire Council's Climate Change Adaptation Plan identifies actions that Council will take to reduce climate risks to the Council and adapt to climate change.</p>	

Significant investments since 2018

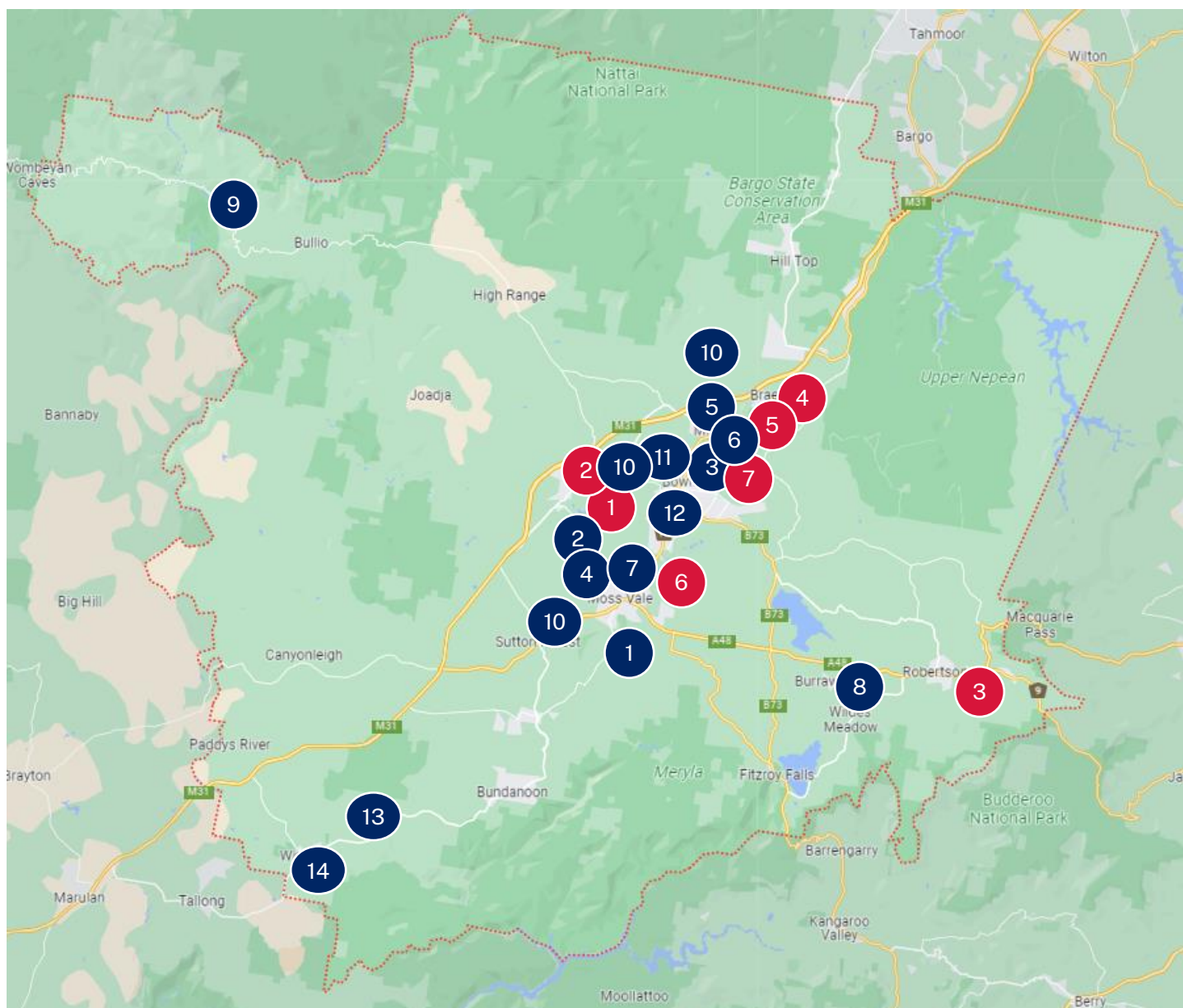


Figure 9: Map of significant investments in the Wingecarribee region since 2018. Map data ©2023 Google.




















As shown in Figure 9, since 2018, the region has seen significant local, state and federal funding, as well as private investment. These investments are at varying stages of development, with some delivered, some underway, and some still in the planning stage. Public investments have largely focused on major health infrastructure, major transport projects, as well as a range of local community amenity related projects. Grant funding has played a key role in delivery of many of these projects.

Major private investment since 2018

Investment	Estimated total project value	Relevant 2018 strategies
1 New Berrima Brickworks	\$80 million	
2 Old Berrima Gaol precinct development	Not available	

3	Robertson Hotel upgrade	\$51 million	
4	XCEM Braemar manufacturing plant expansion ¹	>\$7.5 million	
5	The Maltings development	\$68 million	
6	Racing NSW Bong Bong Farm pre-training centre	Not available	
7	Ngununggula Southern Highlands Art Gallery ²	>\$7 million	 

Major public investment since 2018

Investment	Estimated total project value	Relevant 2018 strategies
1 Continued development of the Southern Highlands Innovation Park	Not available	 
2 Southern Regional Livestock Exchange upgrade	\$5.2 million	 
3 Bowral and District Hospital redevelopment	\$124 million	
4 Wingecarribee Animal Shelter and SES building	\$6.4 million	
5 Loop Line Upgrade Project (Picton to Mittagong railway)	\$14.6 million	  
6 Old South Road rebuild	\$11.5 million	  
7 Moss Vale Bypass – design work	\$3.5 million	  
8 Fixing Country Bridges projects	\$3.5 million	
9 Wombeyan Caves Road upgrade	\$8 million	 
10 Sewerage Treatment Plant upgrades – Bowral, Moss Vale, Mittagong	Not available	

¹ Project supported by a grant through the NSW Government's Regional Job Creation Fund.

