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The Region's diversity of lifestyle, in combination with its wide range of economic and social opportunities, is evident in its variety of local cultures and individual communities. These communities, influenced by the Region's strong rural heritage and the richness of its natural environment, provide the foundation and potential to further develop as a 'region of villages'.

The Far North Coast 'A region of villages'

The Far North Coast Region covers an area of 10 293 square kilometres. The Region extends from the Queensland border in the north, south along the coast to Evans Head and west to Woodenbong and Tabulam. It is the traditional lands of the Bundjalung Aboriginal Nation.

The current population is more than 228 000 and since 2001 has been increasing by an average of 2500 people each year. The community lives in the three major regional centres of Tweed Heads, Lismore and Ballina; the five towns of Murwillumbah, Casino, Mullumbimby, Byron Bay and Kyogle; 36 rural and coastal villages; 110 small villages and numerous rural communities.

Around half of the Region's population live in coastal or non-coastal villages, smaller communities, hamlets and rural areas. It is a highly valued place to live, a place for lifestyle change and retirement.

The Far North Coast is the most biologically diverse region in NSW and the third most in Australia. The Region's 21 national parks (several of which are World Heritage listed) help to protect this biodiversity as well as to preserve its many scenic icons such as Mount Warning and its caldera, and Cape Byron. In addition, the many public reserves (over 1200) that comprise the State's crown reserve system add to this network of public lands and contribute to the protection of biodiversity and provision of open space.

The character of the Region has evolved in response to the environmental and associated economic development influences over the last 150 years. From the early timber industry and agricultural beginnings to the more recent alternative lifestyle and sea-changers, the environment has always been a major influence on the communities and economy of the Region.



the far north coast a region of villages

This is clearly seen in the combination of environmental features and recreational experiences that provides the Region with an opportunity to further develop as a widely recognised domestic and international tourism destination.

Since the high population growth of the 1980s, coastal areas of the Region have continued to grow at a moderate rate, while growth in the hinterland areas has been low or static. The largest population increases have been in the coastal local government areas of Tweed, Byron and Ballina. Due to its proximity to the high growth area of South East Queensland, the urban coastal areas of the Tweed Shire have demonstrated the strongest growth in the Region over the past decade.

The Regional Strategy plans for an overall population of 289 000 by 2031. This represents an additional 60 400 people or a 26% increase for the period 2006–31. The Region's population is also ageing, with the proportion aged 65 years or more expected to more than double by 2031, while the proportion of young people is projected to decline to 14%, leaving just 54% of the population in the working age group.

The key drivers of growth in the Far North Coast Region include:

- in-migration from the Sydney Greater Metropolitan Region and other areas of NSW
- population flow from South East Queensland

- greater accessibility due to the upgrading of the Pacific Highway.

The increased accessibility to South East Queensland due to improved transport routes may result in an increased number of people moving to the Far North Coast for a new lifestyle, more affordable housing and business or employment opportunities.

A **village** in the Far North Coast means a place that:

- is a relatively small 'stand alone' settlement (generally walkable) or may comprise the outlying suburbs of larger centres
- has developed its own distinctive image because of a historical and/or geographical location
- has a strong relationship with its surrounding environment
- generally has a small vibrant mixed use commercial, retail and residential precinct at its centre surrounded by small-scale residential development
- has a strong sense of community.

THE FAR NORTH COAST AT 2031

The Far North Coast at 2031 is expected to be characterised by a series of contained centres, a coastal area protected from inappropriate development, and growing towns and villages across the Region. A connected network of towns and villages will provide a choice of well designed housing and associated lifestyles.

Lismore and Tweed Heads will continue to be the major regional centres, with Ballina also emerging as a major centre. Coastal towns such as Byron Bay, known as a national and international tourist destination, will have retained their village character while still providing a gateway to many regional assets and attractions. Other towns and villages such as Casino, Kyogle, Uki and Bangalow will be recognised as places offering an alternate lifestyle.

More people will be living in and adjacent to centres, close to jobs, shops, services and leisure and recreational facilities. It is planned that the transport network will be improved, particularly in urban centres, and increased and varied employment opportunities will be available.

Areas of high environmental and landscape value such as Mount Warning and its caldera and the Coastal Area (which covers land east of the Pacific Highway and the urban areas, coastal estuary and lakes of Tweed Heads) as well as key natural resources will be protected for future generations.