

# Northern Rivers Regional Plan 2013-2016



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Connecting the Northern Rivers to Opportunities  
community — environment — economy





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RDA–Northern Rivers would also like to acknowledge the contributions of Peter Mathews, Jen Ireland Communications & Consultancy and those of the RDA-NR Board and staff. RDA-NR would like to thank the many regional stakeholders who contributed to this Plan through their participation in workshops and other consultation forums.

*Cover photos: Tweed Valley and Wollumbin (Mt Warning) ©Jules Obers (main), Others courtesy Northern Rivers Food Links, Luke Gooley, Clarence Valley Council, Brunswick Heads Public School/©Verity Bee and North Coast Agricultural Shared Labour Pool ©Aliison Kelly.*

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We respectfully acknowledge the Aboriginal peoples of the Northern Rivers – including the peoples of the Bundjalung, Yaegl and Gumbaynggirr nations – as the traditional custodians and guardians of these lands and waters now known as the Northern Rivers – and we pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

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## CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

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On behalf of Regional Development Australia – Northern Rivers Board, I present this updated edition of the *Northern Rivers Regional Plan* which incorporates the Commonwealth Plan Template requirements but also retains the Northern Rivers regional integrity components which we value.

This Plan builds on the fine work that crafted the *Northern Rivers Regional Strategy*, some years ago, much of which was incorporated into the first edition of this plan in 2010. The subsequent consultation and review process has involved many local organisations and individuals in government, business, communities and not-for-profit sectors. Many of the components of our second iteration, the 2011 Plan, have been retained and improved.

The document is a high level summary and the lead strategy which also embraces the *Regional Industry and Economic Plan*, the *Regional Profile*, *Northern Rivers Social Plan*, *Northern Rivers Digital Economy Strategy* and other key documents. It addresses many of the drivers, initiatives and programs that impact on our region and accepts that while the Northern Rivers has great strengths it also faces significant challenges to our special heritage and lifestyle.

The *Regional Plan* is based on a 10-year overarching vision and identifies seven goals – priorities for investing in the Northern Rivers' economic, social and natural capital. The regional priorities for 2013-2016, respond to the COAG key determinants of long-term regional economic growth: (1) *Connected communities*; (2) *A learning region*; (3) *Natural infrastructure*; (4) *Sustainable industry*; (5) *Inclusive communities*; (6) *Regional identity*; and (7) *A collaborative region*.

RDA – Northern Rivers is the custodian of this Plan, however it is a Plan for all the people of the region. Its desired outcomes will not be achieved by agencies, organisations or individuals working in isolation but will rely for success on the collaboration, co-operation and determination of many people from all walks of life.

I thank consultants Sasha Lennon of SC Lennon and Associates, Peter Mathews of Edge Advantage, RDA – Northern Rivers Board and staff, and especially CEO Katrina Luckie and Communications Officer Geof Webb, for their valued contributions.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'I. Tiley', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr Ian Tiley

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introducing the Northern Rivers region

The Northern Rivers of New South Wales is situated in the far north east of the state. The region covers 20,706 square kilometres and is home to 287,809 people or four per cent of the population of New South Wales. Our region is bounded by the New South Wales state border to the north, the Great Dividing Range to the west, the Mid-North Coast region to the south and more than 200 kilometres of coastline to the east and incorporates three major river systems: the Tweed, the Wilson and the Clarence.

Traditional ownership of the Northern Rivers rests with the Bundjalung, Yaegl and Gumbainggirr peoples, who maintain important custodial links to the region. Seven Local Government Authorities (LGAs) have been established in the region: Ballina Shire; Byron Shire; Clarence Valley; Kyogle; Lismore City; Richmond Valley; and Tweed Shire.

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 is also characterised by a diverse, micro-business economic base with strengths in health care and social assistance, retail, accommodation and food services, education and training, manufacturing, agriculture and construction.

Figure 1: Where is the Northern Rivers region?



### Introducing Regional Development Australia – Northern Rivers

Regional Development Australia is a nation-wide initiative based on building partnerships and encouraging all governments and stakeholders to be responsive to local priorities and needs. Regional Development Australia – Northern Rivers (RDA-NR) is a leadership voice for the region. We support the building of local economies and dynamic communities and enhance liveability in the Northern Rivers by: improving access to government funding and programs; facilitating partnerships and linkages with all tiers of government and the community; and managing a diverse range of projects that create economic, social and natural capital. We are a non-profit, community-based organisation.

## Our vision

**A healthy, prosperous and sustainable future for the communities of the Northern Rivers region.**

## Our goals

This vision informs our goals for investing in the Northern Rivers' economic, social and natural capital. This triple-bottom line framework is designed to holistically address the key determinants of long-term regional economic growth as identified by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Regional Australia Standing Council, being: (1) comparative advantage and business competitiveness; (2) access to international, national and regional markets; (3) human capital; and (4) sustainable communities and population change.

Promoting collaborative partnerships and regional planning effectively form a 'fifth determinant' of long-term regional economic growth. This will be key to the successful implementation of this Plan.

## Our priorities

Our regional priorities are informed by stakeholder consultation, research and analysis. The priorities recognise and build on the previous and on-going work of RDA-NR and its partners in community, government, private enterprise and the not-for-profit sector. Continually engaging with all communities across the region, and understanding and utilising community knowledge and skills will help to deliver a Regional Plan that genuinely reflects community needs, priorities and expectations.

The priorities for the Northern Rivers reflect the need to be both visionary and practical in that they focus on the 'enablers' of regional development – the services, infrastructure and support mechanisms required to facilitate sustainable growth. The regional priorities, which respond to the key determinants of long-term regional economic growth, are:

- |                             |                             |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (1) connected communities;  | (5) inclusive communities;  |
| (2) a learning region;      | (6) regional identity; and  |
| (3) natural infrastructure; | (7) a collaborative region. |
| (4) sustainable industry;   |                             |

The seven regional priorities inform the 27 proposed initiatives, activities and projects for RDA-Northern Rivers and its regional partners articulated in this Plan.

RDA-Northern Rivers is effectively the custodian of this Plan, which is based on building partnerships and encouraging all stakeholders to use the Plan as a guiding framework to address the region's challenges, needs and priorities for long-term economic growth. With regard to the region's government agencies, institutions and other stakeholders, working as a 'collaborative region' provides a foundation for achieving the region's other priorities.

## Activities, projects and initiatives

### Connected communities

- 1.1 Develop an integrated regional transport plan to address the Northern Rivers' intra-regional transport infrastructure shortfalls. (p.20)
- 1.2 Support implementation of the *Northern Rivers Digital Economy Strategy*. (p.21)
- 1.3 Support initiatives to use existing or ageing infrastructure to meet future needs (e.g. the Casino to Murwillumbah rail trail). (p.21)

### 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. (p. 22)
- 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. (p.22)

### 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 (CAP) 2013-2023. (p. 23)
- 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. (p.23)

### Sustainable industry

- 4.1 Review and update the Regional Industry and Economic Plan (RIEP) to focus economic development strategy and identify industry development priorities. (p. 25)
- 4.2 Support the region's health care and 'healthy living' sector using collaborative approaches to workforce planning. (p. 25)
- 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. (p. 25)
- 4.4 Support and promote sustainable food and fibre production in the Northern Rivers region. (p. 26)
- 4.5 Support the growth and development of the region's creative industries including emerging sectors such as sustainable building design. (p. 26)
- 4.6 Promote R&D and investment in technologies which support the generation and delivery of renewable energy. (p. 26)
- 4.7 Encourage collaborative approaches to innovation, R&D and investment in the region's existing and emerging industry clusters. (p. 26)
- 4.8 Attract investment to the region to complement and grow established and emerging new industries. (p. 27)
- 4.9 Support the development of programs to increase micro-business capacity building and innovation, e.g. Kyogle Adopt a Business and Mentoring programs. (p. 27)

## **Inclusive communities**

- 5.1 Implement the recommendations of the Northern Rivers Regional Social Plan 2013-2018. (p. 28)
- 5.2 Develop a regional social procurement strategy. (p. 29)
- 5.3 Increase sustainable, adaptable and affordable housing choice for diversity of needs across different segments of the region's community. (p. 29)
- 5.4 Support the development of health care infrastructure and service delivery. (p. 29)

## **Regional identity**

- 6.1 Collaboratively re-affirm the identity of the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales. (p. 30)
- 6.2 Grow and develop the Northern Rivers' visitor economy consistent with the region's identity. (p. 30)
- 6.3 Promote the region's rich natural asset base, high quality and clean, green image as a means of communicating competitive advantage and accessing international, national and regional markets. (p. 30)

## **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. (p. 31)
- 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. (p. 31)
- 7.3 Support collaborative long-term sustainable land-use planning integrated with infrastructure investment and whole of government implementation for the region. (p. 31)
- 7.4 Collaborate with South East Queensland RDAs, the Cross-Border Commissioner and other key agencies on regional development matters of common interest. (p. 32)

## **Informing annual business planning, programming and monitoring**

RDA-Northern Rivers will provide regular updates and reports on the progress of key actions and initiatives to support regional priorities and outcomes. The Regional Plan also provides the core framework for the development of RDA-Northern Rivers' annual business plan.

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# VISION FOR THE NORTHERN RIVERS

## Vision to 2020

### *A healthy, prosperous and sustainable future for the communities of the Northern Rivers region*

#### HEALTHY and PROSPEROUS means:

- the people and natural environments of our region are healthy;
- a high level of mutual trust, respect for diversity, co-operation and support within our region's communities;
- equal opportunities for everyone; and
- sufficient material wealth to satisfy basic needs and wants recognising that individuals aspire to and define wealth in different ways.

#### SUSTAINABLE FUTURE means:

- recognising the links between our economy, environment and quality of life, now and in the future;
- that ecologically sustainable development is synonymous with socially and economically sustainable development; and that
- by striving for a sustainable future, we aim to achieve a balance between economic, environmental and social goals.

#### COMMUNITIES OF THE NORTHERN RIVERS REGION means:

- people in our region are characterised by their diversity and do not form a homogenous group;
- communities can be defined by spatial boundaries or by particular characteristics including, for example, ethnicity, age, gender, income or different lifestyle choices; and that
- communities work collaboratively around shared goals and visions.

## Guiding principles

Complementing our vision is a series of supporting statements of intent. These are *guiding principles*, which reflect the aspirations for the Northern Rivers and are consistent with the region's goals for investing in our natural, social and economic capital:

- **Economic:** The Northern Rivers will diversify and grow its industry base, providing a variety of meaningful and sustainable employment opportunities for all members of the community with an emphasis on education and training, healthy living and healthy ageing, sustainable food and fibre production, creative industries and the visitor economy.
- **Natural:** The Northern Rivers will invest in maintaining and improving the region's irreplaceable natural infrastructure – the biophysical assets (including soils, biodiversity, rivers, estuaries, wetlands, and coastal and marine environments), systems and processes that enable and support all forms of life – and will promote healthy landscapes and seascapes to support a prosperous and sustainable future for the communities of the region.
- **Social:** The Northern Rivers will celebrate and connect its heritage, lifestyle and character through a strong network of vibrant communities, towns and villages in the region's three river valleys.

These guiding principles are informed by the Northern Rivers region's desired future character.

