




NORTHERN
RIVERS
JOINT ORGANISATION

Strategic Regional Priorities 2022-2024



SUSTAINABLE. RESILIENT. PROSPEROUS.





The Northern Rivers Joint Organisation
acknowledges Australian Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander peoples as the
first inhabitants of this nation.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of
the lands on which we live and work, and pay
our respects to Elders past, present and future.

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Foreword

In June 2018, six councils – Ballina Shire, Byron Shire, Kyogle, Lismore City, Richmond Valley and Tweed Shire – came together to form the Northern Rivers Joint Organisation (NRJO).

Each council will continue to serve and represent its local area, just as they always have, but when we come together as a Joint Organisation we'll be considering the needs of the Northern Rivers region as a whole.

That means we'll be able to prioritise, plan and deliver regional initiatives across traditional council boundaries and speak with a strong, united voice to the Australian and NSW Governments and other stakeholders on issues of regional significance.

We believe that by working together we'll be able to build a stronger region and access funding and other opportunities not available to individual councils.



Cr Sharon Cadwallader
Chair, Northern Rivers Joint Organisation





About Joint Organisations

In 2017 the NSW Government passed legislation to establish a network of Joint Organisations to strengthen collaboration between local councils and government with the goal of driving better planning, economic development and service delivery in regional NSW.

The functions of Joint Organisations are to:

- Establish strategic regional priorities and develop strategies and plans for delivering those priorities
- Provide regional leadership and advocate for strategic regional priorities
- Identify and take up opportunities for inter-governmental cooperation on regional matters.

About this plan

This plan sets out what we'd like to see for the Northern Rivers region and its communities. It outlines the Northern Rivers Joint Organisation's vision for the future and the strategic priorities we know we need to focus on to make that vision a reality. Importantly, it details the key actions we'll undertake as a Joint Organisation to make a difference.

The goals and actions in this plan will guide our decision-making and work over the next four years. They will be reviewed regularly to check progress and make sure our plan remains relevant as our region evolves.

Developing the plan

This plan was originally developed in 2018-2019 collaboratively by the Mayors and General Managers of Ballina Shire Council, Byron Shire Council, Kyogle Council, Lismore City Council, Richmond Valley Council and Tweed Shire Council, in consultation with our partner organisations – NSW Office of Local Government, NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, Regional Development Australia - Northern Rivers and Rous County Council. Following the 2021 election, the plan was reviewed and updated to reflect the disastrous impacts of the 2022 floods, with the selected priorities still being relevant to our region.



Working together

This plan doesn't exist in isolation. It has been developed to align with and complement other major regional plans including:

- The North Coast Regional Plan 2036 – the NSW Department of Planning and Environment's 20- year blueprint for the region
- The Northern Rivers and Tweed Regional Economic Development Strategies 2018-2022.

Similarly, our organisation doesn't act on its own. To deliver the actions in the plan we'll

work collaboratively with Federal and State Government agencies including:

- Regional Development Australia – Northern Rivers
- NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet
- NSW Department of Industry
- NSW Department of Planning and Environment.

We'll also look for opportunities to partner with non- government organisations, the community and the private sector.



Our Vision

For the Northern Rivers to be a unified region of well connected, integrated communities that affords its people a unique balance of place, lifestyle and opportunity.

And for our region to be known to the nation and the world for its:

- outstanding environmental and scenic values
- commitment to sustainability
- respect for Aboriginal culture
- openness to visitors
- entrepreneurial drive
- creative and collective spirit and culture
- support of primary producers

Our Principles

To provide a focus for our efforts we've committed to the following principles:

To provide a forum and vehicle for cooperative action on issues of regional significance and concern to Local Government that require advocacy and/or political representation.

To act as an advocate for the region to the Commonwealth and New South Wales Governments to advance the interests of the region

To seek from governments, financial assistance, legislative and/or policy changes and additional resources required by the region.

To proactively collaborate and facilitate to ensure the delivery of projects and services that benefit our region.



A diverse region

The Northern Rivers Joint Organisation covers an area of more than 10,000 square kilometres extending from Tweed Heads in the north to just beyond Evans Head in the south, and to Woodenbong and Tabulam in the west.

