



An Australian Government Initiative



Regional
Development
Australia



Wide Bay Burnett

Strategic Plan

2026 – 2030

June 2026

Local people developing local solutions www.rda.gov.au



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MINISTER'S MESSAGE



Regional Australia is not a single story. Its communities are distinct from one another - each shaped by different strengths, pressures, and potential. Each deserving of a government that listens, and organisations that genuinely understand what is needed on the ground.

The Regional Development Australia Wide Bay Burnett (RDAWBB) Strategic Plan 2026-2030 reflects the place-based, evidence-led thinking the Australian Government has championed through our Regional Investment Framework. By building regional intelligence, strengthening advocacy, and connecting the people and organisations working across the Wide Bay Burnett, RDAWBB is doing work that makes a real difference to communities - the work of translating local knowledge into action, and local priorities into outcomes.

The Australian Government is proud to support the RDA network as a cornerstone of regional development across the country, a network built on a simple but powerful idea: local people creating local opportunities. We know that when local expertise informs decision-making, the results are meaningful and genuinely owned. This plan is a clear demonstration of that principle in practice.

I congratulate RDAWBB on the thoughtfulness and ambition behind this Strategic Plan. It sets a compelling direction for the organisation and, more importantly, for the region it serves.

I look forward to continuing to work in partnership with RDAWBB as this plan takes shape.

The Hon. Kristy McBain MP

Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories Minister for Emergency Management

PREAMBLE

“If RDAWBB did not exist, what would be different?”

This was the question that guided our strategic planning process.

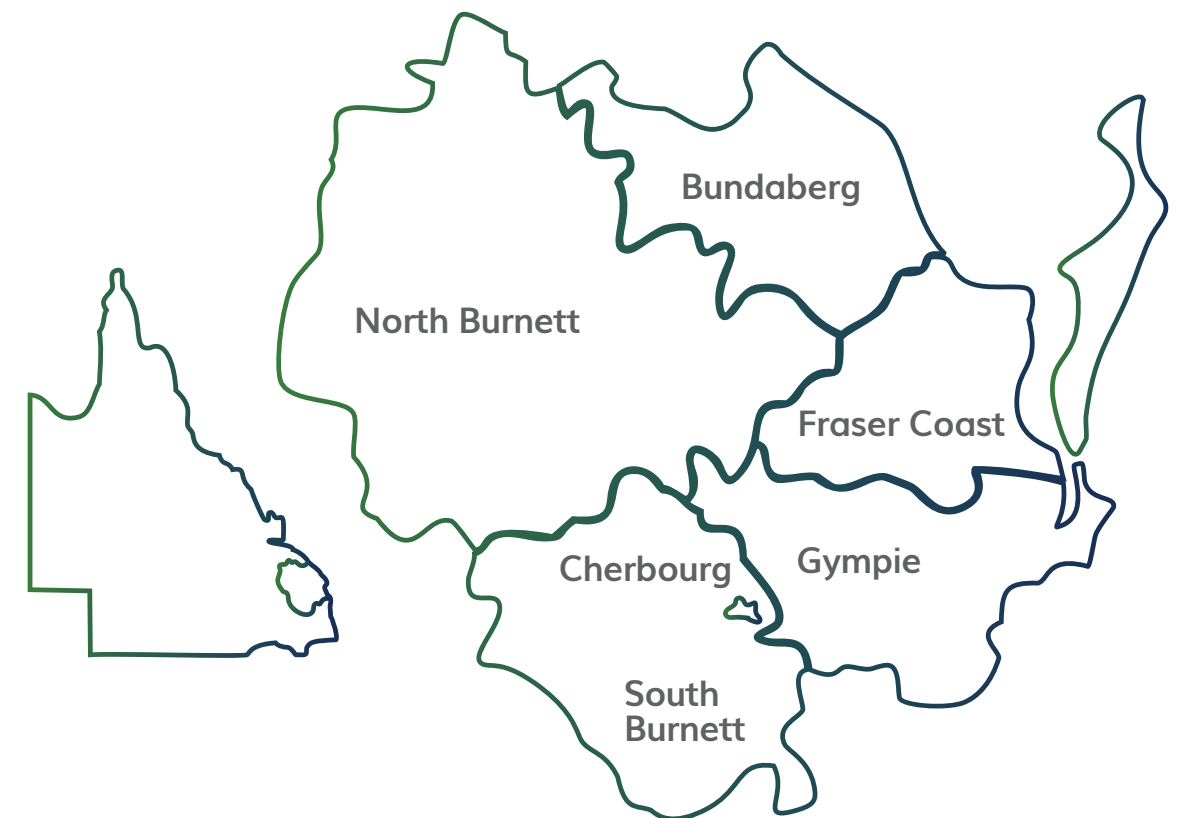
This plan is our answer to that question, and our commitment to making the answer matter.

