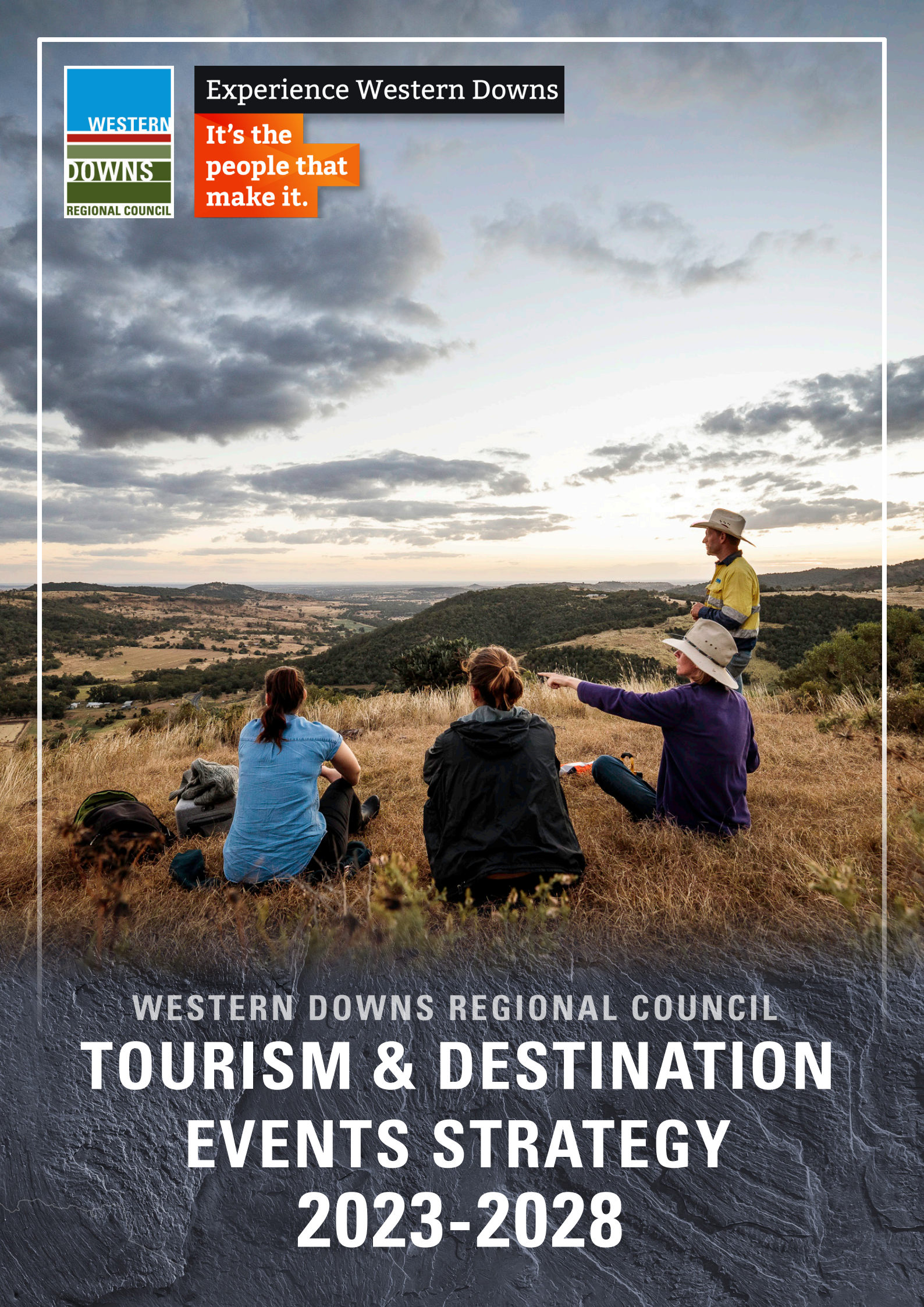




Experience Western Downs

It's the
people that
make it.



WESTERN DOWNS REGIONAL COUNCIL
**TOURISM & DESTINATION
EVENTS STRATEGY
2023-2028**

Mayor's Welcome –



If you travel just 2.5 hours northwest of Brisbane City, you'll find yourself in a magical part of Queensland where the skies are big, the plains are vast, and the people are amazing. It's called the Western Downs, and we're so excited to share our region with you.

The Western Downs offers a range of amazing sights and attractions to fill you with awe; from the ancient treetops of the Bunya Mountains to the French colonial homestead of Jimbour House, and everything in between, there's always more you'll want to explore. Learn the history of the Condamine Bell or Possum Park. Take that perfect selfie at Chinchilla's Big Melon. Walk the tracks of early settlers, or enjoy some great hospitality at any of our great country pubs.

