

# NORTH WEST QUEENSLAND ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION STRATEGY

**2019**

STRATEGY DOCUMENT

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*Image: Wright's Welding, Mount Isa (DSDMIP)*



## Minister's foreword

Creating jobs, increasing private sector investment and engaging more young Queenslanders in education, training or work are key priorities for the Palaszczuk Government. As a key action of our government's \$39 million *A Strategic Blueprint for Queensland's North West Minerals Province*, I am proud to release the *North West Queensland Economic Diversification Strategy*.

Developed in close consultation with key regional stakeholders, the strategy outlines initiatives across the three themes of: enhanced investment environment, strong supply chain and sustainable communities. Through these themes, the strategy aligns with the government's strategic plan to leverage the North West's competitive advantages in resources, agriculture, tourism and other sectors, to support employment and economic growth.

Although mineral resources will remain the primary industry for this region, the strategy aims to support the growth of other industries that can weather commodity cycle impacts to optimise local employment opportunities. The strategic blueprint provides a framework for collaborative action in North West Queensland. The outcomes of this approach are evidenced in this strategy.

Through the public consultation process, stakeholders expressed enthusiasm for a rapid roll out of projects. While a detailed implementation plan is being developed to support this strategy's delivery, the Palaszczuk Government continues to focus on driving regional productivity. Earlier this year, our government unveiled a half a billion-dollar plan to boost freight exports on the Mount Isa Line. In addition, the release of more than 20,200 square kilometres of land in the Mount Isa to Townsville Economic Zone to support future oil and gas exploration highlights the new growth opportunities for this region.

Our government is also supporting mines such as New Century through the Resources Regional Development Framework that is designed to promote investment in regions like the North West Minerals Province. Once executed, this agreement will assist to reinvigorate activity at the Century Zinc Mine (Lawn Hill), including over 260 construction and 240 operational jobs, the recommissioning of associated infrastructure, and the continued dredging of the Port of Karumba.

There is a strong pipeline of projects with the recent Coordinator-General approvals of the 15 Mile Irrigated Agriculture Project and Kidston Pumped Storage Hydro Project. Also, CopperString 2.0 was declared a coordinated project and is currently having its approval process overseen by the Coordinator-General. These potentially transformational projects will act as a catalyst to a more diversified economy.

As we finalise the implementation plan, I look forward to announcing further programs that will continue to create jobs and stimulate growth across this important region. I am committed to continuing to work in partnership with you to realise the opportunities in the *North West Queensland Economic Diversification Strategy* and *A Strategic Blueprint for Queensland's North West Minerals Province*.

### **The Honourable Cameron Dick MP**

Minister for State Development,  
Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning



*Image: Tailings reprocessing, New Century Mine (New Century Resources)*

# Executive summary

Mining and minerals processing is the central source of employment and a significant contributor to the North West Queensland economy.

These operations also have indirect supply chain and employment impacts on zinc and copper refineries in Townsville, as well as the Port of Townsville.

Recent economic challenges including the closure of a number of older, larger mining operations in the region highlight the need to diversify and adjust to global changes. Improvements in commodity prices and the application of advanced technology present an opportunity for renewal in the region's mining industries.

Proximity to growing populations in Asia and the Indo-Pacific, as well as opportunities to improve land management and production, present future agricultural opportunities and markets.

**The Queensland Government through the Department of State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning (DSDMIP) is preparing a detailed plan to support the implementation of this strategy.**

**Some initiatives are already underway, and are ongoing, others will be commenced over two years (mid 2021).**

**The implementation plan will be released later in 2019.**

A unique natural landscape, world-class fossil deposits, national parks and cultural heritage experiences provide a back-drop to vibrant outback events, with opportunities to develop year-round tourism attractions.

This *North West Queensland Economic Diversification Strategy* presents a collaborative plan of action across four key sectors: resources, agriculture, tourism, and business and industry.

North West Queensland has been hit particularly hard in recent times. The 2019 floods impacted critical transport infrastructure and regional productivity. The severity of the event triggered an unprecedented response with around \$242 million in disaster response funding jointly committed by the state and the Commonwealth Government. It will likely be sometime before the region's economy fully recuperates. Despite this, the opportunities to diversify and build resilience across the region's businesses and industries remain more relevant than ever.

While government-led, this strategy has been developed with strong community and industry input and consultation. It is designed to provide North West Queensland with a summary of opportunities and actions that look beyond the immediate economic recovery phase towards long-term opportunities to attract investment, strengthen supply chains and build sustainable communities.

# Introduction and context

The Queensland Government established the North West Minerals Province Taskforce in November 2015 to identify issues affecting the mining industry and to help plan a strategic way forward.

This led to the development of a four-year strategic blueprint for the region. Released in July 2017, *A Strategic Blueprint for Queensland's North West Minerals Province* (the blueprint) sets out the Queensland Government's vision for supporting strong and prosperous industries, businesses and communities in the region.