Home to the Bundjalung people for thousands of years, our region is now populated by around 240,000 people (ABS 2016) who together have created a culture known for its diversity and vibrancy.

Our region is one of contrasts. Our natural environments include beaches and mountains, rainforests and farms, and our communities range from charming country hamlets to bustling tourist meccas, regional centres and alternate lifestyle villages.

Each part of our region also has its own unique strengths. Our world-famous surfing beaches and coastal towns attract visitors from all over

Australia and the globe. Further inland agricultural opportunities abound and peaceful communities offer an enviable rural lifestyle. To the north we have strong connections with the large markets of South East Queensland and beyond, and our major population centres offer transport links, education, health and employment opportunities.

The Northern Rivers is a diverse region but one that comes together over a love of our surroundings, our way of life and our sense of community. These shared values provide a foundation for working together to build a stronger region for us all.



Regional priorities

We have identified five regional priorities that we will focus on to achieve our vision for the Northern Rivers.

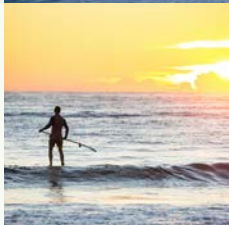
These long-term, high-level priorities have been chosen because they are the issues we know our communities care about, they align with government priorities and they offer opportunities for us to work together to achieve positive outcomes for the Northern Rivers as a whole.

The rest of this plan deals with each of these priorities in detail, including our goals and strategic actions, our stakeholders and how we'll measure our success.



Thriving, healthy and biodiverse natural environments

For the biodiversity and health of our waterways, habitats and wildlife to be protected and enhanced to deliver environmental, economic and recreational benefits for current and future generations of residents and visitors.



Improved community wellbeing now and into the future

For our region to be able to offer its residents a range of affordable, appropriate housing choices and access to health care, mental health care, aged care and other services that enhance wellbeing in the changing climate.



A physically and digitally connected region

For our communities, businesses and visitors to be connected through a diverse range of safe, inclusive, low impact private and public transport options and high quality, reliable internet and mobile telecommunications services.



Innovative, sustainable energy, water and waste management

For our region to establish itself as a leader in renewable energy production; effective, sustainable water management; and innovative approaches to waste management to improve environmental and service delivery outcomes.



A diversified, prosperous and sustainable regional economy

For our region to have a strong, diversified circular economy that provides increased employment and business opportunities and financial wellbeing for communities while protecting and maintaining our region's unique character.



PRIORITY

Thriving, healthy and biodiverse natural environments

Stunning stretches of coastline, beautiful landscapes significant Aboriginal cultural sites, fertile agricultural land and some of the highest levels of biodiversity in the nation – these are the things the Northern Rivers region is famous for.

But our natural environments are also subject to a range of pressures. We have population growth and visitation rates among the highest in Australia and increasing urban development, particularly along the coastal fringe.

According to the Northern Rivers Regional Biodiversity Management Plan, we have a disproportionately large number of rare and threatened plants, animals and ecological communities and some of the highest numbers of invasive plants and pest animals in the State. Historical land clearing has also impacted the amount of effective habitat and connectivity between habitats.

We have 140 kilometres of diverse coastal environments to protect as well as the rivers

which give our region its name – many of which are under pressure from altered flow patterns, water extraction, riparian degradation and reduced water quality.

Why is this important?

Our natural assets provide clean air and water, improve lifestyles and wellbeing and are valuable in their own right. They provide the natural resources that underpin our industries and are the foundation for the tourism sector which plays such an important role in the regional economy.

Northern Rivers communities care deeply about conserving and enhancing biodiversity, improving ecosystem health and resilience, using natural resources wisely, and reducing the environmental impact of population growth and economic development.

What will success look like?

- A collaborative, integrated approach across all three levels of government and other stakeholders
- Widespread recognition of the vital contribution biodiversity makes to the region's economy
- Increased private land owner involvement in biodiversity conservation
- Increase in the amount of effective habitat and vegetation and landscape scale connectivity
- Maintenance or increase in populations of threatened species
- Improved water quality and overall river health against key criteria
- Improved access to rivers for recreation
- Tourism and economic activities that are compatible with and promote the importance of biodiversity and habitat protection.
- Improved weed and feral animal control.

