



ANABRANCH
BURONGA
COOMEALLA
CURLWAA
DARETON
ELLERSLIE
GOL GOL
MONAK
POMONA
POONCARIE
RUFUS RIVER
TRENTHAM CLIFFS
WENTWORTH

Economic Development Strategy

2025-2035

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COUNCIL
OFFICES



Midway Community Centre
3 Midway Drive, Buronga NSW 2739



Wentworth Visitor Centre (Main Administration Office)
61 Darling Street, Wentworth NSW 2648

*We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we live and work,
and pay our respects to their elders past, present, and emerging.*



Interactive displays in the Wentworth Visitor Information Centre,
61 Darling Street, Wentworth.

Our Objectives



Wentworth Shire is a vibrant, growing and thriving region

ECONOMIC



Wentworth Shire is a great place to live

SOCIAL



Wentworth Shire is a community that works to enhance and protect its physical and natural environment

ENVIRONMENTAL



Wentworth Shire is supported by strong and ethical civil leadership with all activities conducted in an open, transparent and inclusive manner

CIVIC LEADERSHIP



Wentworth LGA

Our Values: Honest & Integrity | Accountability & Transparency | Respect | Quality & Commitment



Economic development is about creating places where people want to invest, work and live. It's about making connections between people, companies, institutions and communities.



Jeff Finkle

CEO, International Economic Development Council

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Supporting Documents *(available upon request from Wentworth Shire Council)*

- Document 1 – Engine and Emerging Industries
- Document 2 – Key Wentworth Shire Council planning and reports
- Document 3 – National, State, Regional and Local level Policy & Programs
- Document 4 – Consultation Snapshot
- Document 5 – Business and Industry Consultation Summary
- Document 6 – Community Consultation Summary
- Document 7 – Glossary of Terms

Proudly funded by



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“

Contemporary approaches to local and regional economic development seek to combine, marshal and promote a variety of physical, human, political, environmental, economic and cultural capabilities and endowments. These are often informed by a place-based perspective and endogenous growth theory, whereby strategies are intended to be tailored to promote locally relevant forms of development that make the most of local and regional distinctiveness, assets, conditions and opportunities.

”

Pugalis, L., Tan, SF., 2017,

The Role of Local Government in Local and Regional Economic Development, University of Technology Sydney.

Background

Wentworth Shire covers an area of 2,626,926 hectares (26,000 sq km) and is home to 7,500 people. The southern boundary (edging the Murray River) has the greatest density of population shared amongst the townships of Wentworth, Dareton, Buronga and Gol Gol. The town of Wentworth performs the traditional role of housing the Council Chambers and Offices from its position at the confluence of Australia's two most important rivers: the Darling and the Murray.

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Wentworth is situated 1,075km from Sydney 585km Melbourne and 420km from Adelaide and is a location of contrasts - nestled on the Murray it is both within the rich horticultural expanse of the Sunraysia region whilst also being considered a Gateway to Outback NSW. The Sturt Highway (a key national freight route) and the Silver City Highway, intersect the Shire from east to west, and north to south respectively.

The townships of Wentworth and increasingly Buronga and Gol Gol provide key services to their own communities and those outlying areas. Recognised communities across the Wentworth LGA include Wentworth, Coomealla, Dareton, Curlwaa, Buronga, Gol Gol, Monak, Mourquong, Pan Ban, Pooncarie, Pomona, Ellerslie, and the Anabranck.

Our First Nations population forms 8.3% of our entire population and includes key Traditional Owners the Barkindji people, alongside Barindji, Kureindji, Danggali, Paakantyi, Mutthi Mutthi, and Ngayampaa peoples (with the latter three especially significant to Mungo) (source: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia>).

The cultural history of the region is deeply significant including a footprint into the internationally recognised Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area and Mungo National

Park, home of Mungo Man and Mungo Woman. For tens of thousands of years prior to Sturt naming the Darling River, the traditional owners who lived along it had called the river Baaka, hence their name Barkindji people, meaning 'Kinship to the river'. The magnificent canoe tree located in the Greater Murray Darling Junction Reserve is just one of many examples of this connection.

Wentworth also has an important European history. With the arrival of the river steamers in 1853, a small European settlement found itself to be ideally situated as an administrative and commercial centre for the untapped wealth of the vast Outback. This site was approved as the town of Wentworth, named after the New South Wales explorer and politician William Charles Wentworth, on June 21, 1859. The area was proclaimed a municipality on January 23, 1879, and is the region's oldest settlement. For many years Sydney was the only port in New South Wales to handle more cargo than Wentworth. In the early 1900's the first irrigation settlement in New South Wales was commenced at Curlwaa, seven kilometres east of Wentworth. In 1981 the Willandra Lakes Region (along with Kakadu National Park and the Great Barrier Reef) was one of the first Australian properties included on the World Heritage List.

The region's engine economies have been agricultural (grains - dryland and irrigated, wool and meat) horticultural (table and wine grapes, fruits / vegetables), tourism and the service sector. Emerging industries over the past decades have grown to include an increasing diversity of horticultural crops, growing almond plantations and mineral sands exploration. More recently again is the renewable energy infrastructure, production and transmission industry.

Wentworth LGA's competitive and comparative advantages include its transport corridor centrality; regionally significant environmental and economic features; and established cross-border relationships; all of which tie the area's rich potential to conservation, tourism and commercial opportunities. Beyond these assets however, are people and communities, resilient, connected and deserving of the same opportunities all Australians receive.

Wentworth at a glance



8.40% of our population identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (State average is 3.44%)

Proclaimed a Shire on 23 January
1879

Area (sq. km)
26,256



7,688
Estimated Residential Population (Remplan)

Largest industry of Employment is Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing with **23.46%** of the population



28.81%
Mining is the largest industry sector with (\$445,500,000) gross revenue

3 Libraries

1 Hospital

8 Schools

1 TAFE Campus

2 Aerodromes

29.51%
of homes are owned outright



33.32%

Working age Residents (25-64 yrs old)
(state average is 35.70%)

3,124

Employed Residents

4.20% Unemployment Rate (Sept 2024)



Year 12 education as the highest form of education

Wentworth Shire residents

31.40%

vs.

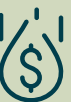
Other areas of NSW

21.40%

\$95,330
per capita Gross Regional Product



The Median Wage for Households:
Wentworth
\$1,987/wk



State (excl. Greater Sydney)
\$1,434/wk



Greater Sydney
\$2,077/wk

The individual median wage is **\$696** per week with **16.25%** of people earning over **\$1,500** per week.

