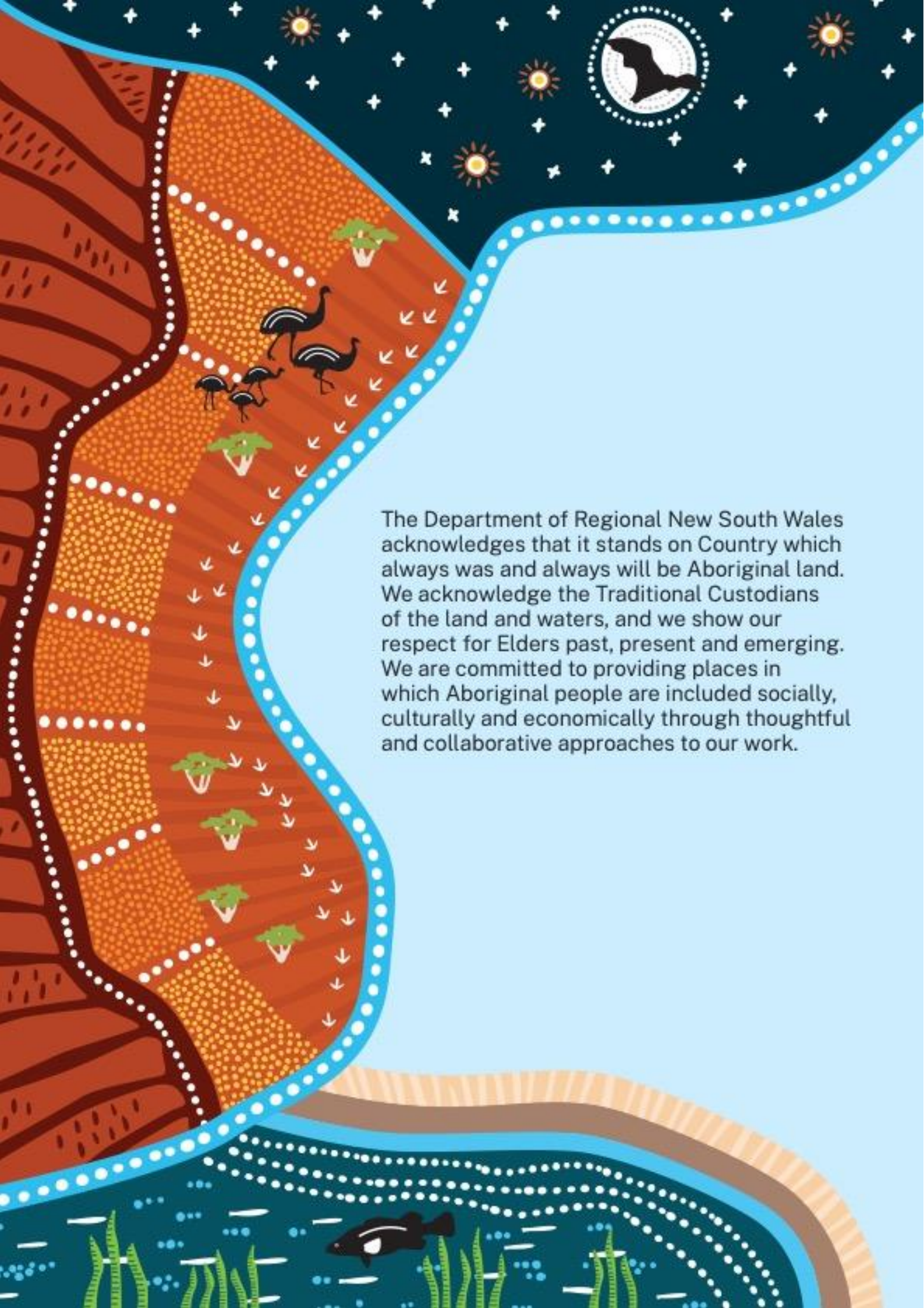


# South West Slopes Regional Economic Development Strategy – 2023 Update





The Department of Regional New South Wales acknowledges that it stands on Country which always was and always will be Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters, and we show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging. We are committed to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work.

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The Department of Regional NSW would like to acknowledge the significant contribution of many stakeholders in the South West Slopes region to the development of the 2023 REDS Update, with particular thanks to staff from Bland Shire Council, Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council, Hilltops Council, Temora Shire Council, and Weddin Shire Council. The Department of Regional NSW also acknowledges the assistance provided by PricewaterhouseCoopers and ProjectsJSA to help deliver the 2023 REDS Update project.

### **On Country – Artwork by Mumbulla Creative**

"On Country" captures the many different countries located within the Department of Regional NSW footprint. Only part of the image is shown on the Acknowledgement of Country page. The regions included in this partial image are detailed below.

The Far West region of NSW is represented by red earth plains, Mallee scrubs and an abundant emu population. Freshwater countries are referenced by the expansive network of rivers stretching through the regions. The Riverina Murray region is represented by the roots of a river redgum on the banks of a river, and a large Murray Cod can be seen in the river. The night sky features as it plays an important navigational and story-telling role in traditional life.

Cover image: Sun setting over Grove Estate Wines, Young. Photo credit: Destination NSW.

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# Table of contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Table of contents</b> .....   | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>1. Executive Summary</b> .....  | <b>5</b>  |
| Changes in the South West Slopes region since 2018 .....   | 5         |
| South West Slopes REDS - 2023 Update strategies and enablers.....                                    | 7         |
| <b>2. About the 2023 REDS Update</b> .....   | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>3. About the South West Slopes region</b> .....   | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>4. The 2018 South West Slopes REDS</b> .....  | <b>10</b> |
| <b>5. The big picture: Shocks and trends impacting the South West Slopes region since 2018</b> ..... | <b>12</b> |
| Significant events impacting major industries.....   | 12        |
| Macroeconomic trends shaping the region's future .....   | 13        |
| <b>6. Responding to change: Initiatives and investments since 2018</b> .....                         | <b>15</b> |
| Significant investments since 2018 .....   | 17        |
| <b>7. South West Slopes region 2023 economic snapshot</b> .....                                      | <b>20</b> |
| Demographics .....   | 20        |
| Housing.....   | 21        |
| Employment.....  | 22        |
| South West Slopes region's 2023 engine and emerging industries.....                                  | 24        |
| South West Slopes region 2023 endowments .....   | 26        |
| <b>8. Looking ahead: Strategic opportunities for growth, resilience and liveability</b> .....        | <b>27</b> |
| Opportunities and vulnerabilities in engine and emerging industries .....                            | 27        |
| Key themes in stakeholder consultation.....  | 31        |
| South West Slopes REDS - 2023 Update strategies .....  | 31        |
| Key enablers of economic growth .....  | 32        |
| <b>9. References</b> .....   | <b>35</b> |

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# 1. Executive Summary

## Changes in the South West Slopes region since 2018

In 2018, the NSW Government developed Regional Economic Development Strategies (REDS) for 38 Functional Economic Regions (FERs) across regional NSW. Since publication, regional NSW has endured shocks including bushfires, floods, COVID-19 and the mouse plague, and significant new economic opportunities have emerged. The 2023 REDS Update provides an updated evidence base to guide governments in making policy and investment decisions to enhance resilience and drive sustainable, long-term economic growth in regional NSW.

### The South West Slopes region has seen significant investment since 2018, with additional projects in the planning or delivery stages



**\$11.5 million** to deliver the **CSIRO Boorowa Agriculture Research Station**.



More than **\$500 million** invested to deliver **solar farm projects**.



**\$50 million** to deliver **major water, wastewater and sewerage projects** across the region.



**\$380 million** expansion of the **Lake Cowal Gold Mine**.

### Since 2018, the region has experienced a tightening of housing availability, reduced unemployment and growth in job vacancies



- **0.4%** population growth since 2018.



The proportion of the **population over 55 years** has increased by **1.1 percentage points** since 2018.



Housing vacancy rates sit **below 1%**, with median house prices having risen by an average of **54%** since 2018.



**Unemployment** across most of the region is **lower than the NSW benchmark**, with job vacancies reaching an all-time high of 2,472 in August 2022.

## The region's key industries including agriculture, tourism, mining and energy generation have remained resilient despite significant challenges since 2018



### Agriculture

+ **7.8%** Year-on-Year (YoY) growth from 2011-2020

**\$ 594 million** Gross Value Added (GVA) in 2020

**3,941 jobs** supported in 2021



### Mining

- **2.8%** YoY growth from 2011-2020

**\$ 159 million** GVA in 2020

**430 jobs** supported in 2021



### Tourism

+ **1.8 %** YoY growth from 2011-2020

**\$ 72 million** visitor spend in 2021

**3,036 jobs** supported in 2021



### Energy generation (including renewables)

+ **4%** YoY growth from 2011-2020

**\$ 159 million** GVA in 2020

**207 jobs** supported in 2021

## Key themes from local consultation

Stakeholders from the South West Slopes region highlighted increasing the regional housing supply, as well as building resilience and maximising long term benefits to the community from major projects as priorities for the region.

### Housing availability and affordability



Addressing current housing availability and affordability challenges was highlighted as a priority to support population growth and meet demand associated with an influx of key workers associated with industry growth and major project delivery.

### Workforce shortages



Stakeholders highlighted concerns about workforce shortages in the region, given low unemployment rates and high job vacancy rates, and sustained demand for labour from major projects both within the region and in adjacent regions.

### Ensuring maximum community return on investment for major projects



Stakeholders are focused on achievable, equitable and sustained community benefits from major projects and on ensuring that major projects in neighbouring regions do not drain skills and resources from the South West Slopes region and exacerbate local workforce challenges.