Strategic context

The following policies, strategies and plans provide context for our planning and activities in this priority area.

- Australia's Strategy for Nature 2018-2030
- Northern Rivers Regional Biodiversity Management Plan (2010)
- Border Ranges Rainforest Biodiversity Management Plan (2010)
- Australian Department of the Environment and Energy, Recovery Plans
- NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, Saving our Species program
- Far North Coast Regional Conservation Plan (2010)
- Regional State of the Environment 2016 - For the North Coast Region of NSW
- NSW Forestry Industry Roadmap (2016)
- NSW Biodiversity Offsets Scheme
- NSW Marine Estate Management Strategy 2018-2028).

Stakeholders

As we implement strategic actions we will seek to engage and partner with a range of stakeholders.

- NSW Office of Environment and Heritage
- NSW Environmental Protection Authority
- NSW Department of Primary Industries
- Local Land Services
- Marine Estate Management Authority
- Forestry Corporation NSW
- Local Aboriginal Land Councils
- Rous County Council
- Private Landholders
- Landcare
- Environmental and conservation groups.

What will we do to make a difference?

GOALS	STRATEGIC ACTIONS
1. Enhanced biodiversity across the region, including an increase in the volume of healthy, stable, interconnected habitat and increased populations of threatened species.	1.1 Investigate the feasibility of establishing a regional biodiversity offset / biobanking program.
	1.2 Advocate for changes to forestry policy and planning regulations to encourage native forestation.
	1.3 Engage with the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage to identify partnering opportunities as part of the Saving our Species program.
	1.4 Partner with Landcare, Local Land Services and community groups to identify ways the Joint Organisation can support efforts to engage the community and land owners in biodiversity conservation.
	1.5 Partner with Rous County Council to deliver effective weed control on public lands.
2. Improved water quality and overall health of the Tweed, Richmond, Clarence, Brunswick and Wilson river systems to deliver positive environmental, recreational and economic outcomes.	2.1 Develop a healthy waterways action plan which identifies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • projects for funding and delivery • opportunities for partnering with government, community groups and others on project implementation.
	2.2 Partner with the NSW Department of Planning and Environment to progress relevant directions in the North Coast Regional Plan 2036, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direction 1: Deliver environmentally sustainable growth • Direction 2: Enhance biodiversity, coastal and aquatic habitats and water catchments.
	2.3 Develop standardised measures for river health and coordinate monitoring and reporting to provide a regional view of river health.
	2.4 Advocate to have powers to restrict access of stock to riverbanks and improve riverbank vegetation.
	2.5 Collaborate on Regenerative Landscape Management to rehydrate landscapes in drought periods and slow flood waters.
3. Protect and enhance the region's natural coastal environments to maintain natural character, scenic value, biological diversity and ecosystem integrity.	3.1 Work collaboratively as a region on the development and implementation of Coastal Management Programs and other activities under the <i>Coastal Management Act 2016</i> .



PRIORITY

Improved community wellbeing now and into the future

The Northern Rivers is home to around 240,000 people and rising (ABS 2016). Our region offers many of the building blocks for wellbeing but we also face a number of challenges, particularly when it comes to meeting the diverse housing and health

care needs of a growing, aging and geographically dispersed population.

Housing affordability and housing stress are already major issues in the Northern Rivers. Over recent decades house prices and rents have risen faster than incomes, particularly in coastal areas. There is also insufficient supply to meet demand for smaller homes, accommodation for older people, social housing and crisis accommodation.

When it comes to health and wellbeing we are fortunate to have a number of hospitals and major health services within the region but gaps in specialist services, large distances and lack of public transport options impact residents' ability to access the services they need.

According to the NSW Department of Planning and Environment, by 2036 the

population of the Northern Rivers will have grown by a further 20% and almost one-third of our residents will be aged over 65 years. This will only intensify the challenges we face.

Why is this important?

Secure, affordable housing and access to health care are basic human needs which are fundamental to wellbeing. They also play a key role in the liveability of our region which in turn enables the population growth we need for our economy to grow.

When housing and health needs aren't met it can have a wider impact on the character and culture of the region through impacts such as young people moving away and older people having to leave their communities.

What will success look like?

