

Central Coast Council

Central Coast Economic Development Strategy

2026 – 2030

Central
Coast
Council



Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live, work and play.

We pay our respects to Darkinjung country, and Elders past and present.

We recognise the continued connection to these lands and waterways and extend this acknowledgement to the homelands and stories of those who also call this place home.

We recognise our future leaders and the shared responsibility to care for and protect our place and people.

Mayor's Message

I'm pleased to present the Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030 – the first to be developed by the new Council in partnership with local businesses, agency partners and industry leaders.

Our new strategy describes a shared vision for the Central Coast to ensure we build a strong foundation for sustainable economic growth.

We've identified key themes that will guide growth and ensure long-term prosperity. These focus on supporting local businesses, enabling critical infrastructure, creating strategic partnerships, and positioning our region as a prosperous place that attracts people to live, work and study.

We'll support industry growth and encourage strategic investment that creates quality jobs.

We'll focus on 'place, identity and activation' to strengthen our town centres.

We'll build our brand and grow our visitor economy, working hand in hand with our Destination Management Plan 2026-29, to enhance our profile as a leading destination for iconic visitor and community experiences.

We'll advocate for, and prioritise, essential infrastructure including transport, roads, and digital networks to support growth and improve access.

We'll continue to adopt practices that support a circular economy where waste is reduced, and environmental impacts are minimised.

And we'll foster alliances and partnerships with government agencies and industry to encourage investment, develop our workforce, and nurture economic growth.

Complementing this strategy, your new Council has developed key priorities that will drive economic prosperity.

We've focussed on improving local roads, increasing connectivity, conserving our environment, developing a Warnervale Business Precinct Masterplan, addressing affordable housing and implementing the Warnervale Airport Masterplan.

We've identified key priority infrastructure and investment projects that will benefit our entire region, and we're seeking partnerships with government, industry bodies and private enterprise to deliver these.

We've committed to improving our development application processes and finding new ways to work with industry to overcome challenges.

We've delivered our first ever business retention and expansion survey that offers valuable insights to help us better support local businesses.

And we've established an Economic Development Committee to provide advice and recommendations to Council on all matters involving the local economy, employment, and regional development.

Our region's success depends on our ability to adapt, collaborate and innovate.

The Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030 is testimony to our commitment to ensuring that everything we do helps to support our economy and grow our future.

Lawrie McKinna

Mayor, Central Coast Council

Our Journey Begins - The Central Coast in Focus

The Central Coast is entering a new chapter of its economic development journey, one that builds on the region's strengths, celebrates its unique identity, and responds proactively to the challenges and opportunities of a changing world.

Executive Summary

This Strategy sets a clear direction for growth and community resilience, shaped by the voices of local businesses, agency partners and industry leaders. It recognises the need to regenerate and future-proof the economy by fostering business capacity and capability building, strengthening existing and growing new industry, and creating inclusive opportunities for all.

We acknowledge the Central Coast's Traditional Custodians and the enduring connection of First Nations peoples to land and water. This deep relationship continues to shape the identity of the region and provides vital cultural and environmental knowledge to guide sustainable growth. Our commitment is to work in genuine partnership with First Nations communities to strengthen cultural recognition and create opportunities for meaningful Indigenous economic participation, building a shared and prosperous future.

Our vision is one of balance and sustainable growth for the Central Coast, underpinned by a renewed and real commitment from Council to support local businesses, activate vibrant places, with local identity, and build strong partnerships with all agencies that deliver economic development programs locally. This approach is grounded in ownership of Council's direct economic development levers, collaboration, and adaptability, ensuring we can respond effectively to shifting economic conditions, environmental pressures and changing global dynamics.

The Central Coast Economic Development Strategy provides a practical framework to guide projects and programs. It outlines a shared vision of success, structured around four key outcomes; a prosperous economy, vibrant places, growing industries, and connected communities. These outcomes are supported by five strategic themes that direct action where it matters most, from supporting local industry and enabling infrastructure to strengthening strategic alliances and actively promoting the region as a destination for new residents, businesses and visitors.

This is a strategy for action. Through annual planning and ongoing engagement, we will deliver targeted initiatives, monitor progress, and remain responsive to new opportunities. It is a future-ready framework, adaptable and resilient, designed to evolve with the region, while providing stability through the long-term vision.

Strategy Framework – A Shared Vision of Success

Vision – The Destination

To build a resilient growing economy through people, place and partnerships – creating opportunities that support local industry, strengthen communities and enhance the Central Coast as a great place to live, work and visit.

Pillars of Success – Defining Our Future

The Strategy is guided by four success pillars that describe the long-term impact that we are working towards.

Prosperous

Businesses thrive, industries grow, and sustainable jobs are created.

Vibrant

Towns, precincts and public spaces are lively, inclusive and reflect the Central Coast's unique identity.

Innovative

Growing and emerging industries, smart solutions and new ideas drive economic opportunity.

Connected

Strong partnerships, regional infrastructure, seamless transport and digital networks bring people, businesses and communities together.

Strategic Themes – The Levers of Action

To achieve the outcomes, the Strategy is structured around five strategic themes. There are the priority areas where targeted action is needed.

1. Industry Growth and Support	Support local industry and attract strategic investment to drive business growth and create quality jobs (Prosperous).
2. Place Identity and Activation	Strengthen town centres through place-based planning, cultural initiatives, and vibrant public spaces that reflect local identity (Vibrant).
3. Destination Brand and Visitor Economy	Grow the region's profile as a leading destination through targeted marketing, events, and storytelling that enhance visitor and community experiences (Prosperous, Vibrant, Connected).
4. Infrastructure and Connectivity	Prioritising and advocating for essential infrastructure including transport, roads, and digital networks to enable growth and improve access for residents, workers, and visitors (Prosperous, Innovative, Connected).
5. Strategic Alliances for Regional Growth	Establish formal partnerships with government, regional agencies and industry to support investment, workforce development, and inclusive economic participation (Innovative, Connected, Prosperous).

Outcomes – Bridging the Gap between Ambition and Delivery

Each key theme in the Strategy is underpinned by clear outcomes.

These are tangible results that show what will be achieved in practice and they will be measured annually.

The outcomes provide the bridge between the long-term vision and practical delivery, ensuring each theme contributes directly to the success pillars.

Annual Action Plans – The Engine of Change

To keep the Strategy responsive and practical, an Annual Action Plan will be prepared each year.

This plan will set out:

- Specific initiatives and projects to be delivered.
- Roles and responsibilities across Council, industry and regional partners.
- Measures of success to track and report progress.

This structure ensures the Strategy remains both dynamic and adaptable, anchored by a clear vision and outcomes, while being flexible enough to adapt to new opportunities, funding and emerging challenges.

How the Strategy Works

Vision – Defines the long-term ambition

Success Pillars – Describe what success will look like when the vision is achieved

Strategic Themes – Are the focus areas – the levers of action where resources and partnerships are focused.

Outcomes – Under each theme set the tangible, measurable results that will deliver the impact and show what success will look like.

Annual Action Plans – Will detail the projects and programs, responsibilities and track progress against the outcomes' measures year by year.

Strategic Intent – Turning Vision into Action

This Strategy provides a clear direction for the Central Coast economy by aligning vision and outcomes with practical action. It establishes priority themes, guides annual planning and enables delivery through targeted initiatives. It provides a practical framework for decision-makers, businesses and regional partners to work together, identifying priorities, guiding investment and driving coordinated regional outcomes.

Designed for stability and adaptability, the Strategy sets a clear long-term vision and measurable outcomes, while being flexible enough to respond to changing circumstances. This adaptability ensures that it can respond to shifting economic conditions, new opportunities and emerging challenges, and ensures actions remain relevant and impactful. By linking high-level outcomes with annual action planning, the Strategy creates an always current practical pathway for delivering growth, attracting investment and building liveability across industry and communities for the Central Coast.

Together, we are shaping a thriving Central Coast, where people, place and regional partnerships drive economic opportunity, community wellbeing and regional pride.

Imagining the Future – Our Vision for the Central Coast

“To build a resilient growing economy through people, place and partnerships – creating opportunities that support local industry, strengthen communities and enhance the Central Coast as a great place to live, work and visit.”

Understand Our Economy: Strategic Context

Defining Economic Development

What is economic development?

Economic development is about more than growth, it is about shaping the conditions that allow industry, local businesses, people and places to thrive. At its core, economic development is the process of building a resilient, inclusive and future-proofed economy that generates opportunities for all members of the community.

It involves supporting existing industries, attracting new investment and creating the right environment for businesses to innovate and grow. Economic development also recognises the vital role of people and place, equipping our workforce with the skills to succeed, nurturing entrepreneurship and ensuring that the Central Coast remains a great place to live, work, visit and invest.

