

Draft Far West Regional Plan 2041





Outback Astronomy, Broken Hill
Credit: Destination NSW

Published by NSW Department of Planning and Environment

Draft Far West Regional Plan 2041

First published: September 2022

© State of New South Wales through Department of Planning and Environment 2022. You may copy, distribute, display, download and otherwise freely deal with this publication for any purpose, provided that you attribute the Department of Planning and Environment as the owner. However, you must obtain permission if you wish to charge others for access to the publication (other than at cost); include the publication in advertising or a product for sale; modify the publication; or republish the publication on a website. You may freely link to the publication on a departmental website.

Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (September 2022) and may not be accurate, current or complete. The State of New South Wales (including the NSW Department of Planning and Environment), the author and the publisher take no responsibility, and will accept no liability, for the accuracy, currency, reliability or correctness of any information included in the document (including material provided by third parties). Readers should make their own inquiries and rely on their own advice when making decisions related to material contained in this publication.



Acknowledgement of Country

The draft *Far West Regional Plan 2041* recognises that, as part of the world's oldest living continuing culture, Traditional Owners and Custodians share a unique connection to Country – a connection forged through thousands of years of living in the region.

Planning for the Far West acknowledges the continuous Aboriginal connection to the land in the region.

The Department of Planning and Environment acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Barkindji, Barindji, Baranbinja, Gamilaraay, Karenggapa, Koamu, Kula, Kurnu, Malyangapa, Milpulo, Murrawarri, Muthi Muthi, Naualko, Ngemba, Ngayampaa, Ngurunta, Parintji, Parundji, Ualarai / Euahlayi, Wadikali, Wilyakali, Wanjiwalku, Pantjikali/Wanyiwalku, Paruntji, Weilwan, and Wongaibon Countries that this region sits within.

Aboriginal people have cared for the region for at least 60,000 years. Until colonisation, Aboriginal people lived sustainably, threatened only by natural hazards which were met with resilience gained from generations of life on Country and sustainable land management. The Aboriginal way of life was tied to the land which provided spiritual, cultural and physical sustenance.

Colonisation profoundly altered the lives of Aboriginal people and their land. Aboriginal people were dispossessed of their land and prevented from practising culture. Land was cleared and fenced, new flora and fauna were introduced and the movement of water across landscapes was modified.

Aboriginal people maintain a strong belief that if we care for Country, it will care for us. This requires Country to be cared for throughout the process of design and development. A Connecting with Country approach can give effect to statutory objectives that require Aboriginal culture and heritage to be sustainably managed in the built environment.

Using comprehensive and respectful approaches, planning for the Far West Region can build capacity and pathways for knowledge sharing between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

Image on front cover: Mount Oxley, Bourke.

Credit: Destination NSW.

Image on this page: Cultural Tours, Mutawinji National Park.

Credit: Destination NSW.

Artwork (above) by Nikita Ridgeway.

Contents

Minister's foreword	5
Introduction	6
Far West 2041 Vision	12

Part 1

Environment 14

Objective 1: Protect, connect and enhance biodiversity throughout the region	18
Objective 2: Protect and enhance culture and heritage	20
Objective 3: Manage water for people and the environment	21
Objective 4: Increase natural hazard resilience in the region	24

Part 2

People and communities 26

Objective 5: Support Aboriginal aspirations through land use planning	29
Objective 6: Plan for housing supply, diversity, affordability and resilience	31
Objective 7: Create a network of centres for the dispersed population	34
Objective 8: Enable appropriate rural residential development	35
Objective 9: Facilitate accommodation options for seasonal, temporary and key workers	36
Objective 10: Plan for connected cross-border communities	39

Part 3

Ongoing prosperity 40

Objective 11: Support and diversify visitor economy opportunities	43
Objective 12: Protect rural and mining industries	46
Objective 13: Protect and develop industry and manufacturing	50
Objective 14: Protect and leverage existing and future road, rail and air transport routes and infrastructure	52
Objective 15: Support the transition to net zero by 2050	54
Objective 16: Ensure government and community service provision	56

Glossary 57

References 59



Nettleton's First Shaft
Lookout, Lightning Ridge
Credit: Destination NSW

Minister's foreword

The Far West is NSW's largest region and one of the most geographically and environmentally diverse. Landscapes range from the outback semi-arid desert areas to rich farmlands, rangelands, and wetlands.

It is traversed by one of Australia's longest river systems, the Barwon-Darling, home to some of the world's oldest heritage sites and dotted with historic mining and agricultural towns that have strong links to the surrounding states and regions.

We've built on community and stakeholder aspirations for the region to create a draft regional plan that focuses on a more diverse economy, supported by the right infrastructure that services strong and resilient communities.

Building on the region's capacity and local leadership will unlock the Far West's unique opportunities. We can help to improve community wellbeing and economic growth by harnessing the strong sense of identity and community and by supporting locally initiated and coordinated approaches to service delivery.

This plan recognises the value of these unique landscapes in supporting existing industries and new economic ventures, including value-added manufacturing and tourism. The Far West can become a leader in renewable energy and climate change adaptation.

The remoteness of many Far West communities coupled with mining and agricultural history has resulted in the development of unique towns and villages. Significant opportunities exist for tourism, taking advantage of accessible outback experiences, dynamic communities, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal culture. The region has some of Australia's most significant cultural sites and landscapes and is home to part of the oldest continuing civilisation in the world.

Major intra-state and interstate transport routes connect the region to Sydney, South Australia, Victoria and Queensland, allowing for efficient freight and passenger transport to the rest

of the country and to ports for global export. Improving transport links and access to reliable telecommunications will provide economic and social benefits for the region's industries, residents and visitors.

Our aim is to support communities in the Far West as they adapt to the changing climate. The plan supports water security and green infrastructure that will contribute both to people's lifestyles and the sustainability and health of the environment.

We also want to help meet the needs of changing communities by creating a greater choice in the type of housing available and make it easier for people to access health and education services and public and community transport.

We recognise the region's Traditional Custodians and the contribution they make to the local economy and communities. As important partners and leaders in the region, they can help us to improve environmental, health, social and economic outcomes for everyone in the Far West.

The draft *Far West Regional Plan 2041* encompasses a vision, goals and actions geared towards achieving greater prosperity in the years ahead for the people who live and work in – or visit – this amazing part of Australia.



The Hon. Anthony Roberts
Minister for Planning
Minister for Homes

Introduction

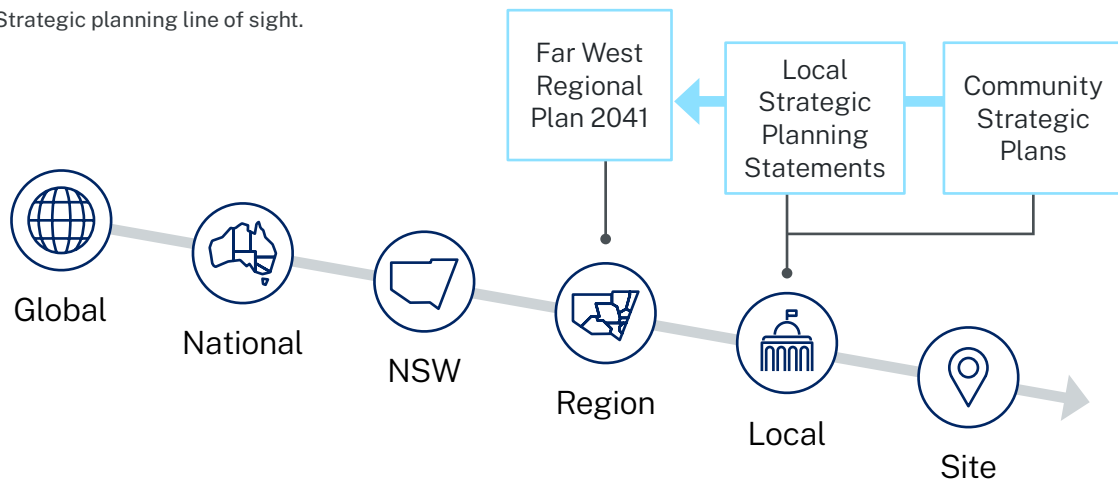
The Far West Region of NSW is one of the most remarkable places in Australia. Offering a mix of arid, semi-arid and riverine environments, with unique, heritage-filled towns and agricultural areas, the region encompasses the diverse local government areas (LGAs) of Balranald, Brewarrina, Bourke, Broken Hill, Central Darling, Cobar, Walgett, Wentworth, and the Unincorporated Area.

This draft *Far West Regional Plan 2041* focuses on the importance of place to the Far West's people and its ongoing prosperity. It is these places that make the region unique.

Figure 1: Context



Figure 2: Strategic planning line of sight.



Reviewing the regional plan

The draft *Far West Regional Plan 2041* is an update of the *Far West Regional Plan 2036*, the NSW Government's vision for the future of the Far West Region. That plan required the NSW Government to work with councils, stakeholders, and the community to achieve priority actions.

Regional plans are 20-year land use plans with a focus on the next 5 years. They are prepared under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act)*.

Since the release of the *Far West Regional Plan 2036*, amendments to planning legislation elevated the importance of strategic planning at a regional and local level. This planning is essential to managing changes in the population and economy while guiding the development of local strategic planning statements.

This updated regional plan draws from the local strategic planning statements prepared by each council for their LGA. It also recognises the interconnections the region has with other jurisdictions, as well as the relationships and commonalities with adjoining regions of NSW.

Our review considers how the region has changed in the last 5 years, the challenges ahead and how best we can respond. It is informed by:

- surveys of council and agency staff
- a council workshop and one-on-one consultation sessions
- consultation with the Far West Regional Leadership Executive and one-on-one consultation with state agencies
- analysis of issues and challenges, existing regional plan actions and government policy changes

- an audit and analysis of local strategic planning statements and relevant local strategies
- commissioned research on region-shaping development, on opportunities to support the region's councils' planning functions, a housing audit and recommendations for reactivating housing stock or land in Broken Hill and investigation into interstate policy and investment (primarily focused on the Riverina Murray with some cross over to the Far West Region).
- This is the first 5-year review of a regional plan for the Far West. It covers all facets of land use planning, including the natural environment, future hazards, housing and related infrastructure, employment areas and town centres.

This draft regional plan also incorporates recent strategic work such as regional economic development strategies, the *NSW 2040 Economic Blueprint*¹, *NSW State Water Strategy*², *Draft NSW Groundwater Strategy*³, *regional water strategies*, *Future Transport 2056*⁴, *NSW Services and Infrastructure Plan*⁵, the establishment of renewable energy zones (REZs) across NSW, *Housing 2041: NSW Housing Strategy*⁶ and regional housing reviews and policies.

The draft regional plan complements this work with land use responses that will help to meet NSW Government objectives, while supporting council and private proponent land use planning.

Analysis of council planning functions in the region found that under-resourced councils need greater support and a one-size-fits-all solution to planning is not going to be sustainable in the Far West Region.

These findings have informed the priorities identified in this plan and will be considered further during consultation and as we finalise the regional plan.

The drought, floods and COVID-19 pandemic of recent years will have a lasting impact on the natural environment, community wellbeing, infrastructure, and the economy. We have considered these impacts in the drafting of this regional plan.

Population change

Population projections forecast the long-term trend of population decline will continue in the region, alongside other trends such as an older population and an increase in single or 2-person households. These also influenced the review of the regional plan.

Housing demand will change in different ways in the region – for example, the population in areas like

Wentworth-Buronga will remain relatively stable while the population is expected to decline or fluctuate because of cyclical changes in industries such as agriculture and mining in places like Broken Hill, Cobar, and Ivanhoe.

Population projections are predictions only; the future is uncertain and unexpected events and policy decisions may alter future population change. We therefore use a range of population outlooks, which means the draft regional plan:

- provides an aspirational outlook in relation to the region's employment and investment strengths and opportunities
- provides a framework that could equally apply to other population outcomes.

Population projections are regularly reviewed to understand and respond to unexpected events such as the COVID-19 pandemic or expected events such as investment on large mining or renewable energy projects and demographic changes.

Murray Darling Junction, Wentworth
Credit: Destination NSW



Focus areas and priorities

The draft regional plan provides a targeted land use planning approach focused on:

- adapting to a hotter and drier climate by helping to create great places and more resilient housing and centres
- providing services to the region's dispersed population, including older people, including in the areas where the population is declining
- capitalising on:
 - better intra and inter-regional transport, digital connectivity, housing choices and lifestyle opportunities
 - strong agricultural, extractive resource, renewable energy, government service and visitor economy sectors, given the expected \$2.332 billion investment in construction in the next 5 years).
- growth pressures in border communities in the south west and along waterways
- rivers and riverine corridors as places for cultural connection, public spaces, recreation, conservation and appropriate economic activity
- helping Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) to utilise the planning system and optimise their land holdings and improving understanding of the planning needs of Registered Native Title Body Corporates (RNTBCs)
- aligning water security and land use planning early
- considering the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (BC Act) early in the strategic planning and development process
- the declining population in some areas and what this means for people's health, wellbeing, and lifestyles
- population change and demand for different types of housing due to changing demographics, temporary workers and tourism opportunities
- Broken Hill as a regional city that provides services for much of the region, and as the focus of an increasing renewable energy, mining and visitor economy
- the opportunities of a changing regional economy and catalyst projects such as the South-West Renewable Energy Zone (South West REZ), and major renewable energy, livestock processing and mining projects
- the region's role and relationships with other NSW regions and states, particularly Victoria and South Australia, and the influence of investment and policy decisions on border communities and Broken Hill
- the NSW Government's commitment for net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Sunrise, Broken Hill
Credit: Destination NSW



Key priorities for implementing the planning system in the Far West:

The regional plan review also identified a need for councils and state agencies to work together to support implementation of the planning system. This assistance could occur in a number of ways, with councils identifying that they need assistance in the following areas:

Strategic planning for housing

Rather than each council undertaking their own local housing strategy, there is opportunity to generate a regional or sub-regional scale housing strategy that can inform LSPs in their next review.