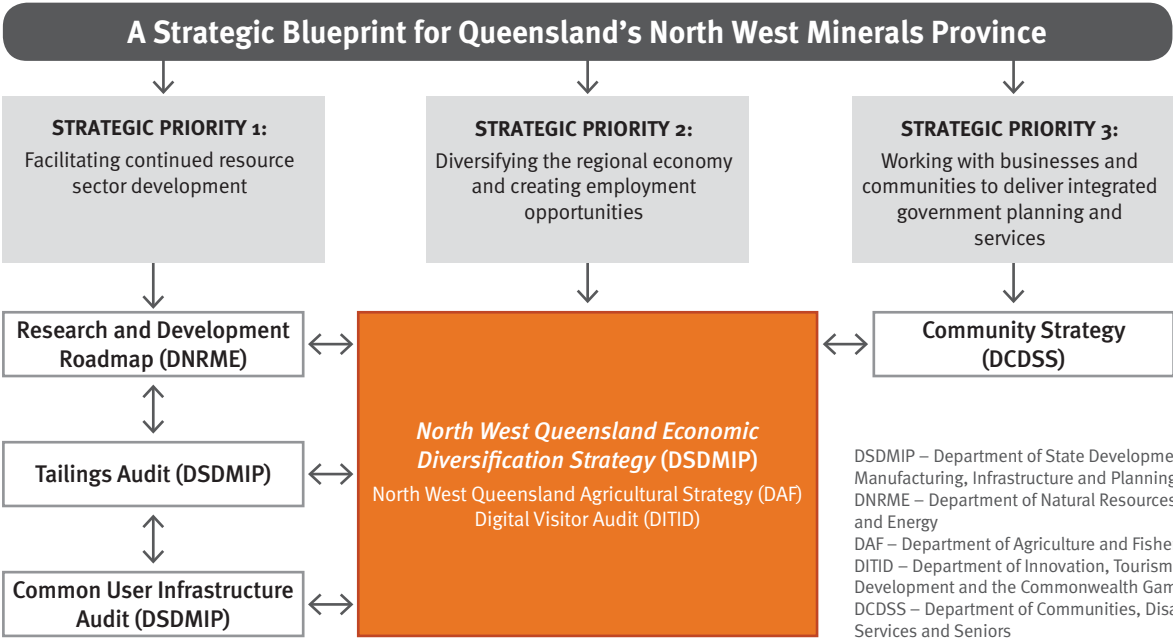
The blueprint provides a platform for collaboration by all levels of government, business and industry, and communities. Supported by \$39 million from the Queensland Government, the blueprint leverages existing initiatives and includes new measures which are being implemented across three strategic priorities, as illustrated below.

A key action of the blueprint's Strategic Priority 2 was development of a *North West Queensland Economic Diversification Strategy* (the strategy). The strategy builds on and supports other blueprint initiatives, providing a mechanism to progress identified opportunities.

- The strategy identifies initiatives to:
- attract and support investment in the province
  - strengthen the supply chains
  - build sustainable communities across the 10 local government areas of the province.

The North West has a strategic relationship with surrounding areas. Critical supply chain and value-adding industries in Townsville rely on the commodities exported from the province.

Increased investment and diversification in North West Queensland will contribute to economic growth outside of the province helping to support new jobs and industries.







*Image: Cattle grazing, McKinlay Shire. (DSDMIP)*

## Consultation

This strategy has been informed by the outcomes and findings of other blueprint actions, and through extensive consultation with key stakeholders.

A formal structure established to guide the blueprint's implementation and review has also provided input to this strategy.

A Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) provided advice and feedback on a range of regional issues. Committee membership includes representatives from:

- local, state and commonwealth government
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- community organisations
- mining and exploration sector
- agriculture
- fertiliser industry
- unions
- tourism
- education and training
- transport
- health.

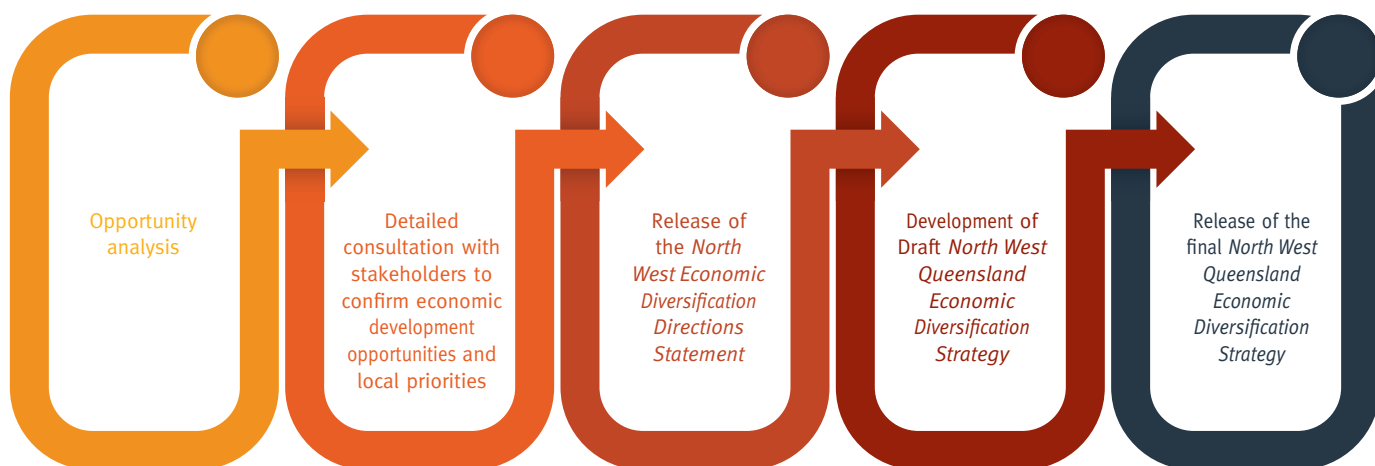
In August 2018, the department hosted a North West Futures forum in Mount Isa. This event brought over 100 stakeholders together to discuss implementation of *A Strategic Blueprint for Queensland's North West Minerals Province*. To guide conversations on the development of this strategy, a *North West Queensland Economic Diversification Directions Statement* was released. Following the forum, the department undertook targeted consultation across the region to develop the draft strategy.

The draft strategy was released for public consultation between 30 May and 26 July 2019. During this time, the department proactively engaged with stakeholders in face-to-face meetings and phone conversations. Written submissions were received from a diverse range of stakeholders.