## South West Slopes REDS - 2023 Update strategies and enablers

| Strategies   | Enablers  |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Support and grow the agriculture, food production, mining, and renewable energy sectors.</b></p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify opportunities to activate industrial lands and leverage upcoming investment in the Inland Rail, Wagga Wagga Special Activation Precinct (SAP) and Parkes SAP to enhance freight and logistics capabilities.</li> <li>• Support councils to use the Connectivity Index Tool following its 2023 release to review existing coverage and identify the areas of greatest need in the region for upgrades to telecommunications infrastructure.</li> <li>• Understand future water needs in relation to water supply from existing assets to develop a long-term water security plan for each Local Government Area (LGA) that aligns with the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee Regional Water strategies (as applicable).</li> <li>• Identify barriers to investment in engine and emerging industries to inform potential policy changes and grant funding opportunities.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Drive economic growth in the region's core sectors by attracting and upskilling the workforce and facilitating innovation.</b></p>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with industry and training providers to deliver training programs that increase the skills base across priority sectors, including agriculture, mining, manufacturing, and service-based sectors.</li> <li>• Support industry to increase the uptake of agtech and drive innovation through collaboration with CSIRO Agricultural Research Station, Temora Agricultural Innovation Centre, and the Southern NSW Innovation Hub.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Continue to develop and grow the visitor economy.</b></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish flexible planning controls and collaborate with businesses to diversify the region's tourism offering, focusing on opportunities associated with agritourism, heritage attractions, events-based tourism and the local food and beverage industry.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Improve and deliver enabling infrastructure and services to enhance liveability and sustainably grow the population of the South West Slopes region.</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore opportunities, maximising the use of unused or underutilised lots to ensure sufficient supply of affordable housing to meet current needs and projected growth.</li> <li>• Support the diversification of the region's housing offering to provide affordable and accessible housing for the ageing population and those living with disabilities.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Monitor impacts of major projects to ensure long-term community benefits are generated.</b></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support undertaking feasibility studies and other relevant investigations to identify areas of the region which can support renewable energy generation and storage projects.</li> <li>• Work collaboratively with local councils to identify opportunities to leverage investment in major projects in order to grow local supply chains to serve the needs of major projects and the community.</li> </ul>   |

## 2. About the 2023 REDS Update

In 2018, the NSW Government and local councils developed a series of REDS for 38 Functional Economic Regions (FERs) across regional NSW. FERs are made up of one or more Local Government Areas (LGAs) that work together to create smaller economies with strong economic links.

Supporting *the 20-Year Economic Vision for Regional NSW*, the REDS set out a place-based vision and framework for economic development for each FER. The REDS identify each FER's endowments, industry specialisations and key vulnerabilities and opportunities, and outline economic development strategies and actions to leverage these strengths.

Since 2018, regional NSW has endured many challenges including drought, bushfires, floods, COVID-19 and the mouse plague. At the same time a range of broader state-wide trends and actions continue to change the economic landscape across regional NSW, including digital transformation, increased remote working and the shift towards net zero. These challenges and trends have altered the landscape of economic development in many regions and created new opportunities for growth.

The 2023 REDS Update provides an updated evidence base to guide governments in making policy and investment decisions to enhance resilience and drive sustainable, long-term economic growth in regional NSW. The objectives of the update are to:

1. **Highlight progress:** reflect on significant initiatives and investments that have supported progress against the key strategies and actions in the 2018 REDS.
2. **Capture major changes:** identify and assess the impacts of major changes to regional economies since 2018, including the effect of recent shocks such as bushfires, droughts, floods, mouse plague and the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. **Identify strategic opportunities:** identify key strategic opportunities and vulnerabilities for engine and emerging industries, as well as any changes to local endowments.
4. **Set the foundation for the future:** review, affirm and/or adjust the 2018 strategies, including consideration of new strategies to meet emerging priorities, to ensure they remain relevant.
5. **Identify key enablers to guide future action:** develop a non-exhaustive list of priority enabling actions that will support the 2023 REDS Update strategies.



Figure 1: Mother and child viewing the Weethalle Silo Art mural, Weethalle. Photo credit: Destination NSW.

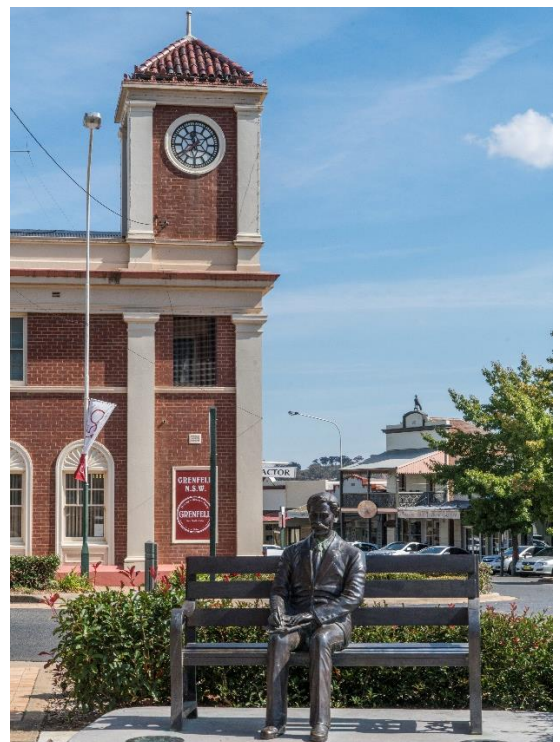


Figure 2: Henry Lawson Sculpture in Grenfell. Photo credit: Destination NSW.



### 3.About the South West Slopes region

The South West Slopes FER is an extensive area centred around the lower inland slopes of the Great Diving Range. It is comprised of the LGAs of Bland Shire, Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional\*, Hilltops, Temora Shire, and Weddin Shire. Major towns in the region include Boorowa, Cootamundra, Grenfell, Gundagai, Harden, Temora, West Wyalong and Young.

|                                       |                 |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Total area covered (km <sup>2</sup> ) | 25,893          |
| Population (2021)                     | 45,746          |
| Bland                                 | 5,542           |
| Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional*        | 11,387          |
| Hilltops                              | 19,216          |
| Temora                                | 6,012           |
| Weddin                                | 3,589           |
| Size of the economy (2020)            | \$2.755 billion |
| Total employment (2021)               | 18,884          |

Source: ABS (2021) Estimated Resident Population, REMPLAN (2020), ABS Census (2021)








Figure 3: Map of the South West Slopes Functional Economic Region.

\* Note: On 26 August 2022, the NSW Government announced that Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council would be demerged into Cootamundra and Gundagai LGAs. At the point of finalisation of the 2023 REDS Update, the process to complete the demerger had not yet been completed.

## 4. The 2018 South West Slopes REDS





In the 2018 South West Slopes REDS, the region was actively pursuing growth in its industry specialisations, in particular agriculture, mining, manufacturing and tourism. Endowments recognised in the document spanned natural, social and infrastructure assets, many of which were central to the approach to enabling economic development across the region.

### 2018 South West Slopes strategies

|  |  |
|--|--|
|    | Support and grow the agriculture, food production and mining sectors.  |
|    | Improve utilities, energy and telecommunications to grow the agricultural, food processing and mining industries, as well as business start-ups throughout the region. |
|    | Drive economic growth in the region's core sectors by upskilling the workforce and facilitating innovation.  |
|   | Continue to develop and grow the visitor economy.  |
|  | Enhance liveability and grow the population of the South West Slopes region.   |













### 2018 South West Slopes region specialisations

The industry specialisations below were identified as comparative advantages for the South West Slopes region in the 2018 REDS based on employment concentrations in industry sectors.

|   |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
|   | Agriculture, forestry, and fishing |
|  | Manufacturing                      |
|  | Mining                             |
|   | Tourism                            |

## 2018 South West Slopes region endowments

The South West Slopes region is home to a wealth of physical, institutional, built, and human capital endowments. These endowments play a role in enabling success in its industry specialisations.

| Endowment                                | Relevant 2018 specialisation   |
|--|--|
| Transport and logistics infrastructure   |    |
| Climate                                  |    |
| Natural and mineral resources            |    |
| Agricultural infrastructure              |    |
| Location                                 |    |
| Lifestyle infrastructure                 |    |
| Regional airports                        |    |
| Education infrastructure                 |  |
| Retiree population                       |  |
| Local institutions and strong leadership |  |
| Health care infrastructure and services  |  |
| Cultural heritage                        |  |

## 5. The big picture: Shocks and trends impacting the South West Slopes region since 2018



Figure 4: An aerial view of canola in full bloom in Temora LGA. Photo credit: Temora Shire Council.

### Significant events impacting major industries

A sustained period of drought, followed by COVID-19, the mouse plague and floods has had significant environmental and economic implications for the region. The COVID-19 pandemic challenged the region, with local businesses in the visitor economy suffering significantly from the impacts of movement and operating restrictions. From 2018 to 2022, the region had seven disaster declarations<sup>[1]</sup> and received \$4.9 million in disaster recovery grants. Recovering from these events and developing both industry and community resilience has been a priority for the region since 2018.

### Drought

As shown in Figure 5, a significant proportion of the region was impacted by sustained drought between 2017 to 2020.<sup>[2]</sup> The prolonged drought was a critical issue for farmers, as it detrimentally impacted incomes. It is estimated that in 2019-20, incomes in some parts of the sector were the lowest in 40 years.<sup>[3]</sup>

To help support communities during the drought, the Federal Drought Communities Program was extended to include all of the South West Slopes LGAs during 2019 and 2020, providing support to deliver a range of local community infrastructure and drought relief projects.<sup>[4]</sup>

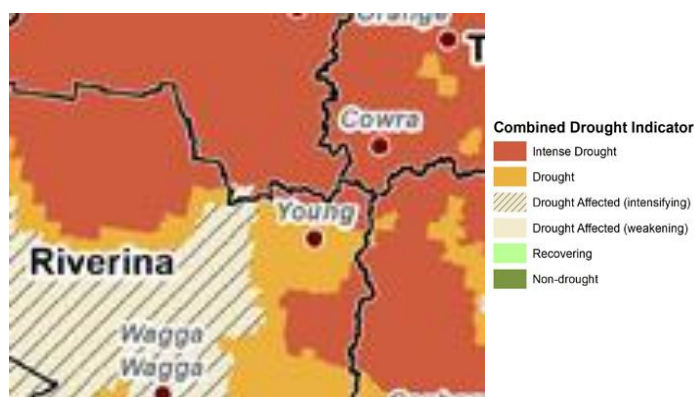


Figure 5: Combined Drought Indicator, 12 months to 31 December 2019 (Department of Primary Industries (DPI), 2022).

