



Experience Western Downs

It's the
people that
make it.



WESTERN DOWNS REGIONAL COUNCIL
**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
STRATEGY
2023-2028**

Mayor's Welcome –



Welcome to the Western Downs, where the principles of hard work, innovation and embracing opportunities underpin the economic success of our region and its people.

Located just two-and-a-half hours from Brisbane, and only an hour from the Toowoomba Wellcamp Airport, the Western Downs offers a spacious regional lifestyle. Our proximity to the city affords the Western Downs region amazing growth and development opportunities right across the four pillars of our diverse regional economy: Agriculture; Intensive Agriculture; Energy; and Manufacturing.

It really is the best of both worlds here in the Western Downs. And it seems the secret's out, with the region experiencing increasing migration rates of people moving here from metropolitan areas. That's because people naturally seek great liveability and they follow opportunity - both of which we have here in spades.

Western Downs Regional Council is committed to ensuring our region's great liveability and fabulous opportunities for decades to come, which is why Council is proud to present its **Economic Development Strategy 2023 - 2028**. This long-term strategy aims to further build, strengthen and diversify the Western Downs' economy, while continuing to improve the quality, spacious lifestyle its residents love so much. This strategy will place the Western Downs at the forefront of the changing world. It will ensure we are boosting the local economy, embracing innovative opportunities and encouraging proactive and Future-Fit development. With the Economic Development Strategy 2023-2028, Council can ensure our children, grandchildren, and future generations will be able to enjoy living, working, studying, and playing right here in the Western Downs for decades to come.

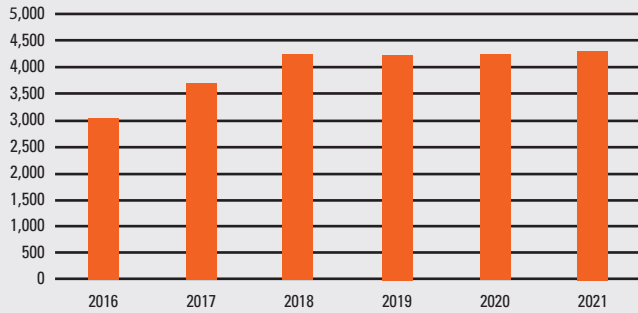
ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

Western Downs Regional Council acknowledges the traditional owners, the Barunggam, Iman (Yiman), Bigambul, Wakka Wakka, and the Jarowair people, as the custodians of this land. We pay respect to all Aboriginal community Elders, past and present, who have resided in the area and have been an integral part of the history of the region.

Economic Snapshot 2022

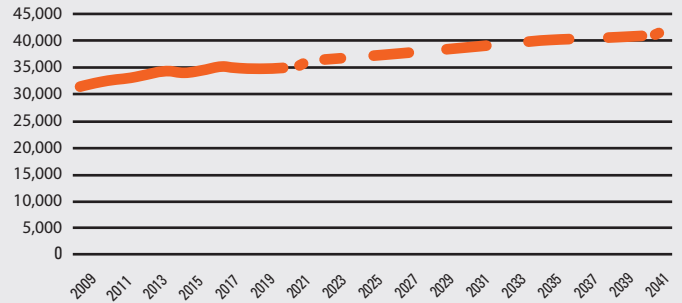
\$ \$4.305 Billion
(+\$1.3 Billion since 2016)

**GRP \$MLN
Western Downs**



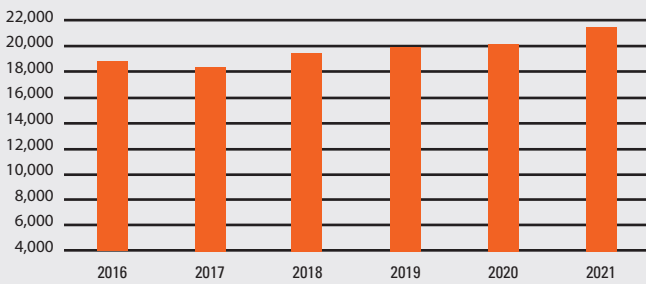
34,360
(+311 persons since 2016)