Our purpose is to give voice to a region too often absent from national conversations. We bring together people and organisations working toward shared goals, and we build the understanding of this complex region that makes that work matter. This plan is how we intend to do it.

This Strategic Plan represents a renewed commitment by Regional Development Australia Wide Bay Burnett (RDAWBB) to serve one of Queensland's most diverse and geographically expansive regions. It reflects the insights of our Board, our team, and the communities and stakeholders we work alongside.

At the heart of this plan is a deliberate shift: from being seen primarily as a coordinator of regional activity, to becoming a trusted, authoritative advocate, convenor and source of regional intelligence for the region.

This plan is designed to align with the Australian Government's Regional Investment Framework (RIF) and Regional Development Australia Charter, while firmly grounding our work in the realities, priorities and aspirations of our region.

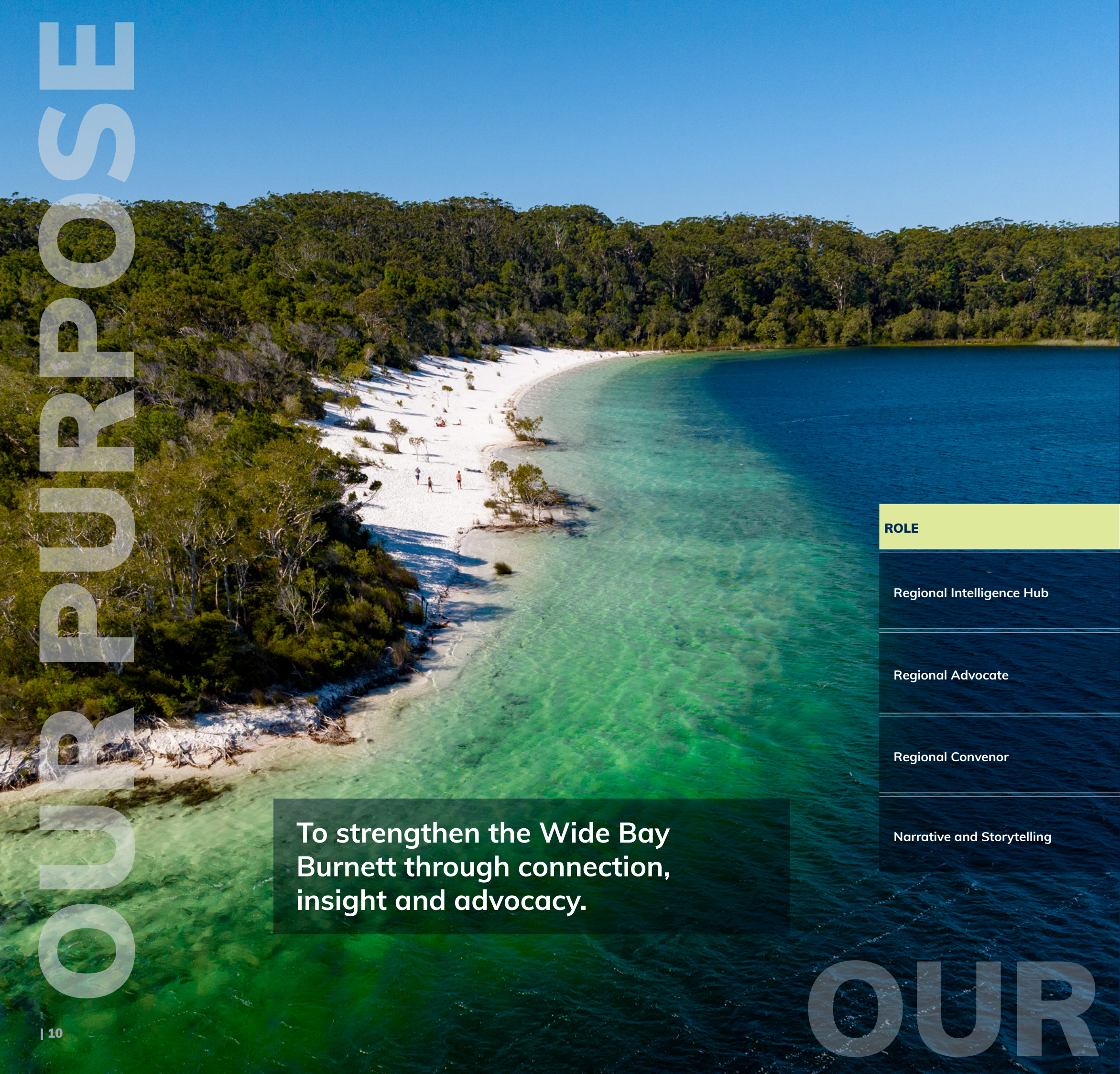


RDAWBB operates across six Local Government Areas (LGA): Fraser Coast, Bundaberg, Gympie, South Burnett, North Burnett, and Cherbourg. The region spans a large and complex geographic area with significant diversity in economic base, infrastructure, population, and opportunity.

We are guided by the [Australian Government's Charter](#) for the [Regional Development Australia Network](#) and [Regional Investment Framework](#), which identifies priority investment areas:

- **People** – Putting people at the forefront of growth, with local voices influencing decision making.
- **Places** – Targeted and place-based investment that enables communities to thrive.
- **Services** – Investment in regional services with a focus on improving quality and accessibility.
- **Industry and Local Economies** – Ensuring regional industries and economies are positioned for sustainable growth.

As an organisation, RDAWBB operates with a small, skilled team and is committed to maximising impact through focus, partnerships, and the intelligent use of evidence and insight.