## Mouse plague

In 2021, a mouse plague impacted the community and farmers, with mice damaging silo bags and contaminating grain.<sup>[5]</sup> As well as impacting existing grain and hay stores, the plague impacted the viability of future crops as mice dug out newly-sown seed and damaged established crops.<sup>[5]</sup> To support impacted communities, the NSW Government made available up to \$95 million for primary producers in financial need, and \$45 million for the Small Business and Household Mouse Control Rebate. In the South West Slopes region, a total of \$1.27 million was paid to 2,381 households and small businesses through the rebate program.<sup>[6]</sup>

## COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic had a notable impact on local businesses in the region, with 36% of businesses reporting that COVID-19 negatively affected their business.<sup>[7]</sup> Border closures triggered a skills shortage in the region as international migration came to a standstill.

Beyond industry impacts, the pandemic also saw a sustained increase in income support recipients, with the number of Jobseeker recipients in the region rising by 43% from March to June 2020 and Health Care Card recipients rising by 24%. Though the number of support payment recipients has since dropped, rates remain higher than pre-COVID-19 levels.<sup>[8]</sup> Meanwhile, border closures between ACT and NSW and Victoria and NSW significantly impacted communities and businesses in the region.


## Floods




The South West Slopes region has been severely impacted by storms and floods since 2018, with four out of seven natural disaster declarations relating to floods and storms.<sup>[1]</sup> Major events have included flash flooding in Temora and West Wyalong with businesses and properties inundated in June 2021,<sup>[9]</sup> multiple major floods in Gundagai in the second half of 2022 causing spills from Burrinjuck Dam,<sup>[10]</sup> and substantial flash flooding impacting Boorowa, Cootamundra, Temora and Young in November 2022.<sup>[11]</sup>

Along with direct property damage, storms and floods have also cut many of the region's major highways and roads on multiple occasions impacting transport routes, and severely impacting agricultural properties, with major damage to crops and infrastructure from sustained flooding.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Macroeconomic trends shaping the region's future

Macroeconomic trends related to climate and migration have played a significant role in the development of the South West Slopes region since 2018 and are likely to continue to have a strong influence on its future. With a growing population of remote workers, the impacts of successive natural disasters, and an increasingly central role in the progression to net zero, the region faces a need to continue to enhance resilience and leverage its competitive advantages to grasp significant opportunities.

| Trend  |  | Opportunities and risks   |
|--|--|---|
| <br>Digital Transformation | <p>The recent COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the digital economy in Australia, with increased uptake of remote working arrangements as well as online services such as education and telehealth.<sup>[13]</sup></p> <p>As industries diversify and innovate, the need for reliable and efficient telecommunications infrastructure to support business growth and to secure a skilled workforce is critical.</p> <p>Investment in improved telecommunications infrastructure since 2018 has included five</p> | <p>The growth in the digital economy can help enhance innovation and support growing industries.</p> <p>Remote working and digital service provision can enable access to a larger labour pool, but also increases out of region competition for skilled workers.</p> |



| Trend   | Opportunities and risks  |  |
|---|--|--|
|   | <p>new mobile towers throughout Hilltops and Temora LGAs. However, significant parts of the region still suffer from poor mobile coverage and/or a lack of high-speed internet connectivity, and further investment is required to address these shortfalls.</p>   | <p>Many farm telemetry systems rely on 3G network technology. 3G network shutdowns in 2024 may present challenges associated with transitioning systems.</p>   |
|  <p>Changing Migration Patterns</p> | <p>The COVID-19 pandemic has led to unprecedented migration to the region. This is evident in the population shift in 2020-21, with regional NSW gaining an additional 26,800 residents while Sydney declined by 5,200.<sup>[14]</sup></p> <p>Migration has led to increased housing pressures and increased demand for metro competitive services and infrastructure. Retaining a skilled working population in the region will require high-quality placemaking and amenity.<sup>[15]</sup></p>  | <p>Sustained population growth may increase pressure on housing availability and affordability.</p> <p>Increased population creates greater demand for goods and services, which support business growth, but also places pressure on existing infrastructure.</p>   |
|  <p>Towards Net Zero</p>           | <p>The South West Slopes region can play a significant role in achieving net zero targets given its location along the renewable energy spine spanning across South East NSW, and the number of renewable energy facilities already established or planned.</p> <p>The region is already home to a number of wind and solar facilities, with additional major investments underway, along with a number of smaller town scale solar facilities.</p>  | <p>Opportunity exists for the region to capitalise on the renewables sector by attracting businesses looking to establish green credentials.</p> <p>Challenges include how to ensure sustained local economic benefits accrue to communities from projects, and how to effectively manage any impacts on prime agricultural land.</p>      |
|  <p>Rising Uncertainty</p>        | <p>The region has experienced a succession of extreme climate events since 2018, including drought, major storms and flooding, with a significant impact on local businesses and industries, in particular agriculture.</p> <p>With the frequency and intensity of these events projected to increase in coming decades<sup>[16]</sup>, there is a need to enhance climate resilience. Building community resilience and continuing investment into infrastructure to secure the supply of key inputs, such as energy and water, will be crucial to supporting the region's economic future.</p> | <p>More regular extreme climate events elevate the risk of major damage to assets.</p> <p>Rising uncertainty presents an opportunity to promote investment to enhance local supply chain resilience.</p> <p>Rising uncertainty places upward pressure on inflation, driving up input costs and increasing the costs of doing business.</p> |











## 6. Responding to change: Initiatives and investments since 2018



Figure 6: The Lambing Flat Chinese Tribute Garden in Young. Photo credit: Destination NSW.

Since 2018, local councils, the NSW Government and other organisations have delivered new and updated strategic documents and plans that help guide economic and community development in the region. These documents support the development of local enabling actions that contribute towards progress against REDS priorities and strategies.

| Strategies and plans   | Relevant 2018 strategies  |
|--|---|
| <p>The <b>Riverina Murray Regional Plan 2041</b> (Bland, Gundagai and Temora LGAs), <b>Central West and Orana Regional Plan 2041</b> (Weddin LGA) and the draft <b>Southern East and Tablelands Regional Plan 2041</b> (Hilltops LGA) set out the strategic land use vision for the region and surrounds, with a focus on supporting economic development.</p> |  |
| <p>All councils have adopted <b>Local Strategic Planning Statements</b> that outline their approach to achieving sustainable growth. Priorities include enabling infrastructure investment, protecting the environment and activating industrial and commercial areas.</p>   |  |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Temora Tomorrow: towards 2035, Weddin 2027 Community Strategic Plan (CSP), Hilltops Our Place 2022-2032, Cootamundra-Gundagai Our Place, Our Future</b> and the <b>Bland Shire Your Vision, Our Future</b> are the CSPs for each LGA, which outline the community's visions, priorities and aspirations with a focus on social, environmental, economic and civic leadership issues.</p>   |    |
| <p>The Riverina Joint Organisation <b>Eastern Riverina Housing Strategy 2021, Bland Shire Housing Strategy, Temora Residential Lands Strategy, Hilltops Economic Growth and Land Use Strategy 2019</b> and the <b>Cootamundra-Gundagai Rural Lands Strategy 2020</b> represent long-term planning frameworks and analysis to help ensure sufficient housing stock across the region, facilitate a greater mix of housing types to meet the needs of the community, and guide a strategic approach to land use.</p> |    |
| <p>The <b>Hilltops Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy 2021</b> outlines a clear direction for minimisation, management, and education around waste and recycling for industries such as manufacturing and the benefit of the local community.</p>   |    |
| <p>The draft <b>Central West and Orana Regional Transport plan</b> (Weddin) and the draft <b>South East and Tablelands Regional Transport Plan</b> (Hilltops) respond to the transport needs of the region. Goals include boosting alternative transport (walk, cycle, public transport) and improving access to major destinations.</p>   |    |
| <p>The Riverina Joint Organisation <b>Regional Freight Transport Plan 2019</b> (Temora, Bland and Cootamundra-Gundagai) highlights priorities for transport and freight management planning activities across the broader Eastern Riverina region.</p>   |  |
| <p>The <b>Riverina Murray Destination Management Plan 2018-2022 (DMP)</b> (Bland, Gundagai and Temora LGAs) and the <b>Destination Southern NSW DMP 2018-2020</b> (Hilltops) and <b>Central West 2022-2030 DMP</b> (Weddin LGA) guide investment and efforts to stimulate growth in the visitor economy, outlining strategic projects and opportunities for growth.</p>  |  |
| <p>The <b>Weddin Shire DMP 2020-2024</b> and the Cootamundra-Gundagai <b>Tourism and Economic Development Strategy 2019</b> and <b>Agritourism Development Plan 2021-2023</b> detail local priorities associated with the development and growth of the visitor economy in the region.</p>   |  |
| <p>The <b>Blueprint for a Resilient South East NSW</b> (Hilltops LGA) is being created by the Canberra Region Joint Organisation to guide actions designed to build resilience and help prevent, prepare, respond and recover from future disasters and challenges.</p>  |  |
| <p>The <b>Central NSW Joint Organisation Economic and Social Environmental Scan</b> (Weddin) reviewed relevant strategic documents across government and the private sector to identify the key risks, opportunities and challenges for the Central West region.</p>   |  |
| <p>The draft <b>Lachlan Regional Water Strategy</b> and <b>draft Murrumbidgee Regional Water Strategy</b> set out a plan to manage the water needs of each region over the next 20-40 years.</p>   |  |