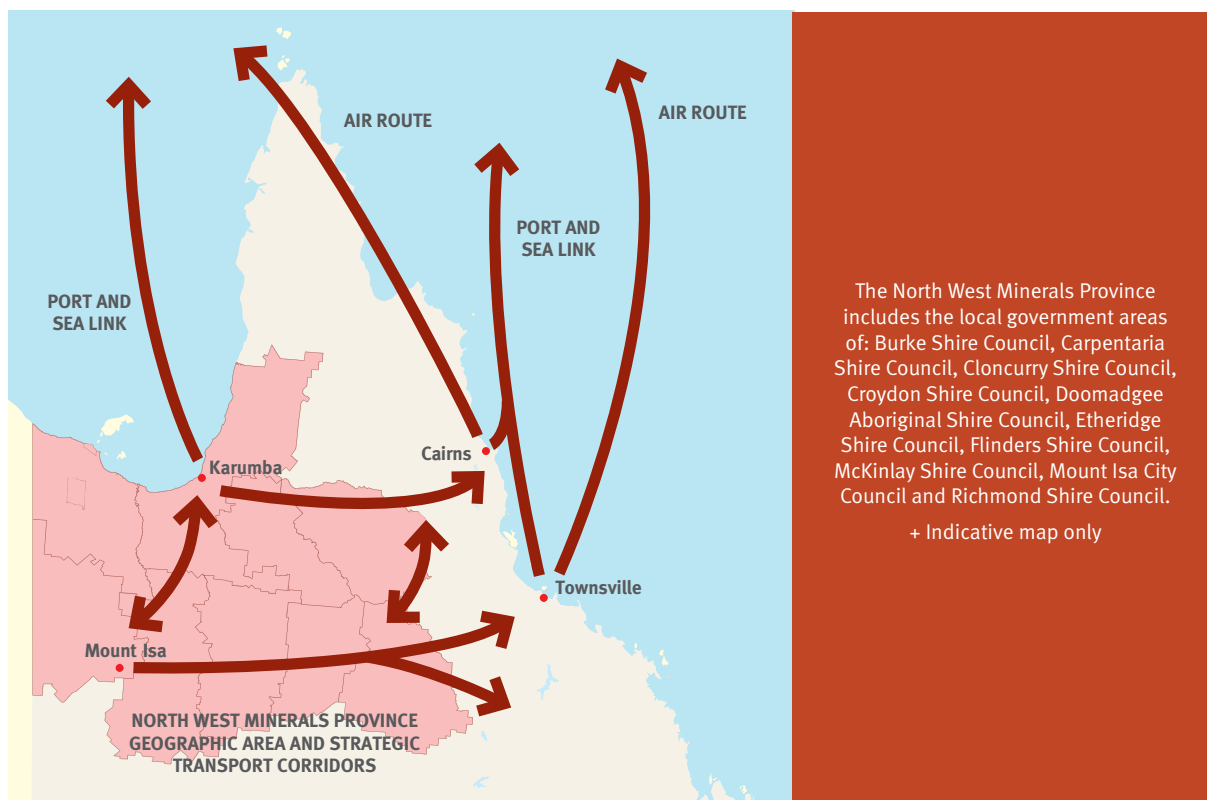
Consultation identified broad support for the draft's strategic direction and acknowledged the importance of regional partnerships in the strategy's implementation. This feedback has been incorporated into this strategy. Engagement will continue via the Stakeholder Advisory Committee as the strategy's supporting implementation plan is finalised.



The Honourable Cameron Dick MP, Minister for State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning with North West Minerals Province Mayors and local government representatives at the North West Futures Forum in Mount Isa, August 2018.



- SAC meeting in Mount Isa
- Regional Implementation Team consultation with local government, remote area boards and chambers of commerce.
- SAC meeting in Cloncurry
- Regional Implementation Team consultation with local government, remote area boards and chambers of commerce.
- Consultation at the North West Futures Forum
- Stakeholder feedback incorporated.
- SAC meeting in Burketown and Mount Isa
- Regional Implementation Team consultation with local government, remote area boards and chambers of commerce
- Release for broader consultation.
- SAC meeting in Richmond
- Development of detailed Implementation Plan.



## Scope

Feedback received during consultation on the draft *North West Queensland Economic Diversification Strategy* supported the government's collaborative approach with local governments, communities, businesses and other stakeholders to attract investment and strengthen supply chains to boost the region's economy.

The region's remoteness and varying climatic conditions pose some challenges to diversification. Energy, road, rail and water are key enablers supporting industry investment and liveability. The diversification initiatives aim to positively influence the investment environment.

The Queensland Government is progressing a broad range of programs to reduce barriers to investment and support ongoing sustainable development.

As the Queensland Government's lead economic development agency, DSDMIP is charged with coordinating the overall implementation of the blueprint as well as development of the *North West Queensland Economic Diversification Strategy*. The department works closely with other Queensland Government agencies to oversee the delivery of the blueprint strategic priorities.

## Objectives

Through aligning with the work of local government, the community, economic development organisations and existing state government programs, this strategy will:

- support long-term, sustainable employment
- strengthen services, employment outcomes and business opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- identify opportunities in new markets and throughout the supply chain
- support innovative commercial models
- build business capacity and entrepreneurship
- set a framework to enhance and optimise enabling infrastructure
- strengthen industry and cross-government coordination
- encourage investment in significant economic development and diversification projects.

Much work is already being done at a local level to attract and retain workers and their families. The initiatives in this strategy, together with the Community Strategy being developed under Strategic Priority 3 of the blueprint, build on this work.

### Supply chain strategy

The Queensland Government has committed \$110 million over four years to improve the North West Minerals Province supply chain right through to the Port of Townsville. This targeted supply chain strategy particularly supports mining and exploration activities, and efficient freight movement.

This investment includes \$80 million over the four years to reduce rail access costs to improve the competitiveness of the Mount Isa line and drive a shift from road to rail.

The strategy includes in-principle support for the development of a new common user multi modal container terminal at the Port of Townsville, that will improve the efficiency of freight movement across the network. This includes a contribution of \$30 million to the terminal, with the Port of Townsville providing a further \$18 million.

### A coordinated response to the 2019 monsoon trough

In January and February of 2019, the North and Far North Queensland Monsoon Trough caused damage and losses to communities across 39 local government areas.

Industries and communities across North West Queensland were severely impacted.

The event activated Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA), a joint commonwealth/state-funded program that provides financial assistance to support disaster recovery.

Under these arrangements, Queensland secured \$242 million in DRFA Category C and D extraordinary circumstances recovery, funding, jointly funded by the state and the Commonwealth Government.

