

DRAFT
MIDCOAST
ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT
STRATEGY
2023-2028





ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and live, the Gathang-speaking people and pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now reside in the MidCoast Council area. We extend our respect to elders past and present, and to all future cultural-knowledge holders.

MAYOR'S MESSAGE

I am very pleased to be able to present the first Economic Development Strategy for the MidCoast Local Government Area.

Growth of a local economy creates new job opportunities and greater diversity of opportunity, which ultimately facilitates an improved quality of life and prosperity for residents. A strategy such as this is a critical tool that local government uses to drive local economic growth.

Through the implementation of this strategy, we will work with local businesses and business leaders aiming to stimulate growth, attract new residents and businesses and retain jobs, build opportunity, grow existing local industry sectors and diversify the economy.

The strategy, and its implementation, will work to align MidCoast Council and local business with a vision and a way forward for the region's growth that increases participation in the local economy. An improved local economy will help fortify businesses against future economic downturns and sudden shocks.

Enhanced opportunities and more jobs will improve the local economy and raise the standard of living of our residents. In turn, this will work to further attract a larger talent pool, thus feeding back into growth in the economy.

This Economic Development Strategy sets a vision and provides a framework for Council to work with the business community to deliver for the community over the next 5 years. It includes a forward focussed action plan which will enable the implementation of annual programs of work. Funding to implement these works will need to be jointly provided by Council, State and Federal Governments (it will rely heavily on obtaining government grants), as well as our local business partners.

The creation of this strategy was a collaborative project between MidCoast Council and the Economic Development Strategy Reference Group which included business chamber and community representatives. I wish to thank the people who provided their time and advice to help MidCoast Council develop this Strategy.

Claire Pontin
Mayor

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1

SETTING THE SCENE

OUR REGION – AN OVERVIEW

Home to over 96,000 people, the MidCoast offers our diverse community a wide range of economic and lifestyle opportunities.

The MidCoast contains 195 towns, villages and localities. Spanning an area of 10,052 km² MidCoast Council is the largest Council area in the Hunter covering 30.5% of the region and 1.25% of NSW. It is a large and diverse area, ranging from beaches and coastline to mountains and hinterland, with green spaces and National Parks in between. This landscape is characterised by pristine waterways, striking scenery and an abundance of natural treasures.

Unique to the MidCoast, there are two main population precincts, Taree and Forster-Tuncurry, each with differing economic drivers. Taree offers a wide range of regional services and facilities that are utilised across our region, including the Manning Base Hospital, Taree Regional Airport, education, sporting, entertainment and cultural facilities. Large tracts of industrial land also support a focus on industry. In contrast, Forster-Tuncurry centres around lifestyle, ideally located between the coast and lakes, both tourism and retirement living drive the economy. This has led to extensive shopping, entertainment and service facilities to support both residents and visitors.

There are also a number of rural and coastal centres that support the main population precincts – some are ‘satellite suburbs’, while others are self-reliant given their distance from the larger centres. These centres include Gloucester, Wingham, Stroud, Tea Gardens, Hawks Nest, Harrington, Old-Bar, Hallidays Point, Nahiic, Bulahdelah and Pacific Palms.

Rural centres, like Gloucester, play a significant role in our economy not only for industries but also the services they provide to their surrounding residential catchments. In addition, there are many villages and localities, each with their own unique character and qualities.

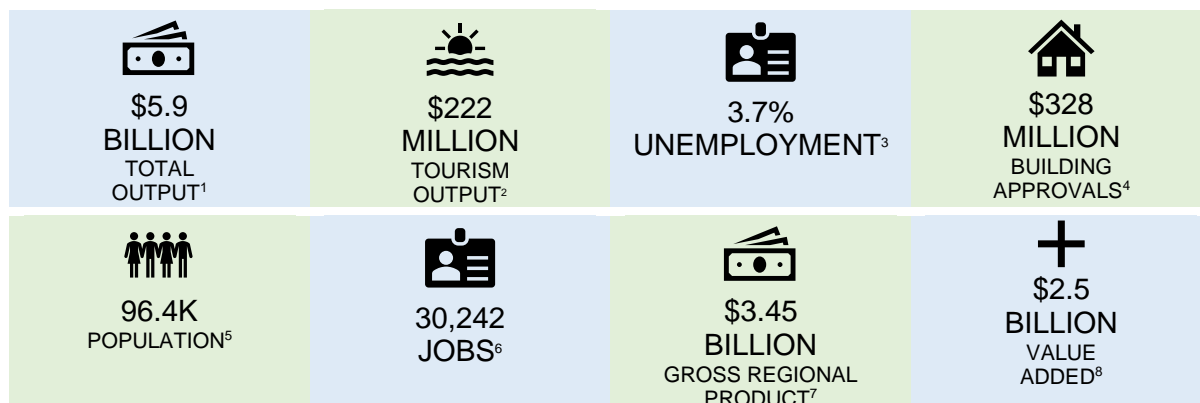
A large portion of the MidCoast is National Park, State Forest and Nature Reserve. Much of the rural area is used for livestock farming, primarily dairy and beef cattle and the poultry industry. Oyster farming and fishing are important industries in coastal locations.

The region is also a key holiday destination. During the summer months the population swells with tourists coming to enjoy the regions pristine coastline and beaches, coastal lakes, lagoons and other environmental attractions. Popular year-round attractions include the Barrington Tops National Park and other National Parks and reserves.

The Biripi and Worimi people are the traditional owners of all the lands that cover the MidCoast.



OUR ECONOMY – THE FACTS AND FIGURES



DIVERSE ECONOMY

Our economy is supported by a range of industry sectors which correspond to the size and diversity of the MidCoast region. The highest employing industries are:

- Health Care and Social Assistance
- Construction
- Retail Trade
- Education and Training
- Accommodation and Food Services

Industries such as Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Manufacturing also employ a significant number of people.

PRODUCTION GROWTH

The Gross Regional Product (GRP) of the MidCoast was \$3.45 billion in June 2021. The sectors recording the greatest proportion of GRP (by value) are Health Care and Social Assistance, Construction and Education.

BUSINESS

There are over 6,900⁹ registered businesses in the MidCoast with a fifth of these being in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing industries. In addition, the following sectors have the highest Gross Value Add (GVA – an indicator of how productive each industry sector is at increasing the value of its inputs):

- Health Care and Social Assistance
- Construction
- Education and Training
- Retail Trade
- Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing

VISITOR ECONOMY

Offering a wide array of events and experiences in a diverse landscape, the MidCoast region (marketed as Barrington Coast) receives over 4.5 million¹¹ visitors every year. In the 2020/21 financial year, tourism generated \$220 million towards the economy (\$123.6 million¹³ value add) and employed over 2,200 residents.

EMPLOYMENT

Our area supports over 30,000 jobs. Health Care and Social Assistance are the largest employers in the area generating over 6,000 local jobs.

DEVELOPMENT GROWTH

Over \$328 million of development was approved by Council in the 2021-22 financial year. Of this, approximately \$255 million was for residential construction and \$73.5 million was for commercial construction.