## Significant investments since 2018

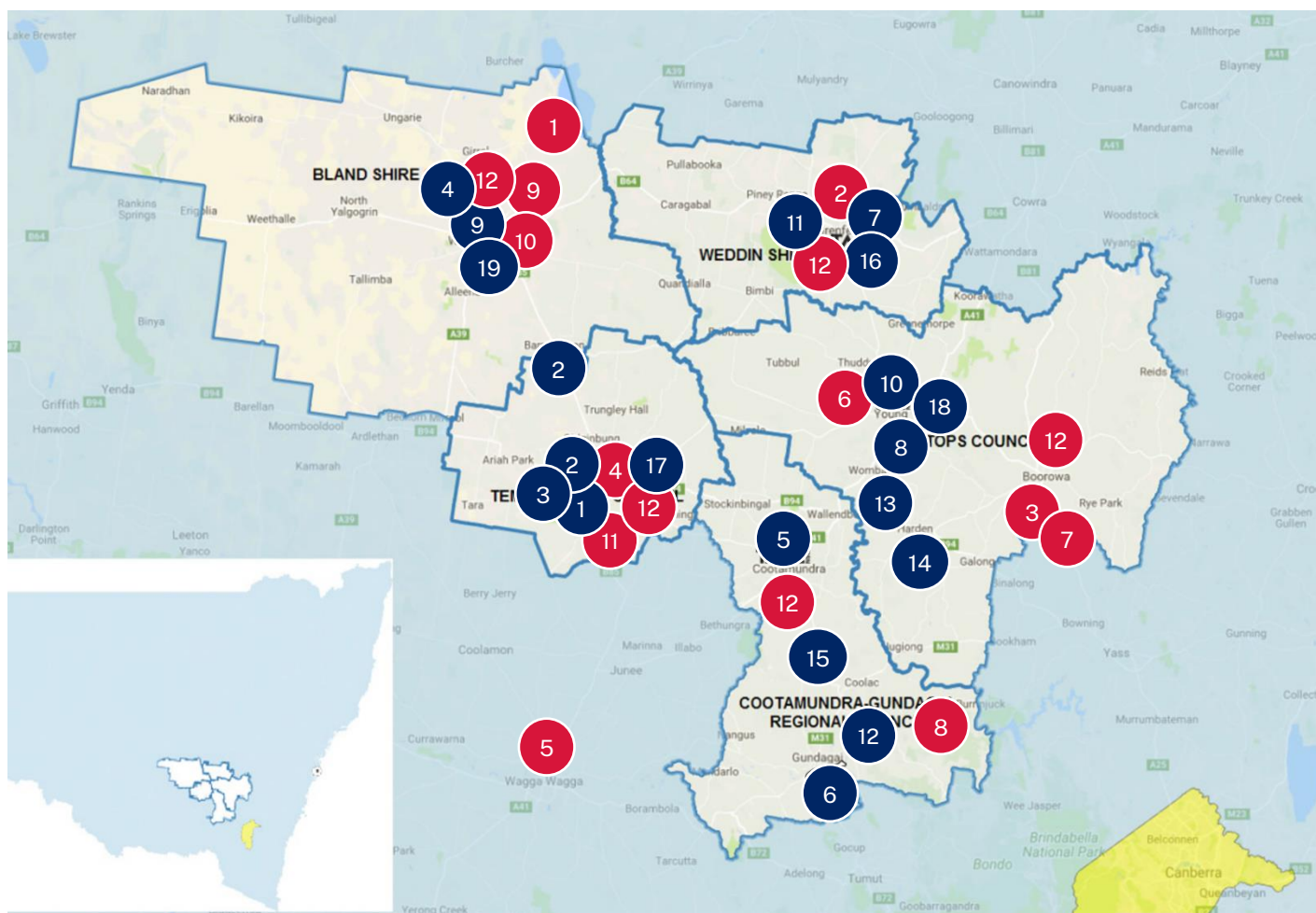










Figure 7: Significant investment in South West Slopes FER since 2018.

As shown in Figure 7 above, since 2018 the region has received significant local, state and federal funding, as well as private investment. These investments are at varying stages of progress, with some delivered, some underway, and some still in planning. Public investments have focused on developing transport and enabling infrastructure, alongside community and recreational infrastructure. Grant funding has played a key role in delivery of many of these projects.






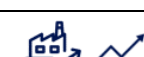


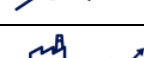

### Major private investment since 2018

| Investment  | Estimated total project value(s) | Relevant 2018 strategies |
|---|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Expansion of Lake Cowal gold mine                       | \$380 million                    |                          |
| 2 Grenfell Poultry Breeder farm                           | \$64 million                     |                          |
| 3 CSIRO Boorowa Agriculture Research Station <sup>1</sup> | \$11.5 million                   |                          |
| 4 BFB corporate farm Temora                               | Not available                    |                          |










<sup>1</sup> Combination of public and private funding supported delivery of this project.

|    |  |               |   |
|----|--|---------------|---|
| 5  | Southern NSW Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub <sup>1</sup> | \$20 million  |  |
| 6  | Apollo Fabrication expansion Young                                       | \$30 million  |  |
| 7  | Bango Wind Farm  | \$500 million |  |
| 8  | Jeremiah Wind Farm   | \$400 million |  |
| 9  | West Wyalong Solar Farm  | \$136 million |  |
| 10 | Wyalong Solar Farm   | \$130 million |  |
| 11 | Sebastopol Solar Farm  | \$120 million |  |
| 12 | Multiple town-scale solar farms  | >\$40 million |  |

### Major public investment since 2018

| Investment  | Estimated total project value(s) | Relevant 2018 strategies  |
|---|----------------------------------|---|
| 1 Temora Health Service Redevelopment                                   | \$80 million                     |  |
| 2 Temora to Calleen rail upgrade and Temora West upgraded rail siding   | \$30.8 million                   |  |
| 3 Temora Airport upgrades   | \$15 million                     |  |
| 4 West Wyalong Aerodrome upgrades                                       | \$1.06 million                   |  |
| 5 Cootamundra water main upgrade  | \$7 million                      |  |
| 6 Gundagai sewage treatment plant                                       | >\$20 million                    |  |
| 7 Grenfell sewage treatment plant                                       | \$12.3 million                   |  |
| 8 Young trunk drainage upgrade  | \$8.2 million                    |  |
| 9 West Wyalong Water Reliability Project                                | \$13.2 million                   |  |
| 10 Young High School Upgrade – joint use library and community facility | \$21 million                     |  |

<sup>1</sup> While the hub is based outside the region in Wagga Wagga, it will play an important role in supporting communities across Southern NSW.

|    |  |               |   |
|----|--|---------------|---|
| 11 | Grenfell TAFE Connected Learning Centre  | \$4 million   |  |
| 12 | Gundagai Preschool redevelopment         | > \$2 million |  |
| 13 | South West Slopes Fire Control Centre    | \$6.1 million |  |
| 14 | Murrumbidgee Creek Precinct upgrade      | \$1.8 million |  |
| 15 | Muttama Church cultural centre           | \$1 million   |  |
| 16 | Grenfell Main Street upgrade             | \$3 million   |  |
| 17 | Temora Ambulance Museum expansion        | \$9 million   |  |
| 18 | Young Aquatic Centre upgrades            | >\$3 million  |  |
| 19 | West Wyalong Tivoli Theatre <sup>1</sup> | \$0.9 million |  |

### Regional grant programs

The region has received \$75.48 million in grant funding approved since 2018. Key programs in the region have included the Stronger Country Communities Fund and the Resources for Region Fund, with a range of projects funded, including upgrades to a range of community and recreational facilities.

| Grant category    | Approved funding |
|-------------------|------------------|
| Community         | \$53.05 million  |
| Economic          | \$17.52 million  |
| Disaster recovery | \$4.9 million    |

Note: Total grant funding outlined above only includes programs managed by the Department of Regional NSW, accurate as at January 2023.



Figure 8: Temora Museum. Photo credit: Temora Shire Council.

<sup>1</sup> This amount includes a contribution made by Evolution mining.

## 7. South West Slopes region 2023 economic snapshot

The population of the South West Slopes is projected to grow in coming years, which will require a focus on developing the skilled workforce in the region

As the region is expected to experience population growth in coming years, there is a need to develop enabling infrastructure to support the needs of the community and increase liveability, and to maintain a focus on growing the skilled workforce to meet increased labour demand.

### Population growth

The region recorded population decline of -0.4% between 2019 and 2021, after a period of relatively flat growth between 2013 and 2019 (see Figure 9).

However, the regional population is forecast to stabilise and experience growth going forward,<sup>[17]</sup> with a range of major projects in the region expected to support this growth.

It is important to ensure sufficient housing, key enabling infrastructure and enhanced population-serving services are in place to support future population growth.

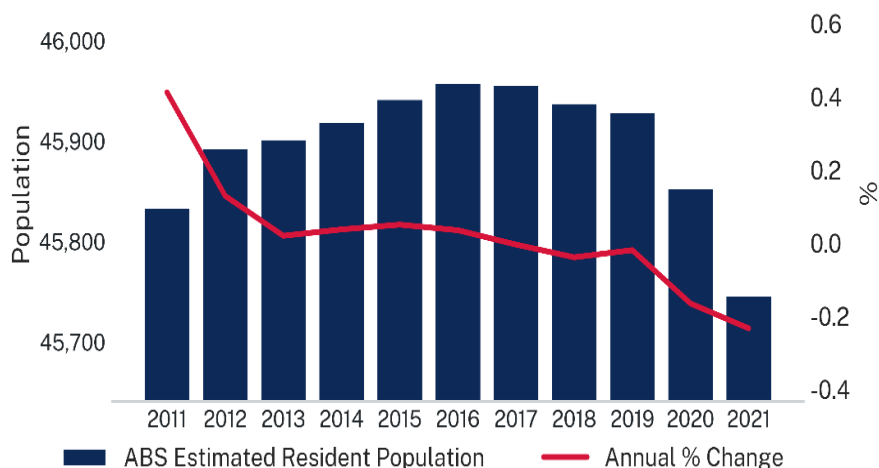


Figure 9: South West Slopes FER population growth, 2011-2021 (ABS ERP, July 2022).

### Demographic profile

In 2021, the proportion of the region's population over 55 years of age was 10% higher than the NSW average, while the population cohort in their prime working age (20-49 years old) was 10.9% lower.

The region has historically had a high retiree population, as reflected in the demographic profile shown in Figure 10.

