

Outback Prosperity 2021

Longreach Region Economic Development Strategy

Building the Foundations for a Prosperous Future

July 2016



SC Lennon & Associates

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Outback Prosperity 2021: Longreach Region Economic Development Strategy
has been prepared on behalf of Longreach Regional Council



It has been prepared by:



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A Message from the Mayor



I take pleasure in commending the Longreach Region Economic Development Strategy to you.

The Strategy appropriately entitled “Outback Prosperity 2021”, has been six months in the making and has received input from community and business participants by way of workshops and visitations conducted by Sasha Lennon and Roger Gibbins of SC Lennon and Associates Pty Ltd.

Council is committed to playing its part in the economic stability and growth of the region. As we address the actions recommended in the Strategy, we will look for stakeholders and participants to assist with driving the anticipated outcomes and ensuring that the document progresses and is reported on.

The three main themes highlighted and which emerged from the workshops undertaken to help inform the Strategy are:

1. Facilitate Farming Resurgence and Build Resilience in Agriculture
2. Develop and Promote the Longreach Region’s Tourism Offer.
3. Establish Longreach as a Region of Choice for Investment, Learning and Outback Living.

I ask that you embrace the Longreach Region Economic Development Strategy and that TOGETHER we explore every action and suggestion listed.

Thank you to those members from the community who participated in achieving the Strategy. Your contribution is valued.

Sincerely,

Councillor Ed Warren
Mayor

Executive Summary

Building the Foundations for a Prosperous Future

The three pillars of the Longreach regional economy are sheep, cattle and tourism. Other industries, like retail and construction, or key service sectors like health and education, rely on these pillars for their own sustainability and growth.

Driven by the impacts of the drought, the Longreach Region is faced with a number of pressing challenges. There is strong support for facilitating the resurgence of the more labour-intensive sheep industry. However, it is recognised that beyond the drought, the industry cannot be revived without dealing with the problem of wild dogs, pigs and foxes.

Perhaps the most pressing issue affecting the communities and the economy of the Longreach Region is critical water security issues. The reliable supply of quality water underpins the region's prosperity and without this matter being resolved, any prospect of a recovery, let alone future prosperity, will be compromised.

Despite many current challenges, the Longreach Region can position itself for a bright future, enabled by a dynamic community that has demonstrated an ability to capitalise on opportunities when they are presented. Efforts to develop regional economies are most successful when they focus on building on comparative advantage. Hence, agriculture and tourism, as pillars of the regional economy, are areas of focus in this Economic Development Strategy.

Outback Prosperity 2021

Outback Prosperity 2021: Longreach Region Economic Development Strategy provides the framework and directions for economic development within the Longreach local government area. The focus is on actions that can be achieved over the next 5 years.

The Strategy addresses the range of issues, challenges and opportunities for sustainable economic development in the region that have been determined through an extensive process of targeted research, consultation, engagement and analysis.

Outback Prosperity 2021 will be led by Longreach Regional Council in partnership with the Queensland Government, Commonwealth Government, regional development bodies such as the Central Western Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD), business and industry and other supporting partners across the region.

Leveraging collaborative partnerships, *Outback Prosperity 2021* focuses on the 'enablers' of economic development. By identifying and articulating the enablers and attributes which support the region's economic development – critical infrastructure, community services and facilities, local and regional planning frameworks and partnerships - Longreach Regional Council, through the Economic Development Strategy, can influence the potential of the region and its appeal as a place to visit, to invest in and in which to work and live. This ideal is encapsulated the Longreach Region Economic Development Vision.

A Vision of Economic Prosperity

Outback Prosperity 2021 articulates a vision for economic development which responds to the Longreach Region's comparative and competitive advantages and the issues, challenges and opportunities that need to be addressed over the course of the next five years. The vision encapsulates the region's desired economic future and reads as follows:

“Capitalising on its strategic setting in Central West Queensland, the Longreach Region will be a location of choice for business investment and outback living, characterised by a vibrant economy that is driven by innovation in a diversity of traditional and emerging industries.”

The vision is supported by Council's commitment to sustainable growth as encapsulated in its economic development charter.

Council's Economic Development Charter

The economic development charter represents Longreach Regional Council's commitment to promoting and facilitating the region's economic development. It is defined by a set of principles which guide the preparation and implementation of the economic development action plan contained in this strategy.

In essence, Longreach Regional Council:

1. Prioritises initiatives and activities that support the growth and development of its **traditional 'driver' industries in agriculture and tourism**, with an emphasis on new opportunities in value-added economic activities which target existing, new and emerging markets.
2. Promotes a **partnership approach to tourism development**, working in collaboration with other tiers of government and the industry to enhance regional branding, marketing, product development, visitor servicing and support infrastructure.
3. Prioritises activities that support **local industry diversification and the growth of 'knowledge-based' industries** in, for example, health care and education, 'new generation' industries such as alternative energy production and scientific, technical and professional services.
4. Pro-actively **promotes the region to prospective investors**, using a strategic, informed and targeted approach consistent with the long-term vision for the region's economic development.
5. Focuses its energies and resources on activities where there are likely to be **positive and measurable outcomes** for the community and long-term strategic economic benefits.

Guided by its economic development charter and the vision, *Outback Prosperity 2021* provides the framework and directions for the region's economic development, with the focus being on 20 individual actions across three strategic activity areas that can be achieved over the next five years.

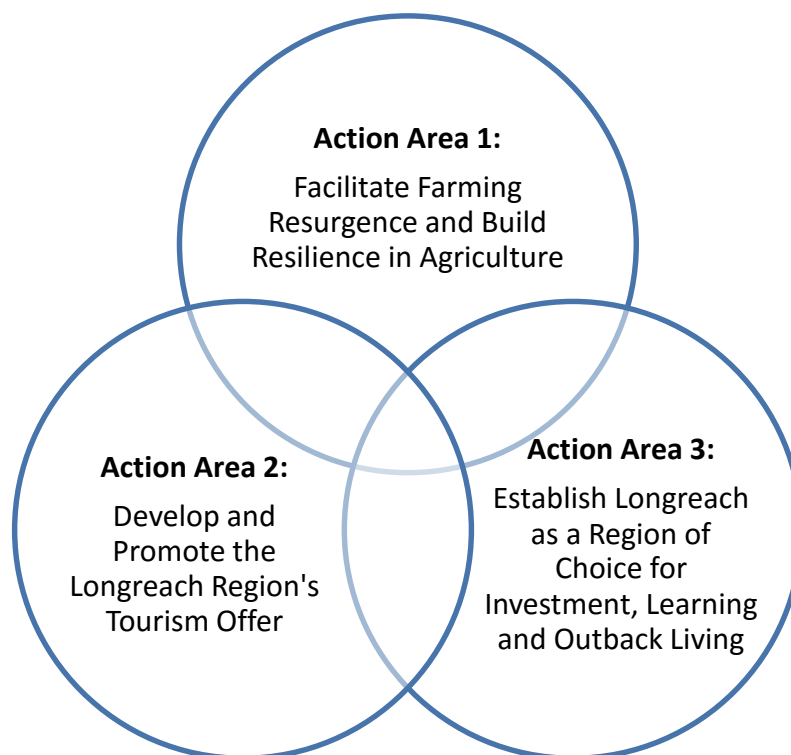
Strategy Themes and Actions

Providing the foundations for growth, *Outback Prosperity 2021* provides a 'blueprint' for enhancing economic vibrancy, sustainability and liveability in the Longreach Region. It sets out the three 'Action Areas' for economic development.

The Action Areas, which have been informed by the extensive research, consultation and analysis undertaken to prepare this strategy, are:

1. Facilitate Farming Resurgence and Build Resilience in Agriculture;
2. Develop and Promote the Longreach Region's Tourism Offer; and
3. Establish Longreach as a Region of Choice for Investment, Learning and Outback Living.

Economic Development Strategy Themes



For each of these action areas there is a discussion of:

- The '**Desired Regional Outcome**' – a statement of a more desirable future based on the comparable and competitive strengths of the Longreach Region; and
- '**Key Actions**' identifying potential tasks that can be carried out to move towards the desired regional outcome.

In summary, the actions are:

Facilitate Farming Resurgence and Build Resilience in Agriculture

Desired Regional Outcome

A more desirable future based on the comparable and competitive strengths of the Longreach Region will see an agricultural industry in recovery and growing steadily, in traditional sectors like sheep and cattle as well as in a diversity of new agricultural activities including game and other meat farming and horticulture.

Key Actions

- Action 1.1: Convene an Inaugural Longreach Region Water Security Summit
- Action 1.2: Facilitate Access to State and Federal Government Drought Relief Assistance
- Action 1.3: Review Council's Funding Commitment to Eradication of Predators on Stock
- Action 1.4: Explore and Resolve Options for the Longreach Saleyards
- Action 1.5: Investigate Diversification into Game and Other Meat Farming

Develop and Promote the Longreach Region's Tourism Offer

Desired Regional Outcome

A more desirable future based on the comparable and competitive strengths of the Longreach Region will see a strong and growing regional tourism industry defined by a quality mix of iconic attractions and genuine outback experiences. The Longreach Region will offer a growing domestic and international visitor market with a true package of experiences that are unique to the region.

Key Actions

- Action 2.1: Operationalise the Outback Destination Tourism Plan
- Action 2.2: Collaborate and Co-ordinate Tourist Destination Management and Marketing
- Action 2.3: Prepare a Longreach Short-Term Accommodation Needs Analysis and Strategy
- Action 2.4: Explore Opportunities for an 'Eco-Lodge' Concept in the Longreach Region
- Action 2.5: Promote Excellence in Customer Service as a High Priority

Establish Longreach as a Region of Choice for Investment, Learning and Outback Living

Desired Regional Outcome

A more desirable future based on comparable and competitive strengths will see Longreach become widely known as a region of choice for individual entrepreneurs and small to medium-sized businesses seeking an outback lifestyle with access to a diversity of services and facilities. Longreach will be a centre of excellence in agribusiness education and training, attracting students from elsewhere in Australia and internationally. With national recognition, Longreach will be a region choice in which to work, live and invest.

Key Actions

- Action 3.1: Undertake a Survey of Regional Perceptions of Liveability and Develop a Liveability Improvements Capital Works Programme
- Action 3.2: Advocate for Housing Insulation and a 'Good Housing Design' Programme
- Action 3.3: Implement a Government Services Retention and Expansion Strategy
- Action 3.4: Facilitate Local Access to Business Information and Support Programs
- Action 3.5: Prepare a Longreach Digital Economy Strategy

- Action 3.6: Audit and Articulate the Region's Industrial Land Capabilities
- Action 3.7: Quantify and Articulate Opportunities for Renewable Energy Production
- Action 3.8: Initiate a Strategic Partnership with Universities
- Action 3.9: Prepare a Future Education Needs Assessment
- Action 3.10: Investigate Student Housing Initiatives including the Feasibility of Re-opening a Student Hostel and Establishing a Housing Co-operative

Priorities for Action – Informing a Year 1 Work Plan

Priority projects and activities for implementation as part of a Year 1 economic development work plan are identified based on the application of a broad set of assessment criteria – *benefit assessment* and *capacity to implement*. They are the activities that Longreach Regional Council will advance (in association with identified partners where relevant) as short-term priorities.

The Year 1 priorities for Longreach Regional Council, as the custodian of the Economic Development Strategy, are:

1. Convene Inaugural Longreach Region Water Security Summit;
2. Facilitate Access to State and Federal Government Drought Relief Assistance;
3. Review Funding Commitment to Eradication of Predators on Stock;
4. Explore and Resolve Options for the Longreach Saleyards;
5. Collaborate and Co-ordinate Tourist Destination Management and Marketing;
6. Prepare a Longreach Short-Term Accommodation Needs Analysis and Strategy;
7. Facilitate Local Access to Business Information and Support Programs;
8. Audit and Articulate the Region's Industrial Land Capabilities;
9. Initiate a Strategic Partnership with Universities; and
10. Undertake a Survey of Regional Perceptions of Liveability and Develop a Liveability Improvements Capital Works Programme.

In progressing these actions, cultivating collaborative partnerships for effective implementation will be key.

Moving Towards Implementation

Outback Prosperity 2021: Longreach Region Economic Development Strategy has been prepared in the context of the role of economic development in Longreach Regional Council's broader program of work and strategic objectives, and wider regional priorities. Led by its CEO, Council will monitor the progress of the Economic Development Strategy in order to achieve the actions set out.

Set performance measures have been established using a range of indicators, including both 'output' indicators and 'outcome' measures. Outcome measures refer to broad development outcomes at the regional level, such as industry output, business growth and jobs. Output measures on the other hand, include, for example, levels of business confidence, community satisfaction, numbers of investment enquiries, strategy/action milestones and project progress and completion.

The set performance measures will be reported annually within the performance monitoring on the implementation of the strategy. It is intended that *Outback Prosperity 2021* be reviewed annually with an update anticipated in three years.

1. Introduction

1.1 Economic Development Strategy Purpose and Objectives

Outback Prosperity 2021: Longreach Region Economic Development Strategy has been prepared on behalf of Longreach Regional Council to provide the framework and directions for economic development within the Longreach local government area, with the focus being on actions that can be achieved over the next 5 years.

Outback Prosperity 2021 recognises 'economic development' as the continuous process of growing the Longreach Region's level of income and capital (wealth) and distributing that wealth (through expenditure and jobs) to the community.



Economic development is measured in terms of income and employment, together with improvements in education, health, culture, community wellbeing, a sense of place and the environment. These are the elements of 'sustainable' economic development, a concept that looks beyond advances in industry output, gross regional product and employment. As fundamental as these more traditional economic growth measures are, 'economic development' requires long-term growth that is characterised by improvements in the Longreach Region's community, cultural and environmental attributes which are inextricably linked with prosperity.

1.2 A Collaborative Approach for Real Outcomes

Outback Prosperity 2021 recognises the role that business and industry plays as the driver of economic growth. The role of Longreach Regional Council - and other government agencies at both the State and Federal levels - is to provide an 'enabling environment' for economic development and a prosperous region.