However you decide to spend your time in the Western Downs, one thing is for sure - it's the people that make it. We are proud to have so many welcoming and knowledgeable locals who are all too keen to have a chat and share the lesser-known treasures of their communities. It's also the people who make our destination events so exciting and successful here in the Western Downs.

These destination events - such as the Big Skies Festival, Chinchilla Melon Festival, Dalby Delicious & DeLightful, Jandowae Timbertown Festival, Miles Back to the Bush Festival, Tara Festival of Culture & Camel Races, and Opera at Jimbour - attract tens of thousands of people to our region every year and offer a fabulous opportunity for Western Downs Regional Council to go even bigger and better in the years to come.

That's why it is my pleasure to present Council's **Tourism & Destination Events Strategy 2023 - 2028**. This long-term strategy aims to proactively advance our region as a tourist destination for travellers all over Australia and beyond. It will expand the visitor economy to the Western Downs by providing leading experiences, delivering for our communities, and enabling strong and sustainable local businesses. Importantly, the Tourism & Destination Events Strategy 2023 - 2028 will be essential for our region as we inch closer to the 2032 Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games - a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the Western Downs region to leverage domestic and international tourism, and to develop our great region as an end destination of choice.

The Western Downs has such a rich history and a wealth of incredible sights and sounds to experience. So, whether you're staying for a week, a day, or even a couple of hours, our great people are ready to make you feel right at home in the Western Downs.

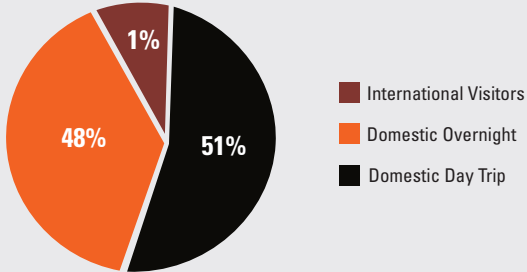
ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

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.

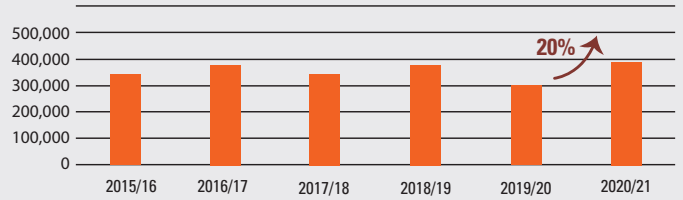
Tourism Snapshot 2022



Visitor Characteristics 5-Year Average

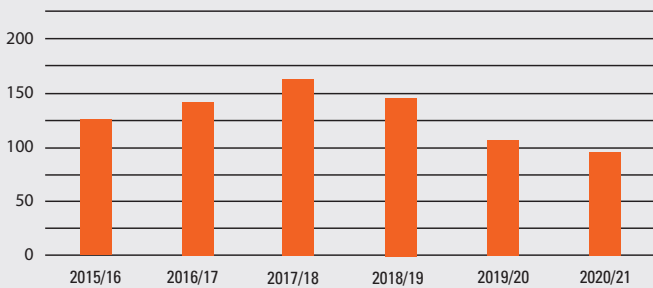


Domestic Overnight Visitors



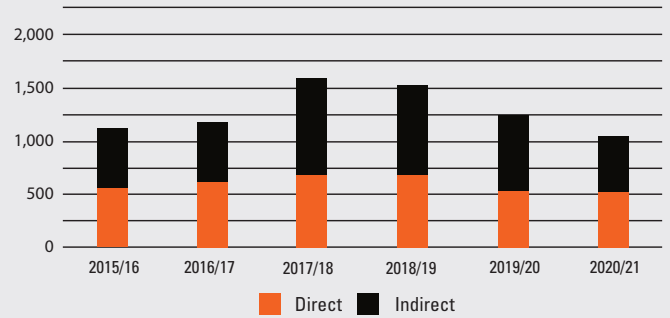
\$86.7 Million in 2021

Tourism Value Added \$MLN



1,137

Employment in Tourism



TOTAL VISITORS
750,000 p/a



TOTAL NIGHTS STAY
1,350,000 p/a



AVERAGE STAY
1.8 Nights

*Source: National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR), 2021
*Source: Tourism Research Australia, 2001
* Please note this data is latest available at the time of the strategy development, January 2023



What is a Visitor Economy?