**Total Estimated
Resident Population (ERP)**



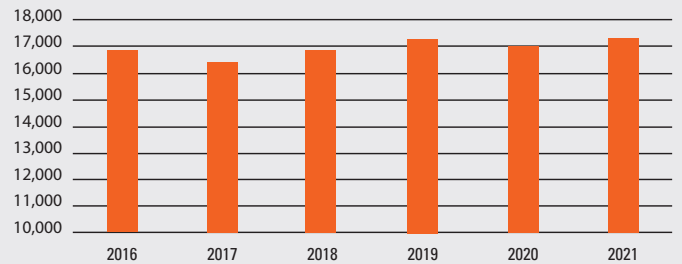
20,980
(+2,310 jobs since 2016)

**Local Jobs
Western Downs**



16,175
(+416 since 2016)

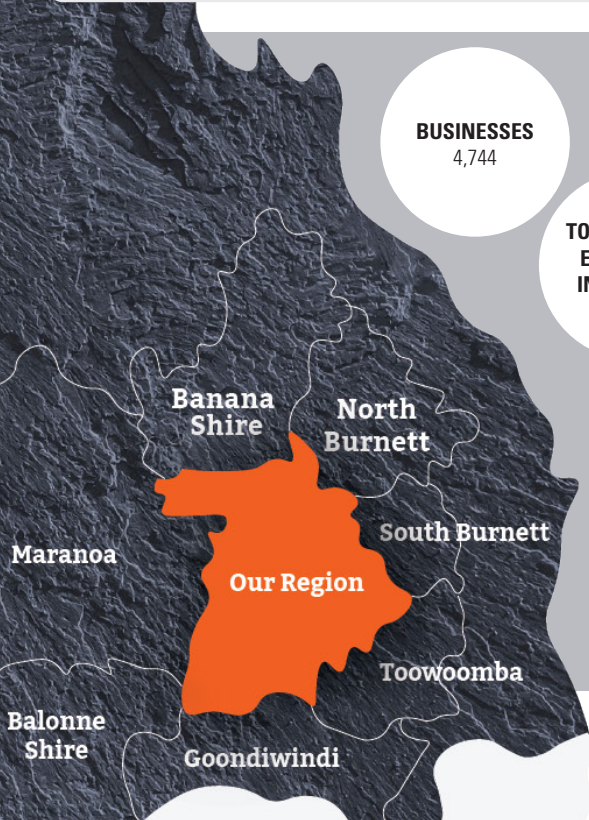
**Employed Residents
Western Downs**



BUSINESSES
4,744

**TOP 5 LARGEST
EMPLOYING
INDUSTRIES,
2021**

Industry	Number Employees	%
Construction	3,978	19.0
Agriculture	2,898	13.8
Manufacturing	1,619	7.7
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste	1,574	7.5
Mining	1,456	6.9



Coal, Gas
Solar, Bio-Ethanol
Hydrogen, Wind



Diverse, resilient
Sustainable ag
Sector



42% national feedlot
occupancy in a 200
km radius of Dalby



High value
Manufacturing
output

*Source Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR), 2021

¹Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA)

*Please note this data is latest available at time of strategy development, January 2023



What is Economic Development?

Economic Development is considered to be **the process of improving our residents' lives by enabling a dynamic economy and vibrant society.**¹ Western Downs Regional Council is committed to ensuring that residents are serviced by quality businesses, infrastructure and services, enabling everyone in our community to live healthy and prosperous lives now and into the future.

This long-term strategy will guide collaboration with businesses, community, neighbouring Councils, State and Federal Government, and other stakeholders to grow the economy and meet the needs of our growing population.

Why is Economic Development Important?