Longreach Regional Council is the custodian or 'keeper' of this economic development strategy. This reflects the important role Council plays in the economy and the community because of its daily engagement with local businesses and residents and its links to other agencies, service providers and tiers of government.

Council does not 'own' the strategy but rather takes responsibility for its preparation and delivery in its role as a co-ordinator and facilitator. Hence, business and industry, other government agencies and service providers all have an equally important role to play in developing and implementing the strategy.

The Longreach Region Economic Development Strategy identifies specific activities for which Council can take the lead and for others to potentially have a key role in. No matter how strong its commitment to a prosperous community, Longreach Regional Council cannot be all things to all people. A successful economic development strategy requires commitment from other stakeholders in government and industry, including Federal Government agencies, State Government agencies and other contributors to economic development such as local industry associations.

In developing this strategy, Council's partners in economic development promotion and facilitation - such as Regional Development Australia Fitzroy and Central West Inc., the Queensland Department of State Development, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, the Department Aboriginal Affairs and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Outback Queensland Tourism, the Central Western Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD) and others - have re-affirmed their continuing commitment to economic

development and community wellbeing and their desire to work with Council in supporting the economic development of the Longreach Region.

Moving forward together, through co-ordinated and collaborative strategic effort, Council and these other 'agents of change' influence the 'enablers' of economic development. These are the things that Longreach Regional Council can have a direct or indirect impact on in order to help stimulate, attract and maintain business activity, investment and employment in the Longreach Region. They include:

- Physical infrastructure such as local transport, communications, water and power;
- Appropriately zoned and protected agricultural, urban and industrial land;
- The urban form and function of the region's towns and settlements including Ilfracombe, Isisford, Longreach and Yaraka;
- Local community services and facilities;
- Lifestyle attributes, such as quality parks and recreational facilities;
- Education infrastructure and workforce skills; and
- A governance framework that is supportive of business innovation, investment and industry growth.

By identifying and articulating the region's enablers and attributes which support economic development, Longreach Regional Council can effectively promote the potential of Longreach and its appeal as a place in which to invest, work and live. This ideal of a collaborative approach which focuses on the enablers of economic development is encapsulated in Longreach Regional Council's economic development vision.

1.3 The Economic Development Vision

With input from the community, the Longreach Region Economic Development Strategy articulates a vision for economic development. The vision responds to the Longreach Region's comparative and competitive advantages and the issues, challenges and opportunities facing the communities of the Longreach Region that need to be addressed over the course of the next five years.

The Longreach Region economic development vision statement, which encapsulates the region's desired economic future, is presented as follows:

Longreach Region Economic Development Vision
Outback Prosperity 2021

Capitalising on its strategic setting in Central West Queensland, the Longreach Region will be a location of choice for business investment and outback living, characterised by a vibrant economy that is driven by innovation in a diversity of traditional and emerging industries.

The vision is supported by Council's commitment to sustainable growth as encapsulated in its economic development charter.

1.4 Longreach Regional Council's Economic Development Charter

The economic development charter represents Longreach Regional Council's commitment to promoting and facilitating the region's economic development. It is defined by a set of principles which guide the preparation and implementation of the economic development action plan contained in this Strategy.

The following guiding principles define the role and scope of Longreach Regional Council's involvement in economic development facilitation. In essence, Longreach Regional Council:



1. Prioritises initiatives and activities that support the growth and development of its **traditional 'driver' industries in agriculture and tourism**, with an emphasis on new opportunities in value-added economic activities which target existing, new and emerging markets.
2. Promotes a **partnership approach to tourism development**, working in collaboration with other tiers of government and the industry to enhance regional branding, marketing, product development, visitor servicing and support infrastructure.
3. Prioritises activities that support **local industry diversification and the growth of 'knowledge-based' industries** in, for example, health care and education, 'new generation' industries such as alternative energy production and scientific, technical and professional services.
4. Pro-actively **promotes the region to prospective investors**, using a strategic, informed and targeted approach consistent with the long-term vision for the region's economic development.
5. Focuses its energies and resources on activities where there are likely to be **positive and measurable outcomes** for the community and long-term strategic economic benefits.

Guided by its economic development charter and the action plan presented in this Strategy, Longreach Regional Council - taking a strategic, informed and targeted approach to economic development - will play its role in helping to influence the factors that facilitate the competitiveness and ultimate success of the region's businesses and industries across all sectors of the economy.

1.5 Longreach Regional Council's Economic Development Activities

Outback Prosperity 2021 reflects the activities that Longreach Regional Council is well placed to lead or contribute to in progressing the region's economic prosperity. Broadly speaking, these activities include:

1. The provision of **information and referral services**, providing information on the local economy and matters of interest to prospective investors such as industrial land supply, as well as assisting other agencies responsible for providing businesses with support and advice and facilitating the enquiries of prospective new businesses;
2. **Investment attraction**, where Council takes a concerted and pro-active role in strategically attracting new people and new businesses to the Longreach Region for the benefit of the wider community;

3. **Strategic planning**, where Council provides the enabling environment for economic development by investing in studies and projects to inform strategically directed business and industry development, by providing a streamlined development approval process and by providing a clear policy statement articulating Longreach Regional Council's development objectives; and
4. **Regional collaboration and advocacy** with other government, non-government and private sector partners in the interests of all communities of the Longreach Region including communities in Ilfracombe, Isisford, Longreach and Yaraka.

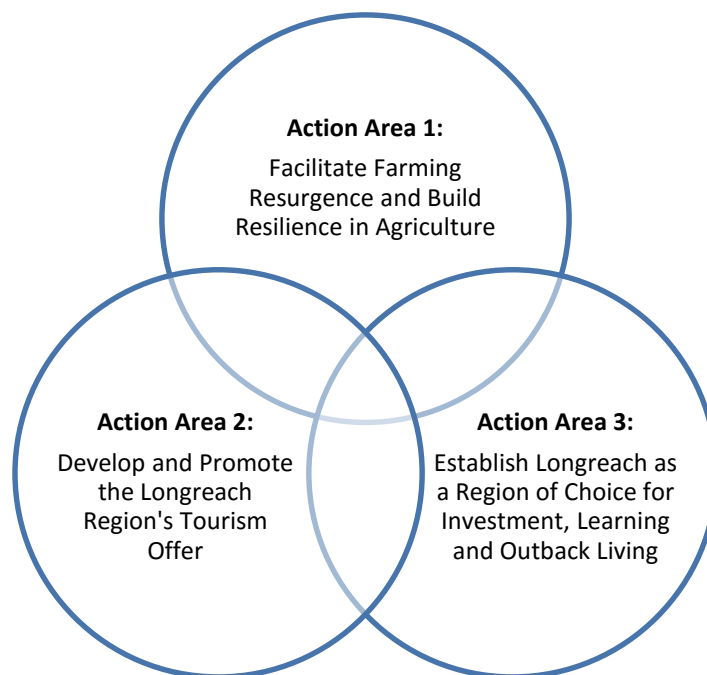
The promotion and facilitation of economic development is not the sole responsibility of Longreach Regional Council, which is the custodian of this Economic Development Strategy. All levels of government, as well as industry and community stakeholders also play a vital role in shaping the region's economic landscape.

It is the intention of this Strategy that collaboration between Council, other government agencies, businesses, non-government institutions and the community will guide the implementation of *Outback Prosperity 2021*, to achieve collaborative economic development outcomes for the Longreach Region now and into the future.

1.6 Economic Development Strategy Themes

Outback Prosperity 2021 will be led by Council in partnership with the Queensland Government, Commonwealth Government, regional development bodies such as the Central Western Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD), business and industry and other supporting partners across the region. A suite of 20 individual actions has been prepared and these are categorised under three strategic themes accordingly.

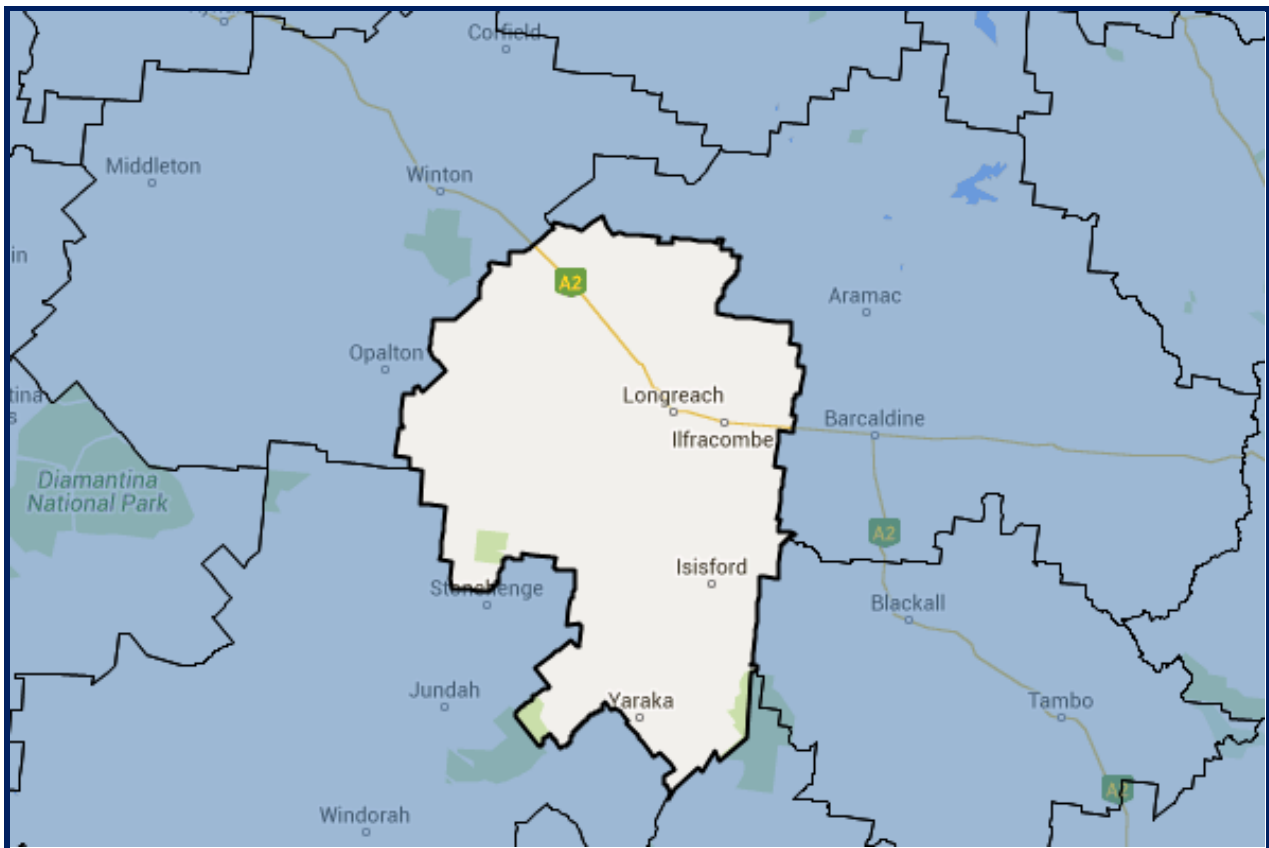
Figure 1. Economic Development Strategy Themes



2. The Longreach Regional Economy: A Brief Snapshot

According to the latest available estimates of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) the Longreach Region (as defined by the Longreach local government area) has a population of around 4,200. The Longreach township has a population around 3,000 and is the largest town in Queensland's sparsely populated far west region of approximately 12,500 people.

Figure 2. The Longreach Region

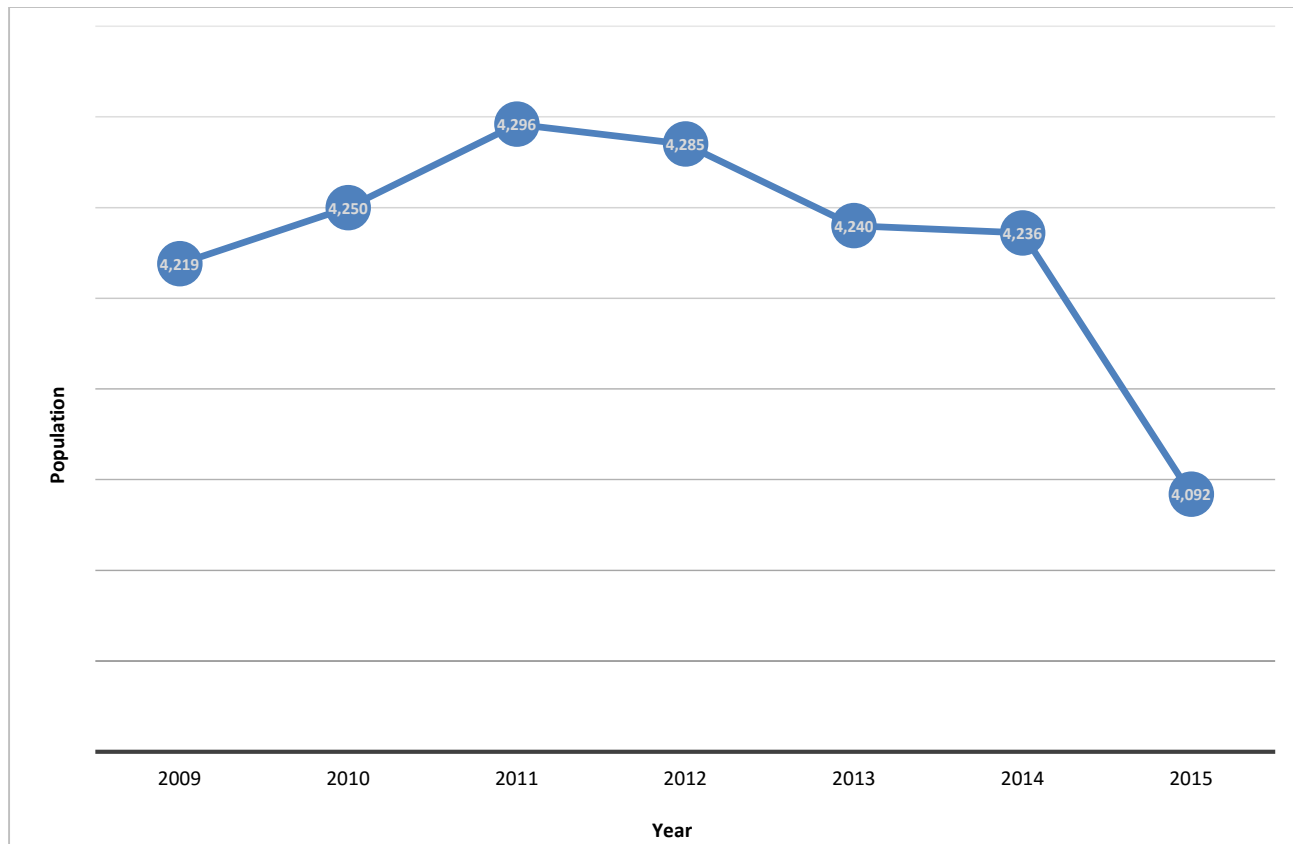


Source: REMPLAN using Google Maps, March 2016

Longreach is a major administrative and business hub for agriculture and tourism. It has a passenger and freight rail service to Rockhampton and Brisbane, as well as daily air services to Brisbane. There are also local airstrips at Isisford and Varaka.