Modern economic development should adopt a holistic approach that considers all foundational elements of a location, alongside growing industry, local jobs, and economic output. It needs to balance economic prosperity with social wellbeing, cultural vitality and environmental sustainability. It is about incorporating:

- People – developing local talent, skills and opportunities for meaningful employment
- Place – creating vibrant, connected and attractive communities that foster identity and pride
- Partnerships – working with industry, education providers, government and the community to drive long-term prosperity

In this sense, economic development is both a place-based process and an outcome. It is the deliberate effort to coordinate policy, business growth and investment, regional place-making and collaboration to ensure that the Central Coast is positioned to compete in a changing economy, while also ensuring that the benefits of growth are widely shared and balanced across the community.

What is economic development?

The Central Coast is one of Australia’s fastest growing areas and the sixth largest region in the country, offering a distinctive blend of coastal lifestyle, vibrant urban centres and thriving industries. Our community faces both opportunities and challenges including a growing population, evolving workforce needs, and the transition to new industries and technologies. By investing in economic development, we can, and need to, create quality jobs on the Central Coast, strengthen local businesses, attract sustainable investment and build a resilient and growth-managed economy that reflects the Central Coast’s local characteristics, sense of identity, and future aspirations.

Council's Role

As a leader, enabler and advocate, Council unlocks the Central Coast's potential by prioritising investment, creating local jobs, and shaping the conditions for businesses to flourish and communities to thrive in a resilient, inclusive and future-ready way.

Leading the delivery of this Strategy, Council will bring together partners from across government and regional agencies and the business community to achieve meaningful outcomes for the Central Coast. Our role will adapt as needed, from executing initiatives, setting strategic direction, providing evidence-based data and insights to leading programs, through to promoting the region's identity and securing new investment.

Council will deliver projects and programs directly, while enhancing and activating the public realm to make it more accessible, attractive and productive. Our dedicated Economic Development team will continue to work closely with other specialist areas of Council, along with businesses, industry groups and State and Federal Governments. Together, these partnerships create the conditions for industry and communities to prosper, enabling economic growth and wealth creation for the Central Coast's residents.

Council will also play an enabling role by strengthening the capability and capacity of businesses and organisations through training, development and capacity building. Above all, success will depend on strong collaboration, with the community, businesses and government agencies all working together to build a thriving and future-ready Central Coast.

Deliver - Delivering economic development programs, projects, services and targeted local initiatives that support industry, entrepreneurs and the wider community.

Facilitate - Creating opportunities for collaboration by connecting businesses, industry, government and community partners to strengthen the region's economic ecosystem.

Partner - Building strategic alliances with stakeholders at local, regional and state levels to align priorities, share resources and maximise impact.

Advocate - Promoting the region's economic priorities to decision makers, investors and influencers to ensure the Central Coast is recognised, supported and positioned for growth.

Partner Roles and Collaboration

The Central Coast's economic future will be shaped by the strength of our partnerships. When businesses, government and regional agencies, and community come together with shared ambition, we unlock opportunities that no single organisation could achieve alone. Collaboration is not just a principle of this Strategy; it is a driving force.

Across the region, Federal, State Government and Regional Agencies deliver programs and services that fuel economic growth. Council plays an active role in these initiatives, aligning them with local priorities and ensuring they translate into opportunities for our businesses, industries and communities.

Partnerships are the core of this Strategy. Clear roles, joint accountability and open data sharing will strengthen regional connections and ensure every effort is moving forward with a united focus. By working side-by-side, Council and its partners can achieve outcomes that are greater than what any one organisation could deliver alone to create a stronger, more resilient Central Coast economy.

Together we can turn collaboration into a competitive advantage.

First Nations Economic Participation

Our Commitment

We strengthen the Central Coast economy by partnering with Aboriginal people, organisations and businesses, embedding shared decision making, growing Aboriginal enterprise and jobs and valuing Culture and Country as economic strengths. This approach reflects the NSW's First Nations Investment Framework and the Closing the Gap partnership in NSW.

Working in Partnership

Our approach to support First Nations economic participation is shaped by respect, trust, and collaboration. We recognise that prosperity is strongest when it is built together, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people leading the way in decisions that affect their communities, businesses and Country.

On the Central Coast, our work reflects the NSW First Nations Investment Framework, ensuing Aboriginal priorities, knowledge and leadership are at the core of economic growth.

This means we are committed to the following principles:

- **Relationships first** – investing time in building trust and strong partnerships before focusing on initiatives and opportunities.
- **Shared decision-making** - Aboriginal voices shape the design and delivery of projects, ensuring priorities and aspirations are embedded from the beginning.
- **Community-led design** - supporting initiatives that are shaped by Aboriginal priorities and aspirations.
- **Respecting data and knowledge** - upholding Indigenous data sovereignty and making sure information is shared openly and responsibly.
- **Transparency and accountability** – committing to open reporting and shared measures of progress.

These principles shape the way Council acts as an enabler, partner and advocate, ensuring Aboriginal participation is at the foundation of how the region plans, invests and grows.

Key Outcomes

Our commitment to Aboriginal economic participation will deliver:

- **Thriving Aboriginal businesses** with greater access to supply opportunities and growth support.
- **Pathways to quality jobs** for Aboriginal people across priority industries and infrastructure projects.
- **Culture and Country embedded** in places, events and the visitor economy.
- **Aboriginal land and assets activated** for housing, jobs and enterprise through enabling infrastructure and partnerships.
- **Shared governance and partnerships** that ensure Aboriginal voices guide planning, investment and reporting.

Aboriginal economic participation is not an addition to growth; it is the foundation. Valuing Aboriginal knowledge, culture, land, and enterprise as essential strengths ensures prosperity is built on respect, resilience, and inclusion. By embedding Aboriginal leadership and priorities in the way we plan and invest, create an economy that is distinctive, fair and deeply connected to people and Country.

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Participation

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people represent a vital and growing part of the Central Coast community and workforce. Supporting participation in education, training, and employment pathways is essential to building an inclusive and resilient local economy.

This Strategy recognises the importance of creating opportunities that are culturally safe, community-led and aligned with the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth. By strengthening connections between young people, industry and education providers, the next generation can be empowered to take up roles in business, innovation and leadership.

Discussion with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth highlighted key focus areas that can guide efforts to strengthen participation and economic outcomes:

1. Culturally Safe Youth Spaces and Infrastructure

Developing youth-focused spaces that are culturally safe and community-led provides young people with a place to connect, create and belong. Investment in cultural infrastructure and youth hubs including outdoor and third spaces supports wellbeing, expression and participation in community life. These spaces should reflect local culture and identity and be designed with young people, for young people.

2. Education and Cultural Learning

Embedding Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives into local education systems will strengthen cultural awareness and understanding across the region. Making Aboriginal Studies a core part of the curriculum, delivered in a way that is meaningful, and not tokenistic, helps build perspective and pride in culture. Strengthening partnerships between schools, Elders and Aboriginal educators can ensure that learning environments are culturally safe and inclusive for all.

3. Pathways to Economic Independence and Stability

Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth to access; financial literacy programs and support, employment pathways, and affordable housing opportunities, helps lay strong foundations for independence and long-term wellbeing. Simplifying financial systems and improving awareness of available supports will make it easier for young people to engage confidently in the local economy.

4. Accessible and Affordable Transport

Reliable and affordable transport is essential to connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to education, employment and community life. Expanding transport opportunities including night-time services, better connections and end-of-trip services, and programs that support young people to obtain their drivers licence, will reduce barriers to participation and mobility across the region.

Investing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth is an investment in the region's future, driving innovation, strengthening culture, and building a stronger, more inclusive economy for all.

