

NORTH BURNETT REGIONAL COUNCIL  
**ADVOCACY PLAN**  
**2024-2028**





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# MAYOR'S FORWARD

*The North Burnett is a great place to live, work, and invest, and we are seeking your support to make it even better.*

The North Burnett has many strengths, offering an affordable rural lifestyle, an abundance of rich and prosperous farmland, and a wealth of opportunities yet to be unlocked. The region is proud and productive, generating approximately \$1.3 billion annually, as a contribution to the state and national economy. Our primary industry is agriculture, forestry and fishing, providing approximately 33% of employment opportunities in the region and comprising significant beef cattle, pork, citrus, peanut, and berry producers - to name a few.

Food is a commodity that all Australians need and appreciate – everyone needs it - and we are proud that food production is the backbone of our economy and community. The needs of our primary industries are a crucial consideration in the success and sustainability of the nation, and the North Burnett has always been a proud and willing contributor to Queensland and Australia's success story.

As Queensland's population grows, areas like the North Burnett are becoming prime tree change opportunities. Housing supply and availability remain an ongoing challenge that we must address if we are to maintain our regions liveability and maximise our regions contribution to the state and nation. Our Council recognises the role our region can play in accommodating wider population demand, but we also need the support of other tiers of government to ensure the necessary infrastructure and services are available to support population and housing growth.

In developing our priorities, we have focused on the essentials to ensure the region remains positioned for success. Economic transport routes, such as Gayndah-Mount Perry Road, are a well-known opportunity for the region, unlocking greater tourism and fostering industry development. Housing availability and affordability is directly impacting many residents, and Council has identified infrastructure constraints that are hindering further housing supply.

Addressing these needs is both responsible and necessary, but we can't do it alone.

Our priorities are about providing a bright future for our residents, our communities and our region, as well as enhancing the North Burnett's contribution to the economic performance of Queensland and Australia.



The North Burnett is a great place to live, work, and invest, and we are seeking your support to make it even better. Regions like ours are built on collaboration and we know we can achieve more for our community when we work in partnership with the Queensland and Commonwealth governments to achieve even better outcomes for our residents.

*Les Hotz*

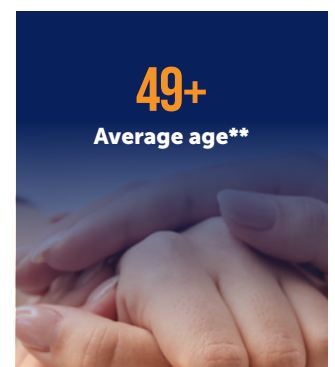
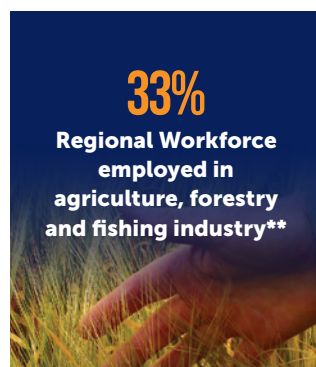
Mayor

# REGIONAL OVERVIEW

The North Burnett region is just under four hours' drive north-west of Brisbane, covering 19,700 square kilometres of rich, beautiful and diverse Australian landscape.

This picturesque countryside includes the six main townships of Biggenden, Eidsvold, Gayndah, Monto, Mundubbera and Mount Perry.

Our network of major centres is supported by an eclectic mix of villages including Abercorn, Auburn, Ban Ban Springs, Binjour, Boynewood, Byrnestown, Cania, Coalstown Lakes, Cockatoo, Cheltenham, Coomingleh, Coonanumbula, Dallarnil, Degilbo, Derri Derra, Didcot, Dykehead, Gooroolba, Hawkwood, Ideraway, Kalpowar, Monal, Monogorilby, Moonford, Mulgildie, Mungungo, Mungy, Rawbelle, Rockybar, Three Moon, Wetheron, Woodmillar and Yarrol. Each of these locations have their own histories, aspirations and opportunities that contribute to the social fabric of the North Burnett.