As illustrated below, over the past seven years, the Longreach Region's population has been on a path of decline, falling from 4,219 in 2009 to 4,092 in 2015.

Figure 3. Population Trend, Longreach Region, 2009-2015



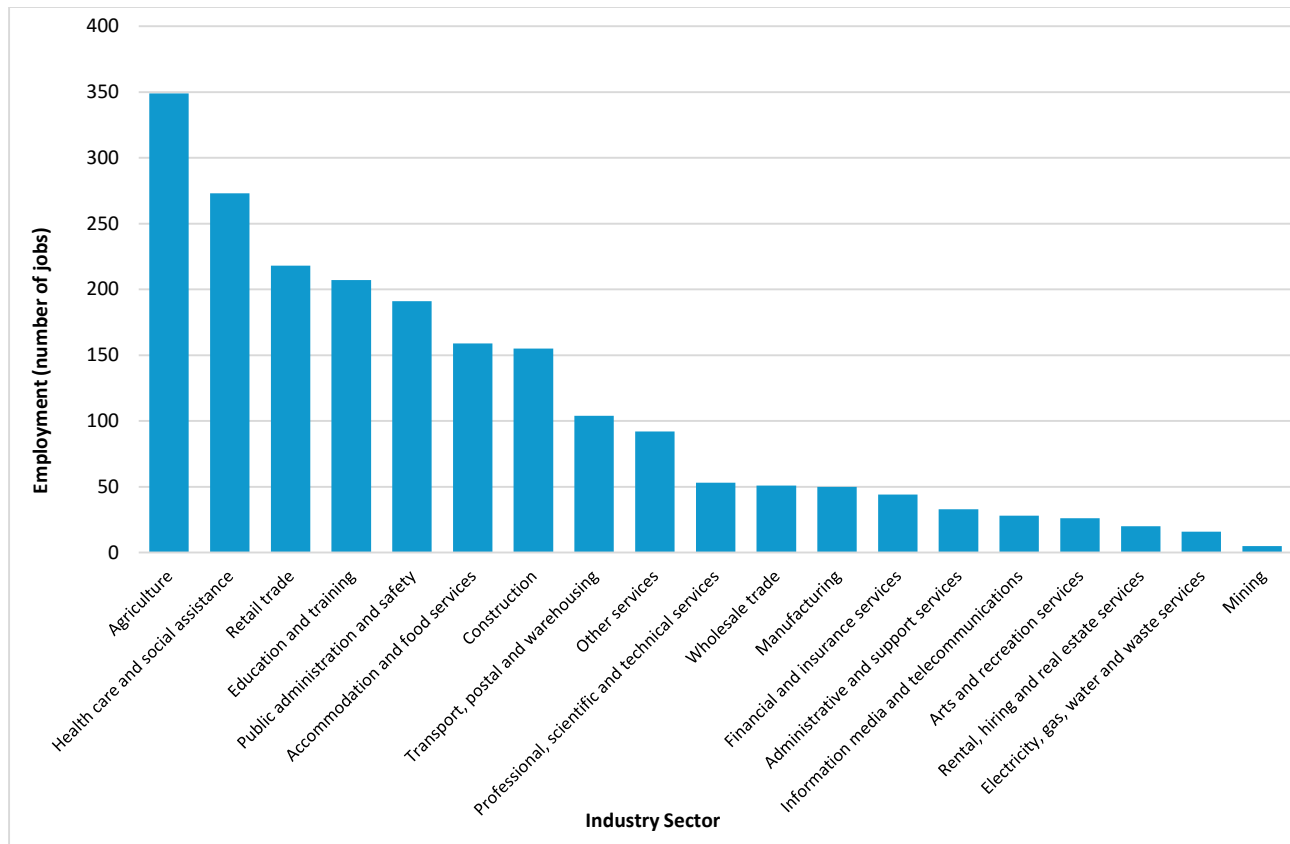
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics with interpretations by SC Lennon & Associates, 2016

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' latest count of Australian Businesses (June 2014), there are about 665 businesses in the Longreach Region, with the largest sector being the traditional economic mainstay of agriculture, which accounts for 45% of all business establishments in the Longreach local government area (LGA). Agriculture is also the largest industry of employment in the Longreach Region.

Figure 4 illustrates the Longreach Region's profile of employment by industry (that is, the number of employees whose place of work is located within the Longreach LGA).¹ The data is the latest available (March 2016) sourced from REMPLAN, which uses 2011 ABS Census Journey to Work data as a base and adjusts employment numbers to current estimates based on the latest (2012/13) national input-output tables and June 2014 Gross State Product data.

¹ The employment data presented in this report represents the number of people employed by businesses / organisations in each of the industry sectors in the Longreach Region (Longreach LGA). The employment data is place of work data and represents total numbers of employees without any conversions to full-time equivalence. Retail jobs for instance represent typical employment profiles for that sector, i.e. some full time, some part time and some casual.

Figure 4. Employment by Industry, Longreach Region, 2016



Source: REMPLAN, March 2016

As illustrated above, the major contributors to employment in the Longreach Region are the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing sector (17% of all jobs in the region), Health Care and Social Assistance (13%) and Retail Trade (11%). Other industry sectors that make notable contributions to the region's jobs stock include Education and Training, Public Administration and Safety and Accommodation and Food Services.

The significance of the Longreach Region's tourism sector is reflected in the size of the retail trade, arts and recreational services and accommodation and food services sectors, which combined account for more jobs in the Longreach LGA than agriculture.

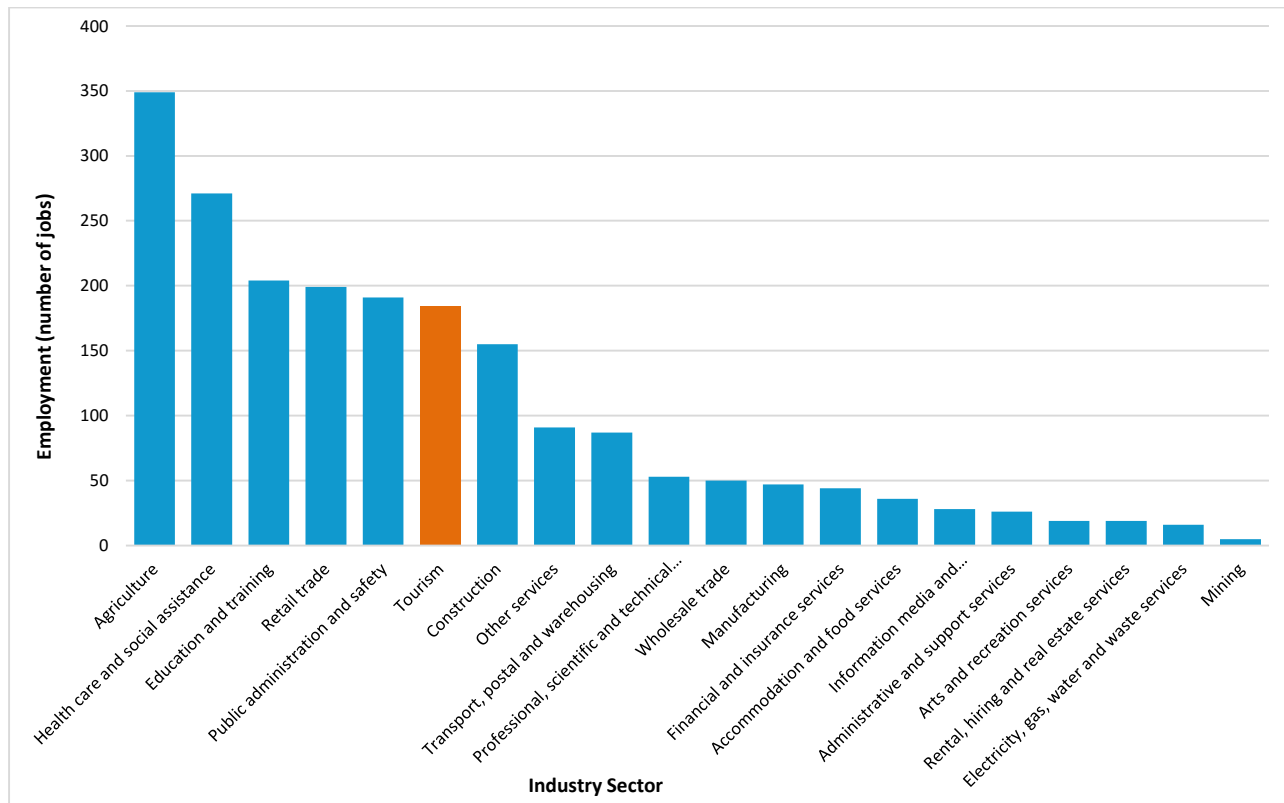
However, these industries collectively and in their entirety account for activity other than tourism. To better capture the true size and value of tourism, data has been sourced from REMPLAN to illustrate the tourism sector as a stand-alone industry.

The tourism industry is an amalgam of activities across various sectors including Retail Trade, Accommodation and Food Services, Arts and Recreational services and Transport. REMPLAN's Tourism Analysis Module estimates the total value of tourism for the local economy and incorporates a 'Tourism Sector' into the output and employment data.

As illustrated in Figure 5, the Longreach Region's tourism industry is one of the area's largest employers, accounting for 9 per cent of jobs located in the region. Employment numbers in this sector are comparable to the region's other service industries including Public Administration and Safety, Retail Trade and Education and Training. Only

the Health Care and Social Assistance sector and Agriculture employ notably more workers in the Longreach Region than Tourism.

Figure 5. Employment by Industry including 'Tourism', Longreach Region, 2016



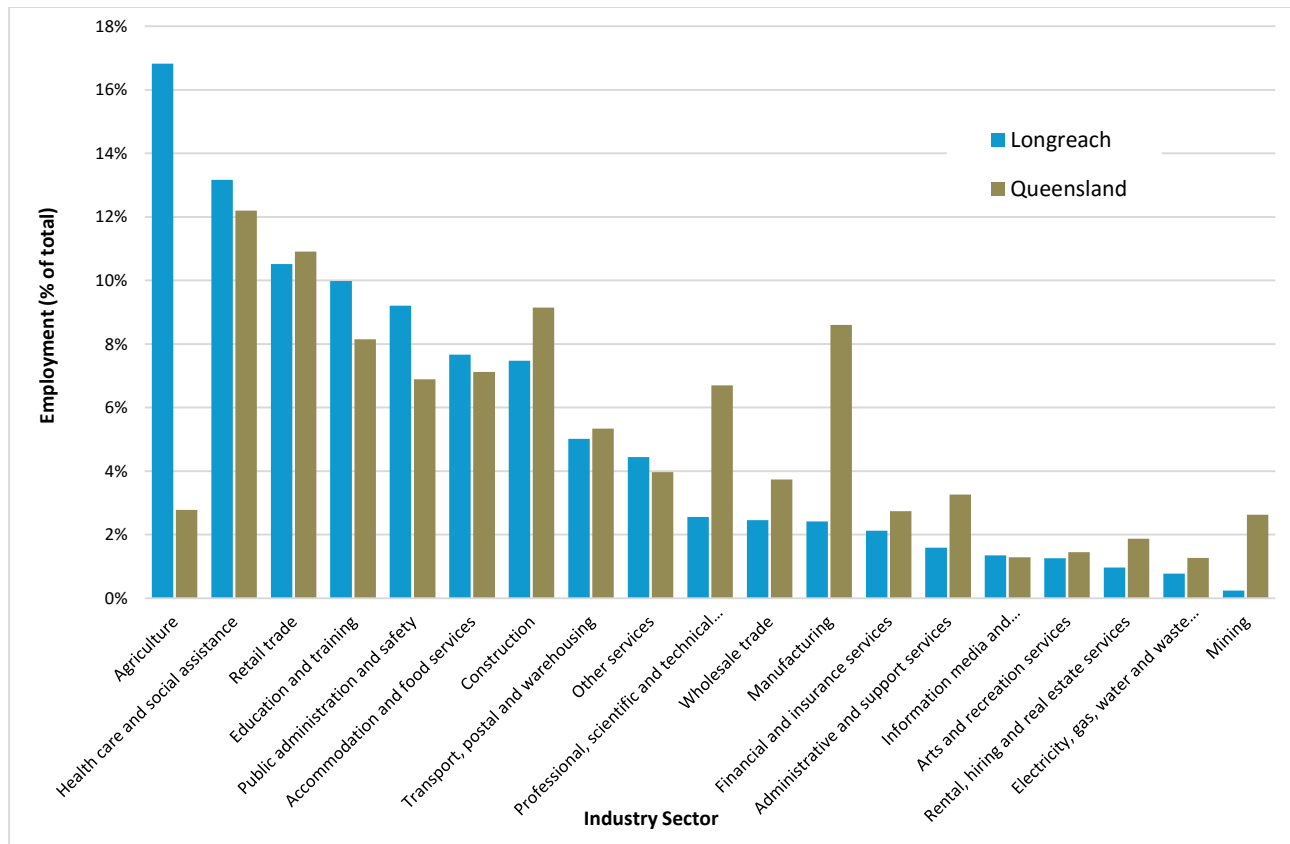
Source: REMPLAN, March 2016

Comparing the employment by industry profile in the Longreach Region with that of Queensland illustrates the significance to the region of key sectors such as Agriculture, Health Care and Social Assistance, Education and Training and Public Administration and Safety.

