

State Plan Priority P6
Regional Business Growth Plan – Northern Rivers Region
July 2008

1. The region

The Northern Rivers region includes the major centres of Ballina, Byron Bay, Grafton, Tweed Heads, Casino and Lismore. As at June 2007 the region had a population of 283,544 which grew by 5.7 per cent between June 2002 and June 2007¹. The main industries include: tourism; agriculture; forestry; health and community services; building and construction; manufacturing; biotechnology; creative industries; and education. Industries with growth prospects are: education; creative industries; biotechnology; horticulture; forestry; meat and dairy; aquaculture; and aged care services.

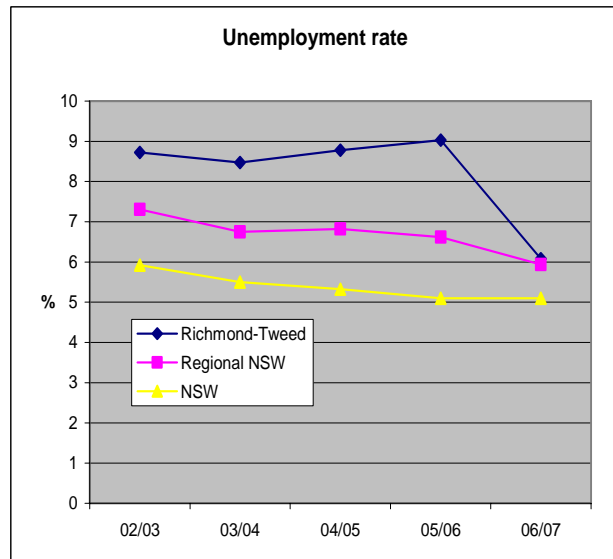
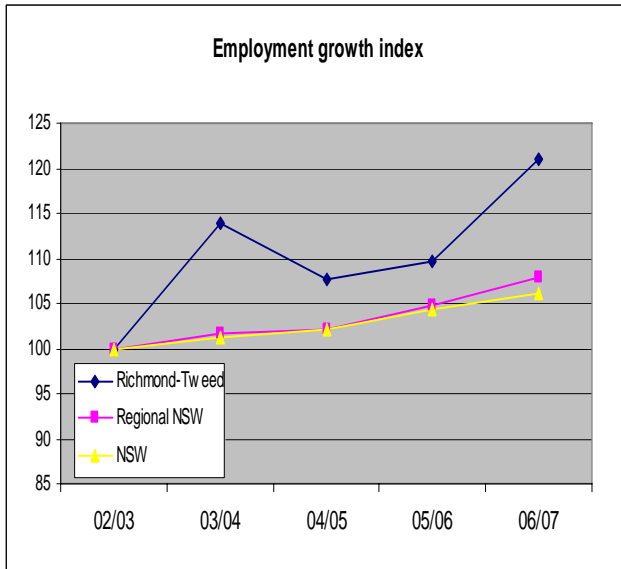
2. Regional opportunities and challenges

TYPE OF ISSUE	OPPORTUNITIES	CHALLENGES
Industry development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aged care services • Value-adding to food and hardwood production • Tourism and education • Creative industries • Exploration and development of gas and petroleum resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-border business perceptions
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support needed for infrastructure: gas (e.g. at Casino) and commercial development of serviced industrial estates • Development of safe 'all-weather' port facilities along the coastline will promote greater investment opportunities for recreational, transport and commercial boating • Opportunities for development contributions to enable the provision of infrastructure necessary to respond to changing demands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alignment of infrastructure needs with population and business growth needs • Water security for existing and future industry development, and proposals for interstate transfer of water • Balancing development contributions to ensure housing and employment lands affordability and delivering appropriate community infrastructure

¹ Source: ABS, Cat No. 3218.0, Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2006-07.

