



The North Burnett Region – Where Opportunity & Lifestyle Align

AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN
for the North Burnett Region 2014-2020

April 2014

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I am pleased to present the *"The North Burnett Region – Where Opportunity & Lifestyle Align", Economic Development Plan for the North Burnett Region 2014-2020.*

We are well positioned to take advantage of emerging opportunities in our region to deliver a robust local economy.

The next six years will bring great change to our community. We must recognise the global influences on our region and through initiatives and advocacy be ready to meet the challenges.

A region's economic competitive advantages are areas of strength in terms of economic performance and capability. These are the areas of the economy that are currently performing well and should be the focus of economic development activity.

In the North Burnett, these competitive advantages are the sectors on which the economy is most reliant including agriculture, mining and manufacturing. We must now devise ways the Region can capitalise on these strengths and diversity to deliver a sustainable economy for the future.

The vision for a delivering a diverse economy will be achieved by focusing on; Council, Business and Industry Leadership, Responding to New and Emerging Opportunities and Resourcing and Implementing Economic Development.

We are blessed with an abundance of natural resources, an enviable climate, and resourceful people who with emerging technologies can take advantage of what's on offer.

This Plan is designed to assist Council, our business partners, State and Federal Government and the community to drive economic development initiatives that will benefit our region. The Plan has been developed to prepare for change and take advantage of the emerging economic environment, explore a new direction for our future and make a commitment to creating a robust and resilient economy for the Region.

On behalf of the North Burnett Regional Council, I thank members of the business community and our many partners for their enthusiasm that delivers economic prosperity in our region.

I look forward to working with you in the economic development of the Region. I am available at any time to discuss our plans for the region.

Cr Don Waugh
MAYOR
NORTH BURNETT REGIONAL COUNCIL

1. Executive Summary

In November 2008, North Burnett Regional Council established the North Burnett Region Futures (NBRF) Program, reporting to the North Burnett Region Futures Advisory Committee to focus economic development activity for the region.

Since this time, using the *Economic Development Plan 2009-2014* as the strategic vision and to guide the economic development portfolio over a period of five years a range of initiatives have been progressed to strengthen the region's ability to use its competitive advantage whilst being open and proactive to the development of new, innovative opportunities in the Region.

This plan does not seek to rewrite Council's current plan but update it given recent events, including importantly the Natural Disasters of 2013. The results of studies documented in the *Economic Impact Assessment of Ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald Report (November 2013)*, *Flood Mitigation Study Report (December 2013)*, *North Burnett Economic Profile 2014* and *North Burnett Advocacy Plan 2014* provide crucial information upon which this latest plan has been developed.

For example, the North Burnett Regional Council now faces the unique challenge of needing to provide leadership at a time when the region is facing the unenviable task of recovering from a natural disaster that impacted the agricultural sector which currently employs 34.1% (1,382 people) of the population according to 2011 Census figures. We are aware, through the *Economic Impact Assessment of Ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald Report (November 2013)*, that Jobs and Employment were some of the areas of most impact and this is now shown in the latest data with the number of employed persons decreasing and the unemployment rate increasing.

Ironically, but also logically, the Natural Disasters of 2013 have also had an impact on the Gross Regional Product which has increased substantially, due in part it is expected to the increased economic activity during the recovery process. But, the balancing factor is that the Participation Rate continues to be very strong in the North Burnett Region.

Taking into consideration the abovementioned impacts this updated *Economic Development Plan 2014-2019* details there are a number of desired objectives around which this Plan is structured including:

- Objective 1: Council, Business and Industry Leadership
- Objective 2: Responding to New and Emerging Opportunities
- Objective 3: Resourcing and Implementing Economic Development

Linked to these objectives the plan details priority actions that assist in ensuring not only Council's but also business/industry resources are prioritized towards those actions that will make a positive impact on the economic development fabric in the North Burnett Region.

This Economic Development Plan provides a renewed vision and direction for economic development in the North Burnett Region. Its focus continues to be about respecting the past, understanding the Region's strengths and growing those strengths while being open and proactive to the development of new, innovative opportunities in the Region. This Plan provides strategies for both support of existing businesses and the growth of the broader economy over the next five years.

2. The Case for Innovation & Opportunity

Region's Current Economic Context

On an annual basis, using selected performance indicators, the North Burnett Regional Council monitors trends and changes from an economic development perspective in the region. The most recent *North Burnett Regional Economic Profile 2014* developed by Lawrence Consulting for the North Burnett Regional Council details the following results for each of the agreed Performance Indicators. The following table also provides an understanding of how the 2014 results differ to that from 2013.