Figure 2: Map of the Northern Rivers region



## Our desired future character

When realised, the vision will result in outcomes that represent our desired future character:

- 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
- People have a strong connection to the earth
- 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
- Villages, farms and natural areas exist in harmony
- Value is placed on the diversity of living things
- Long-term growth is built on the sustainable management of all our natural resources

## Sustainability principles

The Northern Rivers vision is informed by the following sustainability principles, which were developed and endorsed by the region's stakeholders through a process of collaboration and cross-sectoral partnerships and are consistent with the NSW Whole of Government Sustainability Principles (NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2006):

- **The precautionary principle:** we can't always predict the effects of our actions, so environmental decisions should err on the side of caution. We must take steps to prevent serious or irreparable damage to the environment even in circumstances where we have no firm knowledge that significant damage will not be done.
- **Intergenerational equity:** future generations should have the same benefits as we do from the health, diversity and productivity of our natural resources.
- **The use of valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms:** environmental factors should be included in the valuation of assets and services.
- That **biodiversity and ecological integrity** should be maintained and enhanced.
- That we take a **global perspective** on local decisions.
- That development aims to **increase human welfare** and/or **quality of life**.
- That natural resource use is limited to make sure **we maintain constant natural capital**.
- That **efficiency of resource use** is a major objective, contributing to creating a resilient economy and ecology.
- That the **community participates** in creating and realising this vision.

## THE ROLE OF RDA–NORTHERN RIVERS

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As a conduit between government and local communities, RDA-NR is both a source and a provider of information, providing leadership in regional development and playing a pivotal role in the sustainability of the region through community engagement and regional planning.

RDA-NR is a catalyst for regional development that contributes to and drives:

- regional business growth plans and strategies to support economic development, job creation, skills development and business investment;
- environmental solutions, to support ongoing sustainability and the management of climate change (including drought, flood or bushfire impacts); and
- social inclusion strategies to bring together and support all members of our community.

### Promoting collaborative partnerships and regional planning

#### Regional engagement

RDA-NR recognises the importance of regional engagement to help develop and deliver the Regional Plan. Regional engagement assists successful regional development policy-making, program design and management, and service delivery activities.

RDA-NR also recognises the importance of building community capacity to help inform, develop and deliver the Regional Plan. Continually engaging with communities across the region and understanding and utilising community knowledge and skills will help to deliver a Regional Plan that genuinely reflects community needs, priorities and expectations. Community knowledge and expertise is also required to inform and guide regional development activities.

In this sense, RDA-NR acts as the custodian of this Regional Plan, which is based on building partnerships, and encourages all governments and stakeholders to use it as a guiding framework to address the region's challenges, needs and priorities for long-term economic growth.

#### Regional collaboration and partnerships

This Plan builds on the already solid foundation of regional partnerships. When addressing the region's priorities, successful regional development relies on all levels of government working in partnership with each other, with local communities and with the private sector.

Regional Plans cannot be fully implemented by any one agency. They require the support and co-ordination of local government, state and federal agencies, the health, education and training sectors, regional organisations, industry, business, community service and not-for-profits.

Collaborative regional governance and effective regional partnerships is a theme underlying all matters concerning the sustainable development of the Northern Rivers. Governance – a fundamental enabler of regional development – is characterised by collaborative and cooperative approaches to research, community engagement, knowledge-sharing, planning, project design and implementation of strategies and activities for the good of the region and its communities. Promoting regional collaboration is fundamental to the successful implementation of this Plan.



## Planning and review

The three-year planning framework enables the development of key performance indicators (KPIs) to integrate and link the *Northern Rivers Regional Plan* with RDA-NR's annual work plans and the *RDA–Northern Rivers Organisational Strategy*, which has been adopted to build internal organisational capacity to respond to regional challenges.



( iStockphoto.com)

## REGIONAL ANALYSIS

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### Investing in our economic, social and environmental capital

The focus of this Plan is on the region's goals for investing in our natural, social and economic capital.

INVESTING IN OUR NATURAL CAPITAL	INVESTING IN OUR SOCIAL CAPITAL	INVESTING IN OUR ECONOMIC CAPITAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 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.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To improve the health, wellbeing and safety of our communities.</li><li>• To support and strengthen the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in our region.</li><li>• To create a united regional voice to improve our regional identity.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To enhance investment in economic-enabling infrastructure.</li><li>• To facilitate business development and investment in a diverse industry base.</li><li>• To meet the region's employment needs, supporting skills development and capacity-building.</li></ul>

This triple-bottom line approach is consistent with a holistic (all-encompassing) assessment of regional development strengths, challenges, needs and opportunities.

This Plan embraces this holistic framework to address the key determinants of long-term regional economic growth as identified by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Regional Australia Standing Council (Australian Government 2013a and 2013b). These are:

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

RDA-NR recognises that economic development is about more than growth. It is about increasing the region's level of income and capital and distributing that wealth to the community through expenditure and employment. Measured in terms of jobs and income, economic development also importantly includes improvements in education, health, lifestyle and 'liveability', environmental sustainability and community well-being.

RDA-NR believes that the relationship between the social, environmental, cultural and economic factors is inextricably linked. This inherent and mutually-reinforcing relationship between the natural capital, social capital and economic capital of the Northern Rivers underpins the identification of regional strengths, challenges, needs and opportunities which inform the priorities presented herein.

## Consultation and consolidation

Consultation has been undertaken with a cross-section of regional stakeholders in the form of targeted interviews. Three facilitated workshops with regional representatives of Commonwealth and NSW government agencies, industry leaders and local government were also conducted. The consultations helped to establish some common understanding of the region's strengths, challenges, needs and opportunities for long-term growth. The findings reflect a whole-of-region view that is supported by statistical information, regional strategies and policies which collectively inform the priorities presented in this Plan.

The Draft Plan was circulated for public comment and feedback from 27 August to 25 September 2013. Submissions were received from a range of agencies, businesses and individuals in the region and provided additional information to refine the content in the final plan.

A raft of local and regional strategies and policies help inform and contextualise the issues identified. Each of the region's seven local government authorities has a broad spectrum of community plans, land use plans and operational plans. State Government agencies and other non-profit organisations also have in place, and are acting on, strategic plans that have a direct impact on the region's development prospects.

This Plan is designed to complement and build on the existing work of the region's agencies, organisations and institutions that have carriage of those policies, plans, strategies and key directions reports, which collectively aim to enhance local and regional development throughout the Northern Rivers. They include:

- *Northern Rivers Regional Social Plan 2013-2018* (Draft for comment, August 2013)
- *Northern Rivers Digital Economy Strategy* (November 2013)
- *Regional Education, Skills and Jobs Plan 2012-14 – Northern Rivers* (July 2013)
- *Northern Rivers Social Profile* (May 2013)
- *Northern Rivers Catchment Action Plan 2013-2023* (April 2013)
- *NSW North Coast Bioenergy Scoping Study 2013* (April 2013)
- *Sustain Food Roadmap 2013-2015* (2013)
- *Northern Rivers Regional Action Plan (NSW 2021)* (December 2012)
- *Regional Employment Plan – Richmond-Tweed and Clarence Valley Priority Employment Area* (November 2012)
- *Sustain Northern Rivers Regional Action Plan for a Low Carbon Future* (February 2012)
- *Northern Rivers Regional Plan 2011, Vision to 2020* (September 2011)
- *NSW State Plan 2021* (September 2011)
- *An Appetising Investment Destination* (July 2011)
- *Innovative Development of Excellent Aged Services Project Report* (July 2010)
- *Mid North Coast Regional Strategy* (2009)
- *Northern Rivers Regional Industry and Economic Plan Data Update* (December 2009)
- *Northern Rivers Regional Industry and Economic Plan* (2005)

- *NSW Industry Action Plans for creative industries, digital economy, international education and research, manufacturing, professional services and the visitor economy* (2012 and 2013)
- *Northern Rivers Regional Profile 2013* (in press)
- *RDA–Northern Rivers Business Plan 2012-13* (August 2013)
- *RDA–Northern Rivers Food Investment Profile* (2011)
- *RDA–Northern Rivers Strategic Plan 2012-2016* (2012)

The community strategic plans for our region’s councils are:

- Ballina Shire *Our Community: Our Future Community Strategic Plan 2013-2023*
- Byron Shire *Community Strategic Plan 2022*
- Clarence Valley *Interim Valley Vision 2024*
- Lismore City *Imagine Lismore 10 Year Plan 2013-2023*
- Kyogle *Community Strategic Plan 2012-2025*
- Richmond Valley *Towards 2025 Community Strategic Plan*
- Tweed Shire *Community Strategic Plan 2013/2023*

A full list of policy, planning and strategy references is provided in Appendix A.

## **Regional strengths, challenges, needs and opportunities**

The four COAG key determinants of growth are not mutually exclusive. In some instances an issue raised for the region may cut across more than one of the determinants.

Identified needs and challenges are presented together as issues which require ongoing attention to improve the region’s prospects for long-term growth. The needs and challenges represent the limitations or barriers which will be addressed and overcome to grow our natural, social and economic capital.

Similarly, identified strengths and opportunities are grouped together. The Regional Plan identifies priorities and activities which will capitalise on these strengths and opportunities to support the region’s long-term regional economic growth. Where the issue represents a need or challenge as well as an opportunity for growth, it is identified as both.



## Comparative advantage and business competitiveness

Comparative advantage is an area of relative strength or specialisation. Efforts to develop regional economies are most successful when they focus on building on such strengths. Businesses can also use a region's comparative advantage to build a competitive advantage, which is also developed through the combination of factors such as knowledge, resources, skills and the ability to innovate.

Issue	Need / Challenge	Strength / Opportunity
<p><b>The region's natural infrastructure must be protected and enhanced.</b></p> <p>The Northern Rivers region's natural infrastructure – most of which is irreplaceable – underpins the region's social values and its economic development opportunities. Natural infrastructure refers to the biophysical assets (including soils, biodiversity, rivers, estuaries, wetlands, and coastal and marine environments), systems and processes that enable and support all forms of life.</p> <p>The region needs to better understand the values and functions of its natural infrastructure and then invest in maintaining and improving this key attribute. The region's natural beauty and environmental/ climatic attributes offer comparative advantages on which to build new high-value industries like the visitor economy, niche horticulture, creative industries, education and healthy living/healthy ageing.</p>	✓	✓
<p><b>The region has a strong Indigenous cultural heritage and a large Indigenous population.</b></p> <p>Aboriginal people – of the Bundjalung, Yaegl and Gumbaynggirr Nations – reside in the region (presumably) accompanied by Aboriginal people from other Indigenous groups. According to the 2011 Census 11,385 Indigenous people live in the region, accounting for 4.1% of the Northern Rivers' population, compared to 1.9% State-wide.<sup>1</sup> A challenge is how to connect with Indigenous culture.</p>	✓	✓
<p><b>Health and education are the largest employers and fastest-growing industries in the Northern Rivers.</b></p> <p>The health and education sectors are drivers of the regional economy. The region's jobs profile is dominated by the services sector, in particular health care and social assistance (16% of all jobs in the Northern Rivers, compared to 12.5% for non-metropolitan NSW), retail trade (14% compared to 11% for non-metropolitan NSW) and education and training (10% compared to 8% for non-metropolitan NSW).<sup>2</sup></p> <p>The health care and education industries rely on substantial government and private sector investment. They also offer significant spin-off opportunities for private enterprise, much of which can be retained locally in terms of new business investment and employment. With an ageing population (globally) and the emergence of 'healthy living' as an industry (for all age groups), health care (and education) present existing and emerging opportunities for growth. Specifically, for the Northern Rivers, these industries present both challenges (e.g. required infrastructure and skilled labour) and opportunities, e.g. to grow the industries as inter-regional (and even international) service exporters.</p>	✓	✓

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing (Working Population Profile)*, 2011

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

Issue	Need / Challenge	Strength / Opportunity
<p><b>The region's forestry industry has challenges and opportunities.</b></p> <p>The strength of the Australian dollar coupled with growing production costs, cheaper imported products, a slow construction market and exclusion of timber for carbon credits in the Federal Government's Renewable Energy Targets is placing pressure on the region's timber industry.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the industry has also identified a range of opportunities for investment to further develop research and development and new innovations in support of the forestry sector's sustainable growth and development.</p>	✓	✓
<p><b>The region's sugar cane industry is going through a period of transformation.</b></p> <p>The potential for co-generation has been hampered by the limited availability of fuel sources alongside changing electricity generation and wholesale pricing.</p>	✓	✓
<p><b>There is potential to develop and promote the Northern Rivers as the food bowl of New South Wales.</b></p> <p>Analysis of 2011 ABS Census Working Population Profile data reveals the Northern Rivers has a relative industry specialisation (compared to non-metropolitan NSW) across a diversity of manufacturing activities including wood product manufacturing, and textiles, clothing and footwear production.</p> <p>The strength of the region's agriculture and food production sector is evident in the high location quotient – that is, the ratio derived by comparing the proportion of jobs in each industry sector in the Northern Rivers with the proportion of jobs in the same sector in non-metropolitan NSW – of 1.57 for food product manufacturing.<sup>3</sup></p> <p>Promoting sustainable food production presents an opportunity to capitalise on the region's agricultural strengths, its landscape attributes and its proximity to markets.</p>		✓
<p><b>The region must be 'digital-ready'.</b></p> <p>The emergence and growth of the digital economy means the Northern Rivers must be digitally-ready with respect to infrastructure, skills and community capacity.</p>	✓	✓

<sup>3</sup> ibid.