To strengthen the Wide Bay Burnett through connection, insight and advocacy.

RDAWBB plays four core roles in the region:

ROLE	WHAT IT MEANS
Regional Intelligence Hub	Integrating data and insight to inform evidence-based action, and support advocacy and decision-making.
Regional Advocate	Representing the interests, priorities and opportunities of the Wide Bay Burnett to all levels of government, investors and decision-makers.
Regional Convenor	Bringing together stakeholders to align efforts, share information, and identify common priorities.
Narrative and Storytelling	Shaping how the region is understood: by those within it, and by those who make decisions about it.

OUR OPERATING CONTEXT

The Region

Wide Bay Burnett is a large, diverse and complex region. Its six LGAs vary significantly in:

- Economic base and industry mix
- Infrastructure and service levels
- Population size, density and demographics
- Fiscal capacity and government resources
- Aspirations for their region's future.

This diversity is both a strength and a challenge. It creates a wide range of opportunities and means that a single regional narrative is rarely sufficient to capture the full picture.

The Landscape

RDABBB operates across a complex and layered landscape. Our stakeholders span local governments, regional councils and peak bodies, Queensland and Australian Government departments and programs, diverse industry sectors, community organisations, and education and training providers. Navigating this landscape effectively is central to our role as an intelligence hub, advocate and convener.

While relationships across this system are genuine and active, true coordination, in the sense of shared governance, aligned resourcing and integrated planning, remains

limited. Communication and cooperation are more accurate descriptions of current activity. This plan acknowledges that reality and responds to it honestly.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



Priority 1: _____

Build Regional Intelligence

We gather, share and apply regional intelligence where it matters most.