\*Source: Comparative Local Government Data.

\*\*Source: ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2021, All persons QuickStats, North Burnett LGA. – Data as at 2021 Census.

\*\*\*Source: Queensland Department of Environment and Science

^Source: National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR)

^^Source: Queensland Department of Natural Resources Land Valuation Report.



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# ECONOMIC CORRIDORS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Council currently manages around 4,204 linear kilometres of roads within the region, of which almost 80% of the network is unsealed. With no commercial air or rail service in the area, the community heavily depends on the road network for the supply of freight, access to critical services and economic activity, with almost all of the region's tourism arriving via the road network. With the region's largest employer being beef cattle farming, our primary industries require reliable, all weather freight connections to get product from paddock to plate. This connectivity is critical to the economic performance of the North Burnett Region.

Sealed roads provide a higher level of reliability, support a wider range of vehicles and can drastically reduce travel times. Most of the region's major centres are connected by sealed roads; however, Council has identified two priority routes of regional economic significance which need attention. Improvements to these routes will offer more assured connectivity between key centres and unlock greater tourism and export prospects for the region.





## Gayndah Mount Perry Road

Gayndah Mount Perry Road has been identified as a strategic tourism, connectivity and freight route for the North Burnett, facilitating greater access to the region from the Bruce Highway and Queensland's main freight network.

One of the region's standout locations is Mingo Crossing, perched on the banks of the Burnett River upstream from Paradise Dam, providing an ideal fishing and watersport location and offering modern caravan and glamping facilities.

This location is a key tourism attraction, drawing travellers to the region and encouraging them to explore the surrounding areas.

The unsealed sections of Gayndah-Mount Perry Road present a clear barrier for travellers wishing to access Mingo Crossing, Gayndah and other towns within the North Burnett.

For residents, the road provides an essential connection between Gayndah and Mount Perry and is used daily by many to access employment and services in neighbouring towns. This road will also be pivotal to major projects in the region, offering a southerly inland freight route for heavy equipment required to deliver regionally significant infrastructure projects.

Council expects the sealing of the road to notably increase tourism patronage and estimates the economic and connectivity benefits to be invaluable for the region. As a state-controlled road, Council is working with relevant stakeholders to enable this critical project but requires state government commitment to make the need a reality.

### THE ASK

**Council calls on the state government to develop a staged plan for the sealing of Gayndah-Mount Perry Road and an initial commitment of \$10M to progress the next phases of delivery, with a view to achieving a sealed road corridor by 2030.**







## Mundubbera-Durong Road

Mundubbera-Durong Road is a state-controlled road providing an inland connection between the North and South Burnett regions.

Sections of the road are in poor condition and are no longer considered fit for the traffic that needs to use it. Considerable upgrades have been made in recent years; however, an 11km section remains single-lane bitumen, constricting traffic flows and limiting the usability of the road.

Upgrading this 11km section represents a compelling case for the North Burnett, as it would offer a more efficient and direct import and export route for our primary industries, connecting through to Brisbane and other trade regions. In times of disaster, the road is crucial in bringing in essential supplies and fodder for livestock; however, the road's limitations presented challenges for the movement of these supplies in these conditions.

Locally, the road is heavily relied on to access out-of-region health care and education opportunities. For light vehicles, pulling off to the road's shoulder to allow oncoming traffic to pass is never ideal, particularly in wet weather conditions. From an economic perspective, the road also forms part of

Drive Inlands 'Rural Getaway' highway tourism guide, making it significant to tourism for the region.

While much of the subject area falls outside of the North Burnett, Council recognises the region's needs often require a united approach. Council supports South Burnett Regional Council in their calls for upgrades to this section of road.



**Council stands with South Burnett Regional Council, calling on the state government for an estimated \$20M in improvements to Mundubbera-Durong Road, providing interregional benefits.**



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# SUPPORTING HOUSING AVAILABILITY

The North Burnett region, along with much of Queensland and Australia, is experiencing a housing affordability and availability crisis. For smaller regional towns, this crisis impacts both liveability and livelihoods, as housing availability plays a significant role in population attraction and the ability to attract and retain key workers. Local businesses are limited in expansion and essential service providers, such as aged care, health care and local government, are struggling with the inability to recruit appropriate labour forces to deliver these services.