## Access to international, national and regional markets

Access to markets includes access to trading partners, clients and labour. Improving market access broadens trade, allows competitive industries to grow and increases the availability of goods and services.

Issue	Need / Challenge	Strength / Opportunity
<p><b>The Northern Rivers needs a strong and cohesive regional brand.</b></p> <p>The region needs to maintain its rich natural asset base and its high quality, clean, green image as a means of communicating competitive advantage and accessing markets. The region needs to establish consensus and commitment on the 'Northern Rivers' brand to promote to market the region's industry capabilities – regionally, nationally and internationally, to position the region for the Asian Century.</p>	✓	✓
<p><b>The region can build on competitive industry advantage.</b></p> <p>The region's jobs profile is dominated by the services sector (see page 9 for comparisons with the rest of non-metropolitan NSW). Accommodation and food services are also prominent, accounting for 9.5% of all jobs located in the Northern Rivers compared to 7.7% for non-metropolitan NSW.</p> <p>Other industries that account for a large share of the region's employment include manufacturing (7.2%) and construction (6.2%).<sup>4</sup> There is an opportunity to attract investment that will complement and grow the region's established and emerging industries, all of which require appropriate skills to prosper.</p>		✓
<p><b>South East Queensland presents a market opportunity for the Northern Rivers.</b></p> <p>South East Queensland (SEQ), with a population of around 3.1 million people<sup>5</sup>, presents an opportunity for the Northern Rivers to capitalise on its proximity to a large and growing consumer market. It is estimated that the population of SEQ will grow at an average annual rate of close to 2.0% per annum over the next twenty years.<sup>6</sup></p>		✓
<p><b>The Northern Rivers has a large number of micro-businesses.</b></p> <p>The region has a high proportion of micro-businesses. The Australian Bureau of Statistics count of registered businesses shows that in 2011, over half the region's businesses were 'micro-businesses' employing no staff.<sup>7</sup></p> <p>This presents some challenges with respect to low economies of production/scale which impacts the region's ability to serve national and international markets, and to comply with different jurisdictional regulatory requirements. Some emerging businesses/industries lack the infrastructure needed to be competitive (e.g. affordable work spaces).</p>	✓	✓

<sup>4</sup> ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics *Regional Population Growth, Australia* (Catalogue No: 3218.0)

<sup>6</sup> Queensland Government population projections, 2011 edition (medium series)

<sup>7</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011), *Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits, Jun 2007 to Jun 2011*

Issue	Need / Challenge	Strength / Opportunity
<p><b>Broadband infrastructure delivery is critical to regional development.</b></p> <p>While there are some good examples of businesses that use existing digital infrastructure to good effect, a lack of high-speed broadband infrastructure is perceived to limit the region's industries.</p> <p>Looking ahead, many localities in the region will not get fibre optic connections to the premises under the proposed NBN rollout, relying on fixed wireless networks and satellite services. This is not a sustainable option due to increasing demand for content. Towers have limited capacity and fibre is a longer term solution key to supporting the development of the region's digital economy.</p> <p>If the Northern Rivers is to engage effectively with the digital economy, delivery of accessible and affordable infrastructure, and education and training on a range of levels (to residents and businesses) is needed.</p>	✓	✓
<p><b>Transport infrastructure presents a challenge for industry.</b></p> <p>Transport infrastructure, in particular road access to national markets and international gateways (e.g. Gold Coast Airport, Brisbane Airport and the Port of Brisbane) and intra-regional infrastructure, represents a challenge for industry.</p> <p>There is an urgent need to upgrade the Pacific Highway and the Mount Lindsay Road between Mount Lindsay and Warwick, to facilitate industry access to regional, national and international markets.</p>	✓	



## Human capital

Improvements in human capital can enhance the innovative and productive capacity of the workforce. Developing a skilled and educated workforce assists with building the region's resilience. Individuals with higher education and advanced skills can pursue a wider range of employment opportunities and adapt to new processes and technologies, which enhances productivity and improves living standards.

Issue	Need / Challenge	Strength / Opportunity
<p><b>The region's ageing workforce brings skills and experience.</b></p> <p>An ageing population means there may not be enough workers in the Northern Rivers 20 years into the future. The 2011 Census reveals that compared to NSW, the region has smaller proportions of younger adults across the 20-39 years age cohorts, which may be due to a combination of outward youth migration and inward migration of older people to the region.<sup>8</sup> This results in a smaller regional labour pool in those key working age demographics. However, the region's ageing population also presents an opportunity to tap into their skills and experience.</p>	✓	✓
<p><b>There are limited education pathways in some fields and opportunities to attract skilled people to the region.</b></p> <p>There is a perception held by some, of a lack of education/training pathways linked to employment for the region's school-leavers. It is considered that some school-leavers choose not to enrol in tertiary education or training or leave the region to study or train elsewhere. However, if school-leavers are informed of local education and training opportunities, more might choose to stay and study in the region. A lack of local employment opportunities for university graduates forces many to leave the region to find employment/a career. Nevertheless, former residents can also be attracted back to the region, bringing new skills with them.</p>	✓	✓
<p><b>There are skills shortages in some sectors.</b></p> <p>It is difficult to find appropriately skilled staff for some industries (e.g. aged care, disability services). Compounding this problem, there are 'thin' markets for some education and training in the region, e.g. allied health. It is hard to commercialise training if not enough people want it. There is a lot of training available in the region but it needs to better match the needs of local industry. If they are to develop and prosper, emerging industries will require the right mix of skills and expertise. Businesses, government and education providers need to design and fund education and training that better matches skills sets to industry needs.</p>	✓	✓
<p><b>The region has pockets of social disadvantage.</b></p> <p>According to the ABS Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) Index, the region has pockets of social disadvantage, notably in the Richmond Valley, Kyogle and the Clarence Valley<sup>9</sup> where there are, for example, relatively high numbers of households with low incomes and vice versa.</p>	✓	
<p><b>The region has a high rate of unemployment.</b></p> <p>Unemployment in the region is 6.1% compared to 5% for NSW. The region also has a comparatively low labour force participation rate (the number of residents who are employed or actively seeking work as a proportion of the population aged 15 years and older). According to the latest labour markets data, the region's labour force participation rate is just 54% compared to the NSW average of 64%.<sup>10</sup></p>	✓	

<sup>8</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics *Census of Population and Housing*, 2011

<sup>9</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics *Census of Population and Housing: Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)*, 2011

<sup>10</sup> DEEWR (2013), *Australian Regional Labour Markets: December Quarter 2012*

Issue	Need / Challenge	Strength / Opportunity
<p><b>Underemployment and the casualisation of the workforce is a prominent feature of the Northern Rivers.</b></p> <p>ABS Census data shows that 13% of employed residents worked less than 15 hours/week (compared to 10% State-wide); 34% of resident workers are employed part-time (compared to 28% for NSW); and 52% are in full-time employment (compared to 60% for NSW).<sup>11</sup></p>	✓	
<p><b>Employment opportunities in the region are relatively limited.</b></p> <p>The region relies heavily on sectors like retail trade (which accounts for 15% of jobs in the Northern Rivers compared to 11% State-wide), health care and social assistance (17% compared to 12% for NSW) and the hospitality sector (10% compared to 7% for NSW).<sup>12</sup></p>	✓	
<p><b>Educational attainment is low in the region.</b></p> <p>Educational attainment is relatively low in the Northern Rivers compared to the NSW average (and in some instances such as Tweed Shire, more than four times lower) than the proportion State-wide. According to the 2011 Census of Population and Housing, Ballina Shire (14%) and Kyogle (12%) had the region's largest proportions of school leavers enrolled at university, while fewer (approximately 9%) school leavers were enrolled at universities in the region's remaining LGAs, compared to 27% State-wide.<sup>13</sup> While some school-leavers may defer their return to study for a few years after secondary school, access to learning remains a challenge for many, particularly disadvantaged members of the community. Low levels of education attainment adversely impact upon the region's labour market pool.</p>	✓	
<p><b>There is an opportunity to engage the region's disadvantaged groups into employment as well as training.</b></p> <p>There is scope to increase Aboriginal participation in employment and economic development. The region's Indigenous people<sup>14</sup> are a largely untapped source of knowledge and ideas.</p>	✓	✓
<p><b>The region's average income levels are comparatively low.</b></p> <p>Average incomes in regional areas are generally lower than those in Australian metropolitan centres as noted by Lismore City Council (2011)<sup>15</sup> when comparing the 2008/09 average personal incomes in the region (\$35,822) with the broader NSW population (\$48,793). Education is not affordable for all people in the community. Similar patterns emerge from the current, actual weekly household earnings reported by residents in the 2011 Census median household incomes in our region are 67.4% of the median household incomes for NSW; and 59% of our households earn less than \$1,000 per week compared to 42% for the whole of NSW.<sup>16</sup></p>	✓	

<sup>11</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics *Census of Population and Housing, 2011*

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> PHIDU *Social Health Atlas of Australia: Statistical Local Area and Local Government Area, 2013*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Lismore City Council (2011), *Economic Snapshot – November 2011*

<sup>16</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics *Census of Population and Housing, 2011*

## Sustainable communities and population change

Population is one of the most important resources of a region. Population change can be a significant factor in the long term viability of the local community in terms of economic, environmental and social sustainability. Population change affects demand for regional infrastructure and services and can influence regional amenity and liveability. Growth in the region's working age population can boost the labour force and expand the productive capacity of the region's economy.

