



# Economic development and employment growth

## BACKGROUND

The Far North Coast Region has undergone substantial economic change. The rapid increase and change in the Region's population has driven a change in the type and needs of the Region's businesses and industries. Many of the issues affecting the economic development of the Region are driven by trends and influences that originate from outside the Region.

The planned consolidation of employment centres within the South East Queensland Regional Strategy will have implications for the economic growth of the Far North Coast Region. Accordingly, there is a need to strengthen economic activity and associated employment in existing industry sectors as well as encourage diversification into new and emerging opportunities to take advantage of the Region's

relationship with South East Queensland.

The Far North Coast Region is an important domestic and international tourist destination. The Region's diverse attractions include its beaches, rural scenery, river valleys, villages, World Heritage areas, local arts and crafts, and festival events. The iconic centre of Byron Bay provides an international gateway to the Region's many tourism assets and attractions. About 20% of 'visitor nights' spent in the Region are by international tourists. Ballina's regional airport acts as a major entry point for tourism destinations throughout the Region, and this role will be encouraged and supported.

The Northern Rivers Tropical NSW Tourism precinct, which includes the Far North Coast Region, received 4.6 million visitors and \$1.128 billion worth of expenditure in 2005. It is

estimated that the tourism industry employs 7000 people.

The opportunity exists for a widening of the tourism sector to promote both traditional tourism as well as products that provide experiences derived from the Region's natural, cultural and economic resources and attractions (ecotourism).

While tourism creates significant economic and employment benefits for the Region, its impacts need to be carefully managed. The Strategy aims to protect the Region's coastal and hinterland assets, which make it both a popular tourism destination and a desirable place to live. Future urban settlement patterns will be designed to retain their existing tourism appeal and reinforce regional character.

With the strong tourism and population-driven employment base (retail and services sectors)



in the Coastal Area, the availability of affordable land in this area is becoming increasingly limited, and what is available is increasingly being utilised for bulky goods retailing. As such, land available for industries that generate export jobs is decreasing in the Coastal Area.

The Region's western areas, however, have the capacity to provide land to support industrial development, especially for those with an export focus. Casino and Kyogle are located on major transport routes with access to inter-state road and rail networks.

In addition, the identification of substantial coal seam gas reserves within this part of the Region provides the opportunity to develop a new regional energy source with potentially significant employment and economic development outcomes. A number of companies are already active in exploring, testing and developing these resources, with the largest independently certified gas field in NSW identified.

The emergence of a local energy industry presents the opportunity

to develop into an extensive industry providing gas supplies to local industry, and local power generation which will increase the reliability of local supply.

The projected population increase of 60 400 from 2006 to 2031 has the potential to lead to 32 500 new jobs. Around 23 500 of these new jobs will be linked to service and construction industries, with the remainder export-driven employment. This anticipated employment growth translates to a need for about 156 hectares of additional industrial land and about 76 hectares of additional commercial land (a total of 232 hectares).

## OUTCOMES

Economic development and employment growth will be facilitated by identifying suitable business and investment opportunities and providing employment lands to support these opportunities.

The Regional Strategy promotes a clear hierarchy of commercial centres consistent in scale and

centrally located within each community. Major commercial development will be located within large centres. Other commercial development, which relates to the scale of the adjoining urban areas, will be located within the boundaries of towns and villages, utilising existing commercial centres where possible, and integrated with the initial planning of new release areas.

Councils should plan for future industrial needs within existing urban areas and take into account economic markets, South East Queensland pressures for employment lands, lifestyle opportunities, and transport improvements within and from the Region. Certain industries will need to be located away from existing urban centres due to their type, scale and nature. Councils will address this need through their Local Growth Management Strategies.

The economic value of the natural resources and natural environments of the Far North Coast Region will be recognised as an employment generator due



to their importance to tourism and primary industries including agriculture, forestry and fishing.

Large scale tourism facilities may be located in the prime tourism development areas of Tweed Heads–Kingscliff, Byron Bay and Ballina. Opportunities for smaller scale tourism, including environmental based tourism, outside of these prime tourism development areas will be provided.

The Regional Strategy supports the utilisation of existing vacant commercial and industrial land, where appropriate to the proposed use, prior to the release of further lands. The Pacific Highway corridor is an exception, requiring well located highway service centres (with limited defined uses).

## ACTIONS

- The Department of Planning will work with local councils to ensure that sufficient employment land is identified to meet the requirements of the regional economy.

- Local environmental plans (and other relevant planning provisions) will facilitate employment growth in regional and major town centres, appropriate home-based employment, and local jobs in towns, villages and neighbourhood centres.
- Local environmental plans will ensure that sufficient lands which are zoned employment and currently vacant are protected to accommodate the new jobs required for each local government area until 2031.
- Use of existing vacant industrial land should be considered prior to the release of any major new industrial areas.
- The development potential of commercial centres is to be explored by councils and identified in local strategies, local environmental plans and development control plans. Councils will identify opportunities for bulky goods style retailing in appropriate locations in commercial centres and restrict this form

of retailing in employment and industrial zones as set out in the Government policy 'Right Place for Business'.

- Planning for commercial and industrial land uses must be integrated with the supply of relevant infrastructure and transport.
- Highway service centres may be located beside the Pacific Highway at Chinderah and Ballina.
- Councils will monitor the supply and take-up of employment land through the continued update of the Far North Coast Housing and Land Monitor.

## Tourism

- In planning for tourism needs, councils will have regard to the North Coast Regional Tourism Plan 2004–2007 (or latest version) and Northern Rivers Regional Tourism Plan 2003–2006 (or latest version).

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- Local environmental plans will locate large scale tourism development in prime tourism development areas unless other proposed locations are consistent with an approved Local Growth Management Strategy.
- Local environmental plans will ensure that appropriate land is available to provide for a range of tourism experiences and forms of tourist accommodation, including ecotourism and the support of 'bed and breakfast' enterprises within residential and rural areas.
- Local environmental plans will permit no more than small scale tourism development in rural or environment protection zones.
- Local environmental plans will prevent permanent residential accommodation in tourism development, except where it is:
  - > ancillary to existing tourism development, or
  - > part of an area otherwise identified for urban expansion in an approved Local Growth Management Strategy.



### REGIONAL INDUSTRY AND ECONOMIC PLAN

The Regional Industry and Economic Plan for the Northern Rivers prepared by the Northern Rivers Regional Development Board will provide guidance and

support for the development of a sustainable and robust regional economy, which capitalises on existing and emerging opportunities that are specific to

the Northern Rivers. The Regional Strategy requires that councils identify sufficient new commercial and industrial land to match the needs of the growing economy.