² Project supported by grants from the NSW Government.

11	Bowral Memorial Hall refurbishment	\$8.4 million	
12	Station St Bowral renewal project	\$5.1 million	
13	Penrose Community Hall	\$1.7 million	 
14	Casburn Park Wingello rebuilding	\$2.5 million	 

Regional grant programs

The Wingecarribee region has received \$41.43 million in funding through regional grant programs since 2018. Key programs in the region have included Stronger Country Communities Fund and the Bushfire Local Economic Recovery Fund, which collectively have seen \$19.9 million in approved funding for a range of projects including recovery and repair of local key infrastructure, such as the Wombeyan Caves Road, and to upgrade a range of entertainment and lifestyle amenities.

Grant category	Approved funding
Community	\$10.02 million
Economic	\$17.81 million
Disaster recovery	\$13.61 million

Note – approved funding amounts only includes programs managed by the Department of Regional NSW and are accurate as of January 2023



Figure 10: Fitzroy Falls, Morton National Park. Photo credit: Destination NSW.

7. Wingecarribee region 2023 economic snapshot

The region's population is growing, but a lower proportion of the population in the primary working age cohort may present challenges for supporting growth

Although the region has seen consistent population growth since 2015, with this trend expected to continue, there is a need to focus on developing social infrastructure which can support attraction and retention of people in their prime working age. The region is facing pressures that result from an ageing population profile.

Population growth

The Wingecarribee region recorded an average annual population growth rate of 1.3% between 2018 and 2021. As shown in Figure 11, population growth had been relatively consistent between 2017 and 2020, but the arrival of COVID-19 slowed the growth rate, although it remains above the regional NSW average.

This growth translates to a net increase of 1,956 residents between 2018 and 2021, with the population growing from 50,500 to 52,456.

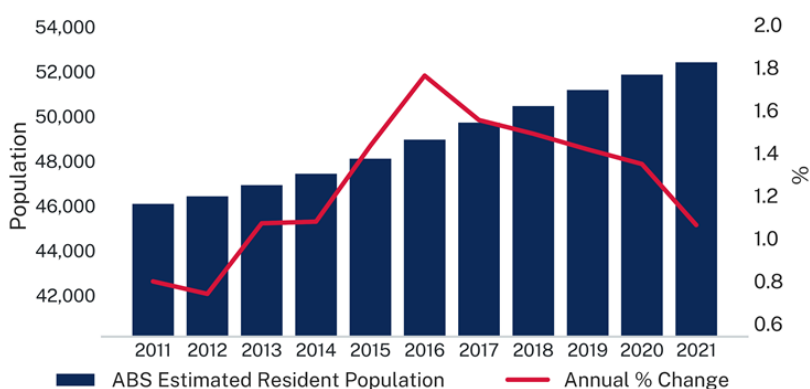


Figure 11: Wingecarribee FER population growth, 2011-2021 (ABS ERP, July 2022).

Demographic profile

In 2021, the proportion of the region's population over 55 was over 10% higher than the NSW average (see Figure 12). This represents a challenge for the region given the proportion of the population in the primary working age is significantly lower than the NSW average. Ensuring sufficient services, infrastructure and a skilled workforce to support health and age care sectors, will need to be a key focus for the region going forward. Workforce attraction, internal training and skills development priorities will be needed to ensure labour supply can match demand, particularly for key population serving industries.

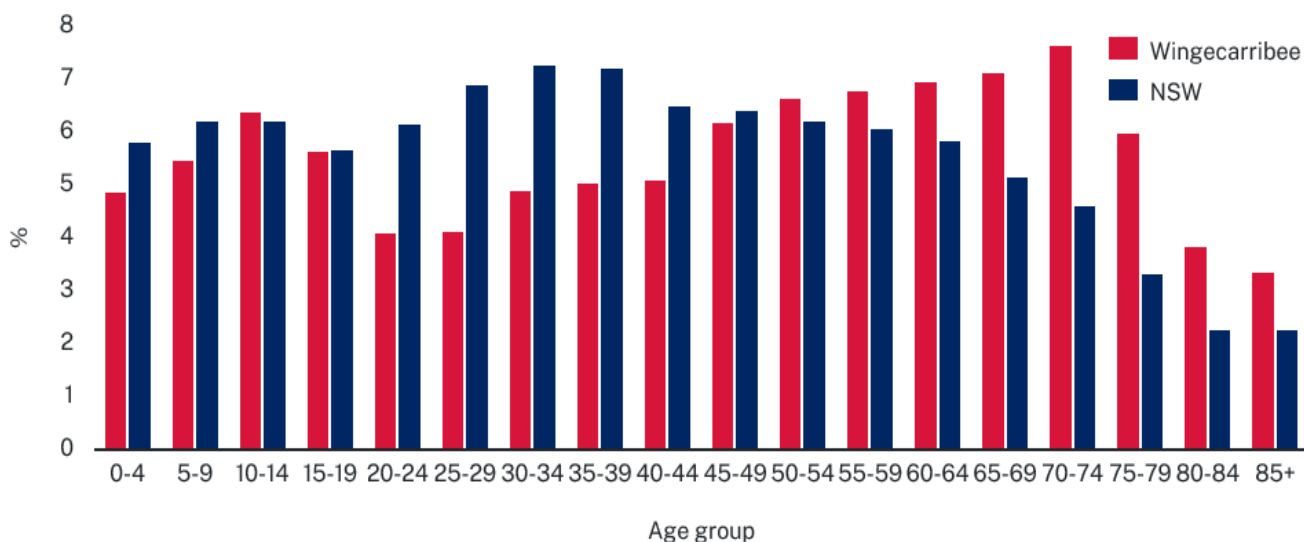


Figure 12: Wingecarribee FER population by age, 2011-2021 (ABS ERP, July 2022).

