

# Economic Development Strategy

Cootamundra Gundagai Regional Council

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Confidential

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# 1. Executive Summary

Cootamundra Gundagai Regional Council was recently created as a result of the “Fit for the Future” program conducted by the NSW State Government. Whilst previously two separate municipalities, many commonalities have been identified, including pride in their rural setting and safe, friendly communities, their reliance on agriculture as a primary source of direct and indirect employment, their location within the Riverina and the centralised location with easy access to many large regional centres, as well as key cities.

This Economic Development Strategy has been informed by community input (via interviews and consultation sessions), desktop research into successful economic development in regional communities and a review of the most recent socio-economic data available.

The information gathered highlights both opportunities and challenges in this regional economy. Population, whilst growing in areas of the local government area, is declining in others. Employment rates are good however this results in skills and labour shortages in some areas of the economy. The community is aging and though good services are available throughout the region, the reduction in younger age groups may soon be felt through services such as education, child care and refreshing the labour force.

The local government area is heavily reliant on a small number of larger employers and whilst focus is required on diversifying this employment base, growth opportunities are being identified in the small business sector. There is an appetite to encourage more innovative businesses and workers to locate in the area (including online business, remote working employees).

As with all regional communities, proactive effort is required in order to sustain existing businesses as a more globalised economy and the changing nature of consumers and businesses bring new challenges. More of the same will not provide the desired end result.

This Strategy highlights five strategic initiatives to support economic development within the Cootamundra Gundagai region. These are:

- Strategic Initiative One: Grow the economy through existing and new businesses
- Strategic Initiative Two: Marketing and promotion as a great place to live and invest
- Strategic Initiative Three: Product development to become a “destination”
- Strategic Initiative Four: Drive agricultural enterprises
- Strategic Initiative Five: Work with partners to encourage economic infrastructure investment

A number of key activities have been identified for each initiative and a high level implementation plan is provided. All initiatives remain subject to Council’s resource planning and budget processes.

Ongoing action and monitoring in these areas should support the continued development and sustainability of a thriving economy in this region.

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Overview

Cootamundra Gundagai Regional Council was proclaimed in May 2016 and was formed through an amalgamation of the former Cootamundra Shire Council and Gundagai Shire Council. The local government area encompasses approximately 3,900 square kilometres and is home to approximately 11,500 people. The region spreads from the western slopes of the Great Dividing Range to the doorstep of the Riverina Plains. It is easily accessible along major transport routes to Melbourne (500kms), Sydney (390kms) and Canberra (95kms).

The region is in proximity to many locations supporting popular recreational pursuits such as the Murrumbidgee River, Burrinjuck and Blowering Dams and the Snowy Mountains snowfields. Gundagai is in close proximity to the Hume Highway while Cootamundra sits on a number of key road and rail routes including Burley Griffin Way, Olympic Highway and the Southern Railway line.

The region aligns with the Riverina and is a member of the Riverina Eastern Regional Organisation of Councils (REROC).

### 2.2 Purpose of Strategy

In order to support the ongoing growth and sustainability of communities within Cootamundra Gundagai Regional Council it is important to have strong economic foundations. The Economic Development Strategy supports Council by providing a framework for a robust and growing economy through:

- Fostering economic resilience;
- Heightening responsiveness to the needs of the current and future business community;
- Emphasising the region as an accessible, affordable and appealing place to do business, raise a family and enjoy a country lifestyle.

### 2.3 Research and Consultation

The strategy has been informed through desktop research and analysis of relevant policy and strategy as well as four community consultations (Cootamundra, Gundagai, Coolac and Nangus) and a number of stakeholder interviews.

In developing this strategy, reference has also been made to the community plans developed by the previous Cootamundra Shire Council and Gundagai Shire Council.

### 3. Regional Overview

Cootamundra Gundagai Regional Council comprises of a number of towns and villages including Gundagai, Cootamundra, Nangus, Coolac, Tumblong, Stockinbingal, Muttama and Wallendbeen.

The newly amalgamated Council is working to merge operations and identify areas of synergy between the two, formerly separate, Council's. Notwithstanding the need for this future work, many synergies between the previously separated Shire's have been identified including:

- Agriculture as a foundation of the economy;
- A community proud of its rural location and the lifestyle that this enables;
- Safe and welcoming communities;
- A thriving small business sector.

Tourism is an important contributor to the amalgamated Shire however the origin of tourists is unique across the area. Cootamundra predominantly sees visitation deriving from visiting friends and family, whilst Gundagai picks up a number of domestic travellers, including the grey nomad sector and through traffic from the highway.