Just 2.5 hours west of Brisbane is the Western Downs. The Western Downs covers 37,937 square kilometres, an area slightly smaller than Switzerland. Despite a small population of just under 35,000 people our region produces a significant share of critical goods and services for domestic and international markets.

The region has experienced significant economic growth over the past decade, demonstrated by a strong increase in Gross Regional Product. Western Downs region is one of the leading regions in Australia based on percentage annual population growth, despite global shifts of urbanisation.

Strong economic growth has resulted in an increased number of local jobs, however the local workforce hasn't increased at the same pace. **Deloitte estimated the gap in Western Downs employment to be approximately 4,610 in 2020 and anticipated this to grow,** compromising local businesses' opportunity to access talent needed to operate.

Housing availability, a limited provision of tertiary education, and the lack of access to support services such as child care and specialised health care are considered constraints to attract people to live and work in the region.

In addition, global trends and events such as climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, droughts and floods are forcing local economies across Australia to change the way of operating

This Economic Development Strategy 2023 - 2028 **addresses critical issues** and clearly articulates **a strategic pathway** for the Western Downs to diversify and grow its economy, building on the region's competitive advantage and further attracting business and investment in value-adding opportunities and emerging markets. All whilst improving the liveability to ensure that residents can enjoy quality services, and enjoy a regional lifestyle.

This strategy will inform Western Downs Regional Council's yearly actions and priorities, and will demonstrate how other key stakeholders can contribute to ensuring the Western Downs remains at the forefront of the changing world.

¹Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA)

Consultation

September / October 2022



140 surveys and
over 100 participants

January 2023



Strategy for
public notice

February 2023



Strategy for
Council adoption

Vision

The Western Downs is a strong, resilient and diverse economy and liveability is strengthened in the region by 2028. This strategic vision aligns with Western Downs Regional Council's Corporate Plan 2021-2026.

Council is committed to ensuring that our children and future generations can live, work, study and play, and have the opportunity to do what they love whilst enjoying a regional lifestyle.

Strategic Pillars

Stakeholders were aware of the need for development activity in Western Downs to help drive and support the Economic Development Strategy and Council's long-term vision.

These are aligned to the Regional Australia Institute's Regionalisation Ambition.

- **Jobs & Skills** The Western Downs workforce is growing, optimised and fit for the future.
- **Liveability & Infrastructure** The Western Downs is equipped with modern infrastructure and quality essential services across the region to enable liveability and wellbeing, whilst sustaining population growth.
- **Population** The Western Downs demonstrates population growth to meet workforce demands.
- **Productivity & Innovation** The Western Downs is a recognised leader in agribusiness, energy and manufacturing, and local productivity continues to increase.
- **Sustainability & Resilience** The Western Downs is future-proofed for a changing climate and transitioning economies, and circular economy principles are stimulated.

Guiding Principles

These are aligned to the Regional Australia Institute's Regionalisation Ambition.

- **Collaborative** Facilitate partnerships and relationships with community stakeholders, industry, education providers, levels of government and neighbouring regions.
- **Socially Inclusive** Improve opportunities for individuals and groups to participate in the community and economy.
- **Sustainable** Ensuring a balance between economic growth, environmental care and social wellbeing.
- **Community Oriented** Focus on communities' needs and opportunities to move forward.
- **Business Friendly** Enabling entrepreneurship and acknowledging businesses' valuable role in the community.
- **Innovative** Continuously improving business processes and seeking new ideas to enable economic growth.

