

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

We are committed to engaging with our community in a meaningful way to make sure our community is at the heart of everything we do.

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 five 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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PREFACE

This Strategy is the first Economic Development Strategy for MidCoast Council. Our vision is that the MidCoast is where people choose to live, work and invest.

It is a five-year high-level document that sets the overall intent of MidCoast Council to:

- Collaboratively build the economic capacity of the MidCoast region to improve its economic future and the quality of life of its community, and
- Do this by working with local businesses and the broader business community.

The Strategy builds on the NSW Government's Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS), 2023 update, by reinforcing the key objectives of Attract and Grow.

Setting the Scene, describes the economic landscape of the MidCoast Region and sets out our Opportunities and Challenges. This section also provides specific details.

Motivation explains the way that we will work to achieve economic development. It provides a framework of our core outcomes and links them to our key objectives of Attract and Grow.

We will work to attract skilled workers and professionals, investment, new businesses, visitors, residents, and events to the region.

We will work to grow and support businesses, collaborations and innovations, skill levels, and business culture.

Measuring success will be difficult, but we have included some measures which we will need to report on and refine through the life of this Strategy.

Our way forward includes a strategic action plan for the next five years.

The 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.

Each year, Council will identify projects for delivery in the following financial year that will be included in Council's annual Operational Plan and budget. Therefore these documents should be read in conjunction with this strategy and the annual Economic Development Action Plan.

Each year, the Business Chambers and/or local businesses will deliver those projects more appropriately developed and delivered by the business community.

This will provide a level of flexibility to allow Council and other stakeholders to be responsive to changes in economic circumstances and/or industry needs. Each action, when identified in an annual operational plan will have its own project plan indicating what is involved, who is responsible and what is expected.

Progress and outcomes will be reported to stakeholders and the general community on an annual basis.

This document should also be read in conjunction with MidCoast Council's Destination Management Plan as tourism is a key driver of the MidCoast economy which needs to be managed sustainably.

OUR REGION - AN OVERVIEW

Home to over 97,000 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.



01

SETTING THE SCENE

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, Nahiack, 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 Gathang (Kattang) speaking people are the traditional owners of all the lands that cover the MidCoast.



OUR ECONOMY - THE FACTS AND FIGURES

\$6.65
BILLION
TOTAL OUTPUT¹

\$608
MILLION
VISITOR SPEND (DIRECT)²

4.1%
UNEMPLOYMENT³

\$328
MILLION
BUILDING APPROVALS⁴

97,000
POPULATION⁵

35,046
JOBS⁶

\$4.08
BILLION
GROSS REGIONAL PRODUCT⁷

\$3.1
BILLION
VALUE ADDED⁸

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 \$4.08 billion in June 2022. The sectors recording the greatest proportion of GRP (by value) are Health Care and Social Assistance, Construction and Education.

Business

There are over 7,000⁹ 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 the Barrington Coast) receives over 2.3 million¹⁰ visitors every year. In the 2021-22 financial year, tourism generated \$608 million towards the economy.

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 2021-2022 financial year. Of this, approximately \$255 million was for residential construction and \$73.5 million was for commercial construction.

Talent

46.5%¹¹ 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 to provide both passenger and freight services.

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 bring 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.

Natural environment

The MidCoast is home to extensive diversity in its natural environment. This environment provides ecosystem services and resources that are valuable to our economy. Quality management and enhancement of our landscapes provides amenity and recreation, liveability and wellbeing. Sustainable growth and prosperity can be achieved by encouraging the business community to understand and embrace the relationship between the economy and the environment as an economic driver.



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.

The following education providers have a presence in our area (either as a partnership with Taree Universities Campus or stand-alone):

- TAFE NSW
- University of New England
- University of Newcastle

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 Universities Campus has been a great step forward in this area and has partnerships with the institutions outlined above as well as Charles Sturt University and Central Queensland University. The challenge is to now create sub-campuses 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.

COASTAL DISTRICT		
STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES	ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES
<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)		
STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES	ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES
<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 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

MIDCOAST HINTERLAND (BARRINGTON DISTRICT)

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES	ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES
<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)

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES	ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity to the Pacific Highway • Taree Universities Campus • Taree Airport • Taree's role as a regional service centre • Cultural services (MEC & Manning 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 • Health Care infrastructure

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.



02

MOTIVATION

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 and link 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.

In delivering against this strategy, emphasis will be placed on work that supports innovation and new technologies, environmental sustainability, the circular economy and Aboriginal enterprises which sustainably supports and grows the MidCoast's visitor economy.

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.

