



## Regional challenges

For the Far North Coast to retain its creative and vibrant culture and rich natural assets, careful management of its future growth and relationship with South East Queensland is required. The Region faces the following key environmental, population and housing, and economic challenges.

### ENVIRONMENT

The Far North Coast is recognised for its significant environmental values. This can be attributed to its wide variation in climate, altitude, landform and geology, which supports a diversity of flora and fauna. Future population growth, particularly in coastal areas, will put further pressure on these fragile environments. Proper consideration and improved management of these areas of high biodiversity and scenic amenity is vital if the Region's highly valued environmental assets and cultural heritage are to be protected for future generations.

The Region is rich in natural resources such as timber, groundwater, extractive resources and productive soils. These resources are an important part of the regional economy and require careful management. Protection of productive farmland from development pressures is one such natural resource imperative. It is critical to keep farmland intact in suitable locations to ensure a viable agriculture industry for the future.

Some areas in the Region are subject to natural hazards such as acid sulfate soils, flooding, and coastal inundation and recession. The potential impacts associated with these hazards on regional development needs careful consideration.

The environmental challenges of the Region are to:

- improve protection and enhancement of environmental assets (including wetlands, littoral rainforest, koala habitat,

and estuaries), biodiversity and landscape values

- improve understanding of Aboriginal and European cultural heritage values and the incorporation of this information within land use planning and natural resource management processes
- ensure sustainable management of, and access to, natural resources, and protection of rural landscapes from increased settlement
- ensure better understanding and management of natural hazards, including flooding, coastal erosion and inundation (including the impacts of climate change on these), land instability, bushfire and acid sulfate soils.

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### POPULATION AND HOUSING

The Regional Strategy is based on a projected regional population increase of 60 400 from 2006 to 2031 as derived by the Department of Planning's Transport and Population Data Centre.

A continuation of current trends would result in the greatest future population growth pressure occurring around the major regional centres of Tweed Heads and Ballina and within the other coastal settlements east of the Pacific Highway. In order to support and maintain the development of non-coastal settlements it is therefore necessary to reduce the coastal population growth pressure.

The make-up of the Region's population is also changing. Over the next 25 years the median age of the population is projected to increase from 39 years to 51 years due to more than doubling of the population aged 65+ years and a declining proportion of young people (aged between 0 and 14 years). This will increase the demand for seniors living housing as well as for local services and amenities such as public transport, health care and recreational facilities.

Together with the general decrease in the size of households, this change in the Region's age structure and workforce will have implications for the types of dwellings likely to be required in the future. There will be a greater demand for diversity in housing form to match the

requirements of changing household structures, particularly an increase in one and two person households.

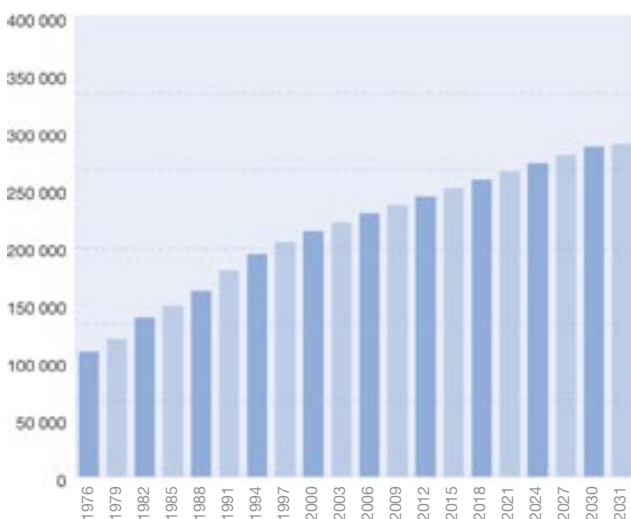
By 2031, an additional 51 000 dwellings will be required to house this growing and changing population.