An adequate and affordable supply of housing will be critical to enabling ongoing economic development

The region has faced a decline in housing availability and affordability since 2018. Population growth and an increase in demand for worker housing for major projects may bring ongoing challenges in meeting expected demand. Ensuring adequate and accessible housing supply will be critical in enabling the delivery of long-term economic and social wellbeing of the region.

Housing availability

As shown in Figure 13, residential vacancy rates in the region have dropped from 3.5% in March 2020 to 2.1% in August 2022, with ongoing migration of remote workers to the region likely a factor. Residential building approvals in Wingecarribee fluctuate greatly, with no evident increase in-line with increased demand for housing brought about by a growing population.

While there is always a degree of lag between supply and demand for housing, there is a need to ensure that state and local planning systems (and other land development enablers such as infrastructure provision) are appropriately calibrated to keep pace with projected demand for housing.

Housing affordability

As with much of regional NSW, this heightened demand has seen growth in house prices. The median house price in the region increased 54% from \$775,000 to \$1,190,000 over the period June 2018 to June 2022.^[18] The estimated house price-to-income ratio for the Wingecarribee region in 2021 was 12.29, significantly above the NSW benchmark of 8.12.^[19] Therefore, housing affordability and availability represents a key challenge for the region, particularly given the need to encourage skilled workers in the primary working age demographic to move to the region to help address skills and workforce challenges in the region.

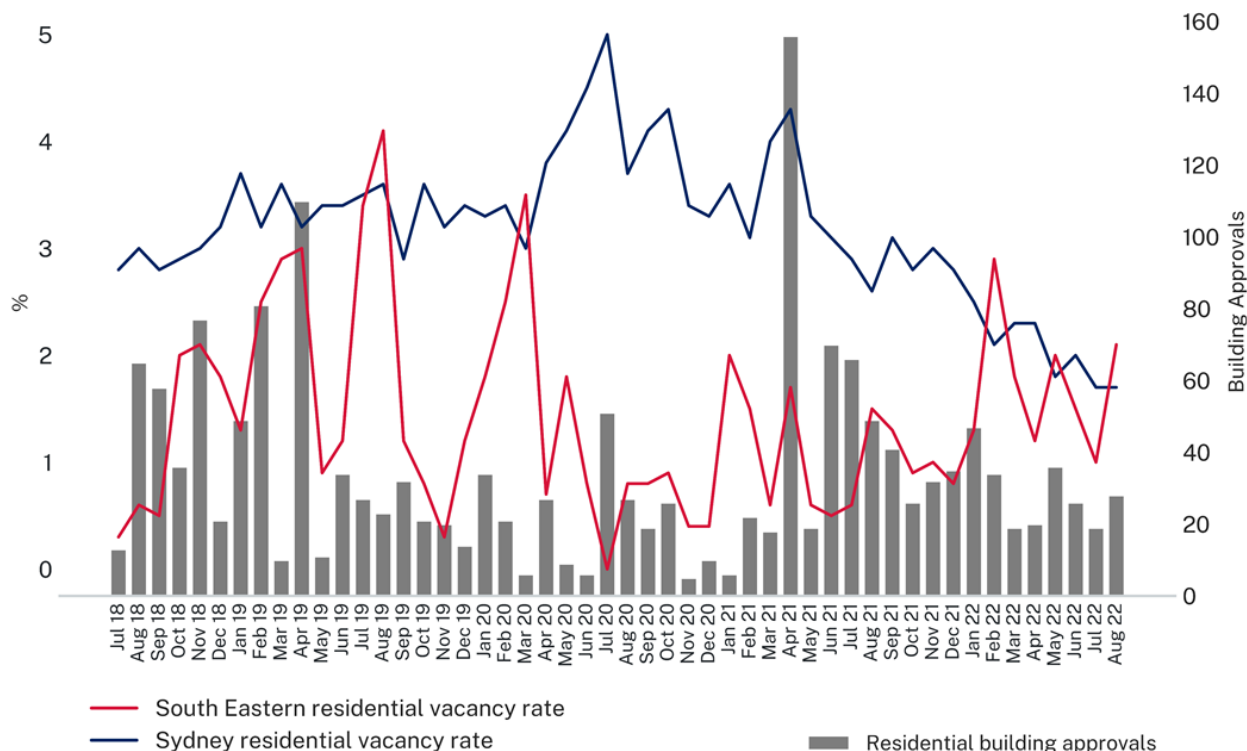


Figure 13: Wingecarribee FER vacancy rate and building approvals, 2018-2022 (REINSW, 2022).

Note: REINSW vacancy data collection is not aligned with the FER boundary map, resulting in an overlap with other FERs. Fluctuations in the south-eastern region are also partially attributable to seasonal variations. These results are therefore intended to provide an indication of housing vacancies in the region.