| Performance Indicator | 2013 Result | 2014 Result |
|---|---|--|
| Gross Regional Product (GRP is the measure of the size of an economy (Market Value of Goods & Services produced in the region). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Gross Regional Product (GRP) of the North Burnett region was estimated at \$641.5 million in 2011/12, whilst real annual growth in GRP was 3.1%. - The North Burnett region contributed 6.0% and 0.2%, respectively, to the gross regional/state products of the Wide Bay-Burnett region (\$10.6 billion) and Queensland (\$283.6 billion) in 2011/12. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Gross Regional Product (GRP) of the North Burnett region was estimated at \$850.3 million in 2012/13, whilst real annual growth in GRP was 8.4%. - The North Burnett region contributed 6.2% and 0.3%, respectively, to the gross regional/state products of the Wide Bay-Burnett region (\$13.7 billion) and Queensland (\$290.2 billion) in 2012/13. |
| Employment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual Employment Growth - Unemployment Rate - Participation Rate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The estimated number of employed persons in the North Burnett region was 6,394 in the September Quarter 2012, which represented a significant annual increase of 477 persons, or 8.1%. - The unemployment rate in the North Burnett region was 3.6% in the September Quarter 2012, a fall of 0.3 percentage points from the level recorded 12 months previously. - Unemployment in the North Burnett region is well below the averages for Brisbane (5.2%), Queensland (5.6%) and Australia (5.2%). - The participation rate (i.e. the proportion of the resident population aged 15 and over in the labour force) in the North Burnett region was estimated at 75.1% in 2011, which was | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The estimated number of employed persons in the North Burnett region was 6,162 in the September Quarter 2013, which represented a decrease of 3.7%. - The unemployment rate in the North Burnett region was 4.6% in the September Quarter 2013, representing an annual increase of 1% and the highest rate since the September Quarter 2006. - Unemployment in the North Burnett region remains well below the averages for Brisbane (5.6%), Queensland (5.9%) and Australia (5.5%). - The participation rate (i.e. the proportion of the resident population aged 15 and over in the labour force) in the North Burnett region was estimated at 75.2% in 2012, which was |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| | significantly higher than the rate for Queensland (68.2%). | significantly higher than the rate for Queensland (67.4%). |
| <u>Housing & Development</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of Dwelling Approvals - Value of non-residential Building Approvals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The number of dwellings approved in the North Burnett region was 14 in the year to the December Quarter 2012, which represented a decrease of 44.0% from the level recorded in the year to the December Quarter 2011 (25). - The value of non-residential building approvals in the North Burnett region decreased annually by 21.5% to \$3.2 million in the year to the December Quarter 2012. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The number of dwellings approved in the North Burnett region was 43 in the year to the December Quarter 2013, which represented a significant increase of 38.7% from the level recorded in the year to the December Quarter 2012 (31). - The value of non-residential building approvals in the North Burnett region increased annually by 26.3% to \$3.4 million in the year to the December Quarter 2013. |
| <u>Business Activity & Engagement</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Businesses by Industry & Turnover - Industry Productivity (measures the efficiency of production in a region by dividing the GRP/ employee hours worked) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The estimated total turnover of all industry in the North Burnett region was \$515.3 million in 2010/11, representing a slight annual decrease of 1.6%, whilst the average turnover of all businesses was approximately \$314,000 (up 0.9%). - The most recent ABS Australian Business Register indicated there were 1,641 business entities registered in the North Burnett region in June 2011, which represented a small annual decrease of 2.5% from the level in June 2010 (1,683). - Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing is the largest industry in terms of business numbers in the North Burnett region, accounting for 62.9% of the total number of businesses, followed by Construction (7.3%), Retail Trade (5.4%) and Transport, Postal & Warehousing (4.9%). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The estimated total turnover of all industry in the North Burnett region was \$469.0 million in 2011/12, representing an annual decrease of 9%, whilst the average turnover of all businesses was approximately \$288,100 (down 8.3%). - The most recent ABS Australian Business Register indicated there were 1,628 business entities registered in the North Burnett region in June 2012, which represented a marginal annual decrease of 0.8% from the level in June 2011 (1,641). - Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing is the largest industry in terms of business numbers in the North Burnett region, accounting for 62.5% of the total number of businesses, followed by Construction (6.9%), Retail Trade (5.4%) and Transport, Postal & Warehousing (4.4%). |
| <u>Increase in key demographic indicators</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Average individual income - Average household income | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Per capita income for the North Burnett region was estimated at \$16,398 in 2009/10, representing an annual increase | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Per capita income for the North Burnett region was estimated at \$18,012 in 2010/11, representing a significant |

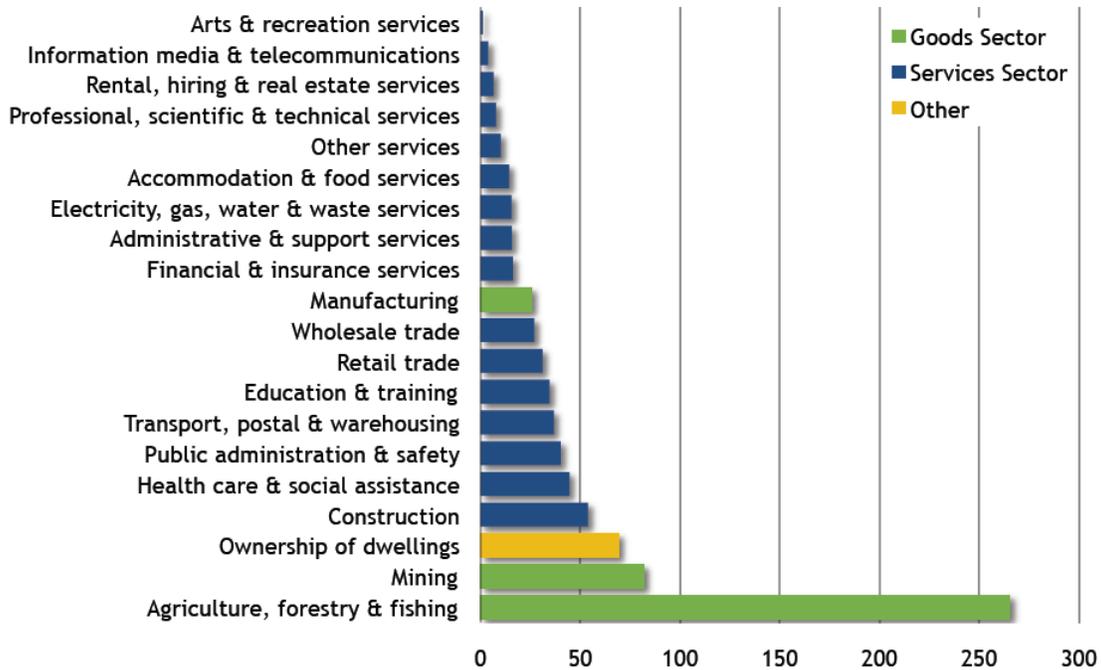
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Average family income | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> of 3.8% from the level recorded in 2008/09 (\$15,800). - The average wages and salaries income for the North Burnett region increased annually by 5.9% to \$34,092 in 2009/10. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> annual increase of 9.2% from the level recorded in 2009/10 (\$16,490). - The average wages and salaries income for the North Burnett region increased annually by 2.5% to \$34,958 in 2010/11. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Population Growth | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The estimated resident population of the North Burnett region was 10,342 in 2011, representing a slight annual decrease of 0.7% from the level recorded in 2010. The North Burnett region comprised 3.7% of the population of the Wide-Bay Burnett region and 0.2% of Queensland in 2011. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The estimated resident population of the North Burnett region was 10,339 in 2012, representing a marginal annual decrease of 0.3% from the level recorded in 2011. The North Burnett region comprised 3.6% of the population of the Wide-Bay Burnett region and 0.2% of Queensland in 2012. |

In consideration of the results from the abovementioned agreed key performance indicators, the following information is presented to highlight the Region’s competitive advantages – those areas of the economy that are current strengths and can be built on to increase economic activity.