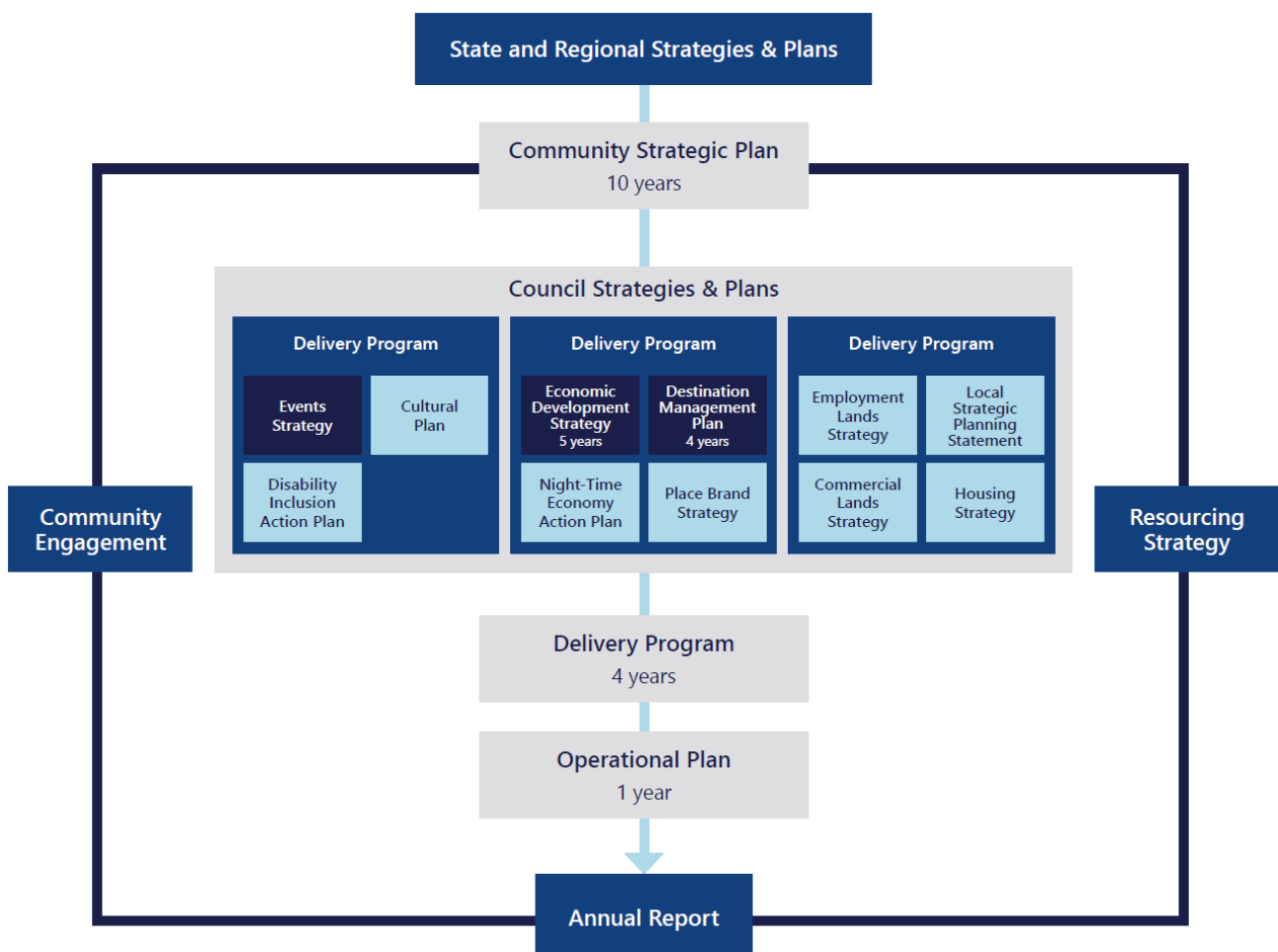
Strategic Overview

The Central Coast Economic Development Strategy has been developed as part of a broader, interconnected strategic framework. It sits alongside Council’s Destination Management Plan and Events Strategy and responds directly to the overarching Community Strategic Plan, ensuring a consistent and coordinated approach to shaping the region’s future.

This approach ensures that our economic development is not pursued in isolation, but is integrated with social, cultural, environmental, infrastructure and planning priorities. It recognises that a thriving economy depends on vibrant communities, strong cultural identity, sustainable environment and the infrastructure to support both growth and liveability. This coordinated approach strengthens collaboration, streamlines effort and ensures outcomes that are sustainable and inclusive.

Together, these aligned strategies strengthen the delivery of the Community Strategic Plan by contributing to:

- **A resilient local economy** that generates sustainable jobs, attracts investment and supports innovation
- **Vibrant, inclusive communities** that value identity, participation and connection.
- **Sustainable environments** that protect the Central Coast’s natural assets and enhance liveability for future generations.



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Economic Landscape

Key Indicators

Total Output - \$20.8B

International Export Value - \$1.4B

Population and Workforce

354,803 Residents – 2024 ERP

+64,100 New Residents between 2021-2046 (+0.7% p.a.)

165,100 Employed Residents – August 2025 ABS Labour Force Australia – Detailed

+12,591 jobs between 2019 and 2024 (1.9%p.a.) – NSW 1.7% p.a.

3.5% (March 2025) Unemployment Rate – NSW 4.0%

70% Job containment rate – Live and work on the Central Coast

Moderate levels of socio-economic disadvantage – SEIFA:994

Top Resident Occupations

- Professionals 20.5%
- Community and Personal Service Workers 14.0%
- Clerical and Administration Workers 13.3%

Top Industries

By Output

1. Construction (16.9%)
2. Manufacturing (13.8%)
3. Healthcare (10.8%)

By International Exports

1. Manufacturing (56.9%)
2. Accommodation and Food Services (9.0%)
3. Retail Trade (7.0%)

By Employment

1. Health and Social Assistance (21.5%)
2. Construction (14.3%)
3. Retail Trade (11.5%)

Business Profile

26,735 Registered Businesses - +465 1-year growth

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14,374 (53.76%) Non-Employing Businesses

Small Businesses (1-19 employees) – 11,741 (43.92%)

Medium Businesses (20-199 employees) – 602 (2.25%)

Large Businesses (200+ employees) – 18 (0.07%)

Business Count by Industry

1. Construction (24.6%)
2. Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (13%)
3. Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services (9.2%)
4. Health Care and Social Assistance (8.4%)
5. Retail Trade (6%)

Voices from the Central Coast

Bringing together the insights of industry leaders, regional partners and emerging voices to ensure the Strategy reflects shared priorities and opportunities for regional growth.

The Central Coast Economic Development Strategy has been shaped by the insights, expertise, and experiences of a wide range of local stakeholders. Through targeted workshops and consultations, Council worked with businesses, industry leaders, government partners, education providers and industry sector professionals to explore the region's strengths, challenges and opportunities.

This engagement has provided a strong foundation for the Strategy, ensuring it reflects diverse and widespread voices, aligns with regional priorities and builds a shared vision for a prosperous, vibrant and connected Central Coast economy.

How we engaged

Over a three-month period, Council engaged with approximately 300 external stakeholders, as well as Councillors and internal staff. This followed a Business Retention Survey, which Council undertook in September 2024, with responses from 227 businesses.

Engagement activities included:

Nine Workshops – with business, peak industry bodies and State and Federal Government agencies.

Targeted Roundtables – For sector-specific issues (tourism, education, infrastructure).

Input Sessions – With university students, capturing the views of young people preparing to enter the workforce.

Discussions – With internal staff and elected Councillor representatives to align with Council priorities.

What We Heard

From this engagement, five priority themes consistently emerged:

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1. **Transport and Infrastructure**

Stakeholders identified transport and infrastructure as foundational to economic growth and supporting businesses, residents and visitors. They emphasised the need for improved connectivity and essential services such as water, sewer, electricity, and internet to enable access to employment, services, and support growth in priority areas.

2. **Skills and Employment**

Stakeholders reported widespread challenges in attracting skilled workers across industries and raised concerns about the outflow of residents seeking employment in Sydney and Newcastle, particularly in professional sectors. They emphasised the need to strengthen local education and training pathways from high school through to TAFE and university to align with regional job opportunities and reduce local unemployment.

3. **Built and Natural Environment**

Town centres present opportunities to support population growth through increased activity, placemaking, and a more vibrant night-time economy. Stakeholders emphasised the value of the natural environment in enhancing liveability and attracting visitors, while also noting that issues such as flooding, and biodiversity constraints can limit development potential in some areas.

4. **Council and Government Processes**

Frustrations were raised regarding lengthy planning timeframes and perceived complexity in Council processes, particularly development and event applications. Stakeholders viewed the development assessment process as a barrier to investment, citing a lack of clarity and responsiveness. Concerns were also expressed about limited coordination within Council and with external agencies, along with a desire for more proactive communication and stronger regional advocacy.

5. **Economic Conditions**

Businesses reported increasing financial pressures driven by rising insurance, rent, and overhead costs, alongside broader uncertainty linked to global markets, geopolitical tensions, and rapid technological change. Stakeholders expressed interest in better understanding the impacts of AI, as well as improved access to grants to support business sustainability and growth.

Engagement Insights

Diverse voices – perspectives captured from business, government agencies, and education providers and students.

" We appreciate the challenges of the past and recognise the focus needs to be forward thinking. We want strong leadership from the top with an aligned long-term vision for the Central Coast... We want efficiency in processes and support to make things happen by stimulating and empowering both businesses and the community."

Multi-level input – contributions across local, state and federal representatives, ensuring alignment across tiers of government.

" Contributing to a multi-level government approach to addressing skills shortages. Increased support for improving education attainment and expanding and keeping employment localised."

