Rural Futures App A Draft

Sunshine Coast Council

Draft Rural Futures Strategy

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Executive Summary

The rural areas of the Sunshine Coast are a key part of the region providing its primary agricultural production areas, a range of living options and a playground for visitors and locals alike. The rural areas of the region account for 89% of its land area, but accommodate only 29% of its residents.

The regional economic value - Gross Regional Product (GRP) - of agriculture, forestry and fishing (as representing some of the primary production activities in rural areas in the region) for 2010/2011 was $390m. This was generated through 1,868 registered businesses employing 4,345 people. Within the region the sector accounts for 5.4% of its businesses and amounts to 2.3% of the agricultural value for the state of Queensland.

Tourism and recreation are also large contributors to the rural economy. In 2010/2011, 12% or 333,000 domestic overnight visitors and 21,296 international visitors to the Sunshine Coast visited the Hinterland – the tourism face of the region's rural areas.

The rural areas and the lifestyle it affords is valued by its residents for a variety of reasons. These include having a greater 'sense of place', a greater 'sense of community', a better work/life balance, less crime, a more relaxed lifestyle and the availability of larger areas to pursue hobbies and home businesses.

A number of factors have (and are) driving change in the rural areas including increasing residential settlement, changes in food production techniques and agricultural practices, deregulation of industries, an aging demographic and a reduction in new entrants into farming. All of these factors are impacting on rural community dynamics and changing the visual landscape. The challenge is to balance the inevitable changes in the production capabilities of the area and the needs, wants and perceptions of rural and urban residents and visitors

Alongside the traditional agricultural industries, the rural towns have a range of more urban based businesses that act as service centres to the wider rural community. These towns are also experiencing change due to market forces and the evolving nature of work, including the increasing trend towards remote working (where enabled by suitable telecommunications infrastructure and services) and seeking a better work/life balance. The rural areas are seen as the destination to achieve these desires as evidenced by the treechange movement where the sharing of common values, helping others in need, caring for the environment, volunteering and supporting local businesses are key characteristics

The rural areas of the Sunshine Coast have many individual distinctive features depending on their locality. There are recognisable variances to be found in landscape, visual amenity, elevation, economic and social activity in each rural town and surrounding area. These characteristics help rural activity centres to define themselves as communities, rural business centres and tourism destinations.

As the Sunshine Coast grows, it is important to maintain and enhance the unique character and identity of the rural areas, and townships in recognition of the economic advantage, lifestyle and other values that they offer. If this does not occur, then an integral component of the economic, social and environmental fabric of the region will be lost.

This draft Strategy attempts to acknowledge and celebrate the common elements of rural living on the Sunshine Coast, while encouraging the townships to retain and accentuate their individual rural identities.

The Need for this Strategy

Council has reaffirmed its aspiration for the Sunshine Coast to be Australia's most sustainable region – vibrant, green, diverse.

Consistent with this vision the Sunshine Coast Council is committed to maintaining and enhancing the vibrancy, vitality and character of the Sunshine Coast rural communities and supporting them in line with community expectations in this regard.

As the Sunshine Coast grows, it is important to articulate the unique opportunities and characteristics of these communities commensurate with the values they espouse.

A balanced future for these areas that acknowledges and keeps faith with these values is a critical factor in the sustainability of the Sunshine Coast.

The purpose of the draft Sunshine Coast Rural Futures Strategy is to guide future activities in the rural areas over the longer term – so that the natural beauty of the rural areas is maintained, community expectations for the Hinterland realised and the economic sustainability of these areas is enhanced.

The draft Rural Futures Strategy forms the basis for an integrated framework for rural communities on the Sunshine Coast, to support and facilitate rural growth and prosperity consistent with community values.

Strategic Directions

This Draft Strategy sets out the range of activities that will help strengthen and enhance the existing role of the Hinterland as an area of outstanding natural beauty and vitality, and a location:

- For agricultural production – where good quality agricultural land is maintained and enhanced for its income potential, as a natural resource, an employment generator and to enable continuity of food supply;
- As a tourism destination – where tourism attractions, accommodation facilities, and natural assets are championed for use as rural pursuits and conservation based activities;
- For a range of economic opportunities – with a desire to increase employment and career options in a range of home based businesses, rural service industries and retail stores and supporting their success by advocating for high speed broadband services to rural areas;
- As a lifestyle area – where the lifestyle options are celebrated and maintained consistent with community expectations; and
- That fosters community cohesion – by encouraging localised participation in decision making and social, environmental and economic activities that strengthen the identity of individual localities

The implementation of this draft Strategy will enable Hinterland communities to support a range of economic activities through strong social links in a rural productive landscape. Further, it will support communities to continue to grow, utilise, and maximise, their potential in a manner that is sensitive to the aspirations and objectives of communities.

Objectives

Reflecting the views, values and aspirations articulated through public consultation and background research, the five objectives of this draft strategy are:

1. **To maintain and enhance lifestyle options**

   The existing lifestyle options of the Sunshine Coast rural communities are valued and supported in line with community expectations

2. **To maximise the use of productive land**

   Existing production activities and landscape characteristics are maintained and enhanced - and available productive, and potentially productive land is maintained for future agricultural activities

3. **To provide a range of economic opportunities**

   Food producing capabilities where the region has a competitive advantage are encouraged and supported to meet the consumption needs of the region and to take advantage of a growing local and global awareness of food security. Worthwhile business investment and localised employment opportunities commensurate with the values and characteristics of the rural communities are encouraged

4. **To foster community development and cohesion**

   Communities are supported to participate in decisions relating to their future and to maximise their participation in the social fabric of their locality

5. **To grow in line with community needs and expectations**

   Grow the region's rural areas in line with their needs and community expectations with appropriate hard and soft infrastructure delivered in a timely, appropriate and cost effective manner

Fundamental Principles to support the Vision

The draft Rural Futures Strategy is firmly grounded in the fundamental principles of **equity** where the region's social, environmental and economic needs guide the fair distribution of resources, **sustainability** where the needs of the present are met without compromising the needs of future generations, **protection** where the current resources are retained and enhanced, **innovation** where new and better ways of doing things are encouraged and **respect** where the needs of others are considered.

Introduction

The draft Sunshine Coast Rural Futures Strategy has been prepared as part of the range of strategic documents for the Sunshine Coast region. It contributes to achieving Council's aspiration to be "Australia's most sustainable region – vibrant, green, diverse". Council's Corporate Plan calls for the development of a Rural Futures Strategy.

This draft Strategy represents the range of views and ideas generated through various community consultation exercises and background research. It sets out a community vision for the rural areas of the Sunshine Coast to build a strong rural sector that contributes to the strengths of the Sunshine Coast region. The draft Strategy builds on the work undertaken in the Rural Futures Background Study, the Rural Land Use Planning Background Study, the Canelands Discussion Paper, and the Rural Action Plan.

Overview of Sunshine Coast rural areas

The Sunshine Coast region is made up of a diverse range of land forms which consist of mountainous areas, floodplains, and coastal low lands. The majority (over 70%), of the Sunshine Coast population of approximately 316,858[1] reside in the urban coastal areas, with the remaining 29% residing in the rural areas of the region. **Map 1 depicts the rural Hinterland areas** for the Rural Futures Strategy.

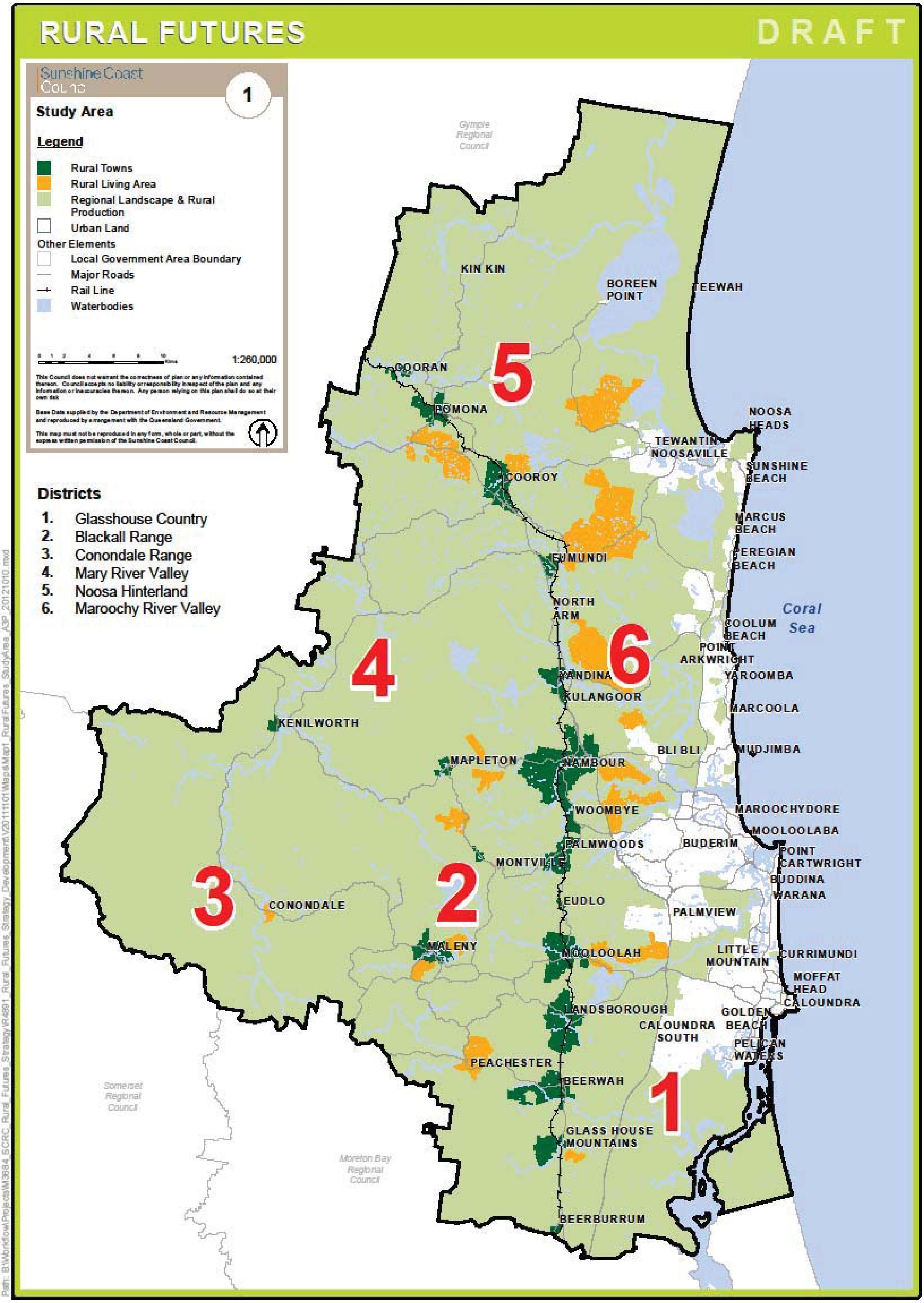
Enjoying a vast array of natural assets, the Sunshine Coast is one of the most biodiverse regions in Australia, and has the only substantial coastal mainland remnant vegetation area between Byron Bay and Bundaberg, consisting of over 100,000 hectares of native vegetation. Its existing remnant vegetation pattern, however, reflects more than a century of land use for forestry and agriculture.