As shown in Figure 6, Agriculture provides for 17 per cent of all jobs in the Longreach Region compared to just 3 per cent of all jobs in Queensland. The significance of the public sector as an employer in the Longreach Region is clearly stated in the data which shows this industry is responsible for 9 per cent of local employment compared to 7 per cent Queensland-wide.

The significance of tourism as a local employer is reflected in the size of the Longreach Region's Accommodation and Food Services sector, which accounts for 8 per cent of jobs in Longreach compared to 7 per cent for Queensland as a whole. Employment numbers in the Retail Trade sector and Arts and Recreation Services in the Longreach Region is comparable, proportionally, to Queensland as a whole.

Figure 6. Employment by Industry, Longreach Region and Queensland, 2016



Source: REMPLAN, March 2016

Some of the current challenges facing industry in the Longreach Region, as well as opportunities for growth (see below) are reflected in the employment trend data as illustrated in Figure 7.

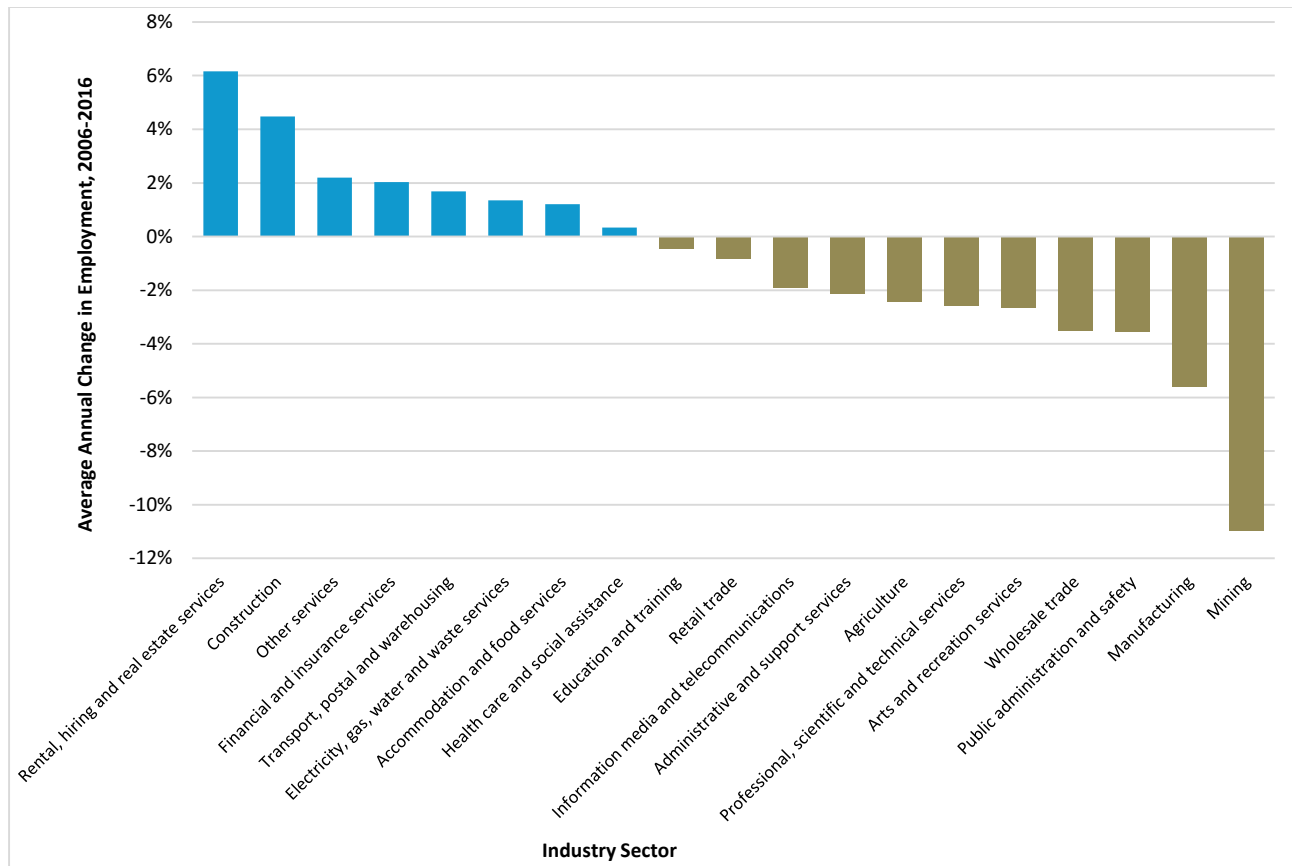
Between 2006 and 2016, the Longreach Region's mainstay 'driver' industry of Agriculture showed an average annual decline in employment of 2.4 per cent.

Other industries that experienced employment decline over the ten-year period include Education and Training, Public Administration and Safety (perhaps illustrative of the withdrawal of State Government services in the region), Manufacturing, Professional Services and Arts and Recreation Services.

Those industries that experienced an increase in the number of jobs over the ten years to 2016 include a small average annual increase Accommodation and Food Services employment (linked to tourism) and Construction.

Employment in the Health Care and Social Assistance sector remained fairly static with no real net change in employment, while a large increase in employment in Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services (driven by activity in the local property services sector), was from a relatively small base.

Figure 7. Average Annual Change in Employment by Industry, Longreach Region, 2006-2016



Source: ABS Census (2006) and REMPLAN (March 2016) with interpretations by SC Lennon & Associates

Figure 8 shows the value of output by industry in the Longreach Region, that is, the gross revenue generated by businesses and organisations in the Longreach LGA. The estimated output generated by tourism for each industry has been deducted and consolidated into a separate tourism sector.

Construction contributes the greatest share of the value of output in the Longreach Region with \$83.2 million of 16% of the region's total industry output.

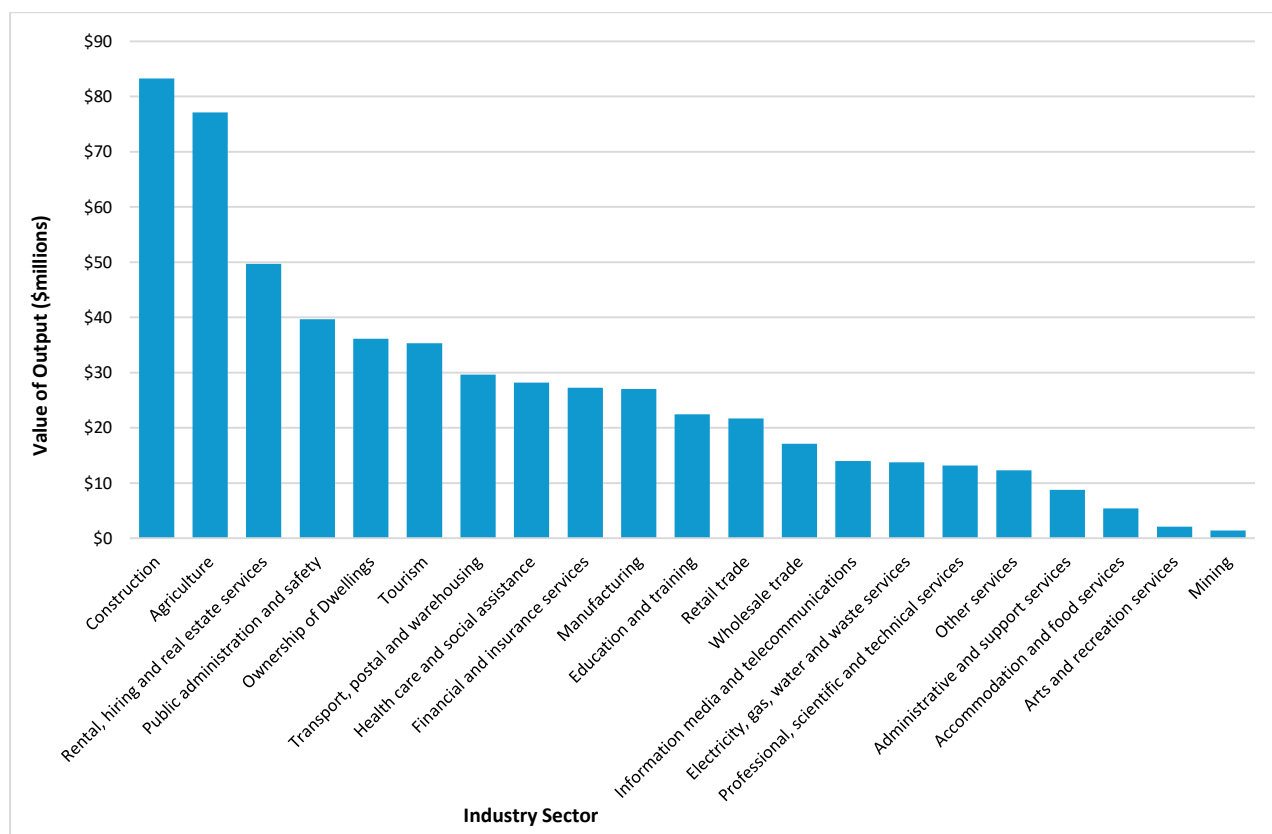
This is followed by Agriculture, which accounts for \$77 million or 15% of total output in the Longreach Region. Sheep, grains and beef cattle accounts for the largest share (75%) of agricultural industry output in the Longreach Region.

A large proportion of the value of output generated in the construction sector is due to activity in the Longreach Region's agricultural sector which sources a lot of its inputs from the construction industry. Construction services accounts for almost a third (30%) of total construction industry output in the Longreach Region.

Tourism is one of the largest contributors to gross revenue generated by businesses and organisations in the Longreach LGA, worth \$35.3 million or 7 per cent of total industry output. Tourism expenditure in the Longreach Region also has a strong multiplier or flow-on effect across other industries in the local economy, most notably Accommodation and Food Services, Transport, Postal and Warehousing and Ownership of Dwellings.

Other key contributors to industry output in the Longreach Region include Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services (approximately \$50 million), Public Administration and Safety (\$40 million) and Transport, Postal and Warehousing (\$30 million). The Longreach Region's transport sector is closely aligned to the local tourism industry which sources a large share of its inputs from the transport sector.

Figure 8. Value of Output (\$m) by Industry, Longreach Region, 2016



Source: REMPLAN, March 2016

The preceding analysis reinforces the significance of agriculture and tourism as pillars of the Longreach regional economy. Other industries, like retail and construction, or key service sectors like health and education, rely on these pillars for their own sustainability and growth.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' count of Australian businesses (June 2014), there are about 665 businesses in the Longreach Region, with the largest sector being the traditional economic mainstay of agriculture, which accounts for 45 per cent of all business establishments in the Longreach LGA.

Agriculture is also one of the largest employers in the region, followed by health care, education, retail trade, public administration and tourism. The significance of the Longreach Region's tourism sector is reflected in its contribution to the region's gross output, which at \$35.3 million or 7 per cent of total output (in 2016) is worth more to the local economy than health care, education or retail trade.

Efforts to develop regional economies are most successful when they focus on building on comparative advantage. Businesses can also use a region's comparative advantage to build a competitive advantage, which is developed through the combination of factors such as knowledge, resources, skills and the ability to innovate. Hence, agriculture and tourism are both areas of focus in this Economic Development Strategy.

3. The Economic Development Strategy Framework

3.1 Economic Development Strategy Deliverables

Having regard for Longreach Regional Council's commitment to sustainable economic development and recognising the challenges and opportunities for long-term growth, *Outback Prosperity 2021* delivers three things:

1. Firstly, it provides an information base (for Longreach Regional Council and others) on the structure and dynamics of the local economy. By establishing a critical information base, *Outback Prosperity 2021* provides the starting point for encouraging economic development in the Longreach Region.
2. Secondly, it identifies economic development challenges and opportunities for Council and other key stakeholders to consider for action and investment.
3. Finally, *Outback Prosperity 2021* identifies ways to address the region's challenges and opportunities, providing a framework to facilitate economic development within the Longreach LGA, with the focus being on actions that can be achieved over the next five years.



The strategy documents a plan of action for Council and its partners in government, industry and the community to facilitate change towards a more prosperous future for the Longreach community - not just the Longreach town centre, but the whole local government area including communities in Ilfracombe, Isisford and Yaraka.

The actions are informed by the vision and Longreach Regional Council's 'economic development charter'. Prioritising where Council's resources can best be directed for the purpose of facilitating and promoting the economic development of the Longreach Region is a key consideration of *Outback Prosperity 2021*.

Outback Prosperity 2021: Longreach Region Economic Development Strategy delivers workable, practical actions that Longreach Regional Council and its partners can act on. Recommended actions are grounded in research and consultation and they are framed in a way that they can be readily adopted and measured for their success with appropriate and easy-to-interpret performance measures.

Recommended actions are prioritised, having regard for the anticipated benefits each action will deliver and Council's capacity to act on it in a strategic fashion.

This Economic Development Strategy will be reviewed and updated (as required) as the region's challenges and opportunities for economic development evolve. Set performance measures will be reported annually within the monitoring on the implementation of the Strategy.

It is intended that *Outback Prosperity 2021* be reviewed every 12 months with a review and update anticipated in three years.

3.2 Strategy Themes and Actions

The following chapters set out the three 'Action Areas' for economic development in the Longreach Region. The Action Areas, which have been informed by the research, consultation and analysis undertaken to prepare this strategy², are:

1. Facilitate Farming Resurgence and Build Resilience in Agriculture;
2. Develop and Promote the Longreach Region's Tourism Offer; and
3. Establish Longreach as a Region of Choice for Investment, Learning and Outback Living.

For each of these action areas there is a discussion of:

- **Desired Regional Outcome** – A statement of a more desirable future based on the comparable and competitive strengths of the Longreach Region.
- **Challenges** – those issues and developments that currently constrain and hinder economic development in the Longreach Region.
- **Opportunities** – initiatives that may potentially address some of the challenges including ideas generated in the community.