ATTRACT

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

1. Attract skilled workers and professionals

Market the region to skilled workers and professionals

2. Attract investment to the region

Develop an approach to investment attraction that supports medium and large-scale investment and seeks to align opportunities for this investment

3. Attract new businesses to the region

Create the assets, incentives and strategy required to present the region to new strategic businesses

4. Attract visitors to the region

Strengthen the appeal of the destination to existing markets and identify new target markets to support the sustainable growth of the visitor economy

5. Attract residents to the region

Utilise the region's assets to attract residents to be part of our vibrant, connected communities

6. Attract events to the region

Attract and support events that capitalise on the strengths of the region in order to create vibrant and connected communities

GROW

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

7. Support business growth, collaboration and innovation

Maintain a strong connection with the business community and an understanding of their needs

8. Support innovative new business

Collaborate to encourage innovation, competitiveness, entrepreneurship and support for the start-up community

9. Increase skill levels of businesses and residents

Provide a supportive environment for the development of the region's existing businesses and workforce including our youth

10. Improve local business culture

Provide an environment that generates confidence and enthusiasm within the region's business community

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 business growth and make the region attractive?

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	\$6.64 billion NIEIR 2022	Increase
Gross Regional Product	\$4.08 billion NIEIR 2022	Increase
Number of Residents	97,090 Estimated Residential Population, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australia 2022	Increase
Proportion of residents aged 18-25yrs	5,111 Service Age Groups, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2021	Increase
Dwelling Approvals	389 Local Development Performance Monitoring (LDPM) FY2021	Increase
Unemployment Rate	4.1% Small Area Labour Market, December 2022	Maintain in line with state average
Business Confidence	Baseline established after Business Confidence Survey is introduced	Increase
Registered Businesses	7,314 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries & Exits 2022	Increase

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.

ATTRACT

STRATEGIC ACTION	MEASURE	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR	BASELINE	TARGET
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	Number and value of grants as reported in the MidCoast Council Annual Report	
		Value of grants received for priority projects identified in the economic development strategy		
3. Attract new businesses to the region	Number of businesses	Increase in the number of registered businesses	7,314 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries & Exits 2022	Increase
4. Attract visitors to the region	Increase in midweek off-season visitation	Increase in yield during these periods	Measures to be established in MidCoast Council Destination Management Plan 2023	
	Increase in shoulder and low season visitation	Increase in yield during these periods		
	Increase in regional dispersal	Increase in yield in identified areas		
5. Attract residents to the region	Increase in number of residents	Increase in estimated population	97,090 Australian Bureau of Statistics Estimated Residential Population 2022	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

STRATEGIC ACTION	MEASURE	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR	BASELINE	TARGET
7. Support business growth, collaboration & innovation	Market value of all final goods and services produced in a region	Gross Regional Product	\$4.08 billion National Institute of Economic and Industrial Research 2022	Increase
8. Support innovative new business	Number of businesses	Increase in number of registered businesses	7,314 Bureau of Statistics, Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries & Exits 2022	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)	TBD
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.	TBD

For measures relating to economic development contained in MidCoast Council's Delivery Program 2022-2026 and Operational Plan 2023-24, please refer to Appendix B.

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN AND IMPLEMENTATION

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

The action plan aligns with NSW Government planning priorities, namely the Regional Economic Development Plan (update 2023) and existing Council strategies and plans such as the Cultural Plan and the Destination Management Plan.

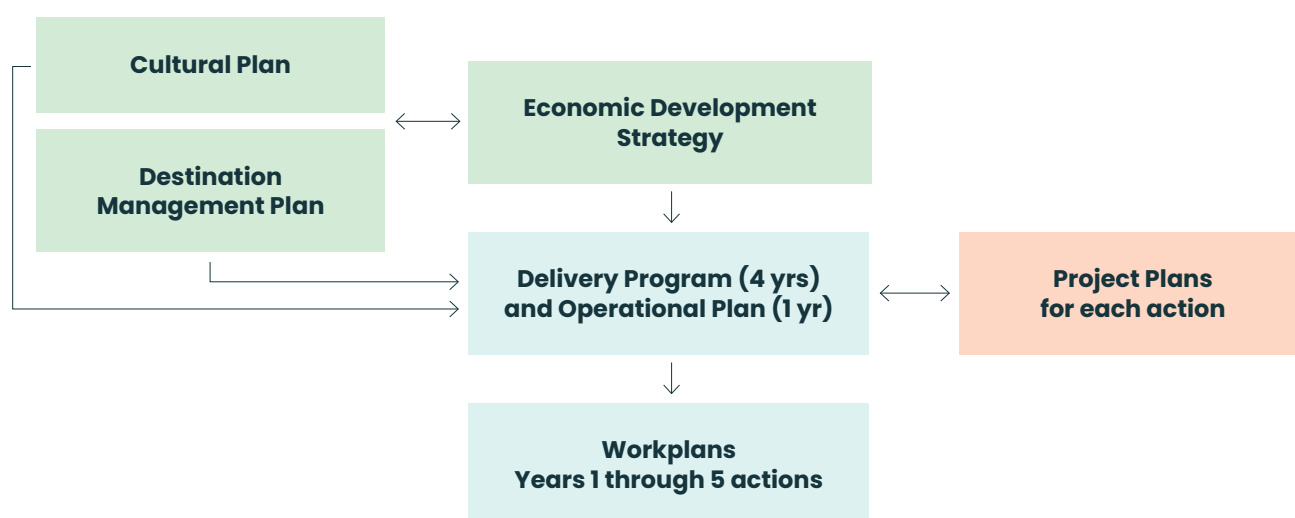
The actions developed maintain a level of flexibility to allow Council and other stakeholders to be responsive to changes in economic circumstances and/or industry needs. Each action requires its own project plan indicating what is involved, who is responsible and what is expected.