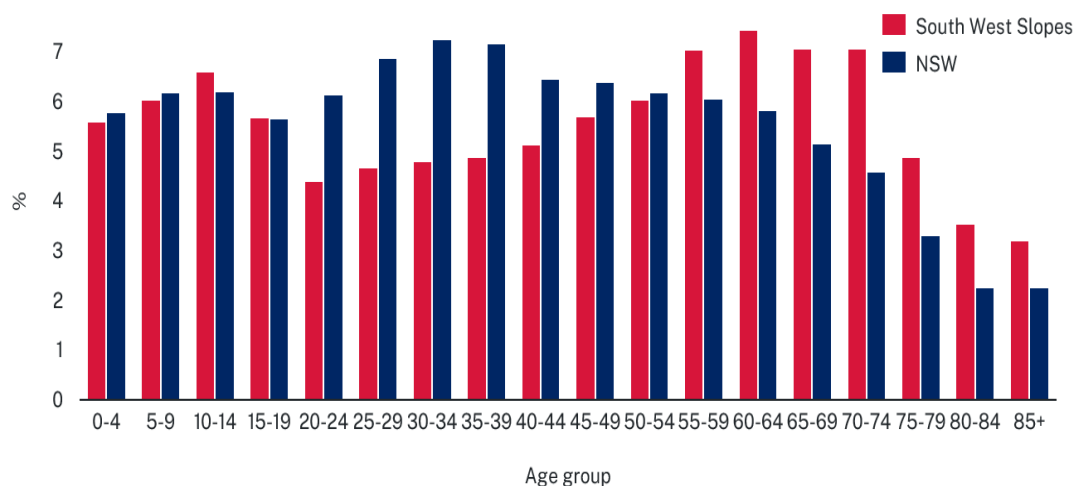


Figure 10: South West Slopes FER population by age, 2021 (ABS ERP, July 2022).

A challenge for the region will be maintaining a sufficient skilled workforce to match the demand for labour in population serving industry sectors, as well as to support major projects. Responses may include a focus on enhancing skills training and workforce development initiatives to ensure local skills can meet key demands. This can also assist with workforce attraction and retention and help address the demographic challenges facing the region.

## Housing availability has tightened significantly in the region, accompanied by steadily rising house prices

The region has faced a steep decline in housing availability and affordability since 2018. This is concerning given projected population growth in the region, as well as significant projects such as Lake Cowal Gold Mine expansion and major renewable energy projects that will add to demand. Ensuring adequate and accessible housing supply is critical to supporting future economic growth in the region.

### Housing availability

Residential vacancy rates in the region have dropped from approximately 3% in 2018-19, to just 0.4% in August 2022 (see Figure 11). Demand for worker housing for major projects, along with COVID-19 migration of workers are likely to be relevant factors in this reduction of housing availability.

There has been some sustained increase in the number of residential building approvals across the region in 2021 and 2022, which suggests the market has responded to increased demand. A key focus needs to be placed on ensuring that state and local planning systems (and other land development enablers such as infrastructure provision) are appropriately calibrated to keep pace with needs for expansion of the housing supply across the region.

### Housing affordability

Between June 2018 and June 2022, median house prices in the Hilltops LGA increased by 54% to \$390,000, by 43% in Cootamundra-Gundagai LGA to reach \$380,000, by 60% in Temora to reach \$400,000, by 106% in Weddin to \$353,000 and by an estimated 50% in West Wyalong to \$286,000.<sup>[18][19]</sup> These significant increases in prices if sustained could constrain the region's ability to attract and retain key workers, which can have implications for major project delivery and economic growth.

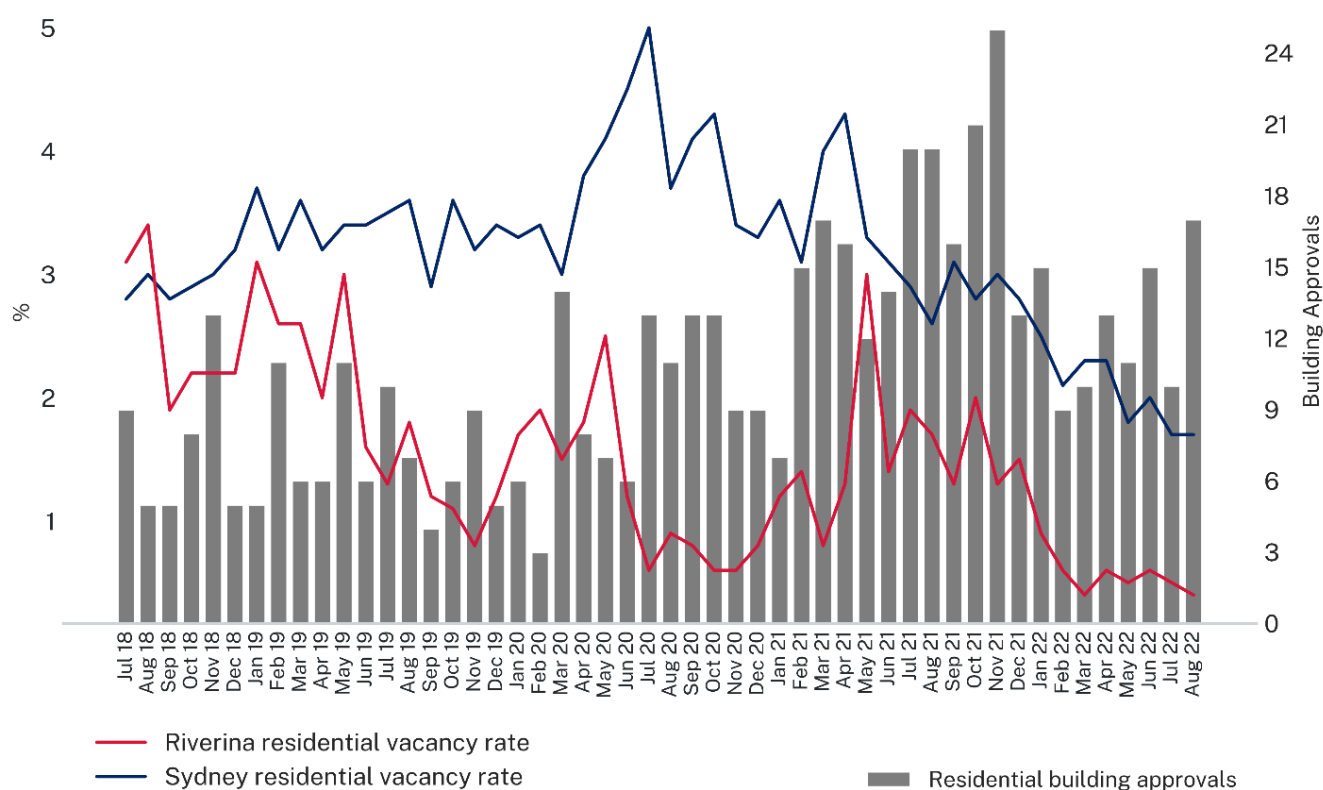


Figure 11: South West Slopes FER vacancy rate and building approvals, 2018-2022 (REINSW, 2022).

Note: REINSW vacancy data collection is not aligned with the FER boundary map, resulting in an overlap with other FERs. These results are therefore intended to provide an indication of housing vacancies in the region.

## Decreasing unemployment and a surge in job vacancies highlights a tightening labour market in South West Slopes region

Since 2018 there have been marked reductions in unemployment rates in the region, which reflects a tightening labour market, given job vacancies also more than doubled across the period.

### Employment

As at June 2022, most of the South West Slopes region had lower unemployment rates than the NSW benchmark of 3.3%, with Bland at 1.6%, Cootamundra-Gundagai at 3.0%, Temora at 2.8%, and Weddin at 2.1% (see Figure 12).

Unemployment in Hilltops Shire was 7.3% in June 2022, consistent with historical trends in which Hilltops has often experienced a higher unemployment rate compared to the rest of the region. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the region's unemployment rates followed a gradual downwards trend after the initial uptick in 2020.

Job vacancies in the broader Riverina and Murray region climbed to reach a record 2,472 in August 2022, having risen significantly from less than 1,000 in mid-2020 (see Figure 13). Occupations with particularly acute need for workers include medical practitioners and nurses, along with administrative and engineering roles.

During consultation, stakeholders noted job vacancy data is likely to underestimate shortages, given it is common in sectors, such as agriculture and hospitality may not formally advertise vacancies, but rather filled via networks or word of mouth.

The 2018 REDS identified a need to focus on skilled workforce attraction and retention initiatives in the region. This will need to remain a priority given major projects will increase demand for skilled labour including from key population serving sectors, such as health.

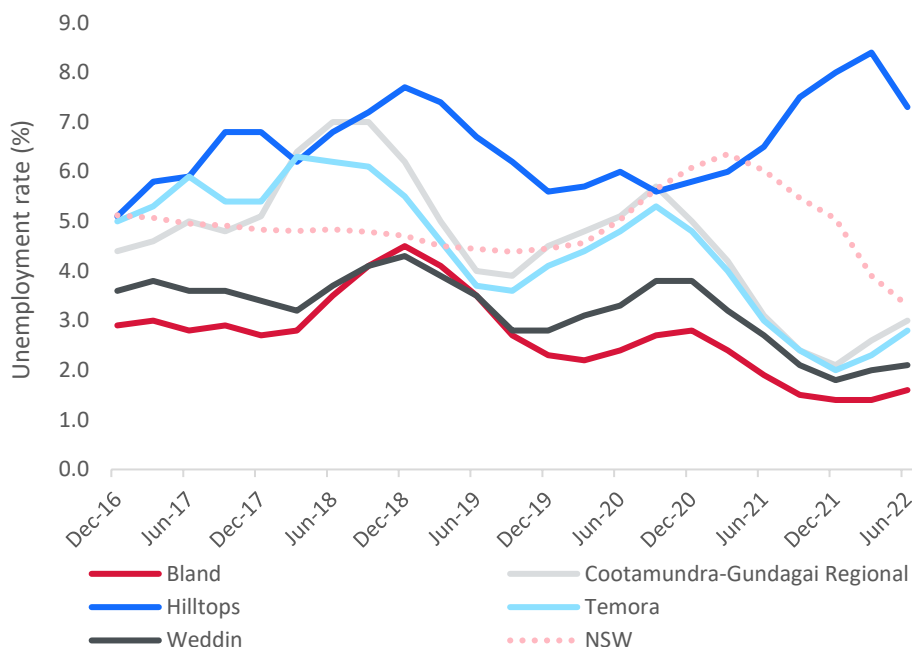


Figure 12: South West Slopes FER unemployment rates (%), 2016-2022 (National Skills Commission, 2022; ABS Labour Force, 2022).



Figure 13: Job vacancies, Riverina & Murray region 2018- 2022 (Regional IVI, National Skills Commission, 2022).

Note: The regional IVI – National Skills Commission job vacancy data collection is not aligned with the FER boundary map, resulting in an overlap with other FERs. Job vacancy data only includes online job vacancies. These results are therefore intended to provide an indication of job vacancies in the region.

