

# Balonne Shire Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027

*A Blueprint for Prosperity*



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We acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land that we work, live and play on, and pay our respects to their cultures, their ancestors and to the elders, past, present and future.



### Disclaimer

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# Our Vision for Economic Development

Capitalising on our strategic location, agricultural heritage and outback setting, Balonne Shire is a location of choice in which to live, work and invest, supported by innovation in a diversity of traditional and emerging new industries.



# Executive Summary

This *Balonne Shire Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027* is a blueprint to support the vibrancy, diversity and sustainability of the communities of Balonne Shire.

Defined by a well-considered plan of action, the strategy guides Balonne Shire Council in its capacity as a supporter of economic development, to encourage economic activity that capitalises on the unique outback character and attributes of the communities of the Shire. These attributes include the Shire's strategic location, its natural assets, its well-established agricultural capabilities and strong supply chains, its capabilities in health care and education, its tourism assets and potential for growth, the potential for new and emerging industries and its appealing outback lifestyle offer.

Strategy themes and actions are designed to fulfil the vision for Balonne Shire as a location of choice in which to live, work and invest, supported by innovation in a diversity of traditional and emerging new industries. The strategy guides Balonne Shire Council, as its custodian, towards achieving the vision through the realisation of four key strategy outcomes, being:

- The delivery of **strategic infrastructure** to enable economic development;
- Initiatives which encourage local **business retention, growth and expansion**;
- The attraction of **investment** (and people) to Balonne Shire; and
- The development of a **skilled and adaptable workforce**, with employment opportunities for Balonne Shire's resident workers.

These strategy outcomes will be delivered through the prioritisation and implementation of a series of actions presented across five key areas, focussed on **Business and Industry**; **People and Place**; **Physical and Digital Connectivity**; **Workforce Planning and Development**; and **Tourism and Events**. Some of the recommended actions seek to build on or continue initiatives already in place, some are already resourced while others require additional resourcing.

Prepared in the context of Council's Corporate Plan 2022-2027 and aligned with the Balonne Shire Tourism and Events Strategy 2025 and other key local and regional strategies, the *Balonne Shire Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027* will be implemented in line with determined priorities as well as the availability of resources and the capacity of Council to progress the initiatives identified. It will be used by Balonne Shire Council to assess and prioritise funding needs and to inform key advocacy and partnership initiatives to secure funding support for key initiatives from the other levels of government.

Strategy implementation progress will be monitored and evaluated using a combination of output measures related directly to the recommended actions and their implementation as well as some broader outcome targets (metrics). The *Balonne Shire Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027* will be reviewed annually with an update anticipated in four years.





# 1. Economic Development Strategy Purpose

## A Blueprint for Prosperity

The *Balonne Shire Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027* is a blueprint for enhancing Shire-wide economic growth and investment through initiatives designed to support the vibrancy, diversity, liveability and sustainability of Balonne Shire and its seven constituent communities of Bollon, Dirranbandi, Hebel, Mungindi, Nindigully, St George and Thallon.

Located in south-west Queensland, approximately 500 kilometres from Brisbane, with a population of 4,320 and an estimated 2,143 jobs, Balonne Shire has a predominantly rural-based economy with cotton, wool, beef and grain production being the most common primary industries.

While Balonne Shire's established economic pillars of sheep, goat and cattle farming, pulses, grain and cotton growing and horticulture will continue to drive economic development, a more diversified industrial base, which also leverages opportunities in health and wellbeing, education and training, renewables and the visitor economy, are encouraged, to help drive future prosperity. This can be achieved by leveraging Balonne Shire's, and the wider south-west region's, comparative and competitive advantages.

These advantages include Balonne Shire's strategic location, its natural assets, well-established agricultural capabilities and strong supply chains, its capabilities in health care and education, its tourism assets and potential and its appealing outback lifestyle offer. Balonne Shire is well-placed to facilitate new economic activity, with opportunities for industrial diversification in established and potential new industries, together with infrastructure investments that could transform business capacity and productivity, supply chain connectivity, market accessibility, investment opportunity and Shire-wide prosperity.

Nevertheless, there are also challenges that need to be addressed if Balonne Shire is to realise its full economic potential. These include an ageing, static population, digital connectivity and other infrastructure shortfalls and their impacts on business productivity, labour (skills) and housing shortfalls, and health care and other community infrastructure constraints, which affect the liveability of the communities of the Shire.

Addressing both the challenges and opportunities for economic development in a strategic, informed and targeted manner is the focus of this strategy, which is underpinned by a suite of themed initiatives that are designed to help fulfil the vision for Balonne Shire as a location of choice in which to live, work and invest, supported by innovation in a diversity of traditional and emerging new industries.

## Our Vision for Economic Development

***Capitalising on our strategic location, agricultural heritage and outback setting, Balonne Shire is a location of choice in which to live, work and invest, supported by innovation in a diversity of traditional and emerging new industries.***

## Desired Economic Development Outcomes

The vision informs Balonne Shire Council's approach to economic development as one which seeks to enhance levels of investment, income and employment underpinned by improvements in education, skills, health, culture, community wellbeing, a sense of place and the natural environment.

Defined by a well-considered plan of action, this strategy is designed to help:

- Encourage business retention and expansion;
- Attract investment (both people and industry);
- Support industry diversification, growth and development; and
- Promote the development of a skilled workforce and the provision of local jobs.

Informed by extensive research, stakeholder consultation and data analysis, this strategy provides the framework for Balonne Shire Council to influence the factors that facilitate local economic resilience, competitiveness and the capacity to grow the Shire's economy in a sustainable fashion. It does this by articulating economic development strategy objectives to guide Council in the application of its economic development support activities.

Strategy objectives will be realised through a suite of initiatives delivered across five key action areas, focussed on ***Business and Industry; People and Place; Physical and Digital Connectivity; Workforce Planning and Development;*** and ***Tourism and Events.***

# 2. Economic Development Strategy Objectives

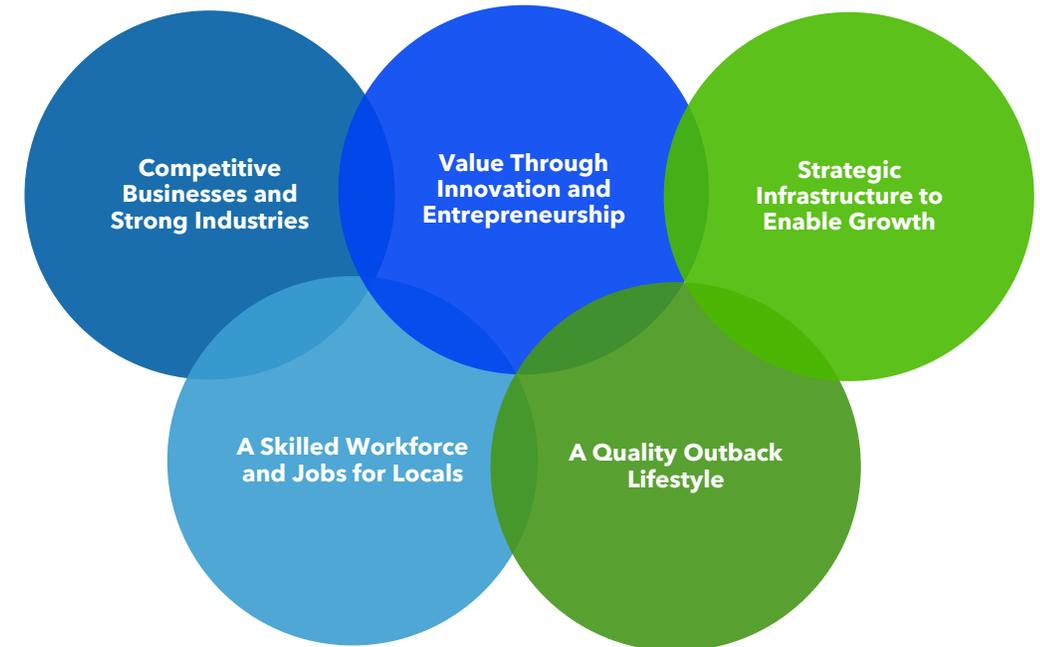
## Economic Development Strategy Objectives

Through the implementation of this strategy, Balonne Shire Council will work to help realise its desired economic development outcomes through the realisation of five key strategy objectives. These objectives align with Balonne Shire Council's Corporate Plan 2022-2027 and reflect the outcomes of the research, consultation and analysis undertaken to inform this strategy. They are:

- 1. Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries** - Balonne Shire will leverage the strength of its pillar industries of sheep, goat and cattle farming, pulses, grain and cotton, horticulture and tourism to diversify and grow through initiatives designed to support continual improvement in the productive capabilities and capacity of the Shire's businesses, to drive value-added economic activities which target existing, new and emerging markets.
- 2. Value through Innovation and Entrepreneurship** - Balonne Shire's economy will prosper through initiatives to support synergies between research and development, education and training and business activities that foster innovation and entrepreneurship to grow economic value across local and regional supply chains.
- 3. Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth** - Balonne Shire's public and private infrastructure will be planned in a holistic manner and delivered in a timely and cost-effective way to enable a diversity of opportunities for investment and economic development to be realised.
- 4. A Skilled Workforce and Jobs for Locals** - Balonne Shire will leverage its business and industry capabilities and its education and training assets to develop a local workforce with the mix of skills required by businesses to prosper in a transitioning, increasingly knowledge-intensive and globally-competitive economy.
- 5. A Quality Outback Lifestyle** - Through the delivery of cultural, recreational and community infrastructure and services which instills a strong sense of community, Balonne Shire will be a lifestyle location of choice where existing residents want to stay and where new residents choose to relocate. Importantly, Balonne Shire Council, as the custodian of this strategy, will endeavour to ensure that opportunities for economic development are distributed as equitably as possible, across all communities of the Shire.

These five key objectives will be met through the implementation of a suite actions categorised under the five strategic action areas, which are presented in Section 9 of this Economic Development Strategy.

## Balonne Shire's Economic Development Strategy Objectives



# 3. An Informed Approach to Strategy Development

## The Economic Development Strategy Consultation Process

In late 2022 and early 2023, consultation was undertaken with local businesses and community representatives in the towns of Bollon, Dirranbandi, Hebel, Mungindi, St George and Thallon. Broader business and community input was received via an online survey. The survey received strong interest with a total of 68 completed responses from business-owners and residents of the towns throughout Balonne Shire.

The purpose of the consultations was to ascertain the needs, goals, opportunities, challenges and aspirations relating to the growth and sustainability of Balonne Shire and its constituent communities. This ensured that the Economic Development Strategy is informed by an appropriately diverse mix of local business and community representation, including people with small businesses, residents with a lifetime of local knowledge and industry leaders with global experience.

The consultation process also included direct engagement with a diversity of key economic development stakeholders and decision-makers including Dirranbandi Progress Association; St George and District Chamber of Commerce; Mungindi Progress Association; Bollon Community Group; Thallon Progress Association; Country Universities Centre Balonne; South West Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (SWQROC); Toowoomba Surat Basin Enterprise (TSBE); Outback Queensland Tourism; NBN Co., Cotton Australia; AgForce; Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA); Australian Rail Track Corporation; SG Aboriginal Housing; various registered training organisations, not-for-profits and community groups and selected State and Federal Government Departments.

It was clear from the consultations that Balonne Shire's agricultural and horticultural industry capabilities, its natural features and its outback location and lifestyle are considered to be its key economic attributes. Some key challenges identified through the consultation process included local workforce skills and capabilities; housing availability and affordability; community services such as childcare; health care; education and training infrastructure; transport infrastructure (rail, road and air); and communications infrastructure (digital connectivity).

Emerging from the consultations were a number of opportunities that could be pursued to help realise the vision for economic development.

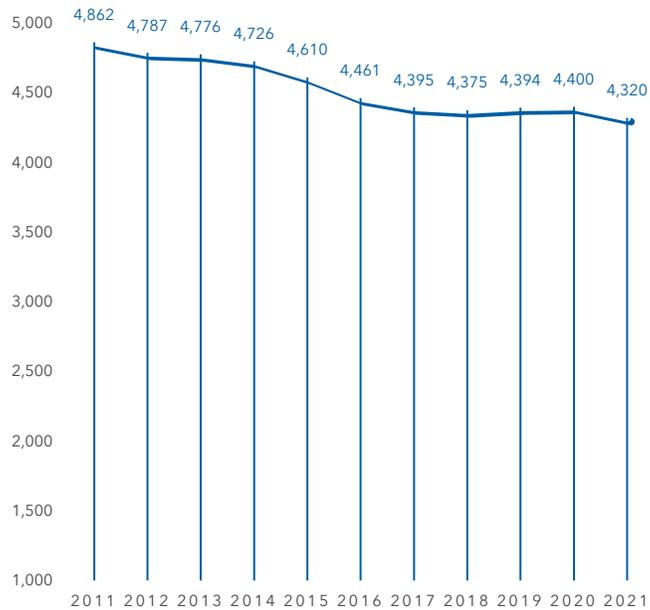
These include building on Balonne Shire's agricultural capabilities with a focus on the three economic pillars of sheep, goat and cattle farming (livestock), grain, cotton and pulses and horticulture; building Balonne Shire's appeal as a place in which to live, work and invest; addressing housing availability and affordability; addressing digital connectivity shortfalls; workforce capability planning and development; small business capacity-building and development; improving transport infrastructure and services; and supporting the growth of Balonne Shire's visitor economy.

## The Strategy Consultation Process



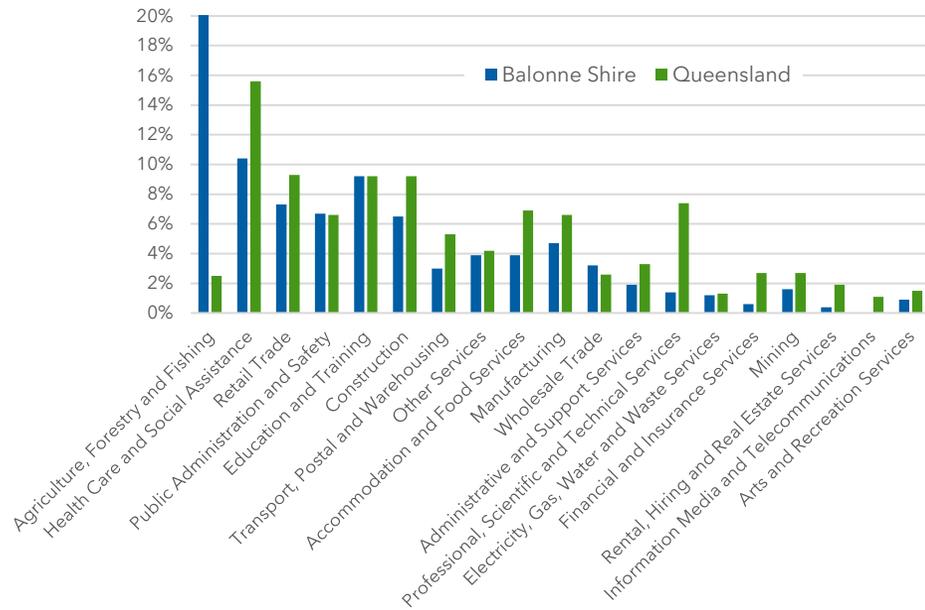
# 4. Economic Snapshot of Balonne Shire

Population, Balonne Shire, 2011 - 2021



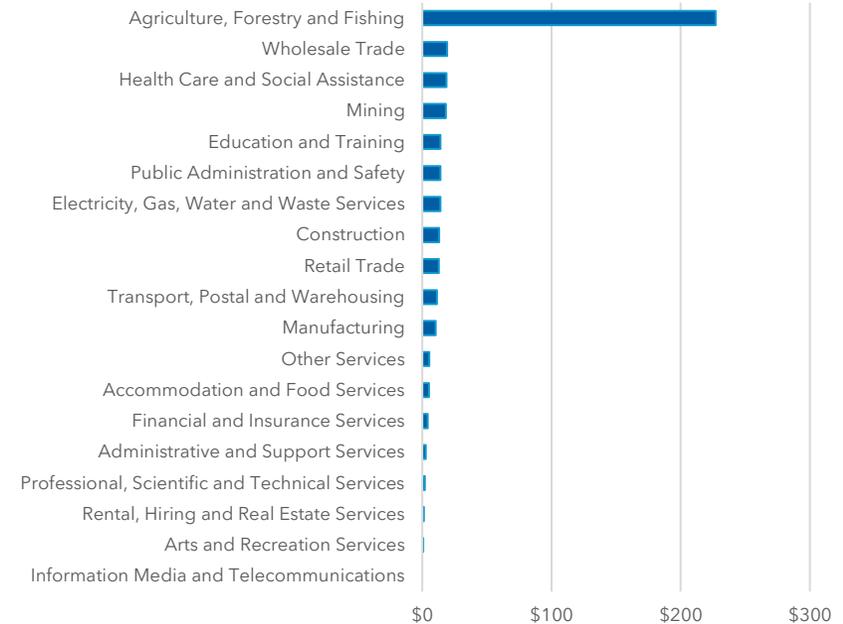
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