Council's Local Housing Action Plan (LHAP) is a proactive response to the State Government's Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025, but the ability to deliver greater housing supply is constrained by the capacity of existing trunk infrastructure networks. Council calls on the state and federal governments to support Council's efforts to improve housing supply within the region by providing funding for two key water and wastewater network projects.





## Mundubbera Water and Wastewater Network

Mundubbera is currently facing a housing shortage for both permanent and transient residents supporting the agricultural sector. This shortage will only be exacerbated with the progression of exploratory mining near Mundubbera and several emerging major infrastructure projects in the wider region.

Mundubbera's water and sewerage networks are limiting development opportunities within the town, particularly in areas not otherwise impacted by flooding.

Investment in the town's water and sewerage networks would unlock affordable development opportunities, encouraging affordable land supply.

### THE ASK

**Council seeks initial funding commitments of \$1.8M from the state government to undertake strategic water and wastewater trunk infrastructure upgrades, securing future expansion opportunities for Mundubbera.**





## Biggenden Water and Wastewater Network

Queensland has experienced considerable population growth throughout COVID and post-COVID periods. As larger regional areas and cities see unprecedented property price growth, outer regional areas offer better affordability while also being close to key services and employment opportunities.

Biggenden is within commuter distance of two rapidly growing regional centres and, with minimal vacant serviced land and an attractive semi-rural lifestyle, is experiencing high housing demand with little room for expansion.

With most serviced land inhabited, water and wastewater network infrastructure is currently being pushed beyond its design capacity, leading to sewer constraints and difficulties in maintaining reticulated water pressure. This limits the opportunity for further urban development and the growth and economic revitalisation of the town.

Trunk infrastructure upgrades are needed to foster affordable serviced land supplies, catering for current demands and easing interregional land supply needs.

### THE ASK

**Council seeks initial funding commitments of \$1.6M from the state government to undertake strategic water and wastewater trunk infrastructure upgrades, securing future expansion opportunities for Biggenden.**





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# COMMUNITY LIVEABILITY

Access to services and resources has a profound impact on the liveability of a region, but just as importantly, it adds to the economic attractiveness and prosperity of an area. The North Burnett has a proud and flourishing agriculture industry, employing one third of the region's workforce, followed by health care and social assistance, and retail trade at 10.0% and 7.5%, respectively. These industries are advancing rapidly, and our local businesses are facing increasing challenges as technology, regulation, and environmental considerations evolve. Having access to the right resources and services is a long standing and growing focus for the communities of the North Burnett.

While not all-encompassing, several key opportunities have been identified to sustain and enhance the region's liveability and economic profile. These priorities are considered essential to retaining and providing a prosperous future for current and future generations, supporting the liveability of our communities and growing investment in the industries the region is known for and which residents depend on for their livelihoods.







## Water Security for the Future

With over 33% of the region's workforce engaged in the agricultural, forestry and fishing industry, and with prominent beef cattle, citrus and small crop industries, water security is essential for the success of the region and its underlying economic contribution to the state. Water security is also critical to ensuring the continued availability of potable water supplies in the region's six main centres.

Council acknowledges the effort Sunwater, the state government, and all stakeholders involved in developing the draft Bundaberg and Burnett Regional Water Assessment. The draft identifies several priority projects and sets out a number of short, medium, and long term actions to support feasible improvements in water security across the region. The draft assessment notes the initiation of detailed business cases for the raising of Jones Weir and Claude Wharton Weir as medium and longer term actions respectively.

The assessment notes the initiation of a detailed business case for the potential construction of Cooranga Weir approximately 51.2 km downstream from Boondooma Dam as

a short-term action, seeking to increase allocation reliability in the Boyne River and Tarong water supply schemes. While this is great news for the region, the assessment is pending finalisation, and the actions remain subject to funding commitment.



