

A photograph of a modern, two-story building with white walls and red brick accents. The building features a large, colorful logo on its side, consisting of concentric, wavy lines in shades of blue, green, and yellow. To the left of the logo, the words "Gunnedah Shire" are written in a blue, sans-serif font. The building has a covered entrance area supported by dark grey columns. The scene is set outdoors with trees and a clear sky in the background.

**Gunnedah Shire**

**Draft  
Gunnedah Shire  
Economic Development  
Strategy 2022-26**

**Themes and Directions Paper**

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# CONTENTS OF THIS THEMES & DIRECTIONS PAPER

This themes and directions paper encapsulates the findings of the research, consultation and analysis which has been undertaken to inform the preparation of the *Gunnedah Shire Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026*. It has been prepared to facilitate ongoing discussion and ideas for action that will assist in the formulation of a draft strategy. It contains three main parts:



## Purpose

An introduction to the Economic Development Strategy purpose and objectives, and the role of Gunnedah Shire Council as custodian of the strategy.

*(Pages 3 to 9)*



## Profile

A summary overview of Gunnedah Shire's socio-economic structure and dynamics, in a wider (regional / State) context.

*(Pages 10 to 34)*



## Prospects

A summary of key attributes, issues, challenges and opportunities for economic development, as identified through research, stakeholder consultation and analysis, and which are used to inform ideas for action.

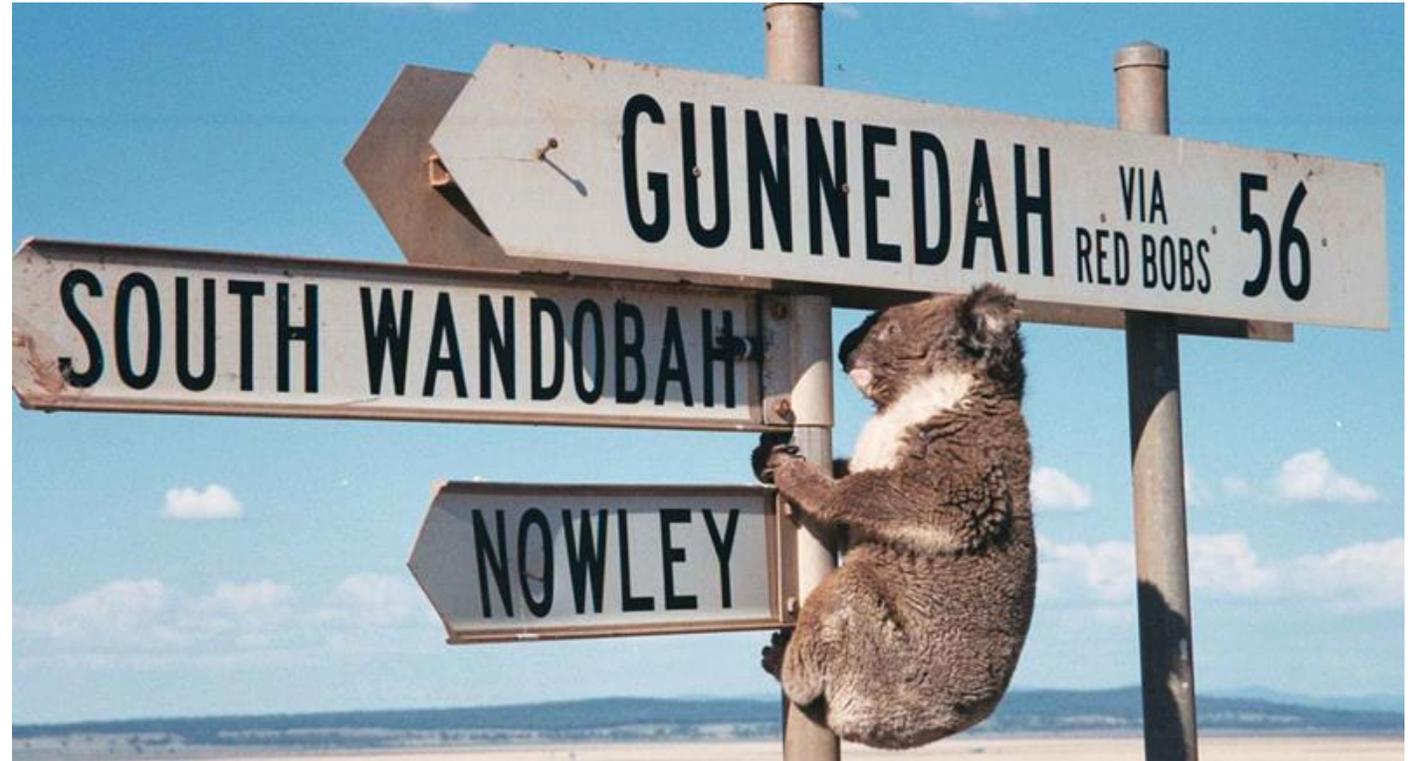
*(Pages 35 to 52)*

The paper concludes with an overview of the steps that were undertaken to turn a discussion on themes and directions into a Draft Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026.

# PART 1 PURPOSE



**Gunnedah**  
Shire Council  
Open New Horizons



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY PURPOSE

The purpose of the *Gunnedah Shire Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026* is to **set the path for future growth and investment into Gunnedah Shire**. This requires:

- **Research and analysis** to inform, prepare and deliver a new evidence-based and delivery-oriented economic development strategy for Gunnedah Shire; and
- **Engagement** with a diversity of internal and external stakeholders to inform an aspirational yet pragmatic and implementable economic development strategy.

The strategy objectives are:

- To provide Gunnedah Shire Council with a clear strategic direction for economic growth;
- To align with other Gunnedah Shire Council strategies; and
- To work within the vision for Economic Development, which is **to nurture a diverse, growing, innovative and vibrant economy that will flourish and remain resilient for generations to come**.



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OUTCOMES

The new strategy, articulates Gunnedah Shire Council's **economic development roles and functions** and set clear and measurable **objectives** and **initiatives** to help Gunnedah Shire Council play its part to encourage and facilitate local investment, business innovation and employment for the benefit of the Gunnedah Shire community.

The Strategy will deliver a well-considered plan of action to help facilitate, support and promote:

- Business retention and expansion in Gunnedah Shire;
- Investment attraction (people and industry) to Gunnedah.
- Visitor attraction;
- Delivery of enabling infrastructure to facilitate economic activity;
- Industry growth and development; and
- A skilled workforce and local jobs.



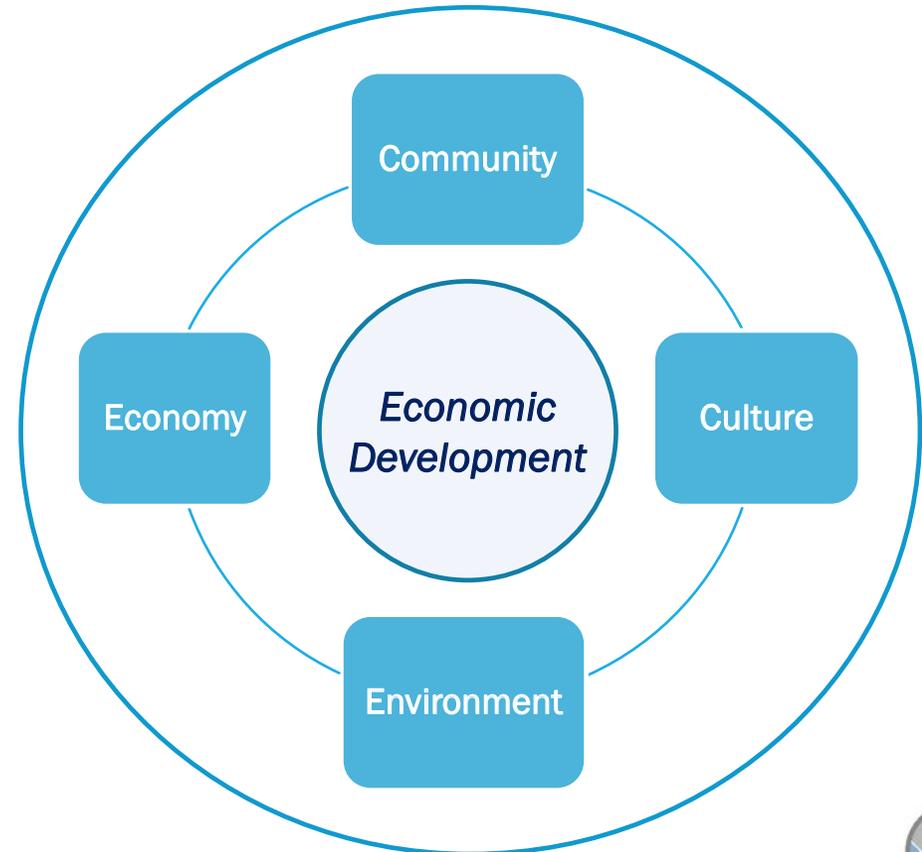
# 'ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT' DEFINED

**Economic development** is about the continuous improvement in an area's level of income and capital (wealth) and the distribution of that wealth (through local expenditure and jobs) to the community.

Typically measured in terms of investment, income flows, population growth and employment, economic development is also measured by improvements in education, skills, health, culture, community wellbeing, 'place' and the environment. Ultimately, economic development is about improving quality of life or to capture the concept more succinctly, it is about **prosperity**.

To ensure we realise desired levels of prosperity, it is important to articulate and focus on key objectives that will have meaningful and measurable outcomes for the communities of Gunnedah Shire.

Retaining and growing the Shire's population is a desired outcome because it will serve to make the communities of Gunnedah Shire more **resilient**. An increase in population will support local service delivery, attract government funding and support stable, or even higher property prices. It will also serve to retain existing businesses and attract new investment. This will generate more opportunities for employment, creating a multiplier effect of more people, more investment and more jobs.



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# A FOCUS ON THE ENABLERS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

While **business and industry drives economic growth and development**, the role of Councils and other key agents of change (including State and Federal Government agencies, regional development organisations and infrastructure and service providers) is to influence the ‘enabling environment’ for economic activity, that is, the services, infrastructure and support mechanisms required to facilitate positive change.

At the local level, the **enablers** include:

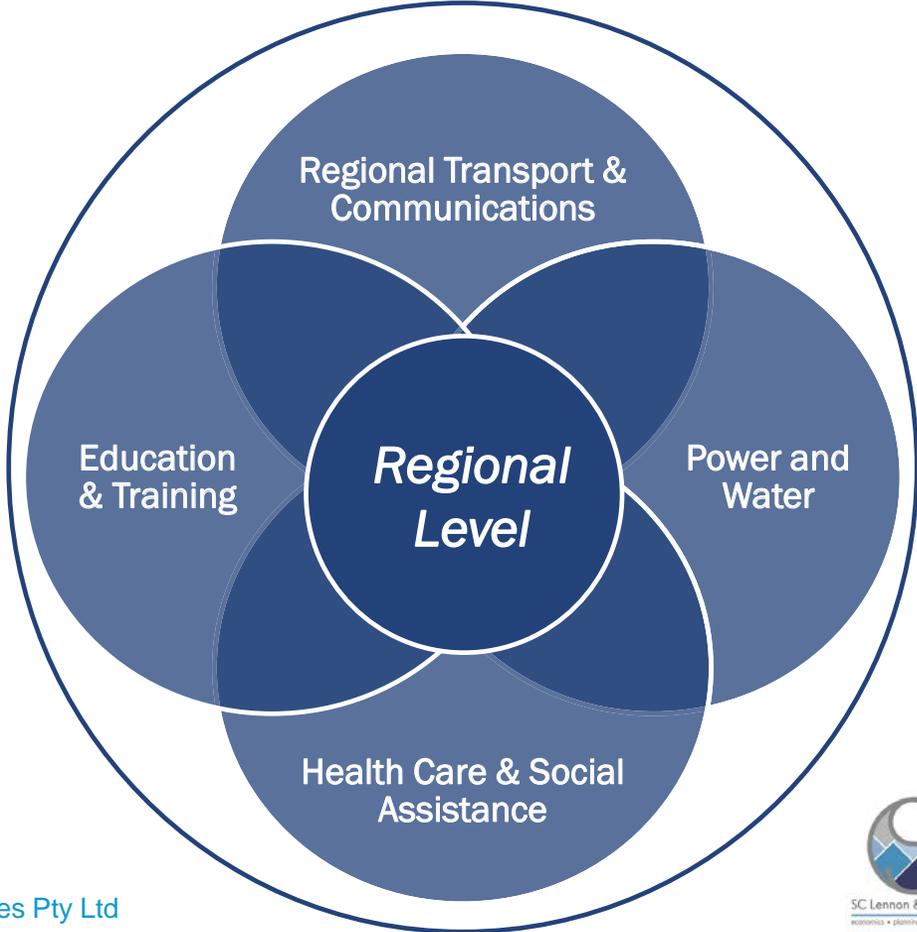
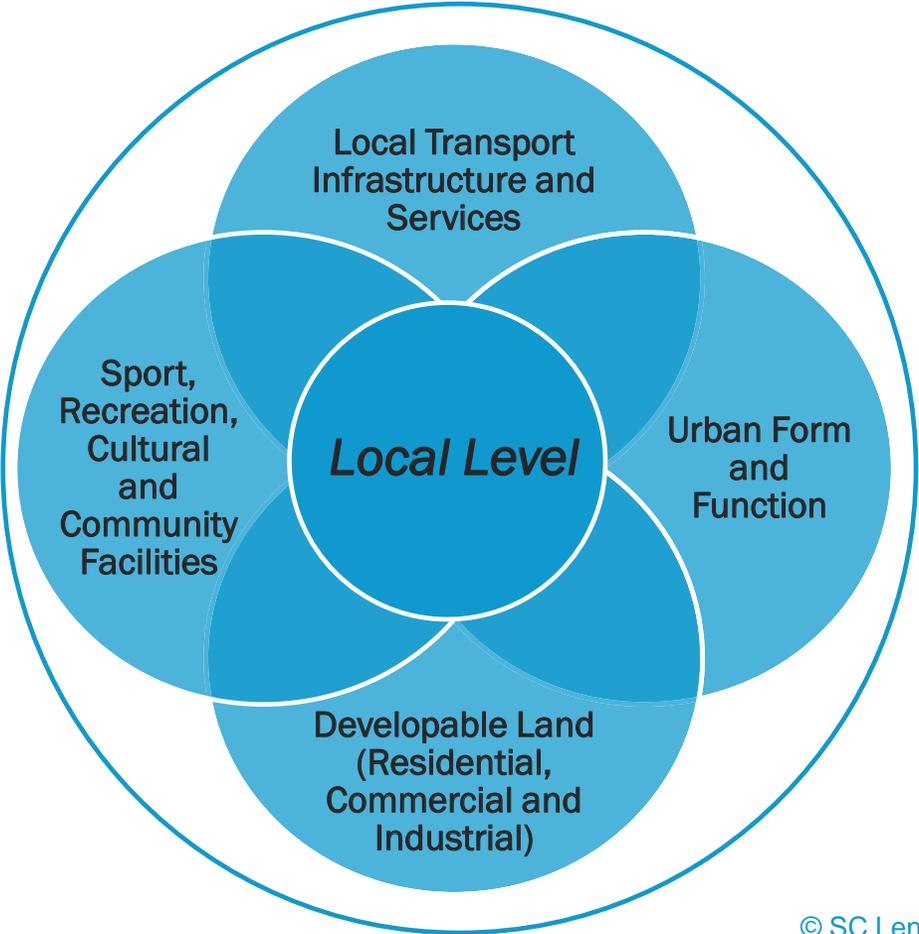
- Local roads.
- Developable residential, commercial and industrial land.
- The form and function of the Gunnedah town centre and other towns and settlements throughout the Shire.
- Community services and facilities including sporting, cultural and recreational facilities.

At the regional level, the enablers of economic development include those attributes which Gunnedah Shire Council is not directly responsible for, but which it can help influence through its regional economic partnerships and its positive advocacy and lobbying efforts including, for example:

- Regional transport and communications infrastructure.
- Power and water.
- Health care and social assistance services.
- Education infrastructure and workforce skills / human capital.

Collectively, these enablers of economic activity help define Gunnedah Shire’s economic development potential and its appeal as a place to visit, work, live and invest in.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ENABLERS

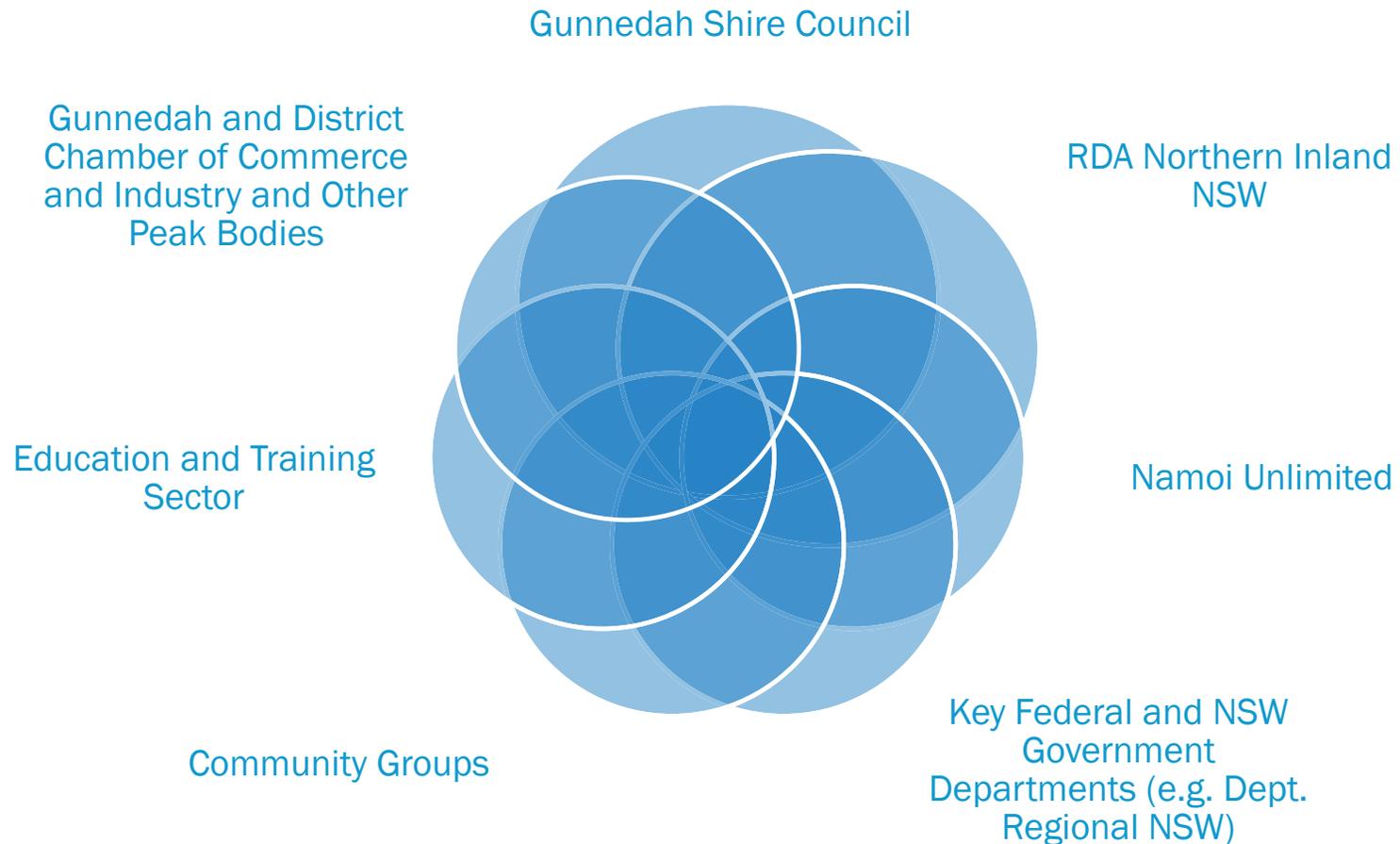


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# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS

Effective economic development outcomes will be best served by collaborative partnerships between Gunnedah Shire Council and other local and regional stakeholders.



# PART 2 THE GUNNEDAH SHIRE ECONOMY IN PROFILE



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# THE GUNNEDAH SHIRE ECONOMY IN BRIEF



Gunnedah Shire has approximately 12,680 residents.



There are 5,490 jobs located in Gunnedah Shire and 6,258 employed residents.



Gunnedah Shire has an unemployment rate of 5.1% compared to 5.2% for Regional NSW and 5% for NSW.



There are approximately 1,565 local businesses in Gunnedah Shire.