TYPE OF ISSUE	OPPORTUNITIES	CHALLENGES
Land use/Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new employment lands - assisted by State-wide review of LEPs and implementation of the <i>Far North Coast Regional Strategy</i> • Planning reform will improve operation of planning system by providing: streamlined approach to rezoning; transparent assessment of major proposals; faster assessment of routine developments; and improved accountability and affordability of development contributions • Each council in the region is reviewing and modernising its land use planning framework as part of the Standard LEP • Work underway on a City Centre plan for Tweed Heads to boost residential and commercial development potential • Recent gazettal of the Rural Lands SEPP provides greater certainty about resolving rural land use conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coastal development pressures
Skills & Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MOU between TAFE NSW and DSRD to improve flexibility of training/skills development for industries and enterprises • Expansion of in-school training and TAFE courses (i.e. skill based traineeships) in response to skills needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapid population growth placing pressure on services (e.g. aged and health care services) • Alignment of jobs growth with population growth • Skills shortages in aged care, metal fabrication, health, construction, planning and engineering sectors

3. Regional indicators and measures

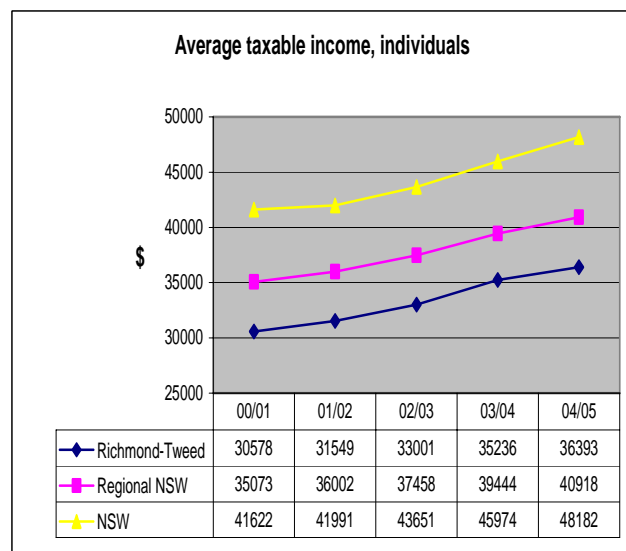
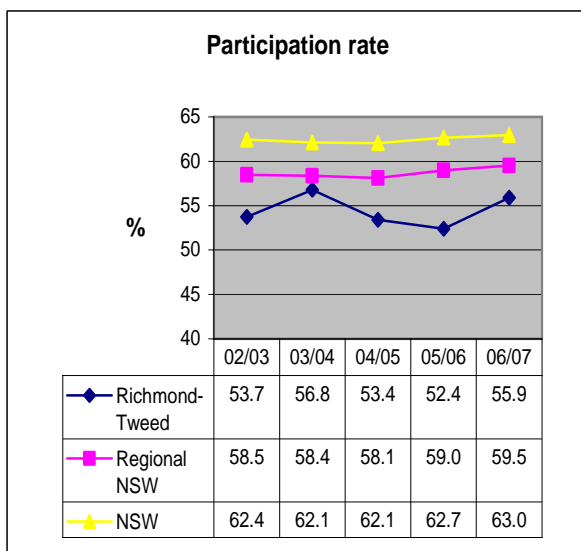


Total Employment, (000's)

	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07
Richmond-Tweed	106	121	114	116	128
Regional NSW	1186	1206	1212	1243	1279
NSW	3118	3154	3187	3255	3307

Total Unemployment (000's)

	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07
Richmond-Tweed	10.3	11.2	11.1	11.6	8.3
Regional NSW	93.6	87.2	88.7	88.2	80.7
NSW	196.6	183.6	179.3	175.0	177.8



Notes: (1) Data is based on ABS Labour Force regions. These regions normally approximate the DSRD regions, but in the case of the Northern Rivers region, the ABS data *excludes the Clarence Valley*, while the DSRD region *includes the Clarence Valley*. Graphs and tables in this section should therefore be read with caution. (2) Labour Force data for the financial year is based on the average of four quarters at August, November, February and May. (3) Taxable income for regions has been based on the postal area – statistical division concordance based on the 2006 Australian Standard Geographical Classifications. The concordance as at 2006 has been applied to previous years. As a result, changes in postal areas or additions and deletions of postal areas in previous years have not been considered. Sources: Labour Force data sources from ABS Cat No 6291.0.00.003 and unpublished ABS data. Taxable income data sourced from the Australian Tax Office at www.ato.gov.au