Employment by Industry (%), Balonne Shire and Queensland, 2021



Source: economy.id using ABS data

Value-Added by Industry (\$m), Balonne Shire, 2021



Source: economy.id and NIEIR using ABS Census and National Accounts data, 2022

**Population**  
**4,320**  
(ABS Census, 2021)

**Indigenous Population**  
**884 (20%)**  
(ABS Census, 2021)

**Local Jobs**  
**2,329**  
(ABS Census, 2021)

**Unemployment**  
**4.1%**  
(Jobs and Skills Australia, Dec. 2022)

**Businesses**  
**900**  
(economy.id, 2022)

**Gross Regional Product (GRP)**  
**\$450 million**  
(economy.id, 2022)

**Agricultural Industry Value-Added**  
**\$227 million**  
(economy.id, 2022)

**Visitor Nights**  
**29,704**  
(Tourism Research Australia, 2021/22)

**Tourism Output/Sales**  
**\$12 million**  
(economy.id, 2022)

# 5. Balonne Shire's Competitiveness Profile

Balonne Shire can capitalise on its comparative advantages, including its people and location, its natural assets, its strong agricultural capabilities, health care and education assets, tourism attributes and its outback lifestyle to grow the economy sustainably. There are also challenges that need to be addressed to help nurture prosperity. In summary, Balonne Shire's competitiveness profile is defined by:

## People and Place

### Strengths and Attributes

- A strong sense of community and sense of place.
- A relaxed and friendly outback lifestyle.
- Natural features (e.g. Balonne River) and outback landscape.
- Natural resources (rich soils, good rainfall, secure water).
- Recreational opportunities, especially sport.
- Proximity to Toowoomba and Brisbane by road and by air.
- Land, labour and infrastructure to support new industry opportunities.
- Pro-active local community groups.
- Strong European and First Nations history and heritage.

### Challenges and Constraints

- A static/declining population.
- An ageing and older population with a median age of 40 compared to 38 for Queensland.
- Youth retention and local skills shortages.
- Relatively high cost of training and lack of incentives to deliver training in more remote locations.
- Shortage of a diversity of quality, affordable housing to cater to existing and potential new residents and workers as well as different demographics (including ageing in place).
- Continued investment in town amenity and opportunities for grant funding for ongoing town centre improvements, community infrastructure and key services.
- Lack of media outlets / coverage.
- Threat of isolation of towns due to flooding.
- Border town service delivery issues.
- Succession planning for local progress associations.

## Enabling Infrastructure and Services

### Strengths and Attributes

- Air transport - St George Aerodrome.
- Proximity to the Inland Rail at Thallon as well as existing connections between rail and road freight.
- Education infrastructure and services including quality primary and secondary schools and the Country Universities Centre located at The Hub in St George and in Dirranbandi.
- Quality public and private health care services.
- Strong health care leadership supporting outlying communities.
- New Community Wellbeing Centre in St George.
- Benefits of wild dog exclusion fencing to sheep industry.

### Challenges and Constraints

- Road transport infrastructure standards.
- Impact of flooding on roads throughout the Shire.
- Retention of health care professionals and service provision in some towns (doctors/GPs).
- Need for place-based solutions to aged care service delivery.
- Some community services shortfalls (e.g. child care).
- Digital connectivity (mobile phone and Internet) shortfalls.
- Research and innovation infrastructure gaps (e.g. Ag-tech) to develop skills and commercialise ideas.
- Power infrastructure/services disruptions and shortfalls.
- Despite good quality and quantity, bore water is too hot.
- Some industrial land shortfalls and unrealised opportunities.
- Inadequate truck parking facilities in key locations.
- Tourism infrastructure shortfalls, e.g. visitor accommodation, signage, rest stops, fuel outlets and EV charging stations.
- Challenge of continual re-investment in education and training to meet evolving needs and opportunities for growth.

## Business and Industry

### Strengths and Attributes

- Agricultural and horticultural capabilities/expertise.
- Innovative and capable small businesses.
- Outback tourism attributes and activities (landscape, people, inland fishing, wildlife, natural and built attractions, cultural attractions).
- A strong calendar of events.
- Strong support for regional development through SWQROC and pro-active business chambers and progress associations.

### Challenges and Constraints

- A need to continue to build economic diversity within and beyond the Shire's agricultural industry pillars.
- Challenges of retaining agricultural value in the Shire (e.g. limited meat processing facilities.)
- Ongoing biosecurity management.
- Impact of water buy-backs on agricultural industry supply chains.
- Changing labour requirements and associated workforce planning and development needs.
- Providing school-based certificate students exposure to real-world work experience.
- A need for investment in agricultural education and training to meet evolving industry needs and opportunities.
- Lack of entry statement and directional signage for visitors.
- Scope to improve visitor information dissemination.
- Limited tourism product and length of stay.
- Establishing a shared understanding amongst businesses of the visitor economy as a potential driver of future prosperity.
- Scope to attract more interstate and international visitors.
- Awareness of new energy economy opportunities (renewables, green industries and the circular economy).

# 6. Challenges and Opportunities for Economic Development

## Industry Diversification Through Research and Innovation

The industry sectors which drive Balonne Shire's economy in terms of inter-regional exports, employment and industry value-added include sheep, cattle and other livestock including goats; grain and cotton; and horticulture. Together with an emerging tourism sector and opportunities in new industries such as renewables, timber, broadacre crops such as hemp and biofuel crops, these are the future 'pillars' of the local economy.

There is an opportunity to add value and grow the Balonne Shire economy through initiatives that capitalise on the region's strengths through industry diversification. This should begin by building value within existing sectors. In Balonne Shire, the region's agricultural strengths present an opportunity to grow through initiatives which support innovation and development of the Shire's agricultural know-how using research, education and innovation to develop skills and know-how and commercialise new ideas.

Working in collaboration with Agrifood Connect / the AgTech Logistics Hub (ATLH) in Toowoomba, there is an opportunity to establish an ag-tech business innovation 'node' in Balonne Shire. A local ag-tech business incubator and accelerator, the facility (perhaps located at The Hub in St George, but potentially elsewhere) would have office, meeting, research, teaching and networking facilities. It would enable innovators in the local ag-tech sector to connect with the region's wider innovation ecosystem, to explore joint project opportunities and collaborate on research and development and the commercialisation of new ideas.

## Continuing to Capitalise on Our Horticultural Strengths

Horticultural activity in Balonne Shire continues to develop through the production of grapes, onions, garlic and pumpkins, as well as blueberries and carrots. The production of high-value crops presents an opportunity to continue to grow a sustainable agricultural sector, and Balonne Shire's existing horticultural industry profile presents an opportunity to attract new investment to the region.

To attract new investment, Council needs to begin with the availability of high-level information which 'sells' the Shire's value proposition in the form of an investment prospectus. The Shire's *Boundless Opportunities* investment attraction platform will be continually updated and promoted, to highlight opportunities to invest in the traditional agricultural pillars as well as in the region's tourism sector and emerging new industries.

## Adding Agricultural Value Locally

Balonne Shire Council's investment in cluster fencing has had remarkable benefits for the local sheep industry which in the past has been adversely affected by wild dogs and other pests. Research has shown that the introduction of cluster fencing has improved the profitability of sheep farming while also enhancing opportunities to farm other small livestock, namely goats.

While the small livestock farming sector has benefited from the introduction of cluster fencing, much of the value is lost when the product grown is transported out of the Shire for processing elsewhere. This warrants investigation of the business case for small livestock processing in Balonne Shire. This would involve a broader economic evaluation of the potential for serving national and international markets and investigating the feasibility of establishing a small livestock processing facility in St George.

### Balonne Shire's Economic Pillars



# 6. Challenges and Opportunities for Economic Development

## New and Emerging Industry Opportunities

A desire on the part of Balonne Shire Council and the communities of the Shire to capitalise on existing industry capabilities in sheep and cattle grazing, grain and cotton and horticulture, point to the need to focus on opportunities for industry value-adding as well as diversification into new and emerging opportunities in tourism, renewable energy, defence, health and education.