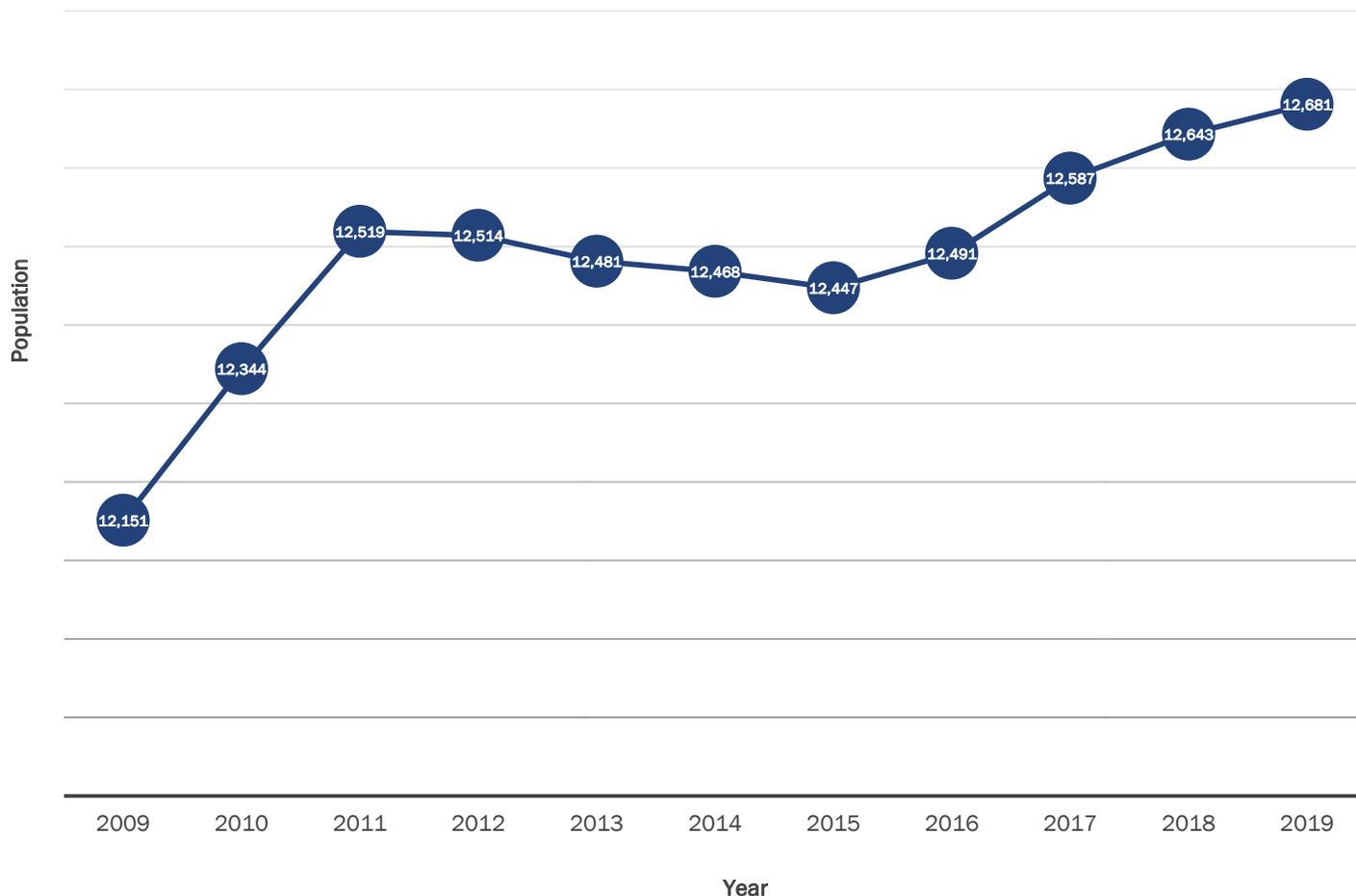


Key industries are agriculture, mining, manufacturing, retail trade, health, education, accommodation & food services and construction.



Gunnedah Shire has a Gross Regional Product (GRP) of \$700 million.

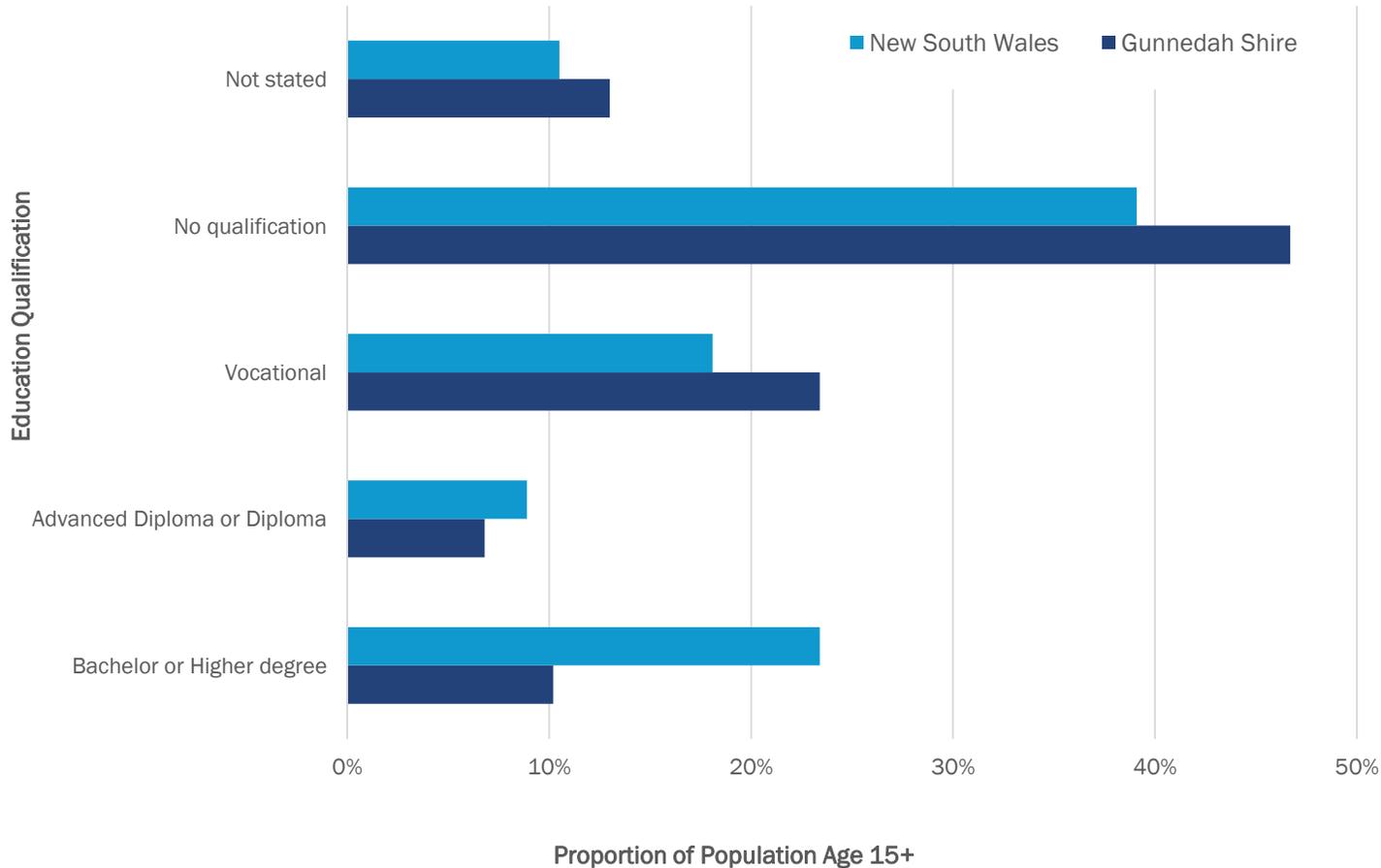
## POPULATION, GUNNEDAH SHIRE, 2009-2019



Source: [http://stat.data.abs.gov.au/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=ABS\\_ERP\\_LGA2019](http://stat.data.abs.gov.au/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=ABS_ERP_LGA2019) with interpretations by SC Lennon & Associates

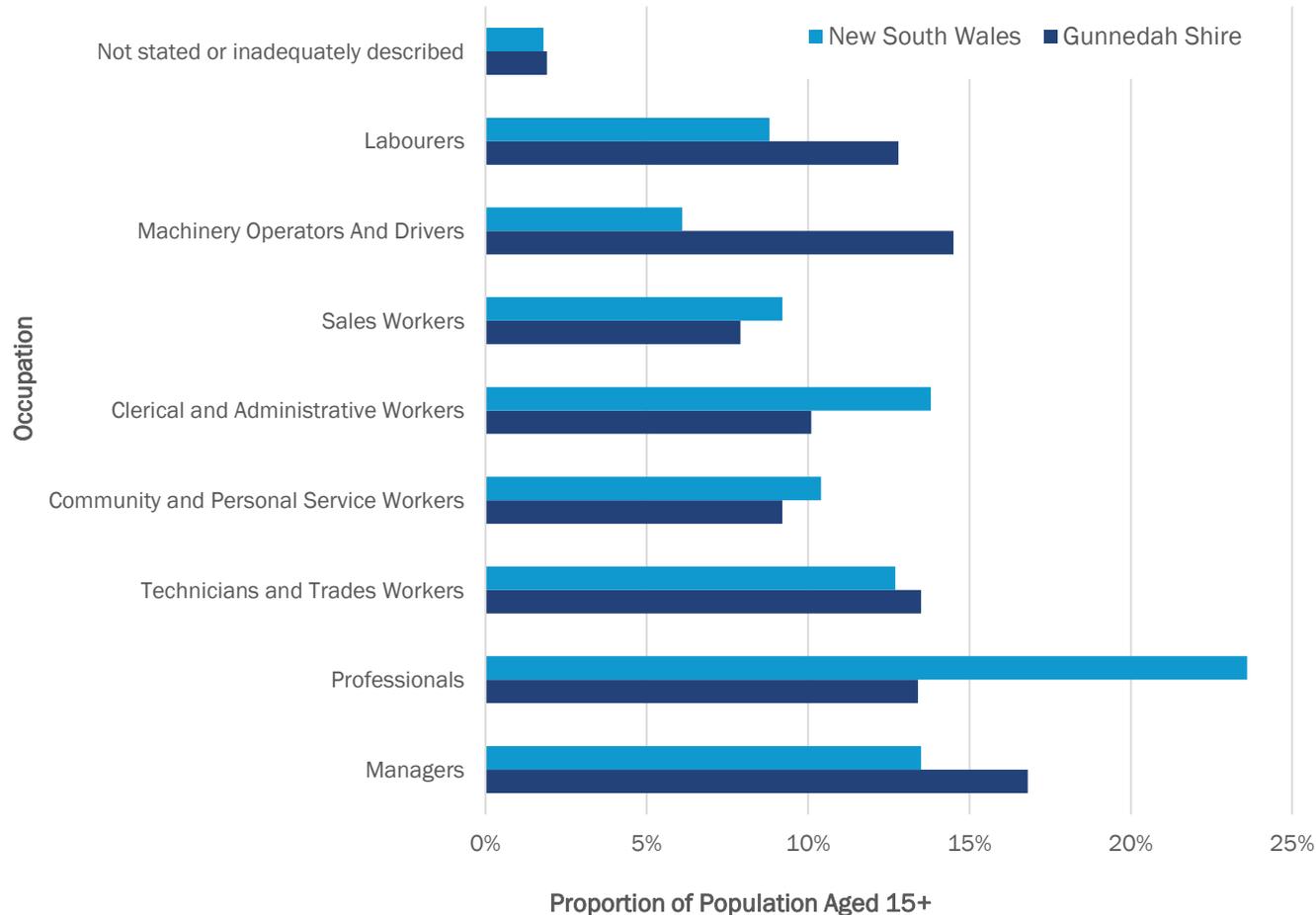
- Gunnedah Shire has a population of approximately 12,680.
- The median age of the Gunnedah Shire's population is 40 compared to 38 for NSW and 38 for Australia.
- Compared to the NSW average, Gunnedah Shire has a higher proportion of people in the younger age groups (0 to 19 years) and in the higher age groups (65+) and a lower proportion of people in the prime working age groups (25-59 years).
- According to the 2016 Census, 26.3% of Gunnedah Shire's population was aged between 0 and 19 (compared with 24.5% for NSW) and 19.0% were aged 65 years and over (compared with 16.2% for NSW).
- Gunnedah Shire's population has remained static over the past five years, increasing at an average annual rate of just 0.47%.
- According to the NSW Department of Planning's latest population projections (<https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Research-and-Demography/Population-projections/Projections>), Gunnedah Shire's population will continue to grow at a similar average annual rate (though fluctuation from year to year), to reach 12,693 people by 2036.

## EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS, GUNNEDAH SHIRE AND NEW SOUTH WALES, 2016



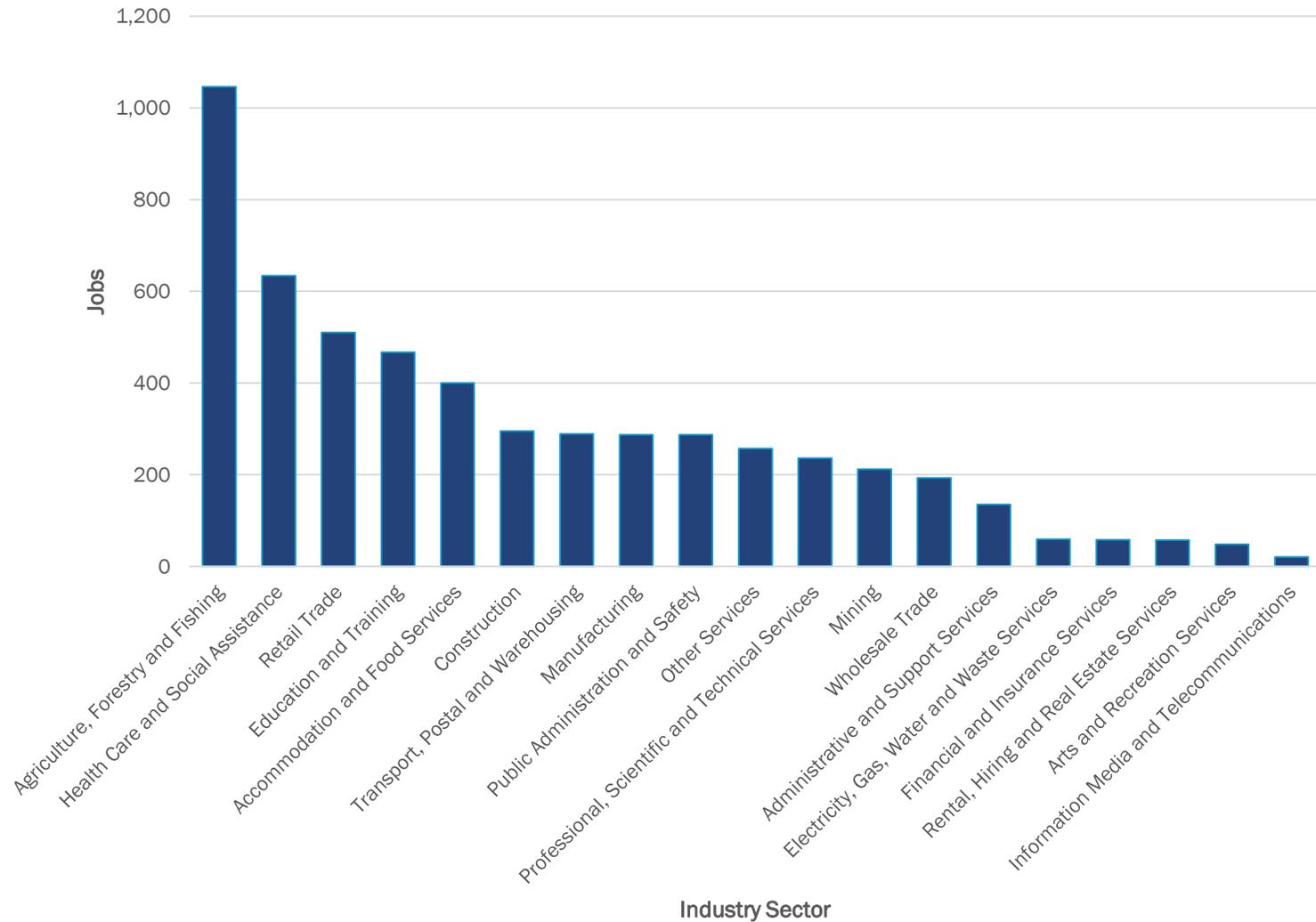
- According to the 2016 Census, 23.4% of people aged 15 years and over in Gunnedah Shire had a vocational educational qualification, which was notably higher than that for the State as a whole (18.1%).
- Fewer Gunnedah Shire residents aged 15 years and over held an Advanced Diploma or Diploma (6.8%) compared to NSW as a whole (8.9%).
- More people aged 15 years and over in Gunnedah Shire reported 'no qualification' (46.7%) compared to NSW as a whole (39.1%).
- Only 10.2% of Gunnedah Shire's population aged 15 years and over had a Bachelor Degree or higher compared to 23.4% for the State as a whole.

## OCCUPATIONAL PROFILE, GUNNEDAH SHIRE AND NEW SOUTH WALES, 2016



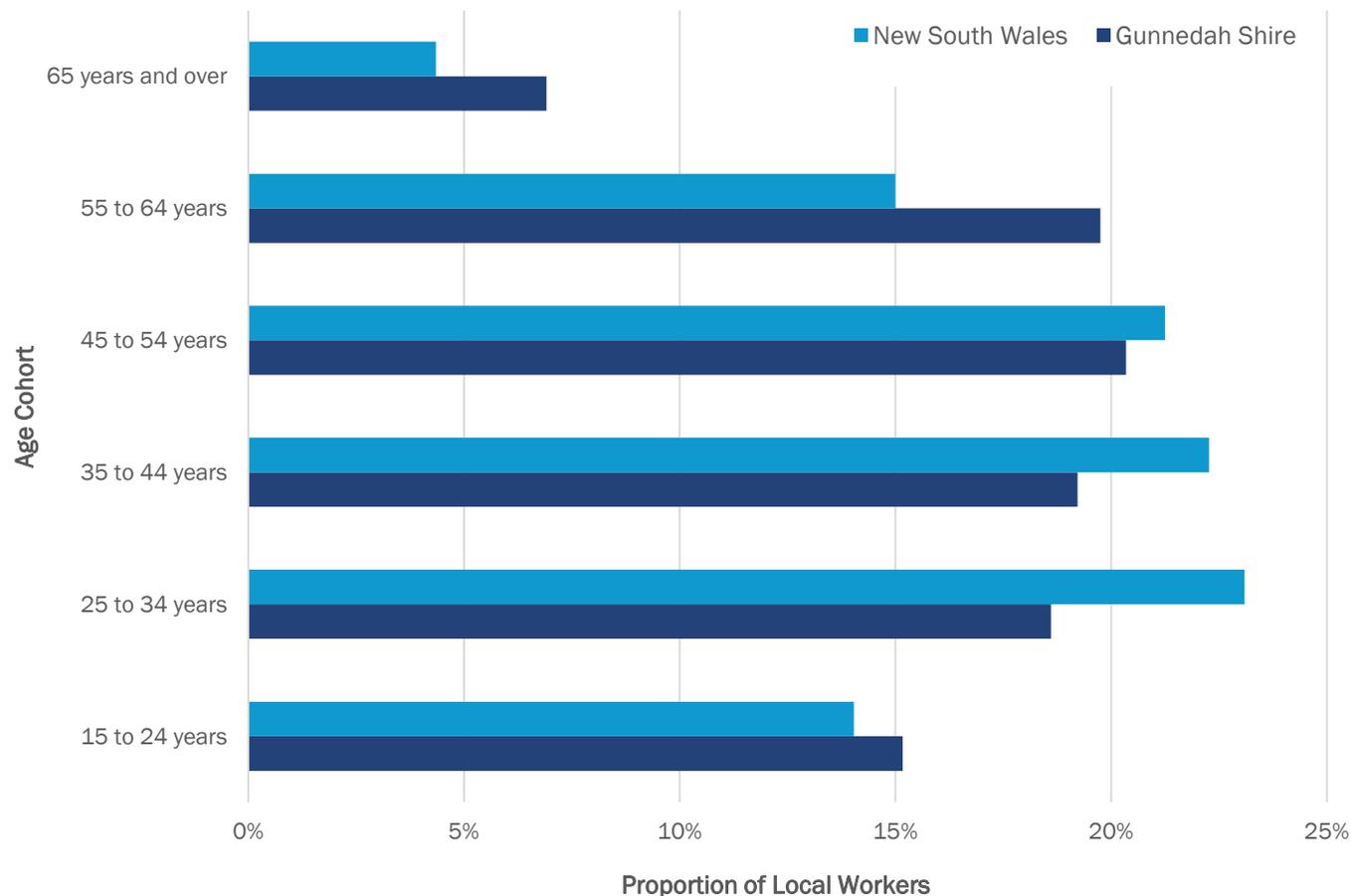
- According to the 2016 Census, Gunnedah Shire has a proportionally higher 'blue collar' working population than the NSW average.
- Gunnedah Shire has a proportionally higher representation of resident workers who are technicians and trade workers, machinery operators and drivers and labourers compared to the State average.
- A much lower share of Gunnedah Shire's working population is classed as 'professionals' (13.4%) compared to the NSW average (23.6%). This suggests a shortage of professionals and an opportunity to attract more workers in this field to Gunnedah.
- Gunnedah Shire however, has a proportionally higher representation of managers (16.8% of resident workers) compared to the NSW average (13.5%). This reflects the size of the Shire's agricultural sector with farmers accounting for a large proportion of this occupational class.

## EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY, GUNNEDAH SHIRE, 2018-19



- There are 5,490 jobs located in Gunnedah Shire.
- Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing accounts for the largest share of employment in the Shire (1,046 jobs or 19% of the total) followed by Health Care and Social Assistance, Retail Trade, Education and Training and Accommodation and Food Services.
- The main agricultural commodities produced in the Shire include cereal crops, other broadacre crops and livestock slaughterings (beef cattle and sheep).
- Other local industries which are also large employers, and which have strong supply chain links to Gunnedah Shire’s agricultural sector include Transport, Postal and Warehousing and Manufacturing (mainly food product manufacturing).
- Although the Mining industry is a relatively small employer in Gunnedah Shire, it is a significant contributor to the value of the Shire’s industry output, exports and value-added.

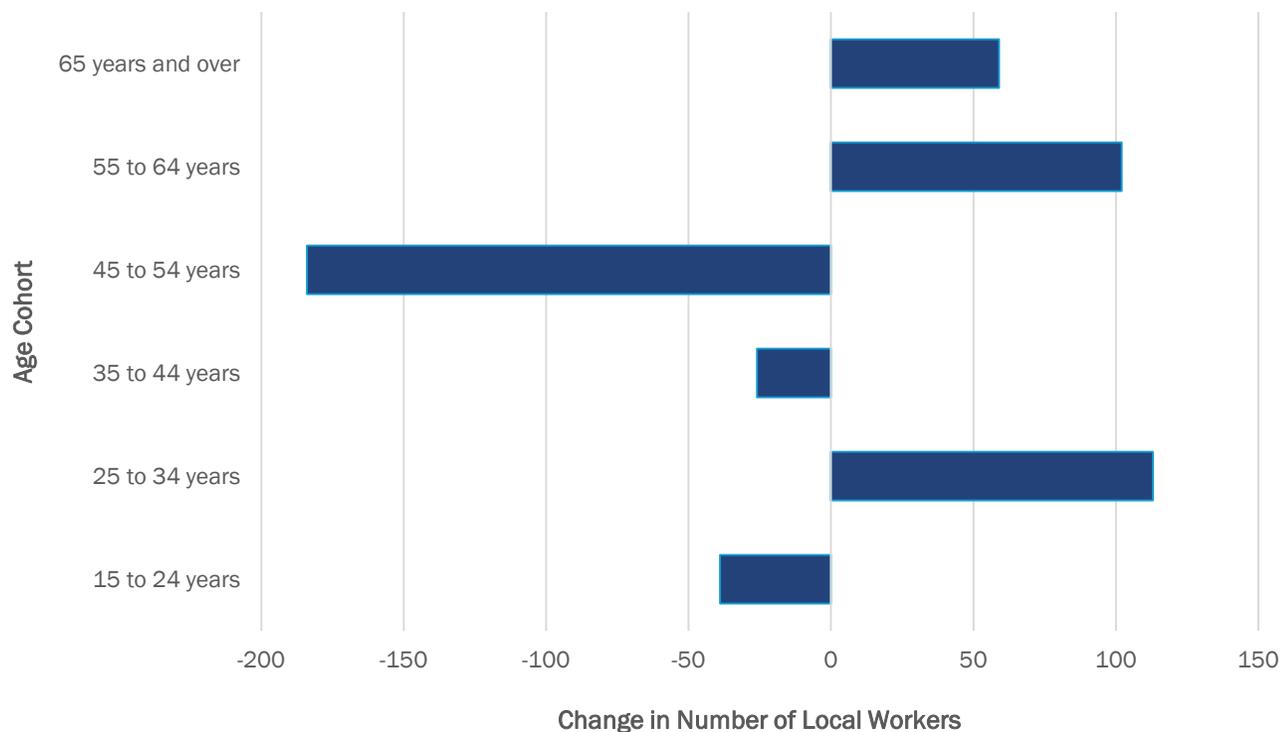
## AGE STRUCTURE OF LOCAL WORKERS, GUNNEDAH SHIRE, 2016



Source: economy.id with interpretations by SC Lennon & Associates

- Analysis of the age structure of the workforce in Gunnedah Shire shows there are more younger workers (15 to 44 years) than older workers (45 years and over) working in all industries.
- However, compared to NSW, at the time of the 2016 Census, there was a lower proportion of people in the younger age groups (15 to 44 years) and a higher proportion of people in the older age groups (45 years and over).
- Overall, 53% of Gunnedah Shire's workforce was aged under 45 years, compared to 59% for NSW, while 47% were aged 45 years +, compared to 41% for NSW.
- Looking at selected industries, in Gunnedah Shire:
  - There are fewer younger workers (15 to 44 years) than older workers (45 years and over) working in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing.
  - There are more younger workers (15 to 44 years) than older workers (45 years and over) working in Mining.
  - There are fewer younger workers (15 to 44 years) than older workers (45 years and over) working in Health Care and Social Assistance.

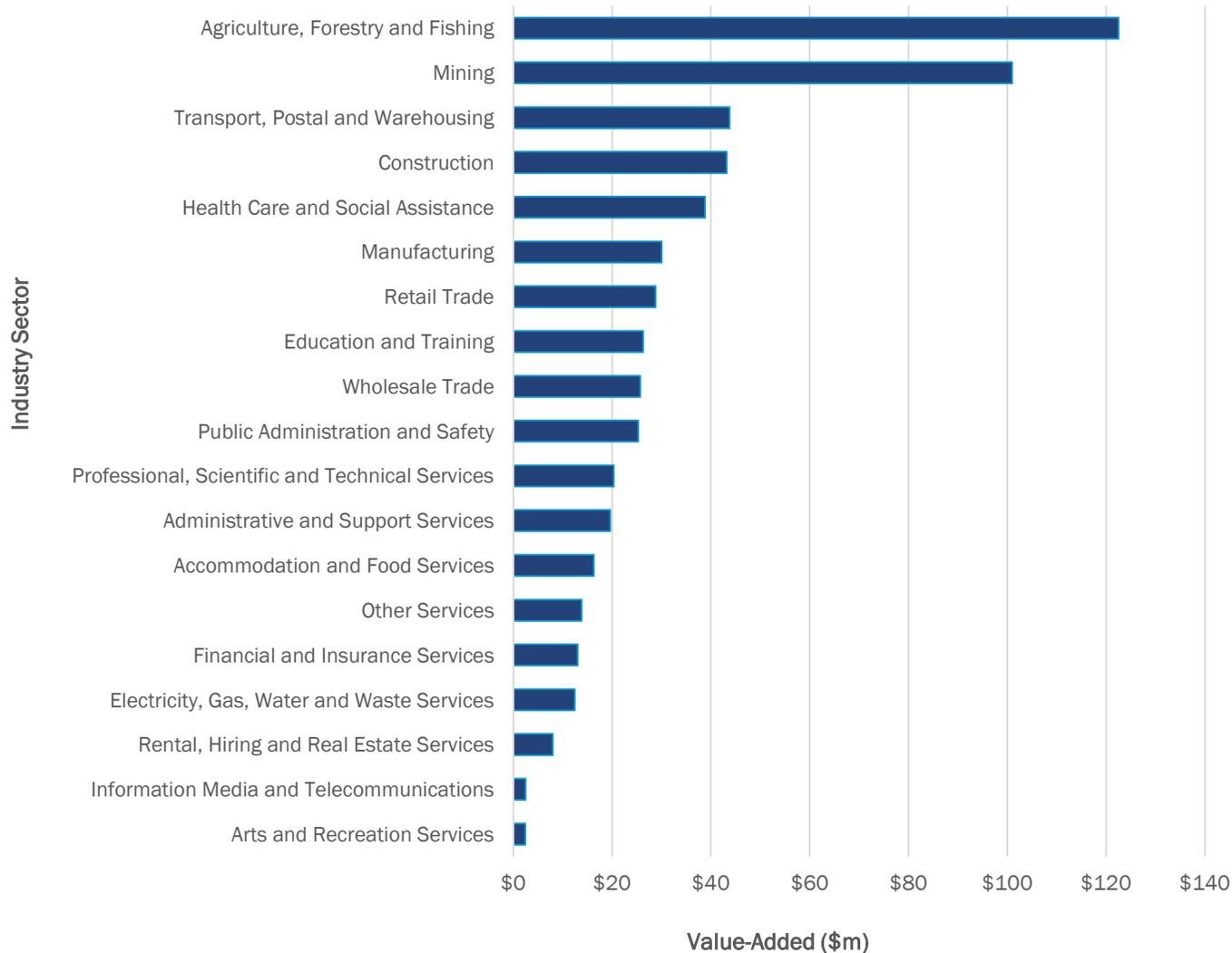
## CHANGE IN AGE STRUCTURE OF LOCAL WORKERS, GUNNEDAH SHIRE, 2011 TO 2016



- Gunnedah Shire's relatively older workforce profile may reflect the nature of the local profile of employment by industry, with agriculture being the Shire's largest industry of employment, as well as its fastest-growing industry.
- Nevertheless, the local workforce has been getting younger. According to the Census, the largest changes in the age structure of the local workforce between 2011 and 2016 were 45 to 54 years (a decline of 184 local workers); and 25 to 34 years (an increase of 113 local workers).
- Other changes in the age structure of the workforce in Gunnedah Shire between 2011 and 2016 were an increase in the number of local workers aged 55 to 64 years (+102 local workers) and an increase in the number of workers aged 65 years and over (+59 local workers).

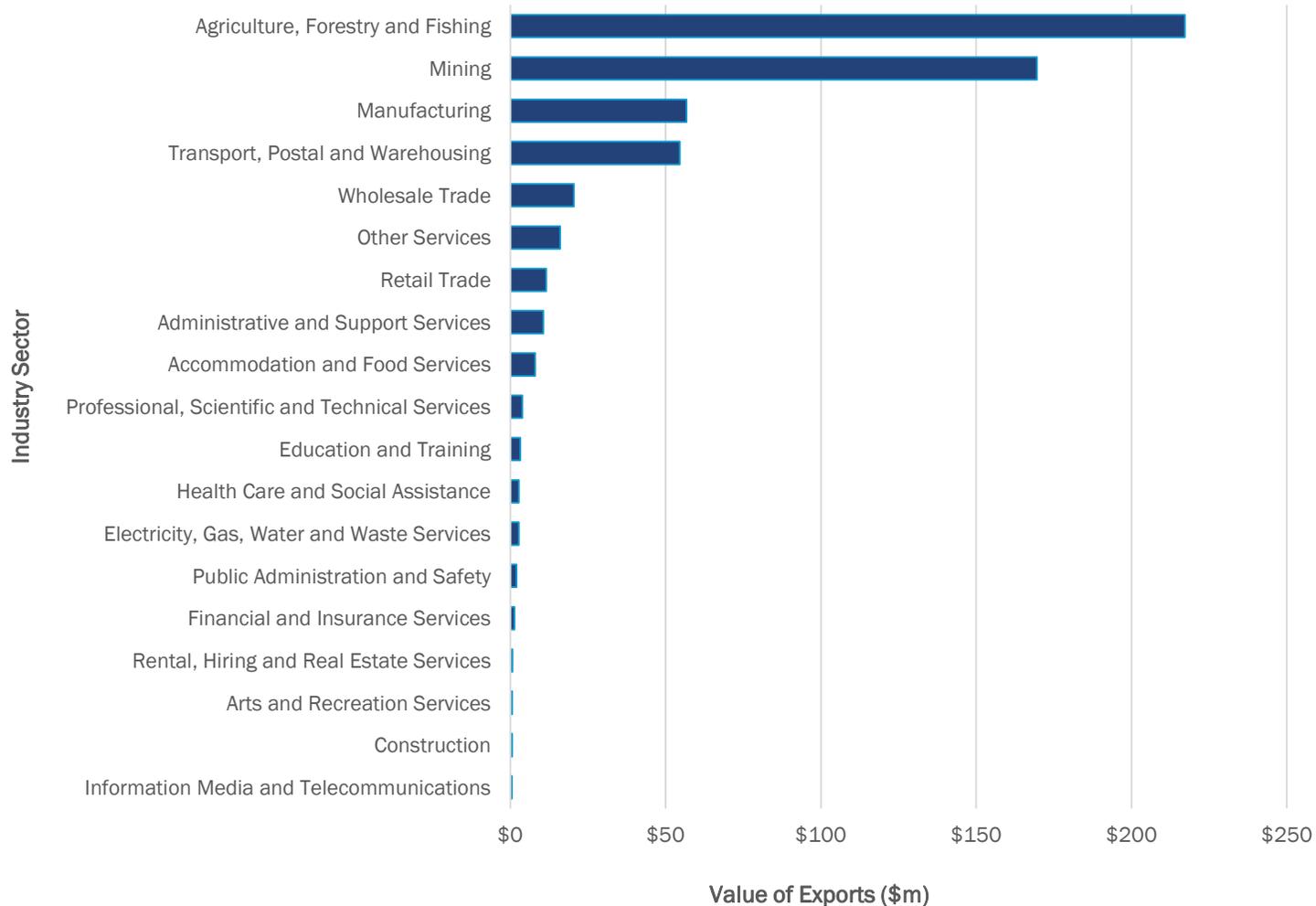
Source: [economy.id](http://economy.id) with interpretations by SC Lennon & Associates

## VALUE-ADDED BY INDUSTRY (\$M), GUNNEDAH SHIRE, 2018-19



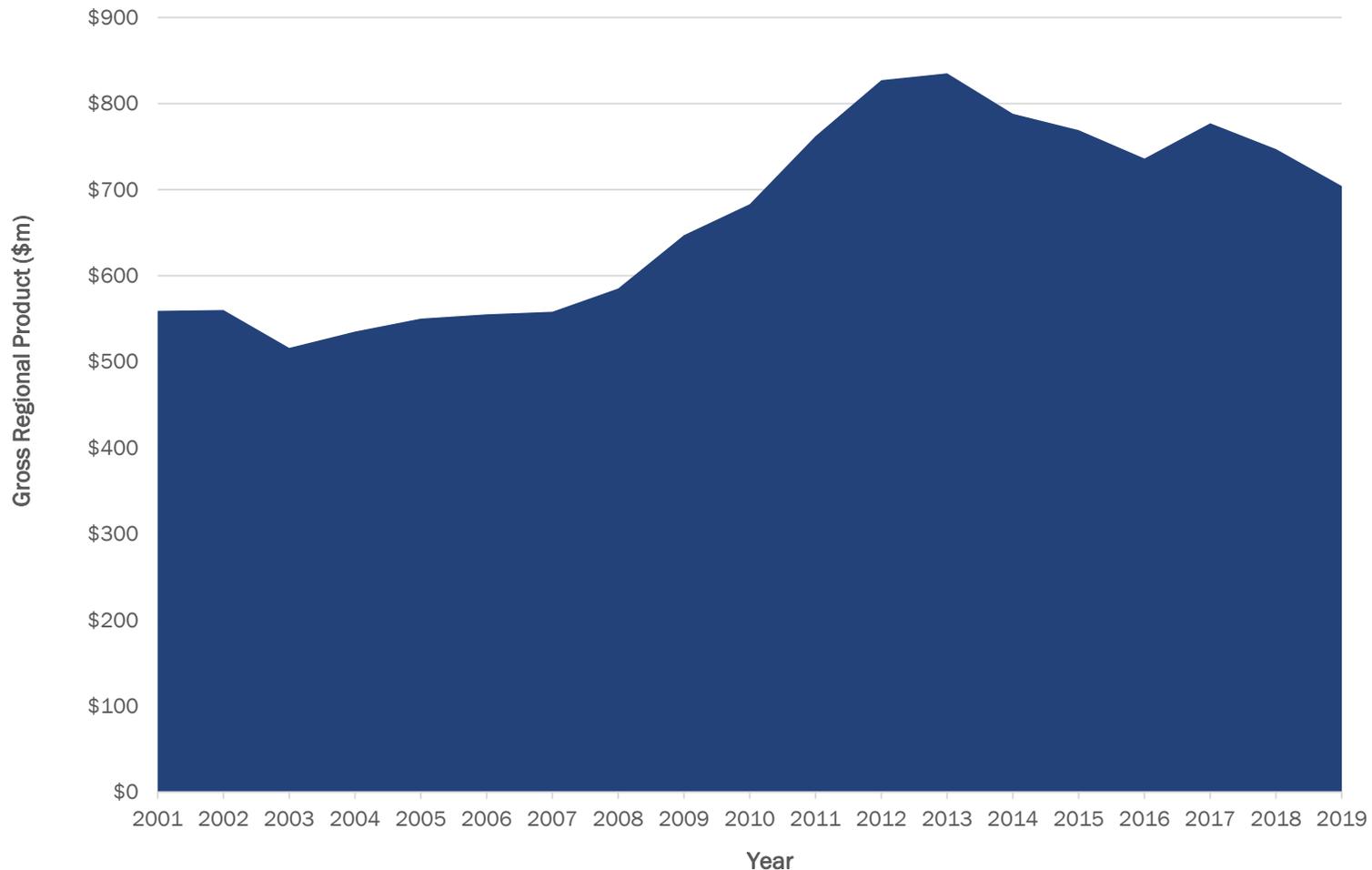
- **Value-added** (or industry's contribution to Gross Regional Product) is an indicator of business productivity. It is the value of goods and services produced by an industry less the cost of production inputs.
- As well as being the largest provider of jobs locally, Gunnedah Shire's agricultural sector accounts for 21% (\$122.5 million) of local industry value-added.
- Mining is the second-largest contributor to Gunnedah Shire's industry value-added, contributing 17% of the region's industry value-added (\$101 million), highlighting the importance of the resources sector to the local economy.
- Other industries which account for a large share of Gunnedah Shire's value-added include Transport, Postal and Warehousing, Construction, Health Care and Social Assistance and Manufacturing.

## EXPORTS BY INDUSTRY (\$M), GUNNEDAH SHIRE, 2018-19



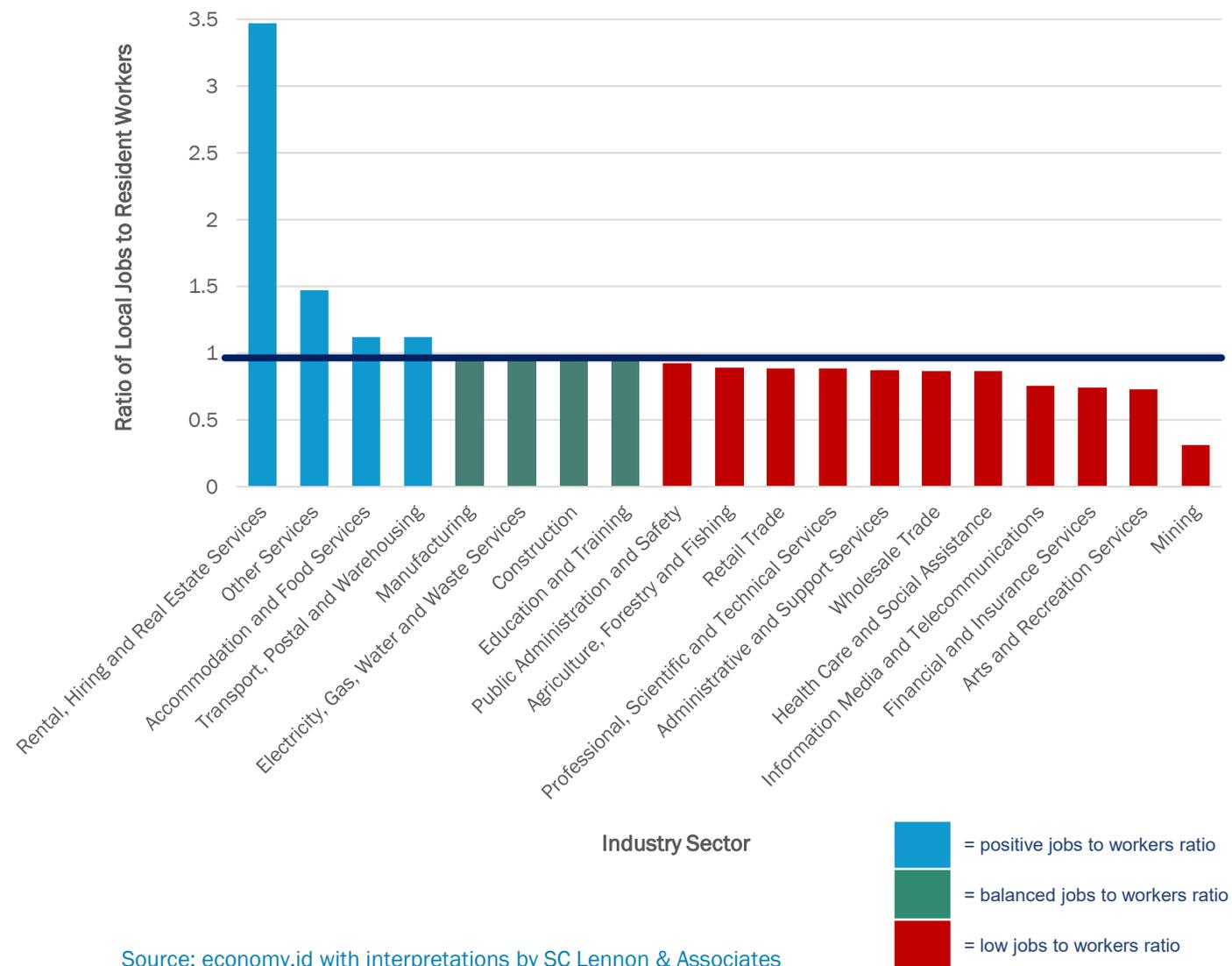
- **Exports** by industry are sales of goods and services to non-resident households, businesses and other organisations, outside the Gunnedah Shire LGA boundary. Exports (domestic) include all exports from the area to other parts of Australia. Exports (international) includes all exports from Gunnedah Shire to countries outside Australia.
- Gunnedah Shire’s ‘driver’ industries of agriculture, mining and manufacturing are its largest exporters by value. The agricultural sector accounts for 37% of the Shire’s exports worth \$217 million, while Mining accounts for another \$170 million of the Shire’s export value or 29% of the total.
- This is followed by Manufacturing (\$57 million) and the Transport, Postal and Warehousing sector (\$55 million), which each account for around 10% of Gunnedah Shire’s exports.