Firstly, it is useful to look at the North Burnett Region’s Gross Regional Product (GRP) as a comparison with the broader region, the Wide Bay Burnett and the State to indicate possible areas of economic strength. The GRP of the North Burnett region was estimated at \$850.3 million in 2012/13, whilst real annual growth in GRP was 8.4%. The North Burnett region contributed 6.2% and 0.3%, respectively, to the gross regional/state products of the Wide Bay-Burnett region (\$13.7 billion) and Queensland (\$290.2 billion) in 2012/13. It is interesting to note that the GRP has increased substantially since the 2013 Profile, and this may be, in part, due to the increased economic activity subsequent to the 2013 natural disaster and the recovery process.

Gross Regional Product

North Burnett, 2012/13 (\$ million)



Source: North Burnett Regional Economic Profile February 2014

While the contribution of agriculture, forestry and fishing to GRP is 31.2%, its employment in the sector, as a percentage of all employment in the Region, is 34.1% (1,383 people) according to 2011 Census figures. In this regard, the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing sector continues to employ greater than 3 times more people in the North Burnett than the next highest employing industry (retail trade).

As stated in the *North Burnett Economic Profile 2013* the 2011 Census detailed that other key employing industries in the North Burnett included:

- Health Care & Social Assistance (9.5%)
- Retail Trade (8.9%)
- Education & Training (7.9%) and,
- Public Administration & Safety (6.1%).

The estimated number of employed persons in the North Burnett region in the September Quarter 2013 was 6,162, which represented a decrease of 3.7% from the level recorded in the September Quarter 2012 and followed six consecutive quarters of positive annual growth. In addition, the unemployment rate in the North Burnett region was 4.6% in the September Quarter 2013, which represented an annual increase of 1.0 percentage point and the highest rate since the September Quarter 2006. It is suggested that the 2013 Natural Disaster had a direct impact on this result. While these results have occurred, it is pleasing to note that the Participation Rate continues to be very strong in the North Burnett Region.

SUMMARY

One-quarter of the North Burnett Region's economy is based on agriculture. When the GRP of the various sectors of strength are combined, it can be said that 47% of the Region's economy is dependent on agriculture, mining and construction, as opposed to 21% across the State.

In line with the *Economic Development Plan 2009-2014*, a key observation, looking at the economic data for the region, is its high reliance on very few industry sectors, once again demonstrating a lack of diversity in the Region. This issue of economic diversity is important to address and is therefore a continuing basis for future regional sustainability through this *Economic Development Plan 2014-2020*.

The Region's Competitive Advantage

A region's economic competitive advantages are areas of strength in terms of economic performance and capability. These are the areas of the economy that are currently performing well and should be the focus of economic development activity. In the North Burnett, these competitive advantages are the sectors on which the economy is most reliant.

As previously indicated, the GRP figures for the North Burnett Region highlight a strong reliance on three specific industry sectors, demonstrating a lack of economic diversity. Rather than consider the negatives of this situation it is important to identify the associated current economic competitive strengths that occur as a result of this and devise ways the Region can capitalize on this reliance and have a positive effect on this issue of diversity.

The data presented in the previous section indicates that current economic strength lie in the following sectors:

- Agriculture, forestry and fishing
- Mining
- Construction.

Given the region's reliance on the agricultural sector following the 2013 Natural Disaster the impact on fruit growers in the Gayndah/Mundubbera region was significant, with damage and losses to tree crops (including capital losses) estimated at \$60 million, the majority of which was citrus. The result of this natural disaster reinforces the point that an effect on any business, particularly in the three key areas of strength identified here, will have a drastic impact on the Region. This has been further demonstrated in the last decade with significant changes, or losses, in the dairy and timber industries respectively. This plan seeks to identify ways of boosting the areas of competitive strength outlined as well as looking at ways of diversifying the economy, starting with these areas of advantage.

An emphasis on these competitive advantages, leading to positive economic growth in the sectors and sub-sectors will have positive multiplier effects into other, more dependent areas of the economy such as construction, wholesale/retail sales, transport/storage and various government services such as education and health.

The data presented above is clear. Something must be done to enhance these areas of competitive advantage and to decrease the overall reliance on a few industry sectors in the economy.

3. DESIRED VISION

Performance Indicators – 2014 & Goal for 2020

In 2020, the North Burnett Region is a region of economic diversity, offering extensive choice in business, industry and employment for youth and people moving to the region.

The vision for a delivering a diverse economy will be achieved by focusing on the following objectives:

- Objective 1: Council, Business and Industry Leadership
- Objective 2: Responding to New and Emerging Opportunities
- Objective 3: Resourcing and Implementing Economic Development.

This Plan identifies that the following goals from 2014 to 2020 will be achieved to deliver an environment where **opportunity and lifestyle align** in the North Burnett region.

| Goals for the North Burnett Region | |
|---|---|
| 2014 | 2020 |
| Economic Growth: Gross Regional Product 2012-13: \$850.3M | Gross Regional Product: \$1.139B (Target annual growth rate of 5%) |
| Population: Current Population Growth -0.3% 2011-2012 | Population Growth: 2.0% (Equal to Queensland Growth Rate 2011-2012) |
| Employment Growth: Current Annual Employment Growth: -2.7% (2012-2013) | Annual Employment Growth: 1.9% (Equal to Queensland Growth Rate 2012-2013) |
| Employment: Current Unemployment rate: 4.6% (2012-2013) | Unemployment rate: Maintained at below the Queensland Unemployment Rate |
| Employment: Employment Participation Rate : 75.2% (2012) | Employment Participation Rate: Maintained at higher than the Queensland Participation Rate |

Economic Development: A Partnership Approach

In setting the scene for the *Economic Development Plan 2014-2020*, it is important to outline the accountabilities around the actions in this plan. That is, who is responsible for what? Critically, it is vital to establish the difference between government activity – especially Council’s role/s – and the activity that is required by business and industry. By agreeing to these positions, a true partnership-based approach can be negotiated.

Council’s Role in Economic Development

Any government agency at any level, local, state or federal, plays both a regulatory and enabling role. As the tier of government most closely aligned to local and regional activity, it is Council’s role to become both a facilitator and a mediator regarding regulatory activity and to provide the right environment for economic development. This Plan is based on strong principles of community engagement, providing numerous mechanisms for consultation, discussion and debate between business/industry sectors and Council to ensure that both are working together, towards the same economic aims and objectives for the region.