Issue	Need / Challenge	Strength / Opportunity
<p><b>An ageing population presents critical infrastructure challenges and opportunities.</b></p> <p>Our population has some distinct features in comparison to the NSW average. According to the 2011 Census data, most prominent are the smaller proportions of younger adults across the 20-39 years age cohorts and the relatively larger proportions of people across the older age cohorts. This indicates that the Northern Rivers is generally an 'older' population in comparison to NSW. This is a scenario that was also evident at the time of the 2006 Census.<sup>17</sup></p> <p>The ageing population places greater demands on key services/community infrastructure. Health care and healthy living is a priority for the region's growing and ageing population. There is a need to develop the region's health care infrastructure and service delivery to support the ageing population and people with special needs. There are opportunities to better link health and education to improve service delivery and to grow these sectors.</p>	✓	✓
<p><b>High speed broadband: opportunities for sustainable population growth.</b></p> <p>The proposed NBN rollout will provide opportunities for people and businesses to connect and potentially reduce the demand on the region's transport infrastructure. The region requires investment in broadband communications infrastructure to ensure the highest-quality access for all communities, including smaller settlements which will not have access to full cable services under the planned rollout.</p>	✓	✓
<p><b>The region's transport infrastructure is insufficient.</b></p> <p>Transport infrastructure shortfalls limit equitable access to employment, services and recreational opportunities. There are many transport-disadvantaged residents in the region, particularly youth, Aboriginal people, those on low incomes, people with disabilities and older people. The region requires substantial investment in intra-regional transport infrastructure to ensure equitable access to services and employment opportunities for all individuals and communities of the Northern Rivers.</p>	✓	✓

<sup>17</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics *Census of Population and Housing (Time Series Profile)*, 2011

Issue	Need / Challenge	Strength / Opportunity
<p><b>Population change presents challenges for the region.</b></p> <p>One distinguishing feature of the Northern Rivers population is its dramatic growth. All LGAs, excluding Kyogle, experienced population growth from 2001 - 2011. According to the Census of Population and Housing, Tweed Shire's population increased by 18.6% over the ten years to 2011 – almost double the population growth experienced state-wide.<sup>18</sup> Moderate relative population growth also occurred in Richmond Valley (7.1%) and Ballina Shire (6.8%).<sup>19</sup></p> <p>Population change varies across the region. The region's population is increasing, more so towards the coast, placing pressure on the region's infrastructure. In other parts of the region, population is slowing or static. There are higher proportions of older people in some areas, while there are higher proportions of Aboriginal people in others. Population growth and pressure for urban development is creating competing land uses and greater land use conflict, between farmers, developers, existing settlements and environmental interests.</p> <p>The region's dispersed settlement pattern is difficult to service effectively. There have been instances of urban land releases being approved without the appropriate investment in water and other infrastructure services. Compounding the issue, there is a lack of baseline and scientific data to address land use conflict that may inhibit investment in the region.</p>	✓	
<p><b>The out-migration of youth creates a 'labour drain'.</b></p> <p>The migration of youth out of the region is a natural occurrence typical of many regional areas. While this can contribute towards a 'labour drain' in the short term, it can also bring new skills to the region in the longer term when people return to live in the region.</p>	✓	✓
<p><b>Cross-border impacts are significant.</b></p> <p>Population growth in South East Queensland (which has grown at 2.3% per annum over the ten years to 2012)<sup>20</sup> and cross-border issues (e.g. State tax anomalies, transport regulations and infrastructure issues, other community infrastructure demand issues, daylight savings, etc.) all impact on businesses and communities in the Northern Rivers, particularly in the Tweed.</p>	✓	
<p><b>Climate change is a pervasive challenge for the region.</b></p> <p>Climate change and peak oil is a pervasive challenge facing all communities throughout the Northern Rivers region. While it negatively impacts the cost of food and food transport affecting those who are living in more dispersed parts of the region and those who are most disadvantaged; adaptation, mitigation and management of climate change may also present new business and development opportunities. This is particularly so if the Northern Rivers region is impacted comparatively less than other regions by climate change, in which case the region may become increasingly important at both local and state levels for its potential as a major food bowl.</p>	✓	✓

<sup>18</sup> ibid.

<sup>19</sup> ibid

<sup>20</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics *Regional Population Growth, Australia*



Issue	Need / Challenge	Strength / Opportunity
<p><b>Housing affordability and housing choice is an issue in the region.</b></p> <p>Parts of the region are characterised by low housing affordability (relative to regional incomes). Data from Housing NSW (2013) shows housing costs vary across the Northern Rivers, and residents in the Ballina, Byron and Tweed LGAs pay the highest rents and face the highest costs of properties for sale.<sup>21</sup> According to the Public Health Information Development Unit, there are greater proportions of households in the region experiencing both rent and mortgage stress when compared to the NSW average.</p> <p>At the local government level, Byron is relatively disadvantaged with larger proportions of households experiencing both rent stress (41.3% of households) and mortgage stress (20.6%) than elsewhere in the region.<sup>22</sup> Anecdotal evidence suggests there is a lack of suitable housing for some segments of the community (e.g. 1-2 bedroom units for younger people such as students). To address housing affordability and choice issues, the Northern Rivers region needs sustainable, adaptable and affordable housing choice for the diversity of needs for different members of the community.</p>	✓	✓
<p><b>The region is a high rainfall area.</b></p> <p>The Northern Rivers is a high rainfall area with one of the highest average annual rainfalls in Australia and this is likely to continue with changing climatic conditions.</p>		✓
<p><b>Water security is a challenge for the region.</b></p> <p>Water security presents a critical challenge in some parts of the region for the growing population. The Northern Rivers requires investment in the region's natural infrastructure – the biophysical assets, systems and processes that enable and support all forms of life, in particular, water availability and security.</p>	✓	
<p><b>Coal seam gas extraction is a contentious issue in the Northern Rivers.</b></p> <p>The prospect of coal seam gas extraction and other mining is a contentious issue in the region. While there may be potential economic benefits from mining, there is a lack of information about how this could threaten the viability of other core sectors such as food production, water supply and the visitor economy, and the potential impacts on human health.</p>	✓	
<p><b>The Northern Rivers needs to progress integrated regional planning.</b></p> <p>The Northern Rivers land use planning is not well integrated with infrastructure investment, industry development, community development, service delivery and program implementation. This has impacts on the sustainability of whole-of-region long-term integrated regional planning. There is an opportunity to build on the Far and Mid North Coast Regional Strategies land use planning framework and the region's collaborative framework to address this.</p>	✓	✓

<sup>21</sup> Housing NSW (2013), *Rent & Sales Report* Issue 102 and 103

<sup>22</sup> PHIDU (2012), *Social Health Atlas of Australia: Statistical Local Area and Local Government Area*

### Principles of regional significance

The following principles have been informed by the consultation and analysis as outlined in the previous section and developed to identify priorities of regional significance, and to help define the activities, projects and initiatives to address them.

An activity of regional significance:

- has an ongoing 'community benefit' (see right) with impact and reach across multiple sectors, domains and/or stakeholders;
- has benefits that are cumulative and have a flow on effect;
- addresses identified needs or entrenched or complex issues;
- is based on the best available evidence, including research, planning, evidence, consultation and community support;
- has linkages and alignment with regional planning and/or stakeholder groups in the region;
- has a focus on wellbeing in the region and uses socially inclusive approaches;
- works through partnerships and/or collaboration;
- is viable and will ensure a return on investment; and
- applies a strategic and/or innovative approach to addressing identified needs.

Each of the priorities identified in this Plan, and the activities, projects and initiatives that support them, demonstrate regional significance by:

- establishing a long term view with sustainable outcomes;
- demonstrating continual improvement processes for refinement and further input;
- exhibiting significant research and consultation;
- recognising diversity;
- promoting community resilience;
- maximising opportunities within the region;
- demonstrating commitment, ownership and participation from a range of stakeholders;
- leveraging private enterprise;
- integrating State and Federal Government priorities and plans; and
- demonstrating transferable outcomes and knowledge.

#### Defining community benefit

Projects or activities of regional significance could involve a large benefit to a single target group/sector/industry or a less significant benefit to a number of target groups/sectors or industries.

A community benefit should not disadvantage another part of the Northern Rivers region or other regions. Likewise a benefit accruing to a community in the short term should not disadvantage the same – or another – community in the long term.

Regionally significant community benefits need to have a geographical reach, with direct benefits extending beyond the project site and across multiple local government boundaries.

#### Benefits might include:

- environmental improvements;
- community resilience, health and wellbeing;
- cultural, artistic and social opportunities;
- improved physical health;
- equity;
- community safety and security;
- increased commercial activity and security;
- potential for export benefits;
- access to goods and services;
- sustainable, long term job creation; and
- skills / career development.

## Regional priorities

The regional priorities for the Northern Rivers reflect the need to be both visionary and practical in that they focus on the ‘enablers’ of regional development, i.e. the services, infrastructure and support mechanisms required to facilitate sustainable growth. The priorities are informed by the trends, attributes and challenges that have been identified. The priorities inform the initiatives, activities and projects of RDA-NR and its regional partners and stakeholders. They also guide RDA-NR’s activities and projects as set out in its annual business plan and budget.

Governance is a fundamental enabler of regional development and is characterised by collaborative and co-operative approaches to research, community engagement, knowledge-sharing, planning, project design and implementation of activities for the good of the region.

Collaborative partnerships and regional planning effectively form a ‘fifth determinant of long-term regional economic growth’ and are vital to successful implementation of the Plan. Working as a ‘collaborative region’, the region’s government agencies and other stakeholders will provide a foundation for achieving the region’s priorities, which are mutually supportive of one another and are not presented here in any particular order of standing.

*Figure 3: Regional priorities*



## Activities, projects and initiatives

Activities, projects and initiatives have been developed in response to data analysis and consultation. They respond to each of the regional priorities and show the specific actions required to progress the Northern Rivers' long-term regional growth. It should be noted that the numbering of the priorities does not reflect a rank order of importance, as all seven priorities are of equal importance.

The role and contribution of RDA-NR in implementing any activity is based on an assessment of its own capacity and resources. RDA-NR will have carriage of some of these activities. Some activities will require RDA-NR to play a supporting role for other stakeholders.

### Priority 1: Connected communities

An effective transport system is essential for providing access to employment and services and to ensure the sustainability of the region's communities. The region's critical transport challenges need to be addressed as a priority for long-term economic growth. The region's freight transport infrastructure – particularly intra-regional roads and road access to national markets and international gateways, including Gold Coast Airport, Brisbane Airport and the Port of Brisbane – presents a challenge for local industry to access national and international markets.

The emergence of the digital economy has increased the propensity for individuals and businesses to interact and trade with suppliers, partners and customers through information and communications technologies. Broadband has become a fundamental enabler of regional economic development. The region currently lacks high-speed broadband infrastructure, limiting our capacity to interact with the global economy. For our businesses to remain competitive and our communities to remain connected, the roll out of high speed broadband must be extended to all our communities to provide a sustainable solution to the region's communications needs.

Transport planning and supporting the Northern Rivers region's transition to the digital economy will assist with enhancing the connectivity of the region and its communities.

Activity	Key Stakeholders	RDA-NR Contribution
1.1 Develop an integrated regional transport plan to address the Northern Rivers' intra-regional transport infrastructure shortfalls.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Business and industry</li><li>• DPC</li><li>• Freight and logistics sector</li><li>• LCSA FNC</li><li>• Local government</li><li>• NGOs</li><li>• NOROC</li><li>• NRSDC</li><li>• NSW Planning and Infrastructure</li><li>• Private and community transport providers</li><li>• Sustain Northern Rivers Transport Working Group</li><li>• Transport NSW</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Complete Sustain Northern Rivers transport survey report to provide data and information on unmet transport needs</li><li>• Participate in Transport for NSW regional strategy planning process</li><li>• Support implementation of Sustain Transport priorities</li></ul>

Activity	Key Stakeholders	RDA-NR Contribution
1.2 Support implementation of the <i>Northern Rivers Digital Economy Strategy</i> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business and industry</li> <li>• Chambers of commerce</li> <li>• DBCDE</li> <li>• DEC</li> <li>• DEEWR</li> <li>• DPC</li> <li>• LEMCs</li> <li>• Local government</li> <li>• NOROC</li> <li>• NSW Trade and Investment</li> <li>• RTOs</li> <li>• Schools</li> <li>• SCU</li> <li>• STS</li> <li>• TAFE North Coast Institute</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead the establishment of the Digital Strategy Task Force to oversee implementation</li> <li>• Advocate for equitable, affordable high speed broadband in the region</li> </ul>
1.3 Support initiatives to use existing or ageing infrastructure to meet future needs (e.g. the Casino to Murwillumbah rail trail).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business and industry</li> <li>• Community sector</li> <li>• Federal Government</li> <li>• State Government</li> <li>• Local government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for and support the actions of other agencies and organisations in the region.</li> </ul>

#### Key performance indicators

- Regional Transport Plan completed and infrastructure needs identified
- Improvements to regional transport infrastructure
- Digital Economy Strategy implemented, with increased uptake of high speed broadband and digital technology by householders
- More businesses have an online presence
- Successful utilisation of ageing infrastructure for other regional priority uses

## Priority 2: A learning region

Addressing barriers to attainment in education and training to boost access to and participation in learning is one of the Northern Rivers region's greatest challenges, particularly for disadvantaged members of the community. A skilled and flexible workforce supported by responsive education and training programs with access to meaningful employment can adapt to changing economic circumstances and new opportunities. An appropriately skilled labour force will help enhance employment prospects in local industries and grow the Northern Rivers economy. Education attainment is relatively low in the Northern Rivers compared to the state average and education and training needs to be tailored for the region's school-leavers to raise awareness of sustainable employment pathways in the region.