43 years old

is the Median Resident age (State median is 39)

29.62% of Residents are aged under 25 (State average is 30.03%)

20.77% of Residents are aged over 65 (State average is 17.65%)



25.07% of families earn over \$130,000 vs. state average of 37.59%



422km
ADELAIDE

583km
MELBOURNE

1,044km
SYDNEY

662km of sealed road

1,360km of unsealed road

THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Key Responsibilities and Strategic Approaches

Local Government plays a vital role in fostering economic growth, attracting investment, and supporting community outcomes. By addressing opportunities and challenges, it aims to retain and expand businesses, diversify the economy, and enhance infrastructure. Guided by best practice principles and the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) framework, economic strategies align with community aspirations and broader plans, such as the Community Strategic Plan (CSP).

The role for Local Government in economic development is to facilitate economic activity and growth by identifying opportunities and challenges and responding to these, and by improving the flow of information and bringing relevant parties together (including business, industry representative groups, all levels of government) to use this information for greater economic benefit.

In achieving this role Local Government will advocate, inform/promote, invest/provide, lead, partner/connect, research, regulate, review, and support. All with the aim of:

- Retaining existing business,
- Encouraging the growth of existing business,
- Attracting new business,
- Attracting investment,
- Diversifying the economy,
- Enhancing infrastructure,
- Improving community outcomes through job creation, training and education,
- Growing the population,
- Attracting visitors, and
- Reducing impediments to commercial activity.

Research by WALGA (2019) has identified four best practice principles to guide economic development strategies:

1. Regional Collaboration

Local areas have sought opportunities to collaborate with other local governments by lending support to regional networks and associations. Businesses are active participants in local government business development. Local stakeholders have been consulted in the development of a local economic development strategy.

2. Functional Integration

Local level government incorporates a focus on understanding their core responsibilities as part of a local level economic development strategy. Economic development is ingrained in the way a local authority conducts itself. Economic development activities are undertaken in a cost-efficient manner and leverage external funds.

3. Strategic Alignment

Local level economic development strategy has a clearly defined role within a given local government's overarching strategic framework. It also aligns with Federal, State and broader regional policy priorities.

4. Current and emerging competitive advantage

Local level government structures its economic development strategy in order to leverage their current and emerging competitive advantages, and the strengths of their local industries (WALGA, 2019).

“

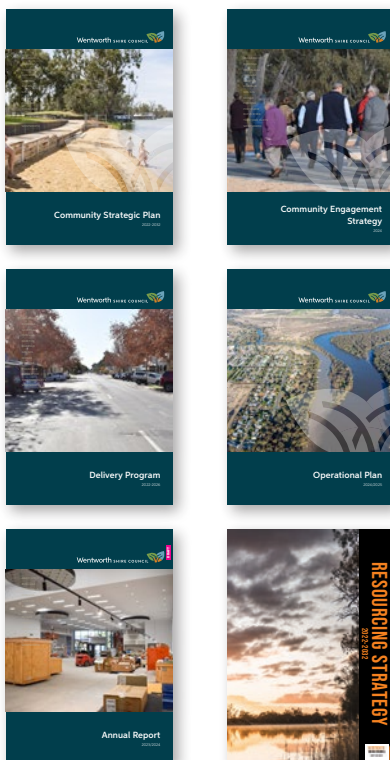
It takes an integrated approach, on the understanding that the city economy is influenced by a range of factors such as liveability and amenity; access to affordable housing for key workers and childcare for parents; a diverse and well-educated community as well as those more commonly associated with the economy such as market access, sector specialisation, innovation and productivity.

”

Sydney2030

The Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) framework came into practice in 2009. The IP&R Framework begins with the community’s aspirations and includes a suite of integrated plans that set out a vision, goals and strategic actions to achieve them. It involves a reporting structure to communicate progress to council and the community as well as a structured timeline for review to ensure the goals and actions are still relevant. Central to the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) framework is the Community Strategic Plan (CSP).

Whilst economic development is usually embedded in the CSP local governments are also, increasingly, developing dedicated Economic Development Strategies which must align to the CSP.



WHAT DRIVES US

Whilst Local Government is not required to develop an Economic Development Strategy, its potential for influence in this sphere is being increasingly recognised. As the closest layer of Government to community and the most important proximate level of advocacy for local communities the role of Local Government is critical. The key is in aligning the Economic Development Strategy to the Community Strategic Plan – giving it ‘licence and longevity’.

The **Wentworth Shire Community Strategic Plan 2022-2032, Our Future in Focus** (undertaken in 2021/2022) presented the following Vision:

A thriving region, supported by a robust economic base, distinctive open spaces, and strong local governance and leadership.

Drawing on this Vision the **Strategic Goals** of the Plan are to make Wentworth a:

- Wentworth Shire is a vibrant, growing and thriving region (**ECONOMIC**);
- Wentworth Shire is a great place to live (**SOCIAL**);
- Wentworth Shire is a community that works to enhance and protect its physical and natural environment (**ENVIRONMENTAL**); and
- Wentworth Shire is supported by strong and ethical civil leadership with all activities conducted in an open, transparent and inclusive manner (**CIVIC LEADERSHIP**).

The **Wentworth Shire Council Local Strategic Planning Statement – A Vision to 2040 and Beyond (2020)** aligns to these Strategic Goals identifying eleven (11) Planning Priorities:

- Promote agriculture and value-added manufacturing.
- Grow tourism.
- Manage resources and renewable energy.
- Efficient transport and connectivity networks.
- Aboriginal economic self-determination.
- Sustainable settlements.
- Infrastructure and services.
- Preserve and promote heritage.
- Sustainable river systems.
- Manage natural hazards and climate change risks.
- Protect areas of environmental value.

Synthesised from the 269 community, business and industry voices that shared their thoughts and knowledge in the development of the **Wentworth Shire Council Economic Development Strategy (2024-2028)** are the following Vision themes and guiding values. Importantly these themes continue to endorse and reflect the Community Strategic Plan’s Vision.

When asked **What is your VISION for your Council area (what will it have, look and feel like)?** Key themes mentioned by community were:

- Access locally to key services, utilities and infrastructure;
- Retains a small community feel alongside growth and development;
- Increased availability of recreational and dining facilities;
- Growing range of local retail services;
- Growth of a high-quality and diverse tourism sector, strong focus on realising the potential of the river, inland and existing assets;
- A thriving community with economic and population growth;
- Strong leadership, community engagement, commitment and advocacy by Local Government;
- Well-planned and considered growth – sustainable, visionary and informed / respectful of all stakeholders; and
- Equitable opportunity and development across the Shire area and for all community members.