Increased availability of skilled labour is needed to support industry growth and meet the demands of a growing population

A constrained labour market continues to be an issue for the Wingecarribee region since 2018. The need to develop skilled workforce attraction and retention initiatives was a focus of the 2018 REDS and this needs to remain a key priority for the region going forward.

Employment

As at June 2022, Wingecarribee had an unemployment rate of 2.3%, lower than the NSW benchmark of 3.3% (see Figure 14). During the pandemic, unemployment increased steadily, but remained well below the state-wide average.

Job vacancies in the broader Southern Highlands & Snowy region climbed to a record high of 1,284 in August 2022, more than doubling since mid-2020, as shown in Figure 15. The region continues to face workforce shortages in many sectors, in particular healthcare, hospitality and retail with top job vacancies in administrative staff, sales assistants, and nurses.

Population growth in Wingecarribee has not always historically translated to employment growth in the region, as there is a high degree of labour mobility to surrounding areas like Sydney, Canberra and the Illawarra. This presents a challenge given the growing population will increase demand for healthcare and other services, while ongoing skills shortage will mean continued pressure on meeting workforce requirements to cater to these needs.

Aboriginal employment

The Aboriginal unemployment rate in Wingecarribee has recorded significant improvement since 2011, dropping from 8.7% to 5.5% in 2021. This is well below the NSW Aboriginal unemployment rate of 9.8%, and only just above the NSW wide unemployment rate of 4.9%.

Aboriginal unemployment rate: Wingecarribee	2011	8.7%
	2016	8.4%
	2021	5.5%
NSW Aboriginal unemployment rate	2021	9.8%
NSW unemployment rate	2021	4.9%

Source: ABS Census

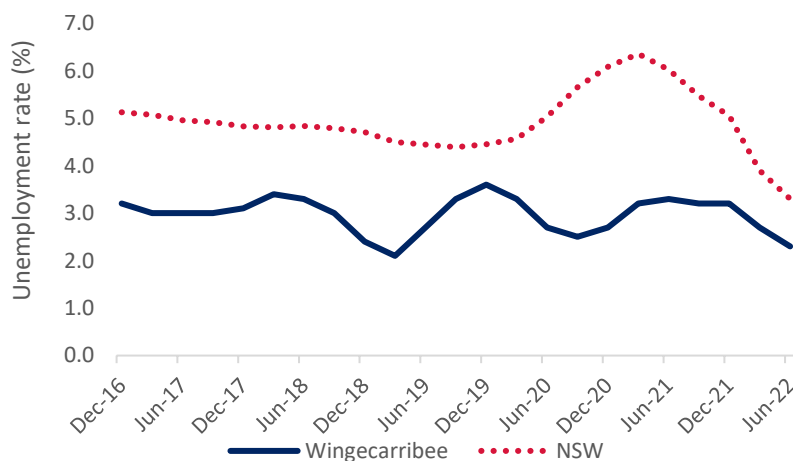


Figure 14: Wingecarribee FER unemployment rate (%), 2016-2022 (National Skills Commission, 2022; ABS Labour Force, 2022).



Figure 15: Job vacancies, the Southern Highlands and Snowy region (2016-2022) (Regional IVI, National Skills Commission, 2022).

Note: The regional IVI – National Skills Commission job vacancy data collection is not aligned with the FER boundary map, resulting in an overlap with other FERs. Job vacancy data only includes online job vacancies. These results are therefore intended to provide an indication of job vacancies in the region.

Wingecarribee region 2023 engine and emerging industries

The Wingecarribee region has a \$2.9 billion economy. Despite significant shocks since 2018, the region's engine industries have remained a source of stability, maintaining consistent growth. The relative strength of each industry is measured using Location Quotient (LQ) analysis¹ as displayed in Figure 16, where industry size correlates with bubble size.

Engine industries

Tourism (LQ of 1.35) is a key driver of economic output for Wingecarribee, contributing \$153 million GVA to the local economy in 2020. The industry is driven by large and specialised accommodation & food services with an LQ of 1.78. It is estimated that visitors to the region spent \$374 million in 2021, despite the significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.^[20]

Healthcare (LQ of 1.28) also stands as a key source of economic output for the region, with major healthcare infrastructure including the recently redeveloped Bowral and District Hospital, as well as close links to a range of Sydney's teaching and referring hospitals. The industry contributed \$261 million GVA in 2020 with an LQ of 1.28.

Despite broad-based decline in the industry over the past decade in line with NSW and nation-wide trends, **manufacturing** (LQ of 1.47) continues to be an engine industry for the region, contributing \$255 million to the regional economy in 2020. The industry is dominated by domestic appliance and cement manufacturing specialisations with LQs of 17.7 and 12.7, respectively.

Agriculture (LQ of 2) is another important engine industry for the region, generating \$112m GVA in 2020. The industry is largely dominated by cattle and dairy farming followed by a growing equine sector and a wide variety of smaller crops.