Promoting economic development is not the primary role of universities, TAFEs, registered training organisations (RTOs) and other tertiary learning institutions. Nevertheless, they have a role to play in regional development by engaging with industry to help inform learning to meet industry needs. Education and training organisations can support the region's knowledge economy by: training the labour force; accessing and bringing to workforces global knowledge on world's best practice; and raising awareness of and participating in opportunities to deploy innovation and new technologies locally. They can also help develop social capital through public lectures, representation on regional boards, consultancy projects and critiques on public policy.

RDA-NR in collaboration with government agencies will help to match the region's skills flow with industry needs by providing information and networking forums. The region's education and training providers need to be engaged in this process.

Activity	Key Stakeholders	RDA-NR Contribution
2.1 Identify barriers and enhance drivers of/opportunities for education accomplishment and support collaborative measures to increase the region's education attainment levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BAFW</li> <li>DEC</li> <li>DEEWR</li> <li>LEC</li> <li>NETPAC</li> <li>RESJ</li> <li>RTOs</li> <li>Schools</li> <li>SCU</li> <li>STS</li> <li>TAFE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct research to identify barriers and drivers and provide this data to education providers</li> <li>Support collaborative initiatives where appropriate</li> </ul>
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.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use industry and employment heat mapping (see also Activity 4.1) to better understand emerging employment hotspots to inform the nature and extent of career pathway development for key industries (e.g. the aged care and sugar industries)</li> <li>Collate and disseminate information about employment pathways in the region</li> </ul>

### Key performance indicators

- Practical collaborations addressing barriers and drivers to educational attainment
- Increased educational attainment levels in the region
- Initiatives in place to increase awareness of employment pathways for school leavers
- Levels of regional employment of school leavers



## Priority 3: Natural infrastructure

Natural infrastructure refers to the region's biophysical assets (soils, biodiversity, rivers, estuaries, wetlands, and coastal and marine environments, etc.) and the systems and processes that enable and support all forms of life. The Northern Rivers has outstanding natural resources and is unique in the mixture and quality of the landscape, livelihood and lifestyle values it supports. The region has the highest biodiversity in New South Wales and the third-highest in Australia. Pressure for urban development is creating competing land uses and greater conflict between farmers, developers, communities and environmental interests. These conflicts compound the challenges inherent in climate variability and change, the impacts of which could affect the security of the region's water and food resources.

The Northern Rivers' natural resource base provides a comparative advantage which supports the competitiveness of established and emerging industries including sustainable food production, which builds on the region's agricultural strengths, natural infrastructure and its proximity to significant markets. It also presents new opportunities for growth which will require careful management. Coal seam gas extraction has been identified as a contentious regional issue with potential economic benefits, but as yet unquantified impacts on water and soil resources.

There is strong community support and capacity for protecting the region's biologically-diverse natural environment and an appreciation that the region's internationally-significant and irreplaceable natural infrastructure – including its landscapes and seascapes – must be protected to provide for the long-term social, environmental, cultural and economic needs of all communities of the Northern Rivers.

Activity	Key Stakeholders	RDA-NR Contribution
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 (CAP) 2013-2023.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental groups</li> <li>Federal Government</li> <li>Land managers</li> <li>Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority</li> <li>NRM agencies and community groups</li> <li>Other State agencies including NPWS and OEH</li> <li>SCU</li> <li>SNR – Biodiversity Working Group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the work of the NRCMA and other stakeholders involved in implementing the CAP</li> <li>RDA-NR is identified as an implementation partner for a range of CAP actions, particularly community capacity, industry practice, reporting and monitoring</li> </ul>
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.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assist with applications to acquire the required research resources</li> </ul>

### Key performance indicators

- CAP implementation achieves key milestones
- Improvements in the region's State of the Environment indicators
- A system in place to quantify the value of the region's natural infrastructure

## Priority 4: Sustainable industry

The injection of new capital is a driver of investment, economic development and jobs growth. A successful economic development strategy will be one that encourages additional investment from business and industry already located in the Northern Rivers as well as the attraction of new capital from outside the region.

Business and industry is the principal driver of economic development and long-term economic growth in the Northern Rivers will be realised through the development of sustainable industries, that is, those which offer meaningful full-time employment across a diversity of skill sets. These industries will capitalise on the region's lifestyle attributes and its natural comparative advantages to enhance our appeal as an investment location and a place in which to live, work and do business.

At present, employment opportunities in the region are relatively limited and the community relies heavily on retail, health care and social assistance, and the hospitality sector. Compared to the NSW average, the region is characterised by high unemployment, low labour force participation, underemployment and casualisation of the workforce.

According to the ABS Business Counts data, of the total number of businesses in the Northern Rivers (in June 2012) 64% were non-employing (micro-businesses/sole traders). Another 22% employed fewer than 5 people; 11% employed 5 - 19 people; 3% employed 20 - 199 people; and only 0.11% employed more than 200 people.<sup>23</sup>

The region's business profile differs to the employment profile, with agriculture, forestry and fishing accounting for 19% of regional businesses and construction for 17%. There are also high levels of businesses involved in rental hiring and real estate services (9%), professional, scientific and technical services (8%) and retail trade (8%).<sup>24</sup>

Industry specialisations in the region range across manufacturing (particularly food and wood products, textiles, clothing and footwear), retail trade and personal and community services (particularly health-related and residential care services). The region's creative industries are also well-represented by the publishing, screen and performing arts sectors.

Diversifying the region's industry base is necessary to grow local business and provide a variety of meaningful and sustainable employment opportunities for all members of the Northern Rivers community. There is a desire to leverage the region's existing attributes and capacities to grow regional competitive advantage, particularly in the fields of education, health care, sustainable and high quality 'food and fibre' production and the visitor economy. There are also opportunities to support business innovation and the development of emerging industries including the 'knowledge-based industries'.

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<sup>23</sup> ABS (2013) *Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits, Jun 2008 to Jun 2012*

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

Activity	Key Stakeholders	RDA-NR Contribution
4.1 Review and update the Regional Industry and Economic Plan (RIEP) to focus economic development strategy and identify industry development priorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AusIndustry</li> <li>BAFW</li> <li>LEC</li> <li>DEC</li> <li>DEEWR</li> <li>DPC</li> <li>Enterprise Connect</li> <li>Industry associations</li> <li>Local government</li> <li>ICN</li> <li>NORBEC</li> <li>NOROC</li> <li>NORTEC</li> <li>NSW Trade and Investment</li> <li>SCU</li> <li>STS</li> <li>TAFE</li> </ul>	<p>Undertake a review and update of the RIEP, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>industry heat mapping (i.e. maps of industry employment concentrations) to inform industry concentrations and opportunities for growth, including emerging industries such as the 'knowledge-based industries'</li> <li>incorporate emerging economic drivers and trends such as the digital and low carbon economy, global financial challenges and rise of the Asian century</li> <li>monitor changing population trends and associated opportunities</li> <li>identify industry clusters   and priorities for action</li> </ul>
4.2 Support the region's health care and 'healthy living' sector using collaborative approaches to workforce planning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ACS</li> <li>ADHC</li> <li>CSHISC</li> <li>DEC</li> <li>FACS</li> <li>NGOs</li> <li>NCML</li> <li>NNSWLHD</li> <li>Private and community sector health and aged care practitioners and providers</li> <li>SCU</li> <li>TAFE</li> <li>UCRH</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help inform priorities by providing information on health industry trends, opportunities and needs through the RIEP update</li> <li>Contribute to the development of the North Coast Ageing Strategy, which is being led by the NSW Office for Ageing, Family and Community Services</li> </ul>
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community Colleges</li> <li>DEC</li> <li>DEEWR</li> <li>NETPAC</li> <li>Private educational providers</li> <li>RTOs</li> <li>Schools</li> <li>SCU</li> <li>STS</li> <li>TAFE</li> <li>U3A</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use the RDA-NR website to showcase the region's strengths and achievements in education</li> </ul>

Activity	Key Stakeholders	RDA-NR Contribution
4.4 Support and promote sustainable food and fibre production in the Northern Rivers region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Australian Macadamia Society</li> <li>• Fishing cooperatives</li> <li>• Food and fibre businesses</li> <li>• Forestry and timber industry</li> <li>• Local government</li> <li>• Northern Rivers CMA</li> <li>• TAFE</li> <li>• NORCO</li> <li>• NCMC</li> <li>• NRF</li> <li>• NSW cane growers</li> <li>• DPI</li> <li>• NSW Environmental Trust</li> <li>• NSW Farmers</li> <li>• NSW Trade &amp; Investment</li> <li>• NSW Sugar</li> <li>• SNR – Sustain Food Working Group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the implementation of the Sustain Food Roadmap 2013-15 including managing <a href="http://www.sustainfood.com.au">www.sustainfood.com.au</a> and MyFood Northern Rivers App</li> <li>• Deliver the NSW Environmental Trust Securing a Sustainable Food Future information dissemination project</li> <li>• Co-ordinate information, awareness and debate about building agricultural value chains in the region</li> <li>• Support participants of the 2012 Northern Rivers Forestry Industry Workshop in addressing future opportunities and challenges for the forestry and timber industry</li> <li>• Contribute to the NSW Agriculture Industry Action Plan</li> </ul>
4.5 Support the growth and development of the region's creative industries including emerging sectors such as sustainable building design.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arts Northern Rivers</li> <li>• NCEIA</li> <li>• Northern Rivers CIC</li> <li>• NORPA</li> <li>• Northern Rivers Screenworks</li> <li>• Northern Rivers Writers Centre</li> <li>• NSW Trade &amp; Investment</li> <li>• SCU</li> <li>• TAFE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in the Northern Rivers Creative Industries Consortium (CIC) and provide leadership on regional creative industries collaborations as required</li> <li>• Co-ordinate a program to collate available data on the contribution of the creative industries to the region</li> </ul>
4.6 Promote R&D and investment in technologies which support the generation and delivery of renewable energy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AusIndustry</li> <li>• Energy providers and businesses</li> <li>• Federal Government</li> <li>• State Government</li> <li>• Local government</li> <li>• OEH</li> <li>• NSW Trade &amp; Investment</li> <li>• SNR –Energy Working Group</li> <li>• SCU</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in the Sustain Energy Working Group and apply for grants to help achieve its goals</li> </ul>
4.7 Attract investment to the region to complement and grow established and emerging new industries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chambers of commerce</li> <li>• Industry associations</li> <li>• Investors</li> <li>• Local government</li> <li>• NSW Trade and Investment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the investment attraction work of other agencies, particularly NSW Trade and Investment and local councils</li> <li>• Provide information about investment opportunities</li> </ul>

Activity	Key Stakeholders	RDA-NR Contribution
4.8 Encourage collaborative approaches to innovation, R&D and investment in the region's existing and emerging industry clusters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AusIndustry</li> <li>• BAFW</li> <li>• LEC</li> <li>• Chambers of commerce</li> <li>• DEC</li> <li>• DEEWR</li> <li>• DPC</li> <li>• Enterprise Connect</li> <li>• ICN</li> <li>• Industry associations</li> <li>• Investors</li> <li>• Local government</li> <li>• NORBEC</li> <li>• NOROC</li> <li>• NORTEC</li> <li>• NSW Trade and Investment</li> <li>• SCU</li> <li>• STS</li> <li>• TAFE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-ordinate the Innovation Pipeline Forum in October 2013</li> </ul>
4.9 Support the development of programs to increase micro-business capacity building and innovation, e.g. Kyogle Adopt a Business and Mentoring programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chambers of commerce</li> <li>• Industry associations</li> <li>• Local government</li> <li>• TAFE</li> <li>• NORBEC</li> <li>• NORTEC</li> <li>• Sourdough Group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide information and referrals to existing business development and/or mentoring programs or networks</li> <li>• Encourage Kyogle Council to share its expertise on its adopt a business program</li> <li>• Advocate for business development support</li> </ul>

#### Key performance indicators

- RIEP updated and industry and economic indicators determined
- Improved performance in employment and regional competitiveness indicators
- Healthy living workforce strategies implemented
- Improvements in renewable energy supply and consumption
- R&D investment in emerging industry clusters
- Level of investment attracted into the region
- Microbusiness development programs

## Priority 5: Inclusive communities

Creating inclusive communities aims to address matters of social inclusion by fostering means to help people participate in learning, employment, healthy living and social and economic interaction and exchange and help those Australians who may be excluded from the opportunities they need to create the life they want and are disadvantaged due to family circumstances, low expectations, community poverty, a lack of suitable and affordable housing, illness or discrimination.