Council provides a critical entry point to regulatory and bureaucratic processes. Elected representatives and senior management are well networked in regional, state and, often, federal regulatory agencies and structures and are allies in moving business and industry issues forward as appropriate. In this regard, Council can be both proactive and reactive in dealing with issues of importance to the Region. However, these issues must be agreed between all stakeholders in economic development, especially the understanding that regulation must be followed in future developments and not an expectation that regulation can be sidestepped.

Council’s role is as a regulator, a facilitator, an enabler and a mediator. Even though Council is one of the largest employers in the Region, it is a ‘social enterprise’, which aims to fill gaps in service delivery to the Region. Council operates as a business and does have business enterprises within its structure and it does this for social, more than economic, reasons.

The objectives detailed in this document provides the framework within which Council and the business and industry communities of the North Burnett Region can work collaboratively to drive enhanced economic development outcomes for the region. Economic Development is of critical importance to Council and it takes its role very seriously in partnership with industry. And, in showing leadership in building these environments for collaboration, Council has certain expectations of the leadership within business and industry sectors.

Business, Industry & Community

Council sets the scene for economic development, as outlined above, but local government cannot ‘do’ economic development. **The economy is generated by the collective of business and industry, their leadership and activities (both commercial and community activities) in the Region.**

Communities or regions that have strong leadership and strong collaboration and networks between businesses and industry sectors are able to be proactive and adaptive to change. These are traits of resilient communities. These networks, collaborations and adaptations will happen as a matter of course. Business people will continue to operate their businesses regardless of Council. Business and industry groups will form without any input from Council. But it is a common theme in strong economies and strong regions that a cohesive approach between industry and government will deliver a changed economy. Diverse and innovative economies rarely happen by accident. They are complex adaptive systems that are the result of collaborative planning and strong leadership by business, industry and government.

As outlined above, Council has set the scene for economic development in this Plan **for delivering where opportunity and lifestyle align**, but it requires the input of leaders in business and industry to continue to be actively involved in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of this Economic Development Plan. Council requires detailed input about business conditions, market environments, critical barriers/opportunities, the positive or negative effects of government policy or strategies etc. to ensure sound decisions can be made to deliver on the plan.

Partnering with Councils across the Wide Bay Burnett region

A particular strength that exists within the Wide Bay Burnett region is the strong regional leadership that exists within the Wide Bay Burnett Regional Organisation of Councils (WBBROC). Since 2000 the Councils that make up WBBROC have sought to implement a regional structure to guide service delivery particularly in the areas of roads, sport and recreation and economic development. The WBBROC has accepted a leadership role on behalf of its regional community to increase economic prosperity and the benefits that flow from this by attracting people to move to the region.

This can be reinforced by the fact that in mid-2011, WBBROC committed to a collaborative approach to economic development as it was agreed that the Wide Bay Burnett region is an appropriate geographic area for a regional economic development organisation for a number of reasons including but not limited to the following:

- It has had the status of a Queensland region for many decades.
- It is one of the fastest growing regions in the state.
- It contains urban, tourism, resource, heritage and transport assets of considerable strategic importance.
- There is a clear need to work collaboratively to maximise opportunities and compete with other regions.
- Its resident population has among the highest levels of disadvantage in Queensland.

To support this commitment the Regional Economic Development Advisory Committee (REDAC) was established which is responsible for representing the regional economic development interests of WBBROC and manages implementation of five priority projects of regional significance focused on the following concepts:

- 1) 'Liveable Cities – Liveable Towns'
- 2) Digital Economy Support
- 3) Rural Innovation Centre
- 4) Experiential/Outdoor/Eco-Tourism (or agri-tourism)
- 5) Economic Scenario Planning.

REDAC is also responsible for the following two strategic responsibilities:

- 1) Manage development and implementation of the Wide Bay Burnett Regional Economic Development Strategy (partnership with the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning).
- 2) Strategic regional involvement in monitoring and planning for integrated transport networks (road, rail, air and sea) for the Wide Bay Burnett region.

Implementation of the priority projects and strategic responsibilities has and will continue to deliver both qualitative and quantitative savings for Councils and, in doing so, the State Government, as the work being undertaken delivers on both state and local government priorities.

4. THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR THE NORTH BURNETT REGION

In presenting this Economic Development Plan, Council has articulated its desired outcomes through the following objectives around which this Plan is structured:

- Objective 1: Council, Business and Industry Leadership
- Objective 2: Responding to New and Emerging Opportunities
- Objective 3: Resourcing and Implementing Economic Development

To deliver on these objectives Council will evaluate its success by monitoring the Goals and Key Performance Indicators on page 10.

OBJECTIVE 1: COUNCIL, BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP

This objective focuses on the leadership required by Council, business and industry in order to enhance existing enterprise in the Region. Leadership, in this instance, means setting the vision and establishing the context for economic development and collaboratively driving and resourcing the vision. As outlined earlier in the Plan, providing a framework for economic development which is supported by key stakeholders is imperative.

Strategy 1.1 Support Existing Business and Industry

The priority in any economic development plan needs to be on strengthening and supporting existing businesses to thrive. Existing business operators have established investments, skills and capabilities in the region. They have not only made an investment in financial terms but also in terms of lifestyle choices. Existing businesses have created the competitive strengths that the Region enjoys today and must not be overlooked by any economic development planning process. The following actions seek to

focus effort to ensure the foundation upon which Council seeks to engage with existing business/industry is appropriate and targeted.

[Priority Action 1: Understand the Needs of Existing Business/Industry](#)

Collecting baseline data is essential to be able to effectively measure change over time. During implementation of the *Economic Development Plan 2009-2014* the North Burnett Region Futures (NBRF) Program on behalf of NBRC established the North Burnett Region Business Database and as at early 2014 the total number of businesses registered on database were 660. For 2014-2020 the goal will be to undertake an assessment, across the six main regional centres, to review existing listings on the database and identify new businesses that need to be added.

Following the release of the Economic Impact Assessment of Ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald Report (November 2013) and Flood Mitigation Study Report (December 2013) an Advocacy Plan was developed and released in March 2014. Via this Advocacy Plan North Burnett Regional Council seeks to influence those who hold government, political or economic power to implement public policies and projects to address the key impacts in the reports that have been developed. To determine the extent of recovery and business outlook, in late 2014 the North Burnett Regional Council will facilitate a follow-up comprehensive industry survey of businesses, the results of which will be used to advocate on behalf of the North Burnett business community as required.