Interviews undertaken with 11 individuals identified as **Council, Community and Regional Leaders** revealed a unified Vision for:

- Clear and considered land use planning - creating friendly and accessible communities and enabling business and industry growth in logical long-term locations;
- Equity of access to services and amenities for all residents;
- Population growth and service growth to match;
- A thriving, attractive and welcoming region;
- Support for young people to thrive, learn and live locally;
- Local self-determination;
- Increased networking / alliance between neighbouring LGAs including cross-border;
- Frameworks to ensure industries contribute in meaningful ways to the communities and LGAs they operate within; and
- A local government that is easy to work with, supporting growth and industry and investment attraction.

The Values that sat alongside these Vision parameters included:



Inclusion,
Equity and
Diversity



Communication -
open, transparent,
representative



Aspiration - give
opportunities and
seize opportunities



Leadership, Advocacy,
Empowerment and
Self-Determination



Relationships,
Collaboration,
Partnership

“I am thinking about what I can achieve now to deliver great outcomes for the next 50 years. I believe in advocacy and leadership and a willingness of council to lead and be part of that.”

“All economic development, unless robotic, requires people – so how do we look after these people?”

“We have to foster an environment where it is easy to do business and do business well and then the community benefits.”

From these **Vision themes and Values** the following **Principles** have been formed to guide how the Wentworth Shire Council Economic Development Strategy will be implemented. These Principles act as rules to guide Council’s decision making around economic development – in this way new economic initiatives should uphold the following principles:

Our existing businesses and industries are central to who we are and our successes to date. New Economic Development should not occur at their expense.	Further innovation, diversification and growth is supported in ways that promote and safeguard the area as a world class destination and food and fibre producing region.	We are planning for today and all our tomorrows. Economic growth will protect and enhance existing natural and built assets, reflecting the community’s vision for long-term sustainable economic development.
Equity of health, wellbeing and opportunities for all community members remain our highest priority. The improved liveability of our towns through planning, advocacy and provision of services and amenities are critical for locals and central to workforce attraction and retention.	All of our community members have a place at the decision-making table, we will continue to grow our leaders and uphold self-determination. Our First Nations community are central to this, and models must be created to ensure their contributions.	The current and cumulative impact of Economic Development is accurately costed to ensure our communities are compensated in both the short and long term.



Our Values

At Wentworth Shire Council we value:

Honesty & Integrity

- ▶ We deliver on commitments.
- ▶ We act ethically.

Quality & Commitment

- ▶ We do our best to provide the highest standard of goods and services to our community.
- ▶ We are responsive to the needs of our community and always look for ways to better serve our community.
- ▶ We are dedicated to fulfilling the Shire's vision and goals.

Respect

- ▶ We act professionally towards our community and our colleagues.

Accountability & Transparency

- ▶ We take responsibility for our actions.
- ▶ We communicate openly and respectfully with our community.

CONSULTATION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

& SNAPSHOT OF FINDINGS

Community, Business and Industry engagement to inform that Wentworth Shire Council's Economic Development Strategy occurred between December 2023 – April 2024 and relied on multiple engagement strategies.

Business and Industry engagement involved four key strategies:

- An online Business and Industry survey (31 respondents),
- Phone based interviews with key business and industry leads across the LGA and those with overarching relevance (nine participants),
- A 'Business Breakfast' focus group (26 participants), and
- Participation in key community events including the Euston Economic Development Forum (March 2023), Tri-State Workforce Forum (Euston, December 2023), and RDA Murray's Buronga Business Breakfast and Murray-Darling Interstate Regional Development Stakeholder Consultation (both Buronga, April 2024)

Community engagement involved two key strategies:

- An online and hard copy survey (190 responses)
- Phone based interviews with key community and Council leadership (6) and overarching government and peak body representatives (5) (totalling 11 interviews), and;
- Two written submissions were also received.

According to the 2021 Census there are 6,020 people aged 15 years and over living in the Wentworth LGA. There were 190 responses to the community survey – effectively a 3.2% community response rate.

Through these varied methods a total of 269 voices from the Wentworth LGA's community, business and industry sectors informed the **Wentworth Shire Council Economic Development Strategy (2024-2028)**.

Complete analysis of all engagement data is presented in Consultation Summaries provided to Wentworth Shire Council leadership and staff. This **Consultation Snapshot** provides a succinct synthesis of all engagement data to demonstrate to readers the foundation to, and pathway of, the recommendations presented in this Economic Development Strategy.

Through the online survey, focus groups and phone interviews with business and industry, the following sectors were engaged and have informed the Wentworth Shire Council Economic Development Strategy:

- Retail
- Tourism
- Recreation/Entertainment/Hospitality services
- Accommodation services
- Communication/Information/Computer
- Agriculture
- Horticulture
- Mining
- Renewable Energies
- Food Processing
- Light Industrial
- Heavy Industrial
- Construction
- Wholesale/warehouse
- Freight and logistics
- Cleaning services

Of the survey respondents 60.0% noted their operation was Expanding, 33.3% Stable, and only 6.7% noted their operation was Reducing. Workforce varied with 60.0% of respondents having 1-5 staff through to 6.7% having more than 61 staff. In total 65.5% of this workforce lived within the LGA.

Collectively the most significant challenges in establishing and operating your business/industry were:

- Government restrictions/regulations
- Attracting staff
- Housing
- Training staff/yourself
- Operating costs (wages, utilities, rents, licencing etc)
- Financing for start-up or on-going costs
- Lack of customers
- Retaining staff

The **MOST** readily available supports/ local strengths/assets in establishing and operating your business/industry operation were:

- Local government advice/knowledge
- Locally available expertise – Construction, Established support industries (such as trades, suppliers etc)
- Available infrastructure – roads

The **LEAST** available supports / local strengths / assets were:

- Financial grants
- Business incentives and in-kind supports
- Locally available expertise – Financial and Environmental
- Available infrastructure - buildings, storage
- Available land
- Housing/accommodation

Survey respondents were asked to select the 5 most important Economic Development factors for Council to focus on. Overwhelmingly (above 65%), the following were selected:

- Ensuring access to affordable and reliable utilities (water, power, waste mgt)
- Encouraging businesses / industries that are identified as 'gaps' by the community
- Improving infrastructure to support/ encourage industrial/commercial growth
- Advocating for policies and programs that support rural NSW
- Ensuring local businesses benefit from economic growth
- Attracting and growing our working-age population
- Maintaining high quality roads
- Start-up funding for new businesses / industries
- Partnering with neighbouring Councils
- Providing access to quality school education

"When grant money for events is obtained ensure that it is local businesses that benefit (not Sydney or Mildura businesses while locals are excluded) and the money stays here."

"Gol Gol / Buronga is a great community. Prep to 10 School and local pool would be the icing the cake."