This package includes funding (\$100 betterment fund) to build more resilient infrastructure and provides other measures such as environmental recovery, community recovery including a flexible grants program, community health and wellbeing support, as well as tourism, industry and business support.

In addition under the DRFA, the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA) has, to date, approved more than \$91 million in Recovery Grants to more than 2170 primary producers, small businesses and not-for-profit organisations impacted by the monsoon trough.

## Why diversify?

North West Queensland's remoteness and reliance on mining and agriculture means that it is disproportionately vulnerable to external impacts such as fluctuations in commodity prices, highly variable climate and energy and transport costs.

These impacts challenge new investment in the region and place pressure on existing business and industry.

Maintaining a critical population mass is vital to support local economies across the region. A stable population provides the basis for employment, maintaining vibrant communities and supporting local business and essential services. These are all elements which influence the liveability and investment potential of North West Queensland.

Economic diversification builds resilience and sustainability. Focusing on the region's existing strengths and competitive advantages provides the most opportunities for success and can best be achieved through collaborative action at both a grassroots and strategic level.

## Regional strengths

Discussions with local government, regional economic development organisations, business and industry, the North West Minerals Province Stakeholder Advisory Committee and the Queensland Government, identified the following sectors as the main economic drivers for North West Queensland:



**Resources** – mining and mineral processing



**Agriculture** – beef cattle production, cropping, fisheries and aquaculture



**Tourism** – predominately drive tourism, strong focus on outback experience



**Business and industry** – small business/ supply chain and emerging industry sectors

These sectors are underpinned by enabling infrastructure and were identified due to their potential to support ongoing employment and investment.

It is important to acknowledge the relationship between these sectors and the resources and infrastructure that they share. The initiatives in this strategy seek to use these synergies to support further economic diversification and growth.

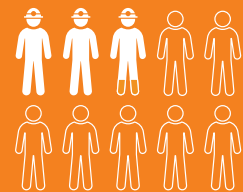
# Economic drivers for North West Queensland<sup>1</sup>

## Resources – mining and mineral processing



67%  
region's economy<sup>1</sup>

\$215 million  
in royalties  
shared  
across  
Qld<sup>2</sup>



28% of workers  
employed  
in the mining industry<sup>3</sup>

## Agriculture – beef cattle production, cropping and commercial fishing<sup>4</sup>



\$2.4 billion  
Gross Value in  
Outback Qld



88%  
total value of  
agricultural  
production



## Tourism – predominately drive tourism, strong focus on outback experience



OUTBACK QLD VISITORS  
98% Domestic

\$584.8 million  
EXPENDITURE FROM DOMESTIC  
OVERNIGHT VISITORS

11,000  
visitors from  
Europe and the UK<sup>5</sup>



2,000  
JOBS  
Outback Qld



\$214 million  
GRP<sup>6</sup>

5.9%  
of  
employment

## Business and industry – small business/ supply chain and emerging industry sectors<sup>7</sup>



2,399  
Businesses

REGISTERED BUSINESSES

31.5%  
Agriculture,  
forestry and fishing



Small  
businesses  
<20 employees

1. Statistical areas for each sector vary depending on the level of available data and the industry classification. Where data is unable to be aggregated for the 10 local government areas, the next most appropriate statistical area is referenced.

2. Source: A Strategic Blueprint for Queensland's North West Minerals Province (Original source Queensland Treasury).

3. Source: ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2016, Working Population Profile (QGSO Regional Profiles) – 10 LGAs within the North West Minerals Province).

4. Source: Australian Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, ABARES: About my Region – Outback.  
[www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/research-topics/aboutmyregion/qld-outback#regional-overview](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/research-topics/aboutmyregion/qld-outback#regional-overview)

NB: Queensland Outback region spans from the tip of Cape York to the borders of the Northern Territory and New South Wales. The region comprises 34 local government areas. It is used as a proxy for the North West Minerals Province due to lack of data available at LGA level.

5. Source: Tourism and Events Queensland Outback Regional Snapshot: Three-year Average – Year Ending December 2017.  
<https://cdn1-teq.queensland.com/~media/6307a214cfff4b358bffffee580e90b3e.ashx?vs=1&td=20180424T110029>

6. Source: Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ), Regional Tourism Satellite Accounts 2015–16, Outback Region Key Facts.  
<https://cdn1-teq.queensland.com/~media/336a466fe7cb4df7a3d8eeca608f1297.ashx?vs=1&td=20170928T091643>

7. Source: ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2016, Workforce Profile, (QGSO Regional Profile) – 10 LGAs within the North West Minerals Province).

## Resources



North West Queensland has a natural competitive advantage in relation to its mineral wealth, highly skilled workforce and established supply chain.

The province remains highly prospective for the discovery of large scale deposits. However, the region's mining and minerals processing sector is undergoing a structural change with new investment occurring in smaller, more specialised operations. Advances in mining equipment, technology and services (METS) provide opportunities to improve the productivity and cost competitiveness of existing operations, increase future mining potential and retain a critical mass of employment and regional services.

There will also be an increase in demand for the North West's minerals as the world continues its shift towards renewable energy, with this region home to many of the metals needed for electric and hybrid vehicles, lithium batteries, wind turbine generators and solar panels.

The mining of these resources will bring with it the opportunity for investment in new, value-adding and specialised processing operations, enabling the region to capitalise on the growing global demand for ethical and environmentally responsible resource industries.

## Opportunities

Opportunities in the resource sector include:

- innovative technologies in renewable energy and industrial manufacturing create potential new markets for previously overlooked minerals
- retreatment of mine waste (tailings) may act as a catalyst for the development of a technology minerals industry as well as other value-adding industries
- sharing of infrastructure among mining operators or like businesses where there are operational advantages or latent capacity may help to subsidise costs and prolong the viability of existing operations.
- Attract investment in new supply chains to support the development of technology mineral deposits.



## Agriculture



While mining and minerals processing dominates in terms of employment, economic activity and gross regional product, agriculture is the main land use in North West Queensland.