Moving forward it is also essential to understand and determine the future needs of existing business and industry including encouraging discussion and information around retiring from business, preparing for the sale of business ensuring the sustainability and succession of business and industry in the region.

Working closely with the North Burnett Region's peak bodies such as local chambers of commerce, enterprise associations and industry groups Council will ensure continual understanding of the existing business/industry across the region.

[Priority Action 2: Promote Existing Business/Industry](#)

North Burnett Regional Council will, in collaboration with business/industry, promote the Region to target segments focusing on the Region's competitive advantages and/or business and industry gaps.

Initiatives such as undertaking a "Buy Local" campaigns or similar initiatives will seek to expand on the work achieved during the life of the former *Economic Development Plan 2009-2014* which resulted in development of a *Doing Business with Your Local Council* Guide and up-skilling of how business/industry can procure services with Council. A "Buy Local" campaign could occur over a period of time and be promoted via regional/local initiatives (eg. such as a *Local & Loving It Festival & Business Expo*) as a means through which the message can be reinforced.

A component of this Action should be to look at not only local but also neighboring industry opportunities (e.g. resource sector, government agencies) and assisting local business and industry to

supply goods and services outside of the region, as exports. Whilst much of this can occur through promotion of the region, it is ultimately up to individual operators to seek the opportunities and work at having the capabilities and capacity to service those opportunities. This Action could see Council working with agencies to get the local business and industry sector 'procurement ready'.

[Priority Action 3: Mentoring for Innovation, Sustainability & Succession](#)

Mentoring in business refers to a relationship between an experienced business person (the mentor) and a business owner or employee (the mentee). It can be used at all stages in the business lifecycle and offers benefits to both mentors and mentees.

The region has a diverse range of successful and innovative businesses many of which have a wealth of knowledge that could be shared with other new or existing business owners in the region. Alternatively, external expertise may be acquired to support these businesses.

Mentoring sessions can assist enterprises that are in starting out, are in growth or are ready for an exit strategy by providing access to a panel of business mentors who can help address commercial problems. Business owners are invited to address their key issues to the mentoring panel who will provide feedback and options drawn from business knowledge, broad experience and specific expertise, one or two key challenges are addressed during structured, one hour panel meetings at no cost to the business.

Building on the *Mentoring for Growth* initiative that was undertaken in 2013 during the life of this plan and linking with strategy 2.2 mentoring sessions will be offered across the region.

[Priority Action 4: Continue to support Business & Industry as part of the North Burnett Region Economic Recovery Subcommittee](#)

Following the 2013 natural disaster the North Burnett Region Economic Recovery Subcommittee was established to oversee and provide guidance to the recovery of the business community. During the life of this Strategy, as and when required, the Subcommittee will be called upon when and if another natural disaster occurs.

Strategy 1.2 Maintain, improve and align planning and infrastructure requirements with economic development priorities

As detailed in the *Economic Development Plan 2009-2014* the North Burnett Regional Council is made up of six major communities – Biggenden, Eidsvold, Gayndah, Mt Perry, Monto and Mundubbera – and over 70 rural villages, each with their own local characteristics and previous planning schemes. This diversity in land use is recognised; however, future land use must be adequately planned for in terms of land used for both residential and industrial purposes. With the advent of the Regional Council must come the development of the North Burnett Regional Council Planning Scheme to ensure consistency of planning and deployment of planning across the entire North Burnett Region.

Priority Action 5: Ensure the North Burnett Regional Council Planning Scheme facilitates Economic Development outcomes

In line with local government reform enacted in 2008, Council is in the process of consolidating previous Shire Planning Schemes into a single North Burnett Regional Council Planning Scheme. The process of consolidation of these planning schemes will require consideration of economic as well as social and environmental considerations. To achieve the required balance one sector of the community that will need to be engaged is business and industry to allow adequate feedback from local business communities as it is envisaged that issues such as considering the need for more appropriately zoned industrial land and for more supply of rural residential property will need to be reviewed.

Priority Action 6: Map and Facilitate the Delivery of Economic Infrastructure to support the North Burnett Minerals Province

The North Burnett Minerals Province has been identified as an area of great opportunity for the future diversification of the region's economy.

There are a large number of potential mining operations in the region looking at the production of Coal, Bauxite, Iron Ore (Magnetite) and other minerals such as Feldspar, Apatite, Ilmenite, limestone, Molybdenum, Silver, Zinc, Copper, Gold and more.

The mining Industry has identified an opportunity for production from coal, bauxite and magnetite reserves to develop over the next 10 years to an estimated 15,000,000 tons of product per annum, potentially resulting in excess of 1000 direct mining jobs with flow-on employment of another 1000 jobs for the Wide Bay Burnett Region¹. This level of production requires a viable transport solution utilising road, rail and sea. A number of mining developments are now constrained by inadequate transport infrastructure and further planning is dependent on identifying a viable solution.

Queensland State Government, Council and Industry Representatives will continue to work together to achieve a positive outcome for viable commodity transportation.

Priority Action 7: Advocate for enhanced ICT Communication for the Region

As part of the *Economic Development Plan 2009-2014* it was identified that considerable effort needed to be focused on ensuring that the region's infrastructure is on par with the broader Wide Bay Burnett Region and other regions throughout Queensland, where possible. This is considered essential in order for the ongoing economic development of the North Burnett.

In late 2013 the North Burnett Regional Council, as part of a regional WBBROC initiative, was provided with an *Independent Broadband Testing Report (February 2014)* detailing the current service provided by the main telecommunication network carriers (Telstra, Optus, Vodaphone) and within this context, coverage across the Wide Bay Burnett Region including the North Burnett. This report details a number of priority areas that should be addressed to improve current service standards. As a member of

¹ North Burnett Minerals Province Information Bulletin Aug 2011

WBBROC and on an individual Council level, during 2014-2020 Council will work closely with providers and other stakeholders to plan for future adaptation or developments. In particular, Council will work closely with NBN Co. to ensure development plans for potential towers are in line with the needs identified from the *Independent Broadband Testing Report (February 2014)*. The fundamental aim of this priority action is to ensure parity of service and pricing between rural and regional Australia and metropolitan areas so that the region can be increasingly recognized as a “connected region”.

[Priority Action 8: Enhance Social Infrastructure](#)

Social infrastructure is the interdependent mix of facilities, places, spaces, programs, projects, services and networks that maintain and improve the standard of living and quality of life in a community. In other words, it is the glue that holds community together. In as much as economic infrastructure has an important role in economic development, the improvement of social infrastructure is vital for economic progress.