A SWOT analysis was undertaken during the Business Breakfast and with 1:1 business and industry leadership interview participants. A synthesis is presented below.

Strengths

- Established engines industries, notably agriculture and horticulture, and new industries.
- Natural assets – rivers and water, solar and wind energy, rare earth / mineral sands.
- Physical location on the highway and at important road junctions (Sturt Highway, Silver City Highway).
- Existing and proposed / possible tourism assets – including natural, cultural and built.
- First Nations culture (artefacts/ experiences) and heritage (pioneering history, river boat trade, Possum's Story).
- First Nation population.
- Residential Estate developments.
- High-quality built assets and local investment and leadership – Community Bank, Community Medical Centre etc.
- Council owned assets such as caravan parks and available vacant lands.
- Wentworth Shire Council – staff, leadership and partnerships. Recognised as 'investment friendly' LGA.
- Small business owners and Arts / creative sectors.
- Community organisations and Passionate residents.
- Regional level plans with clear local level relevance support Wentworth LGA in aligning with higher level opportunities.

"Connection to river is key – most visitors would prefer to be riverside, and Wentworth is beautifully set against the river."

“First Nations Tourism development, Mungo, there is such a density of significant places and sites.”

Weaknesses

- Lack of access to key services - education, health, childcare, aged care and accommodation, public transport.
- Workforce ability and availability, lack of skilled and unskilled labour, challenges with recruitment and retention, minimal opportunities for further education and training locally.
- Cross border challenges - differences in regulations / licencing, recognition of qualifications.
- Gaps in suite of business offerings – trades, retail, recreational, accommodation.
- Limited access to / upkeep of riverfront, tracks (also noted as improving).
- Limited engagement of the First Nation communities in Economic and Community Development discussions.
- Connection /communication between community / businesses and Wentworth Shire Council.
- Lack of permanent accommodation / land development.
- Distance / isolation, including from capital cities and political representatives.
- Road quality – physical connectivity to enable local, industry and visitor travel.
- Digital connectivity.
- Poor public image of some areas and communities.
- Money / opportunity leaving the area to Mildura especially.
- Lack of investment and attraction collateral – prospectus documents required.

“The turnover of council staff can be challenging – Balranald and Wentworth Shire Councils need to be working together in this space, this ensures there is continuity in delivery of strategy regardless of personnel changes.”

Opportunities

- Development of key visitor economy opportunities including visitor economy assets such as Mungo, the rivers, established tracks and trails (Darling River Run, Mungo Loop, proposed Far West Culture and Heritage Trail), tour and event assets, Traditional Owner / First Nations tourism, agritourism, and broad visitor assets (Visitor information Centre, Civic Centre, Field of Lights, PS Ruby, refurbished Wentworth Caravan Park, Military Museum, Possum’s Story).
- Development of a First Nations led and owned visitor economy which supports reconciliation, shares our history, creates business ownership and employment opportunities for First Nations people and builds intra and inter community relationships.
- Mineral sands and rare earth mining.
- The South West Renewable Energy Zone (REZ), transmission line infrastructure and renewable developments.
- Growing horticulture industries, including localised opportunities for processing and further value adding.
- Locally informed planning and development.
- Grow your own workforce opportunities including through industry-based training, apprenticeships and advocacy.
- Need for housing and opportunity for population growth and the attraction of services and amenities around this.
- Victorian businesses are looking to relocate into NSW as a result of Victorian tax and legislation changes.

- Strategically gather and utilise legacy / social benefit funds for long-term and widespread community gains.
- Working with industry leaders to fully understand the Economic opportunities that come with any development.
- Dedicated Economic Development positions within Local Government to support clear, consistent messaging and a central contact point supporting and pursuing community approved investment and attraction opportunities.

“Growing our rural workforce needs a pipeline... We have a Tafe presence in Dareton that could be a logical partner to develop a workforce pipeline (Plus SuniTafe in Mildura).”

“Having a local group from each town that understands the towns history and future and how nature interacts with towns and vice versa is extremely important for council to be able to discuss issues.”

“If you really want to develop the region well – the next task for Council is to facilitate more miners to come into the region – investment and attraction.

Mining companies have skilled people who can support in this handover – invest and attract – these staff could, in a voluntary way, support the Economic Development of the region. We really want to be a part of the community.”

“It is so important that Traditional Owners are telling the story, this has life changing outcomes for Traditional Owners and their families as well.”

Threats

- Regulations, restrictions and policies including State and Federal environmental regulations - Land Zoning; Conflicting regulations for land; VISA regulations; International trade – policy, market, workforce; Biosecurity; Water regulation, availability and price; lack of training and licencing standardisation between States / Nationally.
- National / Global economic climate.
- Inadequate resources, services and infrastructure - accommodation; Internet Speed / telecommunications.
- Workforce shortfall in local skilled and unskilled workforce, Workforce retention and recruitment.
- The impact of some industries is significantly changing the landscape – accommodation villages, wind turbines, power infrastructure - there are one off impacts and cumulative impacts, often difficult to fully assess.
- Lack of partnership / collaboration / frameworks - businesses, industry, government all running in silos.
- Climate change, Natural disasters / extreme weather conditions.
- Cross border issues, funds going outside area.
- Not knowing our region in order to plan and advocate.

“Rural communities need small business as much as new and big business. We all want to see new economic development in our patch/es, but we shouldn’t lose the focus on current businesses. They too need effort to support their sustainability and expansion.”

Over the course of the research for the Economic Development Strategy for both Balranald and Wentworth Shire Councils **significant tri-state conversations** were also occurring. Regionally, over the past several decades, there has been increasing

dialogue about the **importance of cross-border** relationships. Over the past 12 months especially there has been a renewed interest in this – with a NSW, Victoria and South Australia Tri-State economic region being proposed and the following events / research activities occurring:

- Euston Economic Development Forum (March 2023),
- Tri-State Workforce Forum (Euston, December 2023),
- ‘Tri-State Economic Zone Scoping Study: Murray Mallee Cross Border Region’ March 2024. Developed by REMPLAN for Regional Development Victoria and the Mallee Regional Partnership, and
- RDA Murray’s Buronga Business Breakfast and Murray-Darling Interstate Regional Development Stakeholder Consultation (both Buronga, April 2024).

Amongst these multiple entities and efforts it is universally agreed that a tri-state governance model and working agreement would foster regional development, enhance economic growth, and ultimately benefit the residents of all participating states.

“We want to create a regional NSW where people actually want to live and work. What can we do to create communities we want to live and work in?”

“Local Government does their bit, industry does their bit etc etc very rarely do we come together and share this knowledge and capitalise on the opportunities.”

“Regional communities are in fact what many suburbs aspire to be. But so many people don’t see this...”