4. High priority and high impact strategies to address barriers to business investment

Strategy 1 Strategies to improve regional business sustainability (including re-use and recycling of water and use of alternative energy technologies)

The Regional Coordination Management Group's (RCMG) Economic and Environmental Services Subcommittee will oversee the development of regional water plans for the Far North Coast. The *Far North Coast Regional Strategy* confirms that local councils are to complete integrated Water Cycle Management Plans. The Department of Water and Energy (DWE) is the lead agency. All future development is to apply water sensitive urban design principles, including the use of dual use reticulation systems in releases of adequate scale, and meet storm water management targets. The Department of State and Regional Development (DSRD) will also work with the RCMG to pilot alternative energy projects within the region.

High Priority and High Impact Initiatives

- Assist expanding businesses to take-up water saving technologies or techniques.
- Assist local companies to commercialise water saving technologies as a business opportunity.
- On a case by case basis, consider shared infrastructure for business to accommodate future water needs.
- Establish educational programs for business to tap into water saving expertise.
- Support the pilot plant at Harwood for extraction of ethanol from cellulose derived from forest waste products and sugar bagasse.
- RCMG's Economic and Environmental Services Subcommittee will supervise a project that aims to scope flexibility of the commercial introduction of pyrolysis technology to connect waste streams from local government and the forest industry into renewable energy and agrichar.

Impacts

- Strategies will ensure long term regional water efficiencies and improved drought security for the region.
- Assisting relevant businesses to pursue jobs growth and retention as well as make further water available for re-use.
- The pyrolysis pilot will test the technology for future business application.

Resources

- Access to NSW Climate Change and Commonwealth funds for water saving projects relevant to business.
- On a case by case basis consideration of infrastructure project funding for clusters of businesses to utilise water resources more efficiently.
- Educational programs for businesses to tap into water saving expertise.
- DSRD and Department of Primary Industries (DPI) support for the pyrolysis project.

Strategy 2 Balance demand for land and timely release of strategic enterprise zones to match residential growth

Projected population increases in the region will require 32,500 new jobs, of which 23,500 will be linked to service and construction industries, with the remainder driven by export of goods and services.

High Priority and High Impact Initiatives

- Promote and implement Department of Planning's (DOP) *Far North Coast Regional Strategy* including the Northern Rivers Regional Industry and Economic Plan.
- Anticipated job growth translates to a need for about 232 hectares of additional industrial and commercial land. The *Far North Coast Regional Strategy* requires that local councils contribute to the identification of employment lands through their Local Environmental Plans (LEPs).

- Monitor supply and take up of employment lands through continued update of DOP's Housing and Land Monitor and update the Northern Rivers industrial land database.
- Work with councils to assist them to develop industrial and employment lands strategies to cater for projected growth, including:
 - Embedding local government settlement strategies (including employment lands) in the *Far North Coast Regional Strategy*.
 - Assisting Tweed Shire Council in the review of its Employment Land and Urban Release Strategy and development of a strategy to attract new industries.
 - Assisting Kyogle Council to achieve rezoning of identified industrial land.
 - Facilitation of industrial estate development in the Richmond Valley local government area.

Impacts

- Initiatives listed are focussed on contributing to the growth of 32,500 new jobs for the region.
- Strategies will enhance availability of employment lands for potential investors and underpin investment attraction by ensuring that information is available and accessible.

Resources

- Rezoning will require allocation of planning resources by local councils and DOP.
- Where appropriate, DSRD will assist local councils to complete industrial land strategies.
- The Northern Rivers Regional Development Board (NRRDB) will maintain an updated Industrial Lands Register.
- DPI has published the North Coast Land Use Conflict Handbook and distributed copies to local councils and planners. The handbook will assist planners develop their new LEPs, and respond to key buffer and land use conflict outcomes contained in both the *Far North Coast* and the *Mid North Coast Regional Strategies*.
- DPI has identified important farmland under the *Far North Coast Regional Strategy* which will help manage future growth in rural areas (outside of protected areas) and the potential impact of this growth on rural industries.
- Ongoing work by Department of Lands to identify development opportunities on Crown lands.