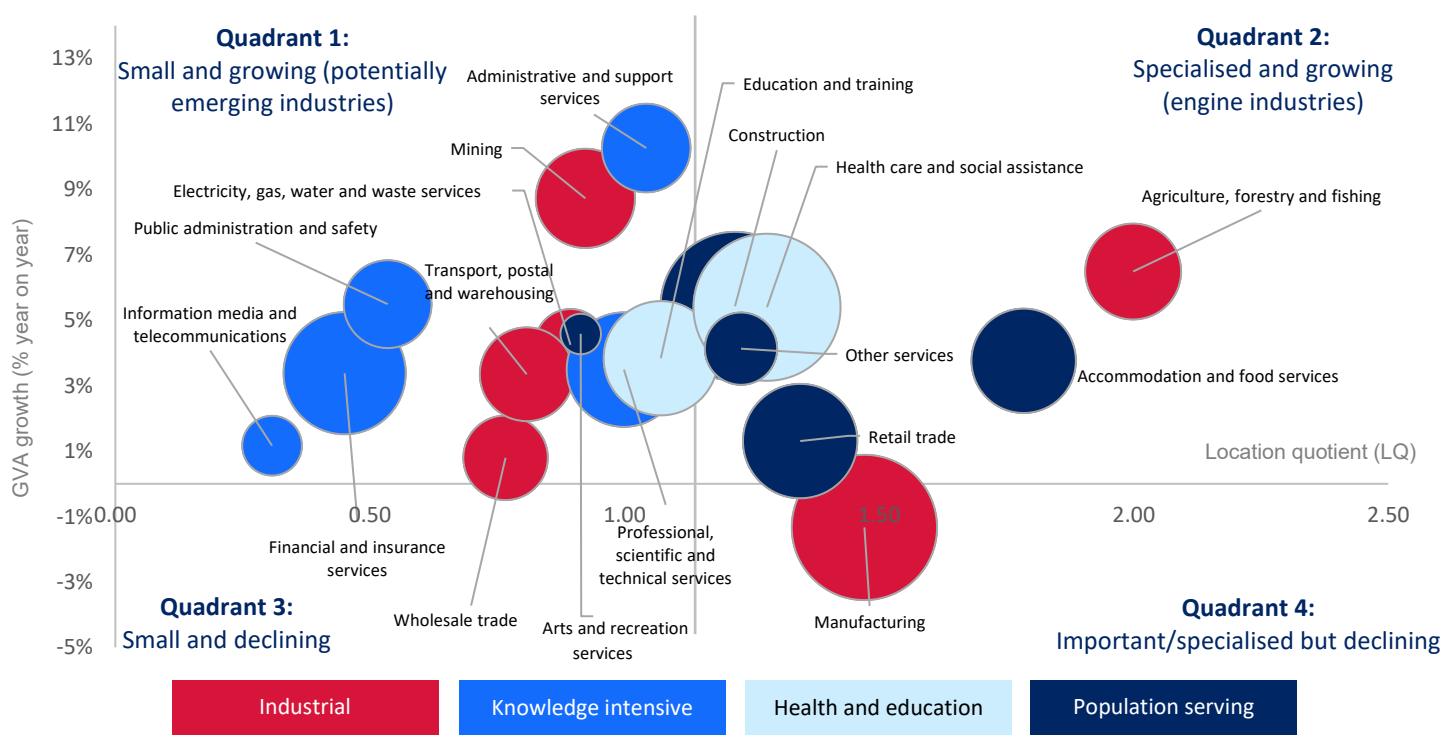


Figure 16: Location Quotient (LQ) Analysis by GVA, 2011-2020 (REMPAN, 2020).

Note: While the 2018 REDS used employment data as the basis for LQ analysis, the 2023 Update has used Gross Value-Add (GVA) data. This allows for a clear demonstration of the changing economic impact of both engine and emerging industries across the regions.

¹LQ analysis is used to measure industry specialisation by comparing the relative size of an industry in the region versus the whole of NSW.

Emerging industries

The region's emerging specialisations have generally remained consistent since the 2018 REDS (see Figure 17).

Knowledge intensive sectors in Wingecarribee, such as professional, scientific and technical services, public administration and safety, and financial and insurance services demonstrated strong growth between 2011 and 2020 and collectively accounted for 15% of local GVA in 2020.

Education and Training also demonstrates potential as a future specialisation for the region. Given the need for developing local labour skills capacity to cater to growing industries.