- Healthy, active and vibrant communities, regardless of geographic location, background, age or socio- economic status
- Equitable access to physical and mental health care services for all
- A coordinated approach to matching provision of health services to specific needs and demand across the region
- Adequate workforce and services to meet the region's health and social support needs
- Homelessness levels well below the national average and access to appropriate, affordable housing options for all
- Increased supply of social housing and crisis and emergency accommodation
- More choices for older people transitioning from their own home including independent living, supported accommodation and aged care
- Affordable homes for key -workers in close proximity to employment.

Strategic context

The following policies, strategies and plans provide context for our planning and activities in this priority area.

- National Strategic Framework for Rural and Remote Health (2016)
- NSW Rural Health Plan 2021
- NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023
- NSW Aging Strategy 2016-2020
- NSW Department of Planning and Environment, North Coast 2036 Regional Plan
- Northern Rivers Regional Affordable Housing Strategy (2012)
- NSW Housing SEPP 2021.

Stakeholders

As we implement strategic actions we will seek to engage and partner with a range of stakeholders.

- Federal Department of Social Services
- Federal Department of Health
- Regional Development Australia - Northern Rivers
- NSW Department of Family and Community Services
- NSW Health
- Northern NSW Local Health District
- Queensland Health
- Landcom
- NSW Department of Planning and Houses
- Community housing providers
- Private developers
- Aged care providers
- Community service providers
- Private health care providers.

What will we do to make a difference?

GOALS	STRATEGIC ACTIONS
4. Increased availability, affordability and choice of housing to meet the needs of current and projected Northern Rivers population.	4.1 Update the evidence base in the Northern Rivers Affordable Housing Strategy 2012 and review, prioritise and progress relevant actions.
	4.2 Partner with the NSW Department of Planning and Environment to progress relevant directions in the North Coast Regional Plan 2036, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direction 22: Deliver greater housing supply • Direction 23: Increase housing diversity and choice • Direction 24: Deliver well-planned rural residential housing areas • Direction 25: Deliver more opportunities for affordable housing.
	4.3 Work collaboratively to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define the joint organisation's advocacy position regarding planning regulations • Identify opportunities for knowledge and skill-sharing and collaborative action between member councils • Engage with public and private stakeholders • Identify potential demonstration projects and attract government or private investment.
	4.4 Partner with relevant government and non-government organisations to support increased access to social housing and homeless and crisis accommodation services across the region.
5. Access to a full range of health and wellbeing services including specialist, aged care, mental health and community services, that meet the needs of a growing, aging and geographically dispersed population.	5.1 Use available regional health data to build understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the availability of health and wellbeing services, by location, relative to current and projected demand • new and planned government health and wellbeing facilities and services • strategies for attracting and retaining private health providers and professional health staff across the region.
	5.2 Develop the Joint Organisation's advocacy priorities for addressing gaps, including opportunities for specialisations.



PRIORITY

A physically and digitally connected region

In a region where population density is as low as two or three people per square kilometre in places, keeping residents and businesses connected to employment, education, markets, essential services and each other is challenging.

Transport plays a key role and our region has some important links in place including several regional airports, upgraded sections of the Pacific Highway and access to external markets through the Gold Coast International Airport and the Port of Brisbane. Unfortunately, transport shortfalls remain. Many communities have no access to public transport and poor quality roads limit tourism, safety and the movement of freight.

Digital technology offers new opportunities for connecting communities and the roll-out of the National Broadband Network is enabling the growth of creative enterprises, knowledge-intensive industries and small businesses across the region.

Despite many areas having access to high quality internet and mobile connections, the percentage of Northern Rivers residents

with access to the internet is lower than the NSW average and inconsistent coverage, including black spots, is a barrier to business viability, economic development and liveability.

Why is this important?

Physical connections through transport and virtual connections through digital technology are essential for economic growth, to provide access to jobs, education, health care and other services, and for the social well-being of regional communities.

There are currently many transport and technology disadvantaged residents in our region – particularly young people, older people, those on low incomes, people with disabilities and people living in isolated or remote locations. Action is needed to ensure all individuals and communities have equitable access to the benefits that connectivity brings.

What will success look like?