## GROSS REGIONAL PRODUCT (\$M), GUNNEDAH SHIRE, 2001 TO 2019



- **Gross Regional Product (GRP)** is a measure of the size or net wealth generated by the local / regional economy. It refers to the total dollar value of all goods and services produced in the economy over a one-year period.
- Gunnedah Shire's Gross Regional Product was \$704 million in the year ending June 2019, down 5.7% on the previous year.
- Over the ten-years to 2019, Gunnedah Shire's GRP displayed a small but steady average annual rate of growth, increasing by 0.8% per annum.
- Within this ten-year period, Gunnedah Shire experienced a sharp increase in GRP, from \$647 million in 2009 to \$835 million in 2013, an average annual increase of 6.6%. Since then, apart from a growth spike in 2017 (of 5.5%), Gunnedah Shire's GRP has fallen steadily at an average annual rate of 2.8%.
- GRP per capita in Gunnedah Shire is approximately \$55,500 compared to a NSW average of 66,000.

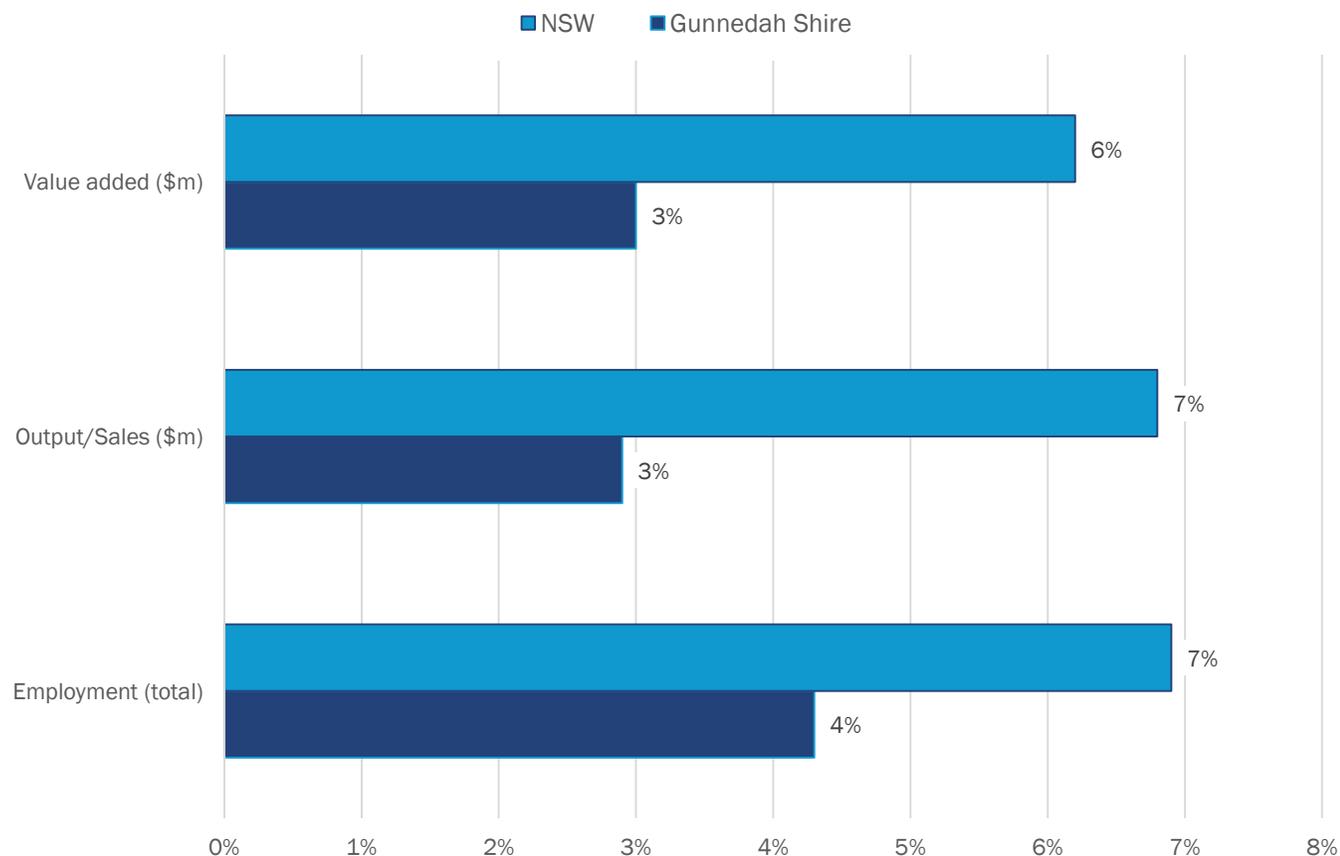
## EMPLOYMENT CAPACITY, GUNNEDAH SHIRE, 2018-19



Source: economy.id with interpretations by SC Lennon & Associates

- **Employment capacity** (or the jobs to resident workers ratio) is a way of looking at whether the Gunnedah Shire economy could theoretically provide jobs for all its residents if they were to choose to work locally. The jobs to resident workers ratio for Gunnedah Shire in 2018/19 was 0.88, meaning that, on the whole, there was a shortfall of jobs to resident workers. This may be a reflection of a local skills mis-match.
- Despite this, some industries had a very high ratio of jobs to resident workers, the highest being Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services (3.47), followed by Other Services (1.47), Accommodation and Food Services and Transport, Postal and Warehousing (1.12).
- Despite being the largest industry of employment in Gunnedah Shire, Agriculture has fewer local jobs to resident workers.
- Other key industries of note where there are fewer jobs available locally than there are residents working in those sectors include the Health Care and Professional Services sectors, and Mining, which had the lowest jobs to resident workers ratio of just 0.31. This reflects the fact that many mining industry workers would travel to work in neighbouring localities such as Narrabri.

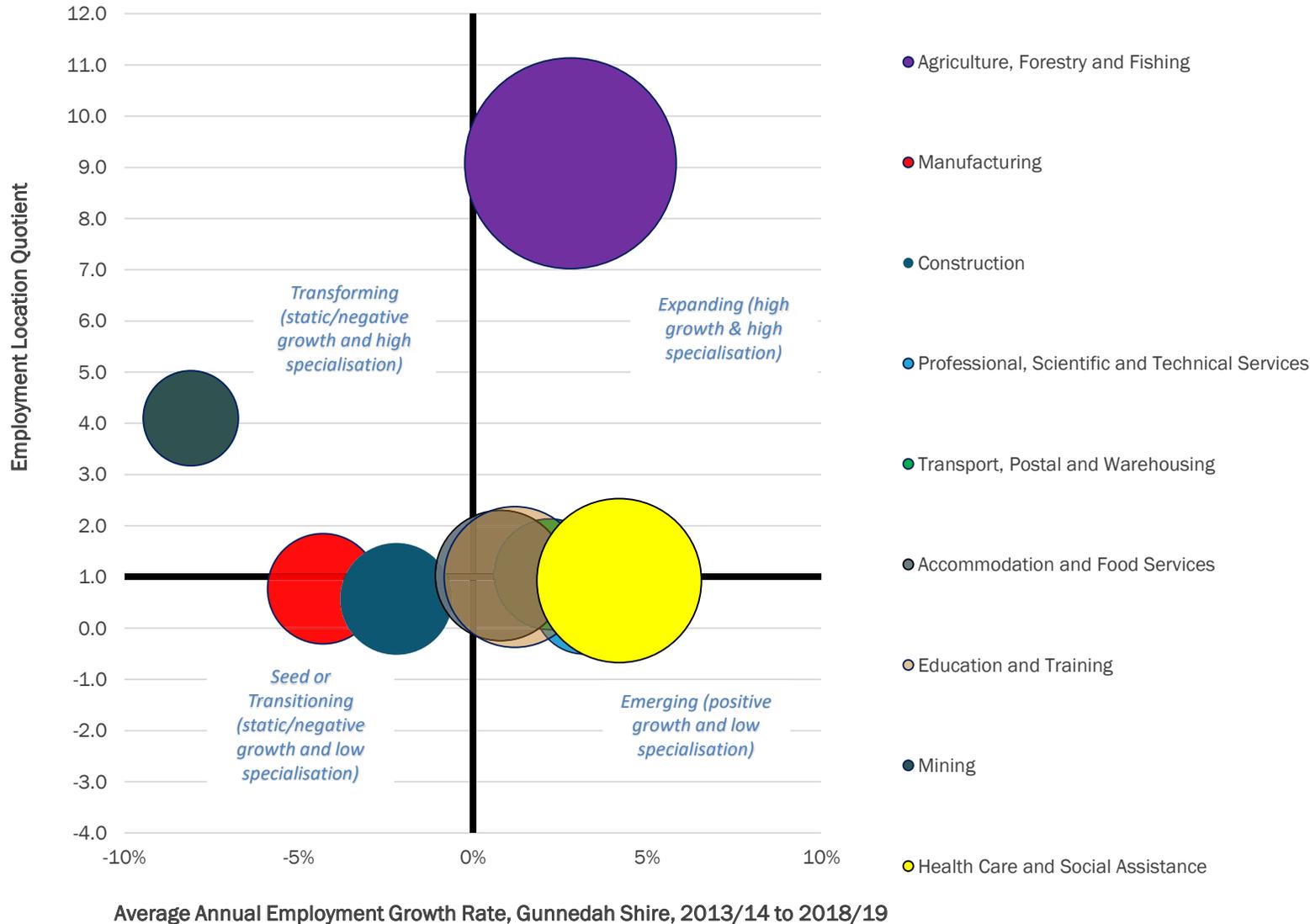
## VALUE OF TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY, GUNNEDAH SHIRE, 2018-19



- The tourism industry provides services to international and domestic visitors on day or overnight trips. Tourists include: those who travel for leisure (holidays); those visiting friends and relatives; and those travelling for work-related purposes.
- The tourism and hospitality sector accounts for only 4% of total employment in Gunnedah Shire compared to the NSW average of 7%. This is not surprising given the dominance of agriculture as the Shire's largest employer and the fact the local visitor economy is still developing.
- Gunnedah Shire's tourism and hospitality sector also falls well short compared to the NSW average in its contribution to output and industry value-added.
- This suggests there is scope to continue efforts to develop programs and projects which will enhance the contribution of tourism to economic development in Gunnedah Shire, including catalyst projects such as the Gunnedah Koala Park.

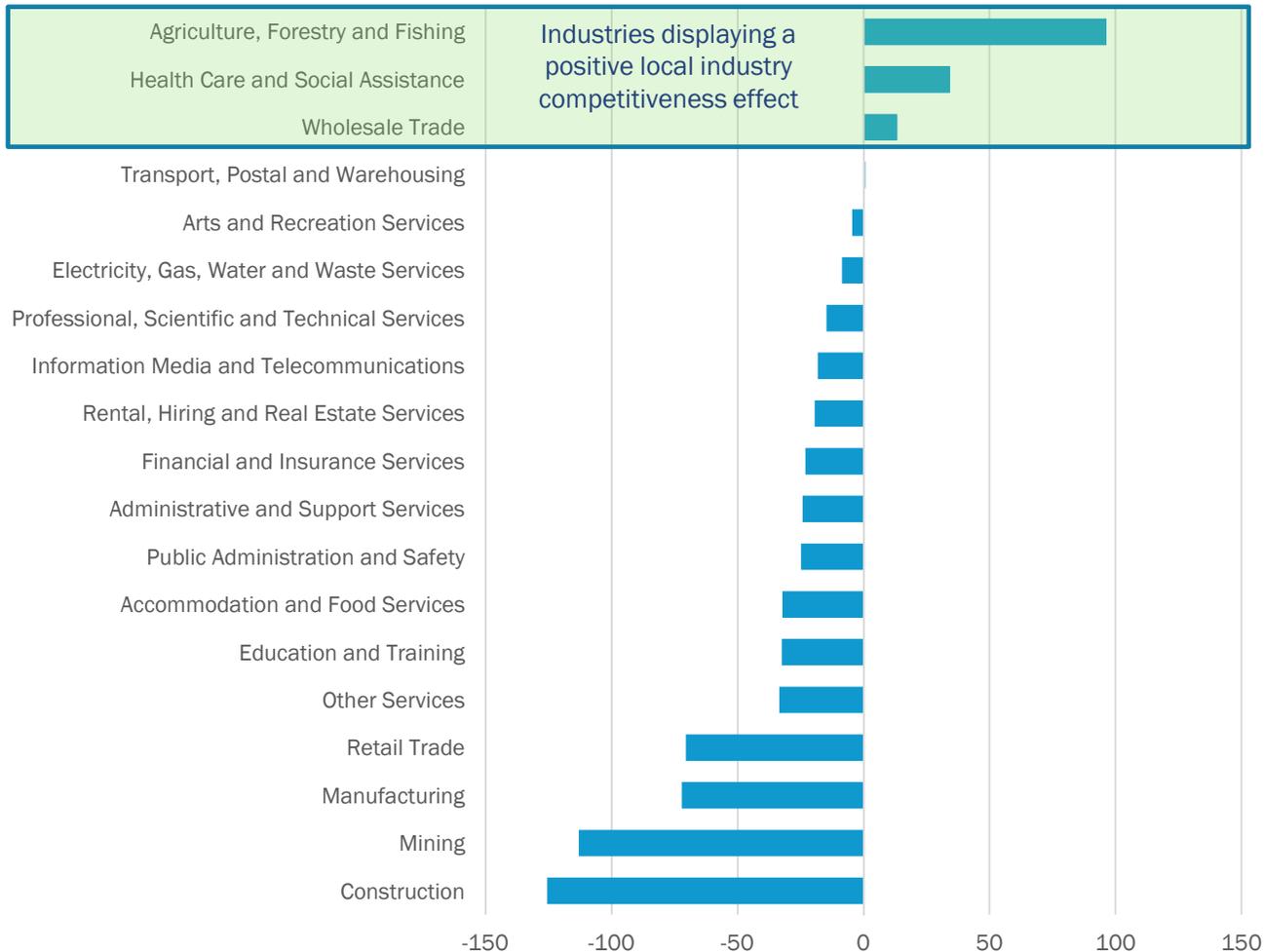
Source: NIEIR and economy.id with interpretations by SC Lennon & Associates

# INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT GROWTH/SHARE, SELECTED INDUSTRIES, 2013/14 – 2018/19, GUNNEDAH SHIRE



- This **'growth-share matrix'** shows how each of Gunnedah Shire's selected industries are performing relative to NSW with respect to its relative specialisation as indicated by its location quotient (LQ), its rate of average annual growth and its size as measured by the number of jobs in that industry sector.
- Agriculture, Gunnedah Shire's largest industry of employment, and which also has a very high level of specialisation as indicated by its employment location quotient of 9.08, continues to expand, growing at an average annual rate of 2.8% over the five years to 2018/19.
- Emerging industries (in employment terms) include Health Care and Social Assistance, Education and Training, Transport and, encouragingly, the Professional and Technical Services.
- Mining, despite its high level of specialisation, has experienced a notable decline in employment numbers over the five years to 2018/19.

## REGIONAL COMPETITIVE EFFECT BY INDUSTRY, GUNNEDAH SHIRE TO NSW, 2013-14 TO 2018-19



- **Shift-share analysis** provides a useful way of interpreting changes in economic variables between different time periods. It is a way of breaking the growth or decline in an industry into three components: national/state economic performance; broader industry performance; and regional competitiveness.
- The **regional competitive effect** for an industry (illustrated here) indicates how the local industry has performed (in employment numbers) against (state-wide) benchmark trends. An industry with a positive regional competitive effect suggests local characteristics supported above trend employment growth while a negative effect suggests local characteristics inhibited growth in that period.
- In Gunnedah Shire, the strongest regional competitive effect between 2013/14 and 2018/19 was experienced in the agricultural sector followed by the health care and social assistance sector and the wholesale trade sector. In other words, these local industries have performed well compared to the NSW average for those industries.
- In the same period, the weakest regional competitive effect was experienced in Gunnedah Shire's construction, mining, manufacturing and retail trade sectors.

## BROADER CONTEXT: GLOBAL CONSIDERATIONS

By virtue of its industrial structure and dynamics, with an economy underpinned by the two pillars of agriculture and mining, Gunnedah Shire has strong connections to national and world markets.

In preparing the Gunnedah Shire Economic Development Strategy, it is prescient to recognise that coal and gas will continue to play a significant role as sources of energy in Australia, while also appreciating that a diversified energy mix that reduces over-reliance on a single or a few primary energy sources will underpin future national and global economic activity.

Having long relied on mining, agriculture and to a lesser degree manufacturing to drive economic development, emerging global changes will have a direct and lasting impact on the way Gunnedah Shire 'does business'. Rather than posing a threat, economic transition in the context of a changing global energy mix, can be embraced by leveraging and capitalising on Gunnedah Shire's comparative and competitive advantages.

These include Gunnedah's strategic location, its wealth of industrial land, its heavy industry expertise, its agricultural know-how and a capacity to innovate, strong supply chains, construction capacity, its workforce, its natural attributes and attractions and its appealing rural lifestyle offer.

Gunnedah's place in a changing national and global economic landscape – as well as that of its neighbouring localities – is recognised by Namoi Unlimited, which has identified the factors influencing the region's capacity for growth to include: understanding national and global cycles of commodity markets; maximising innovation in agricultural production; seeking international investment, on the right terms; engaging the region in major overseas markets; understanding urbanisation; and leveraging regional and brand marketing to attract people to live and work in the region.