New opportunities for bio-futures and renewable energy can be explored, drawing on successful case studies elsewhere. For example, nearby, Goondiwindi Regional Council is proposing to install a hydrogen production facility at the Goondiwindi wastewater treatment plant, with the resulting produced oxygen used to improve the efficiency of its wastewater treatment and offtake for the produced hydrogen being sought from local businesses. Across the border in neighbouring Moree Plains Shire, a Special Activation Precinct has been established to plan and deliver a new business hub, specialising in agribusiness, logistics and food processing. An opportunity to extend this model to Balonne Shire's border towns could be explored through continuing cross-border collaboration.

Circular economy opportunities can also be investigated and promoted. There are funding programs available to explore and support these opportunities. For example, the Queensland Government has developed a comprehensive Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy, which aims to promote more sustainable waste management practices that reduce the amount of waste produced by business, industry and households. The aerospace industry also presents opportunities for Balonne Shire, with companies looking for a presence in western Queensland.



## A Regional Health and Wellbeing Hub

After agriculture, the health care and social assistance sector is Balonne Shire's second-largest industry of employment. Health care is essential to community wellbeing. Without good health care, we don't have a strong community.

Balonne Shire has high quality public and private health care services. However, one issue affecting the health care sector in Balonne Shire is long-term sustainability through succession. This means there is a need for government / Council involvement to ensure sustainability of health care delivery throughout all communities of the Shire.

St George has the potential to build on its existing health care capabilities (St George Hospital and other health care and medical facilities) to develop as a rural-regional health service delivery hub. For this to be realised requires investment in digital connectivity infrastructure.

The Community Wellbeing Centre, to be located in the former RSL building and managed by Goondir Health, is being developed in St George to provide a range of essential social services as well as allied health student training. Balonne Shire Council will continue to support the development of this important community facility as an integral component of a regional health and wellbeing hub.

In addition to the health services already provided by South West Hospital and Health Service (SWHHS) and private and not-for-profit providers, the Community Wellbeing Centre will fill existing gaps in health care through a student-led clinic.

The potential of St George as a rural health / medical hub will enhance its appeal as a place to live. This means housing shortages will also need to be addressed. Demonstrating the business case for the establishment of a rural health / medical hub in St George also emphasises the need for and return on investment in quality digital connectivity.

# Challenges and Opportunities for Economic Development

## Supporting Population Growth and Housing Diversity

Balonne Shire's population has been in gradual decline over the past ten years. To attract and retain people to live, work and invest in the communities of the Shire, a compelling lifestyle offer needs to be made. Importantly, attracting and retaining people requires investment in housing and essential infrastructure and services. Housing shortages constrain Balonne Shire's capacity to attract the workers needed to run and expand the economy. These workers are required across all sectors at all skill levels - to 'bring in the harvest' as well as to provide professional services to the Shire's population. A lot of housing is run-down and is costly to fix-up.

While property prices in Balonne Shire are still relatively affordable, there is a shortage of rental accommodation. According to the consultations, a 50% deposit is required to secure a home loan in some postcodes. This makes borrowing prohibitive and compounds the Shire's housing challenge.

Balonne Shire's housing situation limits the capacity to attract households, and this suppresses potential investment in business establishment and expansion due to labour and professional services shortages. Taken together, these factors have the potential to create a downward spiral in the fortunes of the Shire's communities, particularly the smaller towns, as the population, which has the potential to grow, instead declines, with services becoming unviable to the point where they are inevitably withdrawn.

Shire-wide, there is potential to build or expand retirement living to free up larger homes that older persons are struggling to maintain so that they can be sold or rented out to growing families/attract new ones, while allowing older residents to age in place. Balonne Shire Council can explore options in partnership with community housing organisations. There is an opportunity identify and promote the release and development of strategic parcels of land for housing. Some land in the Shire is constrained because it is subject to Native Title or is on Crown Land.

Balonne Shire Council has committed to the implementation of its Local Housing Action Plan. The Plan has been developed through a joint initiative involving the Queensland Government, Balonne Shire Council and the Western Queensland Alliance of Councils (WQAC) to respond to a range of immediate, emerging, and longer-term housing challenges in the Balonne Shire. The Plan presents an initial set of tactical actions, enabling refinement through an ongoing iterative process. The findings and recommendations of this Economic Development Strategy are designed to support this process.

## Infrastructure Investment to Support Sustainable Communities

Housing delivery needs to be supported by appropriate infrastructure and service provision. The consultations undertaken to inform this strategy identified a number of critical infrastructure shortfalls throughout the communities of Balonne Shire. This includes a lack of transport options beyond the private motor vehicle as well as digital connectivity shortfalls (mobile phone and Internet connections).

Ensuring the Shire's residents and businesses are connected with quality communications infrastructure will build Balonne Shire's capacity to house more 'knowledge workers' This includes those who work in industries that produce goods or services that contribute directly to enhancing the Shire's agricultural value and output and knowledge-intensive industries that can create new wealth while enhancing the quality of the natural environment (e.g. renewable energy, energy-efficient materials design and manufacture; waste management).

Together with quality physical infrastructure, community infrastructure, including Balonne Shire's social, cultural and recreational services and facilities is a vital enabler of economic development for the role it plays in enhancing the Shire's lifestyle and liveability appeal. There is a recognised lack of adequate childcare and allied health services (physiotherapy, optometry, dentistry, nursing, medicine, clinical psychology and pharmacy) in the communities of the Shire, compounding the issue of people and worker attraction. It is particularly challenging to attract (and retain) childcare workers to the area.

Continued strategic investment in Balonne Shire's community, cultural and recreational assets will ensure that a more diverse and higher quality lifestyle experience is provided for the benefit of residents as well as enhancing the appeal of the towns throughout Balonne Shire as destinations for drive tourists and overnight stays.

# Challenges and Opportunities for Economic Development

## Capacity-building through Workforce Planning and Development

Key to the development of competitive businesses and strong industries is a sustainable workforce that is equipped with the skills, knowledge and capabilities required to adapt to new opportunities and to thrive in an evolving economic environment. Developing an appropriately skilled and capable workforce requires a multi-faceted approach to planning and development, including workforce attraction and retention, and it requires input from a range of key stakeholders. In Balonne Shire, workforce planning is as much a housing and liveability issue as it is an education and training issue. As noted earlier, housing shortages are a major factor in the inability of Balonne Shire to attract the workers that are needed to run and expand the economy.

Agriculture is a pillar of the Balonne Shire economy, and the future of farming lies in having better access to new technologies to farm more efficiently. However, this impacts on the scale and nature of labour needed, so education and training needs to adapt. Balonne Shire has the agricultural expertise, and this needs to be supported with continual investment in education and training and in programs which help businesses access the latest technology and the right mix of skills.

At the same time, Balonne Shire's youth needs access to education and training services and facilities with the programs and the infrastructure in place to support their employment aspirations and the requirements of business and industry. Access to tertiary education and training has been an issue in the past, however this is being addressed with the establishment of the Country Universities Centre (CUC), which has had a very positive impact on the communities of Balonne Shire. Nevertheless, there is still scope to better match local workforce skills and capacity with industry needs by leveraging and building on existing capabilities. For example, agricultural expertise in areas such as agronomy and other specialist support services could be connected to education, which could be delivered locally at the CUC (and exported around the country). This would require support in the form of enabling digital connectivity infrastructure so that expertise can be delivered online.

Council will continue to engage with education and training providers and the Shire's youth to connect them with meaningful education and training which will keep them in their communities, through concepts such as a rural training centre or outback education precinct. Direct involvement from local producers / farmers will continue to be encouraged so that the Shire's youth can be provided with opportunities for learning and on-the-job training leading into sustainable career pathways. To encourage more apprentice placements in Balonne Shire (as in other more remote regional locations), the State Government's approach to purchasing training services could also be re-visited. For example, a 15% loading is offered to providers to deliver training in St George or Toowoomba, when it could be higher in St George relative to a larger regional centre like Toowoomba in order to incentivise training delivery in more remote locations.

Balonne Shire Council is pro-active in its commitment to promoting local jobs for locals. It will continue to liaise with business and industry, representative organisations, peak industry bodies and education and training providers to network ideas and articulate workforce planning priorities that need to be addressed. Balonne Shire Council's efforts to attract migrant workers to fill gaps in the local labour market has been well-received in the community and Council will continue to pursue its multicultural worker attraction strategy to help build local workforce capacity.