Prior to the floods of February 2019, cattle in North West Queensland accounted for around 16% of the state's entire herd. It will take some time for producers to restock and recover from the flood's impacts. Over time, there will be opportunities to increase productivity through improved land management and production systems to meet the growing international demand for Australia's 'clean' beef.

In addition, broadacre and tree crops may provide diversification opportunities for the agricultural sector. Matching suitable soils with crops adapted to dry and arid regions will increase productivity per hectare and underpin new industry development resulting in new jobs and economic growth.

Outside of mining and minerals processing, the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector is the second largest employer in the region.

### Scoping opportunities for increasing agricultural production

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries engaged agricultural research and supply chain specialists, Coriolis Australia, to develop a long term strategy and implementation plan for enhanced agricultural production and employment, focused on expansion, diversification and intensification opportunities in North West Queensland. This work identified that increased agricultural production can be achieved by maintaining and growing new industries that offer the highest potential for success and investment attraction.

Further analysis identified that shea nut, sesame and mungbean offer a high potential for success and long-term transformational change in terms of investment and regional productivity. For example, the analysis identified sesame as a potential \$250 million industry for North West Queensland, supplying growing domestic consumption and international markets.

While the factors driving agricultural investment are complex, the analysis has provided valuable information for producers and potential investors on the market opportunities for higher value agricultural products suited to North West Queensland conditions.

## Opportunities

North West Queensland's competitive advantages lie in its proximity to growing populations in Asia and the Indo-Pacific, established infrastructure/supply chains, arable land, expertise in tropical and dry tropical production systems and favourable biosecurity status. Opportunities to capitalise on these strengths to increase productivity and maximise regional economic benefits include:

- suitable dryland cropping options
- realisation of opportunities for irrigated agriculture
- specialising in arid agriculture
- growing fodder as a supplement feed during periods of low pasture quality could increase productivity and reduce the need to transport cattle to finishing facilities
- diversifying tourism ventures to include farm stays/tours and camp fire events
- capitalising on the region's fisheries resources and establishing supply chains to grow a high-value aquaculture industry
- capitalising on Australia's safe, stable and modern investment climate to supply high-value, climatically suited crops to global markets
- growing specialised crops such as hemp, spinifex and/or algae to supply the bio-industry/technology sector<sup>1</sup>
- adopting new business models to increase profitability and production, share resources between producers (e.g. joint ventures between existing water allocation holders) or industries (e.g. waste water from mining could be used to irrigate pasture), reduce investment risk, coordinate logistics and secure large supply contracts
- to partner with global investors to bring new expertise and generate alternate revenue streams for land holders.

1 In addition to research undertaken through the blueprint to identify agricultural diversification opportunities, local stakeholders and previous studies have also captured new and emerging specialised crops as potential new industries in North West Queensland.

# Tourism



Tourism is a key contributor to North West Queensland's economy. Local business relies on tourism to provide underlying economic stability in regional centres. The sector's growth is considered an important part of building a sustainable and diverse regional economy.

Tourism in North West Queensland is highly seasonal with periods of peak visitation occurring around the cooler, winter months. Extending this season through new events or year-round attractions will help to extend the economic benefit of tourism and support ongoing regional employment.

Local governments across the region are already very active in the tourism space, with many in the process of developing formal tourism strategies to further leverage the economic contribution that tourism provides.

## North West Queensland Digital Visitor Survey

The availability of region specific visitation data is essential for tourism planning and product development. The North West Queensland Digital Visitor Survey has provided valuable input into this strategy. Funded as an action of the blueprint, the survey used mobile phone data layered with other data sourced from vehicle trip counts, visitor information centres, regional airports and tourism accommodation providers. Data was filtered to avoid capturing fly-in-fly-out mine workers and residents.

The survey results provided further insight into the profile and visitation patterns of North West Queensland tourists for example, the survey highlighted and confirmed that visitation continues to be heavily driven by the domestic, intrastate market. Overall visitation is composed of 77% intrastate, 21% interstate and 2% international. This information provides valuable, regionally specific, quantitative data that can be used to support the development of tourism product, marketing material and funding submissions.

## Opportunities

North West Queensland's natural landscape, world-class fossil deposits, national parks and Indigenous cultural heritage represent unique natural assets that are complemented by strong and vibrant communities. An events calendar including the iconic Julia Creek Dirt'n'Dust Festival and the Mount Isa rodeo present authentic, established opportunities to grow the outback tourism experience. Other opportunities include:

- capitalising on Australia's highest yielding 'experience seeker' market looking for authentic interactions and 'off the beaten track', immersive experiences
- extending and growing visitor numbers by building on the success of palaeo-tourism by linking the Riversleigh Fossil Fields to Australia's Dinosaur Trail (between Richmond, Hughenden and Winton)
- building the region's profile as an education tourism destination
- coordinating the scheduling and promotion of North West Queensland events to increase visitation numbers and encourage visitors to stay during off-peak or shoulder seasons to smooth out high and low visitation periods
- promoting the region's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage and developing authentic art/photography workshops, story-telling, and interpretive centres to engage visitors seeking immersive experiences
- developing farm tourism as an additional income source for pastoralists by offering farm stays or hosting weekly events
- developing interactive, child-friendly experiences to cater for the growing family market and encouraging them to stay in the region for longer
- building on the region's nature-based experiences including camping, bushwalking, fishing, and birdwatching to include new attractions such as mountain biking trails and star gazing
- enhance tourist information and develop boutique accommodation close to key natural assets.

# Business and industry



Supporting business and industry in North West Queensland is an important part of diversifying the regional economy and ensuring its long-term

sustainability. Key industry sub-sectors offering growth potential include health and aged care, renewable energy and logistics, transport and warehousing.

The technology associated with the ‘internet of things’ continues to rapidly advance, influencing new business models and productivity gains within industry operations. Supporting North West businesses to adopt digital business practices will minimise the challenges of operating a business in a remote location and help business to access new markets and maintain competitiveness.