## THE SHORT-TERM: COVID-19 ECONOMIC IMPACTS

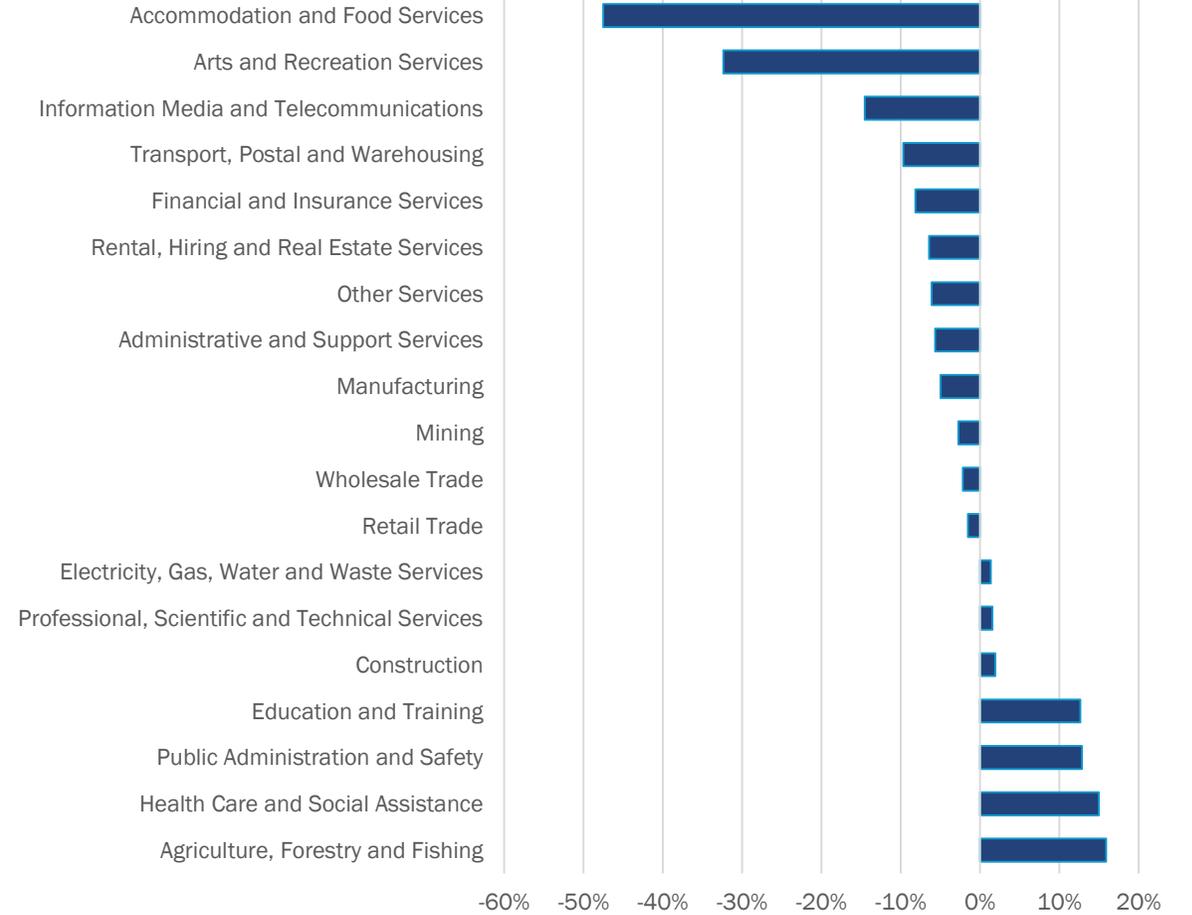
- In light of the COVID-19 pandemic that has affected cities and regions throughout Australia, the need to understand the local impacts on business and industry and to develop appropriate responses to help promote and support economic development is critical. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (September 2, 2020) reported that Australia's Gross Domestic Product fell 7.0 per cent in the June quarter 2020, the largest quarterly fall on record.
- According to Tourism Research Australia, Australian tourism saw overall losses of \$33.7 billion for January to June 2020. This is made up of international tourism losses of \$12 billion (53%) and domestic tourism losses of \$21.7 billion from overnight travel (\$17.7 billion) and day travel (\$4 billion).
- IBISWorld (June 2020) reports that Australia-wide, tourism industry revenue is forecast to decrease by 19.4% in 2019-20, due to the Government's inbound travel restrictions and limits to domestic travel. Those industries most adversely affected as a result include **manufacturing, mining, agriculture**, some **store-based retailing** and the **accommodation and food services** sector (including tourism operators). These industries are all important contributors to economic development in Gunnedah Shire.
- While the COVID-19 pandemic will impact on tourism movements in the short-term, over the medium to longer-term, growth prospects are positive. IBISWorld reports that domestic tourism is already beginning to slowly start back up, with tourism businesses expected to rely heavily on domestic leisure travellers in 2020-21.
- A COVID-19 Outlook Tool has been developed for Gunnedah Shire by economy id to show the economic and industry impacts at the LGA level. This tool draws on the economic forecast model developed by NIEIR and focuses on the impacts in September 2020 compared to 12 months earlier. The findings of the analysis, presented overleaf, show that while Gunnedah Shire's economic driver, Agriculture, has fared well, as has Health Care and Education, those industries most adversely affected include Accommodation and Food Services and Arts and Recreation Services.

## COVID-19 IMPACTS ON JOBS AND GRP, SEPTEMBER 2020 COMPARED TO SEPTEMBER 2019



Source: NIEIR and economy.id

## COVID-19 IMPACTS ON GUNNEDAH SHIRE'S INDUSTRY VALUE-ADDED, SEPTEMBER 2020 COMPARED TO SEPTEMBER 2019



Source: NIEIR and economy.id

# GUNNEDAH SHIRE'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ATTRIBUTES

The consultation and analysis undertaken to inform the preparation of the *Gunnedah Shire Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026* suggests that Gunnedah and the surrounding area has a wealth of attributes that it can capitalise upon in order to promote and support economic development, including:

## A Highly Productive Agricultural Region

- Gunnedah sits at the heart of a rich and productive agricultural region, the Liverpool Plains. Agriculture is a pillar of the Gunnedah Shire economy, which is driven by the production of high-quality beef cattle and sheep, grains and cotton. Fundamental to the success of Gunnedah's agricultural sector is the availability of irrigation water sourced from Keepit Dam, which has a capacity of 425,000ML, as well as extensive groundwater reserves.
- Supporting the area's agricultural industry, Gunnedah is home to professional service providers in agribusiness, agricultural engineering and other agricultural industry support services.

## A Strong Manufacturing Base

- Gunnedah has a competitive strength in manufacturing, which is one of the largest contributors to the Shire's industry output and exports. The local manufacturing sector is characterised by a strong food and beverage product manufacturing industry, which is linked to the region's agricultural sector.

## A Rich Resources Sector

- Gunnedah's mining industry is another pillar of the economy, second only to agriculture for the contribution it makes to local industry output, value-added and exports. The region surrounding Gunnedah is rich in coal and natural gas reserves with further industry expansion either planned or underway, which will generate more investment and more jobs in Gunnedah Shire in the near to medium-term.

## *The Gunnedah Basin's Booming Resources Sector*

*The resources sector is a driver of economic activity and employment in and around Gunnedah Shire. Around 10% of the estimated recoverable coal reserves in NSW are in the Gunnedah Basin. The Gunnedah Basin contains around 11.3% of the estimated recoverable coal reserves in NSW. There are six operational coal mines in the Gunnedah Basin which includes Maules Creek, Narrabri Underground, Boggabri Coal, Tarrawonga, Rocglen and the recently approved Vickery Extension Project. Other activities within Gunnedah Shire include extraction of clay. Quality coal from the Gunnedah Basin is highly sought after and is transported by rail to the Port of Newcastle for export.*

*The resources sector is expected to continue to grow for several decades in line with world demand. This industry brings with it a number of associated industry opportunities in mining-related services, including safety and other equipment sales and hire businesses, machinery and equipment service and maintenance businesses, transportation, vehicle hire and fuel supplies and employment services.*

*Other local industries benefit from the 'flow-on' effects of mining and related activities, in industries including retail, wholesale, personal services and hospitality.*

# GUNNEDAH SHIRE'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ATTRIBUTES

## *A Rich and Productive Agricultural Sector*

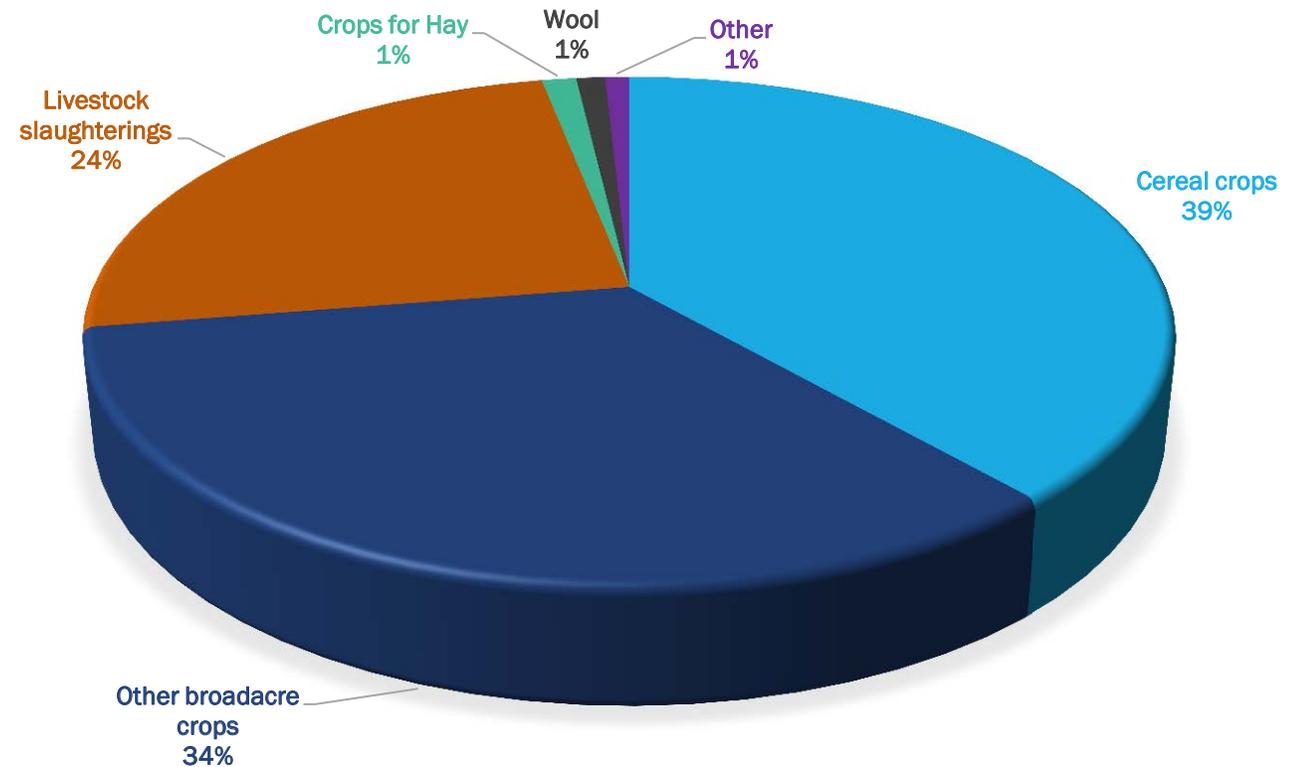
Agriculture is Gunnedah Shire's traditional economic mainstay and a pillar of the local economy. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2015/16 the total value of agricultural production in Gunnedah Shire was around \$182 million.

The region specialises in beef cattle production and broadacre cropping. Wheat is the most commonly grown winter crop, while in summer, the region produces cotton (the highest value crop) along with sorghum and sunflowers.

Gunnedah is home to cotton producer Carroll Cotton Co, which is undergoing a major upgrade to increase production. Gunnedah is also home to three grain mills producing a variety of wheats and maize, along with a specialty mill producing a range of organic and bio-dynamic varieties from wheat to rye, spelt, oats, sorghum and other grains.

Local speciality miller Wholegrain Milling has expanded production to include high-quality milled grains for artisan bakeries throughout Australia and overseas.

**SHARE OF VALUE OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION BY COMMODITY (% OF TOTAL), GUNNEDAH SHIRE, 2015/16**



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Value of Agricultural Commodities Produced, Australia, 2015-16. Cat. No. 7503.0

# GUNNEDAH SHIRE'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ATTRIBUTES

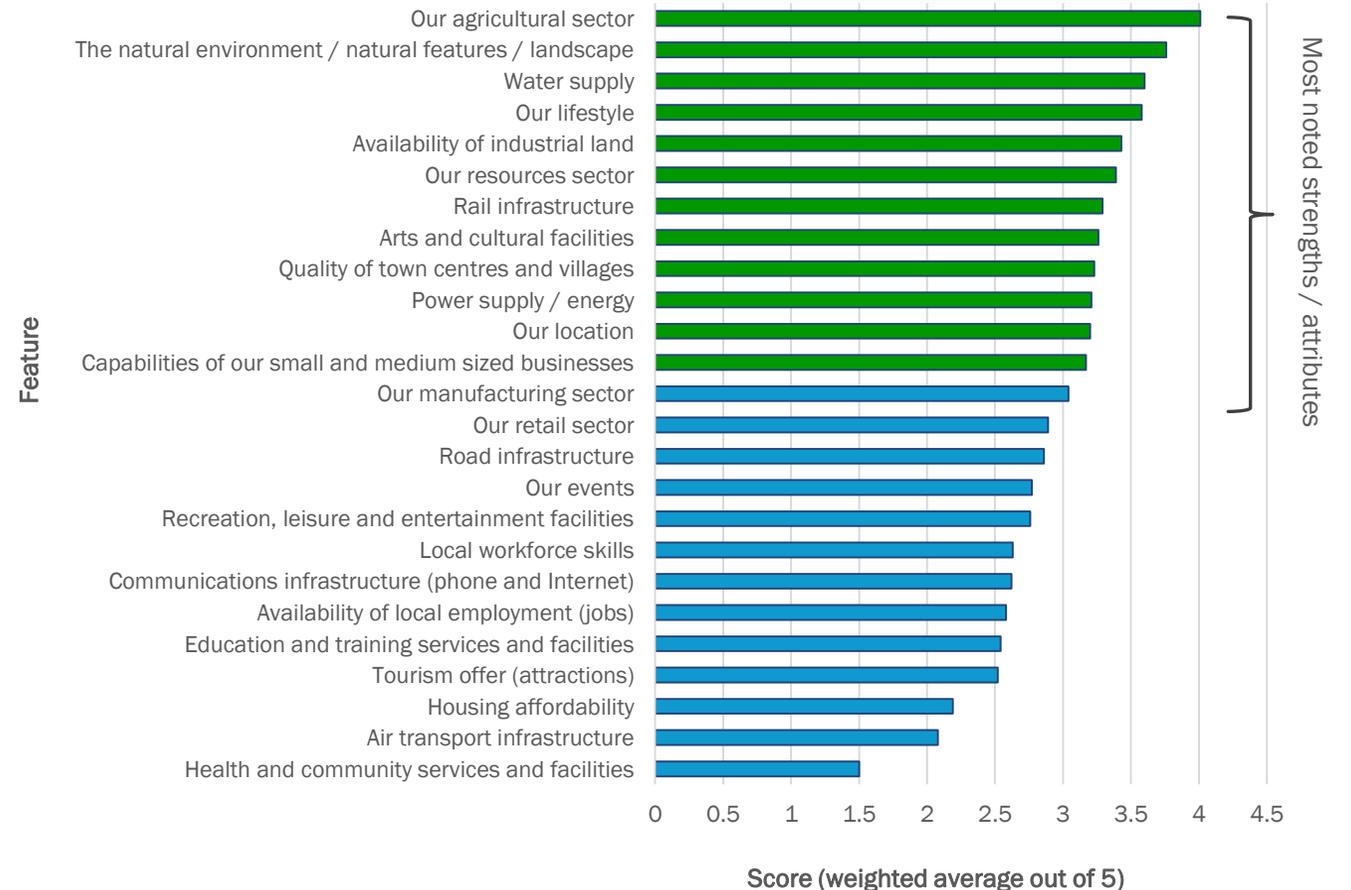
## The Gunnedah Shire Economic Development Survey

To help inform the preparation of the Gunnedah Shire Economic Development Strategy 2021-2025, Gunnedah Shire Council administered an online survey throughout December 2020 and January 2021.

The survey invited Gunnedah Shire's businesses and residents to provide their views on, amongst other things, the Shire's key economic attributes. A total of 180 responses were received, with those surveyed identifying the following as **the Shire's most significant economic strengths**:

- The agricultural industry;
- The natural environment / features / landscape;
- Water supply;
- Gunnedah's lifestyle;
- The availability of industrial land;
- The resources sector;
- Rail infrastructure;
- Arts and cultural facilities;
- The quality of the Shire's town centres;
- Power supply;
- The Shire's location; and
- Local business capabilities.

## IDENTIFIED ECONOMIC STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES, GUNNEDAH SHIRE (WHERE 1 = SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE; 5 = GREAT STRENGTH)



Source: Gunnedah Shire Economic Development Survey (2020/21)

# GUNNEDAH SHIRE'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ATTRIBUTES

## Strong Transport Connections and Digital Connectivity

- **Road** - Gunnedah has major highway access to Sydney and Brisbane and direct highway access to the Port of Newcastle.
- **Passenger rail** - The North West rail line runs through Gunnedah with daily passenger services to and from Sydney.
- **Rail freight connections** - Existing freight connectivity to the ports of Newcastle and Sydney will be enhanced by connection to the future Inland Rail.
- **Air transport** - Nearby Tamworth Airport offers direct services to Brisbane as well as several daily passenger flights to Sydney.
- Gunnedah's proximity to the regional centre of Tamworth and the Tamworth Airport is an attribute that can be leveraged to attract people and investment.
- Gunnedah is well-connected via the National Broadband Network (NBN). Fibre and wireless technology provide businesses and residents in Gunnedah with direct access to high-speed broadband Internet (although there are reportedly some connectivity shortfalls in the Shire's outlying areas).
- A combination of natural endowments and good enabling infrastructure means Gunnedah Shire and the wider region is well located with accessibility and connectivity to national and international markets, has highly productive agricultural land and significant mineral resources and strong lifestyle attributes, all of which provide a strong foundation for investment attraction.

## Proximity to Inland Rail

- Gunnedah and the region is well placed to capitalise on the Inland Rail project. Gunnedah Shire Council proposes to construct an intermodal freight and container area abutting the existing main rail line – the Gunnedah Intermodal Freight Terminal (GIFT). This new infrastructure would utilise an existing coal rail loop and involve construction of a new 400 metre rail siding, complete with a new connecting turnout back onto the main line to allow continuous direction travel west to the Inland Rail connection at or about Narrabri and beyond.

### ***The Inland Rail Opportunity for Gunnedah Shire***

Inland Rail is a once-in-a-generation project connecting regional Australia to domestic and international markets, and is expected to complete the backbone of the national freight network between Melbourne and Brisbane. What will be the largest freight rail infrastructure project in Australia, the Inland Rail is expected to be operational by 2025.

A fully integrated, efficient and cost-effective east coast supply chain will improve the regional economies along the inland rail network and be a strategic asset for the eastern seaboard and the national economy. Gunnedah will benefit from the Inland Rail through its proximity to a proposed inland rail intermodal freight terminal at Narrabri, as well as to the proposed rail hub to be at Werris Creek and future developments proposed for Tamworth.

# GUNNEDAH SHIRE'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ATTRIBUTES

## *A Diverse Labour Force Supported by Local Education and Training*

- Gunnedah Shire's labour force is diverse, offering a range of skills with regional specialisations including engineering, farm management and agricultural services, as well as strengths in mining and related service industries. Local job agencies and an upgraded TAFE, which provides services and facilities for skills training, supports local workforce development.
- While employed residents are increasingly working in areas beyond Gunnedah, this pool of labour provides a ready workforce when local projects turn on.
- There are good education and training options in Gunnedah, including numerous pre-schools and primary schools, two high schools, a TAFE and Community College.

## *A Vibrant Small Business Sector Operating in a Business-Friendly Shire*

- Supported by the Gunnedah Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Gunnedah is home to a diversity of innovative and creative small businesses.
- Gunnedah Shire Council recognises the importance of presenting a business-friendly environment, to encourage investment, innovation and entrepreneurship. Council's Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS) encourages the growth of local businesses, services and the digital economy through education, employment, training and innovation.

## *Abundant Industrial Land*

- Gunnedah Shire has capacity to accommodate extensive industrial development, with close to 420 hectares of industrial land, with up to 220 hectares located within the Shire's three main industrial precincts.
- Gunnedah is accessible to a network of employment areas across the broader region.

## *Gunnedah Saleyards*

- Gunnedah's livestock selling centre is ranked in the top four in New South Wales, and consistently yards more than 120,000 prime beef cattle per year, with a turnover of \$100 million per annum.



# GUNNEDAH SHIRE'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ATTRIBUTES

## An Emerging Tourism Sector

- While tourism is at present only a small industry in Gunnedah Shire, there is an opportunity to explore ways to tap into and grow existing visitor markets including the VFR (visiting friends and relatives) market, grey nomads and the corporate traveller market. The Gunnedah Shire Economic Health Check prepared by economy id in 2020 suggests that visitation and tourism value has been increasing in recent years.
- The **Gunnedah Cultural Precinct** is a key asset hosting a diversity of activities including cinema, live shows and gallery displays. Gunnedah also has a thriving **events** sector with a diversity of sporting, cultural and industry-based festivals and events held throughout the year.
- Gunnedah's agricultural heritage is a strengths which can be capitalised upon for tourism. There are strong links between the events sector and Gunnedah's agricultural industry through AgQuip, which is held in Gunnedah annually. The Southern Hemisphere's largest agricultural field day, AgQuip showcases the latest agricultural industry products, innovations and services. Since 1973, AgQuip has attracted over 100,000 visitors to Gunnedah over three days in August each year.
- The Shire's natural environment is a feature of the area's tourism appeal, and Gunnedah is surrounded by the Liverpool Plains and the Nandewar Ranges. Encompassing a large geographic area, rich in cultural heritage and containing unique natural landscapes, including several national parks, Gunnedah contains a diverse range of tourism attractions and destination opportunities.
- Known as the **'Koala Capital of the World'**, Gunnedah is poised to capitalise on this unique natural attribute with investment committed to a planned new Gunnedah Koala Sanctuary and Hospital.
- Gunnedah has a number of significant sites of Indigenous cultural heritage. There is an opportunity to explore agri-tourism opportunities, including opportunities around the production of local bush tucker.

## **Gunnedah Koala Park**

Gunnedah Shire Council has approved an operational model for the new \$6.48 million Gunnedah Koala Park and Hospital, which will be set on a 50 acre bush setting with its entrance on the Oxley Highway.