## Aboriginal employment

|   |      |       |
|---|------|-------|
| Aboriginal unemployment rate: South West Slopes | 2011 | 16.9% |
|   | 2016 | 15.9% |
|   | 2021 | 9.4%  |
| NSW Aboriginal unemployment rate                | 2021 | 9.8%  |
| NSW unemployment rate                           | 2021 | 4.9%  |

Source: ABS Census 2021

The Aboriginal unemployment rate in the South West Slopes region has reduced substantially from 15.9% in 2016 to 9.4% in 2021, representing a significant improvement in economic participation outcomes for the Aboriginal community in the region. This rate is below the NSW Aboriginal unemployment rate of 9.8%, but still remains above the NSW unemployment rate of 4.9%.

An ongoing focus on positive collaboration between local government, members of the Aboriginal community, business and industry can support continued progress on delivering improved economic development outcomes for the Aboriginal community in the region.

Major upcoming projects such as the Lake Cowal Gold Mine expansion and a range of significant renewable energy generation projects can help build on the positive trends observed since 2011, given significant opportunities will exist associated with these projects to promote increased Aboriginal economic participation and to support Aboriginal business development.



Figure 14: Late afternoon light in Cootamundra. Photo credit: Destination NSW.

## South West Slopes region's 2023 engine and emerging industries

The South West Slopes region is a \$2.75 billion economy, driven largely by its specialisation in agriculture and a strong industrial base. Despite significant shocks since 2018, the South West Slopes region's engine industries have remained a source of stability for the regional economy. The relative strength of industries in the region is highlighted through Location Quotient (LQ) analysis<sup>1</sup> in Figure 15 below, where the size of the bubbles correlates to industry size.

### Engine industries

**Agriculture** (LQ of 11.03) has continued to be the most significant specialisation in the region, generating \$594m in GVA to the local economy in 2020, after recording 10.6% average annual growth between 2011 and 2020. The subsector in the region is the sheep, grains, beef and dairy sector (LQ of 16.4), which generated 74.8% of the industry's output in the region in 2020.

**Mining** (LQ of 1.27) represents another significant sector in the regional economy, contributing \$159m to the local economy in 2020. Non-ferrous metal ore mining is the dominant sub-sector (LQ of 13.3), accounting for approximately 80% of the industry's output. Despite a reduction in GVA over the past decade, the expansion of the Lake Cowal Gold Mine can be expected to support growth going forward.

**Manufacturing** also remains a key source of economic output for the region, contributing \$147m to the economy in 2020. The subsector specialisation in the region is meat product manufacturing (LQ of 7), which contributed 44% of total industry output in the region in 2020.

**Tourism** also remains an important sector in the region, despite significant impacts associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, total spend by visitors to the region was estimated to be \$72 million, and it is estimated that the sector grew on average per year 1.8% between 2011 and 2020.<sup>[20]</sup>

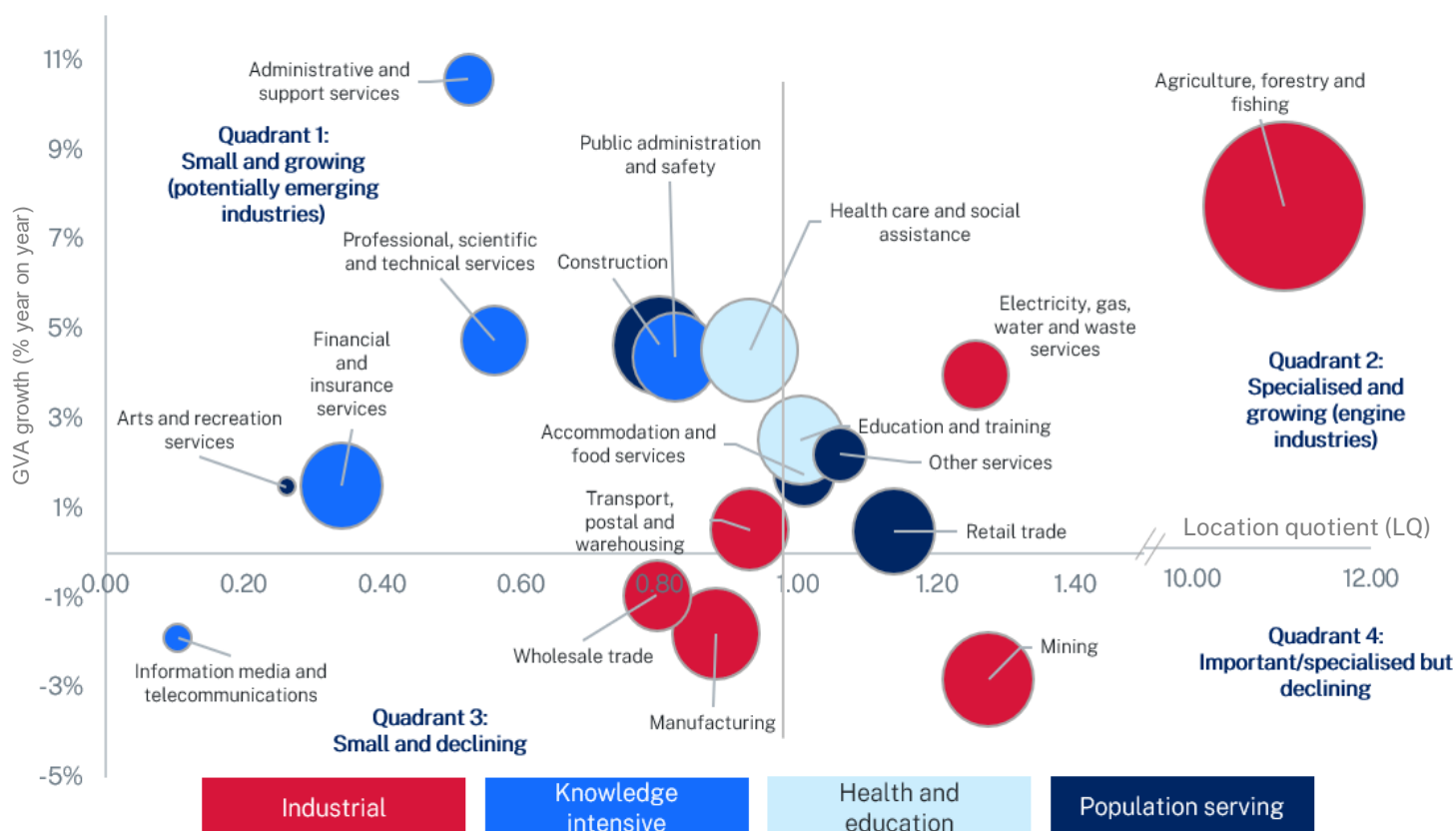


Figure 15: Location Quotient (LQ) Analysis by GVA, 2011-2020 (REMPLAN, 2020).

Note: While the 2018 REDS used employment data as the basis for LQ analysis, the 2023 Update has used Gross Value-Add (GVA) data. This allows for a clear demonstration of the changing economic impact of both engine and emerging industries across the regions.

<sup>1</sup> LQ analysis is used to measure industry specialisation by comparing the relative size of an industry in the region versus the whole of NSW.



## Emerging industries

The region’s emerging specialisations have remained consistent since the 2018 REDS. Supporting growth in these sectors will be key to building a diverse and resilient economy which can support projected population growth while maintaining a high standard of liveability.

Knowledge intensive industries such as **professional, scientific and technical services**, and **public administration and safety** demonstrated strong annual GVA growth over the past decade, at 4.7% and 4.4% respectively from 2011-2020. Public administration is driven by local government administration, while growth in professional, scientific and technical services is likely to be related to the significant focus on investment in enhanced agricultural research in the region.

**Electricity, gas, water and waste services** (including renewable energy generation) continues to represent an emerging specialisation for the region. The sector has recorded average annual growth of 4% between 2011 and 2020, driven by investment in a range of water and sewerage upgrade projects, and a significant number of major solar and wind farms, with more than \$1 billion expected to be invested in coming years into a number of major projects.