What we will do:

We will develop our capacity as the region's primary source of insight, data and system-level understanding. The goal is not to have mapped everything: it is to have the most comprehensive, current and nuanced understanding of the Wide Bay Burnett of any organisation, and to use that understanding with authority and accuracy in every conversation about regional development.

How we will do it:

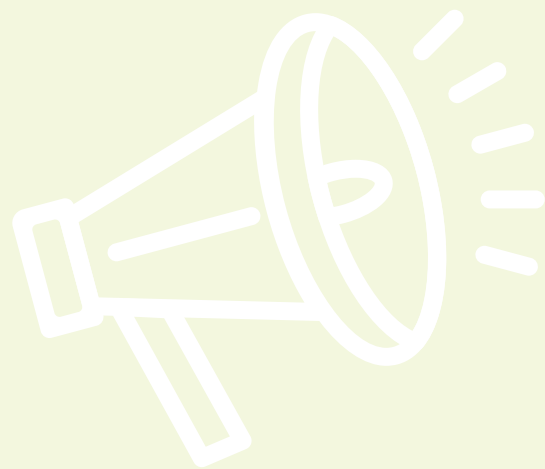
- Develop a Regional Intelligence Framework: a systematic approach to gathering, synthesising and maintaining regional data.
- Build the knowledge and capability of stakeholders to improve investment, cross-boundary relationships and sector interdependencies.
- Share regional intelligence through proactive and responsive policy

engagement, including submissions, briefings, and consultation responses.

- Identify and address knowledge gaps through partnerships with universities, industry and government, sharing that intelligence through proactive and responsive policy engagement including submissions, briefings, and consultation responses.
- Use intelligence to drive advocacy, convening and narrative work.

What success looks like:

- RDAWBB is regarded by stakeholders as the most reliable and authoritative source of regional insight.
- Intelligence is actively used to support government decision-making, investment proposals and program design.
- RDAWBB is a necessary participant in regional conversations, not simply an invited one.



Priority 2: _____

Strengthen Advocacy

Advocacy is where our work becomes visible.

What we will do:

We will strengthen our advocacy function as the primary expression of our value to the region. This means proactively representing regional priorities to government and decision-makers: not only when asked, but at the times and in the forums where it matters most.

How we will do it:

- Develop a clear, evidence-based Regional Advocacy Agenda, updated annually.
- Engage proactively with Australian and Queensland Government policy processes, budget cycles, and investment programs.
- Advocate for individual LGAs, groups of councils, priority industries and the whole region, depending on the opportunity and need.

- Ensure advocacy reflects the RIF framework, connecting regional priorities to national investment priorities.
- Work constructively across all levels of government while maintaining our own authoritative position on regional matters.

What success looks like:

- Advocacy positions are clearly articulated and evidence-based.
- RDAWBB is consistently represented in relevant government forums and consultation processes.
- Demonstrable influence on investment decisions, policy settings, or funding outcomes.



Priority 3: _____

Connect and Convene

We convene the conversations that move the region forward and support the actions that follow.

What we will do:

We will continue to play a convening role, bringing together stakeholders to share information, align efforts and identify common ground. We will do this with clarity about what convening is and is not: it is not coordination in the formal sense, and we will not overstate our authority or capacity in this space. Where genuine collaboration can be built, we will work to support it.

How we will do it:

- Identify and facilitate strategic conversations around shared regional priorities.
- Support alignment across local government, industry and community stakeholders on common themes (e.g. workforce, emerging industries, infrastructure).

- Constructively challenge the use of “collaboration” where communication or cooperation would be a more accurate description, and hold parties to the standard when genuine collaboration is committed to.
- Create the conditions for coordination to become more realistic over time, as trust, shared data and shared narrative develop.

What success looks like:

- Stakeholders consistently describe RDAWBB as a trusted, active and independent convenor.
- Regional priorities are more consistently aligned across key stakeholders.
- Stakeholders are aligned on regional priorities, and new partnerships and initiatives emerge.



Priority 4: _____

Jobs, Skills and Workforce

We connect educators, trainers, employers and job seekers to build a stronger regional workforce pipeline.