LEP reviews and amendment

All Far West Councils LEPs are approximately 10 years old and require review, either as comprehensive reviews or as packages of amendments.

Flood management strategic work

Updating hazards mapping, including flooding, to inform up-to-date hazard planning.

Local strategic planning statement reviews

Councils told us that their local strategic planning statements lack sufficient place-based content. Once finalised, the new Far West Regional Plan 2041 will inform the next generation of local strategic planning statements.

Standard development and engineering controls

Some councils either do not have planners or sufficient experience and in-house technical guidance for development and engineering controls, including for more complex development proposals.

Reclassification of council-owned land

Various councils have parcels of land that has been incorrectly classified as 'community land' which affects its ability to be used for (often existing) infrastructure or for it to be sold.

The department will consult with the councils and other state agencies to identify an ongoing and sustainable approach to providing planning assistance to Far West councils and how these initiatives can be integrated into the final Far West Regional Plan 2041.

Question: What other priorities should be included in the final plan and how should these be integrated into the final plan?

Reading the draft regional plan

We have developed a draft vision for the region to 2041. This is supported by:

- **objectives:** high-level goals usually containing strategies, actions or collaboration activities
- **strategies** identify policy positions or directions implemented through local strategic planning statements, strategic planning, statutory planning or state agency planning
- **actions** are led by the Department of Planning and Environment (identified as DPE in these actions) in the next 5 years.

- **collaboration activities** are led by the department (again, identified as DPE) with state agencies, councils or other organisations.

We have also listed resources – the related plans, policies and other documents that will provide further guidance. You can find these on the regional plan webpage (www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Plans-for-your-area/Regional-Plans/Far-West).

Question: What other resources should be included on the website?

We also list questions that seek specific feedback or advice on any gaps.

Implementation, monitoring and review

The department's Western Region team coordinates the implementation of the regional plan and reports on progress to the Far West Regional Leadership Executive (RLE), councils, state agencies, Aboriginal organisations and the community.

The RLE – comprised of state agencies in each region of NSW – responds to emerging opportunities and issues, leads cross-government or multi-agency actions, provides strategic advice, brokers solutions and makes decisions using a whole-of-region and whole-of-government lens. It is the forum to discuss and resolve implementation issues.

A supporting implementation plan prioritises actions, collaboration activities and council activities. These priorities allow councils and state agencies to focus resources. Indicative timeframes for actions, collaboration activities and council activities are:

- short-term – 1-2 years
- medium-term – 2-3 years
- longer-term – 4-5 years
- ongoing – activities that will occur over several years, as multiple projects or initiatives.

We will test these priorities during consultation and release the implementation plan and final regional plan before the end of 2022.

Bi-annual planning forums between the department and councils focus on regional plan performance and collaboration opportunities. We will update councils on key actions and discuss emerging issues and trends to identify where support is needed. The forums may reprioritise or change regional plan components as required.

Working groups based on identified collaboration activities will include members relevant to the collaboration activity and will meet as needed. The scoping of these activities will consider the SKM Planning review of the planning system in the Far West Region.

The implementation plan, reporting on actions and collaboration activities and other indicators will be displayed on the department's web site.

Resourcing

The Far West Region suffers skill shortages and recruitment difficulties in the planning and construction industries and in the industries essential to towns and cities, such as doctors and teachers.

Strategic planning professionals can advise governments and the community on issues critical to economic vitality, environmental enhancement and community wellbeing. The shortage of planning staff limits councils' ability to undertake strategic planning projects.

Several proposed collaboration activities identify how the NSW Government could work with and support the region's councils, LALCs, native title groups, and organisations with the resources – human and otherwise – to achieve the plan's priorities.

Question: *What can be done to better resource planning and related functions in the region?*

Far West 2041 Vision

The Far West Region is a unique part of western NSW with a diverse economy, the right infrastructure, an exceptional natural environment, a rich Aboriginal culture and resilient communities

In 2041, people in the Far West Region enjoy the distinctive rural character of their communities, with a higher standard of living and wellbeing, and quality built and natural environments.

People visit from around Australia and the world to embrace the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage and the unique and accessible outback experiences.

Collaborative partnerships between government and local stakeholders have improved inter-regional rail and road infrastructure to increase transport choice, build resilience of the region's transport network and improve freight and passenger links. Innovative and affordable public, community and active transport facilities and services make it easy for people to travel to work, socialise and enjoy recreation options.

The region is a leader in climate change adaptation and supporting remote communities. People access the latest information to manage natural hazard risks and respond to the impacts of climate change and water availability. The Far West meets benchmarks for sustainable and innovative water resource management in agriculture, mining and community water supply, and water is shared equitably among existing water users, the environment, Aboriginal people and new developments.

Major rivers –including the Barwon, Darling and Murray –natural waterways, wetlands and environmental corridors, together with many other environmental and cultural heritage features, enrich the lives of residents and attract domestic and international tourists.

The diversified regional economy is focused on a sustainable mining sector in Broken Hill, Cobar, Wentworth and Balranald, which generates jobs, supports related industries and requires new housing that contributes to centres and communities. Growth in renewable energy – including wind, solar and bioenergy generation – creates jobs in smaller communities and in associated industries.

Communication technologies mean more people work and access services locally. New residents are arriving, and older people can keep living in the places they know. New jobs, services and housing attract young families and skilled workers for a fresh start or to return to where they grew up.

Well designed, climate-resilient housing meets the needs of communities, including the Aboriginal community, older people, singles, families, low-income households, and seasonal and itinerant workers.

Walgett, Brewarrina, Bourke and Cobar LGAs are well connected to the Orana and services in Dubbo. People living in Wentworth and Balranald LGAs have ties with communities along the Murray River, and can access the infrastructure and services in Mildura, Victoria.

The region's centres offer attractive areas for people to explore and relax, including unique main streets within an outback environment. Broken Hill is a thriving regional city with connections to Adelaide and services for the western part of the region.

Place-based planning controls support ongoing planning, with councils supported in their planning functions by the department and other state agencies.

Question: *Is this the right vision for the Far West for the next 20 years?*

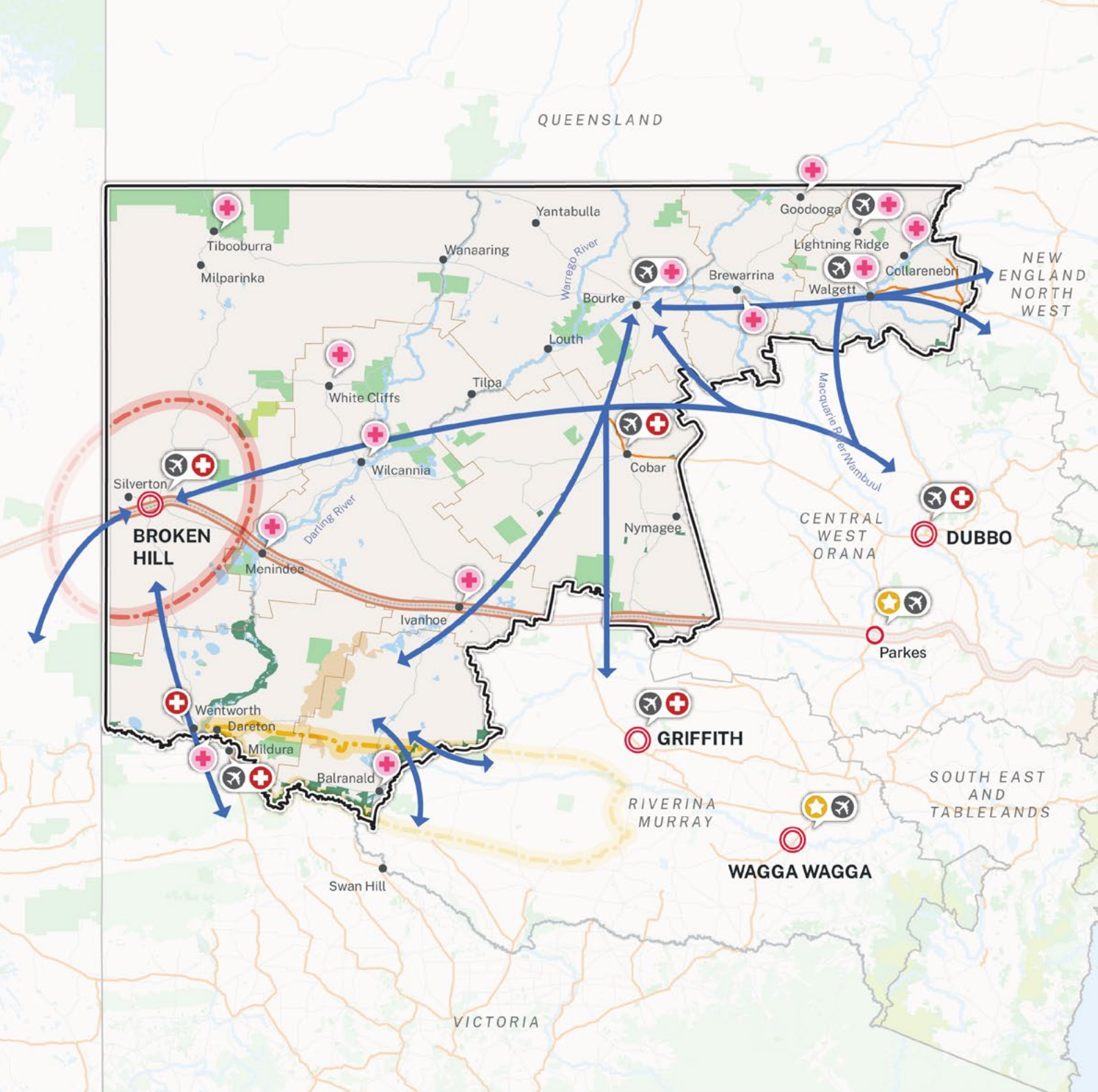


Figure 3: Vision



PART

1

Environment



Mungo National Park, Outback NSW
Credit: Destination NSW



PART

1

Environment

The Far West's natural environment is what makes it unique. The region's semi-arid and arid landscapes support:

- 9 of the 18 bioregions in NSW, dominated by semi-arid sandy and stony plains, and floodplains of brown and grey clay soils, crossed by river channels
- Red Gum, Coolibah and Black Box communities on floodplains, undulating plains of mallee shrubland, dune fields extending into Queensland
- the geologically unique and mineral rich areas around Broken Hill, Cobar and Ivanhoe.

Water is a significant feature of the region's semi-arid environment, with multiple interconnected rivers, creeks, groundwater aquifers, wetlands and human-made waterbodies. The main rivers are the Barwon-Darling River system and its tributaries, the Murray River, and to a smaller extent, the Murrumbidgee River.

These river systems, their tributaries and wetlands (such as the Ramsar-listed Paroo River wetlands) support and connect biodiversity and human habitation across the region into Queensland, Victoria and South Australia.

The Barwon–Darling connects the northern and southern basins. Maintaining connectivity between the river and its tributaries is a challenge during dry periods and drought. The variable and changing climate, releases from upstream dams and water extraction all impact on the amount of water that flows downstream into the Far West Region.

More than 1,000,000 ha of national parks and nature reserves protect vast areas of the region. This includes the Sturt, Paroo–Darling, Mutawintji, Kinchega and Mungo national parks, and recent acquisitions such as the 121,390 ha Avenel–Mt Westwood Station (north of Broken Hill) which includes vegetation from the Broken Hill Complex (BHC) Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia (IBRA) region. Acquisitions target specific areas to ensure the progressive protection of several underrepresented IBRA regions in the National Reserve System.⁷

Since colonisation vegetation and landscapes in the Far West region have been substantially modified through the expansion of pastoralism and the use of groundwater resources from the Great Artesian Basin and the introduction of feral animals to the region, in particular goats.