For each of the Action Areas there are '**Key Actions**' identifying tasks to be carried out to move towards the desired regional outcome.

Finally, there are '**Performance Measures**' – statements of measures particular to each action area that may be applied to monitor implementation progress over time. Other, more general means for monitoring strategy progress are also provided in Chapter 8.

² A separate compendium of information accompanies this report containing documentation of research, the policy review and notes on the consultations that were undertaken.

4. Action Area 1: Facilitate Farming Resurgence and Build Resilience in Agriculture

Desired Regional Outcome

A more desirable future based on the comparable and competitive strengths of the Longreach Region will see an agricultural industry in recovery and growing steadily, in traditional sectors like sheep and cattle as well as in a diversity of new agricultural activities including game and other meat farming and horticulture.

Challenges

Driven by the impacts of the drought, the Longreach Region is faced with a number of pressing challenges concerning the region's economic development. There is strong support in the region for facilitating the resurgence of the more labour-intensive sheep industry. However, it is recognised that beyond the drought the industry cannot be revived without dealing with the problem of wild dogs, pigs and foxes. In determining the full range of issues and challenges facing the Longreach Region, extensive research, consultation and analysis was undertaken. A more detailed background compendium report documents the outputs of this work. Provided below is a summary of what are considered the most pertinent issues to be addressed by this Economic Development Strategy.



An Agricultural Sector in Transition

The demise of the Longreach Region's (more labour-intensive) sheep industry has been perhaps the most significant impact of the severe drought conditions experienced over the past three years. The decline of this traditional mainstay industry of the regional economy is also due in large part to the devastating impact of wild dogs and kangaroos. De-stocking of (less labour-intensive) cattle farms has occurred as a result of the drought and the amalgamation of properties, resulting in fewer families being supported.

Inadequate Water Security

Perhaps the most pressing issue affecting the communities and the economy of the Longreach Region is critical water security issues associated with the drought. The reliable supply of quality water underpins the region's prosperity and without this matter being resolved, any prospect of a recovery, let alone future prosperity, will be seriously compromised.

Impacts of Pest Animals and Predators on Stock

Wild dogs are credited with decimating flocks by taking lambs, and kangaroos are credited with destroying pastures. Together, these factors have decimated the Longreach Region's sheep industry and they are the major threat to recovery after the drought. There are fencing, baiting and culling programs in place but more can be done. Kangaroo harvesting is seen as an opportunity, but culling programs have not been as effective as they could be.

Opportunities

Despite the many current challenges, the Longreach Region can position itself for a bright future, enabled by a dynamic community that has demonstrated an ability to capitalise on opportunities when they are presented.

A Revitalised Sheep and Cattle Industry

The stakeholder consultations undertaken to help inform this Economic Development Strategy highlighted the importance of regenerating the cattle industry, and the sheep industry as farmers and their workers (e.g. shearers) are the lifeblood of the Longreach Region community. The sheep industry must be encouraged on the grounds that it is more labour intensive, it has good prospects in terms of future markets, the land is suitable and it can bounce back more quickly due to lambing rates relative to cattle.

According to IBISWorld (2015), nationally, following years of losses, the sheep farming industry returned to growth for most of the past five years. Increased rainfall during 2010-11 improved pasture feed, reducing the cost of keeping livestock and allowing farmers to expand production. However, industry revenue has remained volatile, moving in line with fluctuations in commodity prices, rainfall and production. Industry revenue is forecast to grow nationally at an annualised 1.5% over the five years through 2015-16, to reach \$3.4 billion.



As noted earlier, for the sheep industry to have a sustainable future in the Longreach Region, efforts to control wild dogs and other pests through fencing, baiting and other means need to continue unabated. Water security is universally accepted as a key issue that needs to be addressed hand-in-hand with efforts to revitalise both the sheep and cattle industries in the Longreach Region. Water security and a revitalised agricultural sector is vital to the prospects for reversing population decline and the associated adverse impacts of this trend, including the withdrawal of essential services such as education, health and community services.

According to IBISWorld (2015), Australia's beef cattle industry's prospects are expected to strengthen over the next five years. Industry revenue is forecast to grow at an annualised 2.2% through 2020-21, to reach \$14 billion. Increasing meat consumption arising from higher incomes in overseas markets is expected to boost industry demand. The volume of live cattle exports is projected to increase in line with growing demand in Asian and Middle Eastern markets. Exports will be further aided by the expected ongoing depreciation of the Australian dollar.

Organic production is one potential area of growth for the industry. Farm gate sales of organically raised beef cattle have grown strongly over the past five years due to skyrocketing demand both domestically and in overseas markets. Potential growth opportunities for organic beef exports include Asian nations, the United States and the United Arab Emirates. As such, organic beef has the potential to create another modest growth cycle for the industry.

Longreach Saleyards

The Longreach Saleyards are located 10kms west of Longreach on the Cramsie/Muttaburra Road. Prior to the cessation of operations (as a result of the drought), before the last sale in May 2014 the saleyards employed three Longreach Regional Council workers and eleven day-staff. The selling season was from February to November during which time the facility moved 80,000 to 100,000 head and it was an economically viable operation for Longreach Regional Council. Prior to the suspension of operations, the saleyards facility was well recognised as a major contributor to the town's (and region's) economy.



With prices for cattle now close to a historical high and demand for beef (including organic beef) being strong both domestically and globally, it is timely to consider the future of the Longreach Saleyards as part of a broader consideration of opportunities to revitalise the Longreach Region's beef cattle industry. Longreach Regional Council has allocated funding for a 'masterplan' for the Longreach saleyards. The saleyards site is well located close to rail and road, but the facilities are somewhat obsolete. Shortcomings include worn out infrastructure, no shade or rain protection, poorly laid out facilities and flood prone land. Hence significant re-investment is required, but there is a question whether this is economically justified on the current site.

In considering the future for the Longreach Saleyards, a second question is whether a greenfields site would be more economically feasible than re-developing the existing saleyard facilities. Longreach Regional Council has a major land holding east of the town which is not subject to flooding and which has good rail and road access.

The future of the Longreach Saleyards will also be influenced in part by developments State-wide and in other parts of the Central West Region. The dynamics of the cattle industry are complex with transport arrangements between regions and the major centres (i.e. between grazing properties, feed lots abattoirs and embarkation points). Major centres in the State are in competition. Longreach is well-positioned with good access by road and rail and has a very large 'natural catchment'. However, transport technologies may nullify this if facilities in Longreach are not up to scratch. Other centres have state-of-the-art facilities, much of which is under-cover.

The first stage of any masterplan should therefore include an economic evaluation of two options: (1) invest in the existing site; or (2) invest in a new greenfields site. It is noted that services (e.g. sewer and water) need to be extended to the new land east of Longreach. This may be justified by multiple uses such as saleyards, an abattoir, industrial activities, rural residential uses and a service centre. These need to be explored as part of a holistic study.

Agricultural Industry Diversification

Agriculture is a traditional economic mainstay of the Longreach Region and one of its comparative advantages. Efforts to develop the Longreach regional economy will be most successful by building on such strengths. Businesses can also use the region's comparative advantage to build a competitive advantage, which is developed through the combination of factors such as knowledge, resources, skills and the ability to innovate. However, this does not mean Longreach cannot diversify its economy. Rather, the region will benefit by strengthening current areas of specialisation and diversifying by developing new ways to capitalise on existing assets, resources and knowledge. Using the region's agricultural know-how to farm goats for example, provides an opportunity worth exploring.

Goats thrive in the Longreach Region's dry climate. Over the past 20 years the Australian goat meat industry has experienced strong growth, largely underpinned by the sale of goats derived from rangeland or extensive production systems. Australia is the world leader in goat meat exports, with around 95% of Australian goat meat sent offshore and accounting for around 50% of the global goat meat trade.

Kangaroo meat offers another opportunity. High densities of kangaroos are causing damage to pastures and crops and native plants in the Longreach Region. In Queensland the species that is currently harvested for commercial export are the red kangaroo, the eastern grey and the common wallaroo. Products derived from kangaroos include meat for human consumption and skins for leather products. Some skin and meat is used domestically, with the remainder exported to more than 55 countries. There have been efforts to grow the kangaroo products export market over the years with significant potential identified in Russia, China and South-East Asia. The Commonwealth Government has announced the 'Package Assisting Small Exporters Programme' to help the aspirations of kangaroo exporters. The grants support small exporters through its \$15 million four-year programme.

Key Actions

Key actions to support the resurgence of farming and to build resilience in agricultural operations in the Longreach Region include the following:

- Action 1.1: Convene an Inaugural Longreach Region Water Security Summit
- Action 1.2: Facilitate Access to State and Federal Government Drought Relief Assistance
- Action 1.3: Review Council's Funding Commitment to Eradication of Predators on Stock
- Action 1.4: Explore and Resolve Options for the Longreach Saleyards
- Action 1.5: Investigate Diversification into Game and Other Meat Farming

Each is explained in turn below.

Action 1.1: Convene an Inaugural Longreach Region Water Security Summit

Water security is a critical issue and options for safeguarding future water supply for the communities of the Longreach Region need to be addressed as a matter of priority. The *Longreach Region Water Security Summit* would be organised by Longreach Regional Council in conjunction with the Central Western Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD) and with support sought from State and Federal Government agencies.

The purpose of the summit would be to bring together key stakeholders in the Longreach Region as well as local and external experts in water security and water management to articulate a shared understanding of the region's critical water security issues and potential solutions in support of an environmental, social and economically sustainable future for the Longreach Region.

A key outcome of the summit would be the identification of options to secure water sources in support of the communities of the region, and agreement on steps to progress action towards a secure and reliable supply of water for the Longreach Region. It is envisaged the summit would flag and discuss a range of issues and options such as alternative sources of bore water.

Action 1.2: Facilitate Access to State and Federal Government Drought Relief Assistance

Both the Queensland and Federal governments offer a range of funding assistance to provide farmers and communities in Outback Queensland with relief from the impact of the drought. For example, through the Department of State Development, the Queensland Government delivers the *Building Our Regions* Regional Infrastructure Fund, the primary purpose of which is to provide funding for critical infrastructure in regional

Queensland, while also supporting jobs, fostering economic development and improving the liveability of regional communities.

The communities and the economy of the Longreach Region will benefit from Longreach Regional Council establishing and maintaining a register of government assistance measures and packages and then work pro-actively in partnership with the State and Federal governments to secure funding and investment in things to help tackle the impacts of the drought, such as regionally-significant strategic infrastructure (e.g. a new bore), land management activities or available concessional / low-interest loans to farmers to assist the industry and the communities of the Longreach Region until the drought breaks and the agricultural sector is in a better position to recover.

This action would also involve Longreach Regional Council working with neighbouring local government authorities and RAPAD to advocate on behalf of local farmers to remove the anomaly that successful diversification into non-agricultural activities in times of hardship triggers the loss of drought assistance, as is currently the case.

Action 1.3: Review Council's Funding Commitment to Eradication of Predators on Stock

The sheep industry is the Longreach Region's traditional economic mainstay, which has been destroyed by the impact of pest animals, most notably wild dogs, and more recently the impact of the drought. The eradication of predators on stock is a priority for the region and a subject for which Longreach Regional Council must review, articulate and resource a clear policy position moving forward in preparation for the drought breaking.

The Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee which exists to provide Council with advice on the control of wild dogs and other pest animals should be maintained. The current special rate levied by Council for the control of pest animals should be reviewed for its efficacy and, if deemed appropriate, increased and/or supplemented with alternative funding to help ensure a viable future for the region's sheep industry.

There is a need for a well-researched study into the scope of measures and the resources required to solve this problem as it is well recognised that reviving the cattle and sheep industries, and the wool industry in particular, are essential to securing the future prosperity of the Longreach Region. While the measures currently in place are welcome, farmers, investors and business people must have confidence in the region's future.

Action 1.4: Explore and Resolve Options for the Longreach Saleyards

Cattle prices are close to a historical high and demand for beef is strong domestically and globally. Demand for organic beef, which offers higher returns, is also growing internationally. Industry analysis and key stakeholder consultation suggests there is scope to investigate potential to revive the Longreach Region's saleyards operations. Longreach Regional Council has allocated funding for a 'masterplan' for the Longreach saleyards. Prior to committing further investment, consideration needs to be made for whether an alternative greenfields site would be more economically feasible. Longreach Regional Council has a major land holding east of the town which is not flood prone and which has good rail and road access.

Before investing in a saleyards masterplan, Council needs to commission a two-phase study which (1) provides a broader economic evaluation of the potential for saleyards facilities in the Longreach Region and (2) subject to the findings of the broader economic needs analysis, compares an economic evaluation of two options - invest in the existing facility or in the greenfields site.

It is essential that 'Phase 1' of the study address the issue of the 'corporatisation' of the industry. With a move to 'Regional Livestock Exchanges' there is a danger that Longreach may invest in new facilities only to discover that corporate players are investing in competing facilities elsewhere in the wider Central West Region. This phase must also explore the option of a possible joint venture with one of the large corporations as this may be an attractive

proposition to them given the strategic location of Longreach and the land holding that is available. Once the two-phase saleyards study is completed and the justification (or otherwise) for investment in Longreach's saleyards facilities is provided on broader regional economic grounds, only then should a masterplan for the preferred option be progressed.

Action 1.5: Investigate Diversification into Game and Other Meat Farming

The growth and prosperity of the Longreach Region's agricultural sector relies on the ability to diversify and grow new products and new markets, adding value to the traditional pillars in sheep and cattle farming. Working in collaboration with RAPAD, Longreach Regional Council can support investigations through a dedicated study into the markets for farming of kangaroo meat and goat meat. Both kangaroos and goats, which thrive in the region's dry climate, are a problem for pasture management and pest control. By engaging with meat processing companies to explore in detail opportunities to harvest and process game meat locally, Council will be contributing to the control of pests and the potential creation of new value added agricultural activity in the Longreach Region.