TALENT

46.5%¹⁰ of the regional labour force is formally qualified. Management, Commerce and Health are the most common university qualifications, while 25.8%¹² of all people with a qualification hold vocational (trade) qualifications.

TRANSPORT CONNECTIONS

The Pacific Highway, a national route, connecting Sydney and Brisbane, runs North South through the region, providing ready access to the Port of Newcastle, Newcastle Airport, Port Macquarie Airport and to Sydney and Brisbane markets. The North Coast railway line provides passenger and rail freight services to Sydney and the Taree Regional Airport has the ability for both passenger and freight services but has very limited services operating.

There are also important transport routes through Gloucester on the western edge of the MidCoast which link the New England and Hunter regions.



OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The following opportunities and challenges for the MidCoast region compliment those identified in the MidCoast Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS) 2023 update, developed by the NSW Government.

Opportunities

Profile and Locality

The MidCoast is recognised as a highly sought-after region of choice, attracting skilled residents and businesses that are bringing new ideas and technology. This shift has begun, and we have the opportunity to build on this change.

Collaboration and Partnerships

With positive engagement between the business community and Council, there is an opportunity to build clearly visible Council and community leadership with a shared strategic vision. Now is the time to ensure that 'Can Do' and 'Make it Happen' are key philosophies that drive outcomes for the region.

Economic Diversity

We have a diverse economy with pockets of excellence. A focus on maintaining this diversity whilst enhancing our strengths will drive strong flow on effects throughout the region.

Population Growth

We have one of the largest Local Government Areas (LGAs) in coastal NSW with room to grow. Ensuring our population grows above current benchmarks and projections in the right locations can drive significant growth.

Innovation

The migration of professional workers to the region combined with an in-depth knowledge of long-established businesses creates the right environment for collaborative innovation. There is an opportunity to see the MidCoast as a centre of innovation, smart development and commercialisation.

Infrastructure

With the development of a strategy that drives clearly targeted long-term growth, there is now the ability to build the infrastructure needed to support attraction and growth and to have this infrastructure strategically planned for and delivered ahead of time.

Challenges

Realising many of the region's economic opportunities depends on its attractiveness to residents, businesses and visitors. While the region has strong existing endowments, it is important to identify the challenges and mitigate these, to maximise potential.

The key barriers to maximising the economic success of the region and to achieving business growth and success are identified as the following:

Housing Affordability and Supply

There is a lack of 'ready for sale' residentially zoned land in suitable locations. This means it is hard to attract new workers to the region to fill professional, supervisory and skilled job vacancies.

The NSW Government is reluctant to consider rezoning more land for residential purposes given the amount of land currently zoned and not developed.

There is also currently a clear disparity between population growth figures and housing requirements across a range of data sets. In the absence of a focus on the 'lived experience' in the MidCoast, there is potential to make decisions based on inaccurate data.

Planning and Land-Use Regulations

Difficulties in obtaining planning and development approvals and inconsistencies in land-use regulations have been identified as key issues that inhibit population growth, the establishment of new businesses and strategic existing business growth.

Hospital Facilities

Currently there is a perception that our regional hospital/health facilities are not sufficient which can deter some people from moving to the area.

Secondary Education

In some areas of the MidCoast region access to secondary education choices is limited.

Tertiary Education (including apprenticeship opportunities)

Students in our region do not have a traditional campus for university education. While our TAFE and other tertiary educators have a suite of options, there are significant gaps which require students (particularly apprentices in industries which will deliver growth) to travel to Port Macquarie or Newcastle for courses and training.

The Taree University Campus has been a great step forward in this area, the challenge is to now create sub-campus across the region.

Infrastructure and Utilities

Roads - The poor state of road infrastructure is identified as a key disadvantage to the development and the attractiveness of the area for both residents and businesses.

Telecommunications - As is the case in many other areas, there are issues with the roll-out of NBN. Poor mobile and internet coverage are also a significant weakness in both urban and rural areas including on major arterial roads where remote workers require consistent access to coverage.

Water - A large body of work is currently being undertaken to secure the regions water supply even though the quality of drinking water is a regional strength. The cost of contributions towards water access for new development is perceived as a concern across the MidCoast.

Freighting

The North Coast railway line provides passenger and rail freight services to Sydney, however for many local businesses the speed is too slow for the nature of their business and airfreight can only be accessed via Newcastle adding significant additional cost.

Labour Force

Access to Motivated Labour - Employers struggle to engage employees who have the full range of soft skills (employability skills such as good communication, motivation, initiative and reliability).

Access to Skilled Labour - Access to skilled labour and professionals is identified as a key weakness.

Transport Options

A lack of public transport options is a significant barrier for youth employment and higher education.



SUB-REGIONAL ECONOMIC ZONES

Due to the MidCoast's large and varied geography, diverse townships and dispersed population/business base, it is important to analyse the strategic economic strengths, barriers to growth and opportunities at a sub-district level. The following summary is modelled on the districts identified in the Hunter Regional Plan 2041. (The name of the corresponding districts referenced in the Hunter Plan is included in brackets below. Refer to Appendix A for maps).

Future work on this strategy should consider the clarification of the identities of our towns and villages as well as our regional economic zones.

	Strengths	Challenges	Economic Opportunities
Coastal District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water-based assets (rivers, lake systems and the ocean) Nature based assets (national parks) Tourism assets & Experiences Access and proximity to extensive shopping, open space, entertainment and service facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Ready for sale" residential and employment land Lack of services in smaller townships Remote and isolated townships Youth retention Hyper-seasonality Property prices Historic paper sub-divisions Sustainability of communities balancing growth with community expectations Non-navigable waterways and siltation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Off-peak visitor attraction Aquaculture Industry Enhancing infrastructure for tourism and recreation Increasing the residential population Growth that is attractive to residents as well as necessary for ongoing community services Increasing tourism and economic activity along rivers, lakes and waterways
Forster-Tuncurry (Forster-Tuncurry regionally significant growth area)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water-based assets (lake systems & ocean) Tourism assets & experiences Lifestyle attraction Shopping & employment precincts Strong business community connections and collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability for attracted new skilled workers to find accommodation – rental or purchase "Ready for sale" residential and employment land Youth retention and attraction The lack of a localised university campus and clear pathway for youth employment Hyper-seasonality – impacts business viability and staff retention Siltation and water quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New business and innovative growth through tourism expertise or local collaboration Aquaculture Industry Town centre activations Enhancing infrastructure for tourism and recreation Off-peak visitor attraction Integrated Urban Release Areas Identification of the next strategic business growth strategy beyond pure tourism numbers