Strategy 1.3 Continue to Support Regional Collaboration

In rural and remote areas such as the North Burnett, communities are crying out for a greater emphasis on regional development to generate robust economic growth and counter the drift of young people to the major metropolitan centres. The way in which Councils have engaged and cooperated regionally has been a growing priority since the mid-1990s. The need to find better regional governance arrangements is clear. Communities and councils in coastal regions are facing dramatic demographic change. Their problems are compounded by the fact that their populations are not only growing at a rapid rate, but are also ageing at a rapid rate.

In the Wide Bay Burnett Region, since 2000 the Councils that make up the Wide Bay Burnett Regional Organisation of Councils (WBBROC) have sought to implement a regional structure to guide service delivery particularly in the areas of roads, sport and recreation and economic development.

[Priority Action 9: Support development of the Wide Bay Burnett Regional Economic Development Strategy as the foundation strategy for achieving enhanced economic development across the Wide Bay Burnett region.](#)

WBBROC will develop a regional economic development strategy to address the broad variety of challenges and opportunities facing the region. As the first document of its kind for the wider region, its development will assist all stakeholders/partners to share not only a common economic development vision for the region, but importantly, a shared commitment to deliver on key economic development projects and initiatives. The North Burnett Regional Council, as a member of WBBROC, will fulfil an active role in reviewing the draft strategy and, once endorsed adopted, ensure relevant aspects are incorporated in applicable Council corporate documents.

[Priority Action 10: Implement initiatives that deliver on a regional Attraction & Retention Strategy, including marketing of The Perfect Place at Your Perfect Pace regional identity and brand](#)

The WBBROC Liveable Cities/Liveable Towns regional priority project focuses on developing themes and linkages across the Wide Bay Burnett’s cities and towns to build a distinctive Wide Bay Burnett regional

image. As part of an Attraction & Retention Strategy the project seeks to promote the Wide Bay Burnett region as a highly viable and attractive region to:

- Invest and re-invest in business and industry development offering lower costs of production, market access, a ready pool of potential labour supply, supporting infrastructure
- Gain employment in a wide range of industries including Agriculture / Horticulture, Engineering Manufacture, Mining, Tourism, Knowledge Based Services and creative industries.
- Live a regional lifestyle of lower cost, security, health, family and strong community connection.

Stage 1 of the project has been completed following endorsement of the *The Perfect Place At Your Perfect Pace* regional brand, however, during the life of this Economic Development Plan, North Burnett Regional Council will play an active role in supporting key initiatives that ensure the brand becomes well-recognised, not only across the region but most importantly external to the region. Local initiatives such as a *Local & Loving It Festival & Business Expo* are one example of how Council will actively work to promote the regional brand.

Priority Action 11: Delivery of programs that capitalise and build on the core of world leading rural technology businesses in the region

Linked with strategy 1.1 and 2.2 Council is gaining a comprehensive understanding of the diverse businesses that operate in the North Burnett Region. While some businesses may benefit as part of strategy 2.2 other businesses, both new and existing, may benefit from programs or initiatives that assist in growing their business. During the life of this plan Council will identify opportunities that align with the growing needs of a business which will be offered by a range of service providers such as State/Commonwealth governments, community organisations and Council.

Priority Action 12: Implement initiatives that improve the capability of small to medium enterprises to compete and thrive in the rapidly evolving digital economy

The way in which business is conducted is continuing to change at an increasingly rapid pace. Internet-based technologies are enabling lower transaction costs, whilst increasing access to new markets. Marketing is shifting from traditional media channels to social marketing, multi media, pay per click, cyber currencies and others. Logistics is now managed online with complete transparency to the customer and the cost of inefficient traditional systems is placing many Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) at an ever increasing competitive disadvantage. These fundamental changes are requiring businesses to adopt new business models in order to remain competitive and sustainable.

North Burnett Regional Council, as a member of WBBROC, supports and implements a range of initiatives aimed at improving the level of understanding of the digital economy among small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the region. During the life of this plan, North Burnett Regional Council will benefit from the Bundaberg Regional Council's Digital Enterprise Program which will support organisations to learn how technology and access to high speed broadband can improve their online presence, offer new products and services, expand their market, improve their competitiveness, and increase their means of communicating with customers and suppliers. Council will also partner with the

WBBROC Councils as part of the Digital Economy regional priority project and deliver other initiatives to support SMEs across the region.

OBJECTIVE 2: RESPONDING TO NEW AND EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES

This objective focuses on Council's leadership and partnering role with the tourism sector and community in order to further support and develop the tourism industry across the North Burnett Region.

Strategy 2.1

Expand and Develop the Tourism Industry

Tourism has been identified, throughout the consultation for this Plan, as a major opportunity for the Region. Currently, Cania Gorge provides a major drawcard for tourism visitors to the Region and the RM Williams Bush Learning Centre in Eidsvold is being developed. It is critical for Council to work with key stakeholders in the tourism sector, including existing business operators, Bundaberg and North Burnett Tourism and Tourism Queensland in order to better promote the North Burnett as a destination; particularly for the drive market. Working with neighbouring regions (including Bundaberg, Fraser Coast and Gladstone) will also be important in achieving this strategy.

Priority Action 13: Support development of the regional AgriTourism Strategy

It is envisaged that a number of different initiatives will be progressed to support development of the regional AgriTourism Strategy including:

- Develop a self-guided tour guidebook to the agritourism facilities within North Burnett that promotes our region to visitors and educates them about our agricultural resources.
- Develop Bus/Coach tour itineraries designed to attract scheduled tours to the North Burnett Region.
- Increase visitor expenditure at agritourism facilities and extend the length of stay in our region by developing on farm accommodation businesses, farm stays and farm tours.
- Create Directories and/or Apps of agritourism businesses including road-side fruit & vegetable stalls and promote them through visitor information centres.
- Encourage agri-business operators to provide on-farm tours and/or to sell their products at the farm-gate to visitors.

Priority Action 14: Build Quantity and Quality of Tourism Product

To assist the North Burnett Tourism businesses to creatively promote their businesses quarterly Tourism Action Group training workshops and meetings will be facilitated. It is also anticipated that in partnership with the tourism sector Council will facilitate production of Tourism Industry Rate Cards and assistance via mentoring partnerships to be "wholesale ready" and confident to pitch their tourism product to relevant wholesale tourism companies.