The natural assets of the Sunshine Coast rural Hinterland areas are of major appeal to both visitors and residents alike. Natural mountains and ridgelines, rivers and coastlines have the highest scenic amenity, alongside agricultural areas which also have significant amenity value. The rural areas provide large open and predominantly green landscapes which offer not only visual appeal, but preserve rural landscapes, maintain air and water quality and provide visual connectivity.

The lifestyle of the Sunshine Coast rural areas is highly valued by residents for a variety of reasons. It is considered by many that rural towns and rural communities have:

- A greater 'sense of place', including connection with the land and its natural ecosystems
- A greater 'sense of community', including more family friendships and ties between local families and the community in general, greater inter-generational linkages and a higher level of social capital
- A better work/ life balance
- Less crime
- A more relaxed lifestyle
- Larger areas to pursue hobbies and home businesses

[1] ERP (Estimated Resident Population) for June 30 2011 - 2011 Census Data, Australian Bureau of Statistics


RURAL FUTURES
DRAFT
Sunshine Coast Council
1
Study Area
Legend
Rural Towns
Rural Living Area
Regional Landscape & Rural Production
Urban Land
Other Elements
Local Government Area Boundary
Major Roads
Rail Line
Waterbodies
1:260,000
Districts
1. Glasshouse Country
2. Blackall Range
3. Conondale Range
4. Mary River Valley
5. Noosa Hinterland
6. Maroochy River Valley
Gympie Regional Council
KIN KIN
BOREEN POINT
TEEWAH
COORAN
POMONA
5
NOOSA HEADS
TEWANTIN
NOOSAVILLE
SUNSHINE BEACH
COOROY
MARCUS BEACH
PEREGIAN BEACH
EUMUNDI
NORTH ARM
Coral Sea
COOLUM BEACH
POINT ARKWRIGHT
4
6
YANDINA
YAROOMBA
KULANGOOR
MARCOOLA
KENILWORTH
BLI BLI
MUDJIMBA
MAPLETON
NAMBOUR
WOOMBYE
MAROOCHYDORE
MOOLOOLABA
PALMWOODS
BUDERIM
POINT CARTWRIGHT
MONTVILLE
BUDDINA
WARANA
3
2
CONONDALE
EUDLO
PALMVIEW
MALENY
MOOLOOLAH
LITTLE MOUNTAIN
CURRIMUNDI
MOFFAT HEAD
CALOUNDRA
LANDSBOROUGH
GOLDEN BEACH
CALOUNDRA SOUTH
PELICAN WATERS
PEACHESTER
BEERWAH
1
Somerset Regional Council
GLASS HOUSE MOUNTAINS
Moreton Bay Regional Council
BEERBURRUM

Rural Districts

The rural areas of the Sunshine Coast, due to their agricultural history and natural features can be clustered into six major districts:

- Glasshouse Country;
- Blackall Range;
- Conondale Range;
- Mary River Valley;
- Noosa Hinterland; and
- Maroochy River Valley

Glasshouse Country

The Glasshouse Country area is partly situated in the Pumicestone Passage, Stanley River and Mooloolah River water catchments. State Forests, and the Glass House Mountains National Park are key natural features of the area. The main townships of Beerburrum, Glass House Mountains, Beerwah, Landsborough, Mooloolah, and Peachester service the area.

The craggy volcanic plugs of the Glass House Mountains are a unique and distinctive feature of the Sunshine Coast, dominating the landscape and providing a marker for generations of travelers - from pre-settlement times when Indigenous people gathered for the Bunya pine feast to the turn of the century prospectors and contemporary tourists. Many of the thirteen peaks are protected in the Glass House Mountains National Park and the landscape is recognised at a National level through its inclusion on the National Heritage List since 2006. Pine plantations and a range of native vegetation types are managed in several State forests and forest reserves near the Glass House Mountains National Park. Other landscape features include the river systems, open forests, coastal wetlands, mountain forests and heath.

The largest economic centre of Beerwah has a long history supporting the timber industry and the area still provides timber from the exotic pine and native hardwood timber plantations. Landsborough was the seat of local government for many years and there are a number of historically significant buildings in the town including the Museum.

The main agricultural activities in this area are pineapples, poultry farming and forestry with other crops such as strawberries, macadamia nuts and avocados also popular. Historically tobacco was a prominent crop, but this is no longer the case.

There are a few small rural bed and breakfasts (B&B's) and some traditional motels in the area. The presence of Australia Zoo, the Big Kart Track and the many outdoor recreation and education opportunities offered (which include scenic lookouts, cultural heritage sites and stories, mountain walks, rock climbing & abseiling, mountain biking, rogaining, horse riding and canoeing on Ewen Maddock Dam) suggest a scope to strengthen the tourism potential of the district and the region - particularly when coupled with the local fresh food offerings, various art studios and galleries and the area's proximity to the Moreton Bay region and the greater Brisbane populations.

Blackall Range

The Blackall Range includes the Mapleton to Maleny Plateau which straddles the Maroochy and Mary River catchments and to a lesser degree, the catchments of the Stanley and Mooloolah Rivers. The Blackall Range is noted for its unique scenic, landscape and environmental qualities.

The Blackall Range Road provides one of the most well used scenic drives in the region. Running from Mapleton to Maleny with the villages and townships enroute, it provides access to a range of tourist, specialty retail, arts, cultural, culinary, lifestyle and accommodation attractions. Decades of logging in the district resulted in the backdrop of green pastures with pockets of forest remaining with steeper terrain.

Montville has developed as primarily a retail and tourist centre where the retail offering is dominated by specialty, unique and eclectic goods targeted at day visitors and with some local goods and services for the community. There remain a series of older heritage buildings and small scale B&B's, cabins and eco retreats offering short term accommodation with many of the local businesses now targeting the wedding and romance market to expand the market attraction of the town.

Maleny, the largest township on the Blackall Range is a vibrant, bustling community with its identity focused on the provision of local goods and services. It offers a large number of retail and service outlets in the town that utilise organic food, provide alternative medicine and therapies, and promote relocalisation.

Mapleton and Flaxton are smaller village style centres and support primarily residential and rural residential communities as well as offering small scale visitor accommodation and attractions. The Mapleton Hotel is a key element on the tourist driving route through the region.

The area has a number of major environmental assets, such as the Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve, Linda Garrett Park, Mapleton Falls National Park, Kondalilla Falls National Park, Obi Obi Gorge, Flaxton State Forest and Lake Baroon Water Reserve. The Sunshine Coast Hinterland Great Walk offers a scenic nature-based adventure close to the comforts of local accommodation.

Historically the district supported a variety of agricultural pursuits including production of bananas, citrus, strawberries, pineapples and even sugar cane. Forestry and dairying were also important parts of its history. Today agriculture has become less predominant but there are still pockets of tree and vine crops including avocadoes, nuts, grapes and citrus. Dairying is mostly located on the lower slopes in Maleny supporting the local cheese and milk factories. The area also has a large number of rural residential uses and hobby farm enterprises.

There is scope for further collaboration between the many individual small scale accommodation offerings along the range with smaller scale attractions such as the cellar door/farm gate experiences and the showcasing and promotion of local food. There is also scope for an increase in the number of accommodation providers and niche market produce experiences.

Conondale Range

The Conondale Range takes in the Mary River floor and the steep slopes of the Conondale Range and Maleny escarpment within the Mary River Catchment. The small settlement of Conondale is located in this district. The area is relatively isolated from urban services and this factor is a key attractor for many of the residents in the area.

Booloumba Creek and Little Yabba Creek provide camping and recreation opportunities. The Conondale Range Great Walk showcases the natural features within the Conondale National Park including ancient rainforest, waterfalls, deep gorges and clear creeks.

A number of sand extraction activities are occurring in the area with the main agricultural activity being timber plantations. In 2009, over 30,000 hectares of land (previously supporting state forestry practices) were added to Conondale National Park - increasing it to more than five times its original size. The National Park features large areas of native vegetation with rare and threatened animal and plant species.

With the evolving changes in the use of the land in the area, there is scope for the introduction of additional nature-based tourism products such as guided walks and fully catered camping, guided fishing, four wheel driving and mountain biking serviced by a high quality eco style accommodation facility to complement and add to the existing service offers, including that of the Crystal Waters Eco Village.