	Strengths	Challenges	Economic Opportunities
MidCoast Hinterland (Barrington District)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nature based assets (Gloucester Tops, Barrington Tops; Ellenborough Falls, National Parks, rivers and waterways) Gloucester's role as a regional service centre Strong industry representation (agricultural and emerging technology) Rural tourism assets & experiences including vibrant country towns Location – entry way to the New England, access to the Hunter Heritage (Gloucester, Stroud, Wingham) Service provision on major highways and transport routes (Bulahdelah, Stroud, Gloucester) Lifestyle attractions due to being remote and isolated with low population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remote and isolated townships Infrastructure development costs relating to water services and electrical supply Youth retention Protecting drinking water catchments Current land uses and historic development patterns prohibiting employment growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance Gloucester's role as a tourist base for Gloucester Tops and the Barrington Tops Enhance the character of rural towns and villages Attract population driven businesses (retail, personal services, service-industrial) Encourage further tech and innovation growth in Gloucester Support growth in the visitor economy Growing jobs within rural industries Supporting rural enterprises and the agricultural sector Increased visitor dispersal from coastal areas
Taree (Taree regionally significant growth area)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proximity to the Pacific Highway Taree University Campus Taree Airport Taree's roles as a regional service centre Cultural services (MEC & Regional Art Gallery, museums) Health Care Infrastructure Taree Recreational Ground and sporting facilities Riverside parks and walkways Railway access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supply of skilled workers Youth retention Inter-generational unemployment Housing shortages Ensuring the regional sporting facility is maintained to a regional standard (recycled water and irrigation) Instances of anti-social behaviour in riverside parks and walkways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northern Gateway activation and commercialisation Taree Airport Business Park Education facilities – Taree Universities Campus, TAFE, University of Newcastle, University of New England Regional sports hub and associated visitor and event attraction Enhanced cultural facilities and events Urban release areas and redevelopment sites Increase in usage of riverside parks and walkways through improved safety measures

A young boy is standing in shallow water, fishing. He is wearing a blue and white striped cap with a cartoon character, a dark blue t-shirt with 'ACTION' written on it, and light blue shorts. He is holding a fishing rod. The background shows a calm lake, a line of trees on the opposite shore, and a clear blue sky. In the foreground, there is a large, dark, semi-transparent number '2' overlaid on the image.

2

MOTIVATION



OUR VISION

The MidCoast is where people choose to live, work, visit and invest.

OUR MISSION

To collaboratively build the economic capacity of the MidCoast region to improve its economic future and the quality of life of its community.

HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE THIS?

Successful economic development involves change. Change through both the introduction of the new, and the enhancement of the existing. Often the two go hand in hand.

In order to create the desired change and stimulate economic growth, we need a clear strategy and targets to be able to introduce new residents, new businesses, new investors and new visitors. We also need to help our existing businesses to develop, through new ideas, new investors, skilled workers and appropriate competition.

At a simplistic level this equates to identifying and embracing two key objectives – Attract and Grow.

It is important to align our direction with that of the State Government given the grant funding opportunities that are available both now and into the future. The three core outcomes identified in the NSW Government's Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS), 2023 update, are as follows which links to our key objectives of Attract and Grow:

1. Strengthening the region's infrastructure and service offerings to attract and retain businesses, residents and visitors (*attract/grow*)
2. Invest in workforce development and create opportunities for local businesses to invest and grow (*grow*)
3. Actively pursue opportunities to bring investment, businesses and skilled workers to the region (*attract*)

In order to attract and grow there is a fundamental shift needed across the MidCoast. There needs to be a mindset change that is built into each project that leaves the community more:

- enthused about who we are and what we have in our region;
- confident about what we can achieve; and
- excited about how we can grow and who/what we may attract into our region to do this.

Strong regional leadership is also essential to support key strategic projects to meet the vision of this strategy.

The following framework brings together the core outcomes identified above and links them to the key objectives of Attract and Grow by identifying 10 strategic actions which underpin the delivery of this strategy.

Strategic Actions	
ATTRACT	1. Attract skilled workers and professionals <i>Market the region to skilled workers and professionals</i>
	2. Attract investment to the region <i>Develop an approach to investment attraction that supports medium and large-scale investment and seeks to align opportunities for this investment</i>
	3. Attract new businesses to the region <i>Create the assets, incentives and strategy required to present the region to new strategic businesses</i>
	4. Attract visitors to the region <i>Strengthen the appeal of the destination to existing markets and identify new target markets to support the sustainable growth of the visitor economy</i>
	5. Attract residents to the region <i>Utilise the region's assets to attract residents to be part of our vibrant, connected communities</i>
	6. Attract Events to the region <i>Attract and support events that capitalise on the strengths of the region in order to create a vibrant and connected community</i>
GROW	7. Support business growth, collaboration and innovation <i>Maintain a strong connection with the business community and an understanding of their needs</i>
	8. Support innovative new business <i>Collaborate to encourage innovation, competitiveness, entrepreneurship and support for the start-up community</i>
	9. Increase skill levels of businesses and residents <i>Provide a supportive environment for the development of the region's existing businesses and workforce including our youth</i>
	10. Improve local business culture <i>Provide an environment that generates confidence and enthusiasm within the region's business community</i>

When assessing projects this framework will be further used to support clear alignment.

To support this approach the following questions will also be used to determine if support should be given to a project:

- Does this project grow the right type of business in the right location for our LGA?
- Will this project practically realise growth for local businesses?
- Will this project bring about genuine attraction of investors, visitors, businesses, residents and which is it focused on?
- Will this project support a change of mindset and support the culture change that will deliver the region's business growth and attractiveness?

HOW WILL WE MEASURE SUCCESS?

Ultimately, the success of any strategy can only be determined if it is measured. This raises the questions - what does success look like? and, what are the indicators of success?

An overarching set of measures (shown below) will provide the broad indicators of the success of this strategy. These broad indicators have been chosen as they are: consistent across the sectors; measurable with clear data that is available and regularly supplied. They will indicate the success of an effectively delivered economic development strategy.

It is important to acknowledge that while we can target these outcomes, there are many other economic and environmental impacts that will bear upon these measures that are outside the control of MidCoast Council. General global and national economic factors may play a larger role than the actions undertaken within the MidCoast.

Measures of Success	Baseline	Target
Total Economic Output	\$5.9 Billion NIEIR 2021	Maintain or increase
Gross Regional Product	\$3.45 Billion NIEIR 2021	Maintain or increase
Number of Residents	96,425 Estimated Residential Population, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australia 2021	Increase
Proportion of residents aged 18-25yrs	5,111 Service Age Groups, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2021	Maintain or increase
Dwelling Approvals	389 Local Development Performance Monitoring (LDPM) FY20	Increase
Unemployment Rate	3.7% Small Area Labour Market, September 2022	Decrease
Business Confidence	Baseline & Methodology to be established	Target to be established
Registered Businesses	6,951 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries & Exits 2021	Increase

Secondly there are more detailed measures outlined below against each of the strategic objectives that will indicate the success of the strategic actions. Finally, as each project is developed, it will include a clear project plan with a specific set of measures for success.

These measures will provide clarity in what we are trying to achieve, as well as accountability for the outcomes that are delivered.