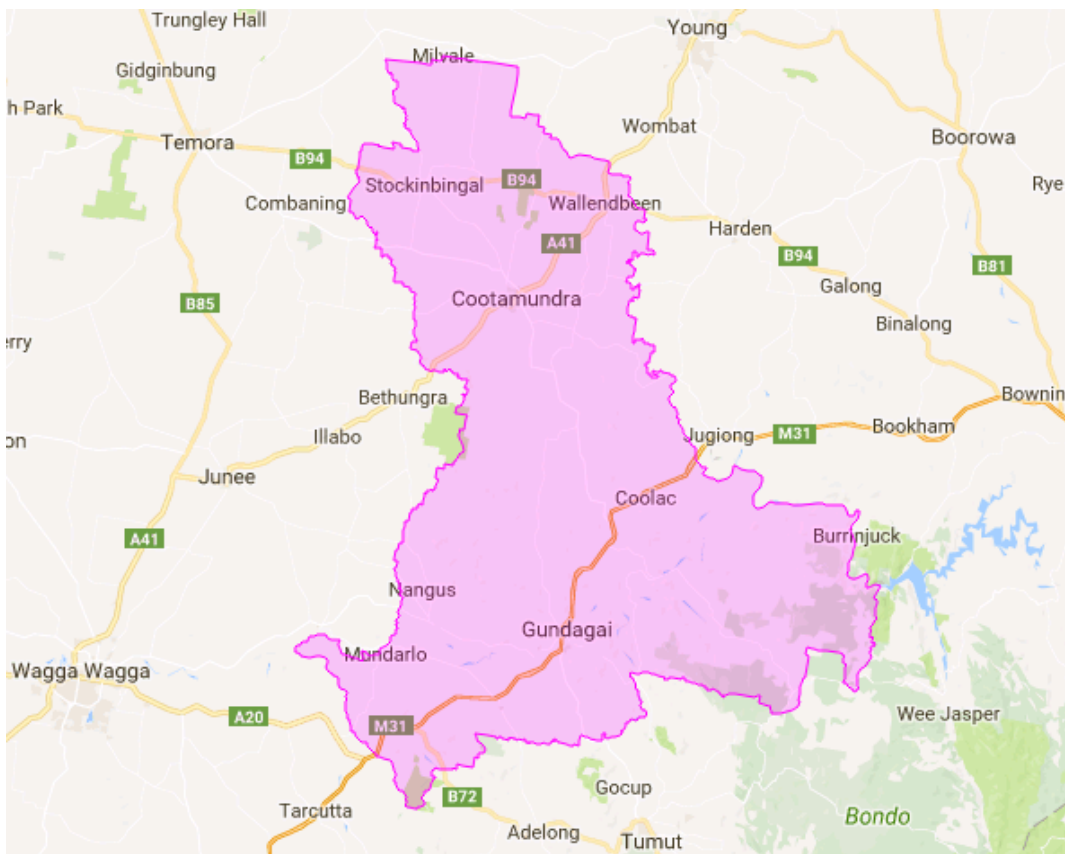


Figure 1: Cootamundra Gundagai Regional Council

### 3.1 Key Statistics

The table below provides a snapshot of relevant socio-economic indicators for the local government area.

Key Statistics	Period	Indicator	5-Year trend
Population (no.)	2013	11,370	↑
Labour force (no.)	Sep-16	5424	↑
Unemployment rate(%)	Sep-16	3.8%	↓
Gross Regional Product (\$'M)	14-15	440	↑
<b>Top 3 sectors by employment</b>			
Agriculture, forestry and fishing (FTE)	2011	690	
Retail (FTE)	2011	314	
Health care and social assistance (FTE)	2011	294	
<b>Businesses</b>			
Total number of businesses	2014	1102	↓
<b>Building and Property</b>			
Value of residential building approvals (\$M)	2014	11	↓
Value of non-residential building approvals (\$M)	2014	3	↓
<b>Tourism</b>			
<b>Gundagai</b>			
Total visitors (overnight domestic visitors) '000	Sep-14	63	
Total expenditure (\$'M)	Sep-14	13	
<b>Purpose of visit</b>			
Visiting friends and relatives	Sep-14	35%	
Holidays	Sep-14	41%	
<b>Cootamundra</b>			
Total visitors (overnight domestic visitors) '000	Sep-14	46	
Total expenditure (\$'M)	Sep-14	14	
<b>Purpose of visit</b>			
Visiting friends and relatives	Sep-14	57%	
Holidays	Sep-14	0%	

Table 1: Cootamundra Gundagai Key Socio-Economic Indicators

The statistics broadly indicate:

- Population is increasing though this increase is more pronounced in Cootamundra than across the local government area as a whole;
- The available labour force is increasing and is coupled with the unemployment rate which is reducing. This however does not highlight the challenge being experienced by some enterprises in sourcing specific skills sets;
- Business and development has been trending downwards across the local government area though GRP is increasing. This suggests a smaller number of businesses, utilising existing facilities, are increasing their output.

### 3.2 Relevant strategies

A number of strategies and plans have been reviewed during the development of this Economic Development Strategy including:

- Cootamundra Community Strategic Plan 2013 – 2023
- Gundagai Community Plan 2012 – 2022
- Murrumbidgee Valley Rail Trail Feasibility Study 2009;
- REROC Regional Freight Plan;
- Gundagai Tourism Strategy (2014 – 2019);
- Riverina Destination Management Plan (2013)
- Cootamundra Rural Residential Land Use Study and Strategy 2010



## 4. The Region's Comparative Advantages

### 4.1 Strengths

The local government area has a number of strengths that will provide a foundation for economic growth into the future. These are outlined below.

<b>Strengths of the region</b>
<b>Economic</b>
Productive agricultural land with good rainfall and access to water leading to a strong agribusiness sector with good support infrastructure for agricultural enterprises
Good freight and logistics access across the local government area
Strong retail business sector providing products and services to the community
Good utility infrastructure (reticulated water, gas, NBN) in major towns
Gundagai tourism product has been developed on the back of its well-known name / brand
Business confidence is strong as demonstrated by recent expansion of large employer businesses
Good visitor support services available to support increased visitation
<b>Social</b>
Safe, affordable and liveable towns and villages
Access to excellent recreational facilities including golf, bowling, sporting fields and pools
Excellent cultural and recreational opportunities for adults, youth and children (including Arts Centre, creative and sporting groups)
A range of diverse lifestyle opportunities exist to support a diversity of living styles including town block sizes, rural living and farm living available
A welcoming community that has an appetite for diversity
Excellent community facilities and services: medical (including availability of specialists), regional universities in close proximity, aged care
Active volunteers and an engaged community
<b>Environment</b>
Significant natural beauty (including the Murrumbidgee River) with great amenity
Heritage buildings
<b>General</b>
Central location to a number of large cities – Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne
Access to international visitors and freight due to proximity to Canberra International Airport
Good proximity to popular places associated with recreational pursuits (snowfields, dams etc)

*Table 2: Strengths of the region*

## 4.2 Barriers

A number of barriers present in the region have been identified. These will need to be addressed in order so that they do not impact the economic strength of the region. These barriers are outlined below.