Mary River Valley

The Mary River Valley is within the Mary River and Belli Creek catchment and includes the Obi Obi escarpment centred on the Kondillilla Falls National Park and State Forest and lands around the Eumundi to Kenilworth Road. The area is serviced by the main township of Kenilworth.

A mosaic of fringing rainforest and large areas of remnant vegetation exist in and around the Walli State Forest and Obi Obi and Walli Creeks. This area provides a range of environmental and scenic amenity values and recreation opportunities.

The good quality agricultural lands are mostly located on the river and creek valley floors. On the upper more rugged terrain, lower intensity rural activities occur. Large broadacre rural land is used largely for pastoral activities and its unique natural values. Dairying supports the local cheese factory at Kenilworth. Large and small scale sand and gravel extractive industry exists, predominately sourced from the Mary River.

The proposed (and now abandoned) Traveston Crossing Dam project impacted heavily on this community, generating uncertainties, the closure of businesses and the loss of population. The recent release of the Mary Valley Economic Development Strategy focuses on facilitating improvement in the local economy, engaging with and supporting the community, and creating new jobs and productive enterprises.

The town of Kenilworth is a small centre popular as a thoroughfare for tourists and motor bike enthusiasts. It also has a high level of visitors passing through or staying at the Recreational Vehicle (RV) compatible camp grounds, the hotel and B&B's. These visitors are generally attracted to the surrounding local natural attractions and local produce.

The district offers opportunities for relaxation, and recreation, tourism, and access to artistic talent and creations. Food and wine tourism has emerged as an increasing economic activity for the district with the annual Kenilworth Cheese, Wine and Food Festival emerging as a key event for the district

Noosa Hinterland

The Noosa Hinterland covers part of the water catchment of the Mary River including Lake Macdonald on Six Mile Creek. It includes the upper Noosa catchment including Kin Kin Creek, and supports a number of communities. The main townships of Eumundi, Cooroy, Pomona, Cooran, Kin Kin and Boreen Point and the rural communities of Federal and Ridgewood service the area.

The area is dominated by the peaks of Mt Cooroy, Mt Tinbeerwah, Black Mountain, Mt Cooroora, Mount Pinbarren and Mt Cooran. Lake Macdonald, Six Mile Creek, Lake Cootharaba, Kin Kin Creek and Ringtail Creek. Significant stands of remnant vegetation exist in the area and accommodate a wide variety of fauna. The area draining into the Mary River is largely characterised by steeply dissecting mountain ranges and narrow valley floors. In the north, the land is dominated by the Woondum Plateau, including the Cooran Tablelands / Mothar Mountain Range system.

The Noosa River is the major waterway flowing south from the Great Sandy Region. Its course is the Cooloola Section of the Great Sandy Region National Park where it is fed by springs draining major sand deposits. The Noosa River is one of the few Queensland rivers which enjoy a continuous year-round freshwater flow. The upper reaches including the everglades, are a popular spot for tourism and recreational activities using water craft.

The district has a strong agricultural history. On the ranges, where traditional agricultural activities have diminished, new rural industries such as farm forestry are occurring. Macadamia nuts, cattle, strawberries, avocadoes, aquaculture, and forestry still remain but the land is now transferring to lifestyle blocks providing permanent homes and increasing numbers of weekend retreat accommodation.

While there are a number of B&Bs, guesthouses, and health retreats in the district, the area has a lower tourism profile than the Blackall Range. There are various markets around the district, including the twice weekly Eumundi Markets.

The distinct towns have become desirable lifestyle destinations for “treechangers” and families looking for more space. Restaurants, coffee shops, boutiques, antique shops and bookshops appeal to both residents and visitors. Pomona boasts the historic Majestic Theatre running silent movies as well as contemporary entertainment events.

With a decline in traditional rural industries (including forestry) these towns have sought to attract new economic enterprises with varying success. There are light industrial precincts in and around Cooroy which assist to provide a wider economic and employment mix in this area.

The district offers opportunities for increased adventure tourism together with accommodation that incorporates facilities in connection with activities such as bushwalking, mountain biking, horse riding, and canoeing. Usage of the trails network linked to events using natural landscape features can provide an increase in visitors that can also access the wide range of creative industry offerings.

Maroochy River Valley

The Maroochy River Valley generally includes the rural lands surrounding the Maroochy and South Maroochy Rivers. It consists of land formerly used for cane production and is largely characterised by low-lying land on the floodplain of the Maroochy River and its tributary streams. The localities of Yandina Creek, Valdora and Maroochy River, as well as rural portions of Yandina, Bli Bli, Coolum Beach, Marcoola and Pacific Paradise are included in this area.

The catchment of the Maroochy River includes the Maroochy River Valley but also extends westward towards the Blackall Range. Much of this catchment is now urban or semi urban. Larger Hinterland towns such as Nambour, Yandina and Bli Bli service surrounding rural areas.

At the foothills of the Blackall Range are the towns of Palmwoods, Woombye and Eudlo. Green inter-urban breaks between them help distinguish each town. Historically the economy of these towns along the northern railway line was based on timber but evolved into fruit farming over the years with pineapples becoming particularly significant and leading to the establishment of the iconic Big Pineapple in the 1970’s. Citrus, avocados and strawberries have also been important to the area with dairying occurred in the Eudlo Creek basin. Increasingly the towns in this district are growing, with commuters working elsewhere in the urban coastal area and outside the region.

The biodiversity values of the Maroochy River Catchment are relatively low, due to widespread clearing of vegetation and long term use of the land for agricultural production. There are a few patches of Melaleuca forest, heathland, Casuarina forest and Eucalypt woodland; however, these are generally small and fragmented. Other remnant vegetation remains, particularly in the rural residential areas of Yandina Creek, Verrierdale and Ninderry. Some of these areas of remnant vegetation are linked together by corridors of intact habitat, such as the National Estate listed Noosa-Maroochy Wallum Area to the east, and the Noosa-Maroochy State Forest corridor to the north. The tidal reaches of the Maroochy River are also designated as Fish Habitat Areas by the State Government.

The current land uses are a reflection of the transition occurring since the closure in 2003 of the Moreton Mill in Nambour. Some small areas of sugar cane remain and other small patches of land are being used for a variety of agricultural and non-agricultural land uses. A growing portion of the land is being utilised for rural living not associated with a rural activity on the land. There are three primary land management issues currently facing the former canelands in the district – maintenance of cane drains, weed and pest spread, and stream bank degradation.

Present Situation

i. Economic

Agriculture

Agriculture in its various forms has traditionally been the predominant land use in the rural areas of the Sunshine Coast and the region has been a major contributor of high value products in Queensland. For the year 2005-06, the value of agriculture from the Sunshine Coast was $198.3million[2], the highest of any region in south east Queensland and representing 2.3% of Queensland's agricultural output - the highest proportion of any single region in SEQ.

The regional economic value - Gross Regional Product (GRP) - of agriculture, forestry and fishing for 2010/2011 was $390m. This was generated through 1,868 registered businesses employing 4,345 people. Between 2006 and 2011 there has been an average 9.7% annual increase in the growth rate of the value of this sector and its contribution to GRP[3]. Within the region the sector accounts for 5.4% of its businesses.

The region's key produce has traditionally been sugar cane and dairy. While both have been in decline for some time, there are still small areas where they continue – a small amount of sugar cane in the Maroochy River Valley and dairying in the Mary River Valley and the Blackall Range. These districts - along with the Noosa Hinterland - also host the majority of the grazing industry, with about 65,000 hectares of land being used for approximately 36,000 beef cattle, 700 stud horses, 360 goats and 200 sheep.

Other industries that have experienced change and rationalisation, but also seen growth, include pineapples where approximately 33% (30,000 tonnes) of the South East Queensland production now occurs in the region, principally in the Glasshouse Country. This district also accounts for the majority of the poultry industry where over 15,000 dozen eggs and 1.7 million meat chickens are produced annually.

Other key industries are strawberries with approximately 200 hectares of production, equating to approximately 34% of the south east Queensland production - almost all of which occurs in the Glasshouse Country District. Within the Noosa Hinterland, ginger continues to be a key crop with around 90% (approximately 6,000 tonnes) of Australian production taking place around the Eumundi area, close to the Buderim Ginger Processing Factory.

Increasing value adding to these raw products is occurring and this represents a high value return to producers and the range of products now include nuts, confectionery, bush foods, dairy products, herbs, dried and baked goods, coffee, tea, wine, fruit juices, olive oil, avocado oil and a range of sauces, jams and chutneys.

The Sunshine Coast is a major supplier of small crops for south east Queensland (SEQ) with the latest figures available from 2005/06 showing that the region produced 98% of SEQ's production of lettuce, with the corresponding figures for zucchini and button squash at 66%, tomatoes at 52%, melons at 39%, sweet potatoes at 27%, peas at 17%, snow peas at 27%, and herbs at 16%. Whilst rationalisation has reduced the number of participants, the total value of production has increased. With the growing market for premium and niche products, crops such as bok choy, mibuna, mizuna, tatsoi, bamboo shoots, chilli, choko, okra and rocket are now produced. Approximately 650 tonnes of mushrooms, produced on only 2 hectares, equated to 14% of the SEQ production.

Lifestyle horticulture including nurseries, cut flowers and turf has been expanding rapidly due to increasing residential development and a growing overseas market for native cut flowers. The total value of the Queensland industry is approximately $1.3 billion (2007-08). According to ABS data, in 2005/06 there was approximately 225 hectares under cultivated turf, 136 hectares of nurseries and 67 hectares for cut flowers in the Sunshine Coast.

Tree crops - predominately occurring in the Blackall Range - have reduced due to encroaching urbanisation and fragmentation. However key products include citrus (100% of SEQ's production). Equivalent rates for other products include nuts at 79%, paw paws at 82%, bananas at 42%, avocados at 34%, stone fruit at 18%, and other orchard fruit at 32%. Forestry has also been a major rural land use for many years, mainly on publicly owned plantations which are now privately managed. These represent an area of 191,500 hectares (90% of the total Queensland plantation area), 85% of which are located in the Glasshouse Country district.