This new catalyst project, when complete, will feature themed accommodation, a restaurant / function area, a ropes course and an international volunteer program. It will include a 'big koala' at the entrance to the park, a eucalyptus plantation, mini-golf, a crocodile enclosure and an education centre.

The Koala park project is on a scale that is new to Gunnedah and is designed to secure the Shire's place as a tourism destination for both the domestic and international markets.

While the project is still in the concept phase, Council has the funding in place, a preferred location and a feasible operational model, with an experienced park operator, the CaPTA Group, committed to the project.

Once fully operational, the Koala Park is expected to attract around 70,000 visitors annually.

# PART 3 PROSPECTS



**Gunnedah**  
Shire Council  
Open New Horizons



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## The Economic Diversification Challenge

- Gunnedah Shire still faces the challenge of reducing its current dependency on the agricultural and mining industries and achieving a balance between industry and environmental protection. The coal industry's contribution to the regional economy is significant but expected to diminish over time. Long-term, Gunnedah needs to be prepared for a post-carbon economy.
- According to the Gunnedah Shire Economic Health Check prepared by economy id in 2020, Gunnedah's industry profile is relatively specialised and is less diverse than the regional average. A diversified economy is generally more resilient than a concentrated one, as declines in one sector can be compensated by growth in others.
- There are a number of opportunities that have the potential to diversify the Gunnedah economy. For example, the investment pipeline includes large projects such as the extension of Vickery South mine, redevelopment of Gunnedah hospital, construction of the proposed Gunnedah Koala Sanctuary and Hospital, a beef processing facility and redevelopment of the Gunnedah Saleyards.

## Resource Industry Opportunities

- Although the national and global economies are transitioning, or preparing to transition away from carbon-dependency, mining will continue to play a role in driving economic activity and employment in and around Gunnedah Shire for some years to come. There is an opportunity for Gunnedah to capitalise on resource sector growth by establishing itself as a permanent residential base for mining industry workers and their families.
- It was suggested during the consultations that the mining sector could do more to re-invest back into the Gunnedah Shire community, through, for example, a 'legacy fund'.

- In future, the Hunter Gas Pipeline may extend past Gunnedah, potentially presenting opportunities for local business and industry.

## Investment Attraction

- Investment attraction efforts should always focus on **'people attraction'** as much as industry attraction. Gunnedah Shire Council recognises this in its efforts to promote the Shire through its 'Open for Business' investment promotion campaign.
- Council can continue to leverage its competitive advantages including its agricultural and related manufacturing capabilities, its lifestyle appeal and its location to compete with the Tamworth, Narrabri and Liverpool Plains Shires (as well as other regional locations) in attracting investment and workers looking to relocate to regional NSW.
- Working in collaboration with local businesses, perhaps through the Gunnedah and District Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Gunnedah Shire Council could explore and potentially coordinate a campaign to promote its small regional city lifestyle to prospective skilled workers / 'knowledge workers' / professionals / creatives (and their families) (especially doctors and other health care workers) through a **'Gunnedah Now Hiring' program** for example.
- Gunnedah Shire and the wider region is well located with connectivity to national and international markets, has highly productive agricultural land and significant mineral resources and strong lifestyle attributes, all of which provide a strong foundation for investment attraction. Lifestyle is a foundation of Gunnedah Shire's 'Live and Invest in Gunnedah' promotional campaign.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## Workforce Skills Planning and Development

- Gunnedah Shire has a workforce shortage, particularly in skilled positions. According to the Gunnedah Shire Workforce Plan 2020-24, businesses across a range of industries have difficulty finding and retaining skilled and experienced employees, putting a strain on growth and productivity. Gunnedah could explore a **'Grow Your Own in Gunnedah' Program**, which would seek to match local trainees, apprentices and graduates with local businesses.
- Gunnedah is exposed to skill shortages due to out-migration of younger workers and an outflow of resident workers. Further, the expansion of mining can 'crowd-out' employment opportunities in other sectors. There is a need to retain young people in Gunnedah through clear employment pathways.
- Gunnedah Shire's relatively low education and skills profile poses a constraint to growth with economies increasingly reliant on technology and knowledge. Recent research has identified a need to develop effective **career pathways** relevant to Gunnedah's (and the region's) economy that better connect and transition young people into the workforce.
- Attracting university graduates to Gunnedah is a challenge. Gunnedah is also losing a large percentage of its young people to pursue further studies and employment opportunities elsewhere. The concept establishing a **Country Universities Centre** in Gunnedah, perhaps focussed on supporting course access delivery in key areas of need such as health, as well disciplines including, for example, agribusiness and engineering, could be explored to help address this issue.
- The consultations suggested that there is a need for further investment in the capacity of Gunnedah's **secondary schooling** and **TAFE** to support a greater diversity of local education and employment pathways.
- The consultations suggested that there is a mis-match between the course offerings of TAFE and local industry needs (i.e. certain trade skills are lacking).

### **Building a Sustainable Workforce: The Gunnedah Shire Workforce Plan**

Capacity-building for a sustainable local / regional workforce and economy requires Gunnedah Shire, as a community, to equip itself with the skills, knowledge and capabilities it needs to adapt to a changing economic environment.

Building workforce capacity will provide Gunnedah with the opportunity to help shape and manage its own physical, social, economic and cultural environment in response to global economic trends and influences.

Education and training and the articulation of employment pathways, to deliver an appropriately skilled workforce is essential to developing Gunnedah Shire's workforce capacity. Local businesses, both big and small, need access to workers with appropriate skills, and human capital is one of the most important inputs to economic activity because it is crucial to supporting businesses to be competitive.

The Gunnedah Shire Workforce Plan sets objectives to ensure that Gunnedah Shire has high quality local skills that are accessible and responsive to the needs of employers and employees (both future and current).

Gunnedah Shire Council aims to support Gunnedah Shire by ensuring a skilled workforce and local educational opportunities by supporting students/learners, job seekers, industry and training providers for a strong local economy now and into the future.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## Workforce Skills Planning and Development (cont'd)

- Despite having a relatively low rate of unemployment, Gunnedah Shire nevertheless has pockets of social disadvantage and problems with youth unemployment and under-employment / workforce casualisation.
- The development of a skilled and adaptable workforce is critical to the future success of Gunnedah Shire's traditional industry strengths in agriculture, manufacturing, transport and mining, as well as new and emerging 'knowledge-based' industry sectors like advanced manufacturing (e.g. machinery and componentry manufacturing), mining equipment, technology and services and professional services.
- With the presence of TAFE NSW in Gunnedah (which has recently undergone a \$3 million upgrade) and the Shire's proximity to the University of New England, **'education and industry innovation'** should form a central platform of Gunnedah Shire's vision for economic development.
- Building the knowledge economy and a pool of skilled labour a key contributor to a successful economy. The Lower North West Regional Economic Development Strategy 2018-2022 recognises this and includes several actions to address labour and skill shortages including the development of **new trade training facilities** (e.g. the proposed Gunnedah Training Centre) and/or a university campus.
- Council could explore opportunities to address local skills gaps and build workforce capacity through a **Designated Area Migration Agreement**. This is a formal agreement between the Australian Government and a regional, state or territory authority. It provides access to more overseas workers than the standard skilled migration program and is designed to provide flexibility for regions to respond to their unique economic and labour market conditions. (See text box overleaf).

## **Skills For The Future**

Skills For The Future - A study into the skill needs of businesses in the Northern Inland region of NSW, identifies a number of key recommendations, as follows:

- Further Vocational Education and Training needs to be made available locally in all major towns and cities across the Northern Inland.
- Increasing the availability of online courses through an expansion of TAFE Digital to encompass higher-level Certificates and Diplomas.
- A renewed focus on work-experience programs in high- schools and for school leavers and jobseekers of any age, coupled with coaching in job- readiness, work ethic and attitude.
- Clearer pathways from VET to tertiary education, including the expansion of hybrid degrees between TAFE and the University of New England.
- An expansion of successful programs such as the Agribusiness Careers and Professions Program (AGCAP) to other key industry sectors.
- Increased promotion and targeting of the numerous subsidised training packages to employers e.g. NSW Government's Smart and Skilled.
- Regionally based organisations such as the Greater Northern Skills Development Group should play a more active role in encouraging and assisting skills development and training throughout the region. There exists a need for an intermediary between industry employers and training providers, who can articulate the needs of employers and trainees to shape VET delivery that works best for them.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## *Designated Area Migration Agreements*

A designated area migration agreement (DAMA) is a formal agreement between the Australian Government and a regional, state or territory authority. It provides access to more overseas workers than the standard skilled migration program. DAMAs operate under an agreement-based framework, providing flexibility for regions to respond to their unique economic and labour market conditions.

A DAMA is a two-tier framework covering a defined regional area. The first tier is an overarching five-year deed of agreement (head agreement) with the region's representative. The second tier comprises individual labour agreements with employers under the settings of the head agreement for that region.

DAMA labour agreements are between the Australian Government and endorsed employers operating within the relevant region. They are generally in effect for five years, and use the subclass 482 Temporary Skills Shortage (TSS), subclass 494 Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional (Provisional), and subclass 186 Employer Nominated Scheme (ENS) visa programs.

Employers must seek and gain endorsement from the Designated Area Representative before lodging a labour agreement request.

Under the DAMA framework, employers in designated areas experiencing skills and labour shortages can sponsor skilled and semi-skilled overseas workers. Individuals cannot directly access a DAMA. Individuals need to be sponsored by an employer operating in a designated region for an occupation that is specified in the head agreement.

DAMAs ensure employers recruit Australian citizens and permanent residents as a first priority. Among other things, employers must demonstrate a genuine attempt to recruit Australians prior to getting access to a DAMA labour agreement.

Source: <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/employing-and-sponsoring-someone/sponsoring-workers/nominating-a-position/labour-agreements/designated-area-migration-agreements>

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## Lifestyle and Liveability

- The consultations highlighted that, in order to attract and retain skilled labour, Gunnedah's lifestyle offer must be competitive, including the fundamentals like quality, affordable housing, schools, health care services and facilities, and child care, which it was reported, is lacking.
- **Housing affordability** has been identified as an emerging challenge in Gunnedah, particularly if the Shire continues to attract investment and grow local business and industry. According to the Gunnedah Shire Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS), the Shire needs to develop a **housing strategy** (land use and type of housing) that identifies and prioritises areas for growth, having regard to housing demand, growth trends, affordability and likely future housing needs, ensuring the strategy preserves important agricultural land.
- Gunnedah Shire has a **strong sense of place**. According to the LSPS, initiatives which project the Shire's healthy, happy, unique and educated community profile will best showcase living in rural communities. Promoting Gunnedah Shire as a place to live, underpinned by access to high quality services and facilities through digital media should continue to form the basis of Shire marketing and promotional campaigns.
- **Streetscape improvements / beautification** in key locations (in Gunnedah and the villages), including pavement treatments, signage, seating, shade structures, tree plantings, garden beds and 'smart' lighting (and free Wi-Fi) could be investigated.
- The consultations suggested more investment in **sport and recreational facilities** is needed, especially for Gunnedah's youth, including indoor sports, an upgraded cinema and an upgraded skate park.
- The consultation feedback suggested that Gunnedah does not fully utilise the Namoi River which is a major asset for the town, for its capacity to accommodate formal and informal sport, recreation and leisure activities.

## Health and Wellbeing

- The Health Care and Social Assistance sector is Australia's fastest-growing industry. In Gunnedah Shire, in the five years to 2018/19, employment in the sector increased by 23%. The Shire is well-served with very good aged care facilities. This is important for Gunnedah's appeal as a place to live as it supports the capacity to facilitate ageing in place.
- The local health care sector will be boosted by a planned \$53 million investment in the **Gunnedah hospital redevelopment**. Gunnedah Shire is likely to see opportunities for investment and business development in a range of health and wellbeing activities including aged care, in-home health care services and specialist care.
- While presenting some challenges, the ageing of Gunnedah's population (and Australia's population more generally) will support demand for health and wellbeing services (hospital, medical, aged care, other health and wellbeing assistance) in Gunnedah Shire and the surrounding region. Gunnedah has good medical facilities but a shortage of qualified staff and available services.
- There is an opportunity to develop the **aged care sector** by meeting the demand for infrastructure and services to cater for the ageing population, and by ensuring an availability of appropriately skilled health care workers (who could potentially be targeted in a tailored investment / people attraction campaign).
- While Gunnedah has state-of-the-art health care facilities, the local health care sector is chronically under-staffed. It was also reported that Gunnedah Shire is under-served by specialist health services, and the need for **more doctors / GPs** was also highlighted. Local health care sector human resource requirements (e.g. nurses) could be one area of focus of a Designated Area Migration Agreement for Gunnedah.
- Opportunities associated with the NDIS need to be explored.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

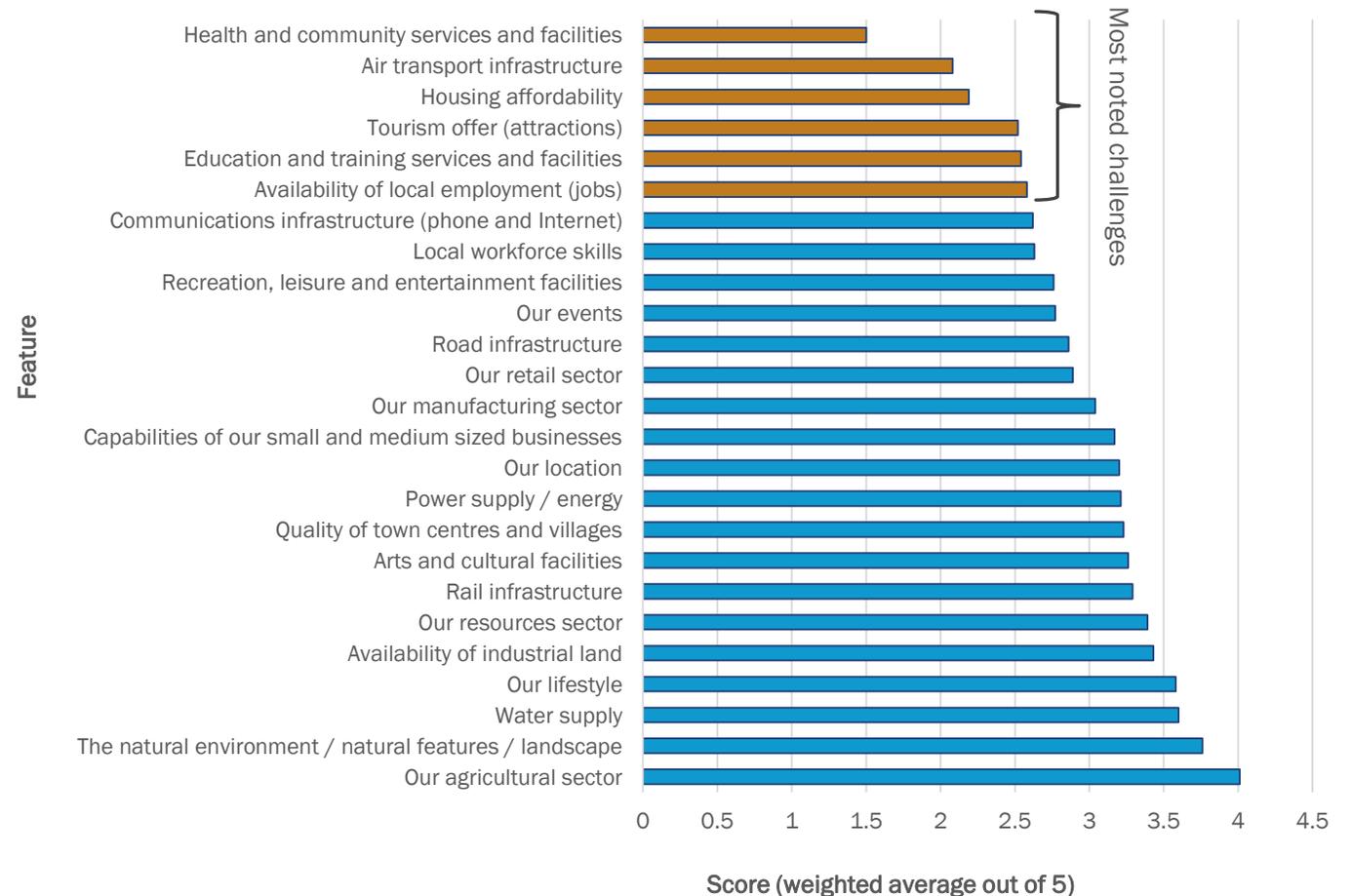
## The Gunnedah Shire Economic Development Survey

To help inform the preparation of the Gunnedah Shire Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026, Gunnedah Shire Council administered an online survey throughout December 2020 and January 2021.

The survey invited Gunnedah Shire's businesses and residents to provide their views on, amongst other things, the Shire's key challenges and opportunities for economic development. A total of 180 responses were received, with those surveyed identifying the following as **the most significant challenges** for local economic development:

- Health and community services and facilities;
- Air transport infrastructure;
- Housing affordability;
- Gunnedah Shire's tourism offer / attractions;
- Local education and training services / facilities; and
- The availability of local employment (or lack thereof).

## IDENTIFIED ECONOMIC STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES, GUNNEDAH SHIRE (WHERE 1 = SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE; 5 = GREAT STRENGTH)





# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## Local Business Development

- A desire to see more support provided for Gunnedah's small business sector through **local procurement initiatives**, was raised during the consultations. The strength of the region's agricultural and resources industries presents on-going opportunities for small and medium-sized businesses to compete for local and regional service and supply contracts across these sectors.
- Gunnedah Shire Council, as a facilitator and promoter of economic development, has a **'concierge' role** to play in alerting and informing existing and prospective businesses of local opportunities, such as procurement / local content, business support programs, etc.
- Gunnedah can continue to capitalise on the region's mining industry by encouraging expansion and diversification in local businesses, and by attracting mine-related service firms and workers to relocate to the Shire.
- There is an opportunity to consolidate Gunnedah Shire **as a centre for agriculture and agricultural innovation** by supporting local innovation and entrepreneurship while also encouraging the establishment of businesses to process and value-add to local agricultural products. Gunnedah can build on its local business capabilities by providing specialist and generalist services for the agricultural sector that are currently not available in Gunnedah.
- Council should prioritise efforts to identify and promote (celebrate) the Shire's business innovators as an integral component of its industry profile.
- During the consultations, the concept of a **shared workspace / co-working space** (and/or maker space for creatives) was raised as an opportunity to attract and support small and creative businesses in Gunnedah Shire.
- Council, through its Economic Development Team, is pro-active in its efforts to welcome new businesses to the Shire, however, it is not always aware of new business arrivals, something that needs to be addressed.

## **Supporting Small Business Research and Innovation**

'Research and innovation infrastructure' is a key enabler of small business success. This refers to facilities, resources and services used by researchers, educators, the science community and industry to conduct research and foster business innovation.

Gunnedah Shire Council can support prospective, emerging and establishing small businesses in their endeavours to become more innovative with support provided in the form of physical spaces where research, knowledge and information can be connected with entrepreneurial ideas to grow high-value and innovative enterprises.

Council can provide support in a variety of ways including, for example, establishing local shared workspaces, or incubator and accelerator facilities with the support of government funding programs and by connecting small business with the information and support services offered by agencies such as AusIndustry.

AusIndustry's *Incubator Support Program* gives incubators the help they need to assist entrepreneurs, through: delivering high quality services to start-ups to improve their chances of commercial success; partnering with first-generation migrant and refugee support organisations to assist migrant and refugee founders to establish their business; and assisting start-ups with a regional focus to expand and scale their business.

# GUNNEDAH SHIRE'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ATTRIBUTES

## *Gunnedah Shire Council's Business Support Programs*

Gunnedah Shire Council has demonstrated its commitment to supporting and promoting new and existing local businesses through a range of programs administered through its Economic Development Team. These include:

- ***Business Partner Program*** – This program is designed to help kick-start new businesses and to help existing businesses to grow. Since the program's inception it has delivered over \$250,000 of funding to local businesses.
- ***Small Business Friendly Program*** – Gunnedah Shire Council partners with Service NSW to deliver the Easy-to-do-Business Program, through a range of initiatives to support new and existing businesses. Council has adopted the NSW Outdoor Dining Policy to make it easier for cafes and restaurants to trade on the footpath and encourage activity along the main street.
- ***Gunny Money*** – Gunnedah Shire Council actively encourages businesses and residents to shop locally, and administers a local gift card program called 'Gunny Money'. Over 90 retailers participate in the program with \$80,000 in sales processed on the card in 2018/19. The program is one of the top ten performing programs of its kind in Australia.
- ***Business Mentoring and Training*** – Council, in partnership with other training organisations and the Gunnedah and District Chamber of Commerce and Industry, runs a number of training and networking events throughout the year to encourage businesses to make connections and refine their capacity. The majority of events are focussed around NSW Small Business Month in October.
- ***Strong Connections to the Gunnedah Chamber of Commerce and Industry*** – Gunnedah Shire Council has close and positive working relationship with the Gunnedah and District Chamber of Commerce, which, with 105 members, represents a diversity of local businesses, from small retailers through to large manufacturers.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## Inland Rail Interface Improvement Program

- To take advantage of its proximity to the Inland Rail, Gunnedah Shire Council proposes to construct an intermodal freight and container area abutting the existing main rail line – the Gunnedah Intermodal Freight Terminal (GIFT).
- The GIFT would leverage a collective opportunity to position Gunnedah as a key anchor point in the Inland Rail Project, given the existing infrastructure in place, and its superior connections to other key towns and cities in the region.
- The project, when complete, would deliver supply chain cost savings to producers and users of the GIFT, attract more investment to the region, grow output and export potential, and facilitate better transport options for business and industry.
- The GIFT would present opportunities to develop the local transport and logistics sector as we'll as those industries that rely heavily on distribution networks such as processing / manufacturing.
- Gunnedah Shire Council is proposing other developments such as an adjacent industrial precinct (The Processing Precinct) that would complement and add value to this investment opportunity, while leveraging the existing industry base that will benefit from having an intermodal terminal connected to the Inland Rail network.