Barriers within the region
<b>Economic</b>
Lack of affordable land to support farming start-ups
Small mixed lot farms have been subsumed into large scale operations reducing employment and population, especially in outlying villages
Labour is hard to access for some skill sets and businesses, especially if the work is physically demanding
Land is tightly held and is hard to get access to small parcels of land (and approval for an associated home) for agricultural use (less than 100 acres)
Lack of understanding as to whether there is adequate land appropriately zoned to support new business and industry initiatives
Government funding to support infrastructure development is hard to access
Key roads require upgrade to support heavy vehicle movements
Village utility infrastructure (i.e. reticulated water, NBN) is limited thus impacting opportunities in these areas
<b>Social</b>
Heavy reliance on Council to advocate and support initiatives – these may not get sufficient support from private businesses
Limited public transport options between villages and towns
Communities can be change averse and resist approaching issues innovatively and creatively
<b>General</b>
Legislative requirements mean initiatives take a long time to get approval
Appearance of some town entries is poor thus discouraging pass-through traffic from entering
A lack of strategic vision and planning for the community. A grand plan is not evident and Council's approach is generally reactive
Council can be perceived as a "blocker" and more "can't do" than "can do"

*Table 3: Barriers present in the region*

### 4.3 Opportunities for Growth

Throughout the strategy development a number of competitive advantages were identified. This demonstrates that the Cootamundra Gundagai Regional Council has significant opportunities to establish and support a strong economy.

Some of the opportunities identified include:

Sector	Opportunity
<b>Agriculture and food processing</b>	Improved accessibility to affordable land for emerging farmers
	Intensive farming on smaller lots, including niche farming
	Export preparedness
<b>Tourism, retail and hospitality</b>	Product development
	Marketing and promotion of region
	Access to international visitors
	Improved accessibility to natural resources for tourism purposes
<b>Transport and logistics</b>	Long term community and business capacity building to support visitor servicing
	Improved public transport linkages between towns and villages
<b>General</b>	Improvement of road and rail infrastructure to support product and heavy vehicle movements across the local government area
	Co-investment in facilities to support small business establishment
	Business mentoring to support start-ups and growing businesses
	Enhancement of liveability in communities through the provision and maintenance of basic infrastructure
	Provide access to a ready workforce
	Growth of small businesses, including online businesses
	Creation of LEP planning zones that can support current and emerging business needs
	Development of long-term relationships with large industries in order to encourage relocation into the region
Professional, streamlined, accessible Council services	

*Table 4: Opportunities for growth*

These opportunities are further considered in the development and definition of the Strategic Initiatives described in Section 5.

## 5. Economic Development Framework

### 5.1 Vision

The Cootamundra Gundagai Regional Council was established in May 2016. Whilst activities continue in order to unify strategic direction and day to day operations, separate visions still exist.

These vision statements are:

#### ***Gundagai and surrounds***

“Gundagai is a safe and friendly thriving rural community where all residents are part of the strong community spirit”

#### ***Cootamundra and surrounds***

“Come to Coota – we’re a great way to live. Cootamundra is a thriving, lively Town set within a natural environment. It is a community with a heart based on its country values, its sense of belonging, its spirit and the warmth and friendliness of its people”

The Gundagai Shire Community Plan (2012 – 2022) identifies 5 core themes to give direction and focus to Council’s activities:

- Leadership: inclusive, transparent and effective governance supported by a highly efficient organisation that demonstrates leadership to the community by being environmentally and financially sustainable and valuing its residents and staff. Leadership underpins all activities at Gundagai Shire Council;
- Community: facilitating community connections and providing services to support residents’ social, cultural and economic wellbeing through programs which contribute to making the community safe, friendly and cohesive where people have a sense of belonging and security;
- Infrastructure: physical assets and infrastructure under Council’s care are necessary for effective functioning of the community. They protect our environment, connect and strengthen our communities, support our recreational and leisure pursuits and represent our unique heritage;
- Environment: care and custodianship of the natural environment that is treasured by residents and visitors along with conservation of our natural resources;
- Economy: a prospering community where jobs are created, tourism developed, and industry and commercial ventures are encouraged.

The Cootamundra Shire Community Plan (2013 – 2023) identifies 4 strategic priorities to give direction and focus to Council’s activities:

- Social: To promote thriving social networks that create and nurture a strong, modern and vibrant community;

- Environmental: To protect the natural environment and maintain the rural character of the Shire;
- Economic: To foster a sound local economy, promote responsible development and regular tourism;
- Civic Leadership: To provide responsible and prudent leadership so that the community will prosper.

Whilst a single vision statement or Community Plan does not yet exist there are common elements. These elements include the desire to maintain and emphasise:

- A thriving community;
- A strong sense of community spirit and belonging;
- The importance of its rural location;
- A welcoming and friendly culture.

Council should continue to develop a common vision and community plan for the newly formed local government area.

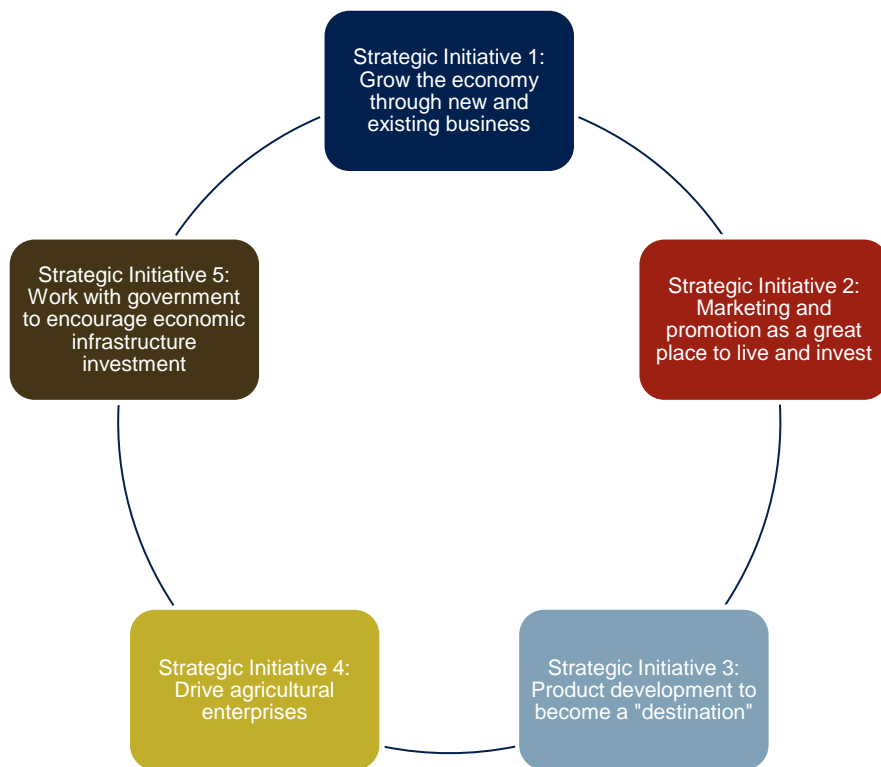
This strategy considers the above documents, current strategies and statements and will recommend a number of economic development strategies to:

- Foster economic resilience;
- Heighten responsiveness to the needs of the current and future business community;
- Emphasise the region as an accessible, affordable and appealing place to do business, raise a family and enjoy a country lifestyle.