The population and housing challenges are to:

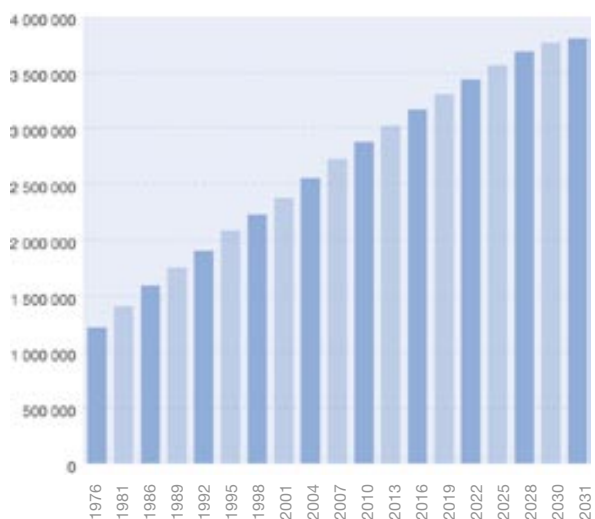
- manage the expected population growth in a way that retains village character, enhances a sense of community, limits the spread of urban development, and minimises damage to environmental values and rural production
- support the development of non-coastal centres

Historic and projected populations

Far North Coast 1976 to 2031



South East Queensland 1976 to 2031





- provide a framework for the planning of new infrastructure and facilities for the growing and ageing population
- provide choice in housing form and affordability in appropriate locations that responds to changing demographics and the associated reduction in household occupancy rates
- ensure that new development reflects and enhances the character of the settlement in which it is located and is based on best practice urban design principles.

## ECONOMY

Rapid population growth and a growing number of tourists visiting the Region has resulted in a change from an economy dominated by agriculture to one now dominated by service sector industries (84%), and manufacturing and construction (12%).

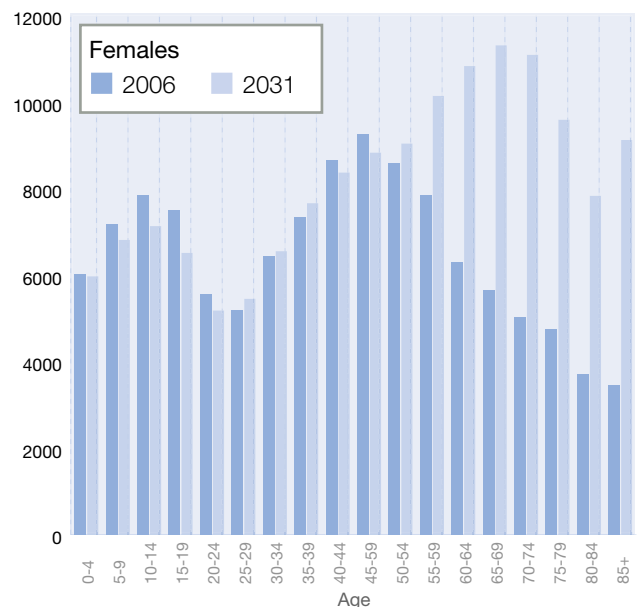
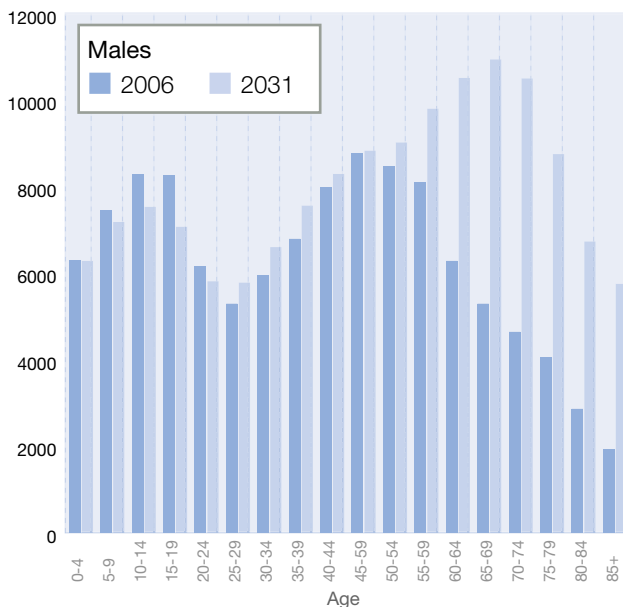
Employment opportunities are greatest in the retail, hospitality and tourism, education and health sectors with employment also in agriculture, forestry and fishing. There is currently an under-representation of jobs in property and business services and finance and insurance.