Annual actions over the five-year life of the plan will be developed based on priorities and available resources and will be clearly identified in Council's Operational Plan so that government agencies, local business and industry representatives, private investors and the community can have input and provide comment on the actions identified. Progress and outcomes will be reported to stakeholders and general community on a 6-monthly basis in line with operational plan reporting.



03

OUR WAY FORWARD



Key terms – How to read the action plan

Community outcomes: The overarching goals to keep in sight. They are based on the quadruple bottom line: social, environment (both natural and built), economic and civic leadership.

Council's role: The Economic Development Strategy will be delivered through many partnerships and by many different stakeholders. These include government agencies (State and Federal), local business

and industry representatives, private investors and the community. Therefore, it is important to clearly identify the role that Council will play.

Business communities role: One of the key partners in the delivery of the Economic Development Strategy is the local business community. The business community has an extremely important role to play and therefore it is important to clearly identify this role.

These roles are described below:

ROLE	DESCRIPTION
Advocate	Council makes representations to State and Federal government, industry and other sectors to achieve the best possible outcomes for the MidCoast community.
Capacity Builder	Council works with business, community groups and agencies so the community can become self-sufficient in order to meet local needs. Council will mentor and/or assist business and community groups to obtain the necessary resources through partnerships with other agencies.
Deliverer	The project is delivered either wholly or partly in conjunction with business, community groups and agencies.
Funding Provider	Funding is provided either wholly or partly to deliver infrastructure, services, facilities and programs that meet the needs of the community.
Leader	Key community issues are identified, and local and external stakeholders are mobilised to respond where appropriate. If Council leads it plans and provides direction through policy and practices.
Partner	Partnerships are developed with business, the community, private and government organisations to deliver benefits for the community.
Planner	Research is undertaken, information is collected and consultation with community stakeholders is used to develop and evaluate ways to resolve identified issues. This work is undertaken from a whole of community perspective.
Regulator	Council has a statutory role in approvals and mandatory inspections, provides enforcement or penalties for breaches of regulations.

ATTRACT

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE	IMPLEMENTATION AREAS	ACTIONS (FOR ANNUAL REVIEW)	COUNCIL'S ROLE
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	Advocate Funding Provider Leader Partner
		1.1.2 Prepare skilled workforce attraction strategies in collaboration with industry where the need is identified	Advocate Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner Planner
		1.1.3 Provide co-work opportunities in Taree, Gloucester and Forster to support skilled worker migration	Advocate Capacity Builder Regulator
	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	Advocate Deliverer Leader Partner Planner Regulator
		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	Advocate Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner Planner
		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	Advocate Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner Planner
		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	Deliverer Leader Partner Planner
		1.2.5 Prepare a 'shovel ready' proposal for the Forster 360 Walk ready for appropriate funding opportunities	Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner Planner Regulator
		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	Advocate

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE	IMPLEMENTATION AREAS	ACTIONS (FOR ANNUAL REVIEW)	COUNCIL'S ROLE
	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	1.2.7 Support the implementation of Electric Vehicle Charging stations across the region	Advocate Capacity Builder Deliverer Leader Partner Planner Regulator
		1.2.8 Openly market positive stories of skilled migration to the region	Deliverer Leader Partner Planner
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: • Identify and apply for appropriate funding • Advocate for these projects *Priority Action* for MidCoast business chambers and Council	Advocate Deliverer Leader Partner Planner
		2.1.2 Prioritise and develop 'shovel ready' proposals for identified projects *Priority Action* for MidCoast business chambers and Council	Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner Planner
		2.1.3 Raise awareness and utilisation of State and Federal Government funding opportunities amongst the business and general community including programs focused on commercialisation, R&D and innovation	Capacity Builder Deliverer Leader Partner Planner
	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	Advocate Capacity Builder Deliverer Leader Partner Planner
		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	Advocate Capacity Builder
		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	Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner Planner
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	Advocate Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner Planner Regulator
		3.1.2 Advocate for NBN and mobile coverage improvements in identified areas	Advocate Planner
		3.1.3 Encourage a regular airline passenger service for the MidCoast	Advocate Leader Partner Planner Regulator