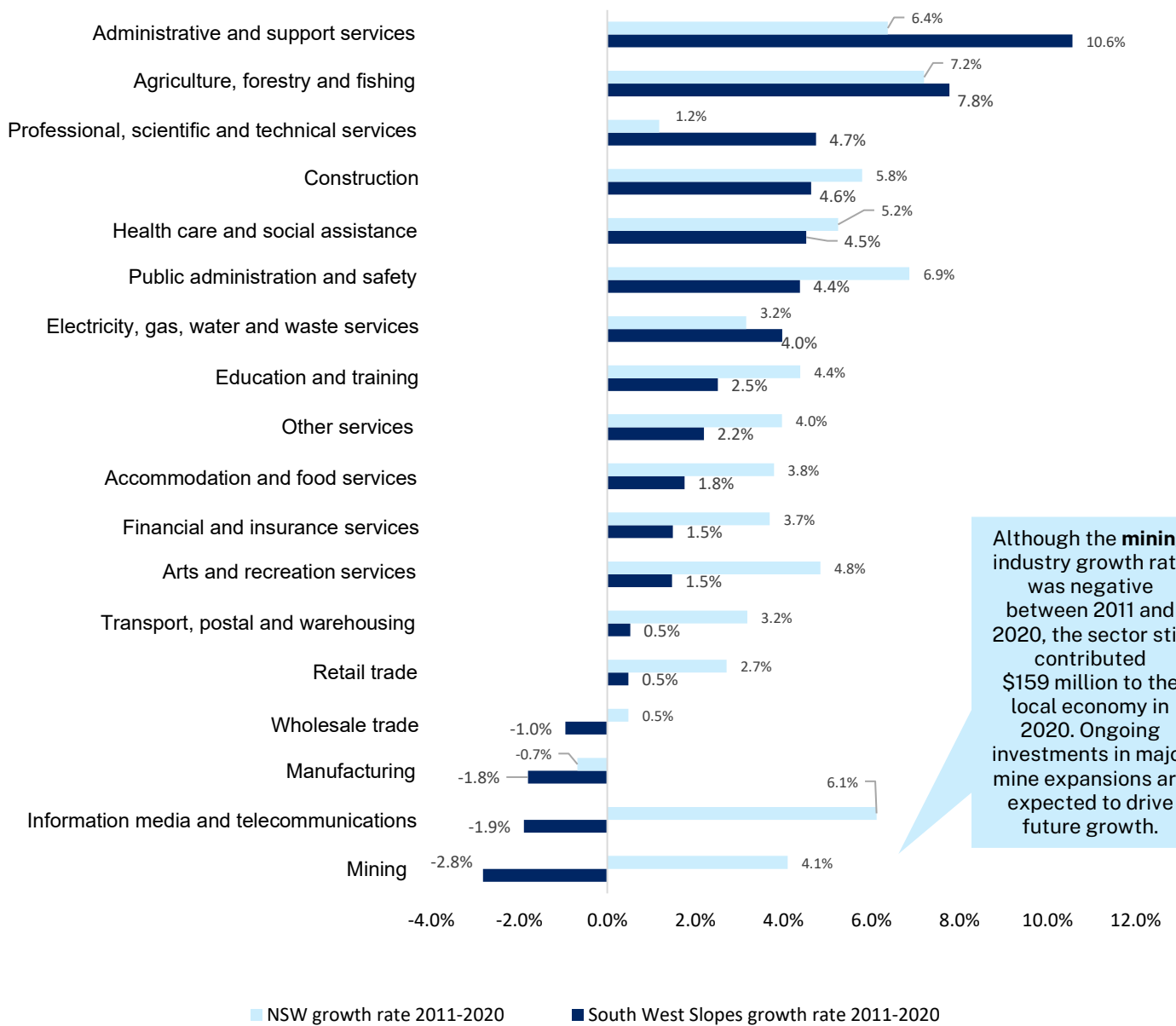


Figure 16: Change in GVA by Industry (% YOY), 2011-2020 (REMPAN, 2011; REMPLAN, 2020).

## South West Slopes region 2023 endowments

### Review of the 2018 endowments

The 2018 REDS identified a diverse range of endowments underpinning the South West Slopes region economy and regional competitiveness (see page 11). Despite recent shocks impacting these endowments, consultation outcomes and analysis have confirmed they remain valid, with endowments including:

- Transport and logistics infrastructure
- Climate
- Natural and mineral resources
- Agricultural infrastructure
- Location (moderate proximity to Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and other regional centres)
- Lifestyle infrastructure
- Regional airports
- Education infrastructure
- Health infrastructure and services
- Cultural heritage



Figure 17: Boorowa CSIRO Agricultural Research Station. Photo credit: CSIRO.

### New endowments

As part of the 2023 REDS Update, an additional endowment is added focused on agricultural innovation and research capability of the region.

The recent major investments into the Boorowa CSIRO Agricultural Research Station and the Southern NSW Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub, based in Wagga Wagga but serving the broader Southern NSW region, will significantly enhance the capacity of the region to continue be a leader agricultural innovation.

These facilities will continue to be supported by a range of long established innovation and research facilities and organisations, such as the Temora Agricultural Innovation Centre and FarmLink, a not-for-profit agricultural research organisation owned by growers.

+ Agricultural innovation facilities

The CSIRO Agricultural Research Station, the Southern NSW Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub, and long established agricultural research capabilities support the South West Slopes region being a leader in agricultural innovation.

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## 8.Looking ahead: Strategic opportunities for growth, resilience and liveability

### Opportunities and vulnerabilities in engine and emerging industries

#### Mining

Despite a reduction in mining sector GVA between 2011 and 2020, the major expansion of existing mining operations and significant critical minerals opportunities can support growth.

|                                |      |
|--------------------------------|------|
| GVA (2020, \$m)                | 159  |
| Employment (2021)              | 430  |
| LQ score (2020)                | 1.27 |
| LQ Non-ferrous ore (2020)      | 13.1 |
| LQ Non-metallic mineral (2020) | 6.1  |

#### Strengths

- The region has a range of mineral resource endowments including gold, limestone, silver, tin, and copper, as well as potentially significant critical minerals deposits of cobalt, scandium, lithium and various rare earth minerals.<sup>[21]</sup>
- The Lake Cowal gold mine in Bland Shire is one of Australia’s largest gold mines, with a major expansion planned and substantial reserves that will support its operation until at least 2040.<sup>[22]</sup>
- Good proximity to major road and rail infrastructure provides well-established pathways to get output to processing facilities and external markets. Substantial investments into Inland Rail and the Special Activation Precincts at Wagga and Parkes in the broader region will further enhance this strength.

#### Vulnerabilities

- Ongoing profitability of the mining industry is vulnerable to supply chain disruptions, fluctuations in input costs, challenges in achieving long-term energy supply, and freight cost increases.
- Like many sectors, the mining sector is facing sustained workforce shortages and challenges in securing a skilled workforce, with roles such as mining engineers particularly challenging to fill. There is also strong competition with other mining companies for young and skilled talent.
- Worker accommodation shortages are a challenge requiring innovative solutions, such as the building of a purpose built West Wyalong accommodation village to support the Lake Cowal Gold Mine expansion.<sup>[23]</sup>

#### Opportunities

- The Lake Cowal Mine expansion will extend the lifespan of the mine significantly, providing a major boost to economic activity in the region.
- The critical minerals sector presents significant opportunity for future growth, highlighted by positive exploration outcomes associated with rare earth minerals deposits at Narraburra near Temora,<sup>[24]</sup> and significant cobalt deposits, including the Nico and Thuddungra deposits near Young.<sup>[25]</sup>
- The release and activation of fully serviced industrial lands surrounding mining lands that have good transport connectivity and access to utilities can help support growth in related industries.

## Agriculture

The region's specialisation in agriculture continues to be a driver of economic growth in the region, and will significantly benefit from major investments to enhance the region's innovation capacity.

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| GVA (2020, \$m)                        | 594   |
| Employment (2021) <sup>a</sup>         | 3,941 |
| LQ score (2020)                        | 11.03 |
| LQ Sheep, grain, beef and dairy (2020) | 16.4  |
| LQ Poultry and other livestock (2020)  | 14.1  |

*a ANZSIC 1 Digit Agriculture, forestry and fishing.*

### Strengths

- Highly fertile land with a suitable temperate climate supports a wide ranging speciality in the agricultural sector.
- The region benefits from geographic co-location with a range of downstream food product manufacturing businesses, and good proximity to regional airports and major transport linkages.
- The region's has a long established agtech and innovation capacity, with facilities including the Temora Agricultural Innovation Centre, the Boorowa CSIRO Agricultural Research Station and the Southern NSW Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub.
- The specialisation in the region is the sheep, grain, beef and dairy sector, which accounted for 74.8% of industry output in 2020, with livestock also a major export industry.

### Vulnerabilities

- The industry relies upon the availability of suitable land and viable climatic conditions for production, both of which are continuing to be challenged by increased climate variability.
- The industry continues to face significant skilled and unskilled labour shortages across the region, that also extend to downstream food manufacturing sectors.<sup>[26]</sup>
- Macroeconomic factors beyond the control of producers, such as input costs, supply chains and commodity prices can significantly impact on the value of outputs.
- Increasing competition for land from new residential and industrial land, as well as major projects such as renewable energy facilities may present challenges for future growth in the sector.

### Opportunities

- Increased adoption of agtech including automated farming processes and greater uptake of intensive and precision agricultural practices can increase productivity and yields, but digital connectivity issues in the region (in particular in Weddin Shire) may constrain the ability for widespread uptake.
- Growth in value-add food manufacturing, including increased adoption of advanced manufacturing technology can help maximise value from production, with opportunities including increased vertical integration in manufacturing and meat processing.
- Opportunities exist to work closely with the tourism sector to grow and develop agritourism in the region as a way to expand and diversify income streams for primary producers.
- Significant opportunities exist to derive benefit for the sector from major infrastructure investments in the surrounding area including Inland Rail and the Parkes and Wagga Wagga SAPs.

## Tourism

Tourism continues to represent an emerging specialisation in the region, with significant opportunities for sustained growth of the visitor economy in the region.

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| Visitor spend (2021, \$m) <sup>[20]</sup> | 72    |
| Employment (2021) <sup>a</sup>            | 3,036 |
| LQ score (2020) <sup>b</sup>              | 1.01  |
| LQ Accommodation (2020)                   | 1.4   |
| LQ Food and beverage (2020)               | 0.9   |

<sup>a</sup> Summation of ANZSIC 1 digit Retail trade, Accommodation and food services, Arts and recreation services.

<sup>b</sup> LQ score is for the Accommodation and food services industry.

### Strengths

- The region is home to a wealth of natural endowments including a range of nature reserves, state forests and national parks including Bendick Murrell, Jindalee and Weddin Mountains.
- The Weddin Mountains is a region with significant Aboriginal cultural value, including carved trees and other sacred sites that highlight the significance of the region to Aboriginal people.
- Significant built tourist attractions in the region include the Temora Aviation Museum, Temora Jet Boat Track at Lake Centenary, Bland Shire Art Trail, major silo artworks at Weethalle, Grenfell and Harden,andra Castle, Bradman's Birthplace Museum, the Dog on the Tucker Box, Australian Road Transport Heritage Centre and the Lambing Flat Chinese Tribute Garden.
- The region has several long established major festivals and events, including the Temora Warbirds Downunder Air show, Grenfell Henry Lawson Festival of Arts, Coota Annual Cycle Classic, West Wyalong Rugby League Knockout, Boorowa Irish Woolfest and the Young National Cherry Festival.

### Vulnerabilities

- The tourism industry is vulnerable to externalities beyond the control of local operators. This has been demonstrated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which reduced visitation to the South West Slopes by 45% between 2019 and 2021, and visitor spend by 40% over the same period.<sup>[20]</sup>
- Skills and workforce challenges are impacting the ability of the sector to sustain growth.

### Opportunities

- A focus on enhancing and expanding existing travelling trails (e.g. Canola Trail), and developing new co-ordinated offerings can generate increased returns from the visitor economy. A focus is needed on delivering supporting infrastructure and achieving co-ordinated marketing.
- Enhancing relationships with local agricultural producers to further develop agritourism can help diversify the region's tourism offering, with potential areas for focus including on-farm experiences and food and beverage offerings.
- Opportunity exists to leverage the region's significant cultural and architectural heritage to develop new visitor economy offerings across the region that can appeal to a wide range of visitors.