## 5.2 Strategic Initiatives

Five strategic initiatives have been identified to drive economic development, population and employment growth in the Cootamundra Gundagai region. These initiatives are not dependent upon each other. Rather, these initiatives taken together, provide a holistic response to building diverse and sustainable economic foundations within the local government area.

The identified initiatives have been informed by the community, existing strategies and economic profile data.



*Figure 2: Strategic Initiatives to drive Economic Development*

These five initiatives are outlined in detail below.

## 5.3 Strategic Initiative One: Grow the economy through existing and new businesses

### 5.3.1 Aspiration

Ensure Council is proactively planning for business and industrial growth and supports businesses through ease of access and facilitating relevant connections.

### 5.3.2 Drivers

Population, economic and employment growth are all critical elements in maintaining a sustainable community. In order to facilitate such growth, Council must be prepared to respond to enquiries immediately and reinforce that they are “open for business”. Unnecessary barriers and roadblocks impact on the attractiveness of a location and may discourage growth or new investment.

The community has provided feedback in a number of forums, including consultation for this strategy, that economic growth and employment is important. However, they are also concerned for the existing “way of life” and emphasise the need for businesses to have synergy with the region.

The Cootamundra Gundagai region is located on a number of key rail and road hubs. It has a long and productive agricultural history. It is ideally located for industry where freight, logistics or easy access to livestock or cereal / grain raw materials is important.

There is a role for Council to target appropriate industries and businesses and take a long term approach to nurturing relationships with such businesses in order to ultimately achieve a relocation of businesses to the region. Council’s leadership is critical in developing such a long term vision and working diligently with the to realise this.

### 5.3.3 Key activities

#### 5.3.3.1 Establish a Business Council to drive economic initiatives

Establish a Business Council to identify and drive significant economic initiatives. The Council should consist of respected and knowledgeable community members, or those with close links to the community, who have a broad external business network. This Council will identify, implement and monitor significant economic initiatives. This will include:

- The identification of significant businesses / industry with synergy to the region to attract to the region;
- The nurturing and development of long term relationships with these players; as well as
- The identification of significant regional events or tourism initiatives to attract to the region.

This initiative will cover the entire local government area and will require high level Council and business support to enable ongoing, effective operations. The establishment of the Council will require:

- Charter document to outline duties and responsibilities of the Council;
- Nominated skills matrix for committee members;
- Participation by commercial and industry representatives; and
- Potential reach beyond the immediate community.

### 5.3.3.2 Ensure responsive Council staff and systems

Responsive, transparent and timely Council processes will encourage fruitful relationships with business owners. The capability to support a “can do, not a can’t do” approach with a clear entry point and path to Council for business queries to be addressed, ease of access to Council systems to enable a “self-serve” information gathering process and a confidence that Council recognises the importance and value of business investment into the region will all increase its attractiveness for ongoing and new investment. This will require:

- Nominated single point of contact for new or existing businesses and agreed protocols across Council should the contact come via an alternative pathway, This approach is consistent with a “concierge” approach currently being developed by Corporate;
- These contact points will support businesses in navigating Council processes and facilitate additional contacts as required (i.e. real estate agents, planning advisors etc.);
- Identifying online tools that will support access to Council services and relevant information;
- Potential economic benefit of business contacts to be monitored and reported.

### 5.3.3.3 Model innovative business practices at Council

New technology, systems and workplace practices have a role in supporting businesses to reduce costs and increase efficiencies. Online opportunities (as well as threats), shared resourcing and cooperative efforts can provide access and leverage into new markets.

Council should seek to introduce such contemporary practices in its operations in order to model how these practices can be advantageous to the region. This may include:

- Web forms for direct submission of information and service requests;
- Online planning maps;
- Online conversation forums to enable community discussion about upcoming matters or issues of concern;
- Contemporary work practices (i.e. hot desking between offices, development of shared services across LGA’s, remote working especially for hard to find skillsets);
- Targeted communication to the community via SMS – i.e. reminder to residents in a local area if road works that may be happening that day.

Opportunities should be identified through discussions with other municipalities as to initiatives they have implemented, as well as discussions with the business community as to what would make Council services more accessible and convenient.

Ultimately, Council’s experiences at implementing these tools should be shared across the business community (along with benefits and costs) to fully enable the learning and role-modelling aspect of this initiative.

### 5.3.3.4 Develop information packs to support business operations and investment

Business owners and operators often need support with navigating in a highly regulated environment. Information packs could be developed to assist business owners in achieving:



- Initial approval: how do I get permission for my business? What information do I need to supply? Who can help me develop this information? How do I maximise my chances of receiving permission?
- Subsequent ongoing approval: does my business / premises require ongoing inspections, who can help me do this? How do I submit this?

#### 5.3.3.5 Undertake strategic planning to support future commercial and industry needs

Access to appropriately zoned land is an attractor for investors looking to “get on the ground” quickly and efficiently. It provides information as to the activities that the land can support and increases certainty around application and establishment outcomes.

#### 5.3.3.6 Work with education providers to support a small business “showcase”

Over 700 small businesses operate within the local government area. These businesses provide an ongoing basis for economic activity within the region as well as, support the liveability of the region for residents and provide owners with a well-balanced lifestyle. Future growth in the sector is important to the economy of the region.

Traditionally many young people leave their communities for educational purposes, or alternatively look to an occupation within the local retail, trade or industrial sectors. Council, working with local businesses and education providers, could work to educate young people on the opportunities available in establishing small businesses, including online businesses. Establishing programs where students could develop an understanding of how a small business operates and how they may be able to start-up their own enterprises may provide alternative pathways for students that have a long term economic benefit to the community.