The Northern Rivers has relatively high percentages of vulnerable and disadvantaged people, including low-income earners, older persons, Indigenous people and people with a disability. According to the ABS SEIFA Index, the Northern Rivers has particular pockets of particular social disadvantage in the Clarence and Richmond Valleys and Kyogle. The region requires renewed investment in health care infrastructure and service delivery to support them.

Housing affordability (relative to average incomes) is also a challenge throughout much of the region and there is a lack of suitable housing for some members of the community, e.g. 1-2 bedroom units for younger people and students.

Coordination between the region's service providers, together with appropriate funding, will help improve health infrastructure, service delivery and affordable housing through initiatives such as the *Northern Rivers Regional Social Plan 2014-2018* and a regional social procurement strategy.

Activity	Key Stakeholders	RDA-NR Contribution
5.1 Implement the recommendations of the Northern Rivers Regional Social Plan 2013-2018.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aboriginal Land Councils</li> <li>BAFW</li> <li>LEC</li> <li>Community services sector</li> <li>Federal Government, particularly DEEWR</li> <li>LCSA FNC</li> <li>Local government</li> <li>NGOs</li> <li>NCOSS</li> <li>Neighbourhood and community centres</li> <li>NRCMA</li> <li>NRSDC</li> <li>State Government, particularly ADHC, DEC, FACS, Housing NSW, NNSWLHD, STS, Transport for NSW</li> <li>RESJ Coordinator</li> <li>RTOs</li> <li>Education providers</li> <li>Schools,</li> <li>SCU, UCRH</li> <li>SNR</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with the Northern Rivers Social Development Council to develop the Social Plan implementation framework</li> <li>Identify RDA-NR Social Plan priorities for action, particularly on the outcomes for health, education and employment, transport, food, and energy</li> </ul>



Activity	Key Stakeholders	RDA-NR Contribution
5.2 Develop a regional social procurement strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BAFW</li> <li>LEC</li> <li>Community Colleges</li> <li>Local Aboriginal Land Councils</li> <li>TAFE</li> <li>NORTEC</li> <li>NRSDC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate discussions and support current initiatives in the region to increase workforce participation of the region's marginalised, disadvantaged and vulnerable members of the community through social enterprise development</li> </ul>
5.3 Increase sustainable, adaptable and affordable housing choice for diversity of needs across different segments of the region's community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community housing providers and services</li> <li>FACs</li> <li>Housing NSW</li> <li>Local government</li> <li>Northern Rivers Housing Forum</li> <li>NRSDC</li> <li>NSW Aboriginal Housing Office</li> <li>NSW Planning and Infrastructure</li> <li>Real estate agents</li> <li>Shelter, Tenancy Advocacy and Advice Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for, support and promote collaborative efforts (particularly those of the Northern Rivers Housing Forum and local government) to improve the region's stock of affordable housing and housing choice</li> </ul>
5.4 Support the development of health care infrastructure and service delivery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ACS</li> <li>CSHISC</li> <li>DEC</li> <li>NGOs</li> <li>NCML</li> <li>NNSWLHD</li> <li>NSW Office for Ageing, Family and Community Services</li> <li>Private and community sector health and aged care practitioners and providers</li> <li>SCU</li> <li>TAFE</li> <li>UCRH</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with the Northern Rivers Social Development Council to progress health care infrastructure and service delivery priorities in the <i>Northern Rivers Social Plan 2014-2018</i></li> </ul>

#### Key performance indicators

- Implementation of *Northern Rivers Regional Social Plan 2014-2018*
- Improved performance on Regional Social Plan population outcomes
- Increased participation of marginalised and disadvantaged community members
- Development of social enterprise in the region
- Decreased levels of mortgage and rental stress
- Improvements in health care infrastructure and delivery

## Priority 6: Regional identity

Confirming and articulating the region's identity and its aspirations underpins all other efforts to foster long-term regional economic growth. There is currently a plethora of regional marketing 'tag lines' and 'promotional products' being produced and disseminated by various agencies including tourism bodies, business chambers and associations, community organisations and government agencies. Promoting a regional identity will be more effective – and cost efficient – if these are consolidated into a single primary brand, i.e. the 'Northern Rivers Region of New South Wales' a region of choice in which to live, work, play and invest.

Regional identity could focus on the Northern Rivers as a region of vibrant communities and villages that are celebrated for their own unique character, heritage and sense of place and which values and embraces its social, cultural and environmental strengths and diversity. We need to support the growth and development of the Northern Rivers' visitor economy consistent with our identity and promote the region's high quality and clean, green image.

Activity	Key Stakeholders	RDA-NR Contribution
6.1 Collaboratively re-affirm the identity of the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arts Northern Rivers</li> <li>DPC</li> <li>Federal Government</li> <li>State Government</li> <li>Local government</li> <li>NCDN</li> <li>Northern Rivers Business Chamber</li> <li>NRF</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate discussion amongst key stakeholders to identify strategies and resources to progress this initiative</li> </ul>
6.2 Grow and develop the Northern Rivers' visitor economy consistent with the region's identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Destination NSW</li> <li>Local government</li> <li>NCDN</li> <li>Tourism and visitor economy businesses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update the RIEP to help determine priorities for and facilitating visitor economy growth and development</li> </ul>
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Destination NSW</li> <li>Local government</li> <li>NCDN</li> <li>NSW Trade &amp; Investment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employ RDA-NR marketing and communications collateral including website, press releases, networks and community forums to promote the region's image consistently</li> </ul>

### Key performance indicators

- Visible evidence of consistent approaches to regional branding
- Improved visitor economy statistics

## Priority 7: A collaborative region

Collaborative governance and effective partnerships underpin all efforts towards sustainable regional development. Promoting cross-sectoral partnerships and regional planning – the ‘fifth determinant’ of long-term regional economic growth – is key to successful implementation of activities to meet the region’s priorities.

We will use our networks to co-ordinate the region’s place-based and (industry) cluster-based economic development activities, establish a framework for collaboration to address the Northern Rivers’ workforce and labour market challenges, and support integrated sustainable land use planning.

Activity	Key Stakeholders	RDA-NR Contribution
7.1 Co-ordinate the region’s economic development planning, promotion, facilitation and development activities using cluster (industry) and/or place-based approaches.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DPC</li> <li>NOROC</li> <li>General Managers Group</li> <li>Industry associations and chambers of commerce</li> <li>LCSA FNC</li> <li>NRSDC</li> <li>Northern Rivers Business Chamber</li> <li>RLN</li> <li>SNR</li> <li>TAFE</li> <li>SCU</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update the RIEP</li> <li>Coordinate discussion among the region’s key industry and agency stakeholders to promote a commitment to coordinated regional economic development planning and implementation and share relevant local and regional plans</li> </ul>
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BAFW</li> <li>LEC</li> <li>Chambers of commerce</li> <li>DEC</li> <li>DEEWR</li> <li>DPC</li> <li>Federal Government</li> <li>Local government</li> <li>NETPAC</li> <li>NSW Trade &amp; Investment</li> <li>RESJ Coordinator</li> <li>SCU</li> <li>STS</li> <li>TAFE</li> <li>Schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate discussion among the region’s education and training institutions, key government agencies and employers to address the Northern Rivers’ workforce and labour market challenges</li> </ul>
7.3 Support collaborative long-term sustainable land use planning integrated with infrastructure investment and whole of government implementation for the region.	<p>This is a NSW Department of Planning responsibility to build on the Far and Mid North Coast Regional Strategies and integrate with infrastructure and service delivery.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DPC</li> <li>Local government</li> <li>NSW Planning and Infrastructure</li> <li>RLN</li> <li>Transport for NSW</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide information about regional needs</li> <li>Advocate for integrated regional planning</li> <li>Encourage the Regional Leadership Network to progress integration of regional planning with infrastructure investment and service delivery</li> </ul>

Activity	Key Stakeholders	RDA-NR Contribution
7.4 Collaborate with South East Queensland RDAs, the Cross-Border Commissioner and other key agencies on regional development matters of common interest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NSW Cross Border Commissioner</li> <li>• South East Queensland RDAs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support and promote cross-border collaboration through participation in the SEQ RDA Network</li> </ul>

#### Key performance indicators

- Improvements in the coordination of regional planning activities and outcomes
- Improvements in workforce and labour market indicators (e.g. unemployment, participation rates, decreased casualisation) linked to investment in infrastructure and 'whole of government' service delivery
- Evidence of successful cross-border initiatives and their impact on the region

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**\*\* NB all RDA-NR documents can be accessed from [www.rdanorthernrivers.org.au](http://www.rdanorthernrivers.org.au)**

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[http://www.richmondvalley.nsw.gov.au/icms\\_docs/160962\\_Richmond\\_Valley\\_Towards\\_2025-Community\\_Strategic\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.richmondvalley.nsw.gov.au/icms_docs/160962_Richmond_Valley_Towards_2025-Community_Strategic_Plan.pdf)

Sustain Northern Rivers (2013) *Sustain Food Roadmap*. Sustain Food Working Group, Lismore:  
[http://sustainfood.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Sustain\\_Food\\_Roadmap\\_2013-2015\\_web.pdf](http://sustainfood.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Sustain_Food_Roadmap_2013-2015_web.pdf)

Sustain Northern Rivers (February 2012), *Sustain Northern Rivers Regional Action Plan for a Low Carbon Future*

Tweed Shire Council (2013), *Tweed Shire Community Strategic Plan 2013/2023*:  
<http://www.tweed.nsw.gov.au/CommunityStrategicPlan/default.aspx>