	Strategic Action	Measure	Key performance Indicator	Baseline	Target
ATTRACT	1. Attract skilled workers and professionals	Proportion of residents with university qualifications	Increase in proportion of persons aged 15+ with university qualifications	12% Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021	Increase to 14%
		Proportion of residents with vocational qualifications	Increase in proportion of persons aged 15+ with trade qualifications (certificate)	25% Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021	Increase to 26%
	2. Attract investment to the region	Funding from State and Federal Government for priority economic development projects	Number of grant applications submitted for priority projects	To be established MidCoast Council & Key Stakeholders	To be confirmed when baseline established
			Value of grants received for priority projects identified in the economic development strategy	To be established MidCoast Council & Key Stakeholders	To be confirmed when baseline established
	3. Attract new businesses to the region	Number of businesses	Increase in the number of registered businesses	6,951 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries & Exits 2021	Increase
	4. Attract visitors to the region	Increase in midweek off-season visitation	Increase in yield during these periods	To be determined	To be determined
		Increase in shoulder and low season visitation	Increase in yield during these periods	To be determined	To be determined
		Increase in regional dispersal	Increase in yield in identified areas	To be determined	To be determined
	5. Attract residents to the region	Increase in number of residents	Increase in estimated population	96,425 Australian Bureau of Statistics Estimated Residential Population 2021	Increase
	6. Attract events to the region	Attraction of strategic events in shoulder/off-peak periods	Secure key game changer events for the region within 5 years	Number of enquiries received / events secured or held	5 events identified 2 events secured
			MidCoast Council and business community agree on which existing events are strategic in our LGA		List completed and agreed

GROW	7. Support business growth, collaboration and innovation	Market value of all final goods and services produced in a region	Gross Regional Product	\$3.45 billion National Institute of Economic and Industrial Research 2021	Maintain or increase
	8. Support innovative new business	Number of businesses	Increase in number of registered businesses	6,951 Bureau of Statistics, Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries & Exits 2021	Increase
	9. Increase skill levels of businesses and residents	Industry feedback on changes in staff skill level	Industry reports an increase	To be established Business survey or business consultation (mechanism to be agreed)	To be determined
	10. Improve local business culture	Positive sentiment regarding the future	Feedback from business regarding factors such as economic outlook, cost forecast and growth forecast	Conduct regular 'check-ins' with the business community to assess business sentiment.	To be determined

For measures relating to economic development contained in the MidCoast Community Strategic Plan 2022-2032, please refer to Appendix B.



3

**OUR WAY
FORWARD**

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN AND IMPLEMENTATION

The following action plan provides a guide for the collaborative delivery of a range of projects and actions. These actions will be implemented over time in partnership between Council, government agencies, local business and industry representatives, private investors and the community.

The actions developed maintain a level of flexibility to allow Council and other stakeholders to be responsive to changes in economic circumstances and/or industry needs. Each action requires its own project plan indicating what is involved, who is responsible and what is expected. An annual action plan will be developed based on priorities and available resources. Progress and outcomes will be reported to the stakeholders and general community on an annual basis.

ATTRACT		
Strategic Objective	Implementation Areas	Actions (for annual review)
1. Attract skilled workers and professionals	1.1 Develop and partner with key stakeholders on projects that support the attraction of a skilled, motivated, accountable and high-performing workforce	1.1.1 Support the MidCoast "AH202 project" which aims to attract, recruit and retain allied health professionals *Priority Action* for Council
		1.1.2 Prepare skilled workforce attraction strategies in collaboration with industry where the need is identified
		1.1.3 Provide co-work opportunities in Taree, Gloucester and Forster to support skilled worker migration
	1.2 Encourage development, including major capital works projects, that will increase the region's attractiveness to sea/tree change professionals and other skilled workers	1.2.1 MidCoast Council will support increases to housing stock in locations of most need and low supply *Priority Action* for MidCoast business chambers and Council
		1.2.2 Undertake the 'Housing Barriers Review Project' to identify barriers and solutions to the housing shortage for skilled workers and professionals *Priority Action* for Council
		1.2.3 As a result of the 'Housing Barriers Review Project', develop and present a set of actions to Council on what is required to change the Development Assessment process to ensure that adequate resources are available and systems are in place to streamline processes, especially for more complex, high economic value applications *Priority Action* for Council
		1.2.4 Operate an internal Economic Development Working Group to provide staff with greater awareness of the potential adverse impacts on economic development with the aim to improve Council's focus on

		facilitating economic development *Priority Action* for Council
		1.2.5 Prepare a 'shovel ready' proposal for the Forster 360 Walk ready for appropriate funding opportunities
		1.2.6 Advocate for improved health and medical services at the Manning Base Hospital, Gloucester Soldiers Memorial Hospital, Bulahdelah Hospital and regional health services. Advocate for new health facilities including an Emergency Department in Forster and support innovative initiatives in this space. *Priority Action* for Council
		1.2.7 Support the implementation of Electric Vehicle Charging stations across the region
		1.2.8 Openly market positive stories of skilled migration to the region
2. Attract investment to the region	2.1 Partner with State and Federal Government and other funding bodies to attract and facilitate investment	2.1.1 Identify projects that will require external funding for success: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and apply for appropriate funding Advocate for these projects *Priority Action* for MidCoast business chambers and Council
		2.1.2 Prioritise and develop 'shovel ready' proposals for identified projects *Priority Action* for MidCoast business chambers and Council
		2.1.3 Raise awareness and utilisation of State and Federal Government funding opportunities amongst the business and general community including programs focussed on commercialisation, R&D and innovation
	2.2 Develop a coordinated approach to attract private investment to the region	2.2.1 Identify and develop projects and opportunities so that they can be presented to private investors
		2.2.2 Support the Forster-Tuncurry Business Chamber to develop the concept of an 'Angel Investment' project for new business innovation and start-ups *Priority Action* for MidCoast business chambers
		2.2.3 Create a prospectus (materials and approach) that will seek and manage generic expressions of interest in the region from private investors *Priority Action* for Council

3. Attract new businesses to the region	3.1 Enhance and expand business infrastructure that will be drivers for growth	3.1.1 Progress the Northern Gateway / Airport Transport Hub project by creating a clearly articulated strategy and plan to enable the attraction of suitable businesses to the site *Priority Action* for Council
		3.1.2 Advocate for NBN and mobile coverage improvements in identified areas
		3.1.3 Encourage a regular airline passenger service for the MidCoast
	3.2 Leverage the expansion of the Newcastle Airport	3.2.1 Investigate how the expansion of the Newcastle Airport can be capitalised on to attract and grow businesses in the region
		3.2.2 Develop a closer partnership arrangement with the Newcastle Airport to harness opportunities
	3.3 Identify and harness opportunities to attract specific businesses or business sectors to the region based on identified need and regional strengths	3.3.1 Create a strategy to identify the businesses required to maximise the growth of Gloucester and Barrington Tops tourism. *Priority Action* for Council
		3.3.2 Identify the businesses to attract to promote the growth of the Gloucester Industrial Park and Ag-Tech Hub *Priority Action* for MidCoast business chambers
		3.3.3 Investigate ways to assist renewable energy and circular economy business growth for the region
		3.3.4 Provide information to small landholders on establishing small business enterprises
		3.3.5 Develop strategies to address the provision of navigable river and estuary entrances *Priority Action* for MidCoast business chambers
		3.3.6 MidCoast Council supports the work of the Manning River Entrance Expert Task Force and its associated investigations, its processes and scientific rigour and will use the Task Force recommendations to appropriately inform the Old Bar – Manning Point Coastal Management Program
		3.3.7 MidCoast Council advocates to State and Federal members to proactively obtain sufficient funding for any actions recommended by the Manning River Entrance Expert Task Force so that there is no burden or ongoing burden on Council