Performance Measures

- Steady growth in the agricultural sector's contribution to the Longreach Region's gross regional product (GRP) over the next five years.
- An increase in the number of agricultural enterprises operating in the Longreach Region over the next five years.
- A greater diversity of agricultural enterprises operating in the Longreach Region over the next five years.
- Increased employment in the Longreach Region's agricultural sector over the next five years.
- Completion of a two-phase study into the future of the saleyards and resolution of the tenure and siting issues.



5. Action Area 2: Develop and Promote the Longreach Region's Tourism Offer

Desired Regional Outcome

A more desirable future based on the comparable and competitive strengths of the Longreach Region will see a strong and growing regional tourism industry defined by a quality mix of iconic attractions and genuine outback experiences. The Longreach Region will offer a growing domestic and international visitor market with a true package of experiences that are unique to the region.

Challenges

A Short Tourist Season and Limited Tourism Offer

Longreach is a cornerstone of Queensland's Outback Tourism Region. In late 2010 Tourism Research Australia and Tourism Queensland undertook research into outback tourism. It shows the majority of visitors to Queensland's Outback are older Australians on long haul touring holidays, of more than seven nights. Longreach is the most visited town in the region (86% of visitors) followed by Winton (76%). Those coming to the Queensland Outback are looking for a new learning experience grounded in Australian heritage and history.

The tourist season in Longreach extends from April to September. Despite the significance of tourism to the region's economy, the visitor season is limited by the climate. From October to March the average daily maximum temperature is in the high 30s accompanied by periods of high rainfall, when not in drought. This is very off-putting for many potential tourists. On the other hand, the winter climate is very pleasant with June and July at 24 degrees on average, with low rainfall, contributing to the appeal of the region as a winter visitor destination of choice.

Limited Tourist Accommodation

Consultation findings suggest serviced accommodation in the Longreach Region is somewhat the same across the board and may be classed as 'mid-range'. There is a lack of quality accommodation for major events and business meetings and little serviced accommodation in Ilfracombe, Isisford and Yaraka. There is a shortage of accommodation for mass events and in winter and there is little if any farm-based accommodation. It is common in regional Australia that the standard and form of accommodation tends to influence the tourist market segments that are attracted.



Tourism Industry Perceptions of Competition

It is not unique to the Longreach Region, but perceptions of tourism industry competition have been reported. Essentially this means there is a prevailing view by business operators that one operator's gain is another's loss. The alternative view is that every operator's success is a plus for the region. For example, accommodation providers can, in response to a client enquiry, say 'we're full' or they can opt to refer the enquiry to a local competitor. Every visit discouraged is a lost opportunity for a repeat visit and for word-of-mouth promotion for the Longreach Region and the Outback Queensland Region more generally.



Customer Service Shortfalls

According to a survey conducted by Tourism Research Australia and Tourism Queensland in 2010, on the whole, visitors to the Outback experienced a wide range of attractions across a number of different towns, consistently rating such experiences as highlights on their trip. Individually however, visitors only tended to experience a couple of attractions on a single visit and they don't always encounter all the unique attractions and local charm that the Outback has to offer. This was largely because they had not allowed enough time to see the attractions or because they were not made aware of them (either at all or in a timely manner). Engaging visitors when they are actually in the region is imperative to assist them in fully experiencing and seeing it all.

This highlights the importance of 'customer service' as a key determinant of success in attracting and holding tourists. Good customer service costs very little (if anything) extra, but it has significant payback potential. Visitors' experience of customer service in a place dictates decisions on return visits and on 'word-of-mouth' promotion to friends and relatives. The free advertising is invaluable.



Under-developed Regional Tourism Promotion

The Longreach Region receives regular media coverage and there have been some notable television programs shot in the area. However, despite success of Outback Queensland Tourism and Longreach Regional Council in promoting 'Longreach', regional tourism promotion is under-developed due to a lack of regional collaboration and co-ordination.

Examples cited include a lack of digital presence of destinations and operators (including social media and Australian Data Warehouse presence), limited Longreach Region-specific tourism market research, inadequate Wi-Fi services and only limited coordination and promotion. On the other hand, there is an accredited and fully staffed visitor information centre (VIC) located in Longreach, which is open seven days a week.

Opportunities

Capitalise Further on the Drive Tourism Market

According to IBISWorld (2015), despite some challenges in recent years, including the global financial crisis, tourism in Australia has performed well and has strong prospects. According to the *Queensland Drive Tourism Strategy 2013-2015*, regional and remote communities can benefit from the income generated from drive tourists (on stopovers), as they are often encouraged to buy local tourism products and services, and basic travel necessities like fuel, food and other supplies. Drive tourism provides a number of benefits to businesses, including: opportunities for new business start-ups; increased demand for new products and services; opportunities for business collaboration; and additional income and employment.

Key measures of success for Queensland's drive tourism market include the number of tourists embarking on self-drive journeys, the length of their journeys, the time they spend in particular places and the amount of money they spend. This market is expected to experience significant growth due to Australia's ageing population and a corresponding increase in retirees who travel around Australia.



It is considered that the Longreach Region's drive tourism market can be further exploited, particularly in regard to length of stay and visitor spending. Surveys have revealed that many visitors are aware of only the main attractions and often miss others, especially those out of the main town. There are potential markets that are currently not being tapped in to. One that has been mentioned is the high-end visitor market segment that seeks 'eco-lodge' type accommodation.

Tourism Product Development and Diversification

One area where Longreach is particularly successful is with its well-known 'iconic' attractions, although it is said the Stockman's Hall of Fame is overdue for a refresh, with some new works currently underway. It has been suggested there is a need for visitor information and interpretation at the key sites of Mount Slowcombe and Starlight's Lookout and there is a general lack of directional signing. Other deficiencies are said to include limited Indigenous product or interpretation and little in the way of nature-based tourism or a focus on food-based products or experiences.

Local operators should continue to be encouraged to develop their products through diversification to enhance the region's visitor experience and to prepare the region for Australia's growing international visitor market, particularly the New Zealand, European and backpacker markets. Opportunities to develop and diversify the Longreach Region's tourism offer include, for example: packaging of short breaks and small conferences/seminars – the meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibition (or MICE) market; development of the families' market;

development of a 'Wool Trail' initiative; and nature-based tourism such as bird watching, walking and garden walks. There is also an opportunity to develop product around Indigenous history and its role in Australia's pioneering history. As the dinosaur-based attractions at Winton gather momentum in the tourism market, there will be benefits for Longreach to tap into this as part of the regional tourist trail.

Catalyst Tourist Accommodation: The Eco-Lodge Concept

The Longreach Region is reported to be under-performing in terms of attracting overnight visitation due to a mismatch of consumer needs and accommodation supply. There is potentially a need to broaden the accommodation offer away from the 'budget motel' typology towards more up-market facilities such as boutique hotels and facilities including farm stays to enable visitors to immerse themselves in the outback farming experience.

The area also lacks flagship accommodation facilities of a world standard that can put the area on the international tourist map. One form of accommodation, which has a close fit with a potential visitor profile, is the 'eco-lodge'. An eco-lodge is a type of tourist accommodation designed to have the minimum possible impact on the natural environment in which it is situated. Eco-lodges differ to traditional hotels in that they are structurally designed to reduce environmental impact.



Eco-lodges are one missing component in the offer and this is posing a constraint on visitor growth. A world-class eco-lodge would have the effect of marketing the area via primary means (e.g. including the imagery in promotion material) and secondary means (e.g. publication in travel and architectural journals and in documentaries).

Development of an eco-lodge along these lines would set the precedent for the quality of design and environmental integration for supportive accommodation options, which can cater for all markets. An eco-lodge must be commercially successful and there is a significant amount of evidence that the eco-lodge must be immersed in the nature it provides access to. Secondary determinants include the environmental practices of the lodge and the type of architecture.

Regional Tourism Promotion

The *Outback Destination Tourism Plan, 2014-2020* adopts goals relating to:

- Promoting events and packaging tourism experiences;
- Extending the shoulder periods;
- Developing business skills and new product development;
- Maintaining road, rail and air access; and
- Research and data and facilitating catalyst developments.

The plan provides insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the Outback Region's 'destination' qualities, current visitor profiles and market opportunities. It provides a 'vision' for the future in this statement:

Be famous for its characters, culture, history and ancient landscapes where visitors feel the genuine embrace of a vast network of welcoming communities.

A number of trends are examined and the following implications are identified:

- There is a need to be prepared for and to develop the international visitor market.
- There is a need to develop tourism experiences in natural areas that are unique and differentiated from competitors.
- Businesses need to respond to the challenge and deliver quality service and experiences.
- The destination needs to embrace a multi-channel approach to communication and promotion. This includes building business skills and capacity and delivering new virtual travel/experiences in the form of providing rich information.
- Open new areas for four-wheel driving and trains, and invest in regional airports.
- The need to compete on quality, experience and service will have implications for investment and development decisions and destination and business levels.

The Plan makes reference to an 'oversupply' of commercial accommodation in the region, a point that is made in a number of studies and documents. However, the supply is somewhat uniformly 'mid-standard' and it is arguable that key markets are not adequately catered for. This is a constraint on increasing the breadth of market penetration.

In pursuit of its vision, the Outback Destination Tourism Plan recommends a number of actions under the headings of 'Nature and Culture', 'Experiences', 'Markets', 'Partnerships', 'Quality Service and Innovation' and 'Investment and Infrastructure'. Responsibilities for implementation are assigned and a timeframe is given.

Some of the actions are quite general in nature, for example - *Create tourism experiences, which reflect community values of welcoming and lifestyle*. This action is assigned to the Outback Queensland Tourism Association and Councils. It has a 'medium' timeframe and it targets all markets.

There is every likelihood that a plan such as this will languish if mechanisms to bring the parties together to act on the recommendations are not put in place. This would be regrettable given the considerable amount of work that has gone into developing the plan.

Individual Councils can take a key role in implementing the plan if they are prepared to adopt its framework and do further work on fleshing out the recommended actions as they are relevant to their areas and developing specific tasks that can be carried out within their sphere of operations or area of interest.

Key Actions

Key actions to support the development of tourism in the Longreach Region include the following:

- Action 2.1: Operationalise the Outback Destination Tourism Plan
- Action 2.2: Collaborate and Co-ordinate Tourist Destination Management and Marketing
- Action 2.3: Prepare a Longreach Short-Term Accommodation Needs Analysis and Strategy
- Action 2.4: Explore Opportunities for an 'Eco-Lodge' Concept in the Longreach Region
- Action 2.5: Promote Excellence in Customer Service as a High Priority

Each is explained in turn below.

Action 2.1: Operationalise the Outback Destination Tourism Plan

The Outback Destination Tourism Plan covers most of the areas identified in this Economic Development Strategy (e.g. further develop Longreach as part of the Outback Regional Brand and promote initiatives to extend the tourism season). The Plan represents a considerable investment by all of the Councils and stakeholders in the tourism industry in the wider region; it adopts the appropriate goals and identifies trends and their implications and it develops and 'action framework'. The Plan confirms the need for the Councils in the region (including Longreach) and other stakeholders to act collaboratively for the mutual benefit of their communities.

There is a need for the individual Councils working collaboratively with stakeholders to operationalise the actions stated in the Plan to suit local circumstances, resources and opportunities. Specifically, this requires a systematic review of the recommended actions to identify specific tasks that can be carried out within the Council's resources, priorities and jurisdiction.

Action 2.2: Collaborate and Co-ordinate Tourist Destination Management and Marketing

This action would see Longreach Regional Council playing a facilitative role for all of the industry stakeholders to work together in a collaborative fashion on the basis that this is where the expertise and investment will be sourced. Working in collaboration with the Queensland Government through the Department of State Development and Tourism and Events Queensland, as well as with the Commonwealth Government through Regional Development Australia Fitzroy and Central West, Longreach Regional Council can be a conduit for government assistance to develop industry skills and for investment in specific projects and tourism infrastructure.

Action 2.3: Prepare a Longreach Short-Term Accommodation Needs Analysis and Strategy

The Outback Destination Tourism Plan makes reference to an 'oversupply' of commercial accommodation in the region, a point that is made in a number of studies and documents. This reflects the fact that, while occupancy rates are very high in the winter season, they are very low in summer and they average out at a comparatively low level over the year. However, the supply is somewhat uniformly 'mid-standard' and it is arguable that key markets are not adequately catered for. This is a constraint on increasing the breadth of market penetration.

A number of potential opportunities have been identified during the preparation of this Economic Development Strategy that are worthy of examination, including an eco-lodge, up-market safari style camping and farm stays. The recommended needs analysis and strategy would research current and future unmet needs for visitor accommodation and specify the types of accommodation that are currently lacking. This would be essential information for potential investors.

Action 2.4: Explore Opportunities for an 'Eco-Lodge' Concept in the Longreach Region

Subject to the outcome of the accommodation needs study recommended above, this project is worthy of a high priority on the basis that this type of accommodation targets a significant market that is not currently catered for in the Longreach Region. These 'self-promoting' facilities attract worldwide attention and contribute greatly to a region's visitor appeal.

An eco-lodge must be in a special site immersed in the environment in order to be attractive to investors and operators. One suggestion that has been made is to locate an eco-lodge on a high point at Yaraka. Longreach Regional Council would be required to resolve land tenure issues and matters relating to environmental and planning approvals. All of this would enable preparation of an investment prospectus.

Action 2.5: Promote Excellence in Customer Service as a High Priority

This action would see a considerable improvement in the level of customer service in the Longreach Region on the basis that it is a relatively low-cost investment with considerable payback. Visitors value the whole experience of their trip and being treated with courtesy in a friendly manner is a highly valued commodity. This results directly in repeat visits and referrals to others.

Working collaboratively with industry stakeholders / local businesses and leveraging potential funding support from the Queensland Government, Longreach Regional Council can assist in co-ordinating training and awareness programmes for service providers and can provide a conduit for government assistance to supplement the necessary resources.

A key aspect of the programme would be a co-ordinated survey of customer satisfaction, which could be via a combination of measures including web-based feedback, on-line surveys and in-house surveys. The talent gathered via these surveys is invaluable in identifying where there are deficiencies in customer service and how these can be addressed.