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE	IMPLEMENTATION AREAS	ACTIONS (FOR ANNUAL REVIEW)	COUNCIL'S ROLE
	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	Advocate Leader Partner Planner
		3.2.2 Develop a closer partnership arrangement with the Newcastle Airport to harness opportunities	Advocate Leader Partner
	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	Capacity Builder Deliverer Leader Partner Planner Regulator
		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	Capacity Builder Deliverer Leader Partner Planner Regulator
		3.3.3 Investigate ways to assist renewable energy and circular economy business growth for the region	Advocate Deliverer Leader Partner Planner Regulator
		3.3.4 Provide information to small landholders on establishing small business enterprises	Capacity Builder Deliverer Leader Partner Planner Regulator
		3.3.5 Develop strategies to address the provision of navigable river and estuary entrances *Priority Action* for MidCoast business chambers	Advocate Partner
		3.3.6 Support the work of the Manning River Entrance Expert Task Force and its associated investigations, its processes and scientific rigour and use the Task Force recommendations to appropriately inform the Old Bar – Manning Point Coastal Management Program	Advocate Deliverer Partner
		3.3.7 Advocate 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	Advocate Partner
		3.3.8 Facilitate a government based inter-agency group to develop strategies to address sand shoaling at important aquaculture and fishing locations	Advocate Deliverer Leader Partner Planner
		3.3.9 Undertake a retail audit 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)	Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner Planner
		3.3.10 Provide support to establish new social enterprise opportunities	Capacity Builder Deliverer Leader Partner

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE	IMPLEMENTATION AREAS	ACTIONS (FOR ANNUAL REVIEW)	COUNCIL'S ROLE
	3.4 Actively support new businesses with advice and other services	3.4.1 Provide Business Liaison Services as a first point of call for new businesses	Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner Planner
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, focusing 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 *Priority Action* for Council	Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner Planner Regulator
		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 	Advocate Capacity Builder Deliverer Leader Partner Planner
		4.1.3 Explore event attraction to target visitors including business, sport, art and cultural events	Advocate Capacity Builder Deliverer Leader Partner Planner
	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 • Supporting the local growth of Aboriginal Arts and Cultural tourism across the MidCoast • Supporting the Mara Wakulda (Come Together) project, in Gloucester *Priority Action* for Council	Advocate Capacity Builder Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner Planner Regulator
		4.2.2 Leverage regionally significant infrastructure including regional cultural and sporting facilities and open spaces	Advocate Capacity Builder Deliverer Leader Partner Planner Regulator
		4.2.3 Develop a feasibility plan for a regional sports facility that maximises the use of existing sporting facilities in Taree including the Iron Arena *Priority Action* for Council	Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner Planner Regulator

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE	IMPLEMENTATION AREAS	ACTIONS (FOR ANNUAL REVIEW)	COUNCIL'S ROLE
		4.2.4 Identify gaps in accommodation offerings across the region to meet expected visitor growth	Capacity Builder Deliverer Leader Partner Planner
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	Capacity Builder Deliverer Leader Partner Planner Regulator
		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 	Capacity Builder Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner Planner Regulator
	5.2 Undertake a coordinated marketing strategy to residents encouraging them to play in their own backyard	5.2.1 Continue to implement the 'Come Visit' or similar campaigns that enable creative ways of enthusing residents about the region	Capacity Builder Deliverer Leader Partner Planner
6. Attract events to the region	6.1 Support and encourage the development and attraction of strategic events to 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	Advocate Capacity Builder Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner Planner Regulator
		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)	Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner
		6.1.3 Provide support to existing and emerging events through a competitive sponsorship program	Capacity Builder Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner
		6.1.4 Review Council's Events and Festivals Policy to enable Council to play a proactive role in their support of events	Capacity Builder Deliverer Leader Partner
		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 region • Engage with the business community to develop products / itineraries suitable for business / corporate events 	Advocate Capacity Builder Deliverer Leader Partner Planner Regulator