## Electricity and water supply (including renewable energy generation)

Significant major investment in renewable energy generation in the South West Slopes region provides opportunities for ongoing growth in the sector and clear opportunities for growth.

|  |      |
|--|------|
| GVA (2020, \$m)                        | 159  |
| Employment (2021) <sup>a</sup>         | 207  |
| LQ score (2020)                        | 1.26 |
| LQ Electricity distribution (2020)     | 1.3  |
| LQ Water, sewerage and drainage (2020) | 1.7  |

<sup>a</sup> ANZSIC 1 Digit Electivity, gas, water and waste services.

### Strengths

- The region has high quality solar and wind resources, well suited to both major solar and wind farm developments and smaller town scale developments.
- The region is well located at the centre of the emerging renewable energy spine spanning across South East NSW, with numerous solar and/or wind farm developments across the region already operational or in planning stages.
- The region also has a specialisation in the water, sewerage and drainage subsector, which likely reflects substantial investments being made across the region to upgrade water and sewerage networks to replace life expired assets, increase service levels and cater for new growth.

### Vulnerabilities

- Large-scale renewable energy generation projects often require a significant amount of land, which is an increasingly in-demand resource given growing agricultural, commercial, industrial and residential demand across the region.
- Ensuring long term, significant economic benefits flow to communities hosting renewable energy projects, in particular post the investment intensive construction phase, represents a key challenge.
- The labor intensive construction phase of renewable energy projects can place significant additional pressure on the demand for housing given the need to accommodate a large number of workers. This will add pressure to a housing market across the region already struggling to meet demand.

### Opportunities

- Upcoming major wind and solar farm developments will deliver significant further investment into the region and create employment opportunities, especially during the construction phase.
- A focus during planning for major projects on ensuring steps are taken to ensure local businesses directly benefit from projects, and on ensuring local skills training aligns with ongoing employment opportunities can help maximise the benefits from projects to the local community.
- The Hume Hydrogen Highway currently under development by the NSW and Victorian Governments will see hydrogen powered linehaul trucks pass through parts of the region. Opportunities may exist for the region's renewable energy generation to be leveraged to support growth in the sector, given the likely need for hydrogen production infrastructure to support the network.

## Key themes in stakeholder consultation

Stakeholders from the South West Slopes region noted the area is facing both opportunities and challenges associated with economic growth and major investments. Recent climate events, in particular drought and floods have brought to the fore the need to ensure planning, policy and programs closely consider the ongoing need to build community and infrastructure resilience.

Major projects such as solar and wind farms, the Lake Cowal Gold Mine expansion and significant adjacent regional infrastructure investments such as Inland Rail and the Wagga Wagga and Parkes SAPs were recognised by stakeholders as presenting opportunities for the region, but it was noted they can also create challenges due to their impacts on housing availability, housing affordability and the skilled local labour supply.

### **Housing availability and affordability**

As reflected in the analysis of housing supply and prices in the region (see page 21), stakeholders highlighted the region is facing significant housing market challenges driven by low vacancy rates and increasing prices.

Local councils outlined that, where possible, they are taking proactive steps to support increased housing supply, and/or supporting the development of innovative approaches to meeting housing demand, such as that associated with the Lake Cowal Gold Mine expansion.

Despite this, stakeholders revealed concerns that current shortages and reducing affordability are likely to worsen in the face of a suite of major projects planned or underway in the region, and an expected return to sustained population growth in coming years.

### **Workforce shortages**

Stakeholders outlined that significant workforce shortages continue in the region, with low unemployment rates and high job vacancies, particularly in medical, administrative, and automotive and engineering sectors. Stakeholders highlighted that councils are facing challenges filling a range of roles, which is impacting their ability to meet increasing demand from the community for basic services.

### **Ensuring maximum community return on investment for major projects**

While stakeholders acknowledged the economic opportunities provided by major investments in regional infrastructure and precinct based developments both in the South West Slopes region and in neighbouring regions, it was highlighted that a challenge is ensuring an equitable long-term distribution of benefits across the community from major projects.

Stakeholders also highlighted the risk that major projects in neighbouring areas have the potential to drain skills and resources from the South West Slopes region, which could exacerbate current labour market challenges being faced by both local government and industry.

## South West Slopes REDS - 2023 Update strategies

The 2018 strategies to guide economic development actions remain relevant to the South West Slopes region. However, stakeholders highlighted revisions to increase focus on current issues facing the region. Changes made to the strategies include:

- amending the strategy focused on population growth to recognise the need for population growth to be sustainable, and to be supported by investment to deliver enabling infrastructure and services,
- shifting the 2018 focus on improving utilities, energy and telecommunications from being a primary strategy to instead being incorporated in relevant targeted strategies and enabling actions, and
- the introduction of a new strategy focused on ensuring that major projects continue to deliver long-term benefits to the community.

Reflecting the changes outlined above, the 2023 REDS Update strategies for the South West Slopes region are listed below (amendments made to existing 2018 strategies are highlighted in **bold**):

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| Existing | Support and grow the agriculture, food production, mining, and renewable energy sectors.   |
| Existing | Drive economic growth in the region's core sectors by attracting and upskilling the workforce and facilitating innovation.   |
| Existing | Continue to develop and grow the visitor economy.  |
| Amended  | <b>Improve and deliver enabling infrastructure and services</b> to enhance liveability and <b>sustainably</b> grow the population of the South West Slopes region. |
| New      | <b>Monitor impacts of major projects to ensure long-term community benefits are generated.</b>   |

## Key enablers of economic growth

A number of enablers have been identified to assist with delivering each of the strategies. This list is non-exhaustive, with a focus on identifying priority short- to medium-term enablers. Responsibility for implementation of these enablers sits with various levels of government, and in some cases may also include business, industry or non-government bodies. Collaboration across these entities at a local level will be key to achieving results.

| Strategy  | New Enablers   |   | Lead and support  | Rationale  |
|---|----------------|---|---|--|
| <b>Support and grow the agriculture, food production, mining, and renewable energy sectors.</b> | Infrastructure | Identify opportunities to activate industrial lands and leverage upcoming investment in the Inland Rail, Wagga Wagga SAP, and Parkes SAP to enhance freight and logistics capabilities.                             | <b>Local councils</b> , Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) – Planning, Department of Regional NSW (DRNSW) | Leveraging major projects for to produce more localised benefits.                                      |
|   |                | Support councils to use the Connectivity Index Tool following its 2023 release to review existing coverage and identify the areas of greatest need in the region for upgrades to telecommunications infrastructure. | <b>NSW Telco Authority</b> , local councils, DRNSW  | Ensuring digital connectivity to support technology adoption in core sectors and improve productivity. |



|   |  |  |   |   |
|---|--|--|---|---|
|   | Utilities                              | Understand future water needs in relation to water supply from existing assets to develop a long-term water security plan for each LGA that aligns with the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee Regional Water strategies (as applicable).                              | <b>Local councils,</b><br>DPE Water   | Ensure water security for local industry growth.  |
|   | Government, regulation and information | Identify barriers to investment in engine and emerging industries to inform potential policy changes and grant funding opportunities.  | <b>Local councils,</b><br>DRNSW   | Provide a favourable policy environment for investment in growing sectors.  |
| <b>Drive economic growth in the region's core sectors by attracting and upskilling the workforce and facilitating innovation.</b> | People and skills                      | Collaborate with industry and training providers to deliver training programs that increase the skills base across priority sectors, including agriculture, mining, manufacturing, and service-based sectors.  | <b>Training Services NSW,</b><br>local council,<br>DRNSW,<br>registered training organisations  | Supporting skills development and adoption of new technology will enhance local economic resilience as the economy diversifies.               |
|   | Business                               | Support industry to increase the uptake of agtech and drive innovation through collaboration with CSIRO Agricultural Research Station, Temora Agricultural Innovation Centre, and Southern NSW Innovation Hub.   | <b>Department of Primary Industries (DPI),</b><br>local councils,<br>CSIRO, industry  |   |
| <b>Continue to develop and grow the visitor economy.</b>  | Government, regulation and information | Establish flexible planning controls and collaborate with businesses to diversify the region's tourism offering, focusing on opportunities associated with agritourism, heritage attractions, events-based tourism and the local food and beverage industry. | <b>Local councils,</b><br>DPE Planning,<br>Destination NSW,<br>Destination Riverina Murray,<br>Destination Southern NSW,<br>Central West Destination Management Network | Regional strengths in agriculture and heritage assets can be leveraged for growth across complimentary sectors including the visitor economy. |

|  |   |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| <p><b>Improve and deliver enabling infrastructure and services to enhance liveability and sustainably grow the population of the South West Slopes region.</b></p> | <p>Infrastructure</p>                         | <p>Explore opportunities, maximising the use of unused or underutilised lots to ensure sufficient supply of affordable housing to meet current needs and projected growth.</p>                                  | <p><b>DPE Planning,</b><br/>local councils,<br/>DRNSW</p> | <p>Improving the supply of housing will aid skills attraction and retention initiatives.</p>   |
|  |   | <p>Support the diversification of the region’s housing offering to provide affordable and accessible housing for the ageing population and those living with disabilities.</p>                                  | <p><b>DPE Planning,</b><br/>local councils,<br/>DRNSW</p> | <p>Ensuring affordable and accessible housing is available for all of the community.</p>   |
| <p><b>Monitor impacts of major projects to ensure long-term community benefits are generated.</b></p>  | <p>Government, regulation and information</p> | <p>Support undertaking feasibility studies and other relevant investigations to identify areas of the region which can support renewable energy generation and storage projects.</p>                            | <p><b>Local councils,</b><br/>DRNSW</p>                   | <p>Undertaking proactive steps to ensure the community receives long-term benefits from the investment being made to deliver major projects in the region.</p> |
|  |   | <p>Work collaboratively with local councils to identify opportunities to leverage investment in major projects in order to grow local supply chains to serve the needs of major projects and the community.</p> | <p><b>DRNSW,</b> local councils,<br/>Investment NSW</p>   |  |



Figure 18: The Historic Railway Station in Grenfell. Photo credit: Destination NSW.

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Figure 19: Pardey & Co. Ltd Flour Mill in Temora LGA. Photo credit: Temora Shire Council.