## APPENDIX B: STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

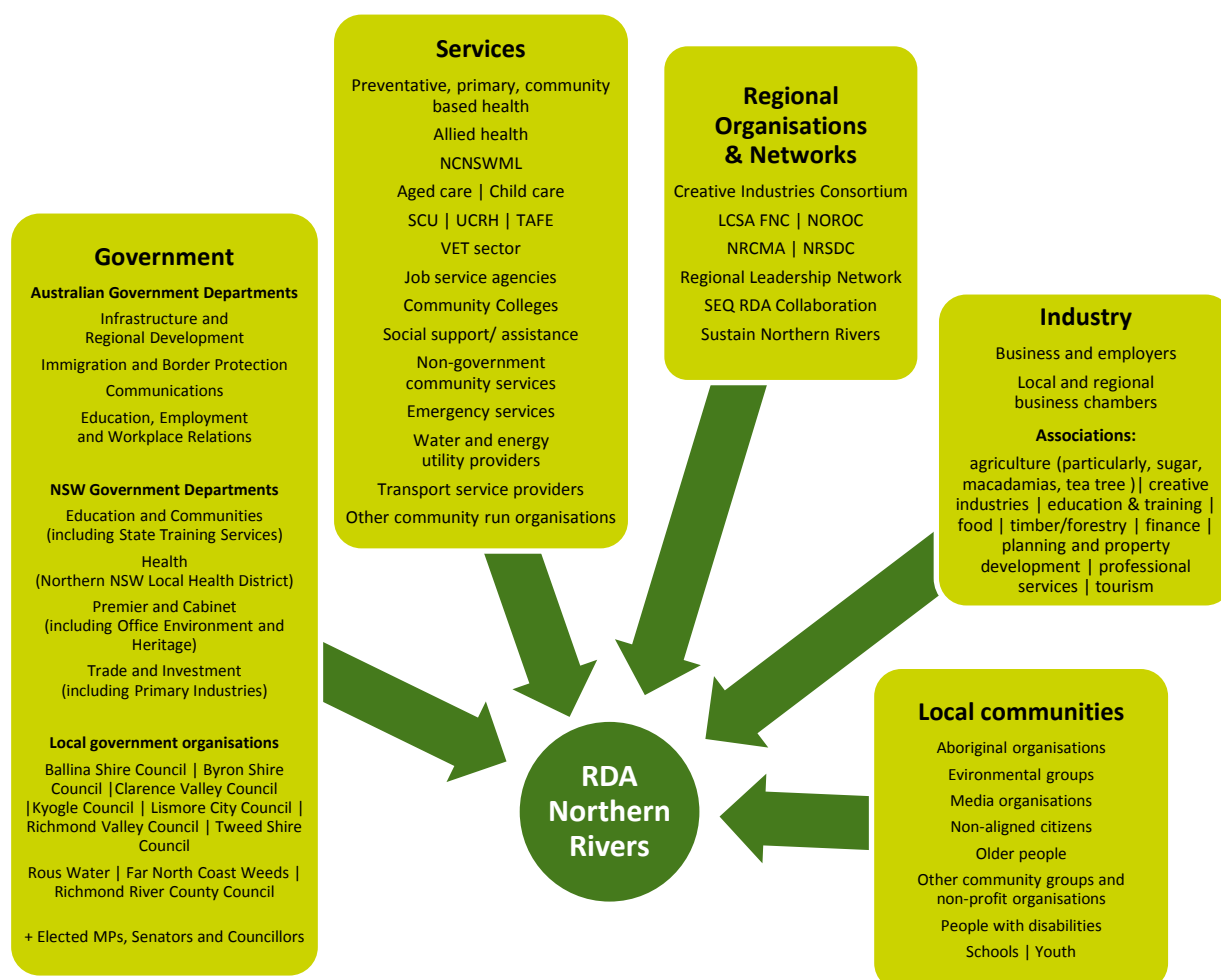
This section documents how RDA – Northern Rivers’ 2012-13 stakeholder engagement processes align with the seven Regional Priorities identified in the *Northern Rivers Regional Plan 2013-16* and highlights how past and current focuses on regional priorities. It outlines how RDA-NR:

- supports effective cross-sectoral, intergovernmental partnerships and integrated regional planning, including opportunities for future collaboration;
- implemented stakeholder relationship-building processes during 2012-13, in particular how stakeholders contributed to the updated Regional Plan 2013-2016; and
- will review the regional priorities, supporting activities and initiative throughout 2013-16.

### Who are RDA-NR’s stakeholders?

One of the guiding principles of the vision behind the Regional Plan is ‘that the community participates in creating and realising this vision’. Without the input of the region’s diverse communities RDA-NR cannot realise its charter. RDA-NR has been highly proactive in partnering, collaborating and engaging with a broad spectrum of stakeholders. Figure 4 illustrates the range and level at which such engagement has taken place during 2012-13.

Figure 4: RDA-NR’s key stakeholders



## Effective partnerships

RDA-NR supports effective cross-sectoral, intergovernmental partnerships, taking a whole-of-government approach based on a commitment to collaborate and connect non-government stakeholders with all tiers of government. The key focus is to provide meaningful engagement with communities and ensure consultations link to priorities and strategies in the Regional Plan. A major priority is to build knowledge of local and regional priorities, and to identify and advance opportunities for regional cooperation and collaboration.

## Regional planning

RDA-NR has contributed to the development and implementation of the following regional plans, which integrate the region's perspective. Each of these plans primarily aligns with at least one of the seven regional priorities identified in the Regional Plan, which are shown in square brackets:

- *Northern Rivers Regional Social Plan* (in collaboration with NRSDC) – see below  
[Priority: inclusive communities]
- *Regional Employment Plan for the Richmond-Tweed and Clarence Valley Priority Area* (BAFW)  
[Priorities: sustainable industry, a learning region]
- *2021 Northern Rivers Regional Action Plan* (NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet)  
[Priorities: connected communities, a collaborative region]
- *Northern Rivers Catchment Action Plan 2* (Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority)  
[Priority: natural infrastructure]
- *NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan* (Transport for NSW)  
[Priorities: connected communities, sustainable industry]
- *NSW State Infrastructure Plan* (Infrastructure NSW)  
[Priorities: connected communities, sustainable industry]
- *NSW Industry Action Plans for Digital Economy and Creative Industries* (NSW Trade & Investment)  
[Priorities: sustainable industry, connected communities]
- *National Food Plan* (Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries)  
[Priority: sustainable industry]
- *NSW Renewable Energy Action Plan* (NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet)  
[Priority: sustainable industry]
- *NSW Freight and Ports Strategy* (Transport for NSW)  
[Priorities: connected communities and sustainable industry priorities]

The most significant collaborative planning exercise during 2012-13 was the development of the *Northern Rivers Regional Social Plan* with the Northern Rivers Social Development Council (NRSDC) to develop knowledge and capacity to support community development outcomes in the region.

Developing the Plan involved consultations with the Local Community Services Association Far North Coast, a Public Participation Reference Group, development of social indicators and a *Regional Social Profile*, a community wellbeing survey, a community engagement program; a community services planning workshop and a website: [www.regionalsocialplan.org.au](http://www.regionalsocialplan.org.au).

The data development workshop for the *Regional Social Profile* in February 2013 was attended by almost 50 representatives from government sector, education providers and non-profits.

## Key partnerships

In addition to these targeted planning initiatives, RDA-NR participated in the following cross-sectoral partnerships and networks in the region during 2012-13:

- **Sustain Northern Rivers (SNR):** a collaboration of 26 peak regional and local organisations including councils, NRCMA, LCSA FNC, TAFE, Departments of Health, Education and Trade & Investment, Northern Rivers Tourism, NRSDC, SCU, Community Colleges and Northern Rivers Youth Environment Society. The goal of the collaboration is to take a regional approach to the challenge of climate change across government, non-government and community sectors. It has been most successful in the areas of local food, energy and transport and an emerging area of biodiversity (priorities for natural infrastructure, sustainable industry and regional identity). RDA-NR staff are actively involved in SNR's Biodiversity, Energy and Food working groups.
- **Northern Rivers Digital Economy Working Group:** (hosted by RDA-NR) identified strong support for a Regional Digital Economy Strategy. RDA-NR worked with individual councils, NOROC, NSW Trade and Investment, North Coast TAFE and SCU to develop a strategy to guide the region's transition to the digital economy. During February and March 2013, 116 community members participated in 14 sector-based, public planning workshops to inform the development of the strategy focused on the digital economy.
- **Creative Industries Consortium:** including industry, education and development organisations in the creative industries sector. RDA-NR has assisted with planning through co-hosting consortium meetings and maintaining a collaborative online workspace for interaction between members. A key focus has been to raise concerns regarding the impacts of education funding cuts to creative industries development, and to ensure that RDA-NR provides a regional perspective to the development of the NSW Creative Industries Action Plan.
- **SEQ Coordinators and SEQ RDA network:** involving RDA-NR attending SEQ RDA Network meetings, a Transport and Logistics Forum in April 2013 and developing linkages to NSW in the SEQ Regional Framework. A key focus has been to identify opportunities for cross-border collaboration; e.g. RDA-NR hosted a cross-border review meeting in August 2012 to review transport, tourism and the Commonwealth Games initiatives (relates to priorities for connected communities and a collaborative region).
- **NSW Trade and Investment:** RDA-NR is co-located with regional representatives from this Department, which enables a flow of information sharing, skills exchange and mutual support for initiatives where there are common objectives.

## Cross-sectoral programs and other initiatives

RDA-NR has a strong commitment to community engagement that identifies and guides current or changing priorities and strategies across the region. RDA-NR has found that the most effective form this engagement often takes is involvement in targeted projects, evidenced by the following initiatives in 2012-13.

- **NSW Sugar Workforce Development Transition Project:** funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) through the Local Employment Coordinator Flexible Funding Pool, worked with over 500 stakeholders to build workforce capacity of the sugar, macadamia and tea tree industries [Priorities: connected communities, sustainable industry].

The project funds were auspiced by RDA-NR, and the reference group comprised representatives from:

- NSW Sugar Milling Cooperative Ltd (NSW Sugar)
- Australian Macadamia Society (AMS)
- NSW Department of Education and Communities – State Training Services (STS)
- NSW Cane Growers Association
- NSW Department of Primary Industries
- NSW Department of Trade and Investment, Regional Infrastructure and Services
- North Coast TAFE
- Main Camp Natural Extracts Pty Ltd
- Australian Tea Tree Industry Association
- Job Services Australia providers
- **Regional Sponsorship Migration Scheme:** As the Northern Rivers Regional Certifying Body, RDA-NR has strong stakeholder relationships with the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and Job Service Agencies to assess local labour market gaps. This role ensures that regional businesses are not restricted in their capacity due to a lack of local labour, but that jobs which can be met by local skilled labour are filled  
[Priorities: sustainable industry and inclusive communities].
- **Digi Advantage program:** a collaborative project between RDA-NR, TAFE, State Training Services, Southern Cross University and NSW Trade & Investment to:
  - assist small businesses prepare to optimise new technologies at an affordable price; and
  - provide a pathway for job-seekers in the fields of online marketing and eCommerce[Priorities: connected communities, sustainable industry, learning region].
- **Timber/Forestry Industry workshop:** hosted in 2012 by RDA-NR in collaboration with NSW Trade & Investment and DEEWR was a response to challenges affecting the industry and the forum provided linkages with government programs from ten agencies to support businesses in the timber/forestry industry  
[Priorities: sustainable industry, natural infrastructure].
- **Coordinators Connect Workforce Development Collaboration Forum:** a partnership with RDA Mid North Coast, held in Port Macquarie and attended by 96 coordinators involved in workforce, economic, business and industry development to find ways to improve collaboration in workforce education, training, employment and development. This information exchange and networking session has continued to encourage collaboration through a LinkedIn forum  
[Priorities: a learning region, connected communities, inclusive communities].

### Potential future collaborations

While RDA-NR has a strong record of collaboration with a diverse range of stakeholders, there are still parts of the community that are yet to be reached to fully realise a whole-of-region approach to community and stakeholder engagement.