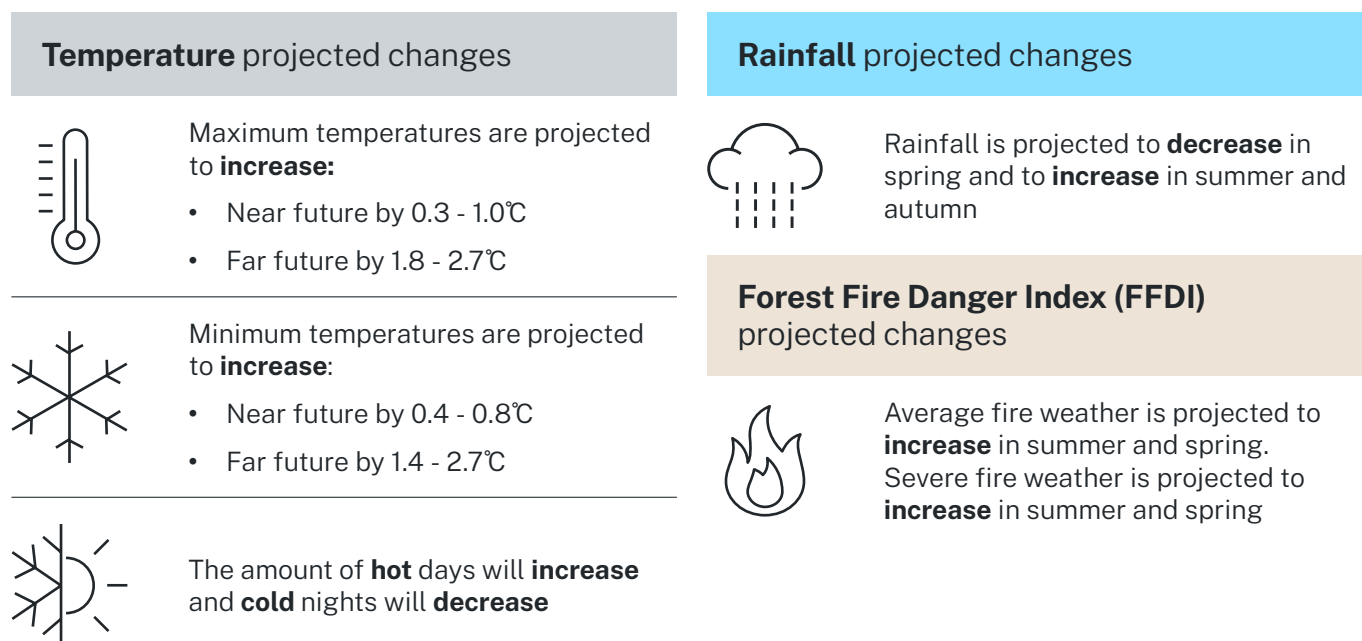
Despite these impacts, we recognise these ancient lands as home to some of the most culturally significant areas in the country, including Aboriginal heritage sites such as Lake Mungo in the state, national and world heritage listed Willandra Lakes Region, the sacred historical sites of Mutawintji National Park, Aboriginal art sites at Gundabooka National Park and Baime's Ngunnhu (Brewarrina fish traps).

Broken Hill also has a national heritage listing and other centres have connections to early settlement, such as Wentworth, once the busiest inland port in NSW, and Cobar for its rich mining heritage.

Nature and culture-based tourism provides economic value and employment opportunities, across the region, including for Aboriginal people.

Climate change projections show temperatures will keep rising, rainfall patterns will change, and droughts could be more severe.⁸ The frequency, intensity, and extent of known natural hazards such as heatwaves, bushfires, droughts, flooding, and storms will increase, as will the potential for cumulative or concurrent large-scale natural hazards to occur and create new hazards such as heat stress. These changes will impact both biodiversity and humans.

Figure 4: Projected temperature and rainfall changes in Far West Region



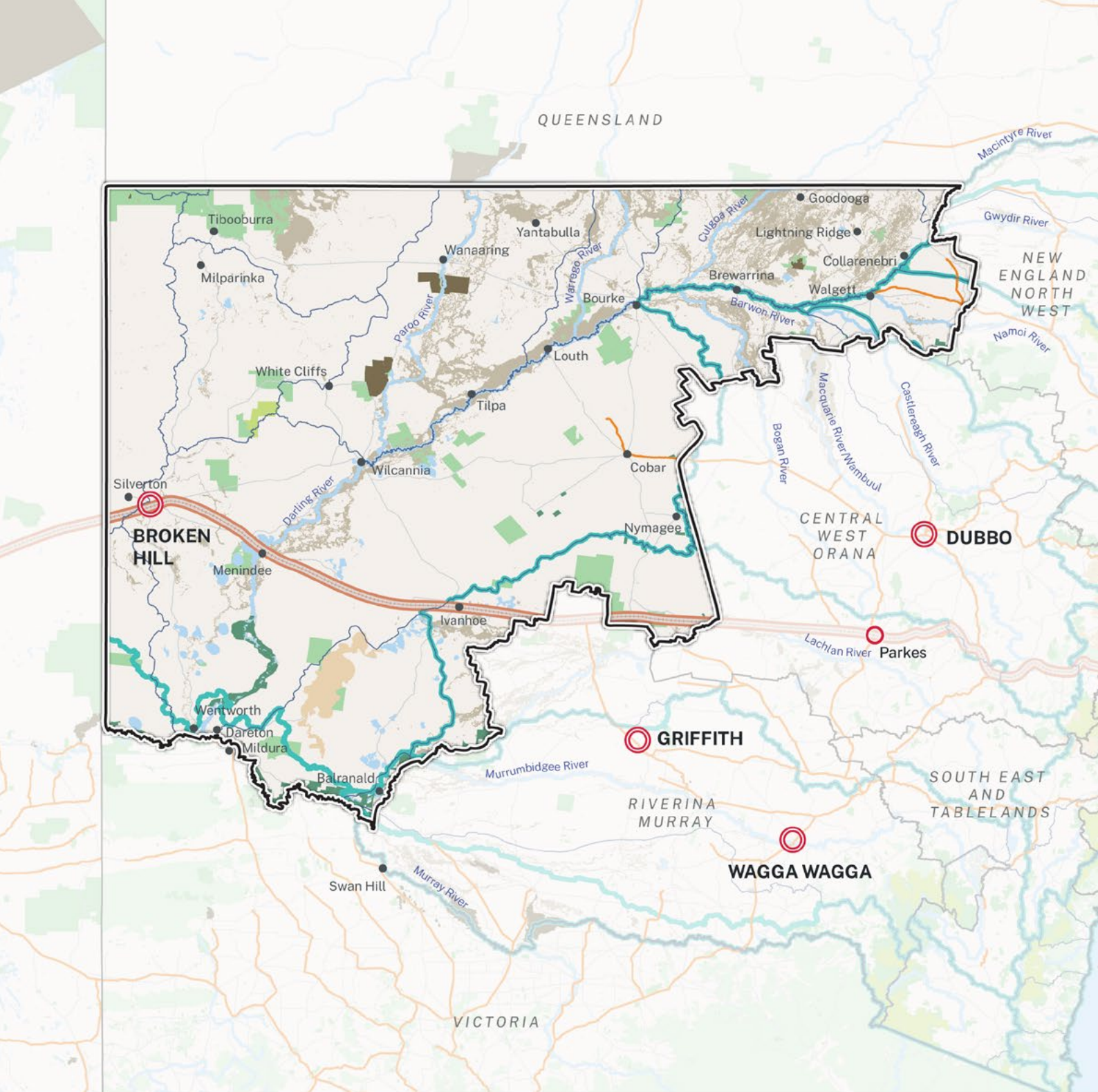


Figure 5: Environment assets



OBJECTIVE 1:

Protect, connect and enhance biodiversity throughout the region

Perry Sandhills, Wentworth
Credit: Destination NSW



The region's rich environmental assets provide ecosystem services as well as connections to Country and positive human experiences and interactions. In areas likely to experience population and/or economic growth, biodiversity values could be compromised if native vegetation is cleared. A collective government effort can identify biodiversity values to:

- provide detailed mapping to councils to identify areas with biodiversity values in local environmental plans (LEPs)
- inform land use decision-making throughout the development process
- avoid and minimise biodiversity loss
- connect and enhance the green infrastructure networks including open space, bushland and waterways
- identify land for environmental conservation, including on land identified for development
- align the BC Act and the EP&A Act to achieve the objectives of both.

Identifying biodiversity values will avoid unnecessary costs and delays at the development application stage. Biodiversity corridors can be strengthened across landscapes, including waterways and riparian corridors, alongside road reserves and in urban areas. These corridors connect bioregions, allow the movement of animals and plants, and provide refugia as the climate changes or natural disasters occur. Again, their identification and protection require a collective effort from councils, residents, developers and the NSW Government.

Recent acquisitions by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service will protect regional environmental values and assets while providing new tourism and operational jobs. As more acquisitions occur we need to consider other impacts on rural communities such as impacts on agricultural production, council rate bases and land management to fully integrate new reserves into the regional economy.

Strategy 1.1



Strategic and statutory planning should aim to first avoid, then minimise, impacts on biodiversity and the natural environment. Biodiversity offsetting (through the BC Act) should only be used when these principles are not feasible. Councils will engage with DPE (Environment) when developing local strategic planning statements and other strategic planning to achieve these principles.

Strategic and statutory planning will:

- identify the biodiversity attributes/values of zoned and strategy-identified investigation areas
- identify zoned urban areas that may be difficult to develop due to biodiversity values
- protect high environmental value land through conservation zones and agreements
- ensure land uses adjacent to high environmental value land and land containing regional and locally significant corridors are compatible with conservation outcomes or have adequate buffers to separate incompatible land uses
- review and update biodiversity mapping and best practice provisions in LEPs.

Collaboration Activity 1 (Ongoing)



DPE (Planning) will work with relevant councils, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and other agencies to ensure national park acquisitions consider:

- agricultural production value and potential and whether areas should remain in production
- land management practices required to integrate with adjoining land uses, particularly active agricultural enterprises
- reductions in rate base, including for council rates and the border fences contribution
- employment opportunities, including for Aboriginal people, including operational, tourism and cultural tourism opportunities.

Collaboration Activity 2 (Ongoing)



DPE (Planning) will work with DPE (Environment) and Crown Lands to ensure the NSW Planning Portal captures validated spatial data on biodiversity values, including data to inform:

- local strategies and local, regional and state significant development proposals
- identification and protection of regionally significant biodiversity corridors and climate refugia

Collaboration Activity 3 (Ongoing)



DPE (Planning) and DPE (Environment) will support and guide councils in their work to:

- understand and apply the BC Act
- prepare and review LEP and development control plan (DCP) controls/principles to guide development and align the EP&A Act and the BC Act throughout development assessment.

Question: Do these strategies and activities balance land use planning and environmental outcomes at a regional level?

OBJECTIVE 2:

Protect and enhance culture and heritage

The Far West Region has a unique history and maintains its heritage character within its settlements and as part of an accessible outback experience. The conservation of Aboriginal heritage and the rights of Aboriginal people to determine how their heritage is identified and managed upholds some of the world's longest standing spiritual, historical, social and educational values.

Heritage is irreplaceable and should be valued and protected. Appropriate heritage management mechanisms, developed with communities, includes heritage studies of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural heritage that can inform strategic and statutory land use planning.

Appropriate protection and recognition of heritage helps to maintain and celebrate local character. Heritage is more than just managing the material culture of the past – it is about understanding how heritage influences and shapes communities today.

Respectfully and authentically combining history and heritage with modern design creates places with shared values and a clear sense of place and identity. This can:

- contribute to a sense of place, for current and future generations
- appropriately re-use heritage items for cultural and economic infrastructure
- attract tourism, businesses and new residents.

Better promotion and targeted community education initiatives can increase community support for heritage assets. This includes incorporating Aboriginal knowledge, culture and traditions into centres, places and developments to embed cultural awareness and build respect for the region's cultural history and the living culture of Aboriginal people.



Bourke Aboriginal Tours, Bourke
Credit: Destination NSW

Strategy 2.1

Councils will identify, conserve and enhance cultural heritage values by:

- engaging with the community (including Traditional Owners) early in the planning process
- undertaking heritage studies to inform conservation, adaptive re-use and development opportunities
- identifying opportunities for Traditional Owners to manage and protect Aboriginal heritage.

Strategy 2.2

Strategic and local planning will help to improve protection of the heritage of the region's centres by:

- identifying and protecting scenic and cultural landscapes, informed by early engagement with the Aboriginal community in the planning process
- reflecting local built form, heritage and character in new and existing residential, retail and commercial developments.

Collaboration Activity 4 (Ongoing)

DPE (Planning) will support councils to incorporate heritage planning controls into local environmental plans.

OBJECTIVE 3:

Manage water for people and the environment

Townscape, Wilcannia
Credit: Destination NSW



The region's river systems and water bodies are home to nationally and internationally significant environmental and heritage sites, such as Menindee Lakes, Barwon–Darling River, Paroo River, Murray River, Baiame's Ngunnhu (Brewarrina Fish Traps), and the World Heritage listed Willandra Lakes Region. The region's waterways, floodplains and riparian lands:

- are a resource base and home for Aboriginal people and contain culturally significant heritage items
- provide water for ecosystems and support communities, culture and the economy
- provide recreation areas and open spaces for towns and communities
- offer lifestyle opportunities (when managed appropriately) for residents and visitors.