## The Gunnedah Intermodal Freight Terminal (GIFT)

The proposed Gunnedah Intermodal Freight Terminal (GIFT) would utilise an existing coal rail loop and involve construction of a new 400 metre rail siding, complete with a new connecting turnout back onto the main line to allow continuous direction travel west to the Inland Rail connection at or about Narrabri and beyond. The planned works will also provide connectivity to services running east towards Newcastle and Sydney along the Hunter Valley Line.

The existing rail line is predominantly used by grain and coal train traffic. The main user is the coal industry, which has a projected life span to 2032 - 2045. GIFT presents an opportunity for the region to drive greater economic diversity, leveraging off the opportunity being generated by the Inland Rail Project. It is expected that as the GIFT increases and expands its own outputs in freight onto rail, a corresponding decline in coal rail traffic will be taking place simultaneously, with no congestion or competition for pathing expected.

Key to the opportunity is the ability of the GIFT to attract freight from other regional areas east of Gunnedah, at Werris Creek and Tamworth that would otherwise be transported by road. This would take trucks off local roads and highways and ensure that maximum value is delivered by the Inland Rail investment by making rail freight cost-competitive with road, and enabling better access to ports, and supply chain linkages.

When complete, the GIFT will support regional economic development by re-positioning local infrastructure to increase the competitiveness of regional economies and supply chains, increasing Inland Rail throughput, delivering cost-effective improvements to the national rail freight network and improving safety outcomes by driving a modal shift from road to rail.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## Value Adding to Gunnedah's Agricultural Output

- Gunnedah Shire's agricultural capabilities and existing processing capabilities mean it is well-placed to explore and invest in higher-value agricultural activities. There may be scope for diversification into new high-value crops, processing and packaged produce targeting export markets.
- Gunnedah Shire Council has been exploring opportunities to establish a food processing precinct in the Shire, with government funding being sought for the required enabling infrastructure. Funding options should continue to be explored and supported with ongoing market research to confirm the business case for the proposal.
- Agriculture is transitioning towards the production of higher-value commodities using new technologies, or 'ag-tech' underpinned by research and development into new ways of producing to enable farmers to be more efficient, less wasteful, more productive and more profitable. Gunnedah's agricultural heritage and capabilities make it well-placed to develop an 'ag-tech eco-system' which invests in R&D, new technologies and new start-ups to grow value in the region's agricultural economy.
- Investment in new agricultural technologies and ways of producing also requires a commensurate investment in skills and workforce planning to meet changing industry needs.
- The consultations suggested that, while an abundance of water is an asset for Gunnedah, the dynamics of water allocation ownership means some irrigators are priced out of the market.

## The Gunnedah Processing Precinct

The proposed Gunnedah Processing Precinct, to be located adjacent to the proposed Intermodal Freight Terminal (GIFT), will allow the development of an abattoir and is intended to be the catalyst for attracting new agri-processing businesses to the precinct.

The project proposal directly supports the expansion of existing agri-processing businesses located adjacent to the site that would also significantly benefit from the infrastructure upgrades. While there is existing industrial land in Gunnedah, it does not offer the appropriate scale or enabling infrastructure required by businesses that will be in the Processing Precinct.

The project is designed to leverage increased international demand, particularly in Asia, for Australian beef and value-added Australian agricultural products. It is expected that the project will deliver flow on benefits that will stimulate the local economy through supporting an increased industrial base and growth in local producers.

Gunnedah Shire Council is acting as broker for this project and is supporting this important regional initiative as the enabling infrastructure costs are prohibitively expensive for private developers. Government's financial injection of \$6.9 million is the catalyst required to initiate this new economic activity. Subsequent private sector investment in the processing precinct is estimated at \$169 million over 5 years.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## A Gunnedah Food Brand

- There is an opportunity to capitalise on consumer preferences for fresh food / local produce / quality products (paddock to plate) by showcasing the specialty products produced in Gunnedah Shire and developing a **recognisable food brand** around that.

## Energy Costs and Renewable Energy

- According to the consultations, high energy costs can be prohibitive for some local businesses.
- Gunnedah Shire's location and its abundance of industrial land means it is well-placed to explore opportunities in renewable energy (solar). There are currently a number of renewable energy companies exploring opportunities for investment in and around Gunnedah with three current proposals for solar farms in Gunnedah Shire already submitted for consideration.
- Gunnedah's proximity to the **New England and Central West Renewable Energy Zones** (REZs) could be leveraged to attract investment into the area. The planned REZs, together with three other Renewable Energy Zones around NSW, are designed to play a vital role in delivering affordable, reliable energy generation to help replace the State's existing power stations as they come to their scheduled end of operational life.

## Gunnedah Saleyards Masterplan

- Gunnedah's livestock selling centre, which is ranked in the top four in New South Wales, is the subject of a \$17.5 million masterplan, which includes: a state-of-the-art office, café and education centre; upgraded cattle holding yards; major biosecurity improvements and the installation of digital communications technology to allow smart tech applications and the streaming of online content. This will serve to enhance and consolidate Gunnedah's role as **a centre of agricultural innovation**.

## Industrial Land

- Gunnedah Shire has capacity to accommodate extensive industrial development, with close to 420 hectares of industrial land, with up to 220 hectares located within the Shire's three main industrial precincts. However, it is important that future industrial development be managed sustainably.
- The Gunnedah Shire Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS), Future 2040 which was endorsed in 2020, identified the need for an employment (industrial and commercial) land use strategy to protect and enhance productive agricultural lands and ensure new industrial land is located with good connections to the freight network (road and rail).

## Underutilised Air Transport Infrastructure

- While Gunnedah is well-served by air transport services at Tamworth Airport, which offers direct services to Brisbane and Sydney, Gunnedah Airport does not accommodate passenger flights. It is understood that Council has held discussions with Rex Airlines about the potential for commercial passenger flights out of Gunnedah Airport. Other opportunities can also be explored, including 'runway sprint' motorsports events.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## Business Regulations and Development Approvals

- The consultations suggested there are a number of bottlenecks facing businesses, particularly small to medium-sized businesses looking to establish or grow in Gunnedah. The principal concern cited was **regulatory 'red tape'**, something that is commonly cited by businesses all over Australia. This is not a local government issue necessarily and, whether this is perception or reality, it is an issue that needs to be addressed.
- Gunnedah Shire Council has a key role to play in designing and delivering a supportive land use planning and regulatory / compliance environment as part of its core remit to support and promote Gunnedah's sustainable economic development.
- Council does offer **pre-lodgement advisory services** to prospective investors / developers. However, this is not well-publicised. Council's Planning Team and its Economic Development Team could work more closely on this and related land use planning considerations (e.g. compliance requirements) to ensure this service is promoted and so developers better understand and appreciate planning requirements and desired outcomes.

## Internet Connectivity

- It was reported during the consultations that Internet connectivity can be patchy in some of the Shire's outlying areas and that any 'blackspots' should continue to be addressed. Ensuring good Internet coverage will support Gunnedah Shire's appeal to prospective 'knowledge workers' / professionals who can work from home.

## Freight Transport Costs

- Studies undertaken to inform Gunnedah Shire Council's plans to capitalise on the Inland Rail identified **restricted and higher transport costs** as limiting the competitiveness of local producers and the ability to grow their business and increase margins.
- A lack of access to well-connected supply chains is limiting the efficiency of transporting bulk commodities that wish to use rail freight. Gunnedah is well-placed to act as a **gateway to the Inland Rail** for surrounding LGAs with access to efficient freight options which may open new markets and stimulate investment in regional businesses.

## Gunnedah's Retail Challenges

- The consultations suggested a lack of retail diversity in Gunnedah constrains its appeal as a place to live or visit. The threat of online shopping to the viability of main street retailers was also raised.
- The point was made during the consultations that quality customer service is critical to supporting a vibrant tourism sector and that local retailers need a shared understanding the important role they play as part of the Gunnedah Shire visitor economy.
- Limited car parking was raised on a number of occasions during the consultations as an issue compromising retail activity in Gunnedah.
- A desire for continued Council investment in town beautification was highlighted in numerous consultation forums. Council should continue to support the retail sector by investing in place improvement measures to enhance and activate public spaces, facilitating retail pop-ups for example, by providing retailers with access to business information and support services, by offering façade improvement incentives and through 'buy local' and other promotional campaigns.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## Growing Gunnedah Shire's Visitor Economy

- Strategies to grow Gunnedah Shire's visitor economy provide a viable avenue for further diversifying the local economic base in a sustainable manner. According to the Gunnedah Shire Economic Health Check (2020), the tourism sector is forecast to expand strongly over the next five years. With the value of regional NSW tourism growing, this is a key opportunity for Gunnedah.
- Nationally, despite the recent impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, IBISWorld reports that domestic tourism is already beginning to start back up, with tourism businesses expected to rely heavily on domestic leisure travellers in 2020-21. This is a market Gunnedah Shire is well-placed to engage with. Gunnedah Shire Council recognises the area's tourism potential and a new tourism strategy will be commissioned in 2021.
- The 2015 Gunnedah Shire Destination Management Plan recognised the **need to develop visitor markets** by focusing on growing and strengthening primary (touring travellers, regional residents, business and sporting events) and secondary markets, developing special interest and activity-based markets and encouraging highway and business travellers to spend more money in the Shire.
- Despite its central location, Gunnedah is often bypassed by drive tourists (grey nomads and families), who will stick to the New England or Newell Highways when travelling north-south. More emphasis needs to be placed on **making Gunnedah attractive to recreational vehicles (RV-friendly)**.
- In order to develop and grow a strong local visitor economy, Gunnedah Shire needs to elevate its appeal as a destination in its own right, by progressively enhancing presentation and improving and expanding the range of tourism attractions, activities, experiences, infrastructure and services available within the Shire. Developing infrastructure, such as upgrading Gunnedah Airport, to accommodate direct flights from major domestic markets, would enhance Gunnedah's appeal as a visitor destination.

## *Gunnedah Shire Destination Management Plan 2015*

Gunnedah Shire Council commissioned the preparation of a Destination Management Plan (DMP) in 2015. The purpose of the DMP was to provide the direction and framework for taking Shire's visitor economy forward over the following five years.

The primary goal of the DMP was to increase visitor expenditure within the Shire, with resultant economic and social benefits for the Shire community. To achieve this, the Plan focuses on:

- Identifying opportunities to strengthen and grow Gunnedah Shire's existing market base and diversify into new markets in order to deliver visitation year-round.
- Understanding the needs and expectations of visitors and ensuring that the infrastructure, facilities and services are in place within the Shire to meet these.
- Encouraging and facilitating the development of tourist attractions, accommodation, events and infrastructure within the Shire.
- Setting the directions for the marketing and promoting the Shire.
- Identifying priorities to ensure the most effective use of limited funds and resources.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## Growing Gunnedah Shire's Visitor Economy (cont'd)

- The Destination Network Country & Outback Product & Experience Audit Report identifies a number of **tourism gaps and challenges** in the wider region of which Gunnedah is a part, including:
  - A general lack of experiences and commercial product and poor promotion of existing products.
  - Generally low presence of agritourism product or effective cross-promotion between industry sectors.
  - Limited supply of Aboriginal Cultural Tourism products and experiences.
- Gunnedah's **lifestyle attributes**, such as its diversity of cultural, sporting and leisure facilities, cafes and dining venues, and natural attributes including access to national parks and reserves, also serve to support its potential as a visitor destination. Nevertheless, shortfalls such as a lack of directional / wayfinding signage at Porcupine Lookout, limits the area's potential in this regard. This area also lacks toilet facilities or drinking fountains.
- **Adventure tourism** is a growing sport and Black Jack Mountain near Gunnedah is already popular with mountain bike riders. There is an opportunity to further develop this market along with hiking and trail running for example.
- Gunnedah hosts a diversity of **festivals and events**. There is scope to build on the Shire's events profile with new and re-invigorated festivals and events, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Council has received Federal Government funding to stage the Harvest Gunnedah Food Festival, which is planned for October 2021. Cycling, motor sports (e.g. a 'runway sprint' annual event at the Gunnedah Aerodrome), river-focussed events (e.g. rafting) and equine events such as polo (and an equine centre) present other opportunities worth exploring.
- Gunnedah is well-known for hosting AgQuip, the Southern Hemisphere's largest agricultural field day, where each year, the latest agricultural industry products, innovations and services are on display. Council could explore ways to continue to leverage AgQuip by better integrating the event with the Gunnedah town centre. The 'NightQuip' markets, which were held in 2019 during AgQuip, were a great success and could become an annual event. It was suggested that better connections between AgQuip and the CBD need to be supported with better public transport.
- Known as the 'Koala Capital of the World', Gunnedah is poised to capitalise on this unique natural attribute with investment committed to a planned new **Gunnedah Koala Park and Hospital**. This catalyst project will be a potential game-changer for the Gunnedah Shire visitor economy.
- Gunnedah Shire Council recognises the area lacks experiences. In planning its approach to facilitate and promote tourism development in the Shire, Council will focus on **three pillars, being: nature-based tourism; agri-tourism; and Indigenous cultural tourism**. These pillars will form the basis of a new tourism strategy / Destination Management Plan, to be prepared in 2021.
- Gunnedah has a depth of **arts and cultural infrastructure and attractions**, something it can promote and build on with new attractions (e.g. a rural museum; Indigenous art gallery) as a cornerstone of Gunnedah's tourism offer.
- The consultations findings suggested that not all tourism or tourism-related operators in Gunnedah Shire are 'up to standard' regarding their approach to things like branding, marketing, web presence, online bookings, customer service and other standards. Council needs to continue its efforts to engage with tourism operators on this matter.
- Gunnedah's natural assets are a cornerstone of the Shire's tourism offer. There is an opportunity to re-define Gunnedah's relationship with its natural attributes. For example, the Namoi River is underutilised (even fenced off in parts). The river could be re-activated for the benefit of both residents and visitors to Gunnedah.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## Growing Gunnedah Shire's Visitor Economy (cont'd)

- There is a recognised opportunity to build capability and capacity to grow Gunnedah Shire's visitor economy and to develop its reputation as a tourism-friendly destination. This will require **building capacity of local tourism industry operators**, Gunnedah Shire Council, strategic partners and local communities.
- There is an opportunity to better connect local operators with **tourism business support programs**. Gunnedah Shire Council can investigate the means by which to facilitate access to business support and training resources in the tourism sector, leveraging NSW and Federal Government programs where available.
- Growing Gunnedah Shire's visitor economy will require efforts to continue to expand and enhance the Shire's **online presence**, capitalising on opportunities for web-based information delivery. In the physical space, the consultations suggested the Gunnedah Visitor Information Centre lacks visibility and better directional signage would assist travellers looking for the VIC.
- Gunnedah Shire Council could support local tourism operators by pro-actively facilitating access to Destination NSW's **'NSW First' program** to assist them to develop, promote and sell their tourism products. The program includes workshops and online webcasts that offer 'how-to' insights on a range of topics for the tourism industry.
- It was reported during the consultations that a diversity of **visitor accommodation** is lacking (from free or low-cost camping through to high-end 'eco' accommodation). This needs to be explored. Council could commission a visitor accommodation audit and gaps analysis, and subject to findings, develop a business case for new accommodation options.
- Investment in **enabling infrastructure** will be an integral component to growing the local visitor economy, including investment in high quality and innovative nature-based, sports, arts, cultural and tourism infrastructure to help grow visitation and encourage private sector investment.

## *The Enablers of a Vibrant Visitor Economy*

In order to grow the tourism sector in any region, Local Government has a key role to play in addressing the 'enablers' of a vibrant visitor economy, which include:

- **A Conducive Environment:** In order to attract and hold visitors, there are three aspects of the environment that must be attended to: the natural environment; the built environment; and the social / cultural environment.
- **Quality Infrastructure and Services:** These include both private and public sector items that are essential for accommodating, entertaining, informing and transporting visitors.
- **Effective Information Management:** With a conducive environment and quality infrastructure and services provided, the region has something to offer to the visitor market, and this will need to be effectively promoted.
- **Collaborative Governance:** This is the glue that binds it all together and is defined by stakeholder collaboration and co-ordination, business engagement and support and investment attraction.

Source: SC Lennon & Associates

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## Nurturing and Supporting Gunnedah's Cultural and Creative Ecosystem

- Gunnedah Shire has a **strong and vibrant cultural and creative economy** and there is a high level of cultural activity in Gunnedah, which is well supported by large portions of the community.
- A Gunnedah Cultural Precinct Masterplan has been prepared by Council, which proposes both new building works and renovations to existing buildings to improve the functionality and provide new cultural facilities to the community. The aim is to create a recognisable precinct that supports the wide variety of community cultural activity. The main spaces include: the Courtyard; the Foyer; the Gunnedah Library; Community Function Rooms; Town Hall; Civic Centre; Gunnedah Arts Centre; and the Visitor Information Centre.
- This proposal reflects the need for additional library space, community meeting space and much improved functionality and will improve upon the already impressive participation rates in this community. It is considered that, the resilience of the Gunnedah community, which thrives through the variability of both the agricultural and mining industries, is dependent on this kind of community building social infrastructure.
- An arts trail is also being developed, with murals, silo art and street art throughout Gunnedah. Council could investigate the merits of a formal street art policy.
- To complement efforts to enhance Gunnedah's cultural hub, Council commissioned the preparation of a 'Vibrant Precincts' plan to help activate Gunnedah's existing commercial, historical and cultural areas. Potential activation opportunities were identified through community engagement for six designated town areas. These areas are: River Precinct; Town Entrances; Tunnel/Laneways; Civic Precinct; Fences; Poetry Precinct and Anzac Park.

- The consultation findings indicated that Gunnedah has a strong cohort of creative industries which contribute to local economic activity and the vibrancy of the Gunnedah town centre. This includes a mix of visual artists, advertising and marketing specialists, digital content producers and designers.
- It is considered that quantitative research into the scale and nature of Gunnedah's creative industries (a creative industries audit) could be undertaken to help Council better understand this eclectic sector and how it might be able to assist it to grow and prosper.

## *Creating Vibrant Places*

The Gunnedah Vibrant Precincts Project is designed to activate the existing commercial, historical and cultural areas of Gunnedah's town centre into vibrant cultural and commercial precincts through the creative development and implementation of place activation projects. It is intended that these initiatives will enhance economic prosperity, social connections and place making values in Gunnedah.

The project also aims to foster connections, which strengthen cultural identity, and connection to place, in order to create a positive and prosperous community, and increase the economic success of Gunnedah.

This project has the potential to develop into a public art trail, with valuable offshoots including an increase in cultural tourism, and enhancement of local cultural experience and opportunities.

# NEXT STEPS



# EMERGING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY THEMES

Based on the outcomes of the research, consultation and analysis, emerging themes, which will be used to inform the preparation of a *Draft Gunnedah Shire Economic Development Strategy, 2022-2026*, include the following:

- Supporting economic development in the context of a **dynamic and transforming global economic landscape** and specifically, the world's evolving energy mix and a transition towards a post-carbon economy.
- Supporting regional economic development by promoting Gunnedah Shire's economic drivers, specifically, its **smart and innovative agricultural sector** and its **dynamic and globally-responsive resource-driven industries**.
- Promoting Gunnedah Shire as a **location of choice for business investment, employment, learning and living**. To do this effectively, Gunnedah needs to articulate its value proposition and define what sets it apart from other places. The Gunnedah Shire community needs to have a **shared narrative** which defines 'who we are'.
- Supporting economic activity by identifying, prioritising and addressing the **key enablers of economic development**, that is, the essential services (such as health care, cultural, sporting and recreational facilities), the infrastructure and support mechanisms required to facilitate positive change.
- Supporting the development of a **skilled workforce**.
- Supporting the development of a **dynamic and innovative small to medium-sized business sector**.
- Using **place-based projects and programs** to enhance Gunnedah's role as a regional centre and the form and function of the Shire's other towns and villages.
- Supporting the development of a **vibrant regional visitor economy**.