		3.3.8	MidCoast Council facilitates a government based inter-agency group to develop strategies to address sand shoaling at important aquaculture and fishing locations	
		3.3.9	A retail audit is undertaken to identify gaps in retail provision in key population centres and identify opportunities to support existing / attract new retail businesses to service residents (and visitors)	
		3.3.10	Support is provided to establish new social enterprise opportunities	
	3.4	Actively support new businesses with advice and other services	3.4.1	Business Liaison Services are provided as a first point of call for new businesses
4. Attract visitors to the region	4.1	Increase visitor yield at specific locations and times during the year	4.1.1	Identify key tourism asset 'shovel ready' projects for appropriate funding, focussing on those that will enable off-peak visitation across the region, consistent with the Destination Management Plan. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regional bike trails• Regional food trails• Regional heritage trails• Regional cultural trails• Aquatic trails (i.e. Wallis Lake trail and app)• Ecological trails (linking natural assets such as Cattai Wetlands, Ellenborough Falls etc)• Conference facilities for business events <p>*Priority Action* for Council</p>
			4.1.2	Leverage the expansion of the Newcastle Airport to explore: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• International visitors• High-yield visitors with connections into the region and Taree Airport
			4.1.3	Explore event attraction to target visitors including business, sport, art and cultural events
	4.2	Develop opportunities that will continue to make our region attractive to visitors	4.2.1	Consistent with the MidCoast Cultural Plan 2036, celebrate, acknowledge and empower our local aboriginal heritage through the sharing of art, stories, history and place through: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The establishment of a combined Gathang Cultural Centre and Regional Art Gallery

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting the local growth of Aboriginal Arts and Cultural tourism across the MidCoast Supporting the Mara Wakulda (Come Together) project, in Gloucester <p>*Priority Action* for Council</p>
		4.2.2 Leverage regionally significant infrastructure including regional cultural and sporting facilities and open spaces
		4.2.3 Develop a feasibility plan for a regional sports facility that maximises the use of existing sporting facilities in Taree and at the Iron Arena
		<p>*Priority Action* for Council</p> <p>4.2.4 Identify gaps in accommodation offerings across the region to meet expected visitor growth</p>
5. Attract residents to the region	5.1 Activate public spaces and town centres	5.1.1 Review the Vibrant Spaces program to ensure it continues to be an effective program to activate public spaces and town centres
		5.1.2 Support projects that provide linkages between CBD's and key community assets and attractions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forster Main Beach Master Plan Wingham CBD Master Plan Manning Health/Taree CBD Precinct Plan Pedestrian access and Mobility Plan
	5.2 A coordinated marketing strategy to residents encouraging them to play in their own backyard	5.2.1 Continue to implement the 'ComeVisit' or similar campaigns that enable creative ways of enthusing residents about the region
6. Attract events to the region	6.1 Support an encourage the development and attraction of strategic events help attract residents to our region and attract visitors at key times of the year to the best locations	6.1.1 Identify key events in the region that can be supported and grown. Identify the key event gaps, including the identification of 2-3 game changer events *Priority Action* for MidCoast business chambers
		6.1.2 Investigate the potential for an Events Development Officer position and program to support the development of new and existing events (Note - this may or may not be a Council employee)
		6.1.3 Provide support to existing and emerging events through a competitive sponsorship program

		<div>6.1.4 Review Council's Events and Festivals Policy to enable Council to play a strategic role in their support of events</div> <div>6.1.5 Investigate and promote opportunities to attract business / corporate events:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Investigate and engage with key stakeholders about the assets required to attract business / corporate events to the regionEngage with the business community to develop products / itineraries suitable for business / corporate events</div>
GROW		
Strategic Objective	Implementation Areas	Actions (for annual review)
7. Support business growth, collaboration and innovation	7.1 Ensure that Economic Development is considered in all of Council's activities	7.1.1 Ensure the economic development objectives of attract and grow are factored into the key decisions of Council
		7.1.2 Improve core foundation infrastructure, in particular roads, bridges, sewer and water to support economic development in the area
		7.1.3 Design, construct and maintain safe and efficient local transport and mobility networks to support economic development in the area
		7.1.4 Maintain and enhance Council's relationship with the MidCoast Business Chamber and local business chambers across the MidCoast *Priority Action* for Council
	7.2 Encourage partnerships to enable business to leverage each other and other groups	7.2.1 Review the shop local 'ShopMidCoast' program and the benefits it provides to the local business community
		7.2.2 Work collaboratively with the MidCoast Business Chamber and local business chambers across the MidCoast to leverage and take advantage of economic development opportunities *Priority Action* for Council
8. Support innovative new business	8.1 Encourage the development of employment hubs to support growth and innovation in specialised industry groups	8.1.1 Support the development of the Northern Gateway / Airport Transport Hub as above *Priority Action* for Council
		8.1.2 Facilitate co-working opportunities in the region's key centres
		8.2.1 Support the concept of an 'Entrepreneur in Residence'

	8.2 Identify and support innovative businesses located in the MidCoast	program in Forster as a pilot for the region *Priority Action* for MidCoast business chambers
		8.2.2 Support the Forster-Tuncurry Business Chamber to develop the concept of an 'Angel Investment' project for new business innovation and start-ups *Priority Action* for MidCoast business chambers
		8.2.3 Support creative industries in the MidCoast by implementing the actions referenced in the MidCoast Cultural Plan 2036
9. Increase skill levels of businesses and residents	9.1 Support the development and growth of a skilled, motivated, accountable and high-performing workforce	9.1.1 Undertake consultation with industry and key stakeholders to identify skills and education gaps and opportunities. *Priority Action* for MidCoast business chambers
	9.2 Strengthen the capacity of our young people to participate and thrive in community life	9.2.1 Advocate for and encourage local education and vocational training to cover skills and employment gaps
		9.2.2 Promote and support local educational facilities and programs including Taree University Campus and TAFE to maximise the learning opportunities of the region's current and future workforce *Priority Action* for Council
		9.2.3 Support school initiatives such as the 'Entrepreneurial Learning in Action' program
	9.3 Initiate networking events and capacity building sessions or seminars for the business community within the region	9.3.1 Provide ongoing workshops, mentoring and training for businesses in collaboration with industry, focussing on opportunities to build business and staff capacity
10. Improve local business culture	10.1 Develop a coordinated approach to monitor business sentiment in the region	10.1.1 Conduct regular 'check-ins' with the business community to assess business sentiment.
	10.2 Strengthen business connectedness through programs and partnerships with business organisations, industry representatives and regional organisations to facilitate information sharing and provide business support	10.2.1 Support, and help grow local and regional business networks
		10.2.2 Recognise business achievement, such as awards programs and/or a program for telling/showcasing business stories in the region and proactively market these programs



4

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Sub-District Maps (source: Hunter Regional Plan 2041)