" Streamlining planning and development process as long as environmental regulations are not ignored, making it easier to do business, providing more certainty around timelines and expectations... being more proactive, transparent and collaborative with engagement, strengthening partnerships with industry and education providers and community to achieve more inclusive economic growth, and not leaving anyone behind."

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Emerging perspectives – insights from students and young professionals preparing to enter the workforce, highlight the future of the Central Coast’s economy.

“Bring young people to the Coast through jobs that stem from larger companies.”

“There seems to be mismatch between the skills people have and the types of jobs that are growing in the region. Many residents commute out of the area for work, at the same time, businesses often struggle to find workers with the right qualifications... Supporting local jobs, and making it easier to access them, is key to strengthening the Central Coast economy.”

Why it Matters

This engagement created a shared evidence base for the Strategy by:

- Grounding outcomes in business and industry priorities.
- Aligning with state and federal policy directions.
- Including the voices of the future workforce.
- Building shared ownership and allocation across sectors.
- Positioning the Central Coast for resilience and long-term opportunities.

Looking Ahead

The insights gathered have directly shaped the Strategy’s vision, outcomes and themes. They highlight the importance of strong partnerships between businesses, government and industry leaders to drive investment, foster innovation, and support a Central Coast economy that is prosperous, vibrant, innovative, and connected.

“We want to embrace and preserve the unique features of the Central Coast and transform the region to meet the current and future needs of a changing community to enjoy today and leave a positive legacy for the next generations.”

Our Places

Broader Regional Context

The Central Coast region spans approximately 1,680 square kilometres with over 80 kilometres of coastline; it is centrally positioned between Sydney and Newcastle. The region benefits from ongoing population growth, with its southern locations just one hour north of Sydney, creating opportunities for economic development. The region's population is projected to increase to 404,250 people by 2041, requiring an additional 32,550 dwellings.

Major Urban Clusters (Town Centres Hierarchy)

The Central Coast's population is dispersed across multiple town centres rather than concentrated in a single urban area, creating a polycentric economic structure.

The Central Coast's largest population and designated regional City of Gosford, stretches from Brisbane Waters in the east to out west to the retail and servicing centre of Erina. Other major designated commercial and town centres on the Central Coast are Wyong, Tuggerah, Lake Haven, The Entrance, Terrigal, Bateau Bay and Woy Woy.

Gosford City – Reimagining our city centre

Gosford's transformation isn't just a vision, it's underway. Central Coast Council is actively shaping the city centre by upgrading public spaces and infrastructure, creating a vibrant and connected urban environment. These improvements are positioning Gosford as an increasingly attractive destination for businesses and investors.

Enhanced infrastructure and a renewed city identity are driving local job growth and economic development, making the CBD's transformation central to the region's prosperity. Council is focused on creating a city centre that is both visually appealing and highly functional. Streetscape upgrades, improved signage, and enhanced public amenities are designed to support local businesses and stimulate investment.

At the same time, landmark projects such as the Gosford Regional Library are delivering modern spaces for learning, collaboration, and innovation. Through these targeted actions, Council is not only delivering visible change but also laying the foundation for Gosford's long-term success.

Each initiative strengthens Gosford's role as a dynamic hub for business, investment, and innovation, with continued growth in education and workforce development further reinforcing its role.

Gosford is also emerging as a key centre for education and workforce development, reinforcing its role as a regional hub for knowledge, skills and innovation. The expansion of the University of Newcastle campus is positioning Gosford as a leading higher education precinct, attracting students, supporting innovation and strengthening connections with industry. The established presence of TAFE NSW is being strengthened through a commitment to invest in Gosford and surrounding areas, expanding delivery and capacity to meet current and future workforce needs. Together, these institutions are strengthening Gosford as an education precinct, supporting investment and contributing to a stronger, more skilled local workforce.

Gosford Waterfront

A NSW State Government project led by Hunter Central Coast Development Corporation. This project is progressing the revitalisation of Gosford's waterfront with a focus on enhancing public space and improving connectivity in the short term while providing opportunities for longer term investment.

Commercial Centres

Our Commercial Centres are the physical places we meet to do business, work and shop. But there is more to Commercial Centres than simply this, they are also places to build community connectedness. Our Commercial Centres provide a venue for civic functions, social interaction, and recreation, and are an ideal location for community facilities and public transport hubs.

Our commercial lands are therefore of importance for numerous reasons:

- 1. Economic Growth:** Commercial lands serve as the backbone of the local economy, providing spaces for businesses to establish and operate, which in turn creates jobs and stimulates economic activity.
- 2. Job Creation:** Commercial lands help new and emerging businesses establish and is essential for accommodating the region's growing population – ensuring residents have access to employment opportunities close to home.
- 3. Support for Local Businesses:** Commercial lands provide essential spaces for local businesses to thrive – supporting the local economy and fostering a sense of community by encouraging residents to shop locally.
- 4. Community Connectedness:** Commercial services within easy reach of residential areas enhances the quality of life for residents and promotes sustainable forms of urban living.

Council is currently preparing a Commercial Lands Strategy for the Central Coast that will provide an overall strategic context for the planning, development and management of our Commercial Centres.

Town Centres and Neighbourhoods

Supporting and contributing to the unique character of our town centres and neighbourhoods are the independent retailers, fashion boutiques, restaurants, grocery stores, salons, and flower shops, these businesses contribute to the vibrancy of our local communities.

Council will support these businesses through policy support, capacity-building initiatives, promotion and streamlined collaboration with regional leaders. We will continue to improve the quality of these places through public domain upgrades, and increase vibrancy. Working with strategic partners to improve transport connectivity.

Our Economic Precincts

Designated Employment Precincts

Across the Central Coast, 29 designated employment precincts (business parks) provide a diverse mix of spaces that support jobs, services and local business growth. Collectively, these precincts deliver more than 3.3 million sqm of employment and residential space. The Central Coast's largest employment sectors by floor space are manufacturing (21%), transport, postal and warehousing (25%) and wholesale trade (10%). These industries, along with other emerging sectors, highlight the region's capacity to attract investment, generate jobs close to home, and strengthen our role as a connected and resilient economy.

The Central Coast's employment precincts are grouped into three sub-areas to reflect their size and distribution across the region: south, central and north.

The North Area

Covering eight precincts from North Wyong to Warner Business Park, the north is the largest sub-area (1,213 ha), though 58% remains underdeveloped. It provides the least floorspace (approximately 611,00 sqm). Most land (92%) is zoned E4 General Industrial, concentrated in Bushells Ridge (59%). The north also holds 74% of all underdeveloped land across the Central Coast (approximately 695ha).

The Central Area

This sub-area contains seven precincts from Lisarow to Tuggerah. It is the smallest by land area (378 ha), representing 17% of zoned employment land across the Central Coast. It provides approximately 1.1 million sqm of floorspace, with most land (53%) zoned E4 General Industrial, concentrated in Tuggerah (69%).

The South Area

Containing 14 precincts, from Mooney Mooney Bridge to North Gosford and Wyoming, this sub-area has the second largest zoned area in (599 ha) and the most floorspace (approximately 1.7m sqm). Most land is zoned E4 General Industrial, concentrated in Somersby (60%) which remains in high demand due to its proximity to Sydney.

The North Area

- The Central Coast
- Economic Precincts



Figure 1 Central Coast Economic Precincts

Central Coast Draft Employment Lands Strategy (ELS)

Unlocking employment lands and accelerating employment precincts is a critical priority on the Central Coast. More than half of the Council area consists of national parks, creating unique planning and development constraints.

A Council initiated Draft Employment Lands Strategy in 2025 identified that:

- Bushells Ridge, Somersby and the Wyong Employment Zone (WEZ) precincts are three of the largest employment precincts on the Central Coast with the most vacant zoned employment land.
- All three precincts contain ecological constraints that considerably reduce the feasibility and capacity of development.
- These sites will require biodiversity offsets and bio-certification solutions to provide streamlined biodiversity approvals before they can provide market ready land to the employment supply pipeline.
- Parts of the WEZ and Bushells Ridge also lack infrastructure (water and sewer) and require large scale intersection upgrades to meet expected growth.

The Draft ELS recommends that a major policy focus for government should be to unlock at least 60 ha of employment land by ensuring that biodiversity and infrastructure servicing issues are resolved to meet demand by 2041.

The Draft ELS identifies four (4) overarching Strategies (see below) and accompanying actions to guide future employment land requirements and land use to 2041.

Overarching Strategies

1. Ensure adequate, appropriate and long-term supply
2. Align infrastructure with current need and future growth
3. Support a sustainable circular economy
4. Develop a planning framework that supports opportunity

Economic Development Foundations

Economic development does not happen in isolation. On the Central Coast it is powered by three foundations:

People – The Heart of the Economy

- Skilled and adaptable workforce supported through education and training.
- Inclusive opportunities for young women, Aboriginal people and diverse communities.
- Careers that retain local talent while attracting skilled workers from outside the region.
- Community wellbeing and prosperity as foundations for long-term success.