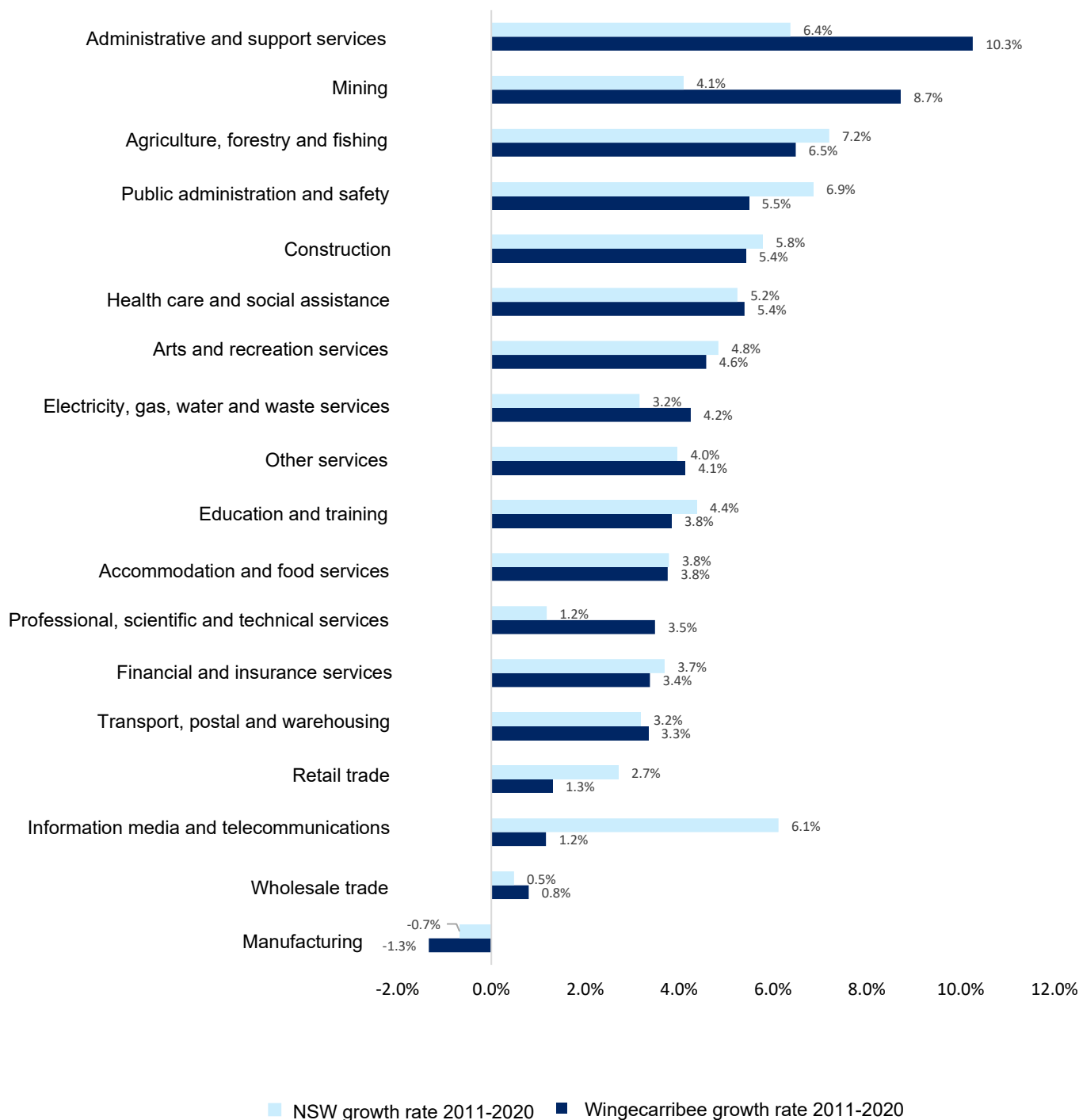


Figure 17: Change in GVA by Industry (% YOY), 2011-2020 (REMPAN, 2020).

Wingecarribee region 2023 endowments

Review of the 2018 endowments

The 2018 REDS identified a range of endowments underpinning Wingecarribee's economy and regional competitiveness (see page 11). Despite recent shocks impacting many endowments, consultation confirmed that most of them remain valid, with key endowments including:

- Proximity to Sydney, Canberra, and Illawarra
- Water, climate and soil
- Education & healthcare infrastructure
- Substantial labour supply
- Local institutions and strong leadership
- Aboriginal & historic heritage

New endowments

While not yet reflected in the employment and industry specialisation (LQ) analysis, recent investments and policy efforts have led to the creation of new endowments which will underpin new economic opportunities and future specialisations.

+	Southern Highlands Innovation Park	The Southern Highlands Innovation Park will help enable industry and jobs growth in manufacturing and construction.
+	Proximity to Nancy-Bird Walton Airport	The region's proximity to the new Western Sydney Airport can be a catalyst for opportunities in tourism and future industry investment.



Figure 18: A canola field in bloom in the Southern Highlands. Photo credit: Destination NSW.

8. Looking ahead: strategic opportunities for growth, resilience and liveability

Opportunities and vulnerabilities in engine and emerging industries

Manufacturing

Future growth in the specialisation of manufacturing will require a focus on industry diversification and coordinated land use planning to support key opportunities.

GVA (2020, \$m)	255
Employment (2021)	1,566
LQ score (2020)	1.47
LQ Domestic appliances (2020)	17.7
LQ Cement, concrete (2020)	12.7

Strengths

- Regional strengths in manufacturing are in cement and concrete, machinery and equipment, fabricated metal products (domestic appliances) and computer electronics.
- Boral cement works and Komatsu are major industry players in the sector and the development of the new brickworks in Berrima can help support ongoing growth in the industry.
- Wingecarribee benefits from its central location, ideal for freighting manufactured goods, with direct rail connection to Port Kembla and proximity to Canberra and Sydney via the Hume Highway.

Vulnerabilities

Manufacturing in the region experienced an average decline in output between 2011 and 2020 of -1.3%, in line with the trend seen across NSW.

- Manufacturing in Wingecarribee is largely reliant on imported equipment, leading to susceptibility to supply chain disruptions, fluctuations in input costs, energy supply and freight costs.
- Within the region, there are competing growth pressures between manufacturing and primary industries for use of land.

Opportunities

- With an increasing focus on developing sovereign manufacturing capabilities, Wingecarribee can further bolster its regional specialisation in manufacturing with a focus on supporting the emerging advanced manufacturing sub-sector.
- The Southern Highlands Innovation Park can provide opportunities for large scale industrial development of advanced manufacturing in renewable metals, building/construction materials, food manufacturing and defence and will leverage its proximity to the new Nancy-Bird Walton Airport.
- Flexible land use zoning could relieve growth competition between manufacturing and other sectors but should be careful to manage land use conflict risks.
- Transport infrastructure investment offers further opportunities to improve connectivity to markets in coastal and inland regions and the ACT.

Agriculture

Ongoing prosperity in the specialisation of agriculture will require increased coordination in land use planning and a focus on leveraging opportunities for emerging parts of the sector.