The large air and land space characteristics of North West Queensland provide significant geographic advantage for emerging aviation and aerospace industries. Attracting investment in these sectors may help to stimulate new opportunities throughout the supply chain in advanced manufacturing and engineering. These activities have the potential to generate high paying jobs and grow a skilled workforce.

## Leveraging common user infrastructure opportunities

Individual projects may be limited in their capacity to develop supporting infrastructure. Common user infrastructure provides the opportunity to drive down development costs for individual projects, with multiple users contributing and benefiting from infrastructure such as road, rail and port, electricity, gas and water or mineral processing infrastructure.

## Opportunities

Opportunities for business and industry in North West Queensland include:

- establishing innovation hubs (e.g. co-located at council library facilities or school campuses) to support entrepreneurship and attract visiting professionals and other service providers
- developing the region as a major clean energy provider through establishing a utility-scale renewable energy industry with high-value construction jobs
- investigating options for alternative energy supply and transmission infrastructure to support projects
- investing in onsite renewable energy generation to reduce operating costs and secure supply for energy intensive operations
- specialising in health and aged care to support employment in nursing, cleaning services, food and maintenance and to help provide a reliable and sustainable economic benefit
- developing common user multimodal and transport logistics hubs to increase transport and supply chain efficiency, provide additional modal choice and reduce the cost of transport for individual users
- build the capability and capacity of business to engage in new commerce platforms
- support businesses to undertake workforce planning to maximise local employment
- facilitate streamlined approval processes to fast track strategic projects for the region
- increase the competitiveness of local businesses to participate in regional supply chains.

# Approach

## The Strategy

This strategy sets a clear vision to guide economic diversification in North West Queensland. It provides a cohesive plan to diversify the economy through a range of regionally-tailored initiatives and actions. It is designed to guide economic diversification decision making within Queensland Government agencies, and guide policy responses by local government and remote areas boards.

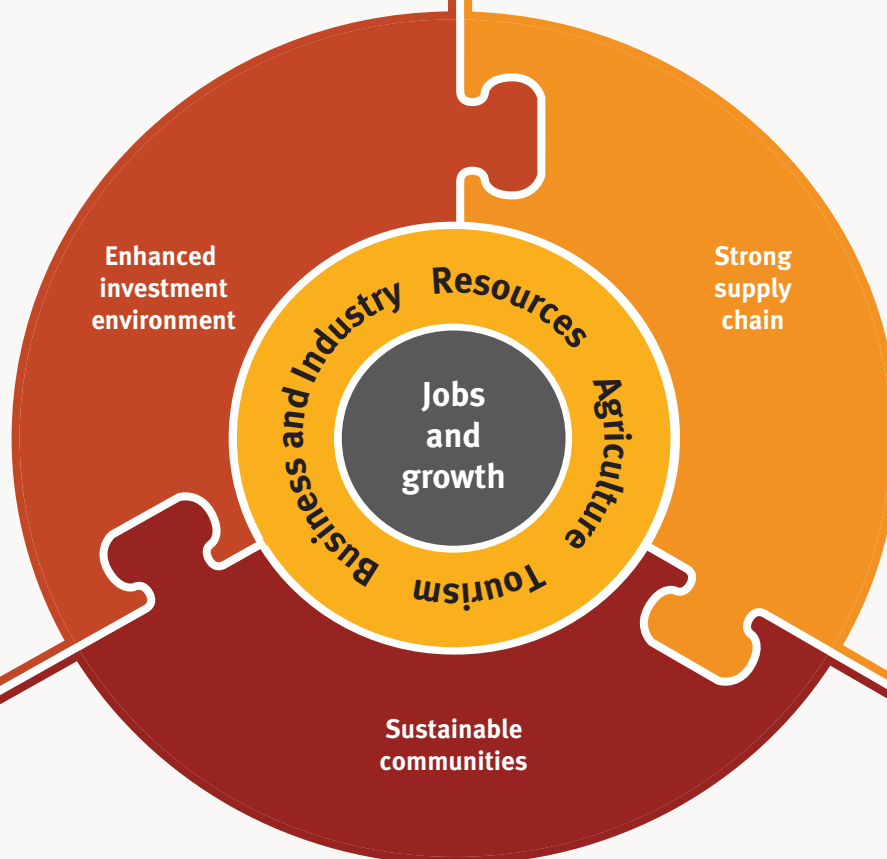
The strategy identifies the region's key opportunities across resources, agriculture, tourism and business and industry. It represents the government's response to identified opportunities, and lays the foundation for long-term step change in the economy through initiatives across the three themes of: enhanced investment environment, strong supply chain and sustainable communities (see diagram).

## The Implementation Plan

A separate, detailed implementation plan, will be developed to support the delivery of this strategy. It will outline how the initiatives and actions will be delivered and their success measured. The implementation plan will detail delivery time frames as well as funding support and will be released later in 2019.

**Enhanced investment environment** – recognises the importance of creating an environment which is conducive to growth and investment. Initiatives within this theme focus on project facilitation, identifying market and supply chain opportunities, common user infrastructure opportunities and strategic economic development planning.

**Strong supply chain** – recognises the importance of efficient and stable supply chains which connect the province’s business and industry to their markets. Initiatives within this theme focus on enhancing local business capabilities and capacity so that the economic benefit of major projects can be captured and retained locally, helping to support economic growth and job creation.



**Sustainable communities** – recognises the fundamental reason for undertaking this work and that is to create sustainable communities with stable populations to support services, thriving local economies, job creation and liveability. Initiatives within this theme focus on harnessing the greatest asset of the region—its people.



*Image: Drone over field (Shutterstock)*

# Initiatives

## Theme 1 – Enhanced investment environment



### 1.1 Maximise the regional economic benefits of private sector projects

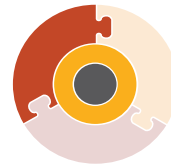
#### Actions

- Facilitate private sector projects to progress in a timely and coordinated manner by assisting proponents to:
  - map approvals pathways with relevant regulatory agencies
  - identify investment partners and funding options including Queensland and Commonwealth Government grants
  - determine supply chain, freight pathway and market opportunities.