Place – The Stage for Growth

- Vibrant, activated town centres and precincts that attract investment and support tourism.
- Infrastructure that enables growth including roads, rail, digital networks, utilities and employment lands.
- Natural environments that are safeguarded, enhanced and celebrated by the community, businesses and visitors
- Strong local identity shaped by a coastal lifestyle natural assets and cultural heritage.
- Liveable, inclusive and culturally rich communities that attract residents, workers and visitors.
- .

Partnerships – Building Collective Strength

- Collaboration across industry partners, businesses, education sector and levels of government.
- Shared responsibility to maximise outcomes and amplify impact.
- Innovation and resilience enabled through collective problem solving.
- Stronger access to funding, investment and national recognition.

Thriving Central Coast Economy

People – Skills, workforce, community, entrepreneurs

Place – Town Centres, precincts, natural assets, identity

Partnerships – Collaboration, networks, shared resources

Engines of Growth: Strategic Themes and Objectives

Theme 1 – Industry Growth and Support

Strengthening the economy by supporting local industry, fostering local business retention and expansion and attracting strategic investment that generates quality job opportunities for local people.

Overview

Driving a stronger, more resilient economy by supporting local industries and attracting high-value investment. This theme is about creating the right conditions for businesses to grow, diversify and compete. The Central Coast's future economic strength depends on supporting existing industries, local business retention and expansion, unlocking new opportunities and ensuring the region has the skills, infrastructure and networks needed to succeed in a changing economy.

What it involves

- **Partnering with local businesses** to understand their challenges, growth plans and workforce needs.
- **Supporting retention and expansion**, ensuring established businesses stay and grow on the Central Coast.
- **Targeting high-potential sectors** such as health, advanced manufacturing, creative industries, professional services and tourism and hospitality to drive diversification and new opportunities.
- **Creating the right conditions for success** through improved infrastructure, streamlined development approvals and a focus on innovation hubs and precincts.
- **Building strong partnerships** with education and training providers, government and industry groups to align skills with demand and create a pipeline of local talent.

Why it will make a difference

- Creates high-quality industry and sustainable employment, reducing the need for residents to commute outside the region.
- Broadens and strengthens the economic base, improving resilience to market fluctuations and future shocks.
- Enhances the region's ability to attract and retain skilled workers and young professionals by offering meaningful local career opportunities in an enviable location.
- Drives innovation and competitiveness, positioning the Central Coast as a key contributor to the NSW and national economy.
- Ensures local self-sustainment with wealth and business activity growing within the region, generating long-term economic and community social benefits

How we will make this happen

The outcomes below set out **industry and workforce targets** that will deliver benefits for both communities and local businesses.

Outcome Number	Outcome	Justification
1.1	Priority industries are expanding, and new investment is being secured on the Central Coast.	The Central Coast has a strong manufacturing base, with opportunities to support industry growth through innovation, investment and supply chain development. Strengthening this sector will rely on a skilled and adaptable workforce, with providers such as University of Newcastle and TAFE NSW playing a key role in delivering vocational training aligned to industry needs. Strengthening collaboration with training providers will support more targeted skills development and ensure the workforce can respond to delivering industry needs.
1.2	Local businesses are growing, innovating and creating sustainable employment opportunities.	Stakeholder feedback and Census data indicate about 30% of employed residents work outside the Central Coast, many in white-collar roles. Expanding such jobs locally would create opportunities for commuters, reduce travel time, and enhance quality of life.
1.3	Residents have access to local employment pathways aligned with industry demand.	Historically the Central Coast has exhibited a lower participation rate than the NSW state average. A lower participation rate indicates a smaller pool of potential workers available to businesses, which may influence workforce availability. An increase in the participation rate would result in a larger number of potential employees for businesses.
1.4	The Central Coast offers a streamlined and responsive business environment.	Rapid changes in technology, regulation, and consumer behaviour require businesses to stay current. Training helps businesses adapt and improve practices; however, these can be expensive for individual businesses to access. Council support for training can remove these barriers, promoting business resilience and economic growth.
1.5	The Central Coast retains and attracts talent through strong local employment opportunities.	According to 2021 Census data, approximately 25% of employed residents had workplaces located outside the Central Coast, with nearly half commuting to Greater Sydney. Expanding local employment opportunities will help reduce the number of residents leaving the region for work and support talent retention. The University of Newcastle is a key partner in delivering this, attracting students, supporting

		higher education pathways and strengthening connections with industry helping to build a more skilled local workforce.
1.6	Skills gaps in priority industries are actively addressed through coordinated workforce initiatives.	Workforce skills shortages remain a key challenge across multiple sectors, limiting business growth and productivity. Providers such as TAFE NSW and the University of Newcastle are key partners in delivering targeted skills development, providing vocational training align to industry needs and supporting a more responsive local workforce.
1.7	Timely Development Application (DA) processes and efficient advice to customers with respect to development matters, to support business investment and economic growth.	Consultation with businesses revealed that lengthy DA assessment times are seen as a barrier to investment on the Central Coast. Shortening these timeframes will lower business costs and enhance the Council's reputation within the business and development sectors.
1.8	Council is recognised as responsive, reliable and supportive by the business community.	Recent business surveys have indicated that there is a negative perception of Council within the business community. It is important that Council work to improve trust and the reputation to facilitate improved working relationships between Council and local businesses, as well as attract investment from outside the region to support the local economy. We will measure this annually by surveying local industry.

Theme 2 – Place, Identity and Activation

Enhancing the region’s distinct towns and locations through place-based initiatives, cultural activations and strategic master planning that reflects local identity and community pride, while creating vibrant spaces for residents and visitors to connect.

Overview

Strengthening the local economy by activating towns, precincts and public spaces to create vibrant, inclusive places. This theme is focused on shaping the everyday experience of residents by celebrating local identity and stimulating economic activity. Through placemaking, events and creative activations, the Central Coast’s towns and centres can become safer, more dynamic and more inclusive. By investing in accessible, vibrant spaces that tell the Central Coast’s story, we create places that residents value and visitors enjoy, supporting both social connection and local economic activity.

What it involves

- **Activating town centres and public** through placemaking and activation projects that increase vibrancy, attract visitors and support business activity.
- **Embedding cultural identity and storytelling** in public spaces through art, storytelling, design and creative expression, including Aboriginal culture and stories.
- **Improving accessibility and safety** to attract more visitors, grow the night-time economy and strengthen local businesses.
- **Partnering with Aboriginal communities** to embed culture, knowledge and stories placemaking and activation initiatives.
- **Safeguarding and celebrating our natural assets** to ensure that future development is environmentally sustainable and there is an ongoing connection to Country.

Why it will make a difference

- Strengthens community pride and local character by celebrating culture and stories.
- Increase vibrancy and activity in town centres, precincts and public spaces.
- Builds safer, more accessible places that encourage participation and support thriving night-time economies.
- Creates distinctive, welcoming destinations that attract investment and enhance liveability.

How we will make this happen

The outcomes below demonstrate how we will activate towns and spaces, build pride, and identity and make public places more inclusive and welcoming.

Outcome Number	Outcome	Justification
2.1	2.1 Town centres are guided by masterplans that support long-term growth and activation.	The Central Coast comprises of 89 centres, as outlined in the Local Strategic Planning Statement 2020, which designates Gosford as a Regional City. Wyong, Tuggerah, Erina, and Woy Woy are identified as Strategic Centres, while Lake Haven and Warnervale are recognised as emerging strategic centres. Ensuring that the planning framework for these principal centres, and any additional centres included in future updates, remains current is essential to supporting continued infrastructure investment and development within these areas.
2.2	Town centres are activated through improvements and place-based initiatives.	Place-making initiatives, such as public art, enhanced street lighting, and updated street furniture, foster a sense of community connection and contribute to the vitality of town centres. By undertaking two place-making projects annually, Council can collaborate with businesses and local communities to address concerns within their centres and enhance overall vibrancy.
2.3	Town centres foster a strong sense of identity, pride and positive experiences for business, residents and visitors.	Consultation with businesses indicated the presence of certain negative perceptions regarding our town centres and the Central Coast. Some Central Coast businesses have expressed a preference for using a Sydney address to obscure their actual location. Enhancing pride in our centres is expected to encourage greater visitation and stimulate economic activity. We will create an ongoing monitor to track the local sentiment ongoing as place-based initiatives are executed.
2.4	A Special Entertainment Precinct (SEP) trial is implemented to support growth in the night-time economy.	As our town centres expand, increased night-time activity needs to be balanced with residential amenity. Establishing a SEP will clarify the centre's purpose and set clear expectations for businesses, residents, and noise impacts. Enhancing certainty allows businesses to host live entertainment, thereby contributing to greater vibrancy within our centres.
2.5	The night-time economy is growing and diverse across key centres.	Extending business operating hours into the evening can enhance pedestrian activity and improve safety within our centres while stimulating business trading.