Tourism

The Sunshine Coast Hinterland is renowned for its diverse natural environment and green assets. While the beaches generally remain the biggest drawcard for visitors to the Sunshine Coast, the rural areas provide a complementary attraction for day and overnight visitors. As a result, eco-tourism,

[2] Australian Bureau of Statistics, Agricultural Commodities, Australia, 2005-06, cat. No. 7125.0

[3] Economic Profile for the Sunshine Coast, May 2012 - AEC Group

agricultural tourism, food & wine tourism, and animal based tourism are major components of the Sunshine Coast tourism product.

The Hinterland area of the Sunshine Coast has been increasing in visitation rates for the past 10 years. Within the Sunshine Coast visitation figures, 12% or 333,000 domestic overnight visitors visited the Hinterland - the majority (76%), being from Queensland, followed by 14.7% from New South Wales. International visitation to the Hinterland has also been following the same trend, with 21,296 international visitors to the Hinterland in 2010/2011. The main areas for tourist activity are the Noosa Hinterland and Blackall Range, although no district figures are available.

Key outdoor activities for visitors include bushwalking, mountain climbing, horseriding, canoeing, waterskiing, hang-gliding, rogaining and trail-running. The region is also a drawcard for a number of events focussing on nature-based activities. Events such as the Hinterland Festival of Walks and Pomona's King of the Mountain festival have been successful in drawing visitors to their localities.

Food and Agri-tourism

Food and Agri-tourism ranges from country drives passing small hobby farms selling produce in road-side stalls, to dedicated tourism ventures such as farm stays and cooking schools, as well as larger scale attractions. This activity is most prevalent in the Noosa Hinterland and Blackall Range. These combine value-add produce retailing to experiences and dining such as the Buderim Ginger Factory, and Cocoa Chocolat - the Eumundi Chocolate Factory. More recently, food-orientated festivals such as the Real Food Festival in Maleny, the Kenilworth Cheese, Wine and Food Festival and the Eumundi Food Fest, alongside the well established Noosa Food and Wine Festival draw visitors from outside the Sunshine Coast region and focus on quality food, produced locally. The reopening of the Big Pineapple in Woombye merging agriculture with education, interactive experiences, dining facilities and value-add products indicates the continued growth in this area of economic activity.

Aligned with the cultural shift towards local, organically grown produce, and permaculture farming systems, the Sunshine Coast Hinterland has approximately 100 properties offering voluntary farm working experiences.

The increased public awareness of food safety and security considerations, a heightened interest in accessing quality food and an increasing public demand for awareness and discussion around the source and production of food consumed is an opportunity for local producers to increase their market presence. With the assistance of the Sunshine Coast Council, a number of Sunshine Coast food producers created a regional brand "Seasons Of The Sun". The Seasons Of The Sun brand is growing recognition as being connected to the Sunshine Coast, strengthening the presence of producers when attending events and festivals and marketing their own value-add products. Seasons Of The Sun assists consumers in making the connection with the Sunshine Coast as an area of outstanding food production, increasing the value of the experience for visitors and consumers of Sunshine Coast Produce.

Arts/ Creative Industries

The Sunshine Coast region has a large number of creative professionals - from furniture makers and glass blowers, to market managers and film makers. Creative artists and artisans contribute substantially to the lifestyle proposition and play an important role in enlivening and enlightening their communities. The Blackall Range has become a key centre of production and sale of artistic products.

The Queensland government estimates that the creative industries contribute $3.4 billion annually to the state economy[4]. Whilst Sunshine Coast specific economic data is not readily available, ABS statistics (2006) indicate that 9% of creative professionals on the Sunshine Coast are engaged in the area of visual arts and crafts, compared to 5% in other regions of the state - with the majority in the Noosa Hinterland and Blackall Range districts.

The role of the internet in sustaining local creative economies is becoming more important, with many local creative practitioners able to connect to a global market whilst based within a regional area. This assists greatly in product finding its way to a national or international market, as well as the market coming to the product, in the form of cultural tourism to the region. Towns like Maleny, Montville and Eumundi define themselves as artistic hubs, promising visitors unique artisan experiences, retail opportunities as well as the other benefits of a relaxed atmosphere and striking natural surrounds. Arts Connect Creative Spaces Open Studio trail had 29 artist studios open to the public over two weekends in October 2011, showing over 2000 people through the creative product of region.

ii. Social

In 2011 the Sunshine Coast rural area accommodated approximately 29.5% of the Sunshine Coast's population with 91,889 people (based on a total Sunshine Coast population of 316,858 (ERP). This compares to 87,467 people in 2006, or 29.6% of the total Sunshine Coast population.

[4] Qld. Dept. of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation. Creative industries

The total rural population forecast for 2026, based on 2011 Census data and a rural population proportion of 29.5% is 135,954 people.

The rural towns of Cooran, Cooroy, Pomona, Bli Bli, Eumundi, Kenilworth, Mapleton, Palmwoods, Yandina, Mooloolah, Maleny, Glass House Mountains, Landsborough, Beerwah, and Beerburrum accounted for 25% of the rural population in 2011. It is predicted that as a result of growth in these towns, they will account for more than half of the rural population by 2026.

The district that has shown the greatest growth since 2006 is the Glass House Country, with an increase in population of 18.9%. The number of usual residents in 2011 was 21,798 people (an increase of 3,469 since 2006). This increase in population is the second highest increase for the Sunshine Coast.

Between 2006 and 2011, the greatest increase in the rural population age demographic (2.7%) was in the 65+ years age group. There was a decrease of 1.2% in the 25-34 age group over the same period. However when the percentage change is examined, the age group with the greatest change is 65+ years with an increase of 34.1% (3,661), followed by 55-64 years with 18.6% (2,150). In the age group 25-34 years there was a decrease of 2.4% (-183).

Since 2006 there has been a 33% increase in the rural labour force. However, the unemployment rate has remained relatively steady between 5.5% in 2006 and 6.0% in March 2012. The increase in the labour force can, in part, be explained by an increase in the participation rate (the proportion of the population aged 15 years and over engaged in the labour force). Since 2006, the participation rate has remained steady with a figure of 59.5% at August 2012.

Household median weekly incomes in the rural areas range from $864 to $1,119, which is comparable to the range in the urban areas where the range is from $857 to $1,278. These are significantly lower that the equivalent figures for Queensland ($1,235) and Australia ($1,234)

Of the 91, 889 residents in the rural areas, 15,806 were born overseas - a rate of 17.5%, which is below the equivalent rate of 20.8% in the urban areas, 26.3% in Queensland and 30.2% in Australia.

iii. Environmental

The Sunshine Coast is one of the most biodiverse regions in Australia, containing 92 different regional ecosystem types ranging from coastal wallum to dry and wet eucalypt forests and rainforests. The Sunshine Coast has the only substantial coastal eucalypt remnant vegetation area between Byron Bay and Bundaberg. Its existing remnant vegetation pattern, however, reflects more than a century of land use for forestry and agriculture. Most large upland forests and smaller coastal lowland remnants are considered significant for biodiversity conservation, and a high proportion of remnant vegetation is regarded as having state significance. Approximately half of the Sunshine Coast's native vegetation is on private land, with most of it located on rural land.

The Sunshine Coast Hinterland also contains particularly impressive and nationally significant landscape features such as the Glasshouse Mountains.

Sunshine Coast Council offers a number of environmental programs and initiatives which support rural areas, including:

- the purchase of land for conservation purposes;
- catchment management planning;
- natural area management;

and assistance to landholders through programs such as:

- Land for Wildlife;
- landholder environment grants;
- pest management programs; and
- support to community organisations through partnership arrangements

The Sunshine Coast has a network of waterways, with major catchments including the Noosa, Maroochy and Mooloolah Rivers. The region also has 12% of the Mary River catchment, some tributaries of the Pumicestone Passage and some headwaters of the Stanley River under its management.

Scenic amenity is another important factor of the Sunshine Coast environment. Natural mountains and ridgelines, rivers and coastline have the highest scenic amenity, although agricultural areas also have significant amenity value. The rural areas provide large open (and predominantly green) spaces. Protected open space and rural lands create inter-urban breaks and separate incompatible land uses. Retention of open space assists to preserve rural landscapes, enables social connectivity and maintains air and water quality.

Scenic amenity is regularly cited as a primary reason for living in the Hinterland area of the Sunshine Coast. Phrases like 'trees and greenery' and 'calming landscapes', 'animals and paddocks' and 'natural environment - away from the rat race' are regularly linked with the appreciation and enjoyment of the Hinterland lifestyle.

Many residents and visitors are attracted to the Sunshine Coast Hinterland because of the extent of conservation reserves, waterways and vegetated private land as well as the amenity of productive rural lands such as green pastures, forestry plantations or canefields. These land resources are therefore intrinsically linked to the economic and social well-being of the whole of the Sunshine Coast.