Equally, older people seeking a career or lifestyle change could find such a showcase useful.

#### 5.3.4 Synergy with existing local, regional or national strategies

This strategic initiative and its nominated activities are consistent with the following strategies / plans:

- *Regional Australia Standing Council: Framework for economic development*  
Developing a regional economy is most successful when it builds upon the comparative strengths of the region. Establishing locally based business support and engagement services assists in achieving the successful establishment and long term operation of business in regional areas.
- *Cootamundra Community Strategic Plan 2013-2023*  
To foster a sound economy, promote responsible development and regular tourism.
- *Gundagai Shire Community Plan 2012-2022*  
A prospering community where jobs are created, tourism developed, and industry and commercial ventures encouraged.

## 5.4 Strategic Initiative Two: Marketing and promotion as a great place to live and invest

### 5.4.1 Aspiration

Increase the profile of Cootamundra Gundagai Regional Council ensuring that the benefits of liveability and affordability are highlighted to potential residents and establishing businesses.

### 5.4.2 Drivers

Sustainability of existing businesses, and establishment of new businesses, requires access to a ready workforce. The ability to access appropriate staff in the region has been challenging to date. Unemployment in the Cootamundra Gundagai area is lower than in many regional areas, which impacts on the capability to recruit appropriately qualified and experienced staff members when required. Consultation has indicated that skills shortages encompass a range of occupations from professionals to labourers. Some larger businesses use 457 visas in order to access an appropriate workforce to enable operations. The recent news of the closure of the Milandra Abattoir in Cootamundra may reduce this requirement and provide temporary additional workforce capacity; however this impact is as yet unknown.

Population growth can increase the available labour force in a region. Equally, access to jobs can attract labour and population into the region. It will be important to spread the message that Cootamundra Gundagai is a great place to live and invest. This message should ensure it incorporates a number of important attributes including:

- Ease of access to three capital cities (Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne);
- Road, rail and air transport options exist to access other areas quickly and conveniently;
- International movements are well supported through Canberra airport (within 90 minutes of local government area);
- Great health and education services;
- High speed internet access (NBN) is available in parts of the local government area;
- High quality of life; and
- Housing / business premises are affordable.

These attributes make the region an attractive location to not only establish a business (including online businesses) but can also support workers utilising contemporary work arrangements (such as remote working or “tele-commuting”) to settle in the area

Council has a role to ensure that the region’s benefits and opportunities for residents and businesses alike are identified and marketed broadly. Attraction of population, especially when there is access to jobs, supports the establishment of new businesses and encourages increased population, and provides confidence for new industries that a workforce will be available. Additionally, service infrastructure grows in line with population and this ultimately results in an increasingly attractive place to live and invest.

### 5.4.3 Key Activities

#### 5.4.3.1 Develop and implement a digital marketing strategy to promote the community

The Cootamundra Gundagai region has many advantages for both residents and businesses. These advantages can be packaged and a broad marketing strategy implemented. A digital marketing strategy including the identification of high access sites to maximise traffic will support the message being broadcast widely.

#### 5.4.3.2 Identify and incentivise a targeted population for relocation to the region

The region's close proximity to Sydney may provide opportunities for relocation of a targeted population – i.e. resettlement of refugees into the area.

A sustained and long term resettlement of a targeted community into the region can support longevity of government services (medical and education), provide access to an increased and consistent job opportunities and workforce, generate close social and community ties and support existing businesses. Studies demonstrate that successful relocation strategies are dependent upon access to services (such as healthcare, education and childcare), contentment and access to jobs and social participation into the community.

Relocation can be encouraged through incentives such as access to subsidised housing, flexibility in work arrangements, conduct of social activities and amenities to nurture a sense of belonging to the community. Council should collaborate with key employers who may benefit from such a strategy in order to facilitate development of infrastructure and services to support a relocating population.

### 5.4.4 Synergy with existing local, regional or national strategies

This strategic initiative and its nominated activities are consistent with the following strategies / plans:

- *Immigration and the regions: taking regional Australia seriously (2003)*  
Successful strategies to attract migrant populations to regional areas.
- *RDA Riverina Profile 2014*  
The Riverina has a consistently aging population and this is impacting on access to a ready labour force. The Profile highlights the potential need to attract skilled migrants to contribute to the labour force.
- *Cootamundra Community Strategic Plan 2013-2023*  
A Community priority identified is the need to promote Cootamundra as a family friendly place to live in order to ensure continuing vibrancy in the community and continued growth in the local economy.

## 5.5 Strategic Initiative Three: Product development to become a “destination”

### 5.5.1 Aspiration

Increase visitation and overnight stays (and ultimately direct and indirect visitor spend) to support sustained and growing commercial businesses.

### 5.5.2 Drivers

Tourism is an important economic driver in the region. Direct and indirect expenditure is an important contributor to sustainability of local businesses especially for accommodation and hospitality venues who require regular and consistent visitation. Consultation has indicated a desire to increase the number of visitors and overnight stays associated with these visitors.

Visitation sources are variable across the local government area. Gundagai sees strong visitation from pass through traffic, as well as holiday makers, whilst Cootamundra derives tourists mainly from the visiting friends and family market. Throughout the local government area there is seen to be an opportunity in developing Cootamundra Gundagai as a destination. During consultation many participants pointed to the regions great stories and historical assets that would form the basis of future tourism “product”.

In addition, there was a view that if product could be linked to the existing Rail Trail proposal this would provide a foundation on which to anchor future business and cottage industry developments.

### 5.5.3 Key activities

#### 5.5.3.1 Product Development

Work is required to develop a “product” to highlight the region as a genuine visitor destination. New businesses could then establish around the new product.

Consideration should be given to product development related to:

- Natural resources: River, proximity to snow, dams;
- Related recreational activities: adventure tourism, water based recreation, cycling;
- History and stories: the flooding of the original town and the role of the indigenous community in this event, Captain Moonlite, Dog on the Tuckerbox;
- Historical assets: timber bridges, statues, memorials.