		Additionally, this creates greater employment opportunities, especially for young people and members of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, who represent a significant portion of the night-time workforce.
2.6	Commercial vacancy in town centres is reducing as town centres become more active and attractive.	Businesses have expressed concerns regarding vacant buildings in some town centres, noting their contribution to reduced foot traffic and a diminished sense of safety. Addressing the issue of vacant properties is anticipated to enhance footfall, foster increased vibrancy, and improve perceptions of safety within these areas.
2.7	First Nations culture and identity are visibly embedded within strategic centres	Aligning with Council's First Nation's Accord and forthcoming NSW Aboriginal Cultural heritage reforms, ensuring Aboriginal culture is respected, preserved and celebrated is identified as a key priority for Council. This outcome responds to community feedback for visible recognition of Aboriginal identity in the built environment and will be achieved through partnerships with Aboriginal led-organisations, knowledge holders and artist.
2.8	Cultural identity and storytelling is embedded in public spaces through art, storytelling, design and creative expression	The Central Coast is a place where people, ideas, stories, experiences, arts and culture converge into a revitalised cultural identity. Embedding cultural identity and storytelling into public spaces will connect communities to place and celebrate the uniqueness of our people, history and stories of the Central Coast.
2.9	Safeguarding and celebrating our natural assets to ensure that future development is environmentally sustainable and there is an ongoing connection to Country.	Continue to advance ECO Destination Certification which is built on the globally recognised Green Destination Standard that certifies sustainable destination management practices, champions giving back to the community, and ensures cultural authenticity.

Theme 3 – Destination Brand and Visitor Economy

Positioning the region as a leading visitation and business destination by growing the destination's profile, marketing initiatives and a dynamic calendar of events that showcase local talent, stories and culture, strengthening both community and visitor experiences.

Overview

Positioning the Central Coast as a must-visit destination through a strong, recognisable brand and expanded visitor experience. This theme is about showcasing the region's natural beauty, lifestyle appeal and cultural assets to external audiences. By building a stronger regional identity and diversifying tourism products, the Central Coast can attract new markets, increase overnight stays and secure greater investment. Strengthening the visitor economy ensures that benefits extend to local businesses and communities while raising the Central Coast's profile within NSW and nationally.

What it involves

- **Strengthening the regional brand** through coordinated marketing, storytelling and promotion that highlights the Central Coast's unique identity and appeal.
- **Enhancing tourism and visitor experiences** by diversifying tourism offerings in nature, food, culture, events and lifestyle experiences.
- **Leveraging strategic master planning** to integrate tourism and cultural infrastructure into town centres and destinations.
- **Partnering with tourism operators** to grow high-quality products and packages that encourage longer stays and enhance the quality and consistency of visitor offerings.
- **Showcasing the Central Coast externally** at state, national and international levels to strengthen visibility and competitiveness.
- **Attracting major events** that showcase the Central Coast's unique culture and lifestyle while generating significant economic activity.

Why it will make a difference

- Elevates the Central Coast's profile as a distinctive tourism and lifestyle destination.
- Diversifies the visitor economy, increasing overnight stays, regional spend and repeat visitation to the Central Coast.
- Attracts new investment into tourism, hospitality and cultural industries.
- Enhances the region's position among other NSW and Australian destinations.
- Creates sustained economic growth that benefits local operators and communities.
- Generates economic returns by attracting major events, visitors and new spending.

How we will make this happen

These outcomes highlight how we will showcase the Central Coast's unique identity and enhance its appeal as a destination for residents and visitors.

Outcome Number	Outcome	Justification
3.1	The Central Coast attracts a growing number of domestic visitors.	The tourism sector is estimated to contribute more than 6,800 direct jobs and generate \$1.3 billion in local sales as of June 2024. Increasing visitor numbers to the Central Coast is expected to create additional employment opportunities and increase sales revenue for businesses in the region.
3.2	The Central Coast strengthens its appeal to international visitors.	In 2023/24, international visitors represented 8.6% of total visitor nights, which is notably lower than the New South Wales average of 36.2%. International tourists constitute an important market segment, as they typically demonstrate higher expenditure on experiences compared to domestic travellers. An increase in this market is expected to result in higher spending and contribute to the local economy through increased sales.
3.3	Visitor expenditure on the Central Coast is increasing.	Although boosting visitor numbers to the Central Coast is important, enhancing both visitor expenditure and the duration of stay, will further contribute to job creation and expanded business opportunities throughout the region.
3.4	The Central Coast attracts major conferences and business events.	Business tourism introduces an additional option for tourism on the Central Coast. Activities such as conferences and training events bring in visitors from outside the area and provide opportunities to highlight local businesses and attractions.
3.5	The Central Coast hosts a diverse calendar of events of high-impact signature events.	The Central Coast currently holds a small number of significant events, and there is potential to develop this market further. Building and attracting events such as cultural festivals, music festivals, and sporting events may provide additional opportunities for residents and draw visitors from outside the area, which contributes to increased spending in local businesses.
3.6	The Central Coast is recognised as an Eco Destination	The Central Coast currently holds Eco Certification

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Theme 4 – Infrastructure and Connectivity

Prioritising and advocating for the infrastructure essentials including roads, transport and digital networks to enable sustainable future economic growth and improve accessibility for residents, workers and visitors, fostering stronger social and economic connections.

Overview

Improving the Central Coast’s connectivity to unlock opportunities, productivity and growth. This theme prioritises investment in the infrastructure needed to support a growing population and economy. It prioritises improved transport networks, high-speed digital access and the delivery of enabling infrastructure that supports businesses and communities. By advocating for major upgrades and improve access to jobs, services and markets, the Central Coast can build resilience, attract investment and ensure long-term prosperity.

What it involves

- **Advocating for transport upgrades** including roads, rail and public transport to improve regional, urban and local connectivity.
- **Expanding digital infrastructure** to provide reliable, high-speed access for residents and businesses across the region.
- **Investing in enabling infrastructure** such as utilities, facilities and serviced land to support business growth.
- **Planning for growth and resilience** to manage demand, climate impacts and changing industry needs.
- **Partnering with government and industry** to secure investment and align delivery with regional priorities.

Why it will make a difference

- Improves connectivity within the Central Coast and to key markets such as Sydney, Newcastle and beyond.
- Enhances liveability by reducing travel times and improving access to essential services.
- Positions the Central Coast as a competitive and attractive location for business and industry.
- Supports sustainable growth by ensuring infrastructure meets both current and future needs.
- Strengthens resilience through modern, adaptable systems that support innovation and long-term prosperity.

How we will make this happen

The following outcomes highlight how infrastructure investment and connectivity improvements will underpin long-term growth and resilience.

Outcome Number	Outcome	Justification
4.1	Priority enabling infrastructure projects are progressed through coordinated advocacy and funding partnerships.	The CSP outlines priority projects in housing, transport, critical infrastructure, and sport, leisure, and recreation infrastructure for the Central Coast. Stakeholder engagement during the development of this Strategy highlighted these sectors as essential to supporting sustained economic growth, enabling access to businesses for both workers and customers, and enabling affordable living options close to employment centres.
4.2	Regionally significant infrastructure projects that support economic growth are delivered on the Central Coast.	In addition to the key projects outlined in the CSP, Council is identifying and prioritising regionally critical infrastructure initiatives for advocacy to other levels of government. The implementation of these projects will enhance the provision of infrastructure to support sustained economic growth.
4.3	Businesses have access to improved digital connectivity and infrastructure and capability and training.	Having fast and reliable internet is critical for business viability and connecting with clients and suppliers. State Government has completed a Smart Central Coast Blueprint for the Central Coast that identifies next generation smart technology initiatives to support the region's future economic development.
4.4	Public transport accessibility and service frequency have improved connections across the region.	During stakeholder engagement, it was identified that transportation represents a significant barrier for both employees and customers attempting to access businesses. Employees and job seekers frequently encounter limited public transport connections to employment precincts. For individuals without access to a private vehicle, this significantly impedes their ability to obtain employment. Customers and visitors also face challenges reaching businesses and centres, particularly those not situated along train lines. Expanding public transport options, and the active transport infrastructure supporting these networks, will enhance accessibility for employment and recreational activities alike.