The most significant gap is engagement from the broader public beyond those already engaged in community activity. Part of RDA-NR's community engagement strategy for 2013-16 is to engage randomly selected citizens through the development of a **Citizens' Panel Register**. The register will comprise citizens who are not aligned with any interest group or organisation, but have an interest in the wellbeing of their communities, and the Northern Rivers as a whole. From this register, small groups

of citizens will be brought together for particular purposes where citizen input is important, such as reviewing regional priorities or giving their views in relation to strategies such as the Digital Economy Strategy.

There are also opportunities for RDA-NR to link in to existing networks and organisations that have a regional focus to build on the collaborative region priority, such as:

- **Regional Leadership Network:** established to support delivery of the Regional Action Plans and made up of regional representatives of all State and Federal agencies, regional councils and RDAs [Priority: a collaborative region].
- **Community Engagement Advisory Council:** an advisory body to address health issues in the region and a potential starting point for consultations on health services equity [Priorities: sustainable industry, inclusive communities].
- **Building Australia's Future Workforce Steering Committee:** provides a conduit in regard to workforce development and employment within the Region [Priorities: a learning region, sustainable industry].
- **SCU Community Engagement Unit, Sustainability, Partnerships and Community Engagement (SPaCE):** offers strategic opportunities for regional partnerships between community organisations, researchers, academic teaching staff and students [Priorities: connected communities, a learning region, sustainable industry].
- **General Managers Group:** brings together the councils' General Managers monthly, primarily to look at resource sharing between local governments [Priority: collaborative region].

### Building relationships

During 2012-13, RDA-NR hosted 189 consultations with 5,453 participants with a key focus on building relationships with local government, the community service sector and industry. Whilst 52 of these consultations related to regional planning, all other consultations were related to implementing initiatives identified in the *RDA-NR 2012-13 Annual Action Plan* and the *Northern Rivers Regional Plan 2011*.

### Community engagement activities

In keeping with RDA-NR's commitment to strategically targeted community engagement, the following consultations were held during the last financial year:

- **RDA-NR online stakeholder survey:** Was distributed to 1,590 stakeholders (with a response rate of 8.7%) to:
  - collect information to assist RDA-NR plan its communications and engagement activities;
  - develop a baseline level of understanding of stakeholder awareness of RDA-NR; and
  - provide information on how RDA-NR can work with its constituents more effectively.
- **Digital TV Switchover Program:** The most extensive community engagement program undertaken by RDA-NR across the region during 2012-13 to raise awareness of the digital TV switchover date and schemes to support or address barriers faced by potential consumers. The program involved 138 consultations and reached 4,226 people across the region, with a focus on the most likely to experience barriers to the switchover.
- **Informing the community of government policy and programs:** The RDA-NR website, latest news, RSS feeds and e-news bulletins were the primary mechanisms for sharing information, particularly



about government programs and opportunities for the regional communities to access. RDA-NR has maintained separate websites on Sustain Food, Northern Rivers Digital Economy and North Coast Shared Labour Pool and the MyFood Northern Rivers App to provide specific information to stakeholders on these regional issues and initiatives. Workshops about the RDA Fund were attended by 66 potential project proponents in November 2012.

- **Informing local government about RDA-NR:** Following the appointment of new Councillors in the 2012 local government elections, RDA-NR presented on the roles of RDA-NR and the Northern Rivers Regional Plan to 74 elected representatives and senior council staff from all the region's councils and county councils between February and May 2013.
- **Informing government of regional needs and issues:** RDA-NR develops position statements and prepares comprehensive submissions on key regional issues to keep government informed of the region's priorities and issues. During 2012-13, RDA-NR was an active participant in government planning processes for the Tweed Renewable Energy Think Tank, Lismore Leaders Group, Regional Leadership Network, South East Queensland RDA collaboration and Sustain Northern Rivers Collaboration.
- **Consulting the community to better inform RDA-NR of regional issues:** During 2012-13 RDA-NR's primary consultations for this purpose involved issue-specific consultations to inform position statements, industry-specific consultations to inform economic development projects, surveys on community well-being, transport and stakeholder engagement and – through the Sustain Northern Rivers Working Groups – consultations on energy, food and transport.
- **Involving and collaborating with the community and government:** These community engagement processes include active partnerships with community and governments to inform specific regional planning initiatives (Regional Plan update, Regional Social Plan and Regional Digital Economy Strategy) and to implement specific community and economic development projects (particularly regarding the timber, agricultural and bioenergy industries).

### Other activities

- **Mentoring support for local Aboriginal business:** resulted in \$25,000 of approved business feasibility and development work, including a dedicated project manager to drive a major land development proposal for participating businesses.
- **Coordinating showcases of Aboriginal businesses:** such as *Bush Foods Sensations* participation at Sydney Good Food and Wine Show, Sample Festival and Gaagal Exhibition and Cultural Celebration.

### Stakeholders' contribution to the Regional Plan

Stakeholder input into the *Regional Social Plan* and *Digital Economy Strategy* partly informed the 2013-16 Regional Plan Update. Specific stakeholder engagement in developing the Plan has involved:

- targeted interviews with 12 regional leaders including local MPs, local government representatives, social/community service representatives, Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority, State Government and RDA-NR Board members;
- three facilitated consultation workshops held with State and Federal Government Agencies; industry leaders representing forestry, education, tourism, small business, business chambers,

environment, arts and creative industries; community sector; and representatives from NOROC and six individual local councils;<sup>25</sup>

- a planning workshop with RDA–NR Board members;
- a four week public exhibition and comment period on the Draft Northern Rivers Regional Plan 2013-2016, during which there were 1,362 downloads of the Draft Regional Plan from the RDA-NR website. Twelve written submissions provided further feedback to refine the final plan.

The purpose of each workshop was to re-visit the region’s challenges, opportunities and goals and to gain stakeholders’ insights to help the Regional Plan consultant team prepare an informed, relevant and practical update.

Each consultation workshop was interactive and based on a *Regional Futures Discussion Paper* that was developed through the interviews and circulated to attendees in advance. Participants were asked to respond to the challenges, opportunities and potential regional priorities in the paper; and discuss and confirm regional priorities and potential strategies and initiatives in small working groups.

### **Annual review of regional priorities, activities and achievements**

The Regional Plan 2013-16 presents activities, projects and initiatives to progress the Northern Rivers’ long-term regional growth.

The **Key Performance Indicators** proposed for each priority are based on current knowledge of the policies that impact on the issues and priorities; existing (or planned) sources of data to measure them; and RDA-NR’s current knowledge of the region’s capacity to deliver them. Where RDA-NR is the lead partner, the KPIs will be embedded into annual work plans.

Inevitably, in a fast and ever-changing political, social and environmental landscape, it will be necessary to review the priorities, activities and the KPIs at least annually throughout the life of this Plan.

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<sup>25</sup> Lismore City Council, Byron Shire Council, Tweed Shire Council, Kyogle Council, Clarence Valley Council, Ballina Shire Council

## APPENDIX C: ABBREVIATIONS

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ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics	NCNSWML	North Coast New South Wales Medicare Local
ACS	Aged and Community Services Association of NSW and ACT	NCOSS	NSW Council of Social Services
ADHC	NSW Ageing, Disability and Home Care	NGO	Non-government organisations
BAFW	Building Australia's Future Workforce	NNSWLHD	Northern NSW Local Health District
CAP	Catchment Action Plan	NORBEC	Northern Rivers Business Enterprise Centre
CIC	Creative Industries Consortium	NOROC	Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils
COAG	Council of Australian Governments	NORPA	Northern Rivers Performing Arts
CSHISC	Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council	NPWS	NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service
DBCDE	Department of Broadband, Communications and Digital Economy	NRCMA	Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority
DEC	Department of Education and Communities	NRF	Northern Rivers Food
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations	NRM	natural resource management
DPC	NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet	NRSDC	Northern Rivers Social Development Council
DPI	NSW Department of Primary Industries	OEH	NSW Office of Environment and Heritage
FACS	NSW Family and Community Services	R&D	research and development
ICN	Industry Capability Network	RDA	Regional Development Australia
KPI	Key Performance Indicator	RDA-NR	Regional Development Australia – Northern Rivers
LCSA FNC	Local Community Services Association Far North Coast	RESJ	Regional Educations, Skills and Jobs Coordinator
LEC	Local Employment Coordinator	RLN	Regional Leadership Network
LEMC	Local Emergency Management Committees	RTO	Registered Training Organisations
LGA	Local Government Authority	SCU	Southern Cross University
NCDN	North Coast Destination Network	SEQ	South East Queensland
NCEIA	North Coast Entertainment Industry Association	SNR	Sustain Northern Rivers
NCML	North Coast Medicare Local	STS	State Training Services
		TAFE	North Coast Institute of Technical and Further Education
		UCRH	University Centre for Rural Health
		U3A	University of the Third Age



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, economic base of micro-businesses, with strengths in health care and social assistance, retail, tourism, education, manufacturing, agriculture and construction.

**The Northern Rivers Regional Plan** is a high-level strategic 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.

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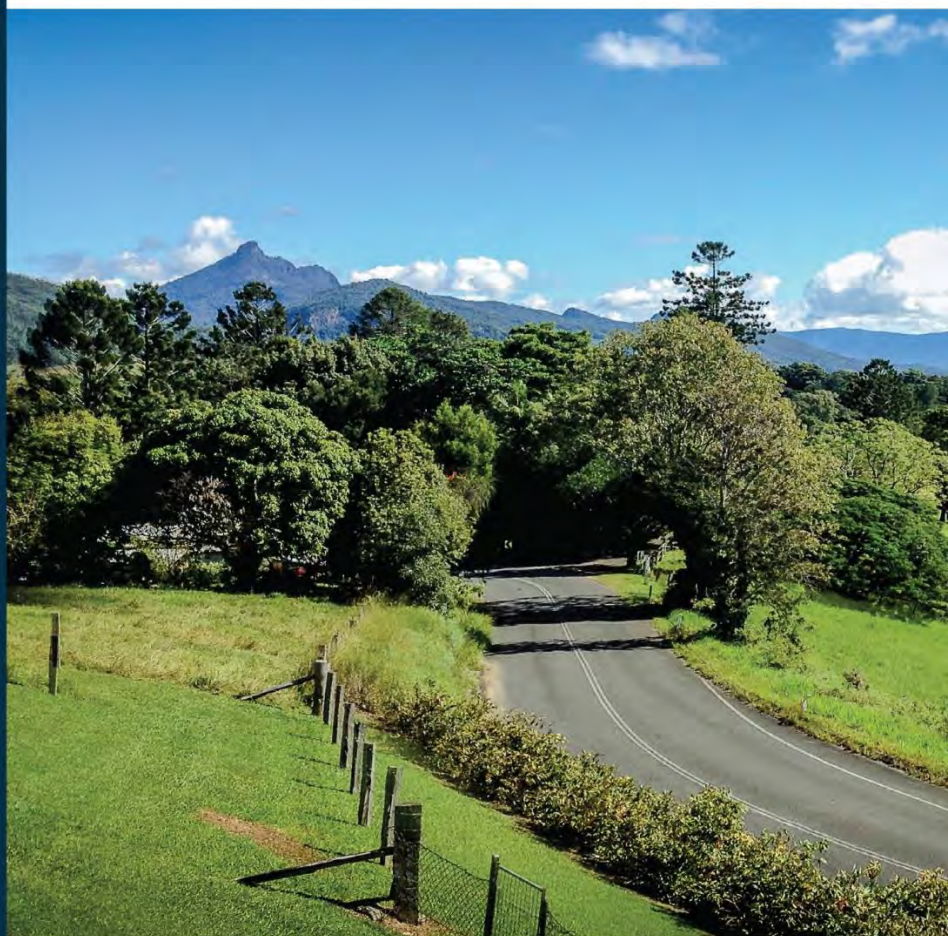


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**Regional  
Development  
Australia**  
NORTHERN RIVERS NSW



"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