**Council supports the identified actions within the draft Bundaberg and Burnett Regional Water Assessment, and seeks commitments to resource the identified priority actions, to advance greater water security for the region.**



## Aged Care Support

As of the 2021 census, the median age of residents in the North Burnett was 49, up 4 years from 2016 and 11 years above the Australian average. The region's largest age demographic is those aged between 60-69 (15.5%), closely followed by those aged 50-59 (14.7%), collectively representing nearly one third of the region's population and indicating affordable and quality aged care will be an area of continuing escalated demand now and for years to come.

Currently, there are 13 aged care services in the North Burnett, with few of these offering residential places. Concerningly, at least two aged care facilities that provide residential places within the region have expressed concerns around their long-term viability. Providers have cited increasing regulation, pending facility upgrades, and an inability to attract staff as key concerns.

Addressing the trunk infrastructure network priorities in this plan will assist – but not resolve – the challenges being faced by the aged care sector and the consequential impacts of reduced aged care options available in the region.

While attracting staff may be a challenge, these providers typically offer sustainable employment opportunities, offering wider community benefits in the form of economic activity, community activities and increased volunteerism.

Aged care solutions, including those that enable residents to remain in private dwellings longer, are needed now and into the future. Ageing in place is not just a theoretical construct – It is crucial to maintaining the economic and social fabric of regions like the North Burnett.

### THE ASK

**Council seeks commitment from the federal government to provide sufficient funding streams, incentives and solutions to facilitate expedited delivery of aged care worker accommodation and general facility upgrades in remote areas, supporting equitable access to aged care services in rural and remote communities, and enabling residents to age well in their communities.**







## Improved Mobile Connectivity

Council has long recognised the pressing need for improved digital telecommunication coverage in our region. Residents have voiced concerns about connectivity issues for many years, and when asked, our community ranked improved mobile phone coverage and digital connectivity as a top priority.

With a growing reliance on mobile technology, the demand for better telecommunication infrastructure in regional Australia extends far beyond the bounds of the North Burnett, impacting on community safety, economic opportunity, healthcare access, and overall quality of life. The evident support of our community and elected members underscores the urgency of this matter.

Greater investment is needed in telecommunications infrastructure to bridge the digital divide, provide security and safety, and enhance the livelihoods of our residents. Improved coverage will empower our region to participate fully in the digital economy, ensuring that no one is left behind in the ever-evolving world of technology and connectivity.



### THE ASK

**Council calls on the federal government to maintain the mobile blackspots program, supporting the progressive improvement to mobile coverage for the safety and prosperity of regional Australia.**

**Council also calls on the state government and private telecommunications providers to work with the LGAQ and rural and regional councils on deliverable plans to improve the terrestrial fibre network throughout Queensland to take advantage of the exceptional international broadband connectivity that Queensland now enjoys as a result of the investment in the Sunshine Coast International Broadband Network.**



## Gravel Pit Restrictions

Like many smaller local governments, the North Burnett Regional Council does not have the necessary resources to operate localised quarries and gravel pits for the supply of road material in a manner compliant with the current environmental regulatory framework. Consequently, Council is required to source and transport materials from commercial and private quarries, increasing the costs associated with building and maintaining roads and leading to a reduction in other maintenance activities. This can result in poorer road safety outcomes and has implications for our critical agricultural industry.

In many instances, material from compliant quarries must be hauled long distances, impacting on Council's carbon footprint and increasing deterioration and damage to haulage routes.

Other major infrastructure projects, such as the prospective reconstruction of the Paradise Dam wall and the needs of the 2032 Brisbane Olympics, will further strain or deplete local supplies, making this matter of relevance to many local governments in proximity to south-east Queensland.

Access to localised quarries and gravel pits without onerous environmental conditions is critical to the ongoing delivery of safe and affordable roads and other built infrastructure within regional, rural, and remote areas, as well as supply chain security for projects of state significance.