GROW

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE	IMPLEMENTATION AREAS	ACTIONS (FOR ANNUAL REVIEW)	COUNCIL'S ROLE
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	Deliverer Leader Partner Planner
		7.1.2 Improve core foundation infrastructure, in particular roads, bridges, sewer and water to support economic development in the area	Advocate Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner Planner
		7.1.3 Design, construct and maintain safe and efficient local transport and mobility networks to support economic development in the area	Advocate Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner Planner
		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	Capacity Builder Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner
	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	Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner Planner
		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	Capacity Builder Deliverer Leader Partner
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	Advocate Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner Planner Regulator
		8.1.2 Facilitate co-working opportunities in the region's key centres	Advocate Capacity Builder Regulator
	8.2 Identify and support innovative businesses located in the MidCoast	8.2.1 Support the concept of an 'Entrepreneur in Residence' program in Forster as a pilot for the region *Priority Action* for MidCoast business chambers	Advocate Capacity Builder
		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	Advocate Capacity Builder
		8.2.3 Support creative industries in the MidCoast by implementing the actions referenced in the MidCoast Cultural Plan 2036	Advocate Capacity Builder Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE	IMPLEMENTATION AREAS	ACTIONS (FOR ANNUAL REVIEW)	COUNCIL'S ROLE
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	Deliverer Leader Partner Planner
	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	Advocate Capacity Builder Partner
		9.2.2 Promote and support local educational facilities and programs including Taree Universities Campus and TAFE to maximise the learning opportunities of the region's current and future workforce *Priority Action* for Council	Advocate Deliverer Leader Partner
		9.2.3 Support school initiatives such as the 'Entrepreneurial Learning in Action' program	Capacity Builder Deliverer Leader Partner
		9.3.1 Provide ongoing workshops, mentoring and training for businesses in collaboration with industry, focusing on opportunities to build business and staff capacity	Capacity Builder Deliverer Leader Partner
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.	Capacity Builder Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner Planner
	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	Capacity Builder Deliverer Funding Provider Leader Partner Planner
		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	Capacity Builder Deliverer Leader Partner





04

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Sub-Districts 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)