Destination NSW provides funding for product development and a grant application for support in this area may be appropriate.

#### 5.5.3.2 Identify and address gaps in tourism servicing

As important as attracting visitors is, it is also critical to appropriately service them. Infrastructure such as toilets, parking facilities and access to natural resources are important as well as capability for tourists to access accommodation and food services when it suits them. An asset and community capacity assessment will highlight the areas where further development or supplementary support may be required.

### 5.5.3.3 Partner with tourism providers

Increased international and domestic visitation may be supported through developing partnerships with tour providers. Understanding what product is attractive to the international market (especially given the proximity of Canberra airport and international routes) will be an important input into the product development phase. The region currently leverages regional tourism initiatives through cellar door maps etc and these opportunities to leverage off regional plans and initiatives should continue.

### 5.5.4 Synergy with existing local, regional or national strategies

This strategic initiative and its nominated activities are consistent with the following strategies / plans:

- *Gundagai Tourism Strategy (2014-2019)*  
Reinventing ourselves as a destination
- *Riverina Destination Management Plan*  
The Murrumbidgee River as an identified key product in the region
- *Gundagai Community Plan 2012 – 2022*  
Facilitate, encourage and assist in the development of strategies, services and attractions that will encourage more tourists and increase tourism expenditure
- *Cootamundra Community Strategic Plan 2013 – 2023*  
Promotion of the Shire as a tourist destination bringing people and business to the Shire

## 5.6 Strategic Initiative Four: Drive agricultural enterprises

### 5.6.1 Aspiration

Establishment of small agricultural enterprises focussed on the delivery of boutique products resulting in:

- Increased economic output; and
- Emerging farmers developing affordable operations.

### 5.6.2 Drivers

Economic indicators and profile data demonstrate the importance and productivity of the agricultural sector in the region. In addition, consultation highlights the importance to the community that any new business or industry has synergy with the region and its communities. This ultimately leads to a conclusion that growth in the agricultural sector would be well received.

Whilst this historical importance was acknowledged it was further recognised that young farmers are finding it increasingly difficult to establish their own agricultural businesses given the affordability of land and its tightly held nature. There is a view that approval for smaller lot sizes would make the entry point for young farmers more achievable, would support more intensive agricultural enterprises (such as nuts, organics, vegetables, meat rabbits, ducks) and would support enterprise relocation from urban fringes to a more attractive and affordable location with continued ready access to market.

Specific strategies to encourage establishment of new agricultural enterprises may ensure that this important pillar of the region's economy is increasingly sustainable.

### 5.6.3 Key activities

#### 5.6.3.1 Ensure the planning scheme allows for smaller, more intensive agricultural enterprises

As per 5.3.3 access to adequately zoned land is important to enable appropriate lot sizes to be created for such enterprises.

#### 5.6.3.2 Consider opportunities to support young farmers establish agricultural enterprises

A concern raised during consultations was the increasing size of farms, and the challenge that young (or emerging) farmers have in accessing affordable land. In addition, in this particular region, land is tightly held and does not often come up for sale.

The sustainability of farming, especially against a backdrop of an aging workforce and unclear succession, is an acknowledged industry challenge. Council may be able to assist new and existing farmers through facilitating relationships with providers such as Cultivate Farms (which seeks to link young families who are trying to get "on the land" with retiring families who may be trying to get "off the land"), or Farmer Incubator (which is developing emerging farmers in the skillsets they may need to manage a successful agricultural enterprise). Opportunities for involvement may be identified which could increase the region's profile with emerging farmers. Should opportunities be identified, Council could facilitate relationships and information sessions for interested parties in the region.

Additional education may be needed for smaller agricultural enterprises, for instance commercialising organic practices, maximising efficiency, how to get your product to the market. Once identified, Council could facilitate a skills growth program through relevant providers.

#### 5.6.3.3 Support farmers in accessing export opportunities

Consultation highlighted the opportunities for the Cootamundra Gundagai region with respect to export. This is especially the case given growing international demand for quality Australian produce and beverages.

Council could support farmers to access export markets through facilitating relationships with the NSW Government Trade and Investment Department. This could include facilitating workshops to aid business owners understanding their export readiness, where to get advice and how to participate in relevant domestic or international trade shows or missions.

#### 5.6.3.4 Assess gaps in service industries to support agricultural businesses

Whilst feedback received during the process indicated that the agricultural industry is well-served with support industries (i.e. abattoirs, transporters), some aspects of the data seemed to contradict this. Food processing and packaging plants as well as access to small volume abattoirs were all identified as issues during the consultation. Since the time of consultation, there has been the announcement of the closure of the Milandra Abattoirs; this may further compound the identified issue.

Council could consider co-investment in developing infrastructure to support smaller agricultural enterprises such as abattoirs, food packaging plants. Consideration could be given to developing a cooperative to enable individual smaller farmers to share part of the costs for developing infrastructure, but not all.

#### 5.6.4 Synergy with existing local, regional or national strategies

This strategic initiative and its nominated activities are consistent with the following strategies / plans:

- *Regional Australia Standing Council: Framework for economic development*  
One of the key determinants of long-term regional economic growth is access to international, national and regional markets. Further comparative advantage is built when economic development is focussed on building on strengths of the region. Some mechanisms to support growth is through contributing to investment in infrastructure that will enable businesses to realise opportunities (including export opportunities).
- *NSW Government: Trade and Investment*  
Strategies for success when building a sustainable export business.
- *Cootamundra Community Strategic Plan 2013-2023*  
To foster a sound economy, promote responsible development and regular tourism. Protecting agriculture as a mainstay of the local economy.
- *Gundagai Shire Community Plan 2012-2022*  
A prospering community where jobs are created, tourism developed, and industry and commercial ventures encouraged.

## 5.7 Strategic Initiative Five: Work with government to encourage economic infrastructure investment

### 5.7.1 Aspiration

Ensure investment in public infrastructure (road, rail, tourism infrastructure) to support and facilitate economic growth in the region.

### 5.7.2 Drivers

Sustainability and growth of the economy in the region is dependent upon appropriate infrastructure being available to support initiatives.