Performance Measures

- Increased average length of stay for visitors to the Longreach Region from 3 nights to 5 nights.
- Expansion of market shares beyond the drive holiday market.
- Steady growth in the tourism sector's contribution to the Longreach Region's gross regional product (GRP) over the next five years.
- Consistent improvement in customer satisfaction ratings via co-ordinated surveys.



6. Action Area 3: Establish Longreach as a Region of Choice for Investment, Learning and Outback Living

Desired Regional Outcome

A more desirable future based on comparable and competitive strengths will see Longreach become widely known as a region of choice for individual entrepreneurs and small to medium-sized businesses seeking an outback lifestyle with access to a diversity of services and facilities. Longreach will be a centre of excellence in agribusiness education and training, attracting students from elsewhere in Australia and internationally. With national recognition, Longreach will be a region choice in which to work, live and invest.

Challenges

While it must be recognised that the key to attracting and retaining households in a region is emphatically the availability of employment, liveability aspects also have a major influence on outcomes. Regions where liveability is compromised find it difficult to attract entrepreneurs who have choices about where they run a business or invest. Public sector agencies can be somewhat footloose and will favour regions where it is easier to attract quality staff. Regions cannot rely on loyalty to the area from long standing families when there are push factors at play in times of economic downturn wrought by challenging market conditions and/or drought.



Population Decline and a Withdrawal of Essential Community Services

As a consequence of the decline of agriculture in the Longreach Region, there is less money circulating in the economy to support providers of goods and services in the region's towns, resulting in business closures. The Longreach Region has also experienced population decline with families moving out as income sources dry up with associated financial stress for many as house prices and business values drop. With the region's population falling, Longreach is witnessing a marked withdrawal of teachers from local schools as enrolments decline. There has also been a withdrawal of some government services as the population declines and due to State Government policies.

These factors act together to induce a 'negative multiplier' effect in the Longreach regional economy. There are many initiatives in place to address some of these issues, including dog fencing, dog baiting, kangaroo culling, other pest eradication schemes and water management strategies. However, when the drought breaks, recovery must deal with the debt overhang and the likelihood that the capital-intensive process of re-stocking will take some time.

Withdrawal of Education Services and Infrastructure

According to Education Queensland more than half of all State schools in Queensland are located in rural and remote areas and about a quarter of State school students are enrolled in rural and remote schools. There are seven Schools of Distance Education throughout Queensland, including one in Longreach.

Longreach is also home to the Longreach Pastoral College and the Longreach Student Hostel. Longreach Pastoral College, which is a division of Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges, was founded in 1967 in response to the needs of the agricultural industry for staff skilled in semi-arid beef and wool production. Since that time, it has been delivering industry endorsed and recognised training in wool and beef production, horse breeding, shearing and wool handling. After 36 years of operation, the student hostel was recently forced to close with the drought and dwindling contract work in the area, impacting on enrolments which fell from 18 to just five over the past four years. The hostel enabled students from the smaller towns to attend high school.



The impact of the drought is having severe flow-on impacts in a number of key service delivery areas including education. The Longreach Region's declining population poses a threat to the viability of schools, particularly the primary schools in the region's small towns. The loss of teachers who have left town has detrimental impacts on the economy and the community. This is compounded by the impact of government subsidies that encourage property owners to send their children to the coast to boarding schools. This is a resource that might be better spent, for example supporting the hostel in Longreach to keep kids in the town.

Climate and Liveability

The extreme heat in the summer period is reported to be a factor creating difficulties attracting and retaining people to work and live in the Longreach Region. Issues that have been raised include a lack of shade in the main street and in public places, poor insulation of houses and a lack of recreational facilities giving relief from the heat. The climate is a major element of the liveability of the Longreach Region and this has been identified as a factor in attracting people and investment.

The Digital Divide

The emergence of the digital economy has increased the propensity for individuals and businesses to interact and trade with suppliers, partners and customers through information and communications technologies. Broadband has become a fundamental enabler of regional economic development. The Longreach Region currently lacks high-speed broadband infrastructure, limiting the capacity for residents and businesses to interact with the national and global economies. For the region's businesses to remain competitive and local communities to remain connected, the roll out of high speed broadband must be extended to all communities to provide a sustainable solution to the region's communications needs.

Limited Economic Information

Strategies to facilitate and promote economic development in the Longreach Region cannot be made without the use of key economic information, nor can well-informed investment facilitation advice be provided to prospective investors. It is important that Council staff who engage with business and prospective investors understand the nature and workings of the region's economy in order to determine the most effective way to support economic development.

In addition to this information, which will allow Council to readily respond to investment enquiries, it must also gauge the performance of the local economy as part of its approach to informing strategic priorities on an on-going basis through the monitoring of performance measures. This Strategy and the data underpinning it provides a good start. However, Council could invest more in key data and information on assistance services (through State and Federal Government programmes for example) that are available to prospective investors and new or expanding businesses in the region.



Opportunities

Micro-climate in Public Spaces

In order to address the Longreach Region's 'liveability challenge', a suite of initiatives to enhance the liveability of the region's towns, is required with a key element being improvements to micro-climatic conditions. A priority should be given to a *Longreach Main Street Revitalisation Project* with an emphasis on shade protection and potentially air conditioning based on renewable energy sources. Other projects could include shade provision in public places, and recreational facilities providing relief from the summer heat.

Climate Adapted Housing

Insulating houses would have many benefits for the Longreach community including comfort, energy savings and health benefits, particularly for the elderly. Longreach Regional Council might approach the State and/or Federal Governments to fund a home insulation programme, obviously one that ensures proper regulation of the installation process to create a safe work environment for installers.

Enhanced Agricultural Education and Training

Announced in July 2015, CQUniversity launched a partnership with Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges to integrate vocational training with a new Bachelor of Agriculture. This builds on the Bachelor of Agribusiness and Food Security, launched in 2013, and its top ranking in national Excellence in Research results in the field of Agriculture and Farm Management. Current and past students who have graduated from Emerald Agricultural College or Longreach Pastoral College now have a direct route to study a Bachelor of Agriculture, while CQUniversity students now have options to complement their academic qualification with practical hands-on training at Emerald or Longreach Colleges. Hence, the Longreach Pastoral College affords opportunities for growth in conjunction with its CQUniversity partnership. There may also be a role for the Longreach student hostel in the

future if the CQUniversity partnership generates a need for students to spend time in Longreach. These may be local, Australian or even international students.

Identify and Embrace New Business Opportunities

The drought has been the major constraint on doing business in the Longreach Region as it has slashed income earnings and impacted adversely on the region's capacity for wealth accumulation. This has imposed constraints on business investment in all sectors of the regional economy. Because farming has traditionally been the economic mainstay of the Longreach Region most the business skills are focussed on this area. Diversifying the Longreach Region's industry base is necessary to grow local business and provide a variety of meaningful and sustainable employment opportunities for all communities of the region. Many local operators and potential investors are unaware of opportunities that might present themselves in sectors other than agriculture. A lack of full engagement with the digital economy besets some potential investors.

Growing the Region's Digital Economy through 'Digital Champions'

Digital tools are needed to support 21st Century economic development and in the Longreach Region, local businesses need to be encouraged to use the digital economy to expand their reach. With the use of the latest digital technologies, farmers could create businesses to get some off-farm income.

Renewable Energy

The generation of renewable energy is an economic opportunity for Central West Queensland. Solar and thermal power generation are possibilities. Winton has hot artesian water and is in the process of investigating opportunities for hot water electricity generation. Local generation of renewables could provide more consistent energy supply for towns on the end of the line that currently experience brownouts at peak times. Energy costs could be reduced for businesses in town and high-energy consuming businesses including foreign investors looking for affordable energy, could be attracted to the Longreach Region. These opportunities need to be explored.

Mobilise Local Capital

While attracting capital from outside a region is important in all regions in Australia, the greatest capital resource is local. There are examples of locals in Longreach diversifying from farming into tourism and other businesses quite successfully, and there is a significant amount of scope for this to continue. When the agricultural sector rebuilds after the drought breaks, there will be more opportunities to diversify in order to 'future proof' against downturns. Business investment opportunities that could potentially flow from the infrastructure boom in northern Australia, especially in the construction sector, should be identified and considered further.

Business Attraction and Capacity Building

Longreach as a regional centre can support and provide some higher order retail and services for the communities of the region. Longreach Regional Council, as a facilitator and promoter of economic development, needs to promote a 'can-do' attitude to support development of local business infrastructure for retail, industrial and community facilities. This is a critical role for Council to attract and facilitate local business investment in the region.

As the region's economy develops over time, it will require ongoing business establishment, growth and investment to be sustained. Council has a key role to play to facilitate and support the process of investment and business establishment and growth, particularly in the small business sector including retail and business services. It can also facilitate business investment with readily-available information on the status of the local/regional economy, industry trends and prospects and locations for investment, including the availability of commercial and industrial land.

Key Actions

Key actions to support the development of Longreach as a region of choice for business investment, learning and outback living include the following:

- Action 3.1: Undertake a Survey of Regional Perceptions of Liveability and Develop a Liveability Improvements Capital Works Programme
- Action 3.2: Advocate for Housing Insulation and a 'Good Housing Design' Programme
- Action 3.3: Implement a Government Services Retention and Expansion Strategy
- Action 3.4: Facilitate Local Access to Business Information and Support Programs
- Action 3.5: Prepare a Longreach Digital Economy Strategy
- Action 3.6: Audit and Articulate the Region's Industrial Land Capabilities
- Action 3.7: Quantify and Articulate Opportunities for Renewable Energy Production
- Action 3.8: Initiate a Strategic Partnership with Universities
- Action 3.9: Prepare a Future Education Needs Assessment
- Action 3.10: Investigate Student Housing Initiatives including the Feasibility of Re-opening a Student Hostel and Establishing a Housing Co-operative

Each is explained in turn below.

Action 3.1: Undertake a Survey of Regional Perceptions of Liveability and Develop a Liveability Improvements Capital Works Programme

Given that investment in improving the liveability of a region requires significant capital investment, it is essential to ensure that intelligence is gathered on the community's needs and preferences and perceptions about what contributes and detracts from their living environment. Capital investments must be designed, prioritised and programmed and evaluation on a cost benefit basis must be done in order to get value for money.

In order to address the Longreach Region's 'liveability challenge', a suite of initiatives to enhance the liveability of the region's towns is required with a key element being improvements to micro-climatic conditions. A priority should be given to a Longreach Main Street Revitalisation Project with an emphasis on shade protection and potentially air-conditioned spaces based on renewable energy sources. Other projects could include shade provision in public places and recreational facilities giving relief from the heat. In parallel with development of the programme options for funding and financing the expenditure are to be explored. This may include separate rates and charges and development contributions, potentially matched with State and Commonwealth Government Grants.

Action 3.2: Advocate for Housing Insulation and a 'Good Housing Design' Programme

Insulating houses would have many benefits for the community including comfort, energy savings and health benefits, particularly for the elderly. The Council to approach the State and/or Federal Governments to fund a home insulation programme, obviously one that ensures proper regulation of the installation process to create a safe work environment for installers. In the addition, Longreach Regional Council can develop an energy efficiency 'good housing design' programme based on available State and Commonwealth Government design guidelines adapted to local circumstances and promoted locally.

Action 3.3: Implement a Government Services Retention and Expansion Strategy

The primary reason for locating government services in a region is the existence of the need for those services. A secondary reason is to support the economy of a region by locating jobs there, recognising the 'spin off' benefits these jobs create. However, in all cases governments must consider the cost effectiveness of options for providing

services, which may include ‘in-situ’ services or alternatively remote services - with transport provided. Increasingly some services may be delivered via the web.

All regions should make sure that governments appreciate the real need for services based on established and forecasts needs. It follows that a powerful tool that the Council can use is a rigorously researched community services needs study that highlights existing and future services shortfalls and clearly identifies essential in-situ services requirements. To supplement this a prospectus can be prepared to promote the region as a location for ‘footloose’ government services on the basis of the locational and lifestyle advantages of the region and its economic advantages, including ability to attract and hold employees.

Action 3.4: Facilitate Local Access to Business Information and Support Programs

In order to develop and maintain an understanding of the key features of the regional economy, appropriate and up-to-date information is required. The sort of data that should be collated and maintained by Longreach Regional includes: demographic structure and trends; employment by industry; gross regional product; value of inter-regional imports and exports; business start-ups; visitor numbers (and profile); and labour force qualifications and skills. The information informing this strategy provides a solid base. However, Council will need to invest further in tailored data services such as REMPLAN or economy.id for example in order to maintain an up-to-date profile of the region’s economic structure and trends. This is the sort of information that investors look for as part of their investigations into potential opportunities in new locations.

As well as assisting Longreach Regional Council with strategic planning and funding allocation, ‘information provision’ is a key tool for providing business assistance. To complement this, it is imperative that Longreach Regional Council identify and keep abreast of business assistance programs on offer from State and Federal Government agencies. This requires Council to regularly engage with the Queensland Department of State Development and RDA Fitzroy and Central West to identify and maintain a register of currently available business assistance programs.

Action 3.5: Prepare a Longreach Digital Economy Strategy

Longreach Regional Council can take the lead in initiating activities to help local businesses better understand and embrace the use of digital technologies for the benefit of their businesses and the communities they serve. The Queensland Government, through the Department of Science, Information, Technology and Information (DSITI) can help Longreach Regional Council develop a Digital Economy Strategy. Working in collaboration with DSITI and RDA Fitzroy and Central West, Council can lead the establishment of the Digital Strategy Task Force to oversee implementation. The National Broadband Network (NBN) will be rolled out in the Longreach Region in 2016/17. Once the NBN is connected, the community will have an opportunity to learn about digital capability/education. A Digital Champions Program could be established.

Action 3.6: Audit and Articulate the Region’s Industrial Land Capabilities

To facilitate investment enquiries in a timely and effective matter, establish and maintain a published register of available commercial / industrial land in Longreach and the region for the information of prospective investors. The register would include details of all commercial / industrial land by location, zoning, dimensions, current status (i.e. use – retail, office, vacant) and relevant qualitative features (e.g. large vacant site strategically located on the Landsborough Highway with potential to house regional distribution facilities), etc.

