



**2015 SEGRA CONFERENCE PAPER
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MACKAY REGIONAL COUNCIL
OCTOBER 2015**

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – IT’S EVERYONE’S BUSINESS

Introduction

Mackay Regional Council is committed to taking a leadership role in the development of a diversified, vibrant and sustainable economy. It’s no secret our country’s mining industry has faced some challenges, particularly with low coal prices and a high Australian dollar. Operationally, each and every one of us in business – council included – must focus on becoming leaner, more efficient, determined and diversified.

Mackay Regional Council is striving to change the face of our economy and, step by step, that’s exactly what we’re doing. This paper will detail the steps we as a council have taken thus far and the tangible achievements we’ve documented to date. All of these successful initiatives have put us on a clear trajectory of collaboration with a view to “future-proofing” our region.

Challenging economic times are the perfect opportunity for us all to focus on what we do, and to strive to make our best even better. We at Mackay Regional Council recognise that our economic climate is cyclical, and as such, we are committed to harnessing our region’s strengths, forging positive economic partnerships and continually diversifying what we have to offer. Our goals are to attract investment, improve services, secure funding and lead by example, however, we cannot – and should not – attempt to do this alone.

Our Mackay region has much to be proud of. We have recently experienced the most intense and prolonged resource sector exploration, investment and development period in recent history. This has left us with a depth of infrastructure and assets to support economic and business development that would otherwise not have been possible, and we will strive to take advantage of this. Our projected population growth rate is anticipated to be a steady 2.1 per cent, our population is predicted to rise more than 123,383 to 200,000 over the coming decades. Mackay’s GRP is \$6.765 billion and our regional exports are a staggering \$5.051 billion worth of goods.

Mackay boasts a world-class marina and multi-cargo port for the export of sugar, fuel and grain. Our airport is the fifth busiest in Queensland (according to 2013 stats), and we’re home to Australia’s first integrated University and TAFE facility. Additionally, Mackay is one of the largest and most innovative sugar-producing regions and one of the largest winter-produce-growing regions in Australia, and a key producer of grain and beef.

While clearly we are already doing what we do well, we are focused on continually striving to do better. Mackay Regional Council acknowledges, however, that diversification cannot be achieved overnight; hence we have developed a host of strategies and guiding tools to direct the future of economic development in Mackay.

For the first time in many years, Mackay Regional Council has set a very conscious and deliberate focus on establishing and supporting an active economic and industry development agenda. Working in collaboration with key strategic development organisations will yield far stronger regional development outcomes than could be accomplished alone, particularly around strategic planning and investment/funding attraction. Thus, building and rebuilding partnerships across our business community has been a key focus for council over the past 12 months – and specifically that of our Economic Development program.

Recent successful partnerships forged between council and our business community have resulted in the following outcomes:

1. MIW (Mackay Isaac Whitsunday) Food and Agri-tourism Project

This project is designed to build our region's capability to implement the recently completed Food and Agri-tourism Strategic Action Plan. Three activities from this plan have been identified for implementation which will provide the catalyst for cementing regional collaboration. These include the establishment and mentoring of a Regional Food Council, delivery of a Food and Agri-tourism Business Development Program and a Master Class Program for commercial users to source and promote regional food as part of their offerings and to showcase successful regional food and agri-tourism products and experiences. The Strategic Action Plan will be a roadmap for regional stakeholders to support the development of a regional food culture.

2. Resource Industry Network (RIN) Portal

Funded by council and in partnership with Rio Tinto and the Resource Industry Network, we created the Resource Industry Network's Capability and Procurement Portal. This online facility (at <http://industryprocurementportal.com.au>) aims to promote the extensive capabilities and capacity that our region has to offer and connect local businesses and industry in order to develop a sustainable and diverse economy for our region. Businesses can register with the site to receive tender and procurement invitations and industry leaders can post tenders and quotes to ensure projects reach local businesses.

3. Bigger, Better, Stronger Business Growth Conference

Mackay Regional Council was honoured to partner with Mackay Chamber of Commerce to deliver October's Bigger, Better, Stronger Business Growth Conference. This two-day session-style program was designed to encourage delegates to feel inspired, be educated and workshop their current business challenges (or opportunities) and walk away prepared to make real change, tomorrow. The delivery of this conference was testament to what we can achieve within – and for – our community by working collaboratively.

4. Mackay's first Start-up Weekend

Mackay Regional Council, through the Economic Development program was a premier sponsor of the upcoming Start-up Weekend Mackay. Participants (budding entrepreneurs) were provided the valuable opportunity to pitch ideas, network and brainstorm, develop prototypes, and present them for critical group feedback.

5. Regional Development Group

In a proactive effort to co-ordinate and facilitate regional development, Mackay, Isaac and Whitsunday councils joined forces with several regional economic organisations to form the Regional Development Group (RDG). This entity includes representatives from the Department of State Development, Whitsunday Marketing and Development Ltd, Regional Development Australia and Mackay Tourism Ltd. This group is now focused on developing regional messaging for promotional purposes, co-ordinating regional projects and collating and maintaining a regional register.

