

Contact: Strategic Outcomes

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REDS Project Team
NSW Department of Regional NSW

Via email:
REDSproject@regional.nsw.gov.au



Civic Centre
68 Elizabeth Street Moss Vale
PO Box 141 Moss Vale NSW 2577

02 4868 0888
mail@wsc.nsw.gov.au
ABN 49 546 344 354

Submission to the draft Wingecarribee Regional Economic Development Strategy 2022 Update

Introduction

Wingecarribee Shire Council appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Wingecarribee Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS) 2022 Update currently on public exhibition.

Council is supportive of the Department's commitment to working with Council and key stakeholders to update the REDS to appropriately address the challenges and opportunities that have emerged since the introduction of the REDS in 2018.

Council generally supports the REDS Update which provides an evidence base to guide governments in making policy and investment decisions to support the growth, resilience and liveability of the region.

Council's feedback on the draft REDS Update is outlined below and detailed in the 'Feedback Template' provided as Attachment 1 to this letter.

Economic and Demographic Data

A number of the data sets used in the draft REDS update are not current and are not an accurate reflection of the changes that have occurred within the Wingecarribee Shire over the past four (4) years.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) will release updated data during October, and it is recommended that the draft REDS Update be amended prior to being finalised, to reflect the current (new) ABS data. Particularly, this will give a broader understanding of the ongoing impacts of economic shocks such as the Covid-19 Pandemic and will provide for a more robust and evidence-based strategy.

Working with you

Key Industries

The draft Update retains the four (4) key industries from the 2018 REDS, being manufacturing, agriculture, health care and tourism. While these industries continue to be critically important for the local economy, emerging industries such as knowledge-based industries and education and training play a significant role in local employment and economic development and should be given the same consideration in the Update as the four (4) key industries.

It is also recommended that references to 'tourism' in the draft Update be amended to 'Hospitality and Tourism' to provide a more accurate description and recognise the significance of the local hospitality industry within the region.

Strategies and Enablers

Council is generally supportive of the Strategies and Enablers outlined in the draft REDS update, however, additional Enablers such as infrastructure, digital connectivity, access / connection to markets, innovation and education would assist in facilitating the Strategies outlined in the draft REDS Update.

For example, one of the major barriers to providing housing supply and diversity within the regions, as well as creating liveable communities, is Government's (including Council) ability to plan for and fund essential infrastructure to support growing communities. This includes critical enabling infrastructure to unlock housing supply, as well as social and community infrastructure to support highly liveable communities.

In relation to 'People and Skills', a stronger focus on higher / tertiary education would assist in building a pipeline of local skills, support a diverse population and workforce, and support the local hospitality and tourism industry with part time and casual workers. Council is currently exploring opportunities to attract a full-scale university campus to the Shire, which would act as a catalyst to achieving the strategies outlined in the REDS Update. In this regard, it is recommended that the REDS Update be amended to identify tertiary education as a key enabler.

While the draft REDS Update identifies connectivity via road and rail as a key 'enabler', there is no recognition of the importance of digital connectivity in supporting economic development within the region. Digital connectivity, including high-speed business grade internet, is critical to support local businesses and economic development, particularly in the emerging knowledge-based industries and education sectors. Improved digital connectivity is considered a key enabler to achieve the strategies identified in the REDS and it is recommended that the REDS Update be amended to reflect the importance of digital connectivity.

Southern Highlands Innovation Park

The Southern Highlands Innovation Park (SHIP) is the largest employment precinct outside of the Western Sydney Aerotropolis and has the potential to support employment and economic development at a local and regional scale.

Council welcomes the opportunity to collaborate across government on the planning and development of the Southern Highlands Innovation Park, to ensure adequate service provision and infrastructure to unlock the potential of the precinct. While Council supports advanced manufacturing and professional and technical services, it is recommended that the REDS Update should also consider other industry sectors that will play a significant role in the SHIP such as tertiary education, research and development and sustainability.

Council thanks the Department for the opportunity to comment on the draft REDS Update and would welcome the opportunity to continue to work with the Department through the review process.

Yours sincerely



Michael Park
Executive Manager Strategic Outcomes