# Challenges and Opportunities for Economic Development

## Prosperity through Digital Connectivity

Digital communications are a fundamental enabler of business innovation and economic development, and the development of the digital economy has increased the propensity for individuals and businesses to interact and trade with suppliers, partners and customers from anywhere in the world using new and evolving communications technologies.

In Balonne Shire, deficiencies in telecommunications infrastructure and services pose real issues for locals and visitors alike. These issues relate to the capacity to do business and the ability of residents in the communities of the Shire to access education, health and other essential services. The capacity for the agricultural industry to evolve through the uptake of ag-tech is constrained by poor digital connectivity, adversely impacting prospects for growth. Hence, digital connectivity needs to be addressed as an economic development priority.

Balonne Shire Council will build on its previous initiatives to facilitate digital connectivity solutions by engaging, lobbying and potentially partnering with telecommunications providers. This includes a focus on alternative, low-cost solutions which use the latest technology. Importantly, Council recognises that strategies to enhance digital connectivity requires engagement with the Shire's business and industry and its communities, to educate stakeholders on the range of digital connectivity solutions that are currently available and which will come online in future.



## A Regional Transport Hub

Transport connectivity is another fundamental enabler of economic development, and the continued evolution and growth of Balonne Shire's (and the region's) agricultural sector will need to be underpinned by strong transport and freight handling capabilities.

Each town has a role to play in Balonne Shire's economic development. For example, Thallon is the only town in Balonne Shire with operating rail access and connections between rail and road freight. It is also Queensland's biggest grain handling site for rail. There are opportunities for more agricultural products on rail such as cotton and this would require the development of a handling facility at Thallon.

A thriving rail hub would be the catalyst for a range of service needs presenting opportunities for the development of light industry tied into the agricultural sector as well as connection into the national freight network (the Inland Rail). A rail transport hub has been proposed at Thallon. Improvements to the South Western Railway Line, to enhance the capacity of the line to carry more containerised agricultural product, are being progressed through the Toowoomba Range Capacity and Clearance Rail project.

There is no land to support industrial development within a 40km radius of the South Western Railway line and land at Thallon is compromised due to flooding constraints. If the railway line is upgraded and the levy bank in Thallon is reconfigured, Thallon has the potential to be a regional freight hub.

The Western Highway from NSW is coming up through Balonne Shire. The concept of the 'inland M1' road link would allow the movement of trucks to alleviate pressure on the coastal highway and generate economic activity along the inland road route. This would add weight to the opportunity for freight handling facilities at Thallon.

Balonne Shire Council, working in collaboration with neighbouring Councils, the State Government and other key stakeholders, will continue to advocate for projects aimed at enhancing the capacity of the South Western Railway Line in the interests of the Shire, the wider south-west and the State of Queensland.

# Challenges and Opportunities for Economic Development

## Supporting a Vibrant Outback Visitor Economy

In Balonne Shire, tourism is an emerging industry with potential for continued growth. Balonne Shire's tourism sector currently accounts for just 2% of total industry value-added compared to the State average of 4.9% and provides for 4.1% of all jobs in the Shire, compared to the Queensland average of 8.6% (source: economy.id). According to Tourism Research Australia, Australia's tourism regions are performing well in the wake of the national recovery from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, with domestic overnight trips and visitor spending now up on pre-pandemic levels.

The *Balonne Shire Tourism and Events Strategy 2025* is the principal strategic document guiding Balonne Shire Council's commitment to destination management planning and promotion. It articulates a long-term vision and strategic direction for tourism and events in Balonne Shire and provides the framework to maximise the economic benefits of tourism and events, whilst managing the environmental and social impacts, including benefits for the local community.

While Council has been pro-active in marketing and branding the area's tourism offer, this is countered by the fact that Balonne Shire does not have major tourism 'products' like a hall of fame, for example. A number of catalyst tourism project opportunities have been identified and include, for example, a motor sports precinct; equestrian centre; a farm stay hunting lodge; river life iconic attractions; Dirranbandi Dip (baths); and a watersports precinct.

Council understands that, through regional collaboration and engagement with local operators, the Shire is best placed to promote its tourism offer as part of a wider regional tourism experience. The Shire can leverage broader market awareness of its iconic attractions, such as the art silos in Thallon for example, to further develop the drive tourism market, particularly in regard to length of stay and visitor spending.

There is scope to better articulate Balonne Shire's point of difference to develop and promote the destination. For example, each town is on a river. The 'river life' concept can be further explored as a key offering in product development and branding. Towns in the Shire each have their own unique cultural and historical attributes which could also be better articulated. For example, Mungindi's One Ton Post marks the end of the three-year task of surveying the straight section of the Queensland/New South Wales border, from Cameron Corner to the Barwon River.

Nature-based tourism, eco-tourism and cultural tourism are growth industries, and more travellers are now searching for immersive, authentic, educational experiences that are unique to the places they visit. Balonne Shire can leverage its natural advantages to develop iconic visitor experiences focussed on, for example, rivers and waterways, inland fishing, Indigenous cultural tourism experiences, pioneer / European history and heritage and nature / wildlife. Recognising that opportunities to develop the local tourism offer will continue to emerge and evolve, Balonne Shire Council will continue to play its role in supporting the visitor economy through implementation of the *Balonne Shire Tourism and Events Strategy 2025*, reviewing and prioritising strategic initiatives annually.





# The hub

# 7. Balonne Shire Council's Role in Economic Development

## Balonne Shire Council's Economic Development Support Activities

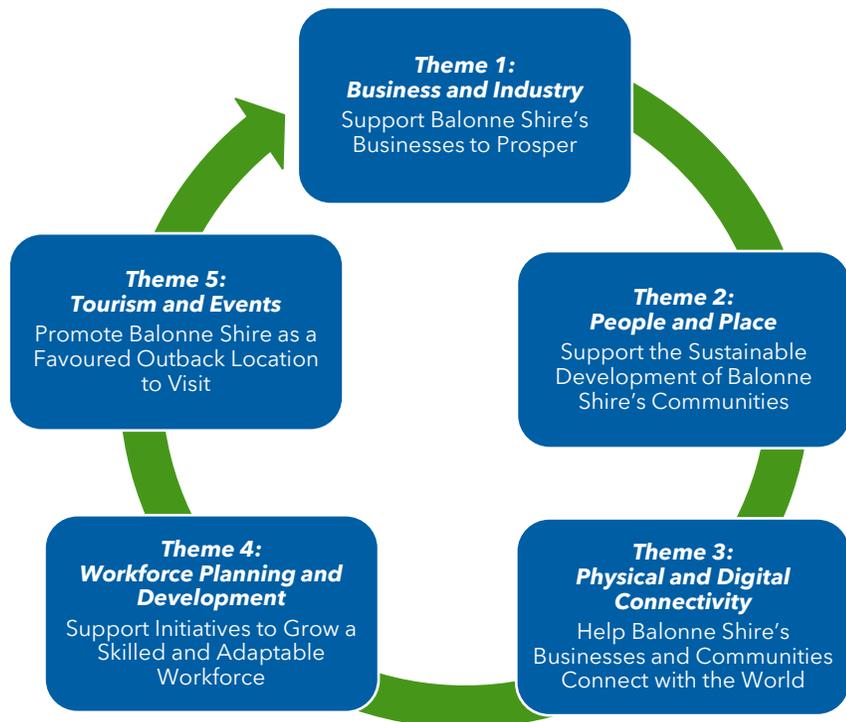
Balonne Shire Council is committed to providing the foundations for sustainable economic development by working within its remit as a local government authority, to strike a balance between lifestyle, environmental sustainability and economic opportunity for the Shire's 4,320 residents. Through the delivery of the actions presented in this strategy, Council fosters economic development through six core areas of support.



# 8. Economic Development Strategy Themes

## Strategy Action Areas

The vision, desired outcomes and strategy objectives, are underpinned by an informed approach to a suite of initiatives that are designed to support economic prosperity throughout the communities of Balonne Shire. The actions in this strategy are presented across five interrelated and mutually-reinforcing themes, focussed on **Business and Industry**; **People and Place**; **Physical and Digital Connectivity**; **Workforce Planning and Development**; and **Tourism and Investment**.