The community provided feedback during the consultation period about the need for:

- Further investment in road infrastructure to renew or upgrade some of the road network;
- The opportunity to leverage the existing rail infrastructure (with opportunities previously identified for an Intermodal Regional Terminal);
- The development of Rail Trails in the region;
- The provision of reticulated water within villages; and
- NBN rollout across the local government area.

It is important for Council to remain abreast of infrastructure needs within the local government area and to work with all levels of government, and other partners, to ensure that the local government area remains a modern and contemporary region with access to excellent services and infrastructure.

### 5.7.3 Key activities

#### 5.7.3.1 Identify key initiatives that require further funding from partners

Council should identify and prioritise infrastructure investment requests, as well as appropriate funding streams to access to support these priorities. A business case, development of master planning as appropriate (and including any relevant capital investment plans) and funding submissions should be developed for priority projects.

#### 5.7.3.2 Advocate for funding to support infrastructure development

Engage with State and Federal Ministers to advocate for funding to support the identified priority projects. These advocacy efforts should be maintained at a consistent level, whether there is current funding or not, to ensure that ongoing relationships are developed and nurtured. This will support future advocacy efforts.

### 5.7.4 Synergy with existing local, regional or national strategies

This strategic initiative and its nominated activities are consistent with the following strategies / plans:

- *REROC (Riverina Eastern Regional Organisation of Councils) Regional Freight Transport Plan*  
Developing a network of identified freight corridors that facilitate movements of freight within and through the region.



- *Cootamundra Intermodal Economic and Social Impact*  
The proposed hub aims to provide a central collection point for road freight thus minimising the distance to be travelled by heavy vehicle transports on the road network. A business case is being prepared to support funding requests.
- *Murrumbidgee Valley Rail Trail Feasibility Study (2009)*  
Funding support for development of the Rail Trail from Coolac-Tumblong.

## 6. Implementation Plan

Two action planning workshops were held in order to identify actions, responsible parties and preferred timelines. This information was considered when developing the implementation program below.

The strategic approach outlined in this document will need to maintain consistency with ongoing Council direction, including its place in larger Shire wide initiatives and planning. Council Officers will ensure that this consistency is maintained and that relevant initiatives outlined below are implemented as appropriate.

### 6.1 Strategic Initiative One: Grow the economy through existing and new businesses

Ref	Key Activity	Detailed Tasks	Accountable Party	Timeframe	Resources required
5.3.3.1	Establish a Business Council to drive economic initiatives	Document and agree a Charter document to outline duties and responsibilities of Council	Economic Development Governance	Immediate	Workshops / how to / mentoring
		Agree secretariat and support duties to be serviced by the organisation	Economic Development Governance		
		Nominate skills matrix for Council members (ensure it contains a cross-section of business and industry networks)	Executive Team Economic Development		
		Nominate potential members	Council / Administrator Executive Team Economic Development		
		Convene Council	Economic Development		
5.3.3.2	Ensure a responsive Council staff and systems	Nominate clear entry points for businesses approaching Council with applications or queries	Executive Team	Immediate	Communication to all staff to ensure common understanding
		Provide clear information about current LEP guidelines in order to create certainty about what the zone	Planning		"Cheat" sheet to be developed providing high level guidance to non-

Ref	Key Activity	Detailed Tasks	Accountable Party	Timeframe	Resources required
		says now			planning Council staff to ensure they can respond to queries.
		Work with key customers to identify what online or remote services would assist them in doing business with Council	Corporate Team	Within 12 months	
		Create online networks for businesses to send through queries and receive input from other businesses and Council			
5.3.3.3	Model innovative business practices at Council	Identify technology, systems and workplace practices in place at other like Council's	Executive Team	Within 3 years	
		Assess for implementation			
5.3.3.4	Develop information packs to support business operations and investment	Interview key stakeholders from a diverse array of businesses in order to identify critical information to share	Economic Development	Immediate	
		Create draft information packs for comment and publish			Budget for development of materials
5.3.3.5	Undertake strategic planning to support future commercial and industry needs	Undertake a full strategic planning exercise to review LEP zones across the local government area. This activity should look at proactive planning, not only mapping zones based upon where activity zones have developed traditionally.	Planning	Within 3 years	Budget allocation will be required for this extensive activity
5.3.3.6	Work with education providers to support a small business "showcase"	Organise a forum with key stakeholders to assess likelihood and / or format of showcase	Economic Development Business based groups	Within 3 years	Mentoring may be required

## 6.2 Strategic Initiative Two: Grow the economy through existing and new businesses

Ref	Key Activity	Detailed Tasks	Accountable Party	Timeframe	Resources required
5.4.3.1	Develop and implement a digital marketing strategy to promote the community	Engage a responsible party to develop digital strategy	Executive Team	Immediate	Budget for development of strategy and content
		Identify a local government area who has successfully implemented a digital marketing strategy and contact them to discuss key learnings and success factors			Support may be required from Destination NSW to nominate an appropriate contact point
		Identify core selling points of local government area			
		Identify high traffic sites (as well as type of media – i.e. Instagram, blogging, online forums, What's On) to optimise message penetration and ensure that site visit numbers are monitored.			
		Assess existing sites (such as Country Change) to determine traffic and success			
		Publish and implement strategy	Economic Development Community Development		Nominate resources required through planning process
5.4.3.2	Identify and incentivise a targeted population for relocation to the region	Identify an area who has successfully implemented such a strategy and discuss key success factors and requirements	Executive Team Business Council	5 years	Ongoing networking Potential advocacy to government for support and possible funding to implement
		Contact government and key service			

Ref	Key Activity	Detailed Tasks	Accountable Party	Timeframe	Resources required
		providers in order to identify an appropriate population with potential synergy to the region			
		Identify attractors and works required to support the value proposition of the region			
		Identify key businesses who may benefit from such a strategy and work to develop a shared view of contributions by all parties			
		Develop plan (timing and actions) to support implementation			Nominate resources required through planning process