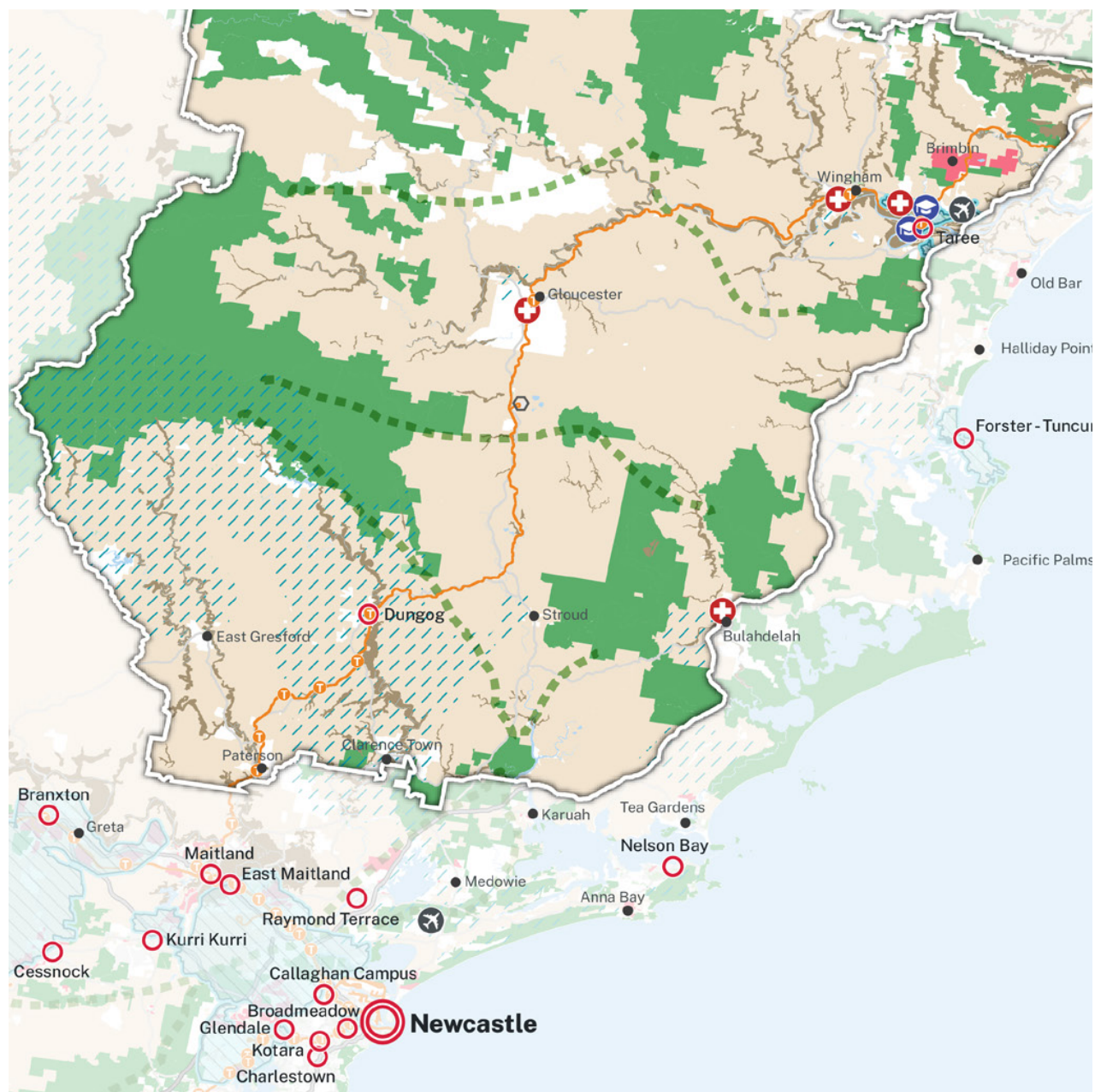
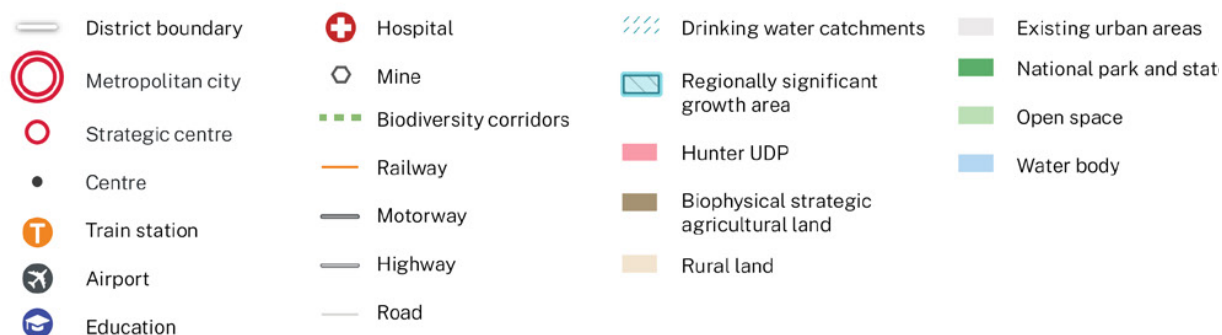