## Strategic Alignment and Key Partnerships

Balonne Shire Council's commitment to supporting economic development does not occur in isolation, and key to the growth of the local economy is the development of connections across departments within the organisation and partnerships with the other tiers of government, non-government and industry stakeholders and the Shire's communities to help realise the vision for a prosperous economy and a sustainable future.

Recognising the important role that Council and its economic development partners play in nurturing an enabling environment for public and private sector investment, this strategy contains actions dedicated to building the case for attracting increased and sustained levels of investment from industry and the other tiers of government. In addition to local community groups, business chambers and progress associations, those stakeholder organisations and agencies which Council partners with to advance Balonne Shire's economic development include:

- Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO)
- AgForce
- Agrifood Connect
- AusIndustry
- Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC)
- Border Regional Organisation of Councils (BROC)
- Cotton Australia
- Country Universities Centre (CUC) Balonne
- Darling Downs South West Council of Mayors
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAF)
- Department of Education
- Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (DESBT)
- Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning (DSDILGP)
- Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport (DTIS) (Advance Queensland)
- Goondir Health
- Growcom
- Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA)
- Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA)
- National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (NHFIC)
- NBN Co.
- Outback Queensland Tourism Association (OQTA)
- Private energy and telecommunications providers
- Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA)
- RDA Darling Downs and South West (RDA DDSW)
- South West Hospital and Health Service
- South West Queensland ROC (SWQROC)
- Toowoomba Surat Basin Enterprise (TSBE)
- Toowoomba Wellcamp Airport Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ)
- Trade and Investment Queensland (TIQ)
- Western Queensland Alliance of Councils (WQAC)
- Wool Australia

# 9. Economic Development Action Plan

## Strategy Delivery Framework

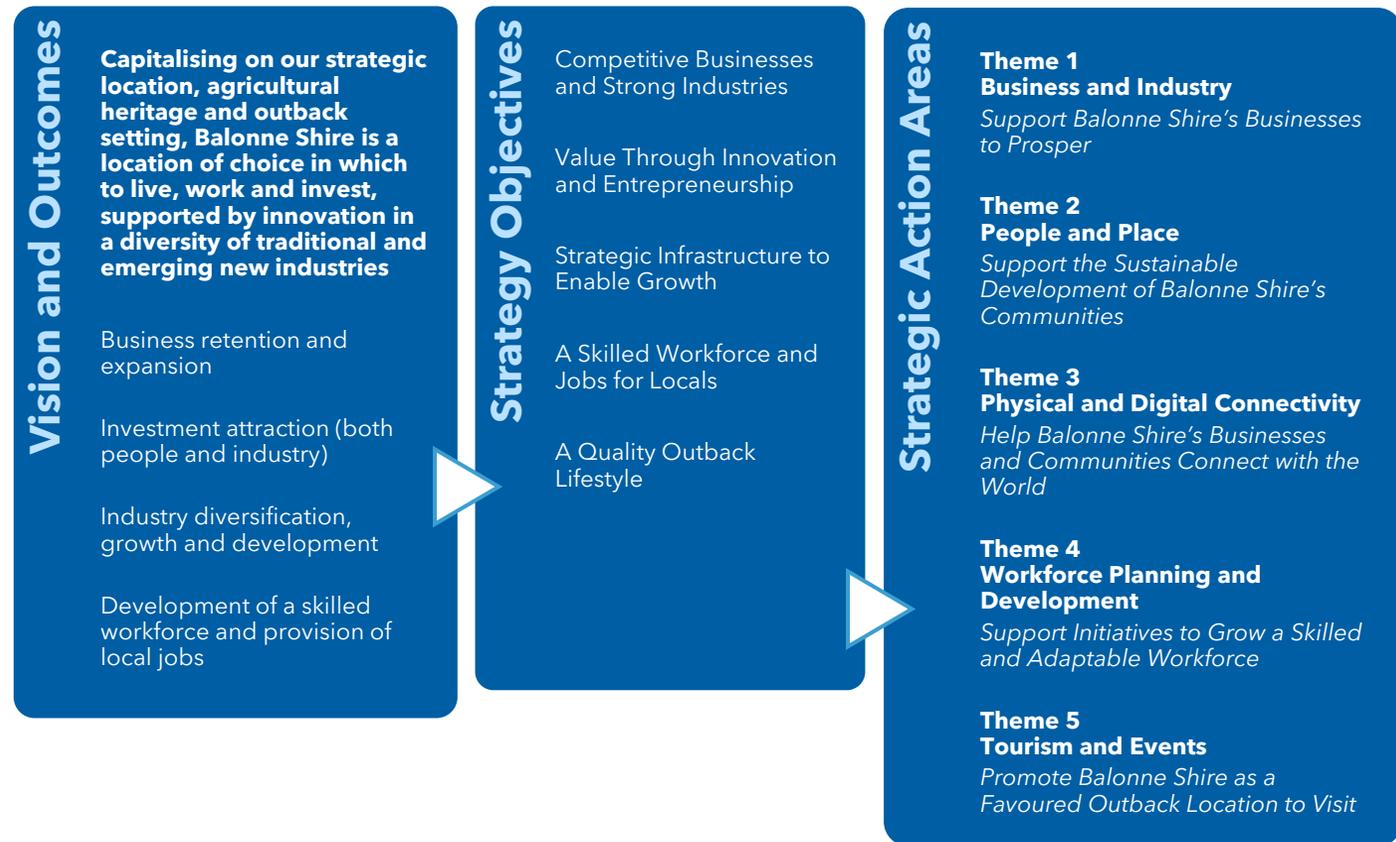
The *Balonne Shire Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027* contains over 50 individual actions across five themed Action Areas.

Informed by the vision and desired outcomes, the initiatives are designed to support a prosperous economy, with a focus on **Business and Industry**; **People and Place**; **Physical and Digital Connectivity**; **Workforce Planning and Development**; and **Tourism and Events**.

Each action is categorised according to whether it is focussed on:

- **Planning** a course of initiatives in an informed and strategic fashion to help realise desired economic development outcomes.
- **Enabling** economic activity through land use planning, infrastructure and service provision, either directly or indirectly through pro-active engagement with key infrastructure and service providers.
- **Supporting** economic development through engagement with local business and industry and other key agents of change including government agencies, other Councils, tourism bodies and economic development organisations.
- **Promoting and Advocating** prosperity through marketing, promotion and investment attraction and by providing a representative voice on strategic priorities in the collective interests of Balonne Shire's businesses and its individual townships.

For each action, implementation partners are identified and desired outcomes are highlighted. Each action is also assigned a **level of priority / timing** according to whether it is a high (short-term) measure (1-2 years), a medium-term initiative (2-3 years) or a longer-term initiative (4+ years).



# Theme 1: Business and Industry



# Theme 1: Business and Industry

## Support Balonne Shire's Businesses to Prosper

Action		Council's Role	Partners	Timing	Objectives Addressed
1.1	Collaborate with Agrifood Connect to establish a Balonne Shire ag-tech business innovation 'node' linked to the AgTech and Logistics Hub in Toowoomba.	Plan; Enable; Support	Agrifood Connect; TSBE; DAF; MLA	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> <li>Value through Innovation and Entrepreneurship</li> </ul>
1.2	Re-launch the <i>Balonne Focus on Food and Fibre</i> conference to address industry support needs around supply chains and markets, workforce development, compliance and provenance.	Plan; Support	Growcom; DAF; MLA	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Value through Innovation and Entrepreneurship</li> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
1.3	Continue to collaborate with TSBE, Toowoomba Wellcamp Airport and Trade and Investment Queensland on current and emerging export opportunities for horticulture.	Plan; Support	TSBE; Toowoomba Wellcamp Airport; TIQ	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
1.4	Regularly review and update the <i>Boundless Opportunities</i> investment attraction material including information on new and emerging industry investment opportunities.	Promote & Advocate	SWQROC; TIQ	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
1.5	Maintain and disseminate information on concessional financial support and disaster relief services offered to farmers through the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority.	Support	QRIDA	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
1.6	Work with Growcom's Resilience Officer to promote opportunities for Balonne Shire's horticulturalists to build their business resilience through the Farm Business Resilience Program.	Support	Growcom	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
1.7	Continue to apply for additional grant funding for pest animal control in key areas and for exclusion fencing to support continued growth of the Shire's livestock industries.	Enable	State and Federal Governments; landowners	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
1.8	Continue to deliver to Balonne Shire's businesses, the latest information on cost-effective business training, advisory and support services such as ecoBiz and others.	Support	CUC Balonne; CCIQ; State and Federal Governments	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
1.9	Support Balonne Shire's retail sector through continued investment in place improvements, offering façade improvement and other incentives such as the energy efficiency program.	Support; Enable	Business chambers and progress associations	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
1.10	Identify strategic commercial/industrial land areas (precincts) for consideration and inclusion in Council's Planning Scheme.	Plan; Enable	DSDILGP	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
1.11	Facilitate access to support programs tailored to Indigenous business opportunities (e.g. bush foods, nutraceuticals, art and culture) including grants, events, mentoring and networking.	Support	State and Federal Governments	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
1.12	Engage with local producers to develop a strategic approach to agricultural industry supply chain opportunities presented by the 2032 Olympic Games.	Plan	TIQ; TSBE; Growcom, SWQROC; WQAC; DAF	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
1.13	Progress the business case for a small livestock processing facility in Balonne Shire.	Plan	Private sector; DAF; MLA; DSDILGP	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Value through Innovation and Entrepreneurship</li> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
1.14	Continue to investigate circular economy and renewable energy industry investment opportunities in Balonne Shire, including hydrogen charging hubs, microgrids and mobile hydro.	Plan; Enable	Private sector; State and Federal Governments	Long	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Value through Innovation and Entrepreneurship</li> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>