- Increased availability and choice of public transport services
- Reduction in transport-related social isolation and disadvantage
- Improved freight and logistics services to support business viability
- Reduction in road toll and injuries
- Increase in sustainable transport options
- Equitable access to telecommunications at a reasonable cost for all residents and businesses
- Eradication of mobile black spots
- Service Level Agreement for provision of telecommunications services
- Standards for telecommunications infrastructure installations that reflect community expectations.

What will we do to make a difference?

GOALS	STRATEGIC ACTIONS
6. An efficient, safe and sustainable regional transport system that enables improved productivity, connectivity and social inclusion for businesses, residents and visitors	6.1 Work with the Federal and State Governments and Regional Development Australia to implement the recommendations outlined in the Northern Rivers NSW Freight Scoping Study (SCU 2017).
	6.2 Adopt an integrated approach to progressing the regional transport- related actions in the Northern Rivers and Tweed Transport Plans and corresponding Regional Economic Development Strategies.
	6.3 Represent the region's interests in the Transport for NSW-led process to develop region-specific, place-based and corridor plans for the Northern Rivers with a focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved connectivity between regional centres, including east/ west connectivity • More public, community and active transport options • Use of innovative technology and materials in transport • Low emissions transport.
7. Equitable access to fast, reliable, competitively priced digital connectivity and mobile phone coverage for businesses and residents across the region to enhance economic opportunities and liveability.	7.1 Advocate for improved telecommunications infrastructure and services across the region with a focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive coverage • Fast, reliable, affordable services • Standards and regulations for infrastructure installations which consider community expectations, sensitive sites, visual amenity and access to third party property.

Strategic context

The following policies, strategies and plans provide context for our planning and activities in this priority area.

- TfNSW Future Transport 2056 Regional Services and Infrastructure Plan
- TfNSW Highway and Corridor Strategies
- TfNSW Freight and Ports Plan 2018-2023
- Northern Rivers Freight Scoping Study (2017)
- Northern Rivers Regional Transport Plan (2013)
- Sustain Northern Rivers Regional Transport Survey (2013)
- Australian Regional Telecommunications Review (2018)
- Australian Telecommunications Code of Practice
- Federal Regional Broadband Scheme
- Federal Mobile Black Spots Program
- Northern Rivers Digital Activation Plan (2016).

Stakeholders

As we implement strategic actions we will seek to engage and partner with a range of stakeholders.

- Federal Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities
- Federal Department of Communications and the Arts
- Regional Development Australia - Northern Rivers
- Transport for NSW
- Roads and Maritime Services
- Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads
- Australian Rail Track Corporation
- Airport operators
- Private transport operators
- Community transport providers
- Australian Communications and Media Authority
- NBN Co
- Telecommunications providers.





PRIORITY

Innovative, sustainable energy, water and waste management

Communities across our region care deeply about minimising the impact of human activity on our environment and we have a proven track record adopting new and innovative approaches to reducing our carbon footprint, particularly when it comes to renewable energy.

The Northern Rivers is already home to Australia's first community-owned renewable energy retailer, Australia's first ever council operated and community funded solar farm, and the highest levels of rooftop solar in the country.

Our favourable climate, land fertility, existing industries and demographics offer opportunities to build on these successes and also explore new areas including bioenergy and waste to energy technology which have the potential to contribute to solving both waste management and energy generation challenges.

As a region we face a future of rising electricity prices, increased demand for water for domestic and agricultural use, waste disposal challenges, along with managing environmental impacts from climate change such as increased flood

and bushfire events. Adopting innovative and sustainable approaches to energy, water, waste and urban planning will play a vital role in allowing us to deliver essential services to our residents and to ensure our communities can co-exist with the ever-changing environment.

Why is this important?

As a Joint Organisation we are committed to reducing emissions and environmental impact in keeping with community expectations and our governance responsibilities.

Our councils seek to lead in this area and we have the opportunity to strengthen that position to provide a model of what can be achieved through collaboration and innovation.

At the same time businesses and residents, particularly those on low incomes or in isolated locations, need access to secure, reliable, and affordable energy, water and waste management services.

What will success look like?