Current Issues, Values and Challenges

i. Lifestyle

The rural areas are frequently cited as a key lifestyle location for working and living. The key attributes that are highlighted by the community are:

- The environment and picturesque amenity of the Hinterland, participation with the environment, and the absence of noise and pollution found in urban areas
- The opportunity for a successful work/life balance, and the increased ability to participate in leisure time, to live close to work and play, and the proximity to coast and major centres if desired
- The natural, peaceful, tranquil environment, and living amongst native trees and wildlife coupled with slower paced living, privacy, and a peaceful lifestyle. Escaping the "rat-race"
- A strong community connection; a perception of like-mindedness, the enjoyment of co-dependency in a community and the opportunity to participate in community volunteering
- Access to good sized and good quality parcels of land, high rainfall and river access, opportunities to interact with both wildlife and farm stock
- The growing trend towards localism and a sense of enterprise; the opportunity to consume local produce, swap or trade and become a self sustaining community
- The current and potential diversity of industries, for example niche tourism, food industry, farming opportunities and home-based business opportunities

Affecting these trends are concerns that the rural areas will be negatively impacted by

- Unplanned urbanisation with particular reference to large scale residential development and a scale of commercial development inappropriate to the locality.
- The exploitation of the area's natural resources resulting in the destruction of natural assets with strong opposition to large industry, particularly extractive industry and its impact on good quality agricultural land, biodiversity and habitat
- Unmaintained landscapes resulting in pests and weeds
- Rural towns becoming transport corridors, particularly heavy industry impacts on the local road network and allied safety concerns and congestion
- Poor communication and engagement by decision makers - with residents and business owners alike expressing a strong calling for local ownership of their future. Consultation with government on future development opportunities is highly valued by the residents and businesses of rural communities

ii. Food Production

A key issue for the rural areas is the retention of land for agricultural use and the increasing interest in food security. This is challenged by continuing changes in food production techniques and agricultural practices driven by market forces, deregulation and increasing international competition in food supply.

The region has seen considerable change in food production since the 1990's, especially with the decline in the dairying and sugar industries and the changes in land use to smaller scale agricultural production and hobby-farm based activities. Further changes to land use have seen increasing encroachment of residential development on formerly productive land and an increase in the number of occupiers of productive land for a rural residential lifestyle. These two residential drivers have resulted in an increase in land values that makes land very expensive for farm operations and increases the barriers for potential farm expansions or for new entrants into farming.

There is also an absence of detailed and contemporary information regarding the region's competitive advantages from a market demand perspective, breadth of current producers, products, value added production and the marketing and distribution of products. The information that is available is often out of date and rarely at the local level. Regional data is also difficult to source. Availability and access to this information is essential to inform production decisions in a rapidly changing agricultural market and with continuing movements in consumption trends.

Initiatives such as assisting farmers to transition easily from traditional style to more contemporary styles of farming are important to achieve more sustainable outcomes. It is clear that there is also a need for localised rural education and training in agricultural production, with a need for adequate facilities to enable continued education for all ages, as well as educating the wider community. This would also help to provide greater local career pathways for young people in the area and contribute to encouraging their retention in the region

iii. Rural Enterprises

Rural enterprises is a term which applies to all those businesses active in the rural areas and the Hinterland service centre towns. It does not just apply to agricultural activities. There is considerable community support for the growth and expansion of rural enterprises that are linked to the land and are of a scale with the existing range of development. These include support for enterprises such as joint food processing facilities and cooperative production facilities for small-scale producers, education-based and lifestyle businesses, the ability for existing businesses to diversify and new businesses to start without excessive regulatory burdens of cost and compliance.

A strong appeal of working in the Hinterland is the perceived opportunity to achieve a good work and lifestyle balance. Being able to work from home or close by, residents feel that there is more time to engage in activities that hold lifestyle value, such as time with family, being close to the environment and the pursuit of hobbies. The increasing access to high speed broadband has facilitated this change, and it is a change that will continue as accessibility and access speeds increase and with trends towards corporate remote based operations. However the current quality and accessibility to high speed broadband is less than that of urban coastal areas and this continuing inequality will pose a challenge to the pursuit of the economic objectives of Hinterland communities.

Continuing changes in employment choice and opportunities have seen increased levels of commuting where the easy access to the coastal urban areas and neighbouring regions provides the ability to live in the Hinterland and work in the urban areas.

There are a number of extractive industry sites operating within the rural area due to long standing permissions. There is considerable community discussion on the nature and extent of the continuation of these activities, especially in instances of intensification, and considerable concern about impacts of these activities on lifestyle including issues around noise, dust, and scale and frequency of traffic.

iv. Community Cohesion

Inclusion and participation are an integral part of the character of many of the above regions rural communities. A clear sense of connection to a local community has been a strong focus throughout all the community consultation that has taken place.

There is a strong acceptance of diversity within each community and an appreciation of the differences between the characteristics of individual Hinterland areas. Each town has its own attributes. There is a strong sense of the Hinterland sharing common values such as helping each other in need, caring for the environment, volunteering in community groups and supporting local enterprises and a commitment to upholding the pristine image of the Hinterland.

Hinterland towns have traditionally been the economic and social hub of rural communities. Offering a mix of essential economic and social services, rural centres have been defined by, and grown by the rural population they serve. The size and needs of the surrounding populations has mostly determined the town's economic mix.

Rural centres provide social opportunities for landowners - and provide a common space for communities to come together. They also provide economic opportunities for the buying, selling and trading of goods, access to services and the exchange of knowledge and skills through community volunteerism and participation.

The decline of traditional large-scale agricultural industries such as dairying and sugar cane, as well as the increasing demand for rural lifestyle allotments has resulted in a form of urban encroachment on (and changed the face of) many rural centres on the Sunshine Coast. This increase in population and changing attitudes to living in the rural area has resulted in potential conflicts between traditional uses of the land and rural residents, which is not unique to the Sunshine Coast and is seen across Australia and internationally in peri-urban areas.

Simultaneously, the increasing popularity of Hinterland experiences and agri-tourism has stimulated changes in the economic mix of rural towns. In response to increased visitation, many rural centres on the Sunshine Coast have worked to create a defined identity with a mix of retail, tourism and entertainment, and service offerings in order to attract the day-tripper, drive-through tourist and support "overnight stays".

Rural areas of the Sunshine Coast are therefore facing many of the challenges faced by urban communities where there is a mix of social groups and uses accessing the common landscape and town centre. In many aspects, common values are shared in the desire and appreciation for a quieter lifestyle, being closer to the environment, self-sufficiency and buying locally.

However, it is the reality that most rural areas of the Sunshine Coast are within a reasonable commute to a major activity centre, offering greater access to services and where larger retailers are able to offer more competitive pricing and wider product ranges and social experiences. This presents regular challenges to the economic health of retailers in rural centres, balancing fluctuating incomes from infrequent local visitors and tourists against the pressure to compete with larger urban retailers in proximate, accessible locations, and increasingly the online retail service offer.

While each rural centre encounters its own challenges the initiatives in this draft strategy have the potential to maintain and strengthen the social fabric of our rural centres: protect and maintain the environmental and amenity values of a town; support the social infrastructure and open space objectives of communities and Council; encourage participation in community; and maximize the opportunities afforded by regional events and celebrations.

v. Development and Growth

Retention of the rural landscapes is an important issue for both residents and visitors. Access to key viewpoints and to corridors where views are available, are important to the community and are of particular significance in defining the Hinterland's image. This includes views of agricultural production.

Residents in the Hinterland are generally adamant that development should not detract from the scenic amenity or obscure important view lines or corridors. For all development, whether or not it includes buildings, there are three important elements: How the development looks; how it fits on the land and with the land's context; and the extent of community support. The community wish to be involved in considering the nature of, form and scale of development.

With the changing economic demands of rural centres, growth and development are key areas of interest of community decision making. There is an economic balance between catering for the local population - which itself (in some cases) may not be sufficient for ongoing sustainability, and catering for visitors who may be larger in number and spend more. This conflict results in development and growth pressures that have been seen in a number of traditional rural centres in the region - where traditional rural centres have diversified to include a mix of retail which whilst catering to the needs of the local community and adhering to the local ethos are also targeted at the visitor market. Various actions are underway within each community seeking to aim at slightly differing tourist markets based on their existing key attractions. These range from markets, vistas across the coast, to niche accommodation.

Rural centres that are located in closer proximity to major urban centres have experienced greater difficulty in adapting to the changes facing the traditional rural economy. This includes factors such as the need for retail operators to compete with an expanding retail offering in nearby urban coastal centres within short drive times, an increase in the demand for residential development in the rural areas as part of the tree change trend and the increasing purchase of rural production land as lifestyle rural residential living lots.

There are many examples where rural based events, festivals and celebrations have been used successfully to define a locality and in attracting visitors. Events bring a range of visitors from outside the locality, provide economic benefit as well as create a broader awareness or exposure of the host town.

As the trend continues of increasing population growth in the Hinterland, accessibility and access to transport and travel through the region is a major issue.

There are longstanding plans for duplication of the main northern railway line, both for passenger and freight transport, which are currently unfunded. Improved rail links has the potential to enhance the resilience of some Hinterland towns through increased accessibility for residents; the potential to attract businesses with regular freight transportation needs, and provide opportunities for existing and future tourism operators.

The importance of bus linkages within, and to the Hinterland, has also been highlighted as important services and infrastructure for sustaining, and improving quality of life. Bus linkages serve a particular importance in meeting the needs of the elderly, the youth, those who are have mobility restrictions and those without access to private transport.

Improvements to major road networks are also significant contributors to providing more opportunities for residents, businesses and visitors to the region, most notably the Bruce Highway and Steve Irwin Way. Improvements to the quality and safety of roads within the Hinterland will also support growth and expansion, enhancing the lifestyle and economic options for the region.

vi. Climate Change and Peak Oil

Climate change is affecting our weather patterns. As the changes continue, the effects are expected to intensify bringing a reduction in annual rainfall, higher temperatures, rising sea levels, increased storm activity and more frequent flooding and droughts, changing life-cycle patterns, loss of native plants and animals and an increase in pest infestations. As the region has seen in recent years, industries such as agriculture and tourism are highly exposed to the impacts of seasonal weather variations and the effects of natural disasters.

The social and economic wellbeing of the Sunshine Coast may be adversely impacted if oil prices rise and become more volatile. This has significant implications for rural communities in terms of accessibility, the future of the visitor market, the ability to support a commuter lifestyle and the viability of many agricultural activities.