What we will do:

We will maintain and strengthen our workforce development programs, particularly those performing well in Fraser Coast and Bundaberg regions, while taking a longer-term systems view of the region's workforce challenges.

How we will do it:

- Continue delivery and expansion of workforce programs across Wide Bay Burnett.
- Engage earlier in education and career pathways, including connections with schools, training providers and industry.
- Develop better longitudinal data on program outcomes, to demonstrate long-term impact.
- Address workforce retention as a systemic challenge, connected to liveability, aspiration and opportunity.

- Contribute to regional workforce planning, aligned to the emerging industry sectors identified in Priority 5.
- Recognise future challenges, and identify pathways and solutions for upskilling and retraining, particularly in industries where AI may replace roles.

What success looks like:

- Employment programs achieve strong outcomes, grow sustainably, and secure additional funding to expand service delivery.
- Data demonstrates long-term impact across program cohorts.
- RDAWBB contributes to a more connected pipeline between education, training and employment.



Priority 5: _____

Position for Emerging Industries

We identify the industries of the future and advocate for the conditions that bring them to Wide Bay Burnett.

What we will do:

Wide Bay Burnett has real potential in sectors aligned to national investment priorities. RDAWBB's role is not to deliver industry development directly, but to ensure the region is well positioned to attract it: identifying opportunities early, supporting strategic positioning, and advocating for the infrastructure, policy and investment conditions that allow industries to grow.

Key sectors of opportunity include:

- Agriculture technology (ag-tech)
- Healthcare and health innovation
- Energy resources and systems
- Digital infrastructure (including data centres).

How we will do it:

- Identify and document the region's current strengths, gaps, vulnerabilities and readiness across each priority sector.
- Advocate for infrastructure, skills and policy settings that enable industry growth.
- Support relevant stakeholders to connect with government programs, investment opportunities and industry networks.
- Ensure technology adoption considers the region's social fabric and workforce capability,

What success looks like:

- Government and decision-makers recognise the Wide Bay Burnett's potential in priority sectors.
- The region is better placed to attract and secure investment in priority sectors.
- At least one significant emerging industry opportunity is actively progressed during the plan period.



Priority 6: _____

Shape the Regional Narrative

Shaping the story of who we are and who we are becoming.

What we will do:

We will build a regional narrative that is true to our diversity, honest about our challenges and confident in our strengths. We will tell that story at every scale, lifting our profile and using it to advocate for what the Wide Bay Burnett deserves.

How we will do it:

- Develop a Regional Narrative Framework with three core questions as its foundation:
 - What do we want people to experience?
 - What do we want people to know?
 - What do we want people to do
- Tell stories at both macro (whole region) and micro (place, sector, community) levels.

- Lift the region's confidence and external profile, celebrating the diverse identities that make the Wide Bay Burnett who we are.
- Use storytelling as an advocacy tool, combining lived experience and evidence to tell narratives that resonate and make the case for investment and opportunity.

What success looks like:

- A coherent regional narrative is shared and used by key stakeholders.
- Stories of regional success reach target audiences in government, investment and community.
- The Wide Bay Burnett is perceived as a region of confidence, opportunity and identity.

Our Operating Principles

Focus over breadth

We will do fewer things with greater impact, rather than attempting to cover everything

Evidence over assumption

Our advocacy, convening and intelligence will be grounded in data and genuine understanding

Influence over control

We will prioritise our ability to shape outcomes, not own them

Honesty over optics

We will name things as they are, including the limits of our role and our reach

Alignment with the Regional Investment Framework

RIF PRIORITY	OUR CONTRIBUTION
People	Workforce programs, education pathways, regional skills intelligence
Places	Infrastructure advocacy, liveability, regional services intelligence
Services	Regional intelligence to support advocacy for investment into services
Local Industries and Economies	Industry positioning, investment facilitation, trade and emerging sector support

HOW
WE WILL
WORK



Regional Development Australia Wide Bay Burnett
3/79 Torquay Road,
Pialba, Queensland 4655
(07) 4124 2526 | info@rdawidebayburnett.org.au



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