4.5	State and Federal infrastructure investment on the Central Coast is increasing.	To implement the needed infrastructure to support economic growth on the Central Coast, there needs to be significant investment from State and Federal Government. Through the development of the Strategy, stakeholder feedback repeatedly noted the funding for Western Sydney to create new infrastructure, the goal is to advocate to replicate that investment on the Central Coast.
4.6	Infrastructure supports innovation, resource recovery and growth in the circular economy.	Prioritising sustainable business practices is required to accommodate for and balance future population and industry growth on the Central Coast. Supporting innovation in circular economy initiatives and investing in advanced waste infrastructure will be critical to reducing environmental impacts, conserving local resources and creating next generation business opportunities. Innovation could include the development of new recycling services for food waste and other materials enabling the region to recover valuable resources and reduce landfill reliance.

Theme 5 – Strategic Alliances for Regional Growth

Establish strategic partnerships with levels of government and industry to enable sustainable future business investment, employment and workforce opportunities. Focus on developing local talent, inclusive participation and future-ready skills to ensure economic growth benefits people as well as industry.

Overview

Creating stronger alliances to deliver shared outcomes and regional growth. This theme recognises that the Central Coast’s prosperity relies on collaboration across sectors and levels of government. By strengthening alliances, building networks and engaging communities, the region can secure funding, attract investment and improve workforce capability. Working together ensures economic growth is inclusive, sustainable and reflective of the Central Coast’s shared priorities.

What it involves

- **Collaborating with government and industry** to unlock new investment opportunities.
- **Building partnerships with education and training providers** to grow local skills and career pathways.
- **Engaging with communities** to ensure inclusive participation in decision making.
- **Securing funding and advocacy outcomes** through collective regional voices.
- **Partnering with Aboriginal organisations** to deliver employment, business and cultural opportunities.

Why it will make a difference

- Unlocks larger-scale projects and investment through stronger collaboration across government, business and education.
- Builds a skilled local workforce by aligning training with industry needs and creating stronger career pathways.
- Strengthens the Central Coast’s influence in regional, state and national decision-making and advocacy.
- Ensures economic growth is inclusive by creating shared opportunities that are widely shared across communities.
- Enhances opportunities for Aboriginal communities and businesses through meaningful partnerships and support for Aboriginal-led enterprises.

How we will make this happen

These outcomes demonstrate how stronger alliances will create opportunities, attract funding and ensure inclusive growth across the region.

Outcome Number	Outcome	Justification
5.1	Apprenticeship and traineeship pathways are expanding and diversifying across the region.	Training Services NSW, Central Coast Industry Connect and Workforce Australia all have targets of growing the number of apprentices and trainees on the Central Coast and reducing the drop-out rate. Council has formal relationships with all and will partner on key regional leadership programs to support program and initiatives.
5.2	Businesses are actively engaged in regional economic and industry insight initiatives	Business NSW Central Coast advocates for the interests of businesses on the Central Coast. Council is a member of their Regional Leaders Collective. BNSW's quarterly business confidence surveys provide decision-makers with valuable, evidence-based insights to instigate regulatory changes to support local businesses. Council can use its established industry databases to increase the reach, and completion, of the surveys' at a local level.
5.3	Employment opportunities are progressing towards greater diversity and equity.	In 2021, women on the Central Coast made up nearly half of employed residents but typically worked fewer hours and earned less. Men, meanwhile, held fewer formal qualifications. There are also key industries and positions which have clear gender biases. Addressing these gaps will strengthen economic resilience and diversity.
5.4	Youth unemployment is reducing through strengthened education-to-employment pathways.	Youth unemployment is identified as a key community value in the Community Strategic Plan 2025-2035 and one of the labour market's key challenges in Workforce Australia's Local Jobs Plan. Supporting youth to access education and employment supports our future population and economy.
5.5	Aboriginal education and employment participation is increasing through strengthened pathways and partnerships.	The Central Coast has a higher proportion and unemployment rate of First Nations people compared to Greater Sydney and NSW. Supporting the ongoing growth in Indigenous education and employment rates will enhance economic opportunities for the local First Nations community.

5.6	Overall unemployment is reducing to state benchmarks.	Historically, the Central Coast has experienced unemployment rates above the state average. Achieving an unemployment rate below the state benchmark will promote enhanced economic and social opportunities for Central Coast residents. The Workforce Australia Local Jobs Plan identifies tailored approaches to accelerate reskilling, upskilling and employment pathways in response to current and emerging local workforce needs. Council sits on the Local Jobs and Skills Taskforce and is a key partner on the delivery of programs targeting employment outcomes on the Central Coast.
5.7	Employment participation for people living with disability is increasing.	The Central Coast has over 12,000 NDIS recipients. Council has a Disability and Inclusion Action Plan in place. Transitioning and supporting people with disabilities into the workforce is critical to delivering widespread inclusive economic development outcomes.

Delivering on the ambitions of this Strategy requires strong governance, clear planning and ongoing accountability.

Implementation will be an active and adaptive process, supported by Council in collaboration with industry partners, businesses and all levels of government to ensure meaningful results are achieved for the Central Coast economy.

Turning Strategy into Action: Implementation and Monitoring

Governance and Responsibility

Strong governance is essential to achieving the ambitions set out in this Strategy. Council will lead delivery, ensuring implementation remains aligned with the Community Strategic Plan and broader regional priorities. The Executive Leadership Team will provide oversight, with business units across Council including the Economic Development Team, ensuring coordinated delivery and accountability.

The Economic Development Team will play a central role in coordinating delivery, working closely with Council units, government agencies, industry bodies and businesses to ensure implementation is collaborative and effective. This approach provides structure, transparency and accountability while reinforcing that economic development is a shared responsibility across the region.

Annual Action Plan

Delivery will be staged and adaptive, guided by an Annual Action Plan. Each year, Council will publish a clear program of projects, initiatives and partnerships that bring the Strategy's priorities to life.

The Action Plan will outline specific actions, roles and lead responsibilities linking each to the outcomes set under the priority themes. This ensures that every action is tied to a measurable outcome and that accountability for delivery is clear. Its rolling nature ensures flexibility, enabling Council and partners to respond to changing economic conditions, new opportunities and emerging industry needs. This approach allows the Central Coast to remain agile, proactive and resilient while maintaining steady progress toward long-term goals.

Monitoring and Reporting

Accountability and transparency are at the core of the delivery of this Strategy. Progress will be measured against the outcomes identified under each priority theme. These outcomes include key performance indicators that demonstrate impact across both economic and community dimensions.

The Economic Development Team will coordinate this process, gathering input from across Council and partner organisations. Progress will be reported annually to Council, stakeholders and partners to ensure progress is communicated transparently.

This monitoring framework creates a cycle of accountability and continuous improvement, with insights feeding back into governance and planning. In doing so, it ensures the Strategy remains relevant, adaptable and focused on generating meaningful benefits for the Central Coast.

Appendix A – Strategy Development Journey

This appendix outlines the process undertaken to develop this Strategy. It describes the steps taken to engage with stakeholders, review evidence and test ideas, ensuring the Strategy reflects the insights of businesses, community organisations, education providers, and residents. It highlights the collaborative approach used to shape priorities and outcomes, providing a clear picture of how the Strategy was development and agreed.

Grounded in the principles of people, place and partnerships, this Strategy captures the insights of local businesses, community organisations, education providers and residents. It has been shaped through evidence, dialogue and collaboration, ensuring it responds to the region’s challenges while unlocking its competitive advantages.

Our Journey

Evaluate *Learning from the Past*

Reviewed the previous Economic Development Strategy to assess achievements, gaps and lessons learned. This was supported by analysis of regional economic data, the impacts of COVID-19, population growth and changing industry needs, as well as alignment with state and federal policy settings.

Engage *Listening to Stakeholders*

Engagement involved businesses, peak industry bodies, government agencies and university students entering the workforce. Discussions explored sector challenges, future skills needs and opportunities for collaboration to shape regional priorities.

Draft *Shaping the Framework*

Combined research and engagement insights into a draft framework outlining the vision, outcomes and key themes. Priority areas were identified and structured around People, Place and Partnerships.

Test *Refining with Feedback*

Shared the insights gathered and draft themes with stakeholders and the wider community for feedback. This process validated the directions, ensured alignment with regional needs and informed refinements to balance ambitions with practicality.

Finalise *Confirming the Strategy*

Incorporated feedback, aligned with Council’s Community Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan and secured adoption to establish the Strategy as the region’s economic growth framework.

Implement *Putting the Strategy into Action*

Delivery will be driven through annual action plans embedded into Council’s Delivery Program and Operational Plan. Partnerships across business, education and government will be mobilised, supported by governance arrangements, roles and responsibilities, to coordinate region-wide implementation.