Barrington District (note map includes Dungog LGA; however, this region is not part of the MidCoast Economic Development Strategy)

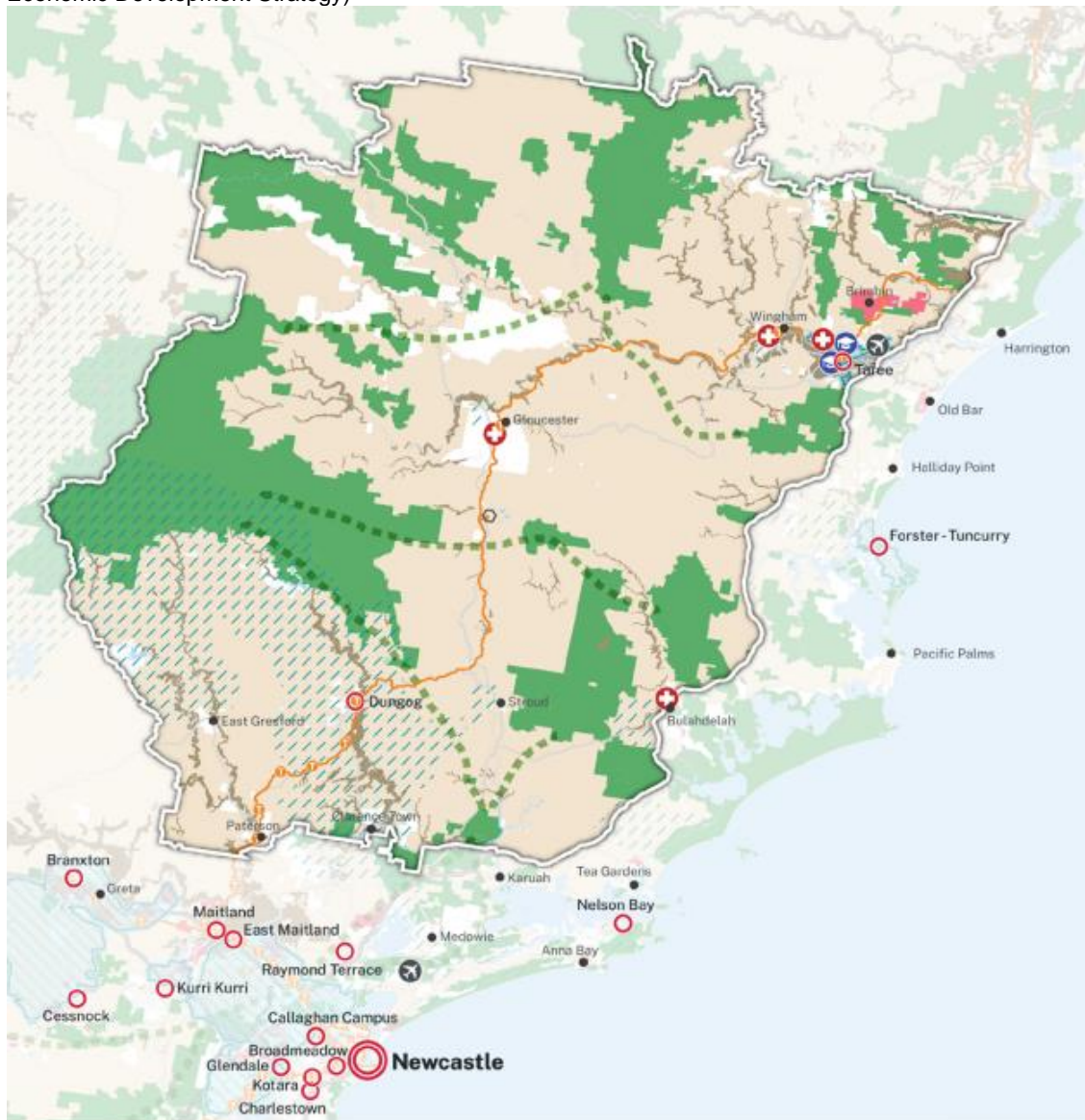
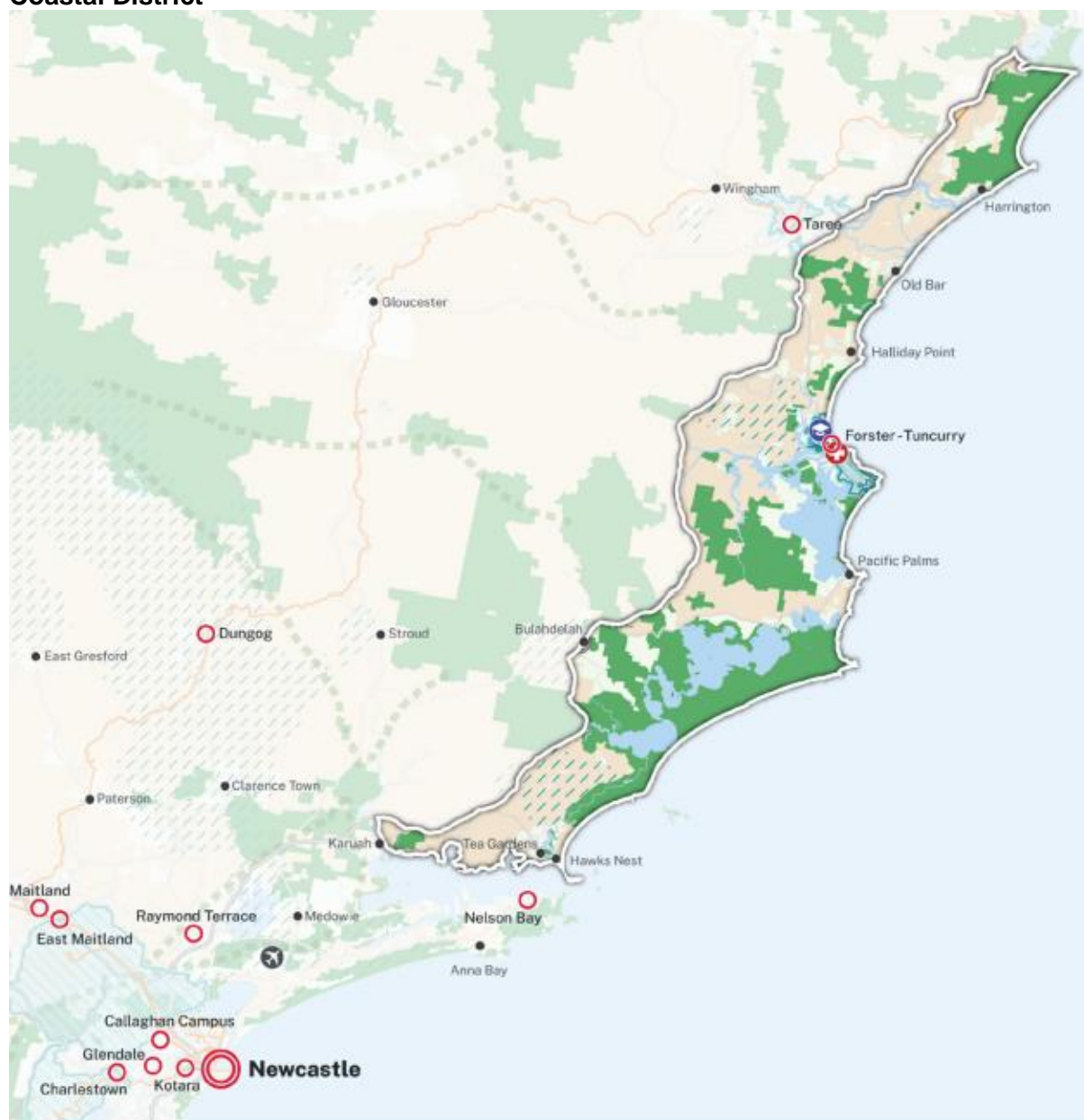