Strategy 3 Provide infrastructure for creative industries, including high speed broadband access

Currently about 7,500 people are actively engaged in creative industries in the Northern Rivers region. This represents 6.2 per cent of the region's workforce and reflects a growth of 100 per cent from 2000. The economic value of creative industries for the region is estimated to be \$190 million. The value of the screen industry sector is estimated at \$40 million.

High Priority and High Impact Initiatives

- Support the development of strategies for the Northern Rivers Visual Arts Network and the music sector. Strategies are to identify infrastructure requirements, opportunities to expand existing markets, and attract business investment.
- Support for the continued skills and industry development activities of Screenworks.
- Support the Northern Rivers Conservatorium Arts Centre to develop e-commerce capability and strategies to service the needs of artists and students in the region.
- Investigate a whole-of-government approach to the development of a Regional Festivals and Events facility within Bryon Shire to secure the future of music festivals in the region.
- Conduct e-commerce seminars in the region.
- Establishment of film-friendly approval procedures.

Impacts

- Creative industries in the region are expected to generate an extra 1,000 jobs by 2010, bringing the total number of jobs to 8,500. This estimate is based on the doubling of jobs that has occurred in this sector since 2000.
- Consolidate the growth of the creative (including digital and multi-media) industries in the region.
- Support for creative industries (including film) will enhance e-commerce capabilities of the sector.
- Establishment of film friendly procedures will result in greater access to NSW Government managed properties.

Resources

- Support for the Northern Rivers Visual Arts Network and music sector.
- Project support to develop the e-commerce capability of Northern Rivers Conservatorium Arts Centre.
- Support for the development of a Regional Festivals and Events facility in Byron Shire.
- E-commerce seminars to be conducted in the region.
- Targeting Regional Needs Skills Program (COAG project) is being funded in the Northern Rivers to address skill needs in the creative industry (screen content). The project is co-managed by the Department of Education and Training (DET) and DSRD.

Strategy 4 Provide infrastructure for business and to support population growth

The *Far North Coast Regional Strategy* envisages that the population will grow to 289,000 by 2031. This represents an additional 60,400 people (an increase of 26 per cent between 2006-2031). This population growth requires the creation of 32,500 new jobs.

High Priority and High Impact Initiatives

- The Tugun Bypass around the Gold Coast Airport has been completed ahead of schedule. The Commonwealth Government has committed \$210 million between 2009/10 and 2013/14 to complete the Banora Point deviation including Sexton Hill.
- Support mining of coal seam methane gas reserves at Casino and the construction of a pipeline to Queensland (establishment of a 30 megawatt power station at Casino also proposed; opportunities opened up for private/public partnerships in local reticulation of gas).
- Support the development of industrial estates in the Richmond Valley Local Government Area (LGA). The provision of fully serviced industrial land close to rail infrastructure can provide a focus for the attraction of 'feeder' industries and enterprises.
- Government to deliver major infrastructure projects 2005/06 to 2015/16 as per the *Far North Coast Regional Strategy* and in line with *State Infrastructure Strategy* priorities.

Impacts

- Completion of Sexton Hill road works will facilitate access from developing industrial estates in Tweed/Byron Shires to South East Queensland markets.
- Completion of Sexton Hill road works will also facilitate relocation of South East Queensland companies impacted by urban environment to industrial estates in Murwillumbah.
- Supply of gas will underpin development of a new clean power source at Casino and provide infrastructure for the attraction of processing industries.
- Development of Richmond Valley industrial lands will assist in the attraction of business investments. It will provide access to the Port of Brisbane and other functional rail/road/sea freight exports links, and related services.

Resources

- Business relocation or expansion activities can draw funding from existing DSRD regional programs.
- DSRD support for the development of industrial estates in the Richmond Valley Council area with a focus on the attraction of ‘feeder’ industries and enterprises.
- Infrastructure needs to be looked at in the context of the *State Infrastructure Strategy*.