It is considered that the possible Tourism Opportunities for the six towns across the North Burnett Region as detailed in the *North Burnett Tourism Strategy (2009)* and adopted by the North Burnett Regional Council include, but are not limited to:

- **Mt Perry** - Possibility of “Gold Fossicking” as a tourism activity.
- **Monto** - The opportunity exists to develop the Coominglah State Forest promoting the rare and endangered evergreen plants in the area and a Western escarpment lookout.
- **Eidsvold** - Develop RM Williams Australian Bush Learning Centre to be Trade Ready. Explore Indigenous culture experience business opportunities such as walking tours, history, bush tucker, storytelling, dances etc.
- **Mundubbera** - Support multicultural festival & Seven-A-Side Cricket Competition & Bullarama Events. Develop Regional Culinary Tourism by launching a local produce campaign. Encourage Localised Dining with businesses featuring and promoting Fresh Local Produce, sourced from within a 100km radius, on their menus. The region could conduct a cooking master-class utilising local personalities to showcase the regions produce and raise the awareness of the region as an emerging “foodies” haven of fresh, unexpected ingredients.
- **Gayndah** – Develop B&B and Farm stay Accommodation Businesses to continue to promote and grow the Orange Festival. Attract start-up operators to establish River Adventure Tours. Promote Historic and Arts Drive Routes along with Creative Workshops & Accommodation Package Deals. Establish Bush Camping Facilities to accommodate the large and growing number of Seasonal Workers visiting, staying and working within the region.
- **Biggenden** – Advance the development and security of the Rose Show/Festival and Auto Spectacular events. Develop and promote Paradise Dam Caravan/Camping & Amenities facilities. Investigate and install non-manned Visitor Information Centre facilities as per the Bundaberg North Burnett Tourism Digital Strategy. Encourage local tourism businesses to consider developing Historical Bridge sites tours. Re-establish Biggenden’s Recreational Vehicle Friendly status by upgrading the free overnight camping facilities on this section of the Bicentennial Trail².

[Priority Action 15: Realise Drive Market Tourism Demand](#)

In line with the *Bundaberg North Burnett 2020 Destination Tourism Plan*³ and in collaboration with the tourism sector, a drive market strategy will be developed that brings together tourism operators to investigate the tourism products and services in the Region. This will be undertaken in collaboration with Tourism Queensland, Bundaberg North Burnett Tourism, Australia’s Country Way & Rural Getaway Highway Committees and RACQ’s new Drive Market Tourism Signage and Mapping Promotions Program.

² *North Burnett Tourism Strategy (2009)* Tourism Queensland and North Burnett Tourism

³ Bundaberg North Burnett 2020 Destination Tourism Plan

The drive tourism strategy will identify interstate, grey nomads and the international youth market as key elements of the touring market. The strategy will also stress the need to develop product, experiences and information sources to attract this market. In the case of the Bundaberg North Burnett region these product developments that link with the drive tourism strategy are as follows:

- Development of consumer based experiences in national parks such as walking trails, interpretation, camping facilities and volunteer programs
- Development of consumer signage and information sources that attract the drive market. There is opportunity to link information services provided by Transport and Main Roads and RACQ to the digital platform being developed by Bundaberg North Burnett Tourism
- Development of drive tourism routes that will aid regional dispersal and development of new product. These could be themed e.g. culinary trails, and
- Australia's Country Way and the Rural Getaway are the key drive routes through the North Burnett and TMR is working to replace and revitalise tourism signage along Australia's Country Way.

Priority Action 16: Develop a Strong Customer Service Culture

Critical to the success of the tourism industry in the North Burnett is consistently high levels of customer service delivery. Great service enhances the visitation experience of tourists and serves as a catalyst for ongoing word-of-mouth marketing and promotion.

Excellent customer service cultures are created and sustained through ongoing internal and selected external training therefore working with local government, education authorities, Chambers of Commerce and operators to provide access to a range of training options is a high priority.

The Council in partnership with the North Burnett Tourism Action Group and Bundaberg North Burnett Tourism will develop a regionally recognised customer service standards program. That is, either a 'star' or other icon to symbolise the rating system and serve as an indicator to patrons of the scale/style of customer service to be expected. These standards may be used to reinforce tourism branding thus adding a competitive advantage to the participating operators.

Highly rated operators who incorporate the standards into their business processes and deliver regular customer service delivery training and development to their teams will be rewarded by receiving free print and online media opportunities to market their business. They will be selected as case studies and/or examples of excellence and invited to present at North Burnett Tourism Action Group, Chambers of Commerce and Business Enterprise Group meetings throughout the region.

Priority Action 17: Brand the North Burnett Region as a Destination

Strengthening the North Burnett's destination of choice brand will be achieved through the implementation of the two key strategic goals identified in the *Bundaberg North Burnett 2020 Destination Tourism Plan* of:

- Setting an agreed direction with priorities for growth, development and marketing to guide the region to achieve its target tourism growth and economic outcomes; and
- Clearly identifying priority projects that will have the greatest impact and provide significant opportunity for commercial outcomes, act as a catalyst for new development and marketing, and are strategically focused on leveraging the key strengths of the destination.

The *Bundaberg North Burnett 2020 Destination Tourism Plan* has identified six key opportunity areas for the North Burnett which covers all aspects of destination development including:

- Fully embracing the digital economy
- Touring Routes and supporting infrastructure
- Product development influenced by the region's culinary experiences and North Burnett characters
- Southern Great Barrier Reef marketing and product development
- Stage 2 of the RM Williams Australian Bush Learning Centre
- Developing Paradise Dam Caravan Park.

Strategy 2.2

Support businesses as part of the Wide Bay Burnett Regional Innovation Centre

Priority Action 18: Identify and support innovative ideas for new and established businesses.

As a project that was initiated from the *North Burnett Region Economic Development Plan 2009 - 2014*, WBBROC is seeking to establish a Centre for Regional Innovation to assist people or businesses with new ideas, undeveloped existing ideas and products or processes - to turn them into real, income producing products and services. Primarily, the Centre will be a project facilitator, providing brokerage services, advice, advocacy, be a project "jogger", a "virtual" connector (with organisations such as Burnett Mary Regional Group, Burnett Catchment Care Association, Landcare, Government Agencies, to name a few) and possibly even a mentor. It will provide a node for all the service providers to innovative businesses and be the advisor of choice or first port of call for primary producers, businesses and individuals seeking to innovate and provide new business and employment opportunities across the region. Its role is to facilitate the innovative development of a business opportunity that will provide economic development outcomes to the region.