Emerging Economic Opportunities

Regional Primary Production Clusters

Market demand for food product is changing rapidly and will continue to change in response to consumer consumption, impacts of weather events and a growing awareness of food security considerations. What is emerging is that the greater the flexibility that exists for producers to transition from one crop to another in response to market demand, the greater the likelihood of continuing farm viability.

Coupled with this is the need for landowners and producers to access better and more relevant information on the region's competitive advantages in agricultural production and how the region can best position itself to be responsive to market demand.

Underpinning this are a number of sites in the Glasshouse Country, Maroochy River Plains and Noosa Hinterland that could act as regional primary production clusters. These include the Big Pineapple at Nambour that has recently reopened, and sites in Beerwah, Yandina, Nambour, and Cooroy. These sites due to their location, size and potential provide the opportunity to create:

- Key demonstrator/showcases of the region's range of primary food production
- Potential incubator sites for new start up businesses in the food and related tourism sector
- Training locations for food and tourism related skills
- Local food distribution centres
- A range of catering options from small scale value adding to major conference facilities
- Dry storage and packaging location for a range of food related businesses
- A range of cooperative cold storage facilities linked to existing or new local food markets
- Key regional locations for local food/farmers markets

With some having the potential to also incorporate:

- Venues for large scale events demonstrating the local food industry
- A cooperative processing plant to be utilised by new and small scale primary producers to value add and process their products
- Business unit space for larger scale food businesses

Biodiesel Feedstock Production and Carbon Sequestration

The biofuels industry in Australia began developing in the 1990s. That development has accelerated recently as a result of rising global oil prices and the Australian Government's Clean Energy Legislation. The Australian Government has also recently released a "Strategic Framework for Alternative Fuels" which identifies dryland oil based crops as a significant feedstock opportunity.

In 2009, 2% of the 19 gigalitres of diesel used in Australia was comprised of biofuels and supply constraints on biofuel feedstock production continue to provide additional feedstock opportunities.

There may be potential for the Glasshouse Country, Maroochy River Plains, Conondale Range, and Mary River Valley districts to grow biofuel feedstock (plant material that can be converted to biofuel through processing) to supply this emerging industry. Plant-based trial crops such as soybean, pongamia pinnata, and algae are all currently being assessed as to their bio-physical and commercial production suitability in rural areas of the Sunshine Coast. This industry development opportunity requires however, further exploration and analysis to determine commercial viability, supply chain elements and production capability and accessible markets.

A number of investment opportunities may exist in the future for ecological infrastructure projects including carbon and biodiversity offsetting that aim to benefit the landholder and environment.

Food security and safety

At both a local and global level, there is emerging a heightened awareness of food production, transport considerations, and a growing consumer interest in where food comes from, where it will come from in the future, how communities will support their own consumption and whether food is produced in a clean, safe and healthy production environment. This awareness of food security and safety considerations is growing in strength locally and in a number of Asian countries, especially China, where there is a burgeoning middle class with a growing desire to access high quality, safe food.

There is the potential for development of additional export opportunities for existing and new food production businesses that will add an additional sales channel to the potential of the expanding local sales market. There is also the potential to build on existing foreign investment in key production and processing facilities in the region.

Tourism and Events

Currently, 12% of the visitors to the region visit the Hinterland. There is significant scope to expand the range of tourism products and services around the rural areas that can act as tourism nodes principally in the Blackall Range, Conondale Range, Mary River Valley and Noosa Hinterland districts. An increase and broadening of the range of events showcasing the rural areas and complementing the landscape could also be pursued. Key districts for these event offers are the Noosa Hinterland and Blackall Range, with initial areas to target being sports and activity related events, and nature based tourism activities utilising the landscape.

The region's natural assets provide potential for tourism operators to maximise the Hinterland experience. The redevelopment of the Mary Cairncross Reserve in the Blackall Range presents an opportunity for tourism operators to leverage off the expected increase in visitors to the site. Linking to the promotion of feature attractions in Glasshouse Country and the Blackall Range such as Australia Zoo, Big Kart Track, Maleny Dairies, and Aussie World as well as proposed attractions including the Obi Obi Zip Line further improves this tourism offer.

As well as the increase in numbers, a wider range of tourist types, including RV tourers, backpackers, and adventure seekers present other tourism growth opportunities. Changing trends in holidays and recreation may provide opportunities to increase the potential for overnight and extended family stays through an increase of suitable accommodation, particularly in the Glasshouse Country, Blackall Range and Noosa Hinterland

Accessing the Digital Economy

A greater diversity of employment opportunities will likely emerge with improvements to accessibility and availability of broadband and telecommunications services. These opportunities will likely occur in small home based businesses trading online through to larger businesses being able to locate in rural service centres.

Skills Transfer and Mentoring

The greater number of lifestyle residents moving to the rural areas bring a greater range of skills and experiences that can (and should be) harnessed to strengthen community vitality and resilience. These skills can support communities achieve their objectives and aspirations, build capacity and viability of rural enterprises and strengthen community organisations and community advocacy. Many of those that are seeking to scale back their working life could be well placed to be involved in intergeneration training and mentoring.

The demographic change that is seeing the retirement of farmers can also provide for mentoring and education schemes that transfer knowledge of local production conditions to the next generation of producers and new entrants to the region's agricultural market

Planning and Policy Context

This draft strategy accords with and complements a range of local, regional and State strategies and plans. More details on each policy and strategy are included in Appendix 1. The following are a summary of the planning and policy context documents:

i. Queensland

Planning for Prosperity

The recently released Temporary State Planning Policy 2/12 Planning for Prosperity sets out how the planning system will facilitate economic growth in Queensland. Those areas identified for economic growth include promoting agriculture, tourism, mineral and extractive resources industries, and construction activities

South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009-2031

The South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009 - 2031 (the Regional Plan) is a statutory instrument under the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009*. The Regional Plan provides an overarching planning framework for the SEQ region including its rural areas. The Regional Plan is scheduled for review in 2013

ii. Sunshine Coast

Sunshine Coast Community Plan

The plan, which is currently a requirement under the *Local Government Act 2009*, captures the community's vision and hopes for the future of the region and guides other planning processes for council. The Community Plan indicates the region will have a strong, local food production industry supplying the local population, will encourage sustainable production techniques and provide opportunities to showcase local production.

Corporate Plan

The Vision contained within Council's Corporate Plan 2009-2014 is to be Australia's most sustainable region – vibrant, green, diverse. There are 8 themes supporting this vision – all of which impact on the liveability and sustainability of rural areas

Draft Sunshine Coast Planning Scheme 2012

Council is developing a new planning scheme for the Sunshine Coast, which will replace the three existing planning schemes – the Caloundra City Plan 2004, the Maroochy Plan 2000 and the Noosa Plan 2006.

The draft Sunshine Coast Planning Scheme is presently on public exhibition. When finalised it will be the tool used by council to manage land use and development for the region in a sustainable way.

Sunshine Coast Affordable Living Strategy

The Affordable Living Strategy highlights the need to improve housing diversity and affordability within self-contained neighbourhoods. It also promotes improved transport choices with better housing and resource efficiency. This in turn will improve access to essential facilities and services and help to create opportunities for all residents in both urban and rural settings.

Sunshine Coast Biodiversity Strategy

The Sunshine Coast Biodiversity Strategy 2010-2020 aims to ensure the region's biodiversity is protected, enhanced, healthy, and resilient to climate change and valued by the entire community.

Sunshine Coast Climate Change and Peak Oil Strategy

The Climate Change and Peak oil strategy aims to tackle climate change and reduce the exposure of the region to oil peaks by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, cutting oil dependency; helping the Sunshine Coast transition to alternative energy sources; adapting to climate change, and building business capacity for the council and region.

Sunshine Coast Economic Development Strategy 2010-2014

The draft Rural Futures Strategy is a sub set of the Economic Development Strategy 2010-2014, which seeks to strengthen and diversify the regional economy through growth in a range of industry sectors. The Economic Development Strategy is presently being revised.

Sunshine Coast Aquatic Plan

The Sunshine Coast Aquatic Plan will guide the planning, development and management of the aquatics facilities across the Coast for the next 16 years. A number of regional aquatic facilities are owned by council in rural areas of the Sunshine Coast.

Sunshine Coast Energy Transition Plan

In conjunction with the Climate Change and Peak Oil Strategy, the Energy Transition Plan will assist in achieving the goal of a low carbon, low oil, and resilient future for the Sunshine Coast.

Sunshine Coast Open Space Strategy

The Sunshine Coast Open Space Strategy 2011 is the long term planning document for recreation parks, sports grounds and recreation trails. It also informs the management principles of environment reserves managed by council. The strategy informs how much land is needed, where it is to be located and how it will function.

Sunshine Coast Social Infrastructure Strategy

The strategy aims to ensure that the social infrastructure on the Coast meets the needs of the region's diverse population. The strategy is a long term planning document, which focuses on the provision of a range of social infrastructure for which council is the primary provider.

Sunshine Coast Waterways and Coastal Management Strategy

The Waterways and Coastal Management Strategy (2011-2021) provides a ten-year framework and direction for management of the region's natural waterways, constructed water bodies and coastal foreshores. Waterways are a vital part of the Sunshine Coast's natural assets - underpinning its identity, prosperity and lifestyle.

Rural Action Plan

Developed in 2009, the Rural Action Plan sets out four target areas: Business Support and Incubation, Development of local food and beverage, Investment Options, and Engagement.

Sunshine Coast Local Government Area Pest Management Plan 2012-2016

The Sunshine Coast Local Government Area Pest Management Plan provides a foundation for managing weeds and pest animals across the Sunshine Coast for the next four years. The plan meets the requirements outlined in the Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002.

iii. Other Policy Contexts, Issues and Legislation

State Planning Policy 1/12: Protection of Queensland's Strategic Cropping Land

This SPP is part of the land use planning and development assessment framework for protecting strategic cropping land as a finite resource conserved and managed for the longer term.