## Theme 2: People and Place



# Theme 2: People and Place

## Support the Sustainable Development of Balonne Shire's Communities

Action		Council's Role	Partners	Timing	Objectives Addressed
2.1	Prepare a business case for the establishment of a 'regional health service hub' which enhances existing medical training facilities in St George to deliver enhanced services throughout the Shire.	Plan	South West Hospital and Health Service (SWHHS); SWQROC	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Skilled Workforce and Jobs for Locals</li> <li>A Quality Outback Lifestyle</li> </ul>
2.2	Design a campaign promoting Balonne Shire's rural centre lifestyle to prospective skilled health care professionals (and their families), especially doctors, through a <i>Balonne Now Hiring</i> program.	Plan; Promote & Advocate	SWHHS; General Practice; ACCHO; SWQROC	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Skilled Workforce and Jobs for Locals</li> <li>A Quality Outback Lifestyle</li> </ul>
2.3	Engage with Goondir Health Services to promote the diversity of community support services offered through the Community Wellbeing Centre in St George.	Support	Goondir Health Services	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Quality Outback Lifestyle</li> <li>A Skilled Workforce and Jobs for Locals</li> </ul>
2.4	Prioritise and seek funding support for selected initiatives outlined in the Dirranbandi Rail and River Precinct Master Plan, to advance the planning and implementation process.	Plan	State and Federal Governments	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Quality Outback Lifestyle</li> </ul>
2.5	Establish a Balonne Shire Community Foundation to invest in and leverage additional funding for community and social impact initiatives.	Plan; Support; Enable	Public and private sector partners	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Quality Outback Lifestyle</li> </ul>
2.6	Work with communities to facilitate sustainable town centre planning, local infrastructure planning and delivery and place activation strategies, including short-term project opportunities as the catalyst for grant funding applications.	Plan; Support	Community groups and progress associations	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> <li>A Quality Outback Lifestyle</li> </ul>
2.7	Implement the priority actions of the <i>Balonne Shire Local Housing Action Plan 2021-2025</i> to respond to the Shire's housing needs.	Plan	WQAC; State Government	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> <li>A Quality Outback Lifestyle</li> </ul>
2.8	Investigate Council-owned land and vacant buildings suitable for disposition as housing and essential services (e.g. police and emergency services).	Plan; Enable	State and Federal Govt. Departments	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> <li>A Quality Outback Lifestyle</li> </ul>
2.9	Promote and facilitate access to the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation's (NHFIC) Regional First Home Buyer Guarantee (RFHBG), which is designed to support eligible regional first home buyers to purchase a home in a regional area.	Promote and Advocate	NHFIC	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> <li>A Quality Outback Lifestyle</li> </ul>
2.10	Target Federal Government support for infrastructure to enable housing development in Balonne Shire to get more land 'development ready'.	Promote & Advocate	Federal Government	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> <li>A Quality Outback Lifestyle</li> </ul>
2.11	Curate a <i>Welcome to Balonne Shire</i> information pack and utilise Council's web site and social media channels to deliver essential information to new residents and businesses.	Enable; Support	Community groups, business chambers and progress associations	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Quality Outback Lifestyle</li> </ul>
2.12	Undertake a childcare needs, opportunities and site options analysis in Balonne Shire and use this information to inform calls for expressions of interest from childcare providers	Plan; Enable	State Government	Long	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> <li>A Quality Outback Lifestyle</li> </ul>

## Theme 3: Physical and Digital Connectivity



# Theme 3: Physical and Digital Connectivity

## Help Balonne Shire's Businesses and Communities Connect with the World

Action	Council's Role	Partners	Timing	Objectives Addressed	
3.1	Working with NBN Co. design and run digital capability awareness sessions for businesses and communities, to ensure existing digital connectivity capabilities and solutions that are currently available throughout Balonne Shire are fully understood and utilised.	Promote and Advocate	Business chambers, progress associations and community groups; NBN Co.	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> </ul>
3.2	Engage with NBN Co. and private telecommunications service providers (e.g. Starlink, Field Solutions Group, others) to identify alternative low-cost digital connectivity solutions and advocate for region-wide digital infrastructure funding support.	Plan; Promote and Advocate	RDA DDSW; SWQROC	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> </ul>
3.3	To complement initiatives to secure Shire-wide low-cost digital connectivity solutions, support communities in securing access to Wi-Fi through grant funding applications.	Plan; Enable	NBN Co.	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> </ul>
3.4	Investigate and prioritise mobile phone blackspots and lobby for improvements.	Promote and Advocate	RDA DDSW; SWQROC	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> </ul>
3.5	Investigate and prioritise State road infrastructure shortfalls and lobby for improvements.	Plan; Promote and Advocate	SWQROC; WQAC; State Government	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> </ul>
3.6	Continue to plan and advocate for key infrastructure projects that will enhance the capacity of the South Western Railway Line.	Plan; Promote and Advocate	TSBE; RDA DDSW; SWQROC; WQAC	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> </ul>
3.7	Continue to provide support for the development of the Brisbane-Melbourne Inland Rail Link.	Promote and Advocate	ARTC; TSBE; RDA DDSW; SWQROC; WQAC	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> </ul>
3.8	Seek funding to prepare a Thallon town centre concept plan including a business case (cost-benefit analysis) for a flood protected business and industry park (industrial land) in Thallon.	Plan; Enable	DSDILGP; RDA DDSW; Thallon Progress Association	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
3.9	Explore agribusiness, logistics and food processing opportunities for Mungindi and Hebel by leveraging the Moree Special Activation Precinct industry hub.	Plan	BROC; Moree Plains Shire Council; State Governments	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
3.10	Building on the St George Aerodrome Masterplan, progress the business case for an industrial precinct at the Aerodrome, with a focus on opportunities for freight transport and for new industries and technologies such as unmanned aerial vehicles (drones).	Plan	State Government	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
3.11	Explore co-funding opportunities under Queensland's Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Infrastructure Scheme, to improve the commercial viability of EV charging stations and to add more public EV fast chargers to the region's charging network.	Plan; Promote and Advocate	QRIDA; RDA DDSW; SWQROC; WQAC	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> </ul>
3.12	Continue to investigate options for the delivery of more reliable, secure and cost-effective energy for Balonne Shire's businesses, other organisations and communities.	Plan	Energy providers	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> </ul>