“[attracting workforce] Bigger than one employer, one industry or one area – a regional system (and brand) to be visible and an advocacy strength.”

“Avoiding a zero sum change in the local economy is important – they [industry]

come, they build, they leave... What is ‘local’ in a ‘local’ investment. Industry will ‘spruik’ their investment, but how will local communities benefit.”

“We need to be identifying pipelines of work as well – so businesses can plan long term at the scale required.”

“Legacy is also about skills retainment beyond the sugar hit.”

“The sugar hit not making a difference here, it has not had a trickle down impact like Economic Development theory would predict.”

“Putting this part of Australia on the map is a challenging one, you are at the coal face of the climate conversation, the indigenous cultural conversation lives here, you need logic over politics and it makes more sense to be working together.”

“Some of these hort companies are also tristate companies as well – so the relationship is fluid.”

“In the Tri-state conversation it is easy to bring people together but so hard to get them to keep moving together.”

“Advocacy should be area wide – then we have a critical mass of population and need... the similarity of ‘shared experience’ is pervasive – housing, childcare, workforce demand – you are stronger in aggregate than in isolation.”

Community engagement to inform that Wentworth Shire Council’s Economic Development Strategy occurred between December 2023 – April 2024 gathering a total of 203 community, community and Council leadership and government representative voices.

In total 190 community members completed the online and hard copy survey with 98.0% of respondents living within the Wentworth

Shire Council area and the majority living in Gol Gol (37.7%) / Buronga (6.3%), Wentworth (27.7%), Coomealla (5.0%) / Dareton (5.7%), and Pooncarie.

In total 3.7% of all respondents identified as Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander and a further 5.3% of respondents indicated they were born overseas.

Respondents most valued about where they live the:

- Small community atmosphere
- Healthy environment
- Access to health and education services
- Affordability/cost of living
- Recreational opportunities
- Thriving local businesses/industries.

The most sought-after businesses/industries were:

- Health/Medical services
- Recreation/Entertainment/Hospitality services
- Tourism
- Retail
- Education/Training services
- Arts and Culture
- Accommodation services

When asked ***What kinds of businesses / industries would you NOT like to see in your area?*** Respondents noted:

- Light Industrial/Construction/Manufacturing/Warehousing/Transport
- Heavy industrial
- Mining
- Renewables
- Chain stores
- Aircraft training

“Any industry or business that takes from the area and does not contribute. IE FIFO workers.”

Respondents felt the **BEST THING** to happen because of Economic Development included:

Strengths	The community said
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An increase in key services (education, health, childcare, aged care, recreational) and retail businesses / services• Sustainable and well-planned growth of both the population and economy, attracting young families• Job opportunities, especially for locals and youth• Tourism, particularly cultural and heritage based and drawing on the riverfront• More housing	<p>“Thriving community with opportunities for all who wish to be involved, growing availability of services etc.”</p>

Conversely, the **WORST THING** to happen because of Economic Development included:

Weakness	The community said
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Destruction of environment and amenity• Inadequate community and economic planning resulting in an inappropriate mix of residential and business / industry, environmental and sustainability costs and a lack of services to support growing populations• Inequitable Economic Development• Entry of undesirable business• Cost of living increases• Housing issues	<p>“Demand for housing and services increases higher than supply leading to increased costs, reduced services and ultimately reduced quality of township and services lowering the socioeconomic status of the district.”</p>

Interviews were undertaken with 11 individuals identified as Council, Community and/or Regional Leaders.

The most mentioned **STRENGTHS/ASSETS** were:

Built	Natural	Human/Social
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure to capitalise on natural assets • Light State • Civic and Visitor Information Centre • Planning for improved recreational facilities • Sealing of roads • Wentworth Airport • Accommodation assets • Waste management facility • Diversity of businesses and industries • Health Infrastructure • Tourism infrastructure and networks • The Buronga shopping precinct 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The local river system • Land availability and scale • Rich in minerals • Mungo and other National Parks • World Heritage Willandra Lakes <p>Natural assets require built assets for optimal use, i.e. transmission line with solar and wind, Ag/ Hort with water, roads for tourism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible, organised and adaptive communities • Human resources – our people • Council has a great and growing team, focus on skilling locals and enabling flexible working conditions • High functioning local / regional action groups

The community said

“Sealing of road to Menindee, sealing of runway – all done by our own workforce.”

“We are a well-managed LGA – so funding bodies should have trust and faith in us to do the right thing / get it done.”

“Wentworth Shire Interagency Group will attract and sustain economic development, especially because it picks up on Indigenous wellbeing and gendered diversity in economies. This is especially important in areas where there are workforce shortages. The interagency has the potential to marry up solutions in workforce shortages – childcare, education, health and wellbeing etc.”

The most mentioned **WEAKNESSES** were:

Weakness	The community said
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliance on water • Housing • Understanding scale and need for services • Attracting and growing the required workforce • Lack of Economic Development skills / personnel within each LGA • Engaging all levels of politics and both sides of the border • Maintaining and improving key infrastructure • Keeping community informed • Capitalising on mining and renewable energy growth – securing legacy • The lack of local benefit from FIFO workforce • Residential expansions growing pains • Lack of ‘to scale’ education and childcare facilities • Under-resourcing and vulnerability amongst some cohorts. 	<p>“There are risks with water supply and access. The industries we are investing in locally – permanent plantings – make it very difficult to be nimble or pivot. Wine industry is really struggling – some have pulled out wine grapes to plant almonds – water will be a premium.”</p> <p>“Securing a meaningful and enduring legacy benefit for the community from the REZ and mining – we need to think this through carefully – how do we benefit ratepayers and the community more broadly.”</p> <p>“Childcare is just so important and it is terrible here. Reliance on family for care means that people new to the region can be locked out of the workforce. People talk about waiting 18 months+ for a childcare place.”</p> <p>“The budget of not-for-profits is huge for this area – but what difference are they making? People are just being drip fed, just enough to keep them quiet. But the cost of living is growing and people are struggling. Why don’t these not-for-profits do something that really makes a difference. Long term support that is driven by the person’s goals NOT the agencies goals, invest in families, to build them up by providing meaningful opportunities.”</p>

The most mentioned **OPPORTUNITIES AND EMERGING TRENDS** were:

Opportunity/Emerging Trend	The community said
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Industry growth (mining, renewables and horticulture) and value adding potential South West REZ Education opportunities – TAFE and Uni Growth in population Tourism Increasing focus on use and enjoyment of riverfront areas Strategic road transport / freight developments, including the second bridge Legacy opportunities Cross border and Tri-State collaborations Workforce sharing and extension models A workforce strategy focussed on 'growing our own' 	<p>"In my earlier days it was roads, rates and rubbish, but our focus is now much more tourism. A \$14 million Visitor Information Centre, and the light state project. Sitting on the junction of Australia's two greatest rivers makes it easy to sell."</p> <p>"There is so much opportunity for really beautiful and meaning tourism around our significant sites, Mungo, Canoe Tree (behind Wentworth hospital), Fletchers Lake, Thegoa Lagoon etc. These places play a significant role in our ecosystems. There must be a plan to build a respectful tourism enterprise around these sites that is community owned and led and employs our community members. Beautify our Shire, mirror what's in our communities on signage or billboards. Have community input, regular consultations not a one off."</p> <p>"We do need to get strategic road transport back onto the agenda including the second bridge. Various strategic documents that refer to it. We need to be pushing now for something to happen in the next 10-20 years."</p> <p>"Wentworth is a historic town - the tourism bones are good, but it needs an updated offering. There is not enough accommodation, no cafes with longer opening hours etc."</p> <p>"Renewables – I would be asking - what can we be doing around longer-term opportunities – manufacturing etc, not just the current 'sugar hit'"</p> <p>"When you have water and energy you have some incredible assets, so then it is about building case for why major investors should come to the area."</p>

The most mentioned **THREATS** included:

Threat	The community said
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision making at higher levels of Government Technical connectivity Reliance on export markets Inflationary environment, Cost of living crisis Exposure to environmental and climatic extremes Lack of resourcing – human and financial Lack of national / state level solutions to the housing crisis Lack of national licencing / infrastructure for key industries, skills and assets 	<p>“Higher level infrastructure – bridges, health, education – are all reliant on state and federal-based decision making. We can advocate but it is not our decision, these are potential threats.”</p> <p>“I have concerns about water buy backs and what that might do to the cost of water in difficult times, especially for permanent plantings.”</p>

The following **KEY PARTNERS** were identified:

Key Partner	The community said
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All of community including First Nations communities, agencies and organisations Local government, and especially neighbouring LGAs across the Tri-State area Cross-border Commissioners Regional representatives Industry representatives – agriculture, horticulture, mining etc; State government departments and agencies Department of Regional NSW RDA Murray and Loddon Mallee. 	<p>“Cross border conversations are just so key – how do we do these well and collaborate for benefit. We need to get past thinking about competition and move to collaboration.”</p> <p>“There should be an Aboriginal Liaison Officers role on Wentworth Shire Council.</p> <p>There is a lack of communication between the Shire and local Indigenous Community.”</p> <p>“The most important key partners are the community. Participatory democracy will be key – we will be more visible. 80% of employment is in small business – so even though the ‘big’ industries look like they are central – LOCAL employment happens locally in local businesses.”</p>

KEY STRATEGIC GOALS, OBJECTIVES & ACTIONS

1. Our Industries

We will protect and grow our engine industries and attract and support emerging industries.

Objectives	Actions	Strategic Alignment
1.1 Existing businesses and industries are supported to benefit from economic growth	1.1.1 Communications frameworks are activated to increase local awareness of economic growth opportunities with potential for local benefit (Business groups, e-lists and information sessions)	Right to Farm
	1.1.2 Understand the accreditation, licencing and procurement needs of emerging industries. Inform local industry and business and attract relevant trainings to support with accreditation/licencing	
	1.1.3 Map local business and industry to support their full utilisation by larger emerging industries such as mining and renewables	
1.2 The importance of the agricultural and horticultural industries is protected	1.2.1 Manage residential encroachment onto agricultural / horticultural land	Wentworth Shire Council Local Environment Plan
	1.2.2 Consider the impact of emerging industries encroachment onto agricultural / horticultural land to food/fibre security	
	1.2.3 Advocate to ensure the impact of the Water Buy back does not inequitably impact South West NSW. Ensure bought water is returned to the area for environmental gains.	

Objectives	Actions	Strategic Alignment
1.3 Emerging and prospective industries and businesses are aware of and attracted to the LGA	1.3.1 A review of long-term strategic land use planning is undertaken drawing on state level expertise and local knowledge to determine placement and enable growth in residential, recreational, commercial and industrial land. This planning is long term, strategic and sustainable and considers all stakeholders. It is visionary about healthy, safe communities	Department of Planning NSW Department of Regional NSW Wentworth Shire Council Local Environment Plan
	1.3.2 A high level LGA Prospectus is developed (with supporting promotional materials) detailing endowments and opportunities and listing the preferred investments, industries and businesses	Regional Development Trust Fund, Department of Regional NSW in the distribution of this WSC Prospectus
	1.3.3 An Economic Development Officer / Team / Concierge role is created and funding secured (could be shared role between BSC/WSC) providing a single entry and advocacy point for all Economic Development enquiries	Investigate incentive schemes Sustainable Communities Funding Alignment to Drought Resilience research
	1.3.4 A inter LGA Economic Development Advisory Group is formed utilising Council and local knowledge and representation from key industries	Wentworth Region Tourism & Events Strategy 2029. Theme: INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT
	1.3.5 Preferred investment interests, businesses, industries and services are proactively sought out and welcomed	Action: Host industry networking events that showcase businesses in the region, what they have been doing to improve their offerings and encourage working together