Western Downs Key Pillars and Guiding Principles



* Please note this data is latest available at the time of the strategy development, January 2023

Key Strategies	What we do and/or support	2023	2028 Target
Increase youth employment opportunities.	Enable local employment opportunities for youth. Continued support for BEST Groups in Chinchilla and Dalby.	Darling Downs - Maranoa youth unemployment rate of 11.4% compared to 9.3% Queensland average. <i>QGSO</i>	Darling Downs - Maranoa youth unemployment rate at or below Queensland average. <i>QGSO</i>
Increase workforce participation.	Support local business' recruitment beyond traditional workforce.	Workforce participation rate of 59.6% compared to 61.6% Queensland average. <i>ABS Census</i>	Workforce participation rate at or above Queensland average. <i>ABS Census</i>
Increase education and skills.	Increase local training opportunities, enabling 'study in place'.	42.2% of persons over 15 years old has a post-school qualification, versus 53.5% of Queensland. <i>ABS Census</i>	Increase persons over 15 years old with a post-school qualification to 50%. <i>ABS Census</i>
Attract and retain health and social assistance workforce, including child carers.	Support Health Sustainability Futures Group, aimed grow health workforce in the Western Downs.	Supply of 1,358 health care and social assistance workers. <i>NIEIR</i>	Supply increased to 1,600 health care and social assistance workers. <i>NIEIR</i>
Enable increased housing supply for rent and sale, and diversity of stock.	Attract and promote residential development, particularly by investors to add rental stock. Investigate and incentivise utilisation of 'empty' houses.	Rental Vacancy below 0.1%. <i>REIQ</i> \$21.5M in residential building approvals, below 10-year average of \$42.2M.	Rental vacancy above 2%. <i>REIQ</i> Annual residential building approvals above \$40M.
Improve digital and mobile connectivity.	Delivery of Advocacy Action Plan and Milestones.	Western Downs' Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) is 66.0, compared to 71.0 Queensland average.	Digital Inclusion at or above Queensland average.
Enable safe and quality road network.	We invest in safe, well maintained road networks to connect our region and support economic activities. Delivery of Advocacy Action Plan and Milestones.	Backlog of urgent maintenance works on the national highway network and state-controlled network.	Insure increase investment for entire road network.
Enable increased commercial and residential water supply.	Delivery of Advocacy Action Plan and Milestones.		
Promote and invest in modern infrastructure and quality services, improving wellbeing.	Promote and invest in modern infrastructure and quality essential services.	Satisfaction Standard Living (Regional Wellbeing Survey) score of 76.9%, compared to 73.1% Queensland average. <i>Regional Wellbeing Survey</i>	Satisfaction Standard Living Score continued above Queensland average. <i>Regional Wellbeing Survey</i>
Attract and retain workforce to the Western Downs, focusing on 18 to 49 age range.	Western Downs Regional Council supports the Regional Activators Alliance and Move to More Campaign. Support investigation of Designated Area Migration Agreements and other VISA pathways, including requirement for accommodation strategy and (cultural) support services.	Total labour force 15,846. <i>ABS</i> Estimated resident population 34,360. <i>ABS</i>	Total labour force and estimated resident population to increase by 2% annually. <i>ABS</i>
Aggressive investment attraction, stimulating private investment and creating jobs.	Development of an Economic Development Incentive Policy, Conduct industry gap analysis and strengthen local value chains.	Western Downs' GRP is \$4.305 billion in 2021 (1.15% of QLD). <i>NIEIR</i>	GRP to increase by 2% annually. <i>NEIR</i>
Attract new business.	Develop business attraction plan, targeting industries identified in industry gap analysis and vacant commercial real estate.	4,744 businesses operate in the Western Downs region. <i>ABS</i>	Increase new business and innovation in the region by 2% annually. <i>ABS</i>
Increase productivity & Innovation.	Support the Western Downs region as recognised leader in agribusiness, energy, and manufacturing. Strengthen international export and trade relationships.	Location Quotient Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services (6.41), Agriculture (4.28), Mining (2.32) Construction (2.04) and Manufacturing (1.13).	Maintain location quotient above 2.0 (major specialisation), and increase Manufacturing to 1.2 (significant specialisation).
Support local business growth.	Support Chambers of Commerce and TSBE providing valuable business support across the region. Maintain Small Business Friendly Council status.	A range of programs and initiatives delivered across the region supporting local business growth.	Continue support provided to key stakeholders.
Enable environmental sustainability.	Study to be conducted to measure emissions in the Western Downs to set benchmark.		Western Downs is trending to net-zero by 2050.
Promote environmental and social governance.	Develop a leading and best practice 'Communities Partnering' Framework for local government and enable legacy social investment.	Communities Partnering framework endorsed.	50 business pledge support to communities partnering framework.