### 6.3 Strategic Initiative Three: Product Development to become a “destination”

Ref	Key Activity	Detailed Tasks	Accountable Party	Timeframe	Resources required
5.5.3.1	Product Development	Liaise with Riverina Regional Tourism to identify regional wide opportunities for product development and how the local government area could play a part in driving this	Economic Development	Immediate	Budget for product development support
		In conjunction with Tourism Action Committee, identify opportunities for product development across the Cootamundra Gundagai local government area			
		Identify funding sources and actively seek this out			
5.5.3.2	Identify and address gaps in tourism servicing	Identify infrastructure gaps to support visitor servicing (this assessment must be consistent with the product being developed and is not an assessment of all gaps across the local government area)	Tourism Groups Assets and infrastructure team	5 years	Input from Riverina Regional Tourism about required infrastructure and business / community capacity to support proposed product development
		Engage a provider to undertake a business capacity assessment and identify where further development is required	Economic Development		
		Community groups to run their own community capacity assessment based upon experiences in like towns	Community Development		Support to identify “model” towns (ie Jugiong, Mogo) to coordinate visits and meeting with key stakeholders to understand success  Community capacity assessment tool

Ref	Key Activity	Detailed Tasks	Accountable Party	Timeframe	Resources required
		Benchmark results and actions against model towns	Community Development		
		Develop plan (timing and actions) to support implementation			Nominate resources required through planning process
5.5.3.3	Partner with tourism providers	Identify key partners	Economic Development Tourism Action Committee	5 years	
		Make contact and understand what attributes are crucial in order to make a partnership successful	Business Council		
		Develop plan (timing and actions) to support implementation			Nominate resources required through planning process

#### 6.4 Strategic Initiative Four: Drive agricultural enterprises

Ref	Key Activity	Detailed Tasks	Accountable Party	Timeframe	Resources required
5.6.3.1	Ensure the planning scheme allows for smaller, more intensive agricultural enterprises	Broadacre and boutique farming sector stakeholders to input to the LEP strategic actions outlined in 6.1	Planning	Within 3 years	
5.6.3.2	Consider opportunities to support young farmers establish agricultural enterprises	Contact providers such as “Cultivate Farms” or “Farmer Incubator” to identify any regional opportunities for closer partnership or support	Economic Development Business Council	5 years	
		Facilitate development of a specialised agricultural industry group to work with Council to implement initiatives to support agricultural enterprises. These initiatives could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocacy to support local supermarkets showcasing local produce</li> <li>Development of an avenue for local producers to showcase their products</li> <li>Implementation of traineeships</li> <li>Advocacy to develop access to support services for small scale producers (i.e. abattoir)</li> </ul>	Economic Development Business Council	Immediate	
		Develop a “shop local” database of availability of local produce	Economic Development	Immediate	Ongoing access to resource to update information as required
		Identify what skills are required to support smaller, more intensive agricultural operations (i.e. how to	Industry group Economic Development		Access to training sessions to develop targeted skills



Ref	Key Activity	Detailed Tasks	Accountable Party	Timeframe	Resources required
		access sales channels) and develop skills programs through Economic Development education program to deliver to target audience			
5.6.3.3	Support farmers (and broader businesses) in accessing export opportunities	Identify opportunities to increase education in this area and conduct regular ongoing sessions	Economic Development Industry group	Within 3 years	
		Lead export trade show delegation participation	Business Council	Immediate	Budget to support participation
5.6.3.4	Assess gaps in service industries to support agricultural businesses	Identify gaps and opportunities to address	Industry Group	Immediate	
		Advocate for development of co-operatives amongst smaller scale producers in order to gain access to services (i.e. work together to increase size of kill in order to gain access to abattoir)	Industry Group	Within 3 years	
		Establishment of an online listing about where services can be accessed, and working with these businesses, understand and publish access requirements and availability	Economic Development	Immediate	
		Develop a business case and advocate for commercial or other funding in order to construct infrastructure required	Industry Group	5 years	

## 6.5 Strategic Initiative Five: Work with government to encourage economic infrastructure investment

Key Activity		Detailed Tasks	Accountable Party	Timeframe	Resources required
5.7.3.1	Identify key initiatives that require further funding from partners	Develop and prioritise list of infrastructure requirements to support economic development across the local government area	Executive Team Council / Administrator	Immediate	
		Identify possible funding sources and develop business cases associated with highest priority investment.	Council	Immediate	
		Identify economic indicators to be influenced by investment and ensure a monitoring mechanism is developed to provide feedback to investors	Council		
5.7.3.2	Advocate for funding to support infrastructure development	Develop an ongoing advocacy program and implement	Business Council Council		

## 7. Measuring Success

The following indicators should be used to measure the success of the strategic initiatives:

1. Increased population;
2. Increased labour force participants;
3. Increased number of businesses; and
4. Increased value of residential and non-residential development.

In order to support the achievement of these measures the important focus areas are:

1. Ensuring appropriately zoned land;
2. Improving accessibility to relevant information and processes within Council;
3. Supporting a resettlement of a population to support access to a ready workforce;
4. Using the Business Council, targeting large businesses with synergy to the region and establishing an ongoing relationship with them to support a long-term relocation possibility;
5. Supporting agricultural producers to access export opportunities;
6. Develop tourism product and assist in business preparedness to provide excellent visitor services;
7. Work with other levels of government to access infrastructure funding in accordance with priority projects.

## References

ABS Census Data 2011 Labour Force Status by Age and Sex (LGA)

Cootamundra Community Strategic Plan 2013 – 2023

Cootamundra Intermodal Economic and Social Impact (Council Paper)

Cootamundra Rural Residential Land Use Study and Strategy 2010

Destination NSW LGA Profile – Cootamundra (Four year annual average to the year ending September 2014)

Destination NSW LGA Profile – Gundagai (Four year annual average to the year ending September 2014)

Gundagai Shire Community Plan 2012 – 2022

Gundagai Tourism Strategy (2014 – 2019)

<http://economic-indicators.id.com.au/>

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Immigration and the regions: taking regional Australia seriously (2003)

Murrumbidgee Valley Rail Trail Feasibility Study 2009;

NSW Government: Trade and Investment

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Regional Development Australia Riverina Profile 2014

Riverina Eastern Regional Organisation of Councils (REROC) Regional Freight Transport Plan

Riverina Destination Management Plan (2013)