#### Rationale

The department's North West Regional Office has demonstrated success in assisting the proponents of regionally significant projects to navigate funding and grant application processes and complex environmental and planning assessments.

Within this office, the Strategic Blueprint Regional Implementation Team will provide additional resources to support an enhanced facilitation service. This service will focus on projects that align with the objectives of this draft strategy and the blueprint. The team includes an Economic Diversification Manager and an Employment Services Manager who will work with project proponents to maximise regional economic development and employment outcomes.



### 1.2 Strengthen economic development planning across the province

#### Actions

- Roll out an Economic Development Toolkit to support local governments to:
  - identify, develop and implement economic strategies
  - align economic development objectives with regional priorities including freight transport, land use and infrastructure planning
  - identify project synergies and partnership opportunities across local government areas.

#### Rationale

Economic development plans are important tools for local government to articulate economic development aspirations and to put strategies in place to achieve growth.

The planning process can be resource intensive for some regional local governments. To assist, DSDMIP has developed a toolkit to simplify the process and align local government economic development strategies with land use and infrastructure planning.

The department's North West Regional Office will work with local governments to support them throughout the economic development planning process and to encourage cross-jurisdictional planning to capitalise on common user infrastructure opportunities.



### 1.3 Investigate energy supply opportunities for the North West Minerals Province

#### Actions

- Work with stakeholders to develop opportunities for new common user electricity infrastructure for the North West Minerals Province. This will include options for renewable generation and consider the benefits for economic development in the region.

#### Rationale

This initiative builds on the opportunities identified in the Common User Infrastructure Audit, (undertaken through Strategic Priority 1 of the blueprint) and capitalises on the regional momentum in the development of alternate and renewable energy supply. Access to competitive energy production and supply is a key enabler for economic development. Investigating a range of energy supply and transmission options will assist industry to identify suitable energy solutions.



### 1.4 Develop a technology minerals industry supporting secondary prospectivity

#### Actions

- Determine the supply chain required to support the development of a technology minerals industry in North West Queensland.
- Identify investment opportunities for new market entrants to contribute to an investment prospectus for the North West Minerals Province.

#### Rationale

There is growing global demand for high value technology minerals. These minerals are used in the manufacture of renewable energy systems, advanced medical equipment and defence and aerospace applications.

The mining of high-value technology minerals presents a significant opportunity for the North West Minerals Province. It offers the potential for new investment by mining companies in more specialised operations, as well as the potential to extract previously overlooked minerals from mine tailings.

Queensland's environmental credentials and advanced manufacturing expertise place the North West in a strong position to attract global investors who are seeking opportunities in more ethical and environmentally responsible ventures.

This initiative will complement the work that the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy is undertaking through the Resources R&D Roadmap and support the role of Trade and Invest Queensland in promoting the prospectivity and investment potential of the North West Minerals Province.





## 1.5 Increase agricultural production

### Actions

- Enhance investment into fodder production trials, with a focus on silage and headlage options such as white sorghum.
- Support irrigated cropping trials across the region, with a specific emphasis on sesame, as one of the top 3 products shortlisted through the North West Agricultural Strategy.
- Identify public / private partnership opportunities for improved common user infrastructure which has the potential to support increased agricultural productivity in North West Queensland. This may include developments which improve supply chain efficiency or which have the potential to act as a catalyst to new investment in the region.
- Design and implement a program of industry development, including market development and investment attraction. This work will include profiling the preferred agricultural development locations and opportunities in the North West.

### Rationale

High-value agriculture (irrigated/dry-land) is a key diversification opportunity in North West Queensland with the potential to support significant employment throughout the supply chain, contributing to population and community sustainability.

Twenty commodities with opportunities spread across the short, medium and longer-term horizons have been identified through work commissioned by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, with three shortlisted and profiled in detail.

The actions in this initiative are designed to complement existing efforts of government, industry and communities in the North West, and leverage new investment that will drive economic diversification and job creation, particularly as it relates to agriculture and associated supply chains.

The inter-agency Agricultural Development and Investment Group (ADIG) chaired by the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy comprises of senior representatives from relevant government portfolios with an interest in agricultural and associated supply chain projects. The group provides strategic advice to government on agricultural development and diversification opportunities and works with proponents to identify approval pathways, potential funding sources, investment partners and common user infrastructure opportunities. The ADIG will continue to support agricultural diversification projects in North West Queensland, drawing upon regional agricultural and economic development expertise to help inform and guide their deliberations and activity.



## 1.6 Develop a pipeline of tourism projects

### Actions

- Allocate funding to progress tourism development proposals to an investment-ready stage.

### Rationale

Local governments are often the primary driver of tourism projects in North West Queensland. This initiative will assist the progression of key projects through pre-feasibility/business case/preliminary design phases.

Funding support will assist councils to overcome resourcing challenges and advance projects to a stage where they are more likely to attract investment from private proponents.

Also within this initiative, the Strategic Blueprint Regional Implementation Team will work with regional tourism operators to build capacity and support a coordinated and strategic approach to sector development.



## 1.7 Coordinate the capture and analysis of regionally specific tourism data

### Actions

- Develop a system to enable the ongoing capture of regionally specific data through Visitor Information Centres. The system will provide for:
  - simple and consistent data capture
  - analysis of data (e.g. visitor profile, reasons for travel, peak visitation periods, accommodation type, direction of travel)
  - use of data to inform tourism marketing, product development and support funding submissions.

### Rationale

While data is currently captured by individual Visitor Information Centres, there is limited collation or analysis across the North West Queensland region. Consultation with regional stakeholders identified the need for a simple system which could be managed within existing local government resources.

This system would be designed in consultation with tourism stakeholders including the Outback Queensland Tourism Association (OQTA) and Tourism Events Queensland (TEQ), and piloted along the Overlander's Way drive route.

