



Community Economic Development Program

Kyogle – Success Story

Challenges and opportunities

Kyogle is a pleasant township of 2,800 people set in a beautiful natural environment on the upper reaches of the Clarence and Richmond rivers.

The Kyogle Shire lies along the Queensland border, 700 kilometres north of Sydney and some two hours drive from Brisbane and the NSW coastal communities of Tweed Heads, Ballina and Byron Bay.

Covering an area of 3,589 square kilometres and with a total population of over 9,500, the Shire's geographic location in an out-of-the-way corner of the Northern Rivers region is transversed by several state roads inland of the Pacific Highway and located on the Sydney to Brisbane rail line. It is perceived to be not ideally placed for road, air or river transport – and this has hindered value-added economic development in the area.

Trees have long played an important part in Kyogle's history and economic development. The region has twelve designated state forests and one of the largest remaining areas of original rainforest in NSW, which is World Heritage listed. The local timber industry has also been very significant, sustaining the region for many years before deregulation and the restructuring of the forestry industry began to take their toll.

By early 2005, unemployment in the Kyogle Local Government Area (LGA) reached 10.07 per cent. The population had dropped by six per cent over five years as young people in the district gradually drifted to the cities to look for work and the decline of family farming, in favour of private native forestry, meant that many families are continuing to leave the land.

In the eastern sector of the LGA, 'tree changers' are coming to settle in the area.

In late 2005, a disastrous fire at Kyogle's largest employer, the Norply timber factory, led to the loss of over 140 jobs overnight. The economic impact of these losses shocked the community, with the ripple effect felt throughout the district. In response, the NSW Government declared the area eligible for the Regional Economic Transition Scheme assistance delivered by the Department of State and Regional Development.

A program and projects for change

In 2003, Kyogle Shire Council and the NSW Department of State and Regional Development worked together to create an economic development plan for Kyogle. This was done in extensive consultation with industry and the community, and by 2004 an annual budget was available to assist village and industry development projects.

As part of this process, the Kyogle Community Economic Development Committee (KCEDC) was established to help turn around the fortunes of the town. The Committee approached the Department of State and Regional Development for assistance and funding for a town marketing program.

By mid-2005 the funding had come through, community discussions had taken place and the programs were ready to roll. Then a factory fire wiped out the town's biggest employer.

The community rallied around the workers from the timber factory who had lost their jobs. An emergency fund was set up immediately after the fire to help those who suddenly found themselves without an income. Then it was necessary to take action to promote Kyogle's struggling retail businesses. Many were hurting because no-one had money to buy anything. Estimates at the time were that local retailers would be affected by some \$18 million in lost sales, which would translate into a loss of jobs in the sector. It was time to take action.

"Overnight, we had to change strategies from our planned marketing and promotion of the town to immediate disaster relief," said Kyogle business development consultant, Samantha Muller. "But we made it happen – we all pulled together and we all contributed."

The Kyogle town marketing program was followed by the retail skills and financial management workshops, a 'shop local' campaign, a Tidy Towns Award for Civic Partnerships in community economic development planning and the *Growing Kyogle* project.

A visitor information centre was also built and staffed in the town.



These projects helped to enhance business activity in the district, improve business skills, reduce retail leakage, develop and grow local events, and attract tourists to the area from the heavily populated coastal strip stretching from Brisbane to Byron Bay.

Local organisations supported the projects with both funding and 'in kind' assistance. In partnership with the Kyogle Community Economic Development Committee, were organisations covering every spectrum of life in the area: Kyogle Shire Council, Kyogle Chamber of Commerce, Kyogle Visitor Information Centre, Kyogle Youth Action, Kyogle and District Arts Council, Kyogle Community Technology Centre and Kyogle High School.

Goals

Kyogle's collaborative goals then – and now – are to:

- boost the local investment climate and attract new investment to the region
- enhance business skills within the community so that people can work 'smarter' not just harder
- increase commercial and business activity within the Shire
- revitalise the retail sector
- increase visitor levels and visitor spending.

How the Department has helped

Since 2003, the Department has offered funding in excess of \$170,000 through its regional programs to organisations such as Kyogle Shire Council, Kyogle Chamber of Commerce and the Kyogle Community Economic Development Committee. Funding has been provided for activities such as a detailed economic strategy, a Business Retention and Expansion Survey, town marketing activities, an economic development coordinator, business plans for Kyogle Technology and Enterprise Training Centre, and for a newly established visitor centre.

Most recently, funding has been provided for the Growing Kyogle project. This initiative implements key recommendations for the Kyogle Shire identified in the strategic plan, the Business Retention and Expansion Survey, the local retail workshops and township marketing plan, and aims to enhance business activity, improve business skills, reduce retail leakage and grow local events.

Ongoing activities

The Kyogle community has shown resilience and determination since the shock of the 2005 Norpily fire and its severe after-effects. In early 2008 disaster again struck the area – severe floods led to the area being declared a natural disaster zone.

New initiatives continue. The *Growing Kyogle* project, for example, helped develop the inaugural 'A Country Affair' event, held in October 2007. This event dovetailed with the traditional Kyogle Agricultural Show and was used to showcase the area as an agricultural and value add producer, and as a destination for potential 'tree changers'. It was also aimed at visitors, especially from the Gold Coast and other parts of South East Queensland.

A 'Country Affair' included the Degustation Food Extravaganza Dinner held at Kyogle Memorial Hall which featured produce fresh from farms in the area. Although the tickets were over \$100 per person, the dinner was a sell out, attended by locals and visitors alike.

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LGA: **Kyogle Shire Region: Northern Rivers**

Population: **9,256 (2006 Census)**

Main industries: **Agriculture (mainly livestock), forestry, tourism**