Action 3.7: Quantify and Articulate Opportunities for Renewable Energy Production

The generation of renewable energy is an economic opportunity for Central West Queensland and Longreach Regional Council has already received enquiries from prospective investors regarding the production of solar

energy in the region. Solar and thermal power generation are both possibilities. In order for Council to respond to and facilitate investment enquiries, it needs data and information to better understand the direct and indirect benefits to be derived from the development of a renewable energy sector in the Longreach Region. This requires Council to commission a study to quantify the immediate impacts (e.g. employment associated with construction and operation of large-scale solar generation facilities) as well as the indirect or flow-on output and employment benefits across other industries including agriculture.

Action 3.8: Initiate a Strategic Partnership with Universities

This action would put in place a liaison committee to open an on-going discourse between Longreach Regional Council and tertiary education institutions including CQ University and James Cook University (JCU) for the purpose of identifying opportunities for the universities to attract and retain students. This would include a collaborative discussion regarding the development of formal links as well as involvement in the recommended student hostel re-opening study and related housing and visiting student support programs.

Action 3.9: Prepare a Future Education Needs Assessment

The purpose of this action is to provide factual information on future education needs beyond the breaking of the drought to ensure that short-term trends do not influence decisions on school closures, which would inevitably be irreversible. This would be part of a population forecasting exercise that would provide important input into an investment prospectus.

Action 3.10: Investigate Student Housing Initiatives including the Feasibility of Re-opening a Student Hostel and Establishing a Housing Co-operative

This action relates to the recommended housing study where solutions to the accommodation needs of students in the small towns and from on the land will be identified to reduce the need for them to leave the region for secondary and tertiary education and training.

After 36 years of operation, the student hostel in Longreach was forced to close with an annual deficit in the order of \$146,000. Drought and dwindling contract work in the area have seen enrolments decline from 18 to just five over the past four years. The hostel enabled students from the smaller towns to attend high school. There may be a role for the hostel in the future if the CQUniversity partnership generates a need for students to spend time in Longreach. These may be local, Australian or international students. The Pastoral College affords opportunities for growth in conjunction with its CQUniversity partnership. The hostel may be a resource that can be repositioned (e.g. with some commercial lettings) to be viable and to support the education sector.

In the consultations the importance of 'backpackers' to the local economy was stressed. It is said that backpackers provide a flexible (on call) and affordable workforce that cannot be sourced locally. This may be a potential market for the hostel. There may be a potential for a housing co-operative to acquire dwellings in the current market to provide affordable housing to key workers and students. Council would initiate a housing study to explore the possibility of re-opening the student hostel on a semi-commercial basis, and the possibility of a housing co-operative establishing in the Region to purchase housing for letting to key workers and students.

Performance Measures

- An increase in business investment enquiries with Longreach Regional Council.
- An increase in business start-ups or re-locations to the Longreach Region.
- An increase in local employment in the Longreach Region.

- Practical collaborations addressing barriers and drivers of higher education provision and attraction/retention of students in the region.
- Enrolments increasing in primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions with positive and improving education outcomes.
- Higher rate of retention of students in the region.
- Growth in student attraction to the Longreach Region.
- A survey of regional perceptions of liveability is completed.
- A liveability improvements capital works program with a funding and financing strategy is adopted.
- A housing insulation and 'Good Housing Design' programme is developed.
- A housing study to investigate the feasibility of re-opening the student hostel in Longreach and establishing a housing co-operative is completed.
- A government services retention and expansion strategy is completed.
- A Digital Economy Strategy completed with increased uptake of digital technology by householders and businesses.
- More businesses in the Longreach Region have an online presence.
- Increased investment in renewable energy in the Longreach Region.



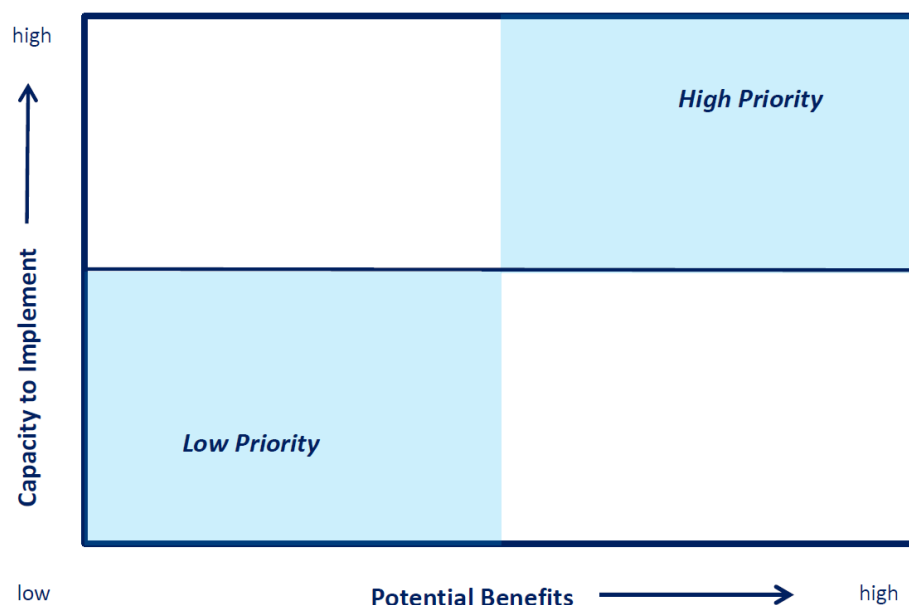
7. Priorities for Change

7.1 Assessing and Prioritising Actions

The actions presented in this Economic Development Strategy have been determined as a result of the findings from extensive research and data analysis coupled with targeted stakeholder consultation. While they are all important for progressing economic prosperity in the Longreach Region, resource constraints make it impossible for Longreach Regional Council to act on all actions immediately. This makes it necessary to prioritise opportunities for short-term implementation.

The prioritisation of identified activities and potential projects is guided by a broad assessment of the likely benefits as well as the capacity to implement the action or project concerned. Based on the criteria, it can be determined to what extent the project or activity in question concerned is a high priority. It is acknowledged that other criteria can also be applied with the use of local knowledge and consideration of other related objectives.

Figure 9. Opportunity Assessment Matrix



Source: SC Lennon & Associates

Benefits Assessment

The following set of criteria are employed to assess likely activity or project benefits:

Economic Benefits

Creates economic growth through:

- *Promoting local and external investment into business enterprises.*
- *Creating a strong jobs growth effect and a high jobs multiplier.*
- *Enhancing productivity of capital and/or labour.*

- *Attracts and holds key workers.*
- *Generating exports and/or replaces imports.*

Environmental Benefits

Creates environmental benefits through:

- *Reducing greenhouse gas emissions through adoption of renewable energy sources and through energy conservation.*
- *Conservation and enhancement of native flora and fauna.*
- *Conservation of cultural heritage.*
- *Conservation of water resources.*
- *Conservation of land resources.*
- *Enhancing urban and rural liveability.*

Social Benefits

Creates social benefits through:

- *Creating a more inclusive and cohesive community.*
- *Addressing housing affordability.*
- *Improving education and training outcomes (links to economic benefits).*
- *Higher quality recreational and cultural facilities.*
- *Enhances comfort and lifestyle.*
- *Improves quality of social support services.*

Capacity to Implement

The capacity to implement the activity or project concerned will be dependent upon the following:

- *Consistency with Longreach Regional Council's community planning, land use planning and corporate planning policy objectives.*
- *Availability of the necessary support infrastructure.*
- *Organisational capacity to implement the project or activity.*
- *Availability of financial resources.*
- *Community support.*
- *Within jurisdiction.*

Applying the assessment criteria and effectively 'rating' and 'ranking' each action determines those actions which are considered the highest priority and which, as a result, are short-term actions to be progressed over the next one to three years.

The assessment outcomes are shown in the table below.

Figure 10. Summary of Action Assessment Outcomes

Action	Benefit Assessment	Capacity to Implement	Overall Assessment
<i>Facilitate Farming Resurgence and Build Resilience in Agriculture</i>			
1.1 Convene Inaugural Longreach Region Water Security Summit	High	High	High
1.2 Facilitate Access to State and Federal Govt. Drought Relief Assistance	High	High	High
1.3 Review Funding Commitment to Eradication of Predators on Stock	High	High	High
1.4 Explore and Resolve Options for the Longreach Saleyards	High	High	High
1.5 Investigate Diversification into Game and Other Meat Farming	Medium	Medium	Medium
<i>Develop and Promote the Longreach Region's Tourism Offer</i>			
2.1 Operationalise the Outback Destination Tourism Plan	High	Low	Medium
2.2 Collaborate and Co-ordinate Tourist Destination Management and Marketing	High	High	High
2.3 Prepare a Longreach Short-Term Accommodation Needs Analysis and Strategy	High	High	High
2.4 Explore Opportunities for an 'Eco-Lodge' Concept in Longreach Region	High	Low	Medium
2.5 Promote Excellence in Customer Service as a High Priority	Medium	Medium	Medium
<i>Establish Longreach as a Region of Choice for Investment, Learning and Outback Living</i>			
3.1 Undertake a Survey of Regional Perceptions of Liveability and Develop a Liveability Improvements Capital Works Programme	High	High	High
3.2 Advocate for Housing Insulation and a 'Good Housing Design' Programme	High	Medium	Medium/High
3.3 Implement a Government Services Retention and Expansion Strategy	High	Low	Medium
3.4 Facilitate Local Access to Business Information and Support Programs	High	High	High
3.5 Prepare a Longreach Digital Economy Strategy	Medium	Medium	Medium
3.6 Audit and Articulate the Region's Industrial Land Capabilities	High	High	High
3.7 Quantify and Articulate Opportunities for Renewable Energy Production	Medium	Medium	Medium
3.8 Initiate a Strategic Partnership with Universities	High	High	High
3.9 Prepare a Future Education Needs Assessment	Medium	Medium	Medium
3.10 Investigate Student Housing Initiatives including the Feasibility of Re-opening a Student Hostel and Establishing a Housing Co-operative	Medium	Medium	Medium

Source: SC Lennon & Associates

Priorities for Action – Informing a Year 1 Work Plan

Priority projects and activities for implementation as part of a Year 1 economic development work plan are identified based on the application of the above broad set of assessment criteria. They reflect priorities that Longreach Regional Council should advance (in association with identified partners where relevant) as short-term priorities.

The Year 1 priorities for Longreach Regional Council, as the custodian of the Economic Development Strategy, are:

1. Convene Inaugural Longreach Region Water Security Summit;
2. Facilitate Access to State and Federal Government Drought Relief Assistance;
3. Review Funding Commitment to Eradication of Predators on Stock;
4. Explore and Resolve Options for the Longreach Saleyards;
5. Collaborate and Co-ordinate Tourist Destination Management and Marketing;
6. Prepare a Longreach Short-Term Accommodation Needs Analysis and Strategy;
7. Facilitate Local Access to Business Information and Support Programs;
8. Audit and Articulate the Region's Industrial Land Capabilities;
9. Initiate a Strategic Partnership with Universities; and
10. Undertake a Survey of Regional Perceptions of Liveability and Develop a Liveability Improvements Capital Works Programme.

In progressing these actions, cultivating collaborative partnerships for effective implementation will be key.



8. Implementing the Economic Development Strategy

8.1 Continuing Collaborative Partnerships for Effective Implementation

Collaborating to cultivate regional economic development partnerships is key to successful strategy implementation. Civic leadership and partnerships, what is otherwise known as ‘collaborative governance’ is a theme underlying all matters concerning the sustainable economic development of the Longreach Region.

Civic leadership - a fundamental enabler of economic development - is characterised by collaborative and cooperative approaches to research, community engagement, knowledge-sharing, planning, project design and implementation of strategies and activities for the good of the region and its local communities. Promoting collaboration is fundamental to the successful implementation of this strategy.

Longreach Regional Council is the lead agency for a range of local services and activities including local economic development and tourism activities. Other agencies at regional, state and federal levels have broader geographic interests and / or specific-sectoral interests and are therefore, not able to represent local interests adequately. However, they can play a critical role in delivering specific outcomes from time-to-time. Effective local economic development therefore requires both leadership and the formation of partnerships.



The Longreach Region Economic Development Strategy will be implemented by Council in partnership with the Queensland Government, Commonwealth Government, regional development bodies such as the Central Western Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD), business and industry and other supporting partners across the region. The strategy is underpinned by a number of key actions that focus on the strategic themes of:

1. Facilitate Farming Resurgence and Build Resilience in Agriculture;
2. Develop and Promote the Longreach Region’s Tourism Offer; and
3. Establish Longreach as a Region of Choice for Investment, Learning and Outback Living.

The Strategy will have significant impact on the growth and development of the Longreach Region. Internal and external reference groups and working committees will be established to ensure ownership of the Strategy and a commitment to its implementation. The region’s businesses and residents will continue to be engaged at a

partnership level to ensure effective collaboration for the Strategy's development and commitment to the delivery of Longreach Regional Council's economic development agenda going forward.

8.2 Monitoring Strategy Progress

Outback Prosperity 2021: Longreach Region Economic Development Strategy has been prepared in the context of the role of economic development in Longreach Regional Council's broader program of work and strategic objectives, and wider regional priorities. Led by its CEO, Council will monitor the progress of the Economic Development Strategy in order to achieve the actions set out.

Set performance measures have been established using a range of indicators, including both 'output' indicators and 'outcome' measures. Outcome measures refer to broad development outcomes at the regional level, such as industry output (gross revenue generated by the region's businesses), business establishments growth and jobs. Output measures on the other hand, include, for example, levels of business confidence, community satisfaction, numbers of investment enquiries, strategy/action milestones and project progress and completion.

Targets set out in this Economic Development Strategy will be monitored through the following methods and sources:

- Business surveys;
- Customer / visitor satisfaction surveys;
- Subscription to a regularly updated and tailored data source such as economy.id, REMPLAN Economy and REMPLAN Community; and
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Business Register data and Labour Force Survey data.

The set performance measures will be reported annually within the performance monitoring on the implementation of the strategy. It is intended that *Outback Prosperity 2021* be reviewed annually with an update anticipated in three years.



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