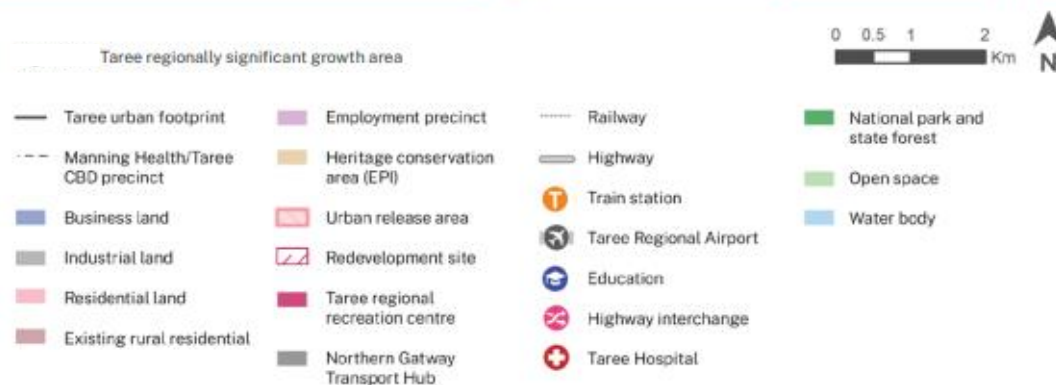
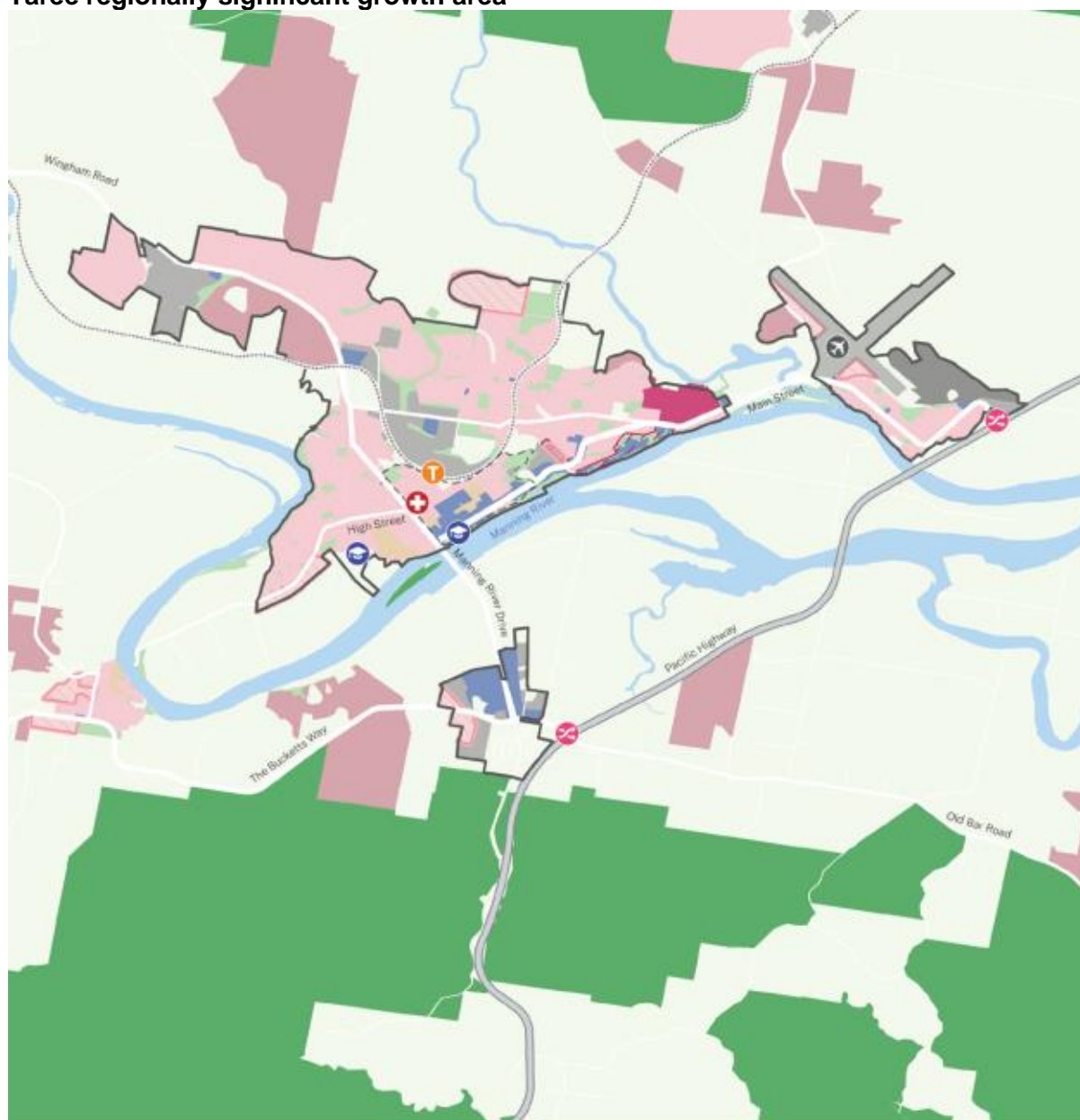
Figure 37: Barrington district