GVA (2020, \$m)	112
Employment (2021) ^a	718
LQ score (2020)	2
LQ Sheep & beef (2020)	1.8
LQ Poultry and other livestock (2020) ^b	3.6

^a ANZSIC 1 Digit Agriculture, forestry and fishing.

^b Other livestock includes horse breeding/farming.

Strengths

- Cattle farming has been the region's main source of agricultural output, followed by high quality fresh horticultural produce.
- Wingecarribee's natural endowments, including high quality soils and ample water supply, have supported these regional specialisations.
- Horse farming and dairy cattle farming are the next most significant agricultural activities.

Vulnerabilities

- The series of adverse climate events since 2018 have impacted the production of beef within the region through property damage and lost livestock.
- Viticulture has also been impacted by recent extreme climate events, with a significant reduction in production and economic activity within this subsector.
- The region is dominated by small farms, limiting opportunities for economies of scale and contributing to increasing challenges for local farms to remain profitable and viable.^[20]
- There are significant development pressures on the sector, driven by increased competition for land due to increasing subdivision for residential and lifestyle purposes.

Opportunities

- The equine industry is an existing sub-sector specialisation which demonstrates enormous growth potential, particularly in horse breeding and horse racing which can also support and enhance opportunities for agritourism in the region.
- Wingecarribee also has emerging specialisations in niche specialty produce such as truffle and garlic products, which are high-value crops that can generate significant economic outcomes for local farmers.
- The further investment being made to upgrade the regional saleyards can help consolidate supply chains, so to drive efficiencies and productivity and support beef production.
- More flexible approaches to land use zoning could help alleviate development constraints between agriculture and its sub-sectors.

Healthcare

The healthcare sector has significant opportunity for further growth, but a focus is needed on ensuring workforce demand can be successfully met.

GVA (2020, \$m)	261
Employment (2021) ^a	3,230
LQ score (2020)	1.28
LQ residential care (2020)	1.5
LQ healthcare (2020)	1.1

^a ANZSIC 1 Digit Healthcare and social assistance.

Strengths

- Wingecarribee is a key local service hub for the broader Southern Highlands region with health infrastructure endowments in the region including the Bowral and District Hospital and the Southern Highlands Private hospital.
- The region also has close links with a range of major Western Sydney hospitals.
- The region specialises in disability care and high-quality aged care and retirement villages, driven by significant demand from the large retiree population.

Vulnerabilities

- Attracting skilled health professionals, from medical practitioners and nurses to carers and aides is a central challenge to meet the growing demand for healthcare and social assistance services.
- An insufficient supply of worker accommodation is also impeding workforce attraction.

Opportunities

- There is opportunity to secure a strong pipeline of medical staff in Wingecarribee through closer integration with local education providers to improve teaching capability.
- Working more closely with the local TAFE network in relation to skills and workforce development associated with care economy jobs (e.g., carers, aides and disability sector workers) can support ongoing growth in demand for these services in the region.
- A focus on closer collaboration with the University of Wollongong Southern Highlands campus in expanding training opportunities associated with medical practitioners, nurses, and ongoing research and development activities can help support growth in the region's health sector.

Tourism

Ongoing significant growth in the tourism sector, one of the key employers in the region and a significant contributor to economic growth will require a key focus on skilled workforce development and retention.

Visitor spend (2021, \$m) ^[20]	374
Employment (2021) ^a	4,441
LQ score (2020) ^b	1.35
LQ food and beverage (2020)	1.6
LQ heritage and creative (2020)	1.7

^a Summation of ANZSIC 1 digit Retail trade, Accommodation and food services, Arts and recreation services.

^b LQ score is for the Accommodation and food services industry.

Strengths

- The tourism and hospitality sector is a key employer in the Wingecarribee region, accounting for 13% of total employment.
- Most tourists to the region are day trippers, predominantly from Sydney and Canberra, with estimated tourists in this category making up 70% of total visitation in 2019.^[21]
- Many visitors are attracted to the region by a range of special events including Tulip Time, Pie Time, Brigadoon, Bong Bong Picnic Races and the Bowral Classic, with many also engaged by a range of experiences offered by local cafes and restaurants.

Vulnerabilities

- The industry is vulnerable to externalities. This has been demonstrated since 2018, with bushfires and floods damaging visitor economy infrastructure (such as the access road to Wombeyan Caves), while COVID-19 border closures and movement restrictions reduced visitation and spend in the region.^[20]
- The hospitality sector has continued to experience significant ongoing workforce shortages since the COVID-19 pandemic commenced in 2020.
- The tourism industry in Wingecarribee is made up of lots of small businesses which traditionally have limited or no networks to increase their customer base and build their business.

Opportunities

- Many opportunities for the tourism sector lie in cross-sector collaboration. For example, increased collaboration with education and training facilities, such as TAFE, to offer advanced levels of hospitality certification, can help develop the required skills base within the local workforce to support ongoing growth in the sector.
- Fostering collaboration between training institutions and industry will bridge the gap between training and work placement, which can also help ensure the retention of qualified workers.
- Opportunities exist to expand the range of tourism attractions, events and experiences in the region in collaboration with agribusinesses. Potential areas of focus could include the equine industry, as well as emerging agricultural production well suited to experience-based tourism, such as truffle farms.

Key themes in stakeholder consultation

Stakeholders from the Wingecarribee region noted that the area is facing both challenges and opportunities related to its population growth, while recent natural disaster events, particularly bushfires in 2019-20, have emphasised the need to build community and infrastructure resilience.