The North Burnett Regional Council is actively involved in identifying businesses that may benefit from the support offered as part of an initial trial stage of development. During the life of this plan it is envisaged that WBBROC will seek to secure ongoing funding to support formal establishment of a centre which will ultimately benefit a diverse range of new/start-up and existing businesses.

Priority Action 19: Enhance youth participation and entry into the economic development of the region

Youth retention and engagement is essential In order for the region to grow, diversify and prosper. In collaboration with the secondary schools in the region on the development and implementation of programs that encourage youth to seek work experience with local business and industry will create awareness of career opportunities within the local community and build an understanding of the local economy.

The development of a Youth Entrepreneur program in conjunction with the centre for regional innovation initiative will be explored as this would help to enhance economic diversity and encourage our youth to remain living, working and creating new business in the region in the surrounds of supportive family and friends.

Strategy 2.3

Support the businesses involved in the North Burnett Minerals Province

Priority Action 20: Collaborate with State Government and Industry to ensure the North Burnett Minerals Province is a success

The North Burnett Minerals Province has been identified as an area of great opportunity for the future diversification of the region's economy.

There are a large number of potential mining operations in the region looking at the production of Coal, Bauxite, Iron Ore (Magnetite) and other minerals such as Feldspar, Apatite, Ilmenite, limestone, Molybdenum, Silver, Zinc, Copper, Gold and more.

Once appropriate transport infrastructure has been enabled, through demand and transportation options studies, the North Burnett Regional Council will facilitate partnerships between State Government and industry to assist the resource sector companies to properly establish and effectively operate in the region, generating economic outcomes whilst recognizing environmental requirements and responsibilities.

Priority Action 21: Develop a strong understanding of supply chain and procurement practices

In order for existing businesses to capitalize on the opportunity presented by success of the North Burnett Mineral Province it is essential that they understand the expectations, engagement process, quality assurance and procurement practices required in order to reliably supply local goods and services to these mining operations.

Expanding on the work achieved during the life of the former *Economic Development Plan 2009-2014* which resulted in development of a *Doing Business with Your Local Council* Guide and up-skilling of how business/industry can procure services with Council, the content will focus on procuring services with the resource sector and other large organisations and industries.

Strategy 2.4

Capitalise on Opportunities from the Queensland Plan

'The Queensland Plan: a 30 year vision for Queensland' is an important strategy that the region must take on board and look for the opportunities that come from that Plan. This plan aspires to, over 30 years have half the State's population living in regional communities in Queensland. One of the key outcomes of the consultation process was that Queenslanders are strong in their determination to ensure our regions are strong and prosperous.

There are a number of ways in which 'Strong and Prosperous Regions' can be achieved, but it must be done in partnership and through the North Burnett Region being willing and able to accept challenges – for the economic good of the region. Capitalising on unique regional opportunities and assets and valuing and investing in our local business and industry sector are just two of the ways in which we can work towards changing the economy of the region. Much of this work is currently being undertaken through the Wide Bay Burnett Region Organisation of Councils Priority Projects (Liveable Cities/Liveable Towns and Centre for Rural Innovation), but the development of State Government Policy through the adoption of the Queensland Plan should provide the platform for the North Burnett Region to 'make its case' for a stronger and more prosperous region.

Priority Action 22: Analyse opportunities for the relocation of State Government Agencies to the Region

The North Burnett Region is well recognised for its agricultural excellence, through cropping, orchards, beef cattle etc. There are a number of facilities in the region that could be utilised for State Government department locations, at minimal cost.

This Action should analyse what the opportunities for State Government department attraction and build the business case to present to Government, citing the aims and objectives of the Queensland Plan.

OBJECTIVE 3: RESOURCING AND IMPLEMENTING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

No plan would be complete without recognition of the resources required in order to deliver on the actions detailed in this plan. This final objective provides some structure to planning and delivering the various actions listed in this document. The objective provides a framework for prioritizing budgets, personnel and time in order to ensure that the monitoring and evaluation requirements are met annually and at the culmination of this Plan in 2020.

Strategy 3.1

Resourcing the Strategic and Operational Areas of the Plan

Priority Action 23: Provide Strategic Management of the Plan

Continuation of the North Burnett Region Futures (NBRF) Advisory Committee will ensure that Council and strategic managers of economic development and tourism are in constant communication and that there is a focused place for discussion of emerging opportunities.

The NBRF Advisory Committee also continues to make vital connections with the neighboring Bundaberg Regional Council and other Councils as part of WBBROC. Ongoing and future partnerships between Bundaberg and the North Burnett will provide ongoing sharing of markets, opportunities, networks, partnerships and promotional collateral in all facets of economic development activity.

The NBRF Advisory Committee will consider and endorse an annual Operational Plan for the NBRF Program that progressively delivers on the actions identified in this plan. The Advisory Committee will then meet on a biannual basis to consider a progress report in relation to implementing the Operational Plan.

Priority Action 24: Ensure strong linkage between the Economic Development Plan and Council's Operational Plan and associated budget

North Burnett Regional Council will use this Economic Development Plan and the associated annual NBRF Program Operational Plans to budget for, and prioritise, key initiatives.

Strategy 3.2

Recognise the Strength of Partnerships

It is essential that the stakeholders in this Economic Development Plan work in partnership towards the objectives, strategies and priority actions identified within the document. Council, government agencies in all tiers of government, industry organizations, business owners/operators and communities play a vital role in the advocacy of the vision outlined in this Plan.

Priority Action 25: Communicate the Economic Development Vision to Stakeholders

Once endorsed by Council, the NBRF Program, on Council's behalf, will actively promote the plan and key actions to business, industry and the broader community. Annually, via the NBRF Program enews and other face-to-face opportunities progress in delivering on the plan will be communicated.

Strategy 3.3

Monitor & Review the Economic Development Plan

Priority Action 26: Annually Review the Economic Development Plan

As with the *Economic Development Plan 2009-2014* this *Economic Development Plan 2014-2020* is not a static document and will be reviewed annually as part of the NBRF Advisory Committee. Subsequent changes to the plan will be communicated to business, industry and the general community as part of priority action 21.