## Theme 4: Workforce Planning and Development

# Theme 4: Workforce Planning and Development

## Support Initiatives to Grow a Skilled and Adaptable Workforce

Action		Council's Role	Partners	Timing	Objectives Addressed
4.1	Continue to pursue Balonne Shire's multicultural worker attraction strategy. Engage with RDA Darling Downs and South West to explore opportunities to address local skills gaps and build workforce capacity through a Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA).	Plan	RDA DDSW	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Skilled Workforce and Jobs for Locals</li> </ul>
4.2	Engage with Balonne Shire Council staff to pilot the numeracy, literacy and language program in collaboration with Country Universities Centre Balonne.	Enable	CUC Balonne	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Skilled Workforce and Jobs for Locals</li> </ul>
4.3	Building on the success of the 2022 Careers Expo, collaborate with CUC Balonne, St George State High School and St George Hospital to run another event in 2023. Invite other key stakeholders to participate in the 2023 Career Expo's planning and delivery.	Plan; Support	CUC Balonne; St George Hospital; St George State High School	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Skilled Workforce and Jobs for Locals</li> </ul>
4.4	Identify and prioritise projects (such as construction or upgrades to community or recreational facilities) which qualify for the Skilling Queenslanders for Work (SQW) Program, to develop local work-readiness skills for the communities' youth and unemployed.	Plan; Support	DESBT	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Skilled Workforce and Jobs for Locals</li> </ul>
4.5	In consultation with registered training organisations (RTOs) and employers, engage with the Department of Education to advocate for more favourable loadings to deliver apprenticeship training to address priority skills needs throughout Balonne Shire.	Promote and Advocate	RTOs; Department of Education	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Skilled Workforce and Jobs for Locals</li> </ul>
4.6	Promote the Eastern Australia Regional University Centre Partnership in the development of university programs designed by the Balonne Shire community for the community.	Promote and Advocate	CUC Balonne; Universities	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Skilled Workforce and Jobs for Locals</li> </ul>
4.7	Design and implement a <i>Grow Your Own in Balonne Shire</i> employment program, to match local trainees, apprentices and graduates with the needs of local businesses.	Support	DESBT	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Skilled Workforce and Jobs for Locals</li> </ul>
4.8	Engage with registered training organisations (RTOs) and large corporates with a presence in Balonne Shire to identify strategies (including lobbying / advocacy efforts) for addressing local worker attraction and retention and workforce training needs.	Promote and Advocate	RTOs; businesses	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Skilled Workforce and Jobs for Locals</li> </ul>
4.9	Through the proposed Balonne Ag-Tech Business Innovation Node, research and design a program to upskill agricultural workers in the use of robotics technology to deliver greater output / yield with the same workforce.	Plan; Support	Agrifood Connect; TSBE; DAF	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Skilled Workforce and Jobs for Locals</li> <li>Value through Innovation and Entrepreneurship</li> </ul>
4.10	Continue to explore the concept of a rural training centre in Balonne Shire with involvement from local producers, to provide the region's youth with opportunities for learning and on-the-job training which leads into sustainable career pathways.	Plan; Enable	CUC Balonne; Department of Education	Long	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Skilled Workforce and Jobs for Locals</li> </ul>

# Theme 5: Tourism and Events



# Theme 5: Tourism and Events

## Promote Balonne Shire as a Favoured Outback Location to Visit

Action		Council's Role	Partners	Timing	Objectives Addressed
5.1	Progress implementation of the <i>Balonne Shire Tourism and Events Strategy 2025</i> , reviewing and prioritising strategic initiatives annually.	Plan	Outback Queensland Tourism Association (OQTA); Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ)	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
5.2	Prepare a town entry enhancement and interpretive signage strategy (with an emphasis on technology-enabled 'smart' signage) to elevate the presentation of Balonne Shire's towns as welcoming visitor destinations.	Plan	OQTA; TEQ	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> </ul>
5.3	Investigate visitor rest stop site options and prioritise investment in suitable locations for facilities (including dump points and EV charging stations) to service drive tourists.	Plan	State Government; TEQ	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> </ul>
5.4	Working in collaboration with CUC Balonne, investigate program options for co-sponsored delivery of customer service training for Balonne Shire's tourism operators.	Plan; Enable	CUC Balonne; Business chambers and progress associations	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Skilled Workforce and Jobs for Locals</li> </ul>
5.5	Encourage tourism operators to be part of the <i>Best of Queensland Experiences Program</i> (BOQEP), that guides industry operators to deliver exceptional transformational experiences.	Support; Enable	OQTA; TEQ	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
5.6	Work with Outback Queensland Tourism and neighbouring Councils to encourage a coordinated approach to the planning, promotion and delivery of major / iconic events, including marketing and coordination of events calendars.	Plan	OQTA; SWQROC	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
5.7	Develop a strategic and coordinated approach to events planning, promotion and delivery which leverages opportunities presented by the 2032 Olympic Games.	Plan	OQTA; TEQ; SWQROC; State Government	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
5.8	Invest in a strategic plan to activate the Balonne River in St George, exploring opportunities for a diversity of complementary activities, including (physical and virtual) historic tours; river tours; houseboats; pontoons; events spaces; water sports; and food and beverage based riverside activities.	Plan	OQTA; TEQ	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
5.9	Undertake an opportunities analysis for iconic, 'game-changer' catalyst tourism project opportunities and prioritise projects for business case investigations.	Plan	OQTA; TEQ; State Government	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>
5.10	Engage with airlines and tourism industry operators to explore opportunities and options for more regular flights and tour packages to St George Airport.	Promote and Advocate	OQTA; TEQ; Airlines	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Infrastructure to Enable Growth</li> </ul>
5.11	In collaboration with Traditional Owners, explore and encourage new opportunities for Indigenous cultural tourism throughout Balonne Shire.	Support	Traditional Owners; OQTA; TEQ	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competitive Businesses and Strong Industries</li> </ul>



# 10. Strategy Implementation and Resourcing

## A Practical and Achievable Plan of Action

The *Balonne Shire Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027* has been prepared in the context of the role of economic development promotion and facilitation in Council's broader program of work and strategic objectives. The strategy will be implemented in line with determined priorities as well as the availability of resources and the capacity of Council, in partnership with others, to progress the initiatives identified.

The initiatives presented in this document represent an achievable plan of action to help support the development of a diverse, resilient, sustainable and prosperous economy. It contains a combination of:

- **Catalyst project planning and development initiatives** which require action combined with a well-planned course of project implementation for the desired outcomes to be realised over time; and
- Initiatives focussed on **strategic program implementation** that can be addressed as part of Balonne Shire Council's day-to-day economic development planning, promotion, business support and advocacy functions in a strategic and targeted manner.

Some of the recommended actions seek to build on or continue initiatives already in place. Some are already resourced while others require additional resourcing (depending on implementation priorities).

The majority of actions will be 'Balonne Shire Council-led' in that they involve specific tasks and an allocation of human, physical and financial resources. Other initiatives refer to 'Council-supported' activities and these are advocacy or support initiatives where implementation relies a partnership approach.

The contents of this strategy will be used to assess and prioritise funding needs and to inform key advocacy and partnership initiatives to secure funding support from all levels of government.



# 11. Strategy Targets, Monitoring and Evaluation

## Measuring and Monitoring Strategy Outcomes

This strategy contains a range of initiatives, which are designed to support economic development in Balonne Shire through:

- The delivery of strategic infrastructure to enable economic development;
- Initiatives which encourage local business retention, growth and development;
- Measures to attract investment to the Shire; and
- The development of a skilled and adaptable workforce, with employment opportunities for Balonne Shire's resident workers.

Balonne Shire Council will monitor the strategy's implementation progress with a view to realising these desired outcomes in line with the vision for the Shire as a location of choice in which to live, work and invest, supported by innovation in a diversity of traditional and emerging new industries.

Means of monitoring and evaluating implementation progress will include the use of both **'output' measures** related directly to the recommended actions and their implementation as well as some broader **'outcome' targets (metrics)**.

The *Balonne Shire Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027* will be reviewed annually with an update anticipated in four years.

## Key Performance Measures

Strategic planning **outcome targets** include the following:

- A sustainable population (as measured by population and housing growth rates).
- Employment creation (an increase in local jobs).
- An increase in employment self-sufficiency (a balanced ratio of local jobs to (for) resident workers).
- New businesses (as measured by net change in local business registrations).
- Construction activity (as measured by building approvals data).
- Greater economic diversity (as measured by industry diversity indices).
- Economic activity and growth (as measured by trends in gross regional product (GRP)).
- Increased tourism activity (and value) (as measured by visitor numbers, expenditure and yield/value).

These desired outcomes will be monitored and measured using data sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Queensland Government Statistician's Office, Balonne Shire Council's subscription to the economy.id database and Tourism Research Australia.

Economic Development Strategy **output measures** that will be used to monitor progress on set tasks include:

- Tracking progress of prioritised actions - implementation rates (ongoing).
- Local business and investor feedback captured through targeted engagement and discussion (ongoing).
- Success in retaining and assisting local businesses (including home-based businesses) as well as supporting business start-ups, captured through targeted business and industry engagement (ongoing).
- Regular business confidence and community satisfaction surveys on Balonne Shire Council's approach to promoting and supporting economic development in line with this strategy and identified priorities.



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