Healthy water catchments support water quality, community health, healthy landscapes and ongoing economic activity and human settlement. As the region's climate and communities change, development on riverine land must conserve waterways, enhance ecological functions and respond to current and future natural hazards.

Managing the social, cultural, environmental and economic importance of rivers requires a coordinated and consistent approach to land use planning from all levels of government. This includes how water resources are managed and planned, how new development interacts with rivers and waterfront areas and the connectivity of riverine environments across the landscape.

Water availability and security are a concern. Cobar's mining industry relies on a secure and reliable water source, with water assets from Nyngan to Cobar reaching their end of life. Upgrades to infrastructure are crucial to the viability of the industry. The pressures of drought, climate change and population change require integrated water planning. Access to water is critical for some land uses but not always an upfront consideration, which can place pressure on stressed water resources.

Opportunities to integrate water resources in strategic planning will optimise water use, water re-use and recycling and shared existing or new water infrastructure, while helping us to understand how land use decisions impact water sources in the context of a capped system.

Riverfront development

Riverfront land can offer opportunities for rural residential living and visitor accommodation, with access to town centres. Development in riverine areas must be carefully planned and managed to enhance environmental values and other lifestyle benefits, while avoiding:

- ribbon development and riverfront fragmentation
- a decrease in public access to rivers and waterways
- a decrease in natural amenity
- a cumulative impact of increased clearing in the river corridors and water extraction.

Any land use change should only occur if compatible with other land uses, particularly biodiversity values, agriculture, and flooding hazards, and only if there is a net benefit regarding conservation of the river, its foreshore areas and increased public access.

Riverfront activation

Rivers and riverfront areas can be the centrepiece of riverfront communities, allowing residents and tourists to visually connect and sensitively interact with the water. Improved public space and access and links between towns and riverine areas can optimise the heritage and character of a place, make waterway areas more attractive to pedestrians and cyclists, or potentially create new public spaces.

Opportunities to connect pedestrian and cycle networks to riverine areas from centres, residential areas, employment areas, cultural facilities and transport nodes can occur alongside improvements to riparian zones and river channels.

Celebrating the historical values of the region's riverfront sites through interpretive design elements and cultural activities will create new destinations, experiences, and stories. Collaboration and partnerships with Aboriginal communities and Traditional Owners can identify opportunities for cultural practice, while recognising culture, place, and economic opportunities for Aboriginal people, including cultural tourism.

Strategy 3.1



Strategic planning will optimise water use by:

- considering water supply, security and quality issues and opportunities throughout the planning process
- locating, designing, constructing and managing new developments to minimise impacts on water catchments, including downstream impacts and groundwater resources
- encouraging the re-use of water in existing and new development for extractive or non-extractive purposes
- identifying water-related gaps in the planning system and assessing the adequacy of land use planning controls to protect water resources.
- considering the evidence base and actions in the Western, Murray and Murrumbidgee regional water strategies, the NSW Water Strategy and NSW Groundwater Strategy
- identifying creeks and waterways as open space for recreation and biodiversity corridors that should be enhanced and protected
- integrating natural features such as bushland and waterways into public space proposals.

Strategy 3.2



Strategic and statutory planning for riverine environments will be consistent with the department's waterfront development guideline.

Strategy 3.3



Strategic and statutory planning for riverine environments should consider the department's riverfront development guidelines and the guiding principles for activation of riverfront areas.

Action 1 (Short-term)

DPE (Planning) will develop riverfront development guidelines to support decision-making for development on or near rivers. The guidelines will:

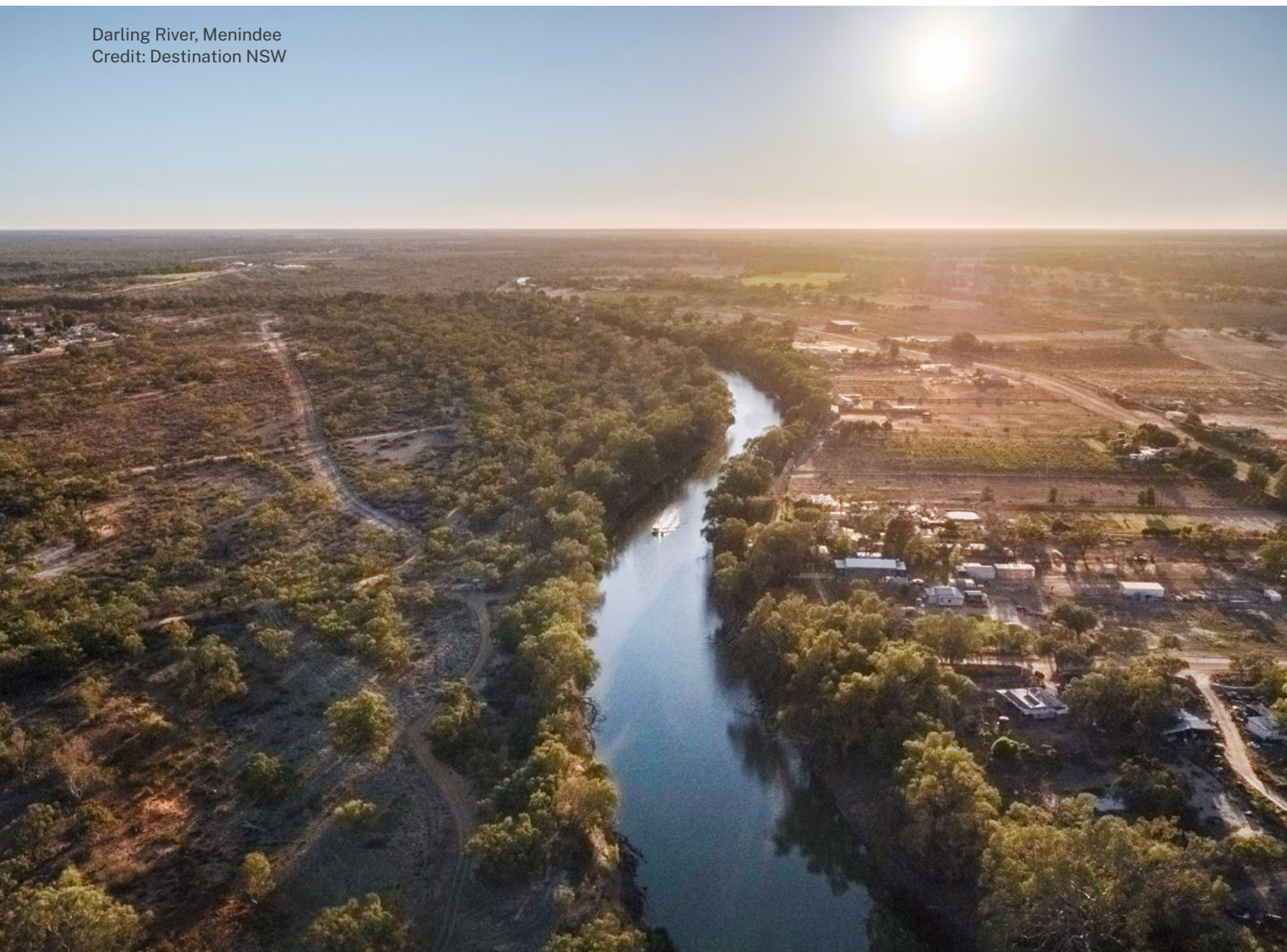
- inform riverfront development and strategic and statutory planning to manage competing land uses along river corridors and riverine land and ensure intergenerational equity for access to rivers, including the needs of Aboriginal communities
- provide best-practice design principles to support a regionally consistent approach to the design and siting of development and land uses on riverine land
- inform local planning provisions to protect and enhance riverine lands.

Action 2 (Medium-term)

DPE (Planning) will investigate a framework for the management of the Western NSW riverfront areas, including:

- priority areas for activation and protection
- mechanisms to fund public ownership of riverfront land, prepare riverfront activation strategies and build a body of knowledge regarding the implementation and delivery of riverfront activation strategies
- mechanisms to ensure riverfront areas provide public and environmental benefits, in perpetuity
- support for councils on the planning and management of riverfront lands.

Darling River, Menindee
Credit: Destination NSW



OBJECTIVE 4:

Increase natural hazard resilience in the region

Ivanhoe-Menindee Road, Ivanhoe
Credit: Destination NSW



As the region's climate changes, there is potential for increasing frequency, intensity and extent of floods, bushfire and droughts and potential for cumulative or concurrent large-scale events.⁹ For example, between 2017-2020 the Far West went through its worst 3-year drought on record, which included record high temperatures, some of the lowest inflows to the Barwon–Darling on record, extremely poor water quality, more than 12 months of no flow along the river and significant fish deaths. This was followed by intense flooding and rainfall, with the region receiving more than 140mm in a single day, surpassing the previous day record set in 1989.

Further, flooding and high rainfall in Queensland 2020 resulted in one of the largest flows down the Barwon-Darling River causing slow moving and long-lasting flooding.

Increased heat, drought and more intense flood events are the 3 main natural hazards that will require careful management, with different areas requiring different responses to different impacts:

- Along rivers and their tributaries flooding often occurs as slow flowing events that last for long periods. These can affect sealed and unsealed roads and leave communities and producers with limited access to services or to get produce to market for months at a time due to key freight routes and roads being inundated by water or unsafe to drive on.
- In some centres, like Broken Hill, and along creeks and drainage lines, flash flooding events can similarly impact infrastructure and roads that cannot withstand the nature of the event and cause disruptions to local road access and supply chains.
- Growth pressures in the south of the region along the Murray and Darling rivers and desirability of riverfront, rural and environmental lands increase demand for development near floodplains, high saline and bushland hazard areas.

Ongoing improvements to the region's road networks –such as the sealing of Pooncarie Road to allow Central Darling residents to connect to Mildura and Wentworth and installing signage along the Silver City Highway–can benefit economic and social connectivity and infrastructure resilience.

New and existing development areas will require careful design and management to ensure an acceptable hazard risk to local communities, so that development decisions do not increase the exposure of people and property to natural hazards. Similarly, levees and flood mitigation works must be planned and upgraded to respond to the most up to date flood and climate projection data.

The planning system can limit the exposure of new development to natural hazards and climate change through a risk-management approach. However, identifying and reviewing hazard-prone lands and their associated risks is a challenge for many councils, particularly given resourcing constraints. Councils often rely on site-by-site analyses that accompany rezoning or development applications, instead of more strategic flood studies.

Three new Doppler radars at Brewarrina Airport, Hillston and Parkes have filled weather radar blackspots, providing real-time weather data that enable emergency services, aviation, businesses, authorities, tourists and residents to make better decisions on immediate weather conditions.¹⁰ This contributes to meteorological record-keeping to understand rainfall trends, improving decision-making. However, some areas in the Far West still do not have accurate weather information.

Resources

The following NSW Government policies and guidelines can guide natural hazard risk management:

- *Planning for a more resilient NSW: A strategic guide to planning for natural hazards*, December 2021
- *Handbook for Strategic Guide to Planning for Natural Hazards*, December 2021
- *Strategic guide to planning for natural hazards – Resource Kit*, December 2021
- *Considering flooding in land use planning guidelines*, July 2021
- *Planning for Bushfire Protection Guideline*, November 2019
- *Flood Prone Land Policy and Floodplain Development Manual*, April 2005

Strategy 4.1



Strategic and statutory planning will:

- be consistent with applicable NSW policies, manuals and/or guidelines
- take a risk-based approach that uses best available evidence in consultation with the NSW Government, emergency service providers, local emergency management committees and bush fire risk management committees
- locate development away from areas of known bushfire, salinity and flooding risk
- encourage opportunities to co-locate compatible land uses such as open spaces, biodiversity conservation areas and nature-based tourism in high hazard risk locations
- design communities that:
 - provide public spaces that build community cohesion and interaction so that communities are better placed to withstand and adapt to climate change and respond to natural hazard events
 - include green infrastructure networks at precinct and landscape scales to help avoid hazards such as urban heat island effect
- provide easy to understand information to increase public awareness of potential natural hazard risks and climate change impacts
- integrate water-sensitive urban design elements to reduce the risk of flooding.

Collaboration Activity 5 (Medium-term)



DPE (Planning) and DPE (Environment) will support councils in undertaking flood and bushfire studies and/or preparing management plans:

- informed by updated mapping and climatic data
- prepared in accordance with the relevant manuals, policies and guidelines
- incorporated into relevant planning provisions
- that improve resilience of transport networks to flood impacts in collaboration with Transport for NSW and the NSW State Emergency Service.

PART

2

People and communities



Townscape, Walgett
Credit: Destination NSW



Townscape, Bourke
Credit: Destination NSW

PART

2

People and communities

The Far West offers a unique lifestyle. Proactively planning for change will benefit communities, residents and tourists. The region's population is changing – it is getting older overall with population decline in some areas and relatively stable populations in others.