- Increased energy supply from renewable sources, including waste to energy
- Reduced emissions
- All council buildings and infrastructure powered by renewable energy
- Renewable energy considered as part of new developments
- Power purchase agreements and tariffs in place to enable greater use of renewable energy
- Lower energy costs for residents
- Reduced waste going to landfill
- Increased volume and efficiency of recycling
- Funds from the NSW Waste Levy returned to local Councils for waste and recycling initiatives
- A local market established for recyclables
- Secure, sustainable water supply to meet current and future needs
- Improved flood preparedness and resilience.

What will we do to make a difference?

GOALS	STRATEGIC ACTIONS
8. To strengthen our region's emerging position as a NSW leader in renewable energy generation, storage and use, in accordance with widespread community support for reduced emissions and action on climate change.	8.1 Champion and promote the increased use of renewable energy for residential, public and commercial purposes.
	8.2 Advocate for changes to energy generation, purchasing, pricing and retailing regulations with a focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased use of renewable energy • Reduced energy costs • Reliable supply.
	8.3 Pursue opportunities to implement the strategies identified in the Northern NSW Renewable Energy Blueprint for Local Governments (DPIE – 2019) to increase the availability of renewable energy in the region.
	8.4 Review energy use and provision and opportunities for member councils to collaborate.
9. A secure and sustainable water supply to meet current and future needs of residents, businesses and visitors.	9.1 Review and progress recommendations of Bulk Water Supply and Demand Management Strategies.
	9.2 Advocate for the region's interests in relation to scientific justification, consultation and regulation associated with commercial water extraction arrangements.

GOALS	STRATEGIC ACTIONS
10. Increased recycling, reduced landfill and improved, cost-effective service delivery through collaborative, innovative approaches to waste management.	10.1 Review and update the North East Waste Regional Waste Management Strategy 2013-21.
	10.2 Identify opportunities for implementation of pilot or demonstration projects to establish the Northern Rivers as a 'centre of excellence' for innovative waste processing and/or waste to energy technology.
	10.3 Advocate for a review of waste management regulations with a focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alignment with global best practice • Review of the EPA and agency requirements to implement regional strategies • Enhancing viability of innovative waste management approaches • Waste to energy policy and guidelines • Review of the waste levy to make funding available for local initiatives • Streamlining the regulatory framework.
11. Improved preparedness for and ability to respond to and recover from flooding events.	11.1 Work with the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation to ensure that projects and programs to rebuild our flood impacted communities are implemented quickly and are sustainable in the long term.
	11.2 Collaborate with the CSIRO to ensure that the Northern Rivers Resilience Initiative delivers a holistic report on flood modelling, catchment management and community resilience, with the actions identified to reflect achievable priorities, for our region.
	11.3 Work with all levels of government to ensure that the recommendations from the 2022 Independent Flood Inquiry and the 2022 Parliamentary Inquiry into the Northern Rivers Floods are implemented throughout our region.

Strategic context

The following policies, strategies and plans provide context for our planning and activities in this priority area.

- Innovating Energy, ARENA's Investment Plan 2017
- National Water Initiative
- National Waste Policy (2009)
- NSW Renewable Energy Action Plan (2013)
- NSW Water Sharing Plans
- NSW Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy 2014–21
- NSW Energy from Waste Policy Statement (2015)
- Northern Rivers Sustain Energy Strategic Plan 2014-2019
- Northern Rivers Social Licence for Bioenergy (2016)
- Northern Rivers Biohubs Pre-Feasibility Study (2016)
- Northern Rivers Regional Bulk Water Supply Strategy (2013)
- Rous Water Future Water Strategy (2014)
- North East Waste Regional Waste Management Strategy 2013-2021.

Stakeholders

As we implement strategic actions we will seek to engage and partner with a range of stakeholders.

- Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation
- Australian Renewable Energy Agency
- Federal Department of Agriculture and Water Resources
- Regional Development Australia - Northern Rivers
- Clean Energy Finance Corporation
- NSW Department of Industry
- NSW Environmental Protection Authority
- WaterNSW
- Rous County Council
- Southern Cross University
- Sustain Northern Rivers
- Energy generators and retailers
- Water licence holders
- uthority
- NBN Co
- Telecommunications providers.



PRIORITY

A diversified, prosperous and sustainable regional economy

Our economy has many strengths. A strong visitor economy supports tourism businesses and delivers flow on effects to supporting industries. Our soils and climate yield high value agricultural products and our reputation for quality is a major branding asset. We have easy access to the more than 3 million strong markets in South East Queensland, and a diverse pool of talented people, including many entrepreneurs, attracted by the Northern Rivers lifestyle.