The Western Downs has a number of great strengths and competitive advantages that this strategy will leverage.

IT'S THE PEOPLE THAT MAKE IT

- A welcoming and connected community with high levels of perceived safety.
- A relative young population with a median age of 37 years old to drive future growth.
- High levels of local amenities and diversity of recreational and sporting opportunities.
- A full calendar of community-run festivals and events boosting the economy.



STRONG AND PRODUCTIVE INDUSTRIES

- Our region has long been built on the economic pillars of agriculture and intensive agriculture, but in more recent years the growth of our manufacturing and energy sectors have developed to bolster our strong regional economy.



STRATEGIC LOCATION AND ACCESS

- Strategically located between the east coast and the west.
- Connectivity to national and international export markets such as Toowoomba Wellcamp Airport and the Port of Brisbane.
- Industrial proximity to Inland Rail.
- Located in the centre of the Queensland Renewable Energy Zone (centre of the energy grid).
- Available land to expand and land zoned to allow for low medium and high impact industries.



NATURE AND LANDSCAPE

- An appealing landscape and location for 'treechangers' due to the assortment of urban centres, quiet small towns and rural lifestyle blocks.
- Surrounded by lakes and weirs for recreational use and the glorious Bunya Mountains area in our backyard.



INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

- Living in the Western Downs is affordable compared to many parts of Queensland.
- Strong offering of quality public and private secondary education.
- Existing pathways into innovation focused industry.





Positive Outcomes

FOR INDIVIDUALS

- Increased educational opportunities.
- Increased and diverse local employment opportunities.
- Utilisation of quality infrastructure and services.

FOR BUSINESS

- Support for current and emerging industry sectors.
- Access to a suitable and skilled workforce.
- Increased customer base living and buying locally.
- Utilisation of quality infrastructure and services.

FOR INVESTORS

- Business friendly Council with award-winning planning scheme.
- Access to a suitable and skilled workforce.
- Available land allowing for low, medium and high impact industries.
- Utilisation of quality infrastructure and services.

FOR THE WESTERN DOWNS COMMUNITY

- Better place to live, work, play and study.
- Providing the community the opportunity to do what they love.
- Serviced by quality business, infrastructure and services, whilst enjoying a regional lifestyle.

Key Partners

Western Downs Regional Council acknowledges the valuable role of key partners for the successful delivery of the strategy, including: Chambers of Commerce, Toowoomba Surat Basin Enterprise (TSBE), Regional Development Australia Darling Downs South West (RDA DDSW), Trade and Investment Queensland (TIQ), Regional Australia Institute (RAI), and the Queensland Small Business Commissioner.





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What's Next?

This long-term strategy will guide collaboration with businesses, community, neighbouring Councils, State and Federal Government, key partners to grow the economy, and meet the needs of our growing population.

Annual actions guided by the strategy will be set in Council's Operational Plan. Western Downs Regional Council reports on a quarterly basis on the successful delivery of these actions.

How can you be involved?

Businesses and organisations operating across the Western Downs can show their support of this **Economic Development Strategy 2023-2028** by submitting a pledge and playing a part in building a strong, resilient, and diverse economy and increasing the region's liveability.

Scan the QR Code below to visit our Economic Development webpage and to stay up to date on the strategy, annual actions, key measures of success, and supporting organisations.

#itspeoplethatmakeit

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FIND OUT MORE