While the Far West region is projected to require less dwellings to house its population by 2041, there is still expected to be demand for new and renovated housing in parts of the region. Housing affordability and vacancy rates have decreased in recent times, which impacts homelessness and accommodation availability for key workers (e.g. teachers, police and health workers) and tourists. We also expect an increase in demand for smaller housing for the increase in single and couple-only households.¹¹

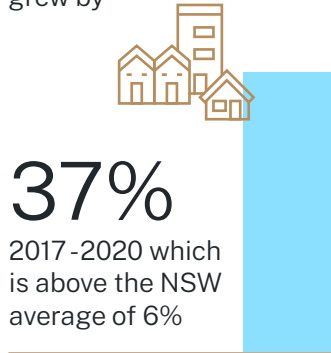
One solution to meet the need for new and appropriate housing may be to better use existing unoccupied housing stock and serviced land.

The number of Aboriginal people in remote and very remote areas of Australia is expected to increase marginally. North-Western NSW expected to record annual Aboriginal population growth rates of 0.6% and 0.3% under high and low series projections respectively.¹² The housing needs of the region's Aboriginal population should be a consideration in strategic and statutory planning.

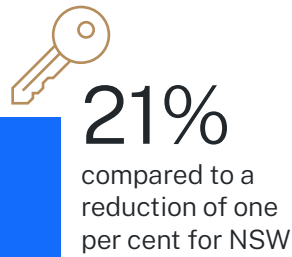
Other issues that will shape the region's housing market include:

- the inflow and outflow of workers (with or without their families) for construction or as existing projects like mines close or new projects commence operation
- seasonal fluctuations for agriculture, the visitor economy or the impacts of climatic events like prolonged drought
- changes to agriculture such as water availability, a shift toward larger landholdings and technological advancements in the agriculture industry.

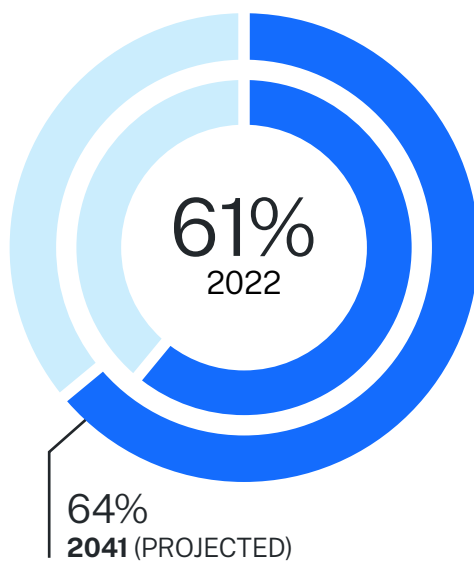
Average house prices in the region grew by



Average weekly rents also increased by



Lone person or couple households in the region



65+ age group projected to make up **30% of the total population** (22% in 2022) in 2041



Household size is projected to decline from 2.24 in 2022 to **2.11 in 2041.**

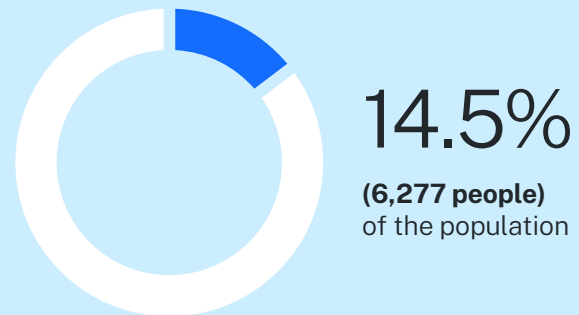


The 2021 Census found that 25% of dwellings (**3,883 dwellings**) were unoccupied



Waiting times for social housing currently are on **average 2-5 years** for various house types in the region

Aboriginal people in the region:



- **had larger households** than the regional average (3 people per household, compared with 2 per household across NSW)
- had a **younger median age** than the regional average (i.e. 29 years, compared to 39 for NSW)

COVID-19 and housing

During the COVID-19 pandemic, less people left the regions for capital cities and more people left capital cities to live in the regions, resulting in record-high net increases of people living outside Greater Sydney.

Strong housing sales and increased demand for rental properties in regional areas led to housing price increases in 2020-21 with rents in regional NSW growing at a faster rate than Sydney. Pre-COVID, house prices in regional NSW were less volatile than in Sydney and rental vacancy rates were steady but tight. Since COVID-19, average regional rental vacancy dropped to below 1%. These trends have increased pressure on the availability and affordability of housing.

Overcrowding and poor-quality housing can result in poor health outcomes; this was exacerbated by COVID-19. Outbreaks in 2021 highlighted the housing strain in towns such as Wilcannia where case number increased due to the inability for individuals to isolate from their extended families.

Homes where up to 4 generations live together were severely impacted in a short period. In response, NSW Health and other agencies organised temporary accommodation, deploying motor homes so that positive patients and close contacts could safely isolate.

OBJECTIVE 5:

Support Aboriginal aspirations through land use planning

Streetscapes, Broken Hill
Credit: Destination NSW



The land and environment are deeply entwined with Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal people's connection to Country. As the first managers and carers of the region's lands, Aboriginal people have rights and a moral obligation to care for it under their law and customs.

The *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* (ALR Act) provides for the return of land to Aboriginal people as compensation for past dispossession. LALCs work to improve, protect and foster the best interests of all Aboriginal people in their area. There are 16 LALCs in the Far West Region, working across multiple LGAs and regional boundaries.

Where LALCs seek to leverage economic development of their land, they usually need to engage with the NSW planning system. However, links between land rights and planning legislation have been limited until recently, meaning the benefits of land rights for Aboriginal people have not been fully realised. LALCs have varying levels of knowledge about, and engagement with, the NSW planning system and development processes. This influences decision-making about the future use of land.

Native title recognises the traditional ownership of land and waters that have always belonged to Aboriginal people according to their traditions, laws, and customs. The *Commonwealth Native Title Act 1993* sets out how to recognise and protect native title rights. While native title rights differ

from the statutory right of LALCs to make claims for land under the ALR Act, native title holders can also own land in freehold. Further consultation will be required with native title holders, via Registered Native Title Body Corporates (RNTBCs), to identify where their interests will interact with the planning system, and how their aspirations for their land can be supported.

The NSW Government will work with Aboriginal communities to better understand and align strategic planning and Aboriginal community aspirations. Improving the cultural competency of all planning practitioners benefits the whole community and should also be promoted and accelerated.

Land use planning should also connect with other NSW Government policy and initiatives so that LALCs and native title holders can capitalise on opportunities for land they own, including:

- biodiversity offsetting, providing water to meet Aboriginal cultural and economic aspirations and public infrastructure
- the Roads to Home program, which aims to allow discrete Aboriginal communities across NSW to subdivide their land and improve access to infrastructure and services.

Councils should also engage with LALCs to consider whether the planning provisions that apply to their land are appropriate and to understand.



Buronga HealthOne facility

In 2020, a lease agreement between the NSW Government and the Barkandji and Malyangapa Aboriginal communities enabled the construction of an integrated HealthOne facility in Buronga.

This construction follows the agreement to transfer Crown land at Buronga to the Barkandji Corporation, with native title rights intact, as freehold land. The Barkandji have leased the land back to NSW Health to build and operate the facility.

The facility complements district hospitals, regional health services and major referral hospitals.

Strategy 5.1



Strategic and statutory planning should be informed by and achieve:

- delivery capacity for LALCs that reflects Aboriginal aspirations, supported by strategic merit
- the identification and conservation of environmental and Aboriginal cultural heritage values
- cultural knowledge and values in land use planning decisions.

Action 3 (Short-term)



DPE (Planning) will continue to work with state agencies, including Transport for NSW and Regional NSW (Local Land Service), to provide access to infrastructure and services to discrete Aboriginal communities including through programs such as Roads to Home.

Resources



The following NSW Government policies and guidelines can assist:

- Aboriginal Land Planning Framework
- Roads to Home program
- Crown Lands LALC20 Project
- Connecting with Country draft framework

Collaboration Activity 6 (Ongoing)

DPE (Planning) will work with LALCs, RNTBCs, councils and Commonwealth and state agencies to better reflect their aspirations for Aboriginal-owned land in plans by:

- involving LALCs and RNTBCs in strategic planning and improving consultation processes that meet the needs of the community on a local scale
- supporting and partnering with Aboriginal communities to identify opportunities to activate land, including through biodiversity offsets
- identifying where land returned to LALCs has suboptimal planning controls and facilitating amendments
- identifying, understanding and responding to housing needs in Aboriginal communities
- identifying where LALC planning proposals have strategic merit, including proposals within urban areas or on the fringe of urban areas that propose an appropriate zoning
- enabling LALCs to better engage with the planning system, including through the provision of planning advice and appropriate training, and working in partnership to inform strategic planning
- consulting with RNTBCs to identify where their interests will interact with the planning system, and how their aspirations for their land can be supported
- promoting opportunities for cultural awareness training for all involved in planning
- incorporating Aboriginal knowledge into planning considerations, decisions and information sharing, including advice on cultural land use options in appropriate zones
- providing planning information to LALCs to prioritise unresolved Aboriginal land claims on Crown land
- improving cultural and economic opportunities associated with water resources
- incorporating Aboriginal-led local and regional plans into local and strategic land use plans where appropriate.

OBJECTIVE 6:

Plan for housing supply, diversity, affordability and resilience

Township, Bourke. Credit: Destination NSW



While increases in population and housing demand are expected in towns in the south-western part of the region, especially in the Wentworth LGA, intermittent peak increases will occur in other towns in response to local economic circumstances like new mine openings, infrastructure and renewable energy projects, and seasonal agricultural and tourism activities.¹³

Changes to demographic and household structures will also prompt a need for housing as will the demand to house key and temporary workers.

Higher sale rental prices, a misalignment between housing supply and demographic trends, and a lack of diverse housing have created housing affordability and homelessness challenges. Strategic planning must promote a diversity of housing choices so that people have more options at different stages of their life and at different affordability levels.

The most cost-effective way to supply housing is to optimise existing housing stock, through infill and renewal development opportunities that utilise existing infrastructure, town centres, main streets and services. Making better use of vacant buildings or land can enable modern, resilient and affordable houses near essential services and facilities.

Broken Hill – Housing audit and renewal opportunities pilot

To help Far West councils identify strategies to better utilise existing housing and residential land, we are working with Broken Hill City Council on a pilot project that analyses housing stock and renewal opportunities to:

- identify gaps in housing supply and demand
- identify and assess housing stock and sites that could be redeveloped
- identify and assess vacant land that could be developed as is, or with the assistance of Council
- identify potential development land that could be reclassified from community to operational land
- investigate council or state interventions to improve or build new housing
- investigate incentives to encourage the sale of unoccupied houses, renovation of housing for rental housing or social housing, or businesses investment in housing
- provide examples and tools that could be applied in other centres where there is vacant or dilapidated housing in urban areas
- identify and assess infrastructure and servicing capacity issues.

The diversity of challenges and influences across the region means there is no one-size-fits-all approach to housing solutions. We need a range of solutions to ensure the region's villages, towns and regional city remain vibrant and productive places to live.

Resilience of housing stock

The changing climate requires government and communities to investigate opportunities and initiatives to improve the resilience of existing housing stock and infrastructure.

In one example, the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) and Zero Mass Water supplied homes with SOURCE Hydropanels to bring fresh drinking water homes to severely stressed water communities in far western NSW, following a trial at West Wyalong, Nyngan and Menindee in 2019. The panels use solar power to convert water vapour into drinking water. This saw 797 hydropanels installed on AHO and community-owned properties in NSW.

We can make more resilient housing by:

- 1 using light coloured roofing materials
- 2 installing rooftop solar with back-up battery or making housing battery-ready
- 3 using hazard resistant construction materials like stormproof windows
- 4 designing and orienting buildings to take advantage of natural light and ventilation
- 5 siting/positioning buildings to avoid hazard paths like floodways
- 6 using rainwater harvesting and stormwater management
- 7 reinforcing and/or insulating structures and walls
- 8 establishing and maintaining hazard resistant or retardant landscaping
- 9 planting greenery to create shade, increase amenity and reduce energy costs.

These improvements provide financial and lifestyle benefits for residents and reduce environmental impacts.



Figure 6: Resilient housing

Strategy 6.1



To manage population, change and decline, strategic and statutory planning should facilitate a diversity of housing in appropriate locations by:

- creating flexible and feasible planning controls and development standards that support greater housing mix
- aligning infrastructure and service provision to housing supply needs
- ensuring developable land is available for housing for the employees of major projects
- transferring suitable public land to operational assets to provide land for diverse housing development
- exploring the potential for public owned land to be used for housing
- reviewing policies and processes to improve certainty and streamline development processes.

Endeavor Mine. Cobar, NSW.



Collaboration Activity 7 (Ongoing)



DPE (Planning) will help councils to develop strategies and controls that address housing supply, diversity, affordability and resilience, either separately or as part of a broader strategy. This work, and identification of the housing pipeline, will be undertaken with relevant state agencies including NSW Department of Education, Crown Lands, Transport for NSW and Regional NSW.

Collaboration Activity 8 (Short-term)



DPE (Planning) will establish a working group with relevant councils and state agencies to investigate the issues and extent of housing affordability, availability and condition and identify opportunities to improve housing affordability.