Australian Clean Energy Legislation 2011

The Clean Energy legislative package is spearheaded by the Clean Energy Act 2011 and includes a suite of 18 Acts related to areas such as household assistance, taxation, change fuel tax, unit issue charges and unit shortfall charges.

Queensland Coastal Plan

The Queensland Coastal Plan is prepared under the *Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995* and the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009* (SPA). It places a number of requirements on local government in relation to managing development and growth across coastal areas. The plan includes the Maroochy River Valley district

Queensland Extractive Industries Legislation

To date, locally significant resource areas have been identified in current and past planning schemes derived from past studies of extractive resource availability on the Sunshine Coast. These are identified together with Key Resource Areas (KRA's) identified as being of state significance under the Queensland state planning policy SPP2/07 – Protection of Extractive Resources.

Queensland Flood Commission of Inquiry- Final Report Recommendations

The final report of the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry was released on 16 March 2012. The Commission was established to enquire into seven matters arising from the Queensland Floods of 2010-2011 which brought tragic loss of life and major destruction to public infrastructure and private residences of Queensland.

Recommendations arising from the final report relate to preparations and planning for floods by governments, agencies and the community; the adequacy of the response to the floods; management of essential services; the adequacy of forecasts and early warning systems; insurers' performance of their responsibilities; the operation of dams; and land use planning to minimise flood impacts. A number of the final report's recommendations are directly relevant to the Sunshine Coast. Council has committed to implement actions arising from the report's recommendations. The primary impact on the rural areas is in relation to the land in the Maroochy River Valley district.

Strategic Actions

To achieve the objectives of the draft Rural Futures Strategy and respond to the identified challenges, trends and opportunities confronting rural communities, a range of actions have been identified. The actions bring together the policy direction and the physical planning. These actions build on the current projects and programs undertaken by Council (or identified in other Council strategies) and the community and direct future priorities in the rural areas of the Sunshine Coast.

How the actions work

Within each objective area there are measurable actions to be undertaken.

Toolkit

The tools used to achieve the actions include:

Advocacy – through debate, evidence and innovation

Activation – improved utilisation of existing resources

Alliances – forming partnerships and working together

Districts

Each action has been assessed for its application in each district. The following abbreviations have been used in the District column:

All	- All the Districts
GC	- Glasshouse Country
BR	- Blackall Range
CR	- Conondale Range
MRV	- Mary River Valley
NH	- Noosa Hinterland
MRV	- Maroochy River Valley

A measure or indicator has been assigned to each action to enable monitoring and review of the performance and delivery.

Cost

Indicative costings for the proposed actions have been prepared

Low	less than $10,000
Medium	between $10,000 and $100,000
High	between $100,000 and 250,000

Priority

The timing of actions is based on priority and achievability. Priorities are subject to budget allocation, both capital and operational.

High	within 2 years
Medium	within 5 years
Long	beyond 5 years

Objective 1 – To maintain and enhance lifestyle options

Actions		Toolkit	District	Measure	Cost	Priority
Strategy 1.1 Reflecting community aspirations						
1.1.1	Ensure that the draft Sunshine Coast planning scheme reflects community expectations and aspirations about the type, scale and scope of development in rural areas	Advocacy	All	Community supported planning scheme provisions for the rural areas	Low	High
1.1.2	Support the development of a range of businesses and employment opportunities consistent with the values of individual communities	Advocacy	All	Increase in business formation in rural communities	Low	High
1.1.3	Support a range of residential accommodation types to ensure a vibrant, diverse and inclusive community	Activation and Advocacy	All	Increase in range of accommodation types	High	Medium
1.1.4	Highlight the opportunities and characteristics of living in rural areas to prospective purchasers of land in rural areas	Alliances	All	Production of information material	Low	Medium
1.1.5	Preserve existing public open space and plan for improved availability and accessibility of public open space options in rural communities	Activation	All	Increase in area designated as public open space	High	Long

Objective 2 – To maximise the use of productive land

Actions		Toolkit	District	Measure	Cost	Priority
Strategy 2.1 Maintain and enhance productive land						
2.1.1	Ensure the productive value of land is considered in all land use decision making	Advocacy	All	Productive land protected in new draft planning scheme	Low	High
2.1.2	Promote sustainable management practices and connect best practice, contemporary scientific and market research with existing and potential producers	Advocacy	All	Increased communication and collaboration with Maroochy Research Station (DAFF and DSDIP) and universities and attract innovative agricultural trials	Low	High
2.1.3	Examine and enhance the urban/rural interface to enable the continuation of existing rural activities, and allow for future additional rural activities and reduce conflicts	Advocacy	All	Identification of current and potential conflict areas. Development of actions to reduce conflicts	Low	High
2.1.4	Protect the floodplain areas and establish improvement programs in collaboration with land users	Advocacy	MRV and NH	Retention of rural areas and effective management of floodplains.	Low	High
2.1.5	Improve the management of the incidence and spread of pests and weeds	Alliances	All	Reduction in number of reported outbreaks	Medium	High
2.1.6	Support the introduction of appropriate new crop pilot schemes that contribute to enhanced landscape maintenance	Advocacy	All	Increase in the range of new crop pilot schemes	Low	Medium
2.1.7	Promote mechanisms that support land owners and producers to easily transition from one crop to another crop in response to market demand	Advocacy and Alliances	All	Information and advisory services are accessible to enable informed decision making by land owners and producers	Medium	High

Objective 3 – To provide a range of economic opportunities

Actions		Toolkit	District	Measure	Cost	Priority
Strategy 3.1 Increase the range of businesses in the food production and processing sector						
3.1.1	Define the region’s competitive advantages in agricultural production and ensure this is available and promoted to regional producers and new market entrants	Alliances	All	Region’s competitive advantages defined by independent research and widely accessible	Medium	High
3.1.2	Support share farming schemes that will connect owners of vacant farm land to potential producers	Alliances	All	Successful sharefarming trials, followed by an endorsed operational scheme	Medium	High
3.1.3	Ensure Council’s Local Business Support Program is accessible to new and existing businesses in the rural areas	Alliances	All	Number of businesses receiving information and support services from Council, and number of new businesses assisted to establish in the region	Medium	High
3.1.4	Consider the establishment of a food industry business site that could incorporate a “Clean” Park, a distribution centre and a new business incubator	Advocacy	GC, MRV and NH	Identification of site and production of business case assessment	High	Medium
3.1.5	Encourage food industry clusters at key rural centres such as Beerwah, Nambour, and Cooroy	Alliances	GC, MRV and NH	Number of businesses co-located at key centres	Medium	High
3.1.6	Enhance the development and understanding of the local food processing supply chain and network	Alliances	All	Rate of rural business growth (and exits)	Medium	High
3.1.7	Connect research capabilities to primary producers - utilising the key research centres in the region including universities and the Maroochy Research Station	Advocacy	All	Increased communication and collaboration with Maroochy Research Station (DAFF and DSIP) and Universities	Low	Medium
3.1.8	Support the development of a skills mentoring program for new entrants to rural production	Alliances	All	Establishment of formal scheme with at least 20 mentors	Medium	Medium
Strategy 3.2 Increase the range of economic activities in rural centres and currently unused food production land						
3.2.1	Encourage carbon farming initiatives that will enhance landscape maintenance	Advocacy	All	Broad community awareness of carbon farming opportunities and the uptake of 3 initiatives by 2018	Low	Medium
3.2.2	Attract and retain rural-based enterprises that have the potential to contribute to the regional economy and local employment, and are compatible in scale and operations to the surrounding areas.	Advocacy	All	Increased rural based enterprises on the Sunshine Coast, increased localised employment figures	Low	High

Actions		Toolkit	District	Measure	Cost	Priority
3.2.3	Promote the importance of rural centres as valuable social and economic hubs	Advocacy	All	Rural centres included in all relevant council activity and publications and tourism marketing material	Low	High
3.2.4	Examine and identify sites for potential biofuel feedstock production to support the growth of this activity as a new economic opportunity for the region	Alliances	All	Business case finalised and supported and number of sites identified	Low	Medium
Strategy 3.3 Expand range of data and information available						
3.3.1	Publish a range of relevant and contemporary data (including market demand data and consumer consumption trends) for rural producers via collaboration with tertiary institutions and the Maroochy Research Centre	Alliances	All	Publicly accessible data repository established and maintained	Medium	Medium
Strategy 3.4 Promote Tourism opportunities						
3.4.1	Work in cooperation and seek opportunities to align with Queensland Government policy platforms impacting on tourism in the Hinterland areas.	Alliances	All	Increased overall tourism expenditure in the Hinterland areas of the Sunshine Coast	Low	High
3.4.2	Enhance the presence of Hinterland experiences in regional destination marketing activities, including digital solutions and social media	Alliances and Advocacy	All	Include promotion of rural centres in all tourism activity and publications	Low	High
3.4.3	Secure a signature event for the Hinterland	Alliances	All	Event secured and takes place	Medium	Medium
3.4.4	Undertake a range of rural tourism promotion programs around culinary tourism, agri-tourism, farm stays and food trails	Advocacy	All	Increase in attendance	Low	Medium
3.4.5	Support the development and promotion of a range of heritage and food trails in the Hinterland	Alliances	All	Publication of 3 trails by 2015	Low	High
Strategy 3.5 Promote the region as a leading food production and processing area						
3.5.1	Assist in the promotion of the region through food branding projects and broader south east Queensland efforts to leverage the region's food produce as an economic opportunity for the region	Alliances	All	Number of marketing initiatives undertaken	Medium	High
3.5.2	Assist in facilitating the expansion of a range of regional and local food shows (including Farmers Markets)	Alliances	All	Increase in attendance at designated food shows by 10% per year	Medium	High
3.5.3	Expand the range of business events such as	Alliances	All	Increase in attendance at designated events	Low	Long