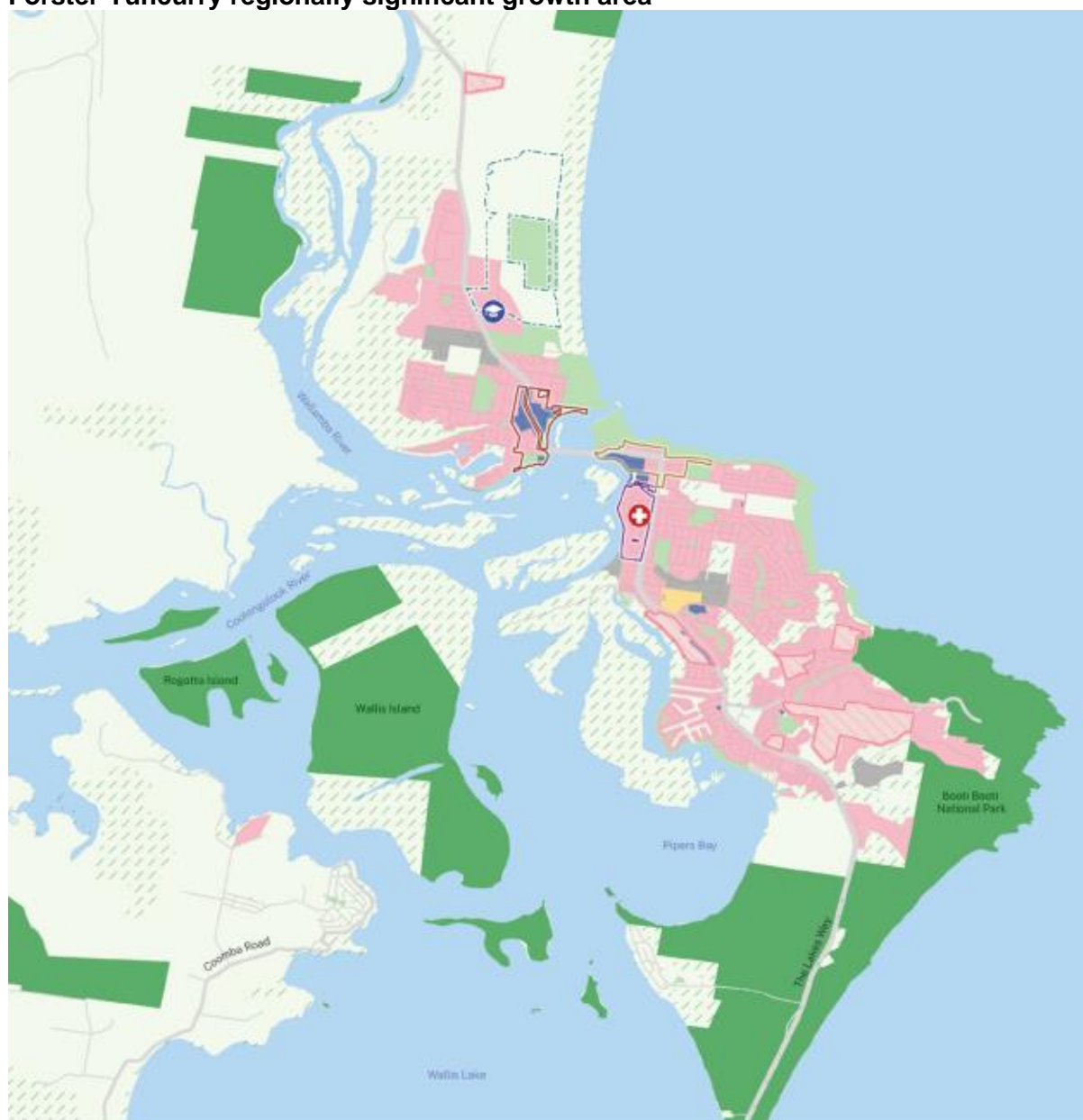
Coastal District



Taree regionally significant growth area



Forster-Tuncurry regionally significant growth area



Forster regionally significant growth area



- | | | |
|--------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Business land | North Tuncurry urban release area | Education |
| Industrial land | Forster town centre and Main Beach | Hospital |
| Residential land | Tuncurry town centre and lake foreshore | National park and state forest |
| Forster Shopping Village | Lakeside residential | Open space |
| Urban release area | Conservation zone | Water body |
| Conservation zone | Road | |

Appendix B – MidCoast Community Strategic Plan 2022-2032 Economic Development related performance measures

Performance Indicator / measure	Source	Baseline	Target	Attract	Grow
Planning for local economic growth and development is adequate	MidCoast Community Satisfaction Survey	35% of residents agree	Increase	✓	✓
Community satisfaction rate with Economic Development	MidCoast Community Satisfaction Survey	64%	Increase		✓
Community satisfaction rate for support of local business	MidCoast Community Satisfaction Survey	70%	Increase		✓
Gross Domestic Regional Product	NIEIR 2021 via .id profile for MidCoast Council	\$3.43 billion	Maintain or increase	✓	✓
Gross Domestic Regional Product per capita	NIEIR 2021 via .id profile for MidCoast Council	\$36,026	Maintain or increase	✓	✓
Local jobs	Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)2021 via .id profile for MidCoast Council	30,250	Maintain or increase	✓	✓
Persons aged 15+ with University Qualifications	Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)2021 via .id profile for MidCoast Council	11%	Increase	✓	✓
Persons aged 15+ with trade qualifications (certificate)	Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2021 via .id profile for MidCoast Council	24%	Increase	✓	✓
Local business	Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2021 via .id profile for MidCoast Council	6,951	Maintain or increase	✓	✓
Visitation rate	Tourism Research Australia Local Government Area Profiles 2020	2.18M	Maintain	✓	
Total visitors spend	Tourism Research Australia Local Government Area Profiles 2020	\$612M	Increase by 4%	✓	✓
Average overnight visitors spend	Tourism Research Australia Local Government Area Profiles 2020	\$453	Increase by 1.5%	✓	✓
NBN coverage in MidCoast	nbn™ rollout map – nbn (nbnco.com.au)	Hawks Nest, Tea Gardens, Karuah and Stroud currently	NBN coverage in Hawks Nest, Tea Gardens,		✓

		do not have NBN coverage	Karuah and Stroud		
Shops and services in shopping areas meet residents needs	MidCoast Community Satisfaction Survey	66% of residents agree	Increase	✓	✓
Community satisfaction with local roads	MidCoast Community Satisfaction Survey	43%	Increase		✓
Community satisfaction with road safety	MidCoast Community Satisfaction Survey	85%	Maintain		✓
Community satisfactions with maintaining local bridges	MidCoast Community Satisfaction Survey	75%	Maintain		✓
Community satisfaction with maintaining footpaths	MidCoast Community Satisfaction Survey	61%	Increase		✓
Public transport is adequate for your needs	MidCoast Community Satisfaction Survey	39% of residents agree	Increase		✓

Appendix C – Related Plans

- MidCoast Regional Economic Development Strategy – 2023 Update (*Department of Regional NSW*) (*currently in development*)
- MidCoast Cultural Plan 2036
- MidCoast 2022-2032 Community Strategic Plan
- MidCoast Destination Management Plan 2017 (*currently under review*)

Appendix D – References

- 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 13 - National Institute of Economic and Industrial Research (NIEIR) 2021
- 3 - Australian Government Small Areas Labour Market September 2022
- 4, 5, 9, 10, 12- Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021
- 11 - Tourism Research Australia 2020/21

Appendix E – Glossary

Gross Regional Product	The total value of final goods and services produced in the region over the period of one (1) year
Gross Value Add	An indicator of how productive each industry sector is at increasing the value of its inputs
Total Economic Output	The amount of goods or services produced in a time period by the local economy
Visitor Economy	Encompasses anyone who provides or promotes services to the region's domestic and international visitors
Employment	Employment data represents the number of people employed by businesses / organisations in each of the industry sectors in a defined region



MIDCOAST
council

Yalawanyi Ganya
2 Biripi Way
PO Box 482
Taree 2430
Mon-Fri 8.30am - 4.30pm
Tel: (02) 7955 7777