Collaboration Activity 9 (Medium-term)



DPE (Planning) will work with LALCs, native title holders, councils and Commonwealth and state agencies to better understand the housing needs and demand of Aboriginal communities.

Resources



The following NSW Government policies and guidelines can assist:

- The Local Housing Strategy Guideline
- The NSW Local Government Housing kit

OBJECTIVE 7:

Create a network of centres for the dispersed population

As the region continues to change, there is opportunity for communities and governments to rethink the Far West centres, townships and settlement's role and function, ensuring their ongoing vitality and viability.

Broken Hill is the largest centre in the region and functions as a Regional City that provides services and facilities for smaller, remote communities and industries.

Considered a major administrative hub, it provides essential services for the western part of the region, and remote eastern parts of South Australia. Wentworth, Buronga-Gol Gol, Bourke and Cobar are also key service centres and support mining operations, remote stations and industries, and more isolated communities.



Public Open Spaces

Both active and passive (including parks, gardens, playgrounds, public beaches, riverbanks and waterfronts, outdoor playing fields and courts, and publicly accessible bushland).



Public Facilities

public libraries, museums, galleries, civic/community centres, showgrounds and indoor public sports facilities



Streets

streets, avenues and boulevards; squares and plazas; pavements; passages and lanes, and bicycle paths

Residents in the eastern side of the region head east to the larger centres of Dubbo, Gunnedah and Wagga for services while people in the region's south access services in Victorian centres such as Mildura.

Some areas are experiencing declining business activity that could reduce the critical mass of services and related business activities without planned intervention. Place-making, retail and commercial investment should be focused in and around existing centres to attract activity and investment, while respecting character and heritage values. This also presents opportunities to re-use vacant buildings and support the region's residents as the population and climate changes.

Centres should provide quality, well maintained and integrated public spaces that can be enjoyed by residents and tourists. Existing facilities such as sporting grounds, ovals and local pools may be upgraded, or new public spaces designed to be comfortable places in hot weather..

Strategy 7.1



Strategic and statutory planning should ensure new and intensified development is located in suitable areas and designed for liveable and sustainable communities. New development must:

- conserve cultural heritage values and the local character of the area to enhance main streets and town centres
- encourage and improve public open spaces
- integrate with green infrastructure to increase thermal comfort and amenity
- consider transport (including walking and cycling) and community facilities commensurate with the scale of the proposal
- consider freight and servicing access early to balance the movement and delivery of goods, with the need to support vibrant and successful places
- leverage economic opportunities related to proximity and/or connectivity to larger centres
- connect to existing and new social infrastructure (including schools).

Collaboration Activity 10 (Ongoing)



DPE (Planning) will work with councils and state agencies to align infrastructure planning with land release and intensification of existing residential and urban areas to ensure adequate infrastructure is available to service new and existing development.

Question: Will these strategies and activities contribute to resilient places that respect local character?

OBJECTIVE 8:

Enable appropriate rural residential development

Rural residential development allows people to live in a semi-rural or urban fringe setting. In the Far West, there is demand for rural residential development in Wentworth, Central Darling and Broken Hill LGAs.

The towns of Buronga and Gol Gol located across the Murray River from Mildura, Victoria provide a range of housing and lifestyle options not available in Mildura. In the town of Wentworth, detached housing along the Darling River is the town's main source of growth. There is growing interest in rural residential development around the edges of Broken Hill, however further expansion is limited by the Unincorporated Area, Western Land leases and mining and exploration leases.

The demand for rural residential development is likely to grow with the changing population and the need for greater housing choice. This development must minimise or avoid unnecessary and irreversible impacts as it can:

- increase potential for land use conflict with nearby or adjoining productive agricultural, industrial, mining or energy uses
- fragment rural or agricultural land to create dwelling opportunities, which increases the value of rural land and potentially reduces the ability of farming enterprises to amalgamate
- place pressure on infrastructure and services, resulting in an economic burden on councils
- cause biodiversity loss, weed control issues or erosion or, in riverfront areas, water quality issues, vegetation loss or impact infrastructure in and adjoining the waterway
- restrict future urban growth opportunities due to multiple landowners and competing priorities.

Strategy 8.1



New rural residential development areas must be identified in a local housing strategy, approved by DPE (Planning) and:

- be near existing urban areas to optimise existing infrastructure and services, including roads, water, sewerage and waste services and connections to social infrastructure such as schools
- not reduce future urban development options
- protect the economic use of rural land and be located away from significant agriculture, forestry, extractive resources or energy production or distribution areas (see Objective 12)
- avoid environmentally sensitive land or areas of cultural or heritage significance and not adversely affect nearby land with those values
- avoid fragmentation of and restriction of public access to waterfront areas, and not proliferate additional water rights to water bodies
- avoid areas that could pose a risk to public safety, including flood, landslip, bushfires or contaminated land
- be suitable for on-site effluent disposal (if required)
- avoid locations that could adversely impact surface water or groundwater resources
- provide an adequate water supply for domestic purposes
- offer permanent and safe all-weather access and avoid ribbon development along main roads and minimise access from major roads
- be integrated with green infrastructure networks, to ensure community resilience and provide cool, healthy places to live.

Question: Will these criteria effectively manage the impacts of rural residential development?

OBJECTIVE 9:

Facilitate accommodation options for seasonal, temporary and key workers

Great Western Hotel, Cobar
Credit: Destination NSW



With \$2.3 billion of planned investment in major capital projects over the next 5 years in an economy centred around agriculture and mining, the temporary or seasonal workforce is an important component of the Far West population and housing mix.¹⁴

Seasonal workers support agriculture harvests and tourism peaks and events. Construction-related jobs associated with large scale projects, such as pipeline and mining projects, solar farms and transmission lines in Balranald also attract temporary workers. As one example, Broken Hill City Council estimates the LGA will require at least 1,000 houses to accommodate more than 1,300 mining workers and their families over the next 3 years.

However, the region has a low and declining supply of smaller and more affordable housing options such as caravans and residential parks that suit temporary or seasonal workers. This undersupply increases pressure on stressed local housing markets and tourist accommodation, leading to higher rents and housing affordability issues, poor outcomes for rural centres, health and safety concerns from overcrowding, makeshift housing, and unsuitable living conditions.

This trend also places pressure on housing for workers in essential occupations such as healthcare, education, and emergency services, who often need to relocate to the region due to lack of local training facilities/opportunities.

In response to these trends the region has seen:

- the repurposing of tourism accommodation for worker accommodation, reducing accommodation for tourists, which impacts the visitor economy
- workers commuting long distances for work, which creates a financial burden and has negative social and health impacts.

Housing solutions for workers could include new permanent housing in towns, close to projects that could be repurposed once the project is completed to provide affordable housing options for the local community. This could be direct (e.g. supported by the company responsible for the project) or in partnership with councils or developers (e.g. by the company providing rental guarantees for certain periods).

If projects are a safe commuting distance to towns, accommodation for workers should be integrated within the centre, either through strategies or as worker camps. These camps should be within the town boundary so that the workers contribute to the economic vitality and viability of centres. Camps should only be outside towns if land is not available within the towns.

Following completion of major projects, these camps could be either relocated to service other projects (leaving behind legacy infrastructure) or remain in place and house workers for other projects in the same area (as has already occurred in Balranald).

To better understand the pipeline of major projects and the potential housing impacts, we need a coordinated process to identify where and when projects will occur. Suitable land within towns and villages should be identified, zoned and planned for worker camps associated with major projects.

Strategy 9.1



Strategic and statutory planning should consider:

- the provision of housing for workers by employers, including state agencies, by providing flexible controls
- the capacity of existing and planned infrastructure to service accommodation for workers
- provision for workers' accommodation sites such as caravan parks, manufactured home estates, tiny homes and manufactured homes on land in or adjoining existing centres, new development areas and publicly owned land.

Strategy 9.2



Development applications for large-scale projects should be supported by a workforce accommodation strategy that:

- assesses anticipated impacts on the local housing market, including (cumulative impacts associated with other large scale projects in the area)
- shows how potential employees can access accommodation, without detrimentally affecting existing housing availability and affordability
- illustrates how the project will contribute to the supply of local housing, and support the nearest centre or centres
- allows for the plan to be monitored and updated over the life of the project.

Action 4 (Short-term)

DPE (Planning) will:

- prepare and release guidance, including standard LEP clauses, to help councils plan for workforce accommodation.

Collaboration Activity 11 (Ongoing)

DPE (Planning) will support councils, other agencies and housing providers to facilitate housing for workers.

Collaboration Activity 12 (Ongoing)

DPE (Planning) will work with the Department of Regional NSW, joint organisations, relevant public authorities and councils to identify and quantify potential housing demands from projects to 2027, including mining, renewable energy and transmission projects, road and rail infrastructure projects.

Collaboration Activity 13 (Ongoing)

DPE (Planning) will work with councils to review LEPs to facilitate accommodation for workers associated with major projects.

Question: Will these strategies and activities help to provide short-term accommodation?

Streetscape and Heritage building in Broken Hill



OBJECTIVE 10:

Plan for connected cross-border communities

People in the Far West often move between communities on either side of the Murray for housing, employment, and services, with some people living in NSW but working or accessing services in other states.

Similarly, residents in other states may access the Far West for business, services or tourism with Wentworth and Broken Hill for example, having strong links to Mildura and Adelaide for health and employment.

Infrastructure networks, including highways, roads, and rail bridges facilitate these relationships. Enhanced collaboration can achieve more efficient development, infrastructure and service outcomes in cross-border settlements.¹⁵

Economic and social connections from the Murray River communities, and Wentworth and Balranald LGAs into northern Victoria are more significant than connections with other areas in NSW. Visitors, residents and workers along the Murray River do not always appreciate the different legal and administrative requirements of the border, with cross-border towns operating as one community.

This can increase cross-border opportunities – already, Buronga Gol Gol, in Wentworth Shire, leverages growth in Mildura and provides an alternative residential option close to Mildura CBD. However, managing and coordinating services and infrastructure must avoid fragmenting government services, duplicating resources or applying different approaches to rules and regulations. Cross-border commissioners in NSW and Victoria are developing common approaches and resolve issues unique to cross-border communities.

An ongoing relationship between the demand and supply of land and housing, particularly in Wentworth and Mildura, will continue as both centres operate within the same housing market and have similar requirements for infrastructure and servicing.

Strategy 10.1



To leverage cross-border opportunities, strategic and statutory planning should:

- share successful cross-border planning collaboration with other cross-border jurisdictions
- investigate barriers and enablers of economic, housing and jobs growth
- consider infrastructure and servicing constraints and opportunities in a cross-border environment and develop service and infrastructure delivery models (including public transport).

Collaboration Activity 14 (Short-term)



DPE (Planning) will work with relevant councils and agencies to share successful cross-border planning collaboration from other cross-border jurisdictions (e.g. Albury-Wodonga).

Question: Do these strategies and actions sufficiently support cross-border communities to collaborate with their counterparts?

PART

3

Ongoing
prosperity

Mutawintji National Park, Mutawintji
Credit: Destination NSW



Back O' Bourke Information & Exhibition Centre. Credit: Destination NSW

PART

3

Ongoing prosperity

The Far West region supports dispersed communities, with some situated hundreds of kilometres away from their nearest urban centre. Despite the smaller population, the regional economy is centred on renewable energy, tourism, agriculture, health and community services, and mining.

Large capital projects are major drivers for economic growth and stability; however, housing affordability and availability, as well as skills shortages and digital connectivity, are understood to be barriers to economic development and employment.

The COVID-19 pandemic is changing the face of local tourism with the region seeing a boost in visitors based on its outback and unique cultural experiences. The region also has an increasing events tourism industry and a creative industry sector based on art and the film industry.

Growth across these sectors must be carefully planned and managed to ensure land uses are compatible and contribute to the region's ongoing prosperity. To achieve this, we must:

- leverage the region's strengths, including its unique environment, productive rural and resource lands and its people
- capitalise on available investment opportunities to support existing and growing tradable industry sectors that promote economic revitalisation, create employment prospects and attract and retain a skilled workforce
- provide vibrant centres with community and connectivity that include services and amenities critical to attracting, developing, and sustaining the industry sectors, as well as providing high amenity to residents and visitors.



