



About our region

With a rich aboriginal cultural history dating back at least 12,000 years, the Northern Rivers embraces National Parks, world heritage sites, pristine rainforest and a magnificent coastline.

Our region is characterised by high levels of biodiversity and significant natural assets, continued population growth, a high proportion of older people, low median household incomes and low labour force participation rates. Our region also has a diverse, micro-business economic base with strengths in health care and social assistance, retail, tourism, education, manufacturing, agriculture and construction.

About the regional plan

The *Northern Rivers Regional Plan* is based on a 10-year overarching vision and identifies

seven priorities for investing in the Northern Rivers' economic, social and natural capital.

As the custodian of the Regional Plan, Regional Development Australia – Northern Rivers (RDA-NR) is committed to ensuring that the principles of sustainable development – caring for country, sense of place, social inclusion, accessibility, respect for cultural heritage, creativity and diversity – underpin our goals and guiding principles for investing in our region's natural, social and economic capital.

The Northern Rivers Regional Plan is a high-level strategic planning document that identifies priorities for our region.

It acknowledges that while our region has great strengths it also faces significant challenges to our special heritage and lifestyle.

Informed by research and consultation, the Regional Plan embraces a partnership approach to sustainable development, by encouraging all stakeholders to use it as a guiding framework to address the region's challenges, needs and priorities for long-term economic growth.

Our vision & aspirations

Our vision is for **a healthy, prosperous and sustainable future for the communities of the Northern Rivers region.**

When realised, our vision will result in the Northern Rivers being characterised and widely regarded for the following attributes:

- A region of vibrant urban and rural villages and communities;
- An inclusive community with jobs and a safe and secure place to live;
- A region which values and encourages entrepreneurship and innovation;
- A region where people are healthy and feel good about themselves and their community;
- A place that is known as the country's top learning and lifestyle region;
- A region known worldwide for a clean and green approach to industry and development;
- A region committed to 'putting local first' in relation to produce, industry and people; and
- A region where growth is built on the sustainable management of all our natural resources.

Our goals & guiding principles

Our vision informs our goals and guiding principles for investing in:

- **Our natural capital** – to empower and enable our communities to reduce the region's ecological footprint, respond and adapt to climate change and maintain and improve our natural infrastructure;
- **Our social capital** – to improve the health and wellbeing of our strong network of vibrant communities, towns and villages in our region's three river valleys; and
- **Our economic capital** – to enhance investment, facilitate business development, diversify our industry base and meet our region's employment needs.

Our priorities

The Regional Plan proposes 27 initiatives and projects to address the issues, challenges and opportunities that impact on our region, which are grouped into seven regional priorities. Our regional priorities respond to the key determinants of long-term regional economic growth as identified by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Regional Australia Standing Council:

1. comparative advantage and business competitiveness;
2. access to international, national and regional markets;
3. human capital; and
4. sustainable communities and population change.



A fifth determinant – **promoting collaborative partnerships and regional planning** – will be key to the plan’s successful implementation.

Our priorities reflect the need to be visionary and practical, to focus on the ‘enablers’ of regional development: the services, infrastructure and support mechanisms that facilitate sustainable growth.



Activities, projects & initiatives

Connected communities

- 1.1 Develop an integrated regional transport plan to address the Northern Rivers’ intra-regional transport infrastructure shortfalls.
- 1.2 Support implementation of the *Northern Rivers Digital Economy Strategy*.
- 1.3 Support initiatives to use existing or ageing infrastructure to meet future needs (e.g. the Casino to Murwillumbah rail trail).

A learning region

- 2.1 Identify barriers and enhance drivers of/opportunities for education accomplishment and support collaborative measures to increase the region’s education attainment levels.

- 2.2 Support innovative measures to tailor education and training for the region’s school-leavers and workforce and raise awareness to provide sustainable employment pathways.

Natural infrastructure

- 3.1 Support measures to maintain and improve the region’s irreplaceable natural infrastructure, in particular the key strategies and actions identified in the *Northern Rivers Catchment Action Plan 2013-2023*.
- 3.2 Support a region-wide program to quantify the economic, social, cultural and environmental value of the Northern Rivers’ natural infrastructure, to inform regional land use planning.

Sustainable industry

- 4.1 Review and update the *Regional Industry and Economic Plan* to focus economic development strategy and identify industry development priorities.
- 4.2 Support the region’s health care and ‘healthy living’ sector using collaborative approaches to workforce planning.
- 4.3 In collaboration with education and training providers and government agencies, promote the region’s strengths and achievements as a provider of education services and lifelong learning.
- 4.4 Support and promote sustainable food and fibre production in the Northern Rivers.
- 4.5 Support the growth and development of the region’s creative industries including emerging sectors such as sustainable building design.
- 4.6 Promote R&D and investment in technologies which support the generation and delivery of renewable energy.
- 4.7 Encourage collaborative approaches to innovation, R&D and investment in the region’s existing and emerging industry clusters.

- 4.8 Attract investment to the region to complement and grow established and emerging new industries.
- 4.9 Support the development of programs to increase micro-business capacity building and innovation, e.g. Kyogle Adopt a Business and other mentoring programs.

Inclusive communities

- 5.1 Implement the recommendations of the *Northern Rivers Regional Social Plan 2013-2018*.
- 5.2 Develop a regional social procurement strategy.
- 5.3 Increase sustainable, adaptable and affordable housing choice for diversity of needs across different segments of the region’s community.
- 5.4 Support the development of health care infrastructure and service delivery.

Regional identity

- 6.1 Collaboratively re-affirm the identity of the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales.
- 6.2 Grow and develop the Northern Rivers’ visitor economy consistent with the region’s identity.
- 6.3 Promote the region’s rich natural asset base and high quality and clean, green image as a means of communicating competitive advantage and accessing international, national and regional markets.

A collaborative region

- 7.1 Co-ordinate the region’s economic development planning, promotion, facilitation and development activities using cluster (industry) and/or place-based approaches.
- 7.2 Establish a framework for collaboration amongst the region’s education and training institutions, key government agencies and employers to address the Northern Rivers’ workforce and labour market challenges.

- 7.3 Support collaborative long-term sustainable land use planning integrated with infrastructure investment and whole of government implementation for the region.
- 7.4 Collaborate with South East Queensland RDAs, the Cross-Border Commissioner and other key agencies on regional development matters of common interest.

“This is a plan for everyone in our region. The desired outcomes will not be achieved by organisations or individuals working in isolation, they will need the collaboration, co-operation and determination of many people from all walks of life.”

Dr Ian Tiley, RDA-NR Chairman

More information

For more information about the *Northern Rivers Regional Plan* or to obtain a printed copy, please contact:

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