### THE ASK

**Council calls on the state government to review and put in place more manageable and balanced statutory compliance obligations for councils in operating, managing and maintaining their own critical gravel supply assets.**





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# FAIRER FUNDING FOR COUNCIL

Councils manage a significant portfolio of diverse community assets and services and must make prudent financial decisions for the long-term sustainability of their regions. By length, local governments manage 77% of the nation’s road network but receive just 3% of overall taxation revenue (Grattan 2023). In Australia, local road maintenance is underfunded and this level of underfunding is much more severe in rural and remote local government areas (Grattan 2023). What is concerning is that local roads are not the only asset that local governments manage for their communities, indicating wider funding shortfalls across other asset classes and services.

North Burnett Regional Council experiences first-hand the disparity between the financial sustainability of councils and the broader sustainability and liveability of the regions they serve. Local government services, such as parks, pools, libraries, and sporting facilities, underpin the liveability of a region and add considerable value to the lives and livelihoods of residents. The deterioration of local government financial sustainability across the nation presents a significant risk to the retention and continuity of these services and should be a priority area for consideration for all levels of government. At the end of the day, these services and facilities provide the backbone of what keeps communities together, living harmoniously and building their economic sustainability.

Consideration needs to be given to the level of funding to the local government sector and the ways funding streams are delivered. We urge the state and federal governments to take action and provide local governments with a fair go, providing security for essential services that benefit all constituents.

*Source: Grattan 2023, 'Potholes and pitfalls: How to fix local roads,' viewed 30 May 2024.*







## Restoring the Value of Financial Assistance Grants

Local governments across Australia receive funding from several streams, and in smaller regional areas, grant funding often accounts for around one-third or more of total recurrent revenue. A key grant scheme is the Financial Assistance Grants, funded by the federal government and distributed to councils by the states and territories.

North Burnett Regional Council depends on such grant schemes to deliver essential services to its community given it has very few other revenue raising levers at its disposal. Without these grants, general rates would need to more than double to maintain current service levels. In the 2023-24 financial year, Council received over \$12.8 million in the Financial Assistance Grants from the Commonwealth, but only \$11.9 million in general rate revenue, which demonstrates how critical this funding stream is to the North Burnett community.

Since 1996, the allocation of overall Commonwealth taxation revenue to the Financial Assistance Grants has decreased from 1% to approximately 0.5%. Given the increasing responsibilities assumed by local government over the same period, this is a significant impost on the sector and Australian

communities. In its 2022 campaign, the Federal Labor Government committed to “fair increases” to the Financial Assistance Grants\*, recognising the need for change.

*\*Source: Page 132 of the ALP's 2021 National Platform.*

### THE ASK

**Council calls on the federal government to uphold its commitment to restore the value of the Financial Assistance Grants pool to 1% of overall taxation revenue to support the current and future sustainability of the local government sector across the nation.**





## Improving Competitive Grant Conditions

Currently, councils across Australia are facing growing pressure to do more with less. The sector is becoming increasingly reliant on competitive grants to deliver essential infrastructure, such as water and wastewater and road improvement projects.

While competitive grant funding offers a lifeline, many funding opportunities require projects to be “shovel ready” at the time of application. This includes detailed designs, tender documentation, costings, and robust business cases - all of which take time and come at significant cost, with no funding certainty in place. This creates an almost insurmountable impediment for councils seeking grant funding for major projects.

Further complicating matters, these schemes also commonly require dollar-for-dollar (50:50) contributions from applicants, placing meaningful funding opportunities out of reach for financially constrained councils.

Competitive grant programs are disadvantageous to smaller regional councils. Rural and remote areas, like the North Burnett, depend on these opportunities for essential infrastructure upgrades, and removing barriers is essential for the sustainability of our region.

### THE ASK

**Council calls on the state and federal governments to limit the co-contribution requirements for grant funding programs to 10% or less for outer regional, rural, or remote areas, which have limited capacity to raise or increase own source revenue outside rating streams.**

**Council also calls on the state and federal governments to mandate 10% or more of capital grant programs be earmarked for planning and capability projects for outer regional, rural, or remote areas, enabling robust participation in future infrastructure funding rounds.**





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