Actions		Toolkit	District	Measure	Cost	Priority
	conferences, expos and awards showcasing rural businesses and food production businesses			by 10% per year		
3.5.4	Undertake an opportunity analysis on the potential of key export markets, the export readiness of existing businesses, and the potential of investment in production capabilities	Alliances	All	Increase by 10% in rural businesses exporting to international markets	Medium	High

Objective 4 – To foster community development and cohesion

Actions		Toolkit	District	Measure	Cost	Priority
Strategy 4.1 Improve Community Participation						
4.1.1	Encourage more residents in rural communities to become actively involved in existing local community groups	Advocacy	All	Increase in numbers attending groups more than once	Low	Medium
4.1.2	Improve access and success rate of rural organisations to community grant programs conducted by all levels of government	Advocacy	All	Increase in the number of successful applications from rural communities	Low	High
4.1.3	Foster community participation in localised social, economic and environmental activities.	Alliances	All	Increased resident participation in rural community consultation exercises	Low	High
4.1.4	Encourage community participation in rural community engagement exercises	Advocacy	All	Growth in participation of community reference groups/Divisional Councillor groups	Low	High
4.1.5	Expand the range of youth activities available in the Hinterland	Alliances	All	Increase in the range, frequency and location of youth programs	High	Medium
Strategy 4.2 Increase the availability of learning and skills development opportunities						
4.2.1	Support development within the region of relevant education and training programs with a particular focus on rural enterprises and peri-urban agriculture	Alliances	All	Number and enrolments in course established	High	Medium
4.2.2	Work with education and training organisations to encourage higher retention and completion rates in the secondary school system	Advocacy	All	Retention rates and completion rates comparable with State averages	Low	High
4.2.3	Improve the availability of timely and relevant information to students in rural areas in Years 10-12 of opportunities to pursue careers based in local rural areas	Alliances	All	Information provided to 100% of students in Years 10-12	Medium	High
Strategy 4.3 Facilitate improved access to critical human services to meet the needs of communities						
4.3.1	Work with the Department of Communities and other human services agencies to improve access to core services responsive to local needs	Alliances	All	10% improvement by 2015 service mix and accessibility in rural areas	High	Medium

Objective 5 – To support growth in line with community needs and expectations

Actions		Toolkit	District	Measure	Cost	Priority
Strategy 5.1 Enhance the opportunities for rural communities from the digital economy						
5.1.1	Encourage the timely roll-out by the NBN and private telecommunications providers of improved broadband and digital solutions for rural areas	Alliances	All	Initial NBN fibre rollout in the region completed by 2015. Improved broadband connectivity available across a range of technologies and services	High	Medium
5.1.2	Improve access by rural residents and rural enterprise owners to contemporary information and advice on participating in the digital economy	Alliances	All	Participation by rural businesses in marketing and skilling initiatives on taking advantage of the digital economy	Medium	High
Strategy 5.2 Enhancing the learning and skills infrastructure in relation to rural based activities						
5.2.1	Examine the establishment of a Agrifood Skills Precinct[5]	Alliances	BR, MRV and GC	Defined business case completed	Medium	Medium
Strategy 5.3 Improve the connectivity of rural communities						
5.3.1	Enhance the connectivity of rural communities to each other, to major rural service centres and the region's activity centres	Alliances	All	A connected public transport network, used regularly by rural residents and visitors	High	Medium
5.3.2	Encourage support for, and use of the existing bus services throughout the Hinterland	Advocacy	All	No decrease in overall level of service	Medium	High
5.3.3	Advocate for the duplication of the North Coast Rail Line to improve accessibility and connectedness of rural areas	Advocacy	GHC and MRV	Duplication timetable outlined by the Queensland Government	Low	High
5.3.4	Consider the introduction of a Travelsmart rural-connection program	Alliances	All	Expansion of existing Travelsmart Policy to rural areas following business case assessment	High	Medium

[5] A precinct that incorporates a whole of business approach to the training and development of food based businesses. It includes vocational and science skills training in a real business environment that incorporates food production, processing and manufacturing through to preparation and usage in a commercial environment

Glossary of Terms

List of items for clarity

Term	Clarification
Agriculture	The use of land and premises for the growth and production of food, fibre, flowers and foliage for human consumption or use.
Agri-tourism	An agricultural-based operation or activity which brings visitors to a farm or rural area, in which farms supplement (or replace) their traditional income from the sale of crops to wholesale markets by offering a variety of consumer or experiential options.
Biodiesel	A vegetable oil- or animal fat-based diesel fuel consisting of long-chain alkyl (methyl, propyl or ethyl) esters. Biodiesel is typically made by chemically reacting lipids (e.g., vegetable oil, animal fat (tallow) with an alcohol producing fatty acid esters.
Biodiesel Feedstock	Plant crops grown to extract oils, to convert to biodiesel. Examples include tallow, soybean, algae
Biodiversity	Biodiversity is the variety of all life forms (plants, animals, micro organisms, the genes they contain and the ecosystems they form part of). In this document the term biodiversity values refers to both the intrinsic values and the anthropocentric (social, recreational, aesthetic, economic etc).
Biosecurity	A set of preventive measures designed to reduce the risk of transmission of infectious diseases, quarantined pests, invasive alien species and living modified organisms.
Broadacre	Farms or industries engaged in the production of grains, oilseeds and other crops (especially wheat, barley, peas, sorghum, maize, hemp, safflower, and sunflower), or the grazing of livestock for meat or wool, on a large scale (i.e., using extensive parcels of land).
Carbon Offset	A carbon offset is an investment in a project or activity that reduces greenhouse gas emissions or sequesters carbon from the atmosphere
Climate Change	Is the change in climate attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere, and that is, in addition to natural climate variability over comparable time periods.
Community Engagement/ Community Consultation	An ongoing dialogue with our community to identify civic issues and opportunities, assist with planning and inform decision making.
Community Garden	A single piece of land collectively gardened by a group of people
Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)	A locally-based socio-economic model of agriculture and food distribution. A CSA also refers to a particular network or association of individuals who have pledged to support one or more local farms, with growers and consumers sharing the risks and benefits of food production
Eco-system	An ecosystem is a natural unit consisting of all plants, animals and microorganisms in an area, functioning together with all the non-living physical factors, including soil, rocks, minerals, water sources and the local atmosphere.

Extractive Industries	The business operations involved in the extraction and processing of extractive resources for use in construction and industry including sand, gravel, quarry rock, clay and soil.
Floodplain	Flat or nearly flat land adjacent to a stream or river that stretches from the banks of its channel to the base of the enclosing valley walls and experiences flooding during periods of high discharge.
Good Quality Agricultural Land (GQAL)	GQAL is determined by an assessment of its agricultural potential. State and local governments have recognised that this land is a scarce productive resource that needs protection through land use planning measures. State Planning Policy (SPP) 1/92: Development and Conservation of Agricultural Land provides guidance to local governments on how to protect good quality agricultural land of state and regional significance when exercising their planning powers.
Gross Regional Product	One of several measures of a region's economy. The total value of all goods and services produced by all businesses and industries in a defined region for a defined period of time.
Hinterland	Those areas of the region that are classified as rural, together with the urban centres surrounded by those rural areas
Horticulture	The production of ornamental horticulture products (plants, turf grass and cut flowers) as well as the planting of stock for of fruit, nut, vegetable and forestry industries. Also includes the businesses involved in services such as landscape design, arboriculture, wholesaling and retailing, indoor plant hire, garden and lawn maintenance.
Irrigation	The artificial application of water to the land or soil. It is used to assist in the growing of agricultural crops, maintenance of landscapes, and revegetation of disturbed soils in dry areas and during periods of inadequate rainfall
Landscape	The visible features of an area of land, including the physical elements of landforms such as mountains, hills, water bodies such as rivers, lakes, ponds and the sea, living elements of land cover including indigenous vegetation, human elements including different forms of land use, buildings and structures, and transitory elements such as lighting and weather conditions.
NBN	National Broadband Network
Peri-urban	Peri-urban areas form belts of non-urban land fringing urban centres. They are often neither fully urban nor rural.
Plantation Forestry	A long artificially established forest, farm or estate, where crops are grown for sale, often in distant markets rather than for local on-site consumption.
Remnant Vegetation	Vegetation where the dominant canopy has greater than 70% of the height and greater than 50% of the cover relative to the undisturbed height and cover of that stratum and dominated by species characteristic of the vegetation's undisturbed canopy.
Resource	Extractive resources include sand, gravel, quarry rock, clay and soil extracted and processed for use in construction.
Rural	Areas of land that are not urbanised, though when large areas are described, country towns and smaller cities will be included. They have a low population density, and typically much of the land is devoted to agriculture.

Rural Enterprise	Economic activity that is ancillary to an existing rural use of premises within the Rural Zone, in which the landowner and/or resident family members derive additional income to supplement that earned from the primary rural activity.
Scenic amenity	Amenity, in the context of the Sunshine Coast Open Space Strategy 2011, refers to the aesthetic values provided by open space areas. It predominantly reflects the capacity of open space to provide an attractive 'scenic' setting to the region and to 'green' urban spaces.
Social Capital	Social capital is the underpinning and core fabric of social communities. Benefits of social capital include safety and security, friendship and community, a sense of civic identity, etc.
Statistical Local Area (SLA)	The SLA is a general purpose spatial unit. It is the base spatial unit used to collect and disseminate statistics other than those collected from the Population Censuses.
Sustainable	Is the capacity to endure. For humans, sustainability is the long-term maintenance of responsibility, which has environmental, economic, and social dimensions, and encompasses the concept of stewardship, the responsible management of resource use. In ecology, sustainability describes how biological systems remain diverse and productive over time, a necessary precondition for the well-being of humans and other organisms.
Tree Crops	Commercial or agricultural produce grown from trees. Examples include avocados, macadamias, stonefruits
Value add	Manufacturing process that increases the value of primary produce. Examples include bottling, ready packaged foods and sweets.

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