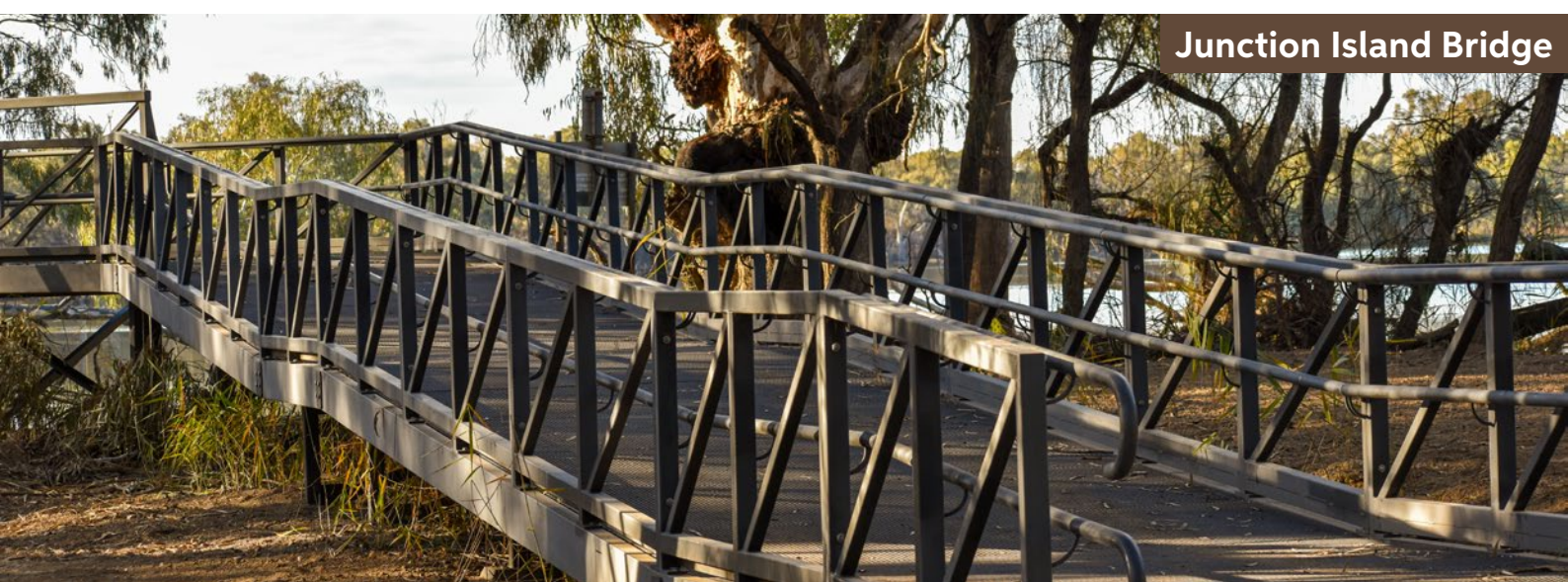
Objectives	Actions	Strategic Alignment
1.4 Our broad visitor economy potential is recognised, understood and enabled	1.4.1 The Wentworth Region Tourism & Events Strategy 2029 is recognised as the key visitor economy planning document to be applied in parallel to this Strategy	Wentworth Region Tourism & Events Strategy 2029 Theme: CUSTOMER FOCUS
	1.4.2 Encourage visitor geographic dispersal and length of stay by delivering on signage recommendations from Wentworth Region Tourism & Events Strategy 2029	Action: Gather existing data from industry and other sources to create the target customer profile set for the Wentworth region (aim for 5-6 profiles)

2. Our Infrastructure & Amenities

We will provide and/or facilitate local infrastructure and amenity development to encourage growth and productivity – because great places to live are great places to work and visit.

Objectives	Actions	Strategic Alignment
2.1 Greater diversity in, and availability, of housing stock with utilities and amenity assets to support	2.1.1 Suitable land for new builds is identified and promoted including through infill of vacant land within communities and through new residential estates	
	2.1.2 Investment is encouraged in independent Aged Care living units for the Dareton/Coomealla communities	
	2.1.3 Council encourages broader community thinking about the possible forms of housing (including tiny homes, prefabricated homes, transition to independent living units and higher density living)	Buronga Gol Gol Structure Plan 2020 Sustainable Wentworth Strategy
	2.1.4 Develop a plan for works in line with new residential developments to ensure these developments have required utilities. Seek funding streams to support with this work	Dareton Revitalised Strategy: Our Town Our Future
	2.1.5 Drawing on the community voice captured in the development of this EDS identify key amenity assets sought by community and facilitate the attraction of these assets to the LGA (with a focus on food, retail and riverfront opportunities)	
	2.1.6 Explore the contribution of industry to housing solutions through legacy / social licence	

Objectives	Actions	Strategic Alignment
2.2 Physical and digital connectivity enables full use of the LGAs potential – both human and natural	2.2.1 Council continues to advocate at appropriate governmental levels for high standard road infrastructure, including vigilance in identifying, accessing and utilising available funding streams	Road Safety Action Plan 2019/20 Wentworth Shire Council Community Strategic Plan
	2.2.2 Council continues to advocate for roadway and property interface priorities identified in the 2016 Buronga to Monak Interface Study Investigations Report, alongside new learnings	Buronga to Monak Interface Study Investigations Report (2016)
	2.2.3 Council continues to advocate at appropriate governmental levels for high standard technical connectivity infrastructure	Wentworth Shire Council Community Strategic Plan
2.3 Residents of the LGA have access to key services via in person or online mechanisms	2.3.1 Council works with key community groups and the broader community to advocate for and facilitate ‘to scale’ key community services including health and education services such as childcare, preschools, schools, adult education, health services and aged care	Wentworth Shire Council Community Strategic Plan
	2.3.2 Advocate for an increased public transport service across the Council communities bordering Victoria	
	2.3.3 Advocate for the critical importance of cross border funding and service delivery	



Junction Island Bridge

3. Our People

We will grow, attract and retain a creative, talented and skilled community and workforce.

Objectives	Actions	Strategic Alignment
3.1 Understand local / regional workforce training and skills gaps and actively support remediation	3.1.1 Work with engine and emerging industries to clearly identify skills gaps. Focussing on the most prevalent gaps plan a skills remediation strategy which includes a plan for industry's contribution	Wentworth Region Tourism & Events Strategy 2029 Theme: INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT Action: Host industry networking events that showcase businesses in the region, what they have been doing to improve their offerings and encourage working together
	3.1.2 Council works with key community groups and the broader community to advocate for increased post school / tertiary training provision locally	TAFE, Country University Centre (Swan Hill)
	3.1.3 Continue engagement in cross border networks to advocate for a National accreditation and licencing system for key industries and other practical strategies to address workforce and skills shortages	Wentworth Shire Council Community Strategic Plan
	3.1.4 Explore membership to the Robinvale Euston Workforce Network as it considers increasing its catchment area	

Objectives	Actions	Strategic Alignment
3.2 Uphold the importance of the early years in unlocking the full potential of future generations	3.2.1 Advocate for the ongoing delivery of high quality and consistent early years health, wellbeing, education and care services across the LGA	Wentworth Shire Council Disability Inclusion Plan
	3.2.2 Support all children have access to and attend high quality early years education in the two years before commencing school	Wentworth Shire Council Child Care Study June 2017
3.3 Increase awareness of, and facilitate employment pathways for community members	3.3.1 Work with key community organisations to reach un- and under-employed community members, facilitating their awareness of employment opportunities and connecting them to training and employment pathways	Is it a core for value for council to be connecting employment to training & Pathways.
	3.3.2 Negotiate with large industries for a minimum localised employment expectation, recognising this as a long-term legacy impact for individuals, families and communities	
3.4 Create the conditions for and actively support population and skills attraction	3.4.1 Support initiatives that promote and/or provide incentives for population migration to the Shire and the region	Move to More Country Change programs www.countrychange.com.au
	3.4.2 Invest in place-making, streetscape and resident, prospective resident and visitor amenity improvements	
	3.4.3 Activate opportunity to the Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA) initiative within the RDA Murray region	RDA Murray
	3.4.4 Investigate local solutions to workforce gaps by exploring more flexible working arrangements, workforce sharing and role sharing models	

4. Our Natural Assets & Identity

We will protect natural assets and create a clear, unique and consistent regional identity to attract national and international attention.