Monitor and Review *Driving Continuous Improvement*

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Established annual reporting to measure outcomes by tracking economic data and indicators and gather feedback on the effectiveness of programs executed. This ensures accountability against targets set and flexibility to adapt to emerging opportunities and challenges.

Appendix B – Regional Context: Challenges, Strengths and Opportunities

This appendix outlines the evidence base that informed the development of the Strategy. It highlights key challenges facing the Central Coast, as well as the strengths and opportunities that provide a platform for growth and resilience.

Socio-Economic Diversity

The Central Coast is home to communities with diverse social and economic circumstances. The challenge is to ensure economic development delivers equitable outcomes, with opportunities and benefits for all residents. By focusing on long-term priorities that raise standards of living and respond to different community needs and build on local strengths, the Central Coast can create a more inclusive, resilient and connected future.

Employment Lands Availability

While demand for employment land on the Central Coast is strong, supply is often constrained by environmental and ecological considerations and a lack of appropriate infrastructure. The challenge is to accelerate usable employment lands while balancing environmental requirements. The Central Coast needs clear, consistent and appropriate land zoning to ensure space is available for manufacturing, commercial and housing needs. Getting this balance right will unlock new opportunities, support sustainable growth and attract long-term investment.

Workforce and Participation

The Central Coast has a unique workforce profile, with many older residents and a growing number of young people. The challenge is to meet the servicing and support needs of an aging population while also retaining and developing younger workers who drive innovation and business growth. Reducing the number of residents commuting outside of the region for work through the creation of new industry and employment options will also be critical to supporting the local labour force and improving quality of life.

Skills and Pathways

Skills shortages are affecting multiple industries across the region. The challenge is to expand education, training and career pathways that align with established and emerging employment sectors. By building a stronger skilled local talent pipeline, the Central Coast can support innovation, create new opportunities for residents and ensure the economy is resilient to future change.

Industry Mix and Resilience

While the Central Coast economy has a broad base, it is still concentrated in a small number of sectors. The challenge is to diversify and encourage growth in emerging industries while strengthening existing ones. A more balanced and innovative economy will increase resilience, attract new opportunities and deliver lasting benefits for the community.

Micro and Small Business Strength

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The Central Coast economy is built on a base of micro and small businesses, the majority of which employ fewer than 20 people, or are sole traders. The challenge is to provide the right support for these small businesses to thrive, scale and adapt to change. By strengthening entrepreneurship and helping small businesses grow, the Central Coast can create more local jobs, drive innovation and build economic resilience.

Housing Availability and Affordability

Access to affordable housing remains a critical issue across the region alongside of escalating rental prices in a market where demand is outpacing supply. This means mortgage and rental stress are more prevalent on the Central Coast when compared with Greater Sydney and other regional areas. The challenge is to increase the supply and diversity of housing to meet growing demand, while ensuring affordability and liveability for residents. Addressing this will directly impact local workforce engagement and participation, and strengthen community stability, and liveability.

Transport and Connectivity

The Central Coast has a broad transport network, but residents and workers still face challenges with mobility, including limited services at key times, infrastructure gaps and affordability. A key priority is to improve public and active transport options, frequency and availability, and strengthen intermodal (train and bus) connections across the region. By investing in future-ready, reliable, on-demand and accessible transport, the Central Coast can better connect people to jobs, education and services, while reducing barriers to economic opportunity.

Strengths and Emerging Opportunities

The Central Coast's economy is both significant and diverse, generating a Gross Domestic Product (GRP) of \$20.80 billion as of June 2024. This growth is driven by three major industry sectors; Health Care and Social Assistance, Construction, and Manufacturing.

These industries are supported by a population more than 354,000 residents and a network of over 26,700 businesses. With an adaptable workforce, a central location between Sydney and Newcastle and desirable lifestyle, the region is strongly positioned to attract investment, drive innovation and retain and grow talent, that make it highly appealing to both residents and investors, particularly from the Sydney basin.

Food Manufacturing

The Central Coast has earned national recognition as a leader in food and beverage manufacturing. The sector is characterised by its diversity, from multinational producers to boutique operators, all supported by specialist education and training through the University of Newcastle's Food Science School. Central Coast Industry Connect (CCIC) plays a pivotal role in linking businesses, fostering collaboration, and driving growth across the industry.

A major milestone for the sector will be the opening of the Central Coast Food Manufacturing Innovation Hub in 2026. This state-of-the-art facility will enable small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to access cutting-edge research, advanced training, and innovation partnerships. By supporting the adoption of new technologies and processes, the Hub will lift productivity, enhance competitiveness, and embed the Central Coast as a national leader in food science and processing.

Manufacturing and Advanced Manufacturing

Manufacturing remains one of the Coast's largest and most transformative industries. Businesses are shifting towards advanced manufacturing models, integrating robotics, artificial intelligence, and precision production techniques to remain competitive in both domestic and global markets. The region's strong logistics base, supported by its proximity to Sydney and Newcastle and connected employment lands, ensures access to supply chains and skilled labour.

As global markets shift towards higher-value production and customised products, the Central Coast is well placed to capture this opportunity. Investments in technology and advanced capabilities are strengthening local industry resilience and ensuring that manufacturing continues to play a central role in the economy.

Circular Economy

The Central Coast is emerging as a leader in the transition to a circular economy, where waste is reduced, materials are reused, and environmental impacts are minimised. CCIC's Circular Economy sub-committee is helping businesses assess and benchmark their sustainability practices while promoting new models of production and consumption.

By advancing circular economy practices, the region can not only support local manufacturers to become more efficient but also position itself as a testbed for sustainable innovation. These practices will attract new investment, reduce reliance on traditional resource use, and align the Central Coast with national and international climate and sustainability goals.

Innovation, Health and Education

The growth of Gosford as a hub for health, education, and research represents one of the region's most significant long-term opportunities. Anchored by Gosford Hospital, the Central Coast Clinical School, and the Central Coast Research Institute for Integrated Care, the City is evolving into a centre of health innovation, research, and practice.

The University of Newcastle's ongoing investment in its Gosford CBD campus including the planned 2025 expansion will increase the City's role as a destination for higher education, skills development, and knowledge-based jobs. Together, these institutions are fostering a skilled workforce, attracting research funding, and creating opportunities for collaboration between healthcare, industry, and academia.

Natural Assets, Ecotourism and Tourism

The Central Coast's environment is one of its greatest strengths, offering a unique mix of beaches, lakes, national parks, and hinterland areas. This natural setting supports a thriving visitor economy, recognised through Ecotourism certification and supported by strong tourism infrastructure. The Central Coast attracts visitors seeking sustainable and nature-based experiences, while also hosting large-scale events and festivals that generate significant economic activity.

Tourism continues to grow as a critical driver of local jobs and investment. The region's proximity to Sydney, combined with its active events calendar and growing appeal as a short-break and lifestyle destination ensures the visitor economy will remain a major contributor to economic growth.

Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone

The Central Coast sits at the heart of the Hunter–Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone (REZ), a key driver of the state’s transition to renewable power. With capacity for solar, wind, battery storage, and transmission infrastructure, the REZ is set to generate thousands of new jobs in energy-intensive industries, advanced manufacturing, and clean technology.

This transformation will not only reduce carbon emissions but also create new supply chain opportunities, attract investment from energy companies, and underpin the development of green industries. The Central Coast’s role in the REZ ensures it will be central to the state’s low-carbon future.

Employment lands, Infrastructure and Local Workforce

The Central Coast has strong transport connections, a growing population and valuable lifestyle assets. There is significant opportunity to address existing challenges and leverage these strengths to position the Central Coast as a leading employment destination. Key priorities include:

- **Strategic land availability** – Unlocking a pipeline of vacant, unconstrained, serviced land. The majority of the vacant employment lands on the Central Coast contains constraints, some of which are considered ‘partial’, however would likely impact yield, delivery timeframes and feasibility for future developments.
- **Improving job containment** – Expanding local employment opportunities to reduce the 36,358 residents (24.1% of the workforce) who currently travel outside the region for work. Increasing local jobs will boost the economy, attract investment and improve liability.
- **Infrastructure delivery** – Ensuring stormwater, water, sewerage, electricity, telecommunications and road upgrades are in place to support employment lands. Council will need to prioritise job-creation infrastructure and lobby for additional funds from the State or Federal Governments to deliver infrastructure required for employment lands.
- **Internal road connectivity** – Addressing poor access to employment sites along the Central Coast Highway and improving accessibility for businesses that are reliant on distribution and connectivity to ensure business remain competitive.
- **Protecting urban service pockets** – Protection of key industrial and urban service land in close proximity to residential areas and town centres to retain employment capacity and support community needs.

By aligning infrastructure delivery, land use planning, and workforce development, the Central Coast can strengthen its capacity to retain talent, support existing industries, and attract new investment and businesses to the region.