\$2.3 billion
of investment in the region
for **major capital projects**
over the next five years

Highest Gross Value by Industry in 2018



22%
Construction and
infrastructure



19%
Mining



17%
Agribusiness and food

The region's strategic challenges:

- Small, very dispersed population
- Poor digital connectivity
- Attracting and retain skilled workforce
- Housing availability and affordability
- Outward migration
- Capacity and reliability of road networks
- Climate change and natural disasters
- Land use conflict
- Social and education disadvantage

Drivers and trends

- Global demand for high quality food
- Net zero transition will increase demand for:
 - batteries and other storage
 - solar and wind electricity generation infrastructure
 - low emissions technologies
- Technology advances
- Increased globalisation of markets
- Consumer behaviour change
- Rising freight and logistic functions
- Genuine and real tourism experiences



The region's strengths

- Existing agricultural sector and established agribusiness
- Minerals, critical minerals and high-tech metals
- Existing mining economy
- Good quality infrastructure
- Land accessibility and affordability
- Strategic location and transport connections
- Rich cultural heritage, national parks and accessible outback experience
- Agritourism
- Abundant renewable energy resources
- Attractive centres with heritage



Opportunities

- Strengthening the visitor economy due to the accessible outback experiences
- Manufacturing value-add and industrial opportunities
- Increased reliance on Far West natural assets and resources (minerals, agriculture, renewable energy)
- Change the narrative around population change
- Improved amenity and services in centres
- Slow the outmigration patterns

OBJECTIVE 11:

Support and diversify visitor economy opportunities

Cobar Sound Chapel
Credit: Georges Lentz



The region's unique geology, landscapes and wildlife, national parks, the Darling, Murrumbidgee and Murray river systems and rich Aboriginal and post-colonisation settlement history collectively provide an authentic 'accessible outback' experience.¹⁶ Key infrastructure developed or upgraded in recent years include the Great Cobar Heritage Centre.

The region is a popular tourism destination for national and international visitors with domestic tourism recently driving growth in centres such as Broken Hill, White Cliffs and Lightning Ridge and in areas that adjoin larger centres such as Wentworth.

World-first outback experiences

The Cobar Sound Chapel opened in April 2022 as a permanent new sound installation, set in an old disused water tank from 1901 and inspired by the vast landscape of the Australian outback.

The chapel is a creation by renowned composer and sound artist, George Lentz, in collaboration with Pritzker-Prize-winning architect Glenn Murcutt, The Noise String Quartet, and Cobar Aboriginal visual artist Sharron Ohlsen.

This immersive walk-in sound installation is one-of-a-kind experience and functions as a permanent home of Lentz's digital surround-sound composition String Quartet(s) (2000-2022), a vast piece of sound art inspired by the outback landscape and its night skies.

The adaptive re-use of a water tank highlights a unique perspective of the area's infrastructure while capitalising local heritage and region-specific experiences.¹⁷

5.7%
average annual
growth in visitors from
year ended June 2010
to year end June 2019

239 businesses employ
1,572
people in the region
until year ended 2019

8.6%
of Far West & Orana
total employment
up to year end 2019

7.1% annual
increase in visitor spend in
the region since year ended
June 2010 to **\$357.5 million**
in year ended June 2019

The region's cultural heritage sites include Baiame's Ngunnahu (Brewarrina Fish Traps), Menindee Lakes, the sacred historical sites of Mungo and Mutawintji national parks and Aboriginal art sites at Gundabooka National Park. Cultural tourism presents economic benefits and employment opportunities for Aboriginal communities. The *Aboriginal Tourism Action Plan 2017-2020*¹⁸ aims to capitalise on the growing interest and demand for cultural experiences

With the COVID-19 pandemic, festivals and filming opportunities have increased in the region. These activities have placed pressure on the region's road network with many tourists opting for the cross-country experience in caravans, motorhomes and alike. These activities can be supported through:

- identifying appropriately sized and located sites for events away from sensitive land uses and with reliable access to the existing road network and public facilities
- improving short term accommodation availability
- repurposing underutilised industrial and commercial premises for tourism activities or other businesses associated with the film industry like set preparation, filming and editing
- embellishing natural or man-made assets to appropriately increase visitation
- identifying opportunities for walking or cycling trails through national parks and in linear corridors, such as the disused rail corridor between Broken Hill and Silverton.

Balranald Art Gallery, Balranald. Credit: Destination NSW



The region's unique landscape and characteristics have attracted many nationally and internationally acclaimed artists over the years, including Pro Hart, and there is also a strong Aboriginal art industry including activist, artist and cultural consultant Badger Bates.

Opportunities to strengthen the region's creative industries, tourism and place-making can draw from ongoing technological advancements, new visitation trends since the COVID-19 pandemic and improved digital connectivity. This includes opportunities for local artists and performers by enabling virtual patrons to participate in the experience.

Agritourism is growing, providing additional income for landholders. Food and wine trails, farm stays, farmers markets, functions and events, and farm gate experiences offer unique local tourism experiences that showcase the region's landscapes and people.

Recent planning amendments will allow farming communities to carry out agritourism and small-scale agricultural development with appropriate approval.¹⁹ However, the diversification of the agricultural enterprises into visitor accommodation can also result in land use conflict which should be managed through relevant impact consideration. This is outlined in Objective 12.

Strategy 11.1



Strategic and statutory planning should support and promote tourism activities by:

- reviewing planning controls to ensure they support and enable tourism development in appropriate locations
- supporting events and festivals carried out on public land without development consent
- integrating with cross-border communities and neighbouring councils for major tourism projects and value add opportunities.

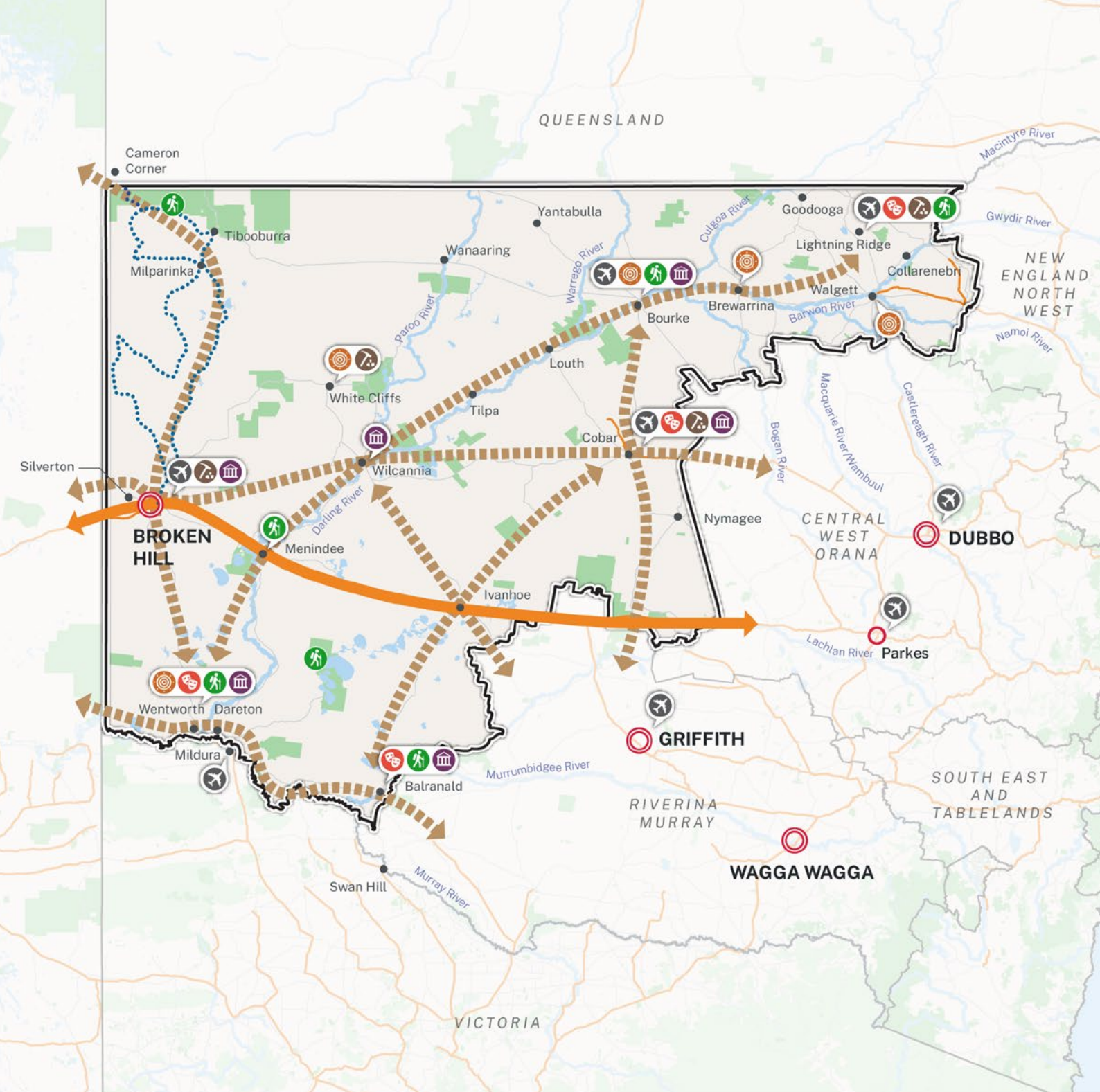


Figure 7: Employment (tourism)



OBJECTIVE 12:

Protect rural and mining industries

Agriculture

Agricultural production occurs across the region through irrigated crops, broadacre crops, horticulture, viticulture and livestock production.

Access to the Barwon-Darling River system to the north and Murray-Murrumbidgee River system to the south has resulted in significant irrigation agricultural activity in Central Darling, Balranald, Wentworth, Bourke, Brewarrina and Walgett LGAs. These river systems support irrigated agricultural activities such as cotton in the north (Walgett, Brewarrina and Bourke LGAs) and grapes, citrus and vegetables in the south (Wentworth and Balranald LGAs).

Highly productive agriculture requires ready access to water, high quality soils, labour and a suitable climate. More recently the emergence of almonds, pistachios and walnut farming has created opportunities along the river corridors in the Far West.

Outside areas with access to water, broadacre cropping and livestock production is the predominant agricultural activity in the region. The region is known for producing dryland cotton, cereals, oilseed and pulses. Cropping also supports livestock production within and outside of the region through the production of hay. As global demand for goat and kangaroo meat increases, the region is developing a niche meat industry and leveraging connections to key freight corridors.

A strategic approach to rural and extractive resource land planning will enable communities and all levels of government to understand the importance of, and plan effectively for, the future of rural industries and mining in each LGA.

Collaboration Activity 15 (Ongoing)



DPE (Planning) will work with councils and state agencies to identify and support productive agricultural lands through strategic and statutory land use processes by:

- identifying and managing land use impacts on productive agricultural areas and areas with opportunities for economies of scale and access to assets such as processing or logistics
- avoiding the fragmentation of productive agricultural lands
- locating value-add industries where they can support agricultural production
- ensuring land uses adjacent to highly productive agricultural land are compatible with agricultural production activities or have adequate buffers
- protecting productive agricultural land from uses which decrease the agricultural potential of the land
- providing guidance on impact of climate changes and agricultural industries that are best suited to arid conditions.

Mining and critical minerals

The Far West is rich in diverse minerals with a long history of mining, providing Australia and global markets with traditional metals and minerals needed for industrial and consumer led applications. These include:

- silver, lead, zinc, cobalt, iron ore, and mineral sands in and around Broken Hill
- copper and gold in and around Cobar
- opal in and around Lightning Ridge and White Cliffs
- mineral sands in and around Balranald and Wentworth.

There are also active exploration opportunities around the geological Curnamona Province (Broken Hill and Euriowie blocks) and Cobar Basin. Broken Hill presents opportunities for new deposits in addition to existing traditional zinc, lead, silver, and cobalt deposits. Mineral sands mining near the Murray River continues to expand.

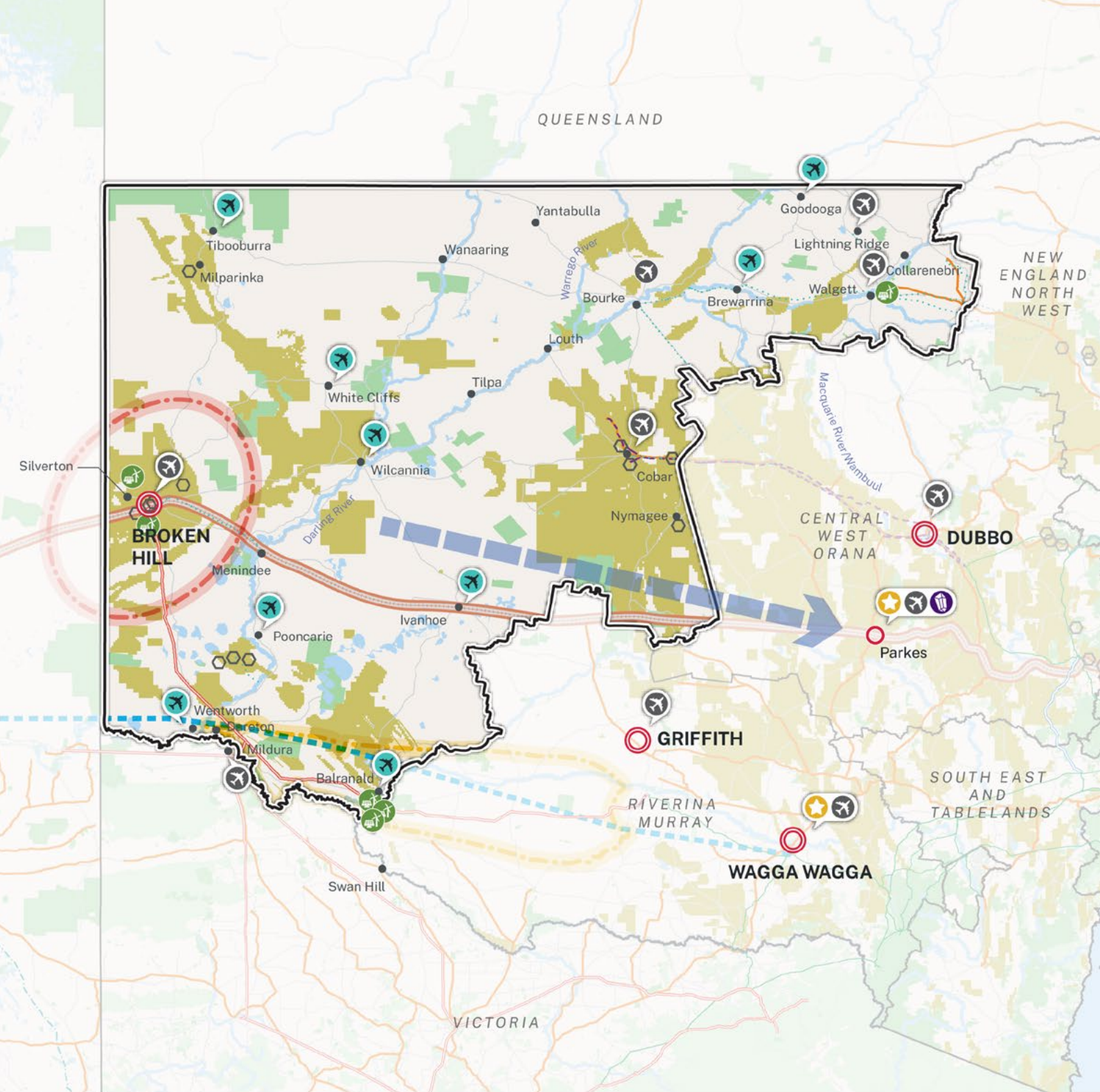


Figure 8: Employment (mining and renewables)