Stakeholders expressed concerns over the impacts of population growth on the availability and affordability of housing in the area, as well as the disconnect between those using local services and infrastructure and those contributing to the local economy through local employment.

Housing availability and affordability

Consultation highlighted concerns among stakeholders that current housing shortages and reduced housing affordability will impede workforce attraction. Stakeholders noted a growing disconnect between residents using local services and infrastructure, and those also actively contributing to the local economy through local employment.

The proximity of the region to Sydney, and the increased ability to undertake remote working following the COVID-19 pandemic are contributing factors to this observed trend. As a result, population growth is placing increased pressure on local housing supply, but not necessarily translating into increased availability of workforce to meet local business and industry need.

Greater collaboration

Stakeholders expressed a desire for increased collaboration between neighbouring councils and businesses to help drive positive outcomes for the broader region. Priorities included collaborative actions to maximise value to the community from policies and investments, productive partnerships and building capability within the significant small business community in the region.

Building resilience

Recent natural disasters, alongside the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on business confidence, consumer spending and visitation has elevated the importance of building principles of resilience into policy, programs and projects. Stakeholders highlighted a need to focus on building both resilience of physical infrastructure and the community as a whole.

Wingecarribee REDS - 2023 Update strategies

The 2018 strategies broadly remain relevant to Wingecarribee. However, consultation outcomes, and analysis of changes and events in the region since 2018 have highlighted a need to place greater emphasis on building economic resilience. To achieve this focus, changes to the strategies include:

- a small shift in focus around the visitor economy strategy to reflect the need to not only develop new product offerings, but enhance those already existing associated with food, wine and events,
- amendments to reflect the significant opportunity for the manufacturing sector that may arise from the emerging Southern Highlands Innovation Park,
- introducing a new strategy focused on supporting the resilience of small business, given the role this sector plays within the region's economy.

Reflecting the changes outlined above, the 2023 REDS Update strategies for Wingecarribee FER are listed below (amendments made to existing 2018 strategies are highlighted in **bold**):

Existing	Enhance the liveability of the Wingecarribee region.
Amended	Facilitate the development of agriculture as a key strength and enhance the visitor economy based on food, wine, and events.

Existing	Grow the education, health, and aged-care sector.
Amended	Strengthen the region's manufacturing base and monitor opportunities associated with the emerging Southern Highlands Innovation Park.
New	Support the resilience of small businesses.

Key enablers of economic growth

A number of key enablers have been identified to assist with delivering each of the strategies. This list is non-exhaustive, with a focus on identifying priority short- to medium-term enablers. Responsibility for implementation of these enablers sits with various levels of government, and in some cases may also include business, industry or non-government bodies. Collaboration across these entities at a local level will be key to achieving results.

Strategy	New Enablers		Lead and support	Rationale
Enhance the liveability of the Wingecarribee region.	Infrastructure	Plan for a diverse range of housing by supporting council to implement its Local Housing Strategy, prioritising the provision of development ready land and exploring opportunities for increasing density through infill development.	Department of Planning & Environment (DPE), Department of Regional NSW (DRNSW), Wingecarribee Shire Council	Improve housing supply and diversification of local housing stock to improve housing affordability.
		Support forward planning for the provision of essential enabling infrastructure including water, sewerage, digital infrastructure and transport connectivity for access to markets and education.	DPE, DRNSW, NSW Telco Authority, Transport for NSW (TfNSW), DPE Water	Provision of enabling infrastructure to support liveability and needs of the community.
Facilitate the development of agriculture as a key strength and enhance the visitor economy based on food, wine, and events.	People and skills	Work collaboratively with the local agriculture and tourism sectors to explore opportunities to expand the range of tourism attractions, events, and experiences capitalising on the region's agricultural specialisation.	Wingecarribee Shire Council, Destination Sydney Surrounds South, DRNSW, DPE, Destination NSW	Create opportunities for diversification within the agricultural sector and enhance the visitor economy.

Strategy	New Enablers		Lead and support	Rationale
<p>Grow the education, health, and aged care sector.</p>	<p>People and skills</p>	<p>Build a pipeline of local skills capacity by collaborating with local government, industry and educational providers to attract additional education providers and enable development of an appropriately skilled local workforce in priority sectors.</p>	<p>Training Services NSW, DRNSW, University of Wollongong, Wingecarribee Shire Council, Department of Education, Registered Training Organisations, Illawarra Expert Panel.</p>	<p>Improve pipeline of industry ready skills to fill demand for labour across the region.</p>
<p>Strengthen the region's manufacturing base and monitor opportunities associated with the emerging Southern Highlands Innovation Park.</p>	<p>Government, regulation and information</p>	<p>Collaborate across government on the development of the Southern Highlands Innovation Park to ensure adequate service provision and infrastructure to attract innovative businesses in sectors including advanced manufacturing, professional and technical services, and research and development.</p>	<p>DRNSW, DPE, Infrastructure NSW, Wingecarribee Shire Council.</p>	<p>Ensure emerging industries are supported.</p>
<p>Support the resilience of small businesses.</p>	<p>Infrastructure</p>	<p>Explore options for improving access and connectivity via road and rail to improve supply chain resilience.</p>	<p>TfNSW, DRNSW, Wingecarribee Shire Council, DPE</p>	<p>Increase capacity for growth through freight connectivity.</p>

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Figure 19: Aerial view overlooking Bundanoon. Photo credit: Destination NSW.