Objectives	Actions	Strategic Alignment
4.1 Our natural and cultural assets are protected and honoured	4.1.1 Our system of rivers, lakes, wetlands and landscapes are protected including the monitoring of loss of water from the region, ecosystem and water health and the impact of industry including visual and physical impacts	National Parks
	4.1.2 Our cultural and heritage assets are mapped, their significance recorded and protected	Traditional Owners Aboriginal Lands Council National Parks / World Heritage Willandra Lakes Advisory Committee
	4.1.3 Traditional owners are supported to lead and manage access to sites of cultural significance in a manner that protects the site and their ongoing connection to that site	Traditional Owners



Perry Sandhills, Wentworth

Objectives	Actions	Strategic Alignment
4.2 An aligned, modern and comprehensive suite of visitor economy assets and experiences are developed (including ecological, cultural and heritage)	4.2.1 Explore and encourage the growing demand for and potential of eco and agri-tourism across the LGA	Riverina Murray Tourism Destination Management Plan Wentworth Region Tourism & Events Strategy 2029 Theme: INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT Action: Identify target groups, reach out to Elders, to enable further empowerment over their heritage, and the opportunity to work together to share the stories
	4.2.2 Work with Traditional Owners and key stakeholders to enable the international significance of Mungo. Ensure the benefits of this accrue firstly to Traditional Owners, encouraging their ownership of, and employment in, these tourism assets. Support the Mungo experience as a platform for National reconciliation	Traditional Owners Aboriginal Lands Council National Parks / World Heritage Willandra Lakes Advisory Committee
	4.2.3 Work with BSC in the development the Far West Culture and Heritage Trail to highlight the First Nations and settlement / pastoralists story	Balranald Shire Council
	4.2.4 Facilitate new tour package products including heritage, food and wine, Indigenous, nature-based and walking tours and charters	Wentworth Region Tourism & Events Strategy 2029 Theme: INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT Action: Identify target groups, reach out to Elders, to enable further empowerment over their heritage, and the opportunity to work together to share the stories

Objectives	Actions	Strategic Alignment
4.3 Our brand is distinct, synonymous with our region and broadly recognised	4.2.5 In conjunction with MRCC capitalise on the joint Bruce Munro “LightState” Art Installation Experience (Fibre Optic Symphonic Orchestra & Trail of Lights).	Mildura Rural City Council Mildura Regional Development
	4.2.6 Support the efforts of Sunraysia Early Settlers Museum Inc to develop a museum dedicated to the early pioneering spirit of the region.	Riverina Murray Tourism Destination Management Plan Murray Regional Tourism Destination Management Plan
	4.3.1 Create a regional brand that encapsulates the strengths of our people and place and showcases hero products	Wentworth Region Tourism & Events Strategy 2029
	4.3.2 Leverage local character by sharing, engaging, and using genuine local stories to improve how visitors connect with the region	Theme: AWARENESS & EDUCATION Action: Create an images/video bank for industry use, where anyone can use the high quality images for marketing, gathered from existed sources
	4.3.3 Develop and deliver a digital tourism marketing strategy to guide consistent use of social media and other digital assets	
	4.3.4 Develop print and digital materials including guides, itineraries and packages to promote touring routes	

Objectives	Actions	Strategic Alignment
4.4 Continue to build improved visitor access, accommodation, amenity and awareness	4.4.1 Extend new and maintain existing cycling and walking trails	
	4.4.2 Work with Traditional Owners and other key stakeholders towards a sealed road loop encompassing Balranald – Mungo – Buronga. Be mindful of the Mungo site and experience being ‘ready’ (adequate levels of protection in place)	
	4.4.3 Continue to facilitate a broadening suite of accommodation options to meet visitor demand and encourage overnight and extended stays	Wentworth Region Tourism & Events Strategy 2029 Riverina Murray Tourism DMP
	4.4.4 Plan and provide for adequate visitor amenity at key visitor sites, including lighting, signage, public toilets, seating and shade	Buronga/Gol Gol Sporting Master Plan
	4.4.5 Ensure the core visitor economy workforce is familiar with key attractions and experiences and can promote these in an informed, high integrity manner	
	4.4.6 Progress Actions as outlined in the Buronga/Gol Gol Sporting Master Plan	

5. Our Tomorrow

We will plan now for an even better tomorrow, building local connection, leadership, partnership, legacy and advocacy.

Objectives	Actions	Strategic Alignment
5.1 Strong, diverse local leadership is built and community connection is supported and celebrated	5.1.1 Advocate for opportunities that improve social and economic outcomes for First Nations communities.	Wentworth Shire Council Community Strategic Plan
	5.1.3 We recognise a strong Local Government needs skilled elected representatives and so invest in our Councillors with training, experiences and support mechanisms	
	5.1.4 We celebrate our community leaders, promoting their achievements at all levels. We create a culture that values and respects community leadership	
5.2 We build partnerships to achieve equity for our region and have collective impact	5.2.1 We actively seek out and nurture partnerships at all levels including with our neighbouring LGAs, Joint Organisations, Regional, State and National advocacy bodies, and political and governmental representatives	Mildura Rural City Council Department Regional NSW RDA Murray Riverina Murray Tourism

Objectives	Actions	Strategic Alignment
5.3 We seize the full opportunity and potential of legacy, making strategic long-term investments	5.3.1 Council and community form a governance model to enable the collection and strategic distribution / investment of social licence / legacy payments from industry	Wentworth Shire Council Community Engagement Strategy
	5.3.2 BSC and WSC collaborate to understand the possible scale of social licence payments and develop an aligned position to guide negotiation and expectations, recognising the synergy of their opportunities and the strength in being united	Balranald Shire Council
	5.3.3 Council and community use legacy investments strategically and long-term so the benefits drawn from emerging industries last beyond their lifespan within the region	Wentworth Shire Council Community Engagement Strategy
5.4 We grow our Council workforce – skilling locals and encouraging career progression	5.4.1 Council adopts a leadership role in promoting local government as a career path, highlighting high demand fields	Wentworth Shire Council Workforce Management Plan
	5.4.2 Council strengthens its trainee and apprenticeship program by including work experience or other industry placements	
	5.4.3 Council has a philosophy of continuous professional development, encouraging all staff to set and fulfil professional goals and supporting, where reasonable, the cost of trainings in this space	



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