We also have our challenges. The bulk of tourist activity, together with its benefits and pressures, is centred in a few small areas. Average regional employment levels are high but for many communities unemployment remains a major issue. Our economy is characterised by a large number of non-employing, low revenue businesses with fewer employment opportunities for graduates and professionals.

The task now is to make the most of our opportunities. To grow tourism sustainably in ways that minimise impact and maximise benefit to our region as a whole, to build capability and encourage innovation in the agribusiness sector, and to provide the conditions for emerging industries to flourish.

Many of the actions required to achieve these outcomes are identified in the Northern Rivers and Tweed Regional Economic Development Strategies. This plan has been developed to align with those strategies.

Why is this important?

A strong economy based on sustainable growth and value-adding within existing industries and expansion of creative, knowledge-based and innovative industries will mean more job opportunities and a better standard of living for regional communities.

Taking a regional approach to economic development will allow us to be strategic about what when and where development occurs to ensure the benefits of economic growth flow to all regional communities.

What will success look like?

- Unemployment levels below the national average
- Increased volume and diversity of employment opportunities, including higher value employment and more jobs for under-employed groups
- Well-developed creative and knowledge-based sector
- Increased innovation, value adding and vertical integration in the agriculture, agribusiness and food production sectors
- Sustainable tourism growth focused on increased dispersal of visitors across the region
- Increased appropriate, high quality tourism product to support visitor dispersal
- Strong employment and new business opportunities in the health, education and retail sectors
- Better connections to external markets and increased export volumes from the region
- Enabling infrastructure, including food production and transport and supply chain infrastructure, supports viability of new and existing businesses
- Coordinated approach to attracting and retaining business investment across the region.

Strategic context

The following policies, strategies and plans provide context for our planning and activities in this priority area.

- Australian Government, Regions 2030: Unlocking Opportunity (2017)
- NSW Regional Development Framework (2018)
- NSW Visitor Economy Industry Action Plan 2030
- Northern Rivers and Tweed Regional Economic Development Strategies (2018)
- North Coast Destination Management Plan 2018 to 2021

Stakeholders

As we implement strategic actions we will seek to engage and partner with a range of stakeholders.

- Regional Development Australia - Northern Rivers
- NSW Department of Industry
- NSW Office of Regional Economic Development
- NSW Centre for Economic and Regional Development
- Tourism Australia
- Destination NSW
- Destination North Coast
- Tourism operators
- Primary producers
- Agribusinesses

What will we do to make a difference?

GOALS	STRATEGIC ACTIONS
12. A strong, diverse regional economy which provides local employment by attracting new enterprises, enabling existing enterprises to innovate and expand, and offering the conditions required for emerging industries to flourish	12.1 Implement actions from the Regional Economic Development Strategies to enable economic development through a focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 'Engines of Growth' including agriculture, manufacturing and tourism • Enabling infrastructure • Investment attraction and retention • Capability development • Innovation • Generating general and youth employment.
	12.2 Partner with the Department of Industry as it delivers key actions in the Making it Happen in the Regions: Regional Development Framework including working with local bodies to develop and publish Regional Investment Prospectuses.
	12.3 Collaborate with Regional Development NSW to encourage a diversification of employment in the Northern Rivers.
13. Increased contribution to the regional economy from tourism and dispersal of tourists across the region, while protecting the Northern Rivers' unique character, environment and quality of life	13.1 Partner with the NSW Department of Planning and Environment to progress Direction 8 of the North Coast Regional Plan 2036 to sustainably "promote the growth of tourism"
	13.2 Deepen the relationship between the Northern Rivers Joint Organisation and Destination North Coast to facilitate regional input into: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tourism planning and development • regional branding and promotion.





Credits

We acknowledge and thank the following organisations for the images used throughout the plan.

- Ballina Shire Council (page 17)
- Byron Shire Council (Page 7 – beach)
- Destination NSW (front and back cover; page 7, page 8, page 9; page 17)
- Lismore City Council (page 11; page 23)
- Taro Taylor (page 7 – bus sign)

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