6. Diversify Mackay Leadership Alliance

The establishment of our Diversify Mackay Leadership Alliance is yet another prominent example of how we are working collaboratively to meet the needs of our local community. In February, 2014, Mackay Regional Council hosted our first Diversify Mackay Forum. Facilitated by Jude Munro (OAM and former Brisbane City Council CEO), the forum identified 11 priorities that could help position Mackay to remain buoyant for the next 30 years. Priorities included expanding Mackay's airport and seaport; positioning the region as a food bowl for Asia and revitalising our City Centre, to name just a few. (In keeping with public demand, the \$18 million City Centre

revitalisation – co-funded by council and the Australian Government – began in June 2014. This project is due to be completed by the end of 2015.)

The Diversify Mackay Forum then spurred the creation of our Diversify Mackay Leadership Alliance (DMLA). The alliance is a leading advocacy group comprising 12-members hailing from a diverse cross-section of industry, business and government. Alliance members are champions for the growth of globally competitive local industries across the areas – or “Pillar Groups” – of tourism and social wellbeing; infrastructure and construction; education, training, research and innovation; agriculture; and mining services and defence. Pillar group members work closely with our alliance leaders to strategise initiatives and actions, harness available business opportunities and to deliver tangible long-term results.

DMLA achievements to date include:

- Northern Australia Green Paper Submission
This submission aims to put Mackay on the map. The paper documented our goals to collectively strive to substantially increase our region’s economic output. As an example, if the 10 per cent generated from value adding is increased, Mackay Sugar estimates total output of the sugar industry in the region could be increased from \$400 million to about \$1 billion a year.
- Defence White Paper Submission
This document provides input on the promotion of a globally competitive defence industry. Undertaking capability mapping projects to help prime and subprime contractors connect with skilled SMEs operating in Mackay is identified as a priority for our region.
- Bowen Basin Service Link DVD
Council is in the throes of lobbying the State Government to list this project on their program of works.
- Freight Optimisation Project
This project involves identifying all existing options for freight distribution on the road network, connecting the region to the Bowen and Galilee basins. The Project Brief completed by DMLA estimated \$50,000 was required to be provided by council and we are now taking the lead in engagement and facilitating the procurement process.
- 101 Things to Do in the Mackay Region Z-card
This effective marketing tool was recognised with a 2015 Mackay Tourism Award for Destination Marketing.
- Mackay Region Joblink website
This free online site links local people to local jobs and on average attracts about 350 job views a week. www.mackayregionjoblink.com.au
- #Mackaypride video.
This three-minute video promotes the positive aspects of our region, showcasing some of the reasons why we should have a sense of pride and a sense of achievement about where we live. The campaign aims to encourage positive conversations by local residents and celebrates our community.
- Mackay named Best Performer (March 30, 2015).
The Local Government Growing Regional Australia study – conducted by the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) in partnership with Regional Capitals Australia (RCA) – named Mackay as the “Best Performer”. The study examined five regional cities and the key leadership and governance roles their local councils had in building strong regional capitals. The study also noted that despite the downturn in the

construction of new mines, there was evidence of some economic diversification with new distribution and manufacturing businesses starting up since the inception of the Diversify Mackay Leadership Alliance.

This year we also delivered our new Corporate Plan and will soon release Mackay Regional Council's first ever Economic Development Strategy.

These integral documents set the strategic direction and priorities for council over the next five years, and lay the foundation to facilitate economic development locally.

- Mackay Regional Council Economic Development Strategy (EDS) 2015-2020

Our EDS is the product of council's commitment to taking a leadership role in the development of a diversified, vibrant and sustainable economy through advocacy, facilitation, regulation, planning and the provision of services. Extensive consultation with key stakeholders on the EDS identified four Strategic Directions for Mackay – co-ordinated and proactive regional planning, creating a positive attitude, enhancing local business skills and attracting investment. Through this strategy and its directions, we look forward to working collaboratively with business and industry leaders and our community members to shape and create a diverse and sustainable future for Mackay.

- Corporate Plan 2015-2020

This document outlines the shared vision for our region and our commitment to making Mackay an even greater place to live and work. As a council, we will advocate for our region to attract investment, improve services, secure funding and lead by example. This plan continues on the economic revitalisation of our City Centre and identifies the areas we want to focus on over the next five years. It identifies eight priority areas covering the economy, community pride, regional identity, health and wellbeing, environment, infrastructure, lifelong learning and organisational performance.

Conclusion

Our Mackay region has an exciting future, provided we embrace the challenges and work together to achieve outcomes. In today's economic climate, it's important we and our industry leaders recognise that business as usual simply doesn't cut it. A diversified economy will help secure our future prosperity and address existing challenges to deliver a more resilient, stronger economy.

As such, Mackay Regional Council strives to work collaboratively to support local business and industry to build our capabilities, promote Mackay as an attractive investment destination and realise the potential of our region. We are committed to working together to create, implement and promote supportive strategies and initiatives that will help us change to facilitate the cultural and economic shift that is required because – ***economic development is everyone's business.***