Figure 37: Barrington district

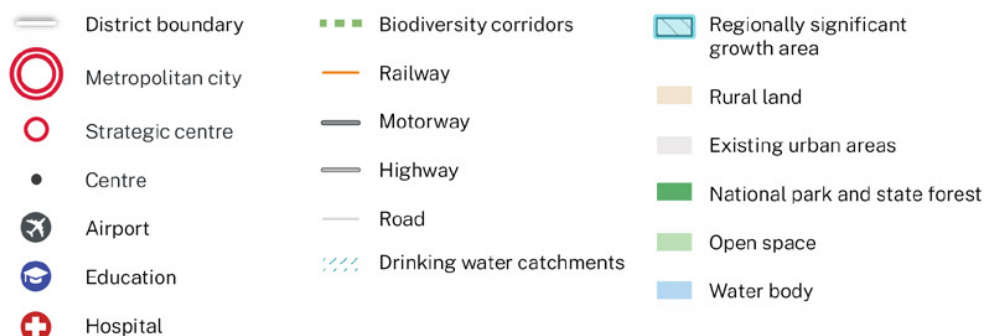
0 5 10 20
Km



Coastal District



Figure 39: Coastal district



Taree regionally significant growth area

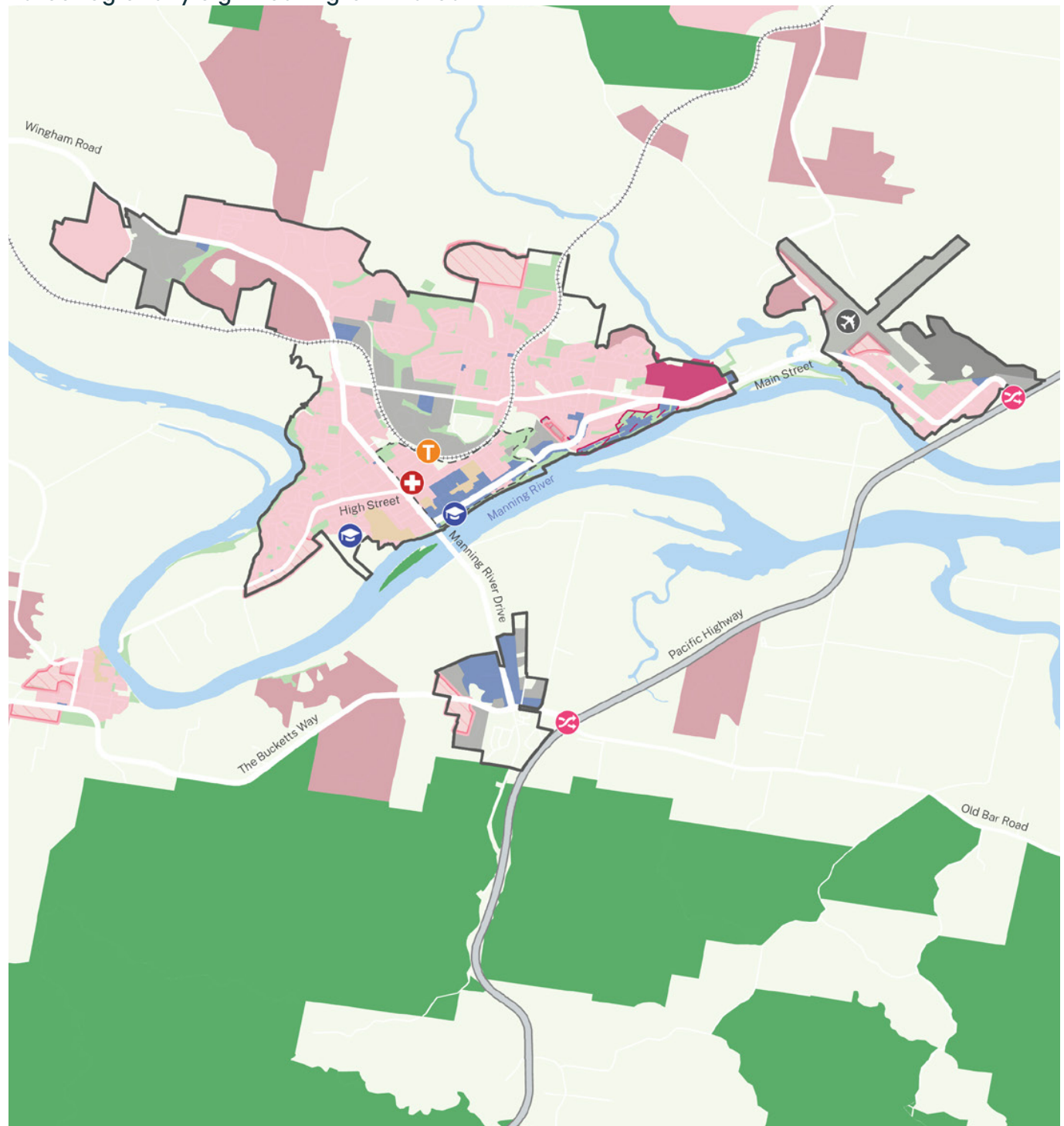


Figure 38: Taree regionally significant growth area



— Taree urban footprint	Employment precinct	----- Railway	National park and state forest
- - - Manning Health/Taree CBD precinct	Heritage conservation area (EPI)	— Highway	Open space
Business land	Urban release area	Train station	Water body
Industrial land	Redevelopment site	Taree Regional Airport	
Residential land	Taree regional recreation centre	Education	
Existing rural residential	Northern Gateway Transport Hub	Highway interchange	
		Taree Hospital	