# PROSPECTIVE STRATEGY ACTION / IMPLEMENTATION THEMES

As discussed earlier in this paper, Gunnedah Shire Council has a key role to play in addressing the ‘enablers’ of economic development through its ‘core’ economic development support functions. This covers a range of activities including strategic land use planning, infrastructure and service delivery, research and information provision, marketing and promotion, business support and investment attraction and advocacy.

Based on the long list of challenges and opportunities presented in this Themes and Directions Paper, the following four overarching strategic themes have been identified for further consideration. These themes provide a potential framework for categorising actions for implementation. They are:

*Theme 1: Promote Economic Diversification in Gunnedah Shire’s Key Industries*

*Theme 2: Enable Prosperity through Investment in Gunnedah Shire’s Strategic Infrastructure*

*Theme 3: Support Gunnedah Shire’s Micro -to -Medium Businesses to Prosper*

*Theme 4: Promote Gunnedah Shire ‘s Appeal as a Place in Which to Live, Learn and Prosper*

Recommended actions will be developed across these (or similar) broad themes, based on the contents of this Themes and Directions Paper and further engagement with Gunnedah Shire Council and other stakeholders.

# A DRAFT VISION AND CHARTER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Based on the findings of the research, consultation and analysis, a [draft vision](#) for Gunnedah Shire's economic future has been prepared as follows:

*Underpinned by the strength and depth of a diversity of economic activities,  
Gunnedah Shire is a vibrant, dynamic and connected community and  
A location of choice in which to live, learn, work, play and prosper.*

The vision (and a Council charter articulating its commitment to promoting, facilitating and co-ordinating economic development activities) will be subject to further discussion with Council. A [draft Council Charter](#) has been prepared as follows:

*Through sound planning, information-sharing, infrastructure provision, service delivery and advocacy, Gunnedah Shire Council promotes investment, encourages local businesses to prosper and works with its partners in government, the community and industry to cultivate the Shire's appeal as a place to live, learn, work, play and prosper.*



# STRATEGY ACTION PLANNING

Economic Development Strategy actions / initiatives, when prepared, will need to be categorised according to whether they represent:

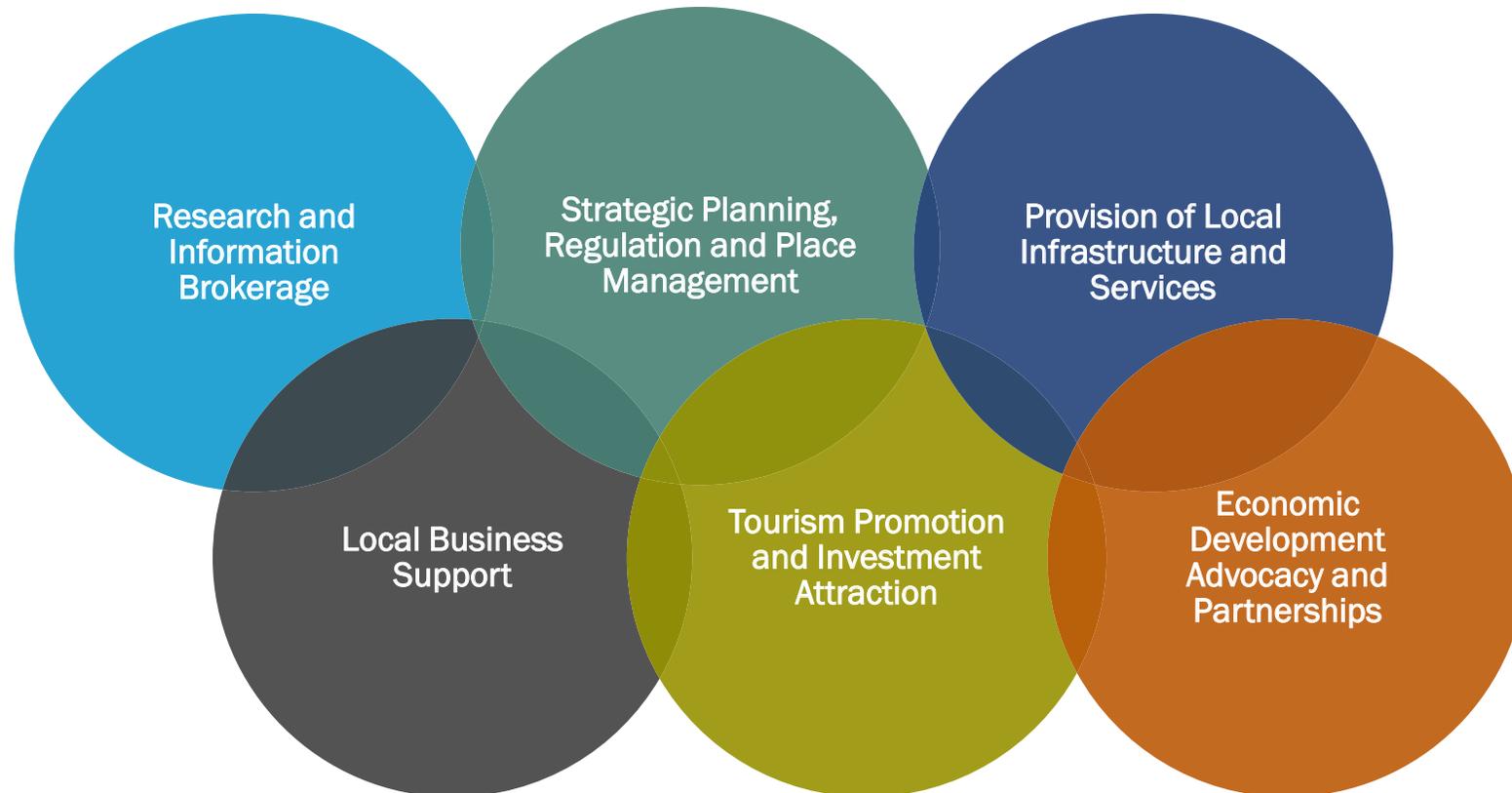
- *'Catalyst project planning & development'* initiatives, which typically require a collaborative multi-agency/stakeholder approach combined with a well-planned course of project implementation for desired outcomes to be realised; and
- *'Strategic program implementation'* that can be addressed as part of Gunnedah Shire Council's day-to-day economic development planning and facilitation functions in a strategic and informed manner.

Some actions will be *'Council-led'*. Others will be *'Council-supported'* activities and these are advocacy, promotion or support initiatives where the implementation of the actions is to be led by organisations other than Gunnedah Shire Council.

Within the organisation, some initiatives will be the responsibility of Council's Economic Development Team, which in itself may have implications for resourcing needs to be addressed, while others will fall to other sections of Council.

# COUNCIL'S CORE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

Having regard for its role as an enabler, promoter and supporter of regional prosperity, Gunnedah Shire Council's **economic development support activities** will typically cut across the following six focus areas:



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

## Research and Information Brokerage

While business and industry drives economic activity and employment creation, local government has a vital role to play in the leadership, organisation, delivery and promotion of local and regional economic development. Gunnedah Shire Council can take the lead in establishing and nurturing effective economic partnerships and enabling industry innovation and entrepreneurship, particularly through networking, facilitation and information sharing on a diversity of matters, effectively working as a local economic development ‘concierge’ or ‘solutions broker’.

## Strategic Planning, Regulation and Place Management

Strategic land use planning, development controls, building and other regulations are perhaps the most powerful tools of Councils when working to facilitate and enable economic development. Gunnedah Shire Council can work to establish and promote a local regulatory and land use planning environment that is open, engaging and supportive of business opportunity. Within its own remit and by engaging with the State Government on matters concerning NSW planning legislation, Council can work to ensure that adequate land and floorspace is available for commercial and industrial development and for other economic activity. Council can also influence a sense of place and the functioning of its towns and villages through master planning, development control, place activation and urban improvement programs.

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## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT ACTIVITIES



### Provision of Local Infrastructure and Services

Gunnedah Shire Council can work to ensure that the fundamentals for investment attraction and economic development are addressed by planning for and providing local infrastructure and services within its remit. For example, it can (and does) prioritise local infrastructure needs including roads and industrial land as well as ‘lifestyle’ and cultural infrastructure such as parks, museums, libraries and art galleries (the Gunnedah Cultural Precinct). At a broader level, it can collaborate with regional stakeholders to ensure that the fundamental enablers for investment and economic development are addressed by planning for and providing regionally-significant infrastructure in an informed, planned and co-ordinated manner.



### Local Business Support

Gunnedah Shire Council, in its role as an economic development support agency, has a responsibility to liaise with business and industry as well as representative organisations and peak industry bodies to understand local needs and priorities and to respond accordingly with the planning, program and project delivery required to address those priorities. Council, which is often a first point of contact for the business community, has a role to play in informing businesses of State and Federal Government business assistance programs on offer, such as the Building Better Regions Fund for example, and it can engage in activities to support local business and employment growth by facilitating access to business support programs, training workshops and investment forums offered by other agencies and organisations. This role is particularly relevant in light of the current and likely ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT ACTIVITIES



## Tourism Promotion and Investment Attraction

Investment is fundamental to economic development, and access to markets is a key determinant of long-term economic growth. Gunnedah Shire Council can facilitate investment by promoting what the local area and wider region has to offer prospective investors in a strategic and targeted fashion. It can (and does) pro-actively promote Gunnedah's 'tourism offer' as well as plan for and prioritise local infrastructure investment through an informed approach to destination management. An economic development strategy can provide the overarching framework to guide investment attraction, tourism promotion and destination management planning. In Gunnedah Shire, where the Council is already pro-actively engaged in investment promotion, the EDS provides an opportunity to review and refine the strategic direction for investment promotion.



## Economic Development Advocacy and Partnerships

No one organisation has the knowledge, know-how or resources to effectively pursue a local or regional economic development agenda alone. Positive collaborative partnerships are an essential ingredient of success. Gunnedah Shire Council and its partners in industry, government and the non-government sector can provide a unifying voice for communities and for businesses when lobbying State and Federal Governments on key economic or infrastructure issues. Council has a key role to play in attracting government investment in enabling infrastructure by identifying strategic priorities and preparing business cases to inform government funding for key projects.

# GUNNEDAH SHIRE COUNCIL'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ROLES

## *The Gunnedah Shire Economic Development Survey*

To help inform the preparation of the Gunnedah Shire Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026, Gunnedah Shire Council administered an online survey throughout December 2020 and January 2021.

The survey invited Gunnedah Shire's businesses and residents to provide their views on what they believe are **the activities that Council should focus on in its role as a promoter and facilitator of economic development**. A total of 180 responses were received. The importance of Council's role in advocacy / lobbying and in local infrastructure and service provision is evident in the results, with the following suggestions receiving a high level of response:

- Sourcing government funding for major projects;
- Providing local social services and facilities;
- Providing sport and recreational services and facilities;
- Considering sustainability when developing actions;
- Infrastructure provision;
- Advocacy / lobbying State and Federal Governments;
- Ensuring training meets the needs of the community;
- Tourism promotion; and
- Advocacy / lobbying major industry on key issues.

## SUGGESTED KEY AREAS OF FOCUS FOR GUNNEDAH SHIRE COUNCIL AS A FACILITATOR AND ENABLER OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (WHERE 1 = NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT; 5 = VERY IMPORTANT)





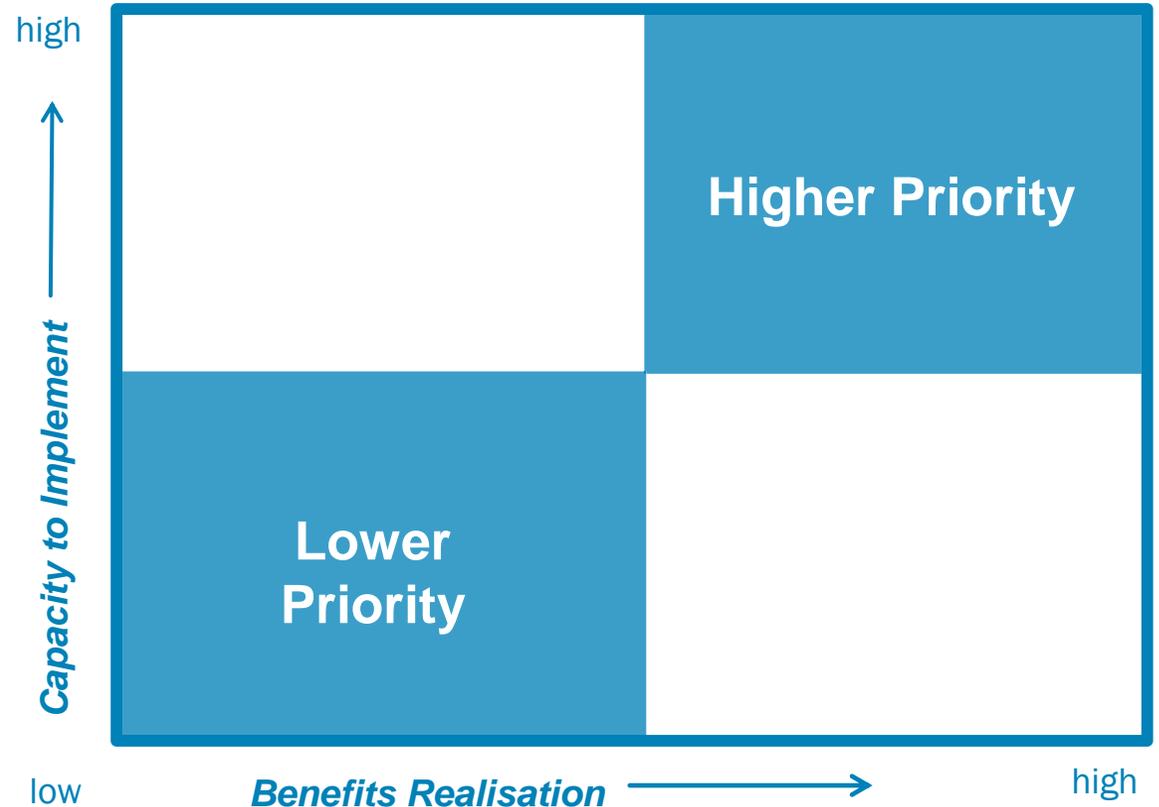
# IDENTIFYING AND PRIORITISING ACTIONS

Detailed actions will be developed from the issues, challenges, opportunities and strategic themes presented herein. Specific opportunities / ideas for action will be articulated and presented to Council in the context of the contents of this Themes and Directions Paper.

Deciding which opportunities to address (and which ones to prioritise), either as part of Council's operations or in a support role, will depend on:

- The anticipated **benefits** of the opportunity concerned; and
- Gunnedah Shire Council's **capacity to implement**.

Once a long list of actions is identified, decisions about which ones to pursue will need to be cognisant of these key considerations. A detailed set of assessment criteria will be developed when drafting the Economic Development Strategy.



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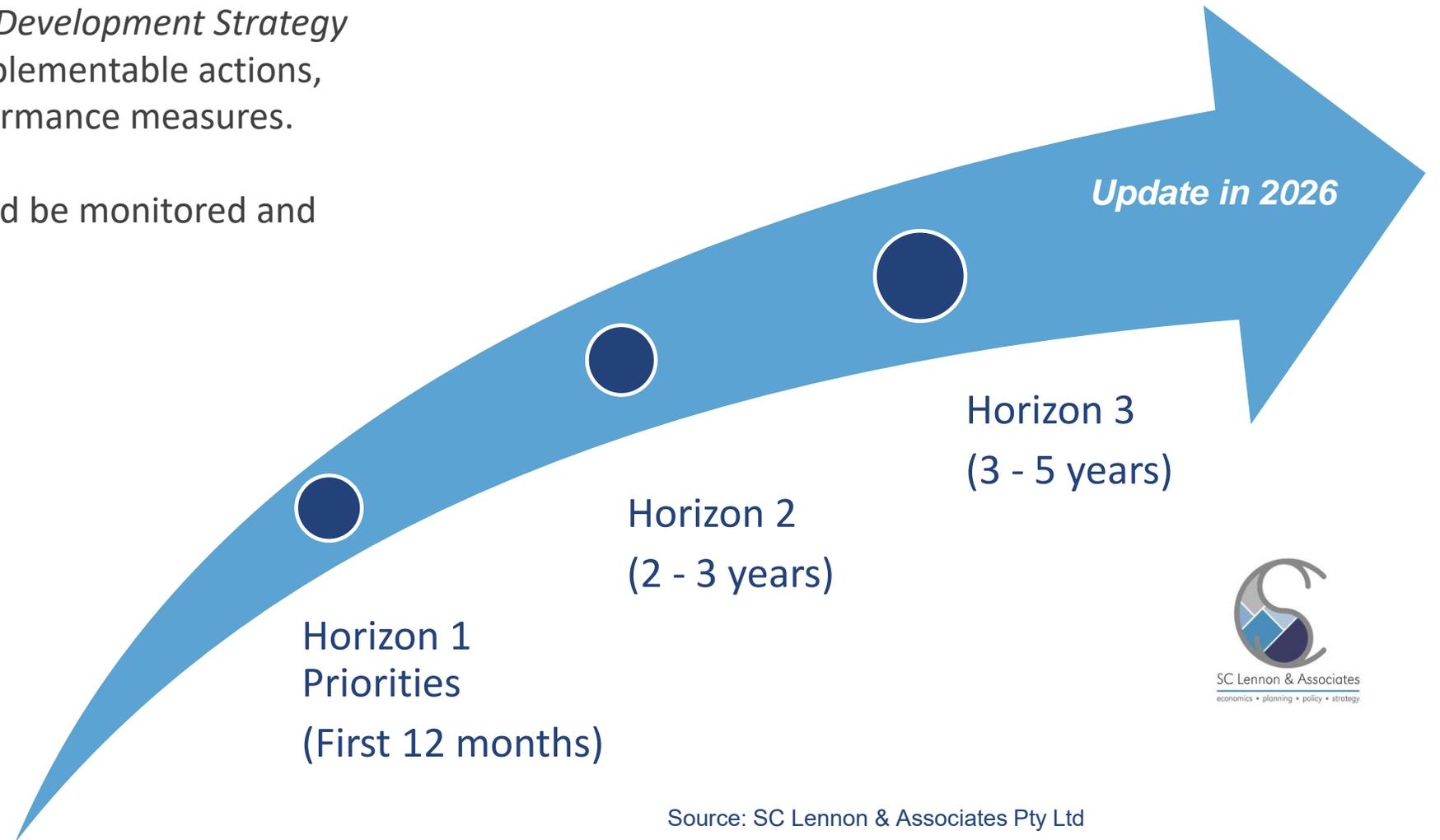


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# HORIZON PLANNING AND STRATEGY REVIEW

The *Gunnedah Shire Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026* will include firm implementable actions, associated outcomes and performance measures.

Implementation progress should be monitored and measured annually.



Source: SC Lennon & Associates Pty Ltd

# MOVING FORWARD – COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Moving forward, successful economic development planning and implementation will require Gunnedah Shire Council to:

- Continue to promote a **positive narrative** about Gunnedah Shire, its strengths, challenges and opportunities for economic development.
- Articulate and communicate a **shared vision** for economic development.
- Apply a **strategic, informed and targeted** plan of action to address priorities for implementation (the strategy).
- Confirm and **communicate** its economic development roles and functions.
- **Integrate** its economic development activities across the organisation.
- Continue to appropriately **resource** its Economic Development program.
- Take an informed **business case approach** to project planning, working together with government agencies on a principle of ‘shared equity’.
- Be pro-active and show **leadership** in building **partnerships** with industry and other economic development agencies to continue to grow confidence in the community.
- Measure and **monitor strategy implementation progress** using a combination of output and outcome measures.

## NEXT STEPS

This advanced working paper has been prepared to highlight findings from the strategy research, consultation and analysis. It is designed to generate discussion around the points raised and proposed strategy themes and directions to ensure an informed pathway to the preparation of a new Gunnedah Shire Economic Development Strategy that meets its stated objectives, and which has shared buy-in.

Council feedback on the contents of this Themes and Directions Paper is sought to help focus strategic thinking, and to deliver a strategy that is aspirational while also being pragmatic and implementable. Next steps in the strategy development process include:

- Consultation and feedback on the contents of this Themes and Directions Paper, with Council and other key stakeholders including the Economic Development Working Group, and confirmation of strategy themes and focal areas for action, as the basis of a *Draft Gunnedah Shire Economic Development Strategy, 2022-2026*. [\(Late February 2021\)](#)
- Finalisation of the strategic themes and refinement of ideas for action, as well as an economic development vision and a charter for Gunnedah Shire Council to support, facilitate and promote economic development in partnership with local and wider regional stakeholders.
- Preparation of a Draft Gunnedah Shire Economic Development Strategy and action plan followed by consultation with Council regarding its contents and recommendations. [\(Late June 2021\)](#)
- Exhibition of the *Draft Gunnedah Shire Economic Development Strategy, 2022-2026*. [\(August 2021\)](#)
- Preparation and publication of the Final *Gunnedah Shire Economic Development Strategy, 2022-2026*. [\(August/September 2021\)](#)



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Gunnedah Shire Economic Development Strategy 2022 – 2026  
Themes and Directions Paper  
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