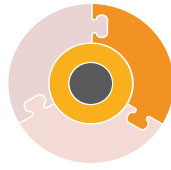


*Image: Lawn Hill Gorge, Boodjamulla National Park (Shutterstock)*



Image: Shutterstock

## Theme 2 - Strong supply chain



### 2.1 Build the capacity of business and entrepreneurs to respond to market opportunities

#### Actions

- Consult with business networks to develop and deliver training and capacity building programs.

#### Rationale

Digital business practices enable remote regions to access markets and customers via social media, trip reviews, marketing and business administration. Consultation with regional business networks identified the need for capacity building in this area.



### 2.2 Maximise local business participation in regional supply chains supporting key sectors

#### Actions

- Support buyers and suppliers to identify requirements and local contract opportunities.
- Assist businesses to develop capability statements.
- Deliver tailored workshops and networking events throughout the region to introduce local suppliers to large buyers.
- Identify partnership opportunities between suppliers.

#### Rationale

Retaining businesses locally will improve employment outcomes and capture and retain the local economic benefit from large resource and energy projects.

This initiative will help local businesses to competitively tender for large supply contracts. DSDMIP's North West Regional Office will work with local businesses to develop capability statements. These statements assist major buyers to identify what key project or business inputs can be sourced from within the region.

Concurrent to this, the department will continue to deliver a range of workshops to support local business in the tendering process. These workshops will also encourage local business to consider partnering to increase their offering.

This initiative also provides an opportunity to bring business operators together through networking events to identify partnership and supply opportunities.



## 2.3 Facilitate industry-led training opportunities

### Actions

- Engage with industry groups and chambers of commerce to identify suitable industry-led training and employment models.
- Investigate the potential to establish a mine training facility at the Hard Times Mine, Mount Isa to:
  - audit regional, national and international interest from mine operators for training programs
  - identify training and facility requirements
  - conduct a detailed feasibility study, develop a business plan and marketing strategies.
- Partner with resource companies, regional training organisations, employment and youth programs to identify training pathways via the Hard Times Mine facility.

### Rationale

Consultation with industry has identified a range of training and employee attraction models that could be adopted to address workforce challenges. For example informal pre-qualification and work-readiness/experience programs. The Employment Services Manager will work in partnership with industry groups and employment service and training providers to coordinate programs which contribute to improved employment and business outcomes.

The Hard Times Mine tourist attraction in Mount Isa provides a unique opportunity to establish a training facility that specialises in the hard rock mining techniques and processes used in many North West Queensland mines. Mine training would not interfere with the tourism aspect of the facility. The facility will address safety risks that may be associated with on-site training. Course curriculum will be developed in close consultation with key stakeholders to provide specific employment pathways in the resources sector.

This initiative will assist the development of a highly-skilled regional workforce that can support both existing and new industries in the future.



## 2.4 Increase the economic benefit of tourism

### Actions

- Work in partnership with local governments and the tourism industry to identify ways to maximise the length of time visitors stay in the region. This may be through coordinated event scheduling and developing attractions which are suitable for the shoulder season.

### Rationale

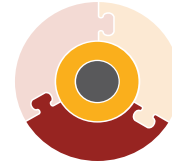
Encouraging visitors to stay longer in local towns will assist to increase expenditure and local economic benefit captured from tourism. Establishing complementary products and experiences that coincide with existing peak periods of visitation (such as event times) could also be used as a mechanism to increase length of stay.

Developing downloadable content such as digital visitor guides and itineraries could appeal to specific visitor categories (e.g. families with children) or focus on areas of interest (e.g. bird watching or photography). This content could be hosted on local tourism information websites.



*Image: Road to Cobbold Gorge, Forsayth. (Shutterstock)*

## Theme 3 – Sustainable communities



### 3.1 Maximise local economic development outcomes by implementing the Community Strategy

#### Actions

- Where appropriate, support the implementation of key projects which contribute to population retention, community capacity building and economic development.

#### Rationale

The Community Strategy, a key action of Strategic Priority 3 of the blueprint, will focus on developing 10 action plans for each local government area.

There may be opportunities for the North West Regional Implementation Team to provide facilitation support to projects identified in the local action plans. The team will focus on projects which provide economic development outcomes or which contribute to promoting the livability of the region.

For example, community infrastructure projects such as child care centres or outside school hours care could support greater workforce participation; leadership or mentoring programs could support the development of entrepreneurs and future business champions; innovation hubs could support long distance tertiary education, host visiting professional services and business start-ups.



### 3.2 Improve regional employment outcomes through optimised workforce planning

#### Actions

- The Employment Services Manager will engage with potential employers and proponents during project development to determine skills requirements. As part of this process, the Employment Services Manager will:
  - advise on local workforce profile community/training organisations
  - provide examples of regional employment models that have been successful in the province
  - advise on potential government funding or support
  - facilitate introductions between project proponents, community organisations and registered training organisations.

#### Rationale

Early workforce planning will provide better local employment outcomes as skill requirements can be identified and training pathways put in place.

This initiative will maximise opportunities for local workers to gain employment in new projects, retain populations in regional communities and support new investment and economic growth across the province.



## Implementation and next steps

Implementation of some initiatives has already commenced. The implementation plan is the delivery framework for each of the themes and will identify:

- delivery agency
- funding
- timeframe for delivery
- key indicators of success.

Separating the supporting Implementation Plan from the strategy enables the plan to be regularly updated in response to changing regional circumstances.

The implementation plan gives effect to the strategy's objectives by prioritising initiatives and actions to support a pipeline of initiatives over its delivery horizon. It will leverage blueprint actions and resourcing in addition to drawing on broader government initiatives that support the North West Minerals Province.

The North West Regional Implementation Team will continue to drive on-the-ground outcomes and work with stakeholders to deliver the strategy and blueprint actions.





Image: Mount Isa (Shutterstock)

For further information on the *North West Queensland Economic Diversification Strategy* and *A Strategic Blueprint for Queensland's North West Minerals Province*, please contact the Department of State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning.

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