The Australian Government's "THRIVE 2030" defines a visitor economy as "**a visitor economy reflects the full scope of visitor types and range of businesses that provide services as part of the visitor's end-to-end experience.**" This acknowledges that there are many reasons people travel, including beyond leisure, and there are many individuals and businesses servicing those industries.

The visitor economy caters to both domestic and international visitors travelling for holiday, visiting friends and relatives (VFR), business, work (international travellers only), and/or education (international travellers only).

Why is this Strategy important?

The visitor economy is vital to Western Downs' prosperity as domestic and international visitors generate jobs, investment and growth in communities. It is widely recognised that visitor experiences influence their future spending and investment decisions, drive demand for local products and services, and create lasting networks.

The visitor economy is the **Western Downs' sixth largest employer**, providing jobs in accommodation, transport, arts, culture and recreation, tourism services, education and training, business events, food services and retail.

Whilst COVID-19 and public health measures hit the Australian visitor economy, visitation to the Western Downs region surged. Testament to this is the **20% growth of domestic overnight visitors.**

Key challenges for the Western Downs to be an end destination by choice are **insufficient tourism product and amenities** providing visitors with reasons to stop and stay, as well as **limited accommodation options** and the **lack of coordination between destination events.**

This Tourism & Destination Events Strategy 2023 - 2028 clearly articulates **a strategic pathway** for the Western Downs to **build the visitor economy** in a competitive and resilient industry, by diversifying markets, increasing experiences, collaborating and enabling modernisation of tourism product.

This strategy will inform Western Downs Regional Council's yearly actions and priorities and will demonstrate how other key stakeholders can contribute to ensure the Western Downs grows into an end destination of choice for repeat visitors.

¹Australian Government, Australian Trade and Investment Commission, *THRIVE 2030 The Re-Imagined Visitor Economy A national strategy for Australia's visitor economy recovery and return to sustainable growth, 2022 to 2030*

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 an end destination of choice for repeat visitors, and leverages off significant drive-through visitation. This strategic vision aligns with Western Downs Regional Council's Corporate Plan 2021-2026.

Council is committed to build the visitor economy in a competitive and resilient industry, by diversifying markets, increasing experiences, collaborating and enabling, and modernisation of tourism product.

Strategic Pillars

Throughout community engagement sessions, broadly similar expectations for the future vision for the Western Downs were verbalized, which have been captured in the below strategic pillars. These are aligned to Thrive 2030. The below guiding principles were defined to guide the future tourism development of Western Downs.