Forster-Tuncurry regionally significant growth area

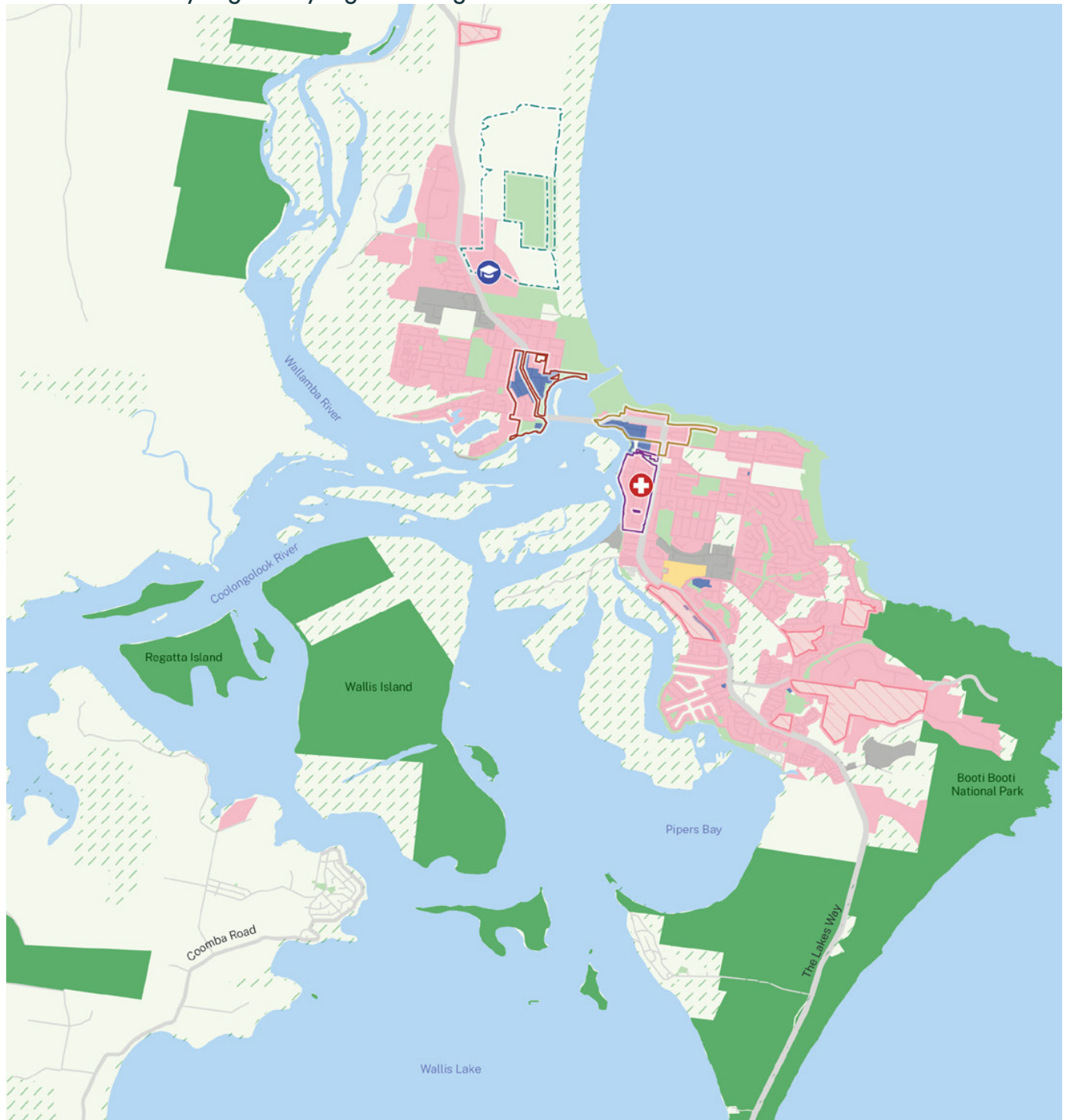


Figure 40: Forster regionally significant growth area



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	Road	Water body
Conservation zone		

Appendix B – MidCoast Council’s Delivery Program 2022–2026 and Operational Plan 2023–24 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	nbnTM rollout map – nbn (nbnco.com.au)	Hawks Nest, Tea Gardens, Karuah and Stroud currently do not have NBN coverage	NBN coverage in Hawks Nest, Tea Gardens, Karuah and Stroud		✓

PERFORMANCE INDICATOR / MEASURE	SOURCE	BASELINE	TARGET	ATTRACT	GROW
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	NIEIR 2021 via .id profile for MidCoast Council	75%	Maintain		✓
Community satisfaction with maintaining footpaths	NIEIR 2021 via .id profile for MidCoast Council	61%	Increase		✓
Public transport is adequate for your needs	Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)2021 via .id profile for MidCoast Council	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 Council’s Delivery Program 2022-2026 and Operational Plan 2023-24
- MidCoast Destination Management Plan 2017 (currently under review)

Appendix D – References

1, 6, 7, 8 – National Institute of Economic and Industrial Research (NIEIR) 2021-22

2, 10 – Tourism Research Australia LGA Tourism profile 2021-22

3 – Australian Government Small Areas Labour Market December 2022

4, 5, 9, 11, 12 – Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021

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

Appendix F – The Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) Framework

The IP&R framework was first introduced by the Office of Local Government in 2009. It is based on the idea that Council planning should be linked directly to community priorities. The framework is made up of several different plans that work alongside each other.

For more information visit:

<https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/councils/integrated-planning-and-reporting/>