Strategy 5 Implement the Northern Rivers Regional Industry and Economic Plan

- The Northern Rivers Regional Industry and Economic Plan is recognised by DSRD and DOP as providing guidance for the development of a robust regional economy which capitalises on existing and emerging opportunities. The Plan should be recognised as a valuable guide to future development.

High Priority and High Impact Initiatives

- Maintenance and upgrade of online searchable employment lands database in each LGA.
- Support the conduct of five (5) investment promotion activities across the region (including development of investment profiles and identification of opportunities for key industry sectors).

Impacts

- Maintain and encourage business investment prospects and identify potential investors for the region. It is expected that implementation of the Northern Rivers Regional Industry and Economic Plan will result in extra jobs in the forestry industry, creative industries, and the value-adding food industry.

Resources

- Maintenance and upgrade of industrial lands database and other regional investment attraction activities.

Strategy 6 Develop initiatives to bring skills to the region and to retrain the existing workforce

The region is experiencing a shortage of skilled and qualified people in many occupations, in particular in metal fabrication, health and aged care, building and construction, planning and engineering.

High Priority and High Impact Initiatives

- Implement Collaborative Partnership Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between DSRD and TAFE NSW - North Coast Institute to improve flexibility of training/skills development for industries and enterprises.
- RCMG to undertake skills project to support vocational education and training by building better links between schools, TAFE and industry focussing on better skilling of young people.
- Implement the Innovative Development of Excellent Aged-Care Service (IDEAS) Project for the aged care services sector. The aged care sector is a growth industry which currently provides 8,800 jobs in the region and has chronic skill and labour shortages. Strategies to tackle shortages are developed as part of the Project, which is funded under the COAG Targeting Regional Skills Program. The Project is jointly managed between DET and DSRD, with TAFE NSW – North Coast Institute as a partner.
- Conduct workforce development workshops in the aged care sector.
- Continue implementation of Invest Northern Rivers Technology and Innovation Awards (NRRDB).
- Conduct Careers Expos and supplementary careers/industry advice initiatives in the region.

Impacts

Lack of skilled labour results in:

- restricted growth potential for local businesses, e.g. a local fabrication company has been unable to attract sufficient metal fabrication skills to meet customer demand for its products.
- local businesses/industry not maintaining operations in the region and/or off-shoring facilities.

Resources

- MOU between DSRD and the TAFE Mid-North Coast Institute.
- IDEAS Project implementation.
- Continuation of Invest Northern Rivers Technology and Innovation Awards.
- Careers Expo and supplementary initiatives to be conducted.
- RCMG skills project to support vocational training.
- Workforce development workshops in the aged care sector.
- DET (State Training Services) and DSRD are developing workforce development resources for employers in the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) sector to enhance their capabilities in recruiting, retaining and developing staff.
- DPI will provide PROfarm courses to help land managers use their natural resources in a sustainable manner and adapt to climate change impacts. PROfarm courses will also be delivered to improve personal, financial and resource management skills especially in times of threat such as industry restructure and drought.

Strategy 7 Develop initiatives to attract potential investment in petroleum

The Northern Rivers has potential for petroleum exploration (coal seam methane and conventional oil and gas).

High priority and high impact initiatives

- The Department of Primary Industries recently acquired 109 kilometres of 2D seismic to fill the data gap and provide image profiles along the prospective structural flanks of the basin where the potential for conventional oil and gas is considered very high.
- A structural synthesis of the Clarence-Moreton Basin was completed which guided the placement of the seismic lines.
- Aeromagnetic and radiometric data will be acquired in order to complete the geophysical coverage of the entire basin and assist in identification of a geothermal resource.
- A review, synthesis and compilation of a petroleum data package for the Clarence-Moreton Basin will be undertaken to promote the conventional petroleum potential both for onshore and offshore areas.

Resources

- The NSW Government has committed \$16.5 million to the New Frontiers exploration initiative across NSW over the next three years.
- This is expected to be supplemented by additional funding from industry and the Commonwealth Government.

For more information: regional@business.nsw.gov.au