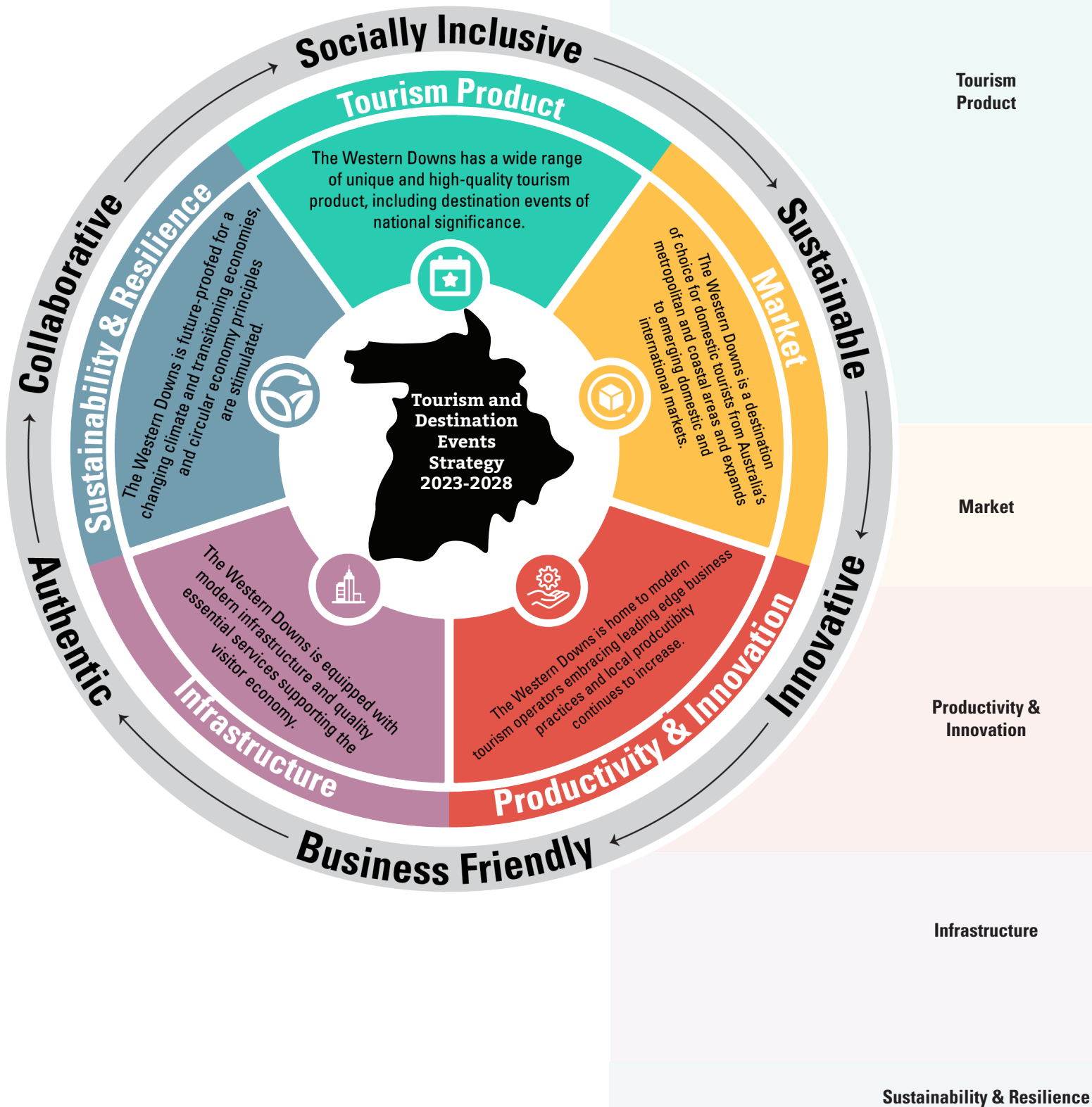
- **Tourism Product** The Western Downs has a wide range of unique and high-quality tourism product, including destination events of national significance.
- **Market** The Western Downs is a destination of choice for domestic tourists from Australia's metropolitan and coastal areas and expands to emerging domestic and international markets.
- **Infrastructure** The Western Downs is equipped with modern infrastructure and quality essential services supporting the visitor economy.
- **Productivity & Innovation** The Western Downs is home to modern tourism operators embracing leading edge business practices 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

The below guiding principles were defined to guide the future tourism development of Western Downs. These guiding principles will guide the overall direction of the strategy, as well as tangible objectives and actions that follow.

- **Collaborative** Facilitate partnerships and relationships with community, tourism operators, destination event committees, regional tourism organisations, levels of government and neighbouring regions.
- **Socially Inclusive** Tourism and event offering is accessible and inclusive to diversity of travellers and meeting their individual needs.
- **Sustainable** Ensuring a balance between economic growth, environmental care and social wellbeing.
- **Authentic** Tourism product and destination events celebrate the authenticity of the Western Downs region and is locally advocated.
- **Business Friendly** Enabling entrepreneurship and acknowledging businesses' valuable role in the community.
- **Innovative** Continuously improving business processes and seeking new ideas to enable tourism market 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
Grow visitation to destination events.	Support Local Committees delivering Destination Events through continued cash and in-kind funding support. Successful delivery of Council-run destination events.	6 supported destination events collectively attract an average of 54,900 visitors to the region every two (2) years. <i>WDRC</i> Council-delivered Big Skies Festival (annual) attracts 1,366 visitors to the region for an average of 4 days annually. <i>WDRC</i>	60,000 visitation and increased average night stay at existing destination events. <i>WDRC</i> 2,000 visitation and increased average night stay at already existing destination events. <i>WDRC</i>
Attract new destination events.	Promotion of the Destination Events Grants Program and providing clear instructions on required information for application.	2021/22 no successful applications under the Destination Events Grants Program.	Full utilisation of Destination Events Grants Program by attracting a minimum of 3 new destination events to the region annually.
Attract new accommodation.	Attract new accommodation, and support diversification.	70 accommodation providers in the Western Downs. <i>WDRC</i>	75 providers and or product expansion. <i>WDRC</i>
Expand tourism product.	Support development of unique tourism product and experiences, leveraging of regional assets and strengths. Encourage expanded opening hours of hospitality and retail businesses when destination events are held.	125 ATDW listed Tourism products and experiences in the Western Downs.	175 ATDW listings in the region.
	Support museums and galleries through continued funding support.	7 museums and galleries collectively attract 9,348 visitors. <i>WDRC</i>	Increase visitation to museums & galleries to 10,000 annually. <i>WDRC</i>
	Develop public art and sculpture trails.	Public art promoted town-based.	Public art and sculpture trail developed ad promoted.
Grow and diversify tourism markets.	Marketing & promotion to increase visibility of Western Downs as destination of choice continued support to Southern Queensland Country Tourism.	750,000 visitors p.a. <i>TRA</i> 48% domestic day, 51% domestic overnight and 1% international travellers. <i>TRA</i>	800,000 visitors p.a. <i>TRA</i> 35% domestic day, 60% domestic overnight and 2% international travellers. <i>TRA</i>
Increase access to new markets.	Tourism product and offering marketed and sold by commercial tourism companies (tour operators, whole sales), referred to as 'packaged product'. Tourism product and offering marketed and sold online by owners/operators, referred to as 'bookable experience'.	0 packaged experiences online. <i>WDRC</i> 6 bookable experiences. <i>WDRC</i>	5 packaged experiences online. <i>WDRC</i> 12 bookable experiences. <i>WDRC</i>
Increase quality of tourism product.	Support tourism operators to increase customer experience.	30 'Best of Queensland' products and experiences in the Western Downs. <i>TEQ</i>	38 Best of Queensland Experiences. <i>TEQ</i>
Increase customer experience by providing information and extending visitation.	Operate profitable and accredited Visitor Information Centres (VIC) and support non-accredited VICs.	3 accredited VICs operated by Council, 2 operated by committees and 3 within Council Customer Service Centres. (CSC's)	3 accredited VICs operated by Council, 2 operated by committees and 3 within Council CSC's. Develop tourism experiences co-located to our VICs.
Expand visitor infrastructure.	Support investment in priority / key infrastructure and services.	Commence visitor surveys.	Improved visitor feedback.
Enable environmental sustainability of tourism offering.	Study to be conducted to measure emissions in the Western Downs region to set a benchmark.		Western Downs is trending towards net zero emissions by 2050, unlocking new jobs and industry opportunities.