It is estimated that at least 32 500 new jobs will be required as a result of the projected population growth. In order to create sufficient

opportunities for the growth in employment there is a need to strengthen economic activity and associated employment in existing industry sectors as well as encouraging diversification into new and emerging opportunities. The Regional Industry and Economic Plan (2005) prepared by the Northern Rivers Regional Development Board has identified tourism, education, creative industries, horticulture, health, aquaculture, residential development and construction, forestry, meat and dairy, and transport as key industry sectors with growth opportunities. The Regional Industry and Economic Plan compliments the Outcomes and Actions of the Regional Strategy.

Economic growth must be balanced with conserving the Region's natural

Age structure for the Far North Coast, 2006-31



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environment and heritage assets and preserving the character of the villages and the lifestyle for residents. A commitment to sustainability, productivity, creativity and innovation is fundamental to the Region's economic future, particularly in order to foster tourism opportunities.

The economic challenges are to:

- ensure sufficient employment lands are available in appropriate locations to accommodate growth in

existing and emerging industries and businesses

- ensure that the planning system facilitates the development of these lands
- ensure future employment lands are located to take advantage of the transport network offered by upgrades to the Pacific Highway and other major roads in the Region
- utilise the Region's reputation to build on the key industry sectors while protecting the

natural resources on which these industries depend

- support and strengthen the Region's economic base by implementing the specific strategies and actions identified in the Regional Industry and Economic Plan for the Northern Rivers (NRRDB 2005).

### SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND

The South East Queensland Regional Plan 2005–2026 (2005) is the Queensland Government's plan for sustainable growth for the Queensland region that stretches north from the NSW border to Noosa and west to Toowoomba.

By 2031, based on current trends, the population of the NSW Far North Coast Region will have grown by 60 400 people. Over the same period, South East Queensland is projected to grow by 1.1 million people (about 22% of Australia's population growth). Of this growth, it is expected that about 300 000 more people will reside in the directly adjoining areas of the Gold Coast and Beaudesert in addition to the 530 000 people who currently live there.

This projected growth for South East Queensland will have a significant influence on the Far North Coast. Due to the proximity of the Region

to this high growth area, the regional economy is closely linked to that of South East Queensland.

Current data indicates that a large number of Far North Coast Region residents (especially from Tweed Shire) rely on South East Queensland for employment and services. Conversely, the Region is increasingly used by South East Queensland residents for recreational activities, daytrips and short stays. This has a significant and growing impact in terms of both the provision and use of State and local infrastructure, particularly in the coastal areas of Tweed and Byron shires.

The proposed further upgrades to the Pacific Highway will improve cross-border accessibility, providing opportunities for the regional economy. The Queensland Government has recognised that South East Queensland has

some immediate and short- to medium-term shortages of industrial land. This presents an economic opportunity for the Region as investors and businesses looking for affordable land with good access to local, national and international markets may capitalise on the capacity of the Far North Coast to accommodate this potential growth.

Rising land prices and increased congestion in South East Queensland could also see people moving from areas such as the Gold Coast to the NSW Far North Coast for the lifestyle, and more affordable housing and business locations.

Although this additional business (including tourism) may mean a stronger regional economy, unless effectively managed it will also put additional pressure on biodiversity values and adversely impact on the Region's character.