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 full calendar of community-run festivals and events boosting the economy.



ENVIRONMENT

- A pristine natural environment and diverse natural assets.
- Extensive open spaces, big skies, views, sunsets, forestry, mountains, lakes, weirs, creeks, rivers and fossils make the region an attractive and accessible holiday retreat for metropolitan communities.
- Offers a rural experience - peace and quiet - connection to flora and fauna.



LOCATION

- Located only 2.5 hours northwest of Brisbane and 3+ hours of the coastal areas.
- Strategically located on a key transport junction.
- Connectivity to national and international markets via Toowoomba Wellcamp Airport and Brisbane Airport.



DESTINATION EVENTS

- A consistent and full calendar of events held across the region.
- A range of destination activities and events to suit all ages.



INFRASTRUCTURE

- Accommodation options (traditional and emerging) to support the growth in demand.
- Existing and recently upgraded high quality campgrounds located at weirs and lakes.
- A number of well maintained showgrounds located across the region.
- A number of walking tracks and bike trails.
- Visitor Information Centres and strong online presence.



OPEN FOR BUSINESS

- A Council considered easy to engage and do business with, committed to attracting and enabling development.
- One of Queensland's most progressive, and award-winning, Planning Scheme.
- Western Downs Regional Council having committed to, and recognised as, a Small Business Friendly Council.
- A range of state-of-the-art conferencing and event facilities.





Positive Outcomes

FOR INDIVIDUALS

- Utilisation of quality infrastructure and services.
- Strong and diverse employment opportunities.

FOR BUSINESS

- Support for current and emerging industry sectors.
- Increased demand for local products and services.
- Utilisation of quality infrastructure and services.

FOR INVESTORS

- Utilisation of quality infrastructure and services.
- Business friendly Council with award-winning planning scheme.
- Access to growing tourism market, both domestically and internationally.

FOR THE WESTERN DOWNS COMMUNITY

- Better place to live, work, play and study.
- 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: Destination Event Committees, Southern Queensland Country Tourism (SQCT), Tourism & Events Queensland (TEQ), Tourism Australia (TA), Regional Development Australia Darling Downs South West (RDA DDSW), Regional Australia Institute (RAI), the Queensland Small Business Commissioner, Local Volunteers, Individuals and other Organisations.





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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 to this **Tourism & Destination Events Strategy 2023-2028** by submitting a pledge, and playing a part to grow the Western Downs into an end destination of choice for repeat visitors.

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

#itsthepeoplethatmakeit

Western Downs Regional Council

Postal Address

PO Box 551 Dalby, QLD 4405

E info@wdrc.qld.gov.au

P 1300 COUNCIL

Interstate +617 4679 4000

W www.wdrc.qld.gov.au

FIND OUT MORE