National and global shifts in consumer economics, renewable energy, advanced technologies, and climate policies and decarbonised economic futures is driving demand for the region's metal and critical mineral resources. The Far West has a significant share of the emerging critical minerals market which will shape new mining, processing and manufacturing opportunities. It is identified as one of the strategic locations underpinning NSW's *Critical Minerals and High-tech Metals Strategy*.²⁰

The region's copper, cobalt, scandium and rare earth elements are critical components of renewable energy storage batteries, solar panels, high-performance optics and powerful magnets needed for electric motors, wind turbines, electric vehicles and a range of advanced manufacturing capabilities.

Ethically sourced critical minerals and high-tech metals and capitalising on the region's infrastructure and connectivity with the east coast markets, existing mining capabilities and established mining economy, will drive success. Linking to the NSW Critical Minerals Hub, manufacturing opportunities in the Parkes Special Activation Precinct and interstate opportunities could create significant value-add benefits to the region and adjoining regions.

The existing mix of skills, infrastructure and capabilities could support value-add and processing opportunities for extractive materials, enabling further diversification of industry and efforts to decarbonise industry. Cobalt Blue's Thackaringa Cobalt Project at Broken Hill is one example that will use existing capabilities in mining and infrastructure to develop world-first on-site extraction and a processing facility to turn extracted cobalt ore into a commercial, battery-ready material.

Land use planning can sustain the sector by:

- ensuring extractive industry projects align with industry best standards, contributing to a secure critical minerals sector and protecting the region's environmental values
- improving information on the location and resource potential of critical mineral occurrences in NSW, in consultation with Mining, Exploration and Geoscience, Department of Regional NSW
- protecting existing projects, associated mining and processing infrastructure, supply chains and known and potential extractive resource deposits from incompatible land uses
- accelerating the emerging metals industry by leveraging the Planning Reform Action Plan designed to reduce red tape and assessment timeframes for development applications (while maintaining a best-practice and transparent environmental assessment framework)
- utilising the NSW Government's Mining Concierge service to support investors and mining corporations navigate regulatory requirements for mining proposals in NSW
- identifying potential industry pinch-points and other opportunities to collaborate around related issues such as housing, transport, logistics and skills, and climate change.

Strategy 12.1

Strategic planning and statutory planning should consider the life cycle of resource extraction opportunities, including:

- protecting potential mineral and energy resources from land uses that would sterilise this potential
- protecting existing and proposed resource extraction projects from land uses that could impact operations
- protecting road, rail and freight routes from development that could affect current or future extraction and supply-chain movements
- promoting opportunities for minerals processing within the region
- addressing water resource constraints and impacts
- identifying future mine closure dates, understanding potential changes to water, economic/skill profiles and demographics, and considering land use changes, mine rehabilitation activities and post-mining land use opportunities.

Collaboration Activity 16 (Medium-term)

DPE (Planning) and the Department of Regional NSW will identify existing and proposed mining and extractive industry operations and known or potential resource areas in the region and update/produce mapping to inform the application of local planning direction 8.1 Mining, Petroleum Production and Extractive Industries.

Collaboration Activity 17 (Medium-term)

DPE (Planning), Department of Regional NSW and the RLE will collaborate with councils and other stakeholders to identify opportunities and pinch-points that could affect the mining industry in the region e.g. housing, supply chains, processing and manufacturing opportunities and other related industry opportunities such as renewable energy.

Resources

The following NSW Government plans and policies can support agriculture and mining industries:

- NSW's Critical Minerals and High-tech Metals Strategy
- Right to Farm Policy

Question: Will these strategies and activities sufficiently manage rural and mining land use planning issues?



Red Earth Opal, White Cliffs
Credit: Destination NSW

OBJECTIVE 13:

Protect and develop industry and manufacturing



Industrial and manufacturing operations can leverage the region's strengths in transport and logistics, mining and support processing, production and processing of livestock, and production and exports from irrigated agriculture (e.g. citrus, stone fruits, table grapes, tree nuts and vegetables).

Based on the regional economy and its major industries (agriculture and mining), opportunistic manufacturing and value-adds require connections with primary operations, input supply chains and markets. Clustering manufacturing and other industrial operations can reduce land use conflict, create new circular economy opportunities, and create efficiencies from infrastructure investment and supply and distribution networks.

Opportunities also exist in the adaptive re-use of existing sites with appropriate infrastructure that are not currently active, such as the old Endeavor Mine in Cobar. Creating flexible planning and development controls, or clustering compatible businesses that respond to industry needs, will enhance the competitiveness and productivity of existing industries, and stimulate the growth of emerging industries, while reducing potential land use conflicts.

These approaches need a collective government and industry effort to understand:

- what areas of the region's development-ready land can facilitate and service new ventures, including servicing capacity of infrastructure
- industry and manufacturing needs in relation to demand for housing, temporary accommodation, social infrastructure and industrial land for complementary/secondary industries.

Collaboration Activity 18 (Ongoing)



DPE (Planning) will collaborate with councils, state agencies and industry to understand opportunities for value-add manufacturing and associated needs. Collectively we will look for opportunities to:

- locate new industrial land close to inter-regional networks and/or the potential to transport of goods by rail, unencumbered by natural hazards or environmental constraints and accessible to businesses and communities
- provide flexible and simplified planning controls that support the changing needs of industry, emerging industries and diversification, adaptation and innovation
- provide for the supply of development-ready industrial land to meet the changing demands of industry
- encourage co-location and clustering of compatible industries to improve efficiencies and productivity, reduce land use conflict, maximise infrastructure investment and capitalise on supply networks
- protect industrial land from other potential land use conflicts arising from inappropriate and incompatible surrounding land uses
- drive competitive advantage by leveraging strengths, assets and attributes while maintaining integrity of existing industrial precincts
- investigate bespoke industrial precinct planning using targeted responses.

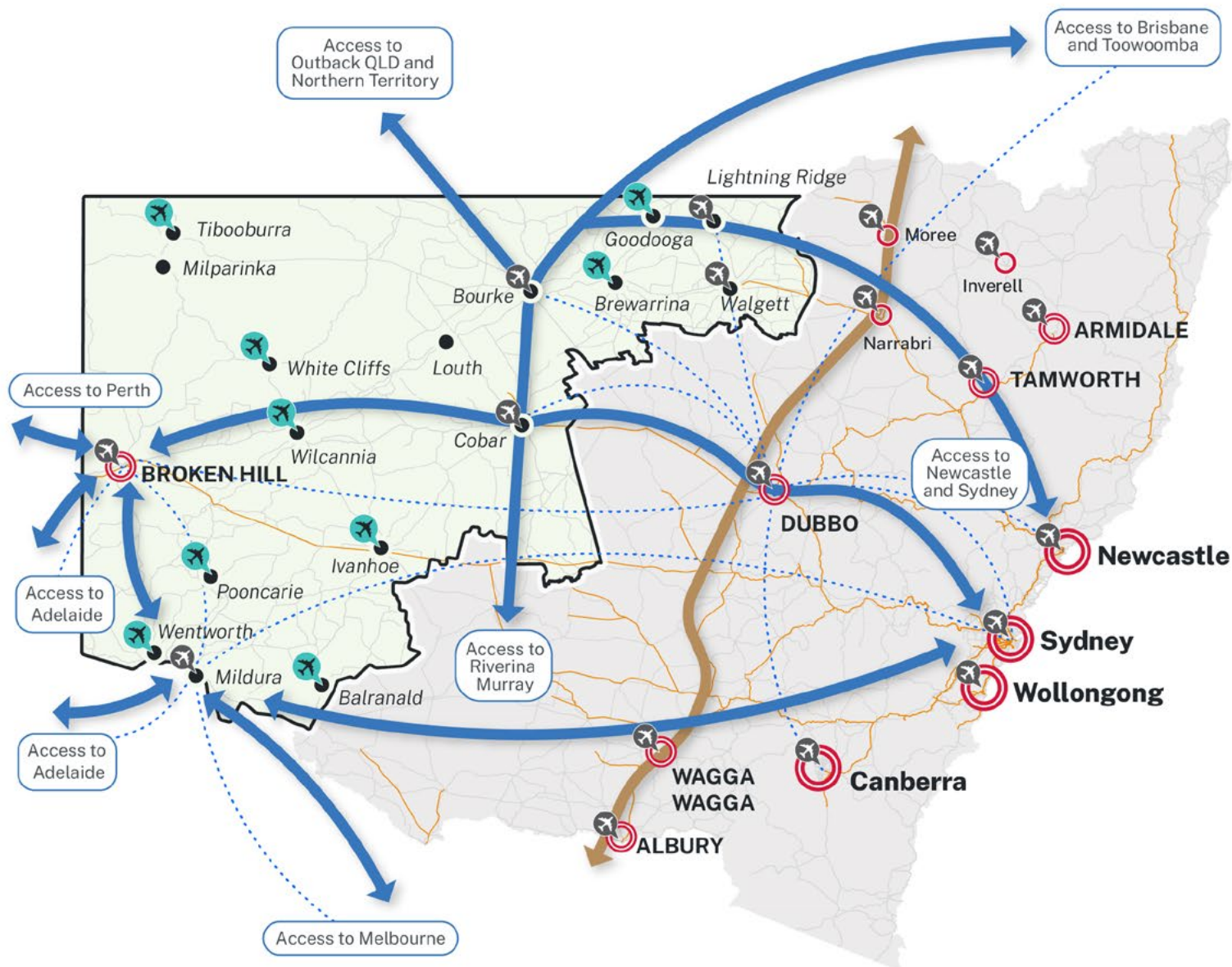


Figure 9: Inter-regional transport connections



0 50 100 200
km



OBJECTIVE 14:

Protect and leverage existing and future road, rail and air transport routes and infrastructure

The Silver City Stiletto train, Outback NSW
Credit: Destination NSW



Transport and Logistics accounts for

3.5% of the total value of major projects in the region over the next 5 years

With regional NSW's freight volumes projected to increase by 12% by 2036, the Far West requires a reliable freight and logistics system that moves agricultural and mining products across regions to markets and connects people across geographies.²¹ Improved passenger rail, road access, public transport and walking and cycling networks allow more people to access services.

As freight volumes grow, so will movements on local, regional and state roads. However, some roads are already either failing under the pressure of freight movements, are in poor condition or are poorly aligned. First and last mile freight issues should be considered when identifying strategic opportunities for growth or investment.

A reliable freight network needs to be free of natural hazards. Industry needs to understand the benefits or changes that will come from rail and road upgrades and road sealing programs. Upgrades and sealing of 153 km of the Silver City Highway, 132 km of the Cobb Highway and remaining parts of the Wool Track (Ivanhoe-Cobar Road) will improve connections between Victorian and Queensland through western NSW, improving the regional freight network, connecting communities, and supporting the tourism industry.

Other potential upgrades to Pooncarie or Arumpo roads connecting Menindee Lakes and Lake Mungo to Mildura will also provide better access to tourism attractions and potentially shifting the community's reliance from one strategic centre to another.

The Broken Hill Rail Line connects Adelaide and Perth to the east coast, via Parkes and Orange. Having a diversity of freight routes, including heavy haulage routes for oversize and overmass (OSOM) vehicles and loads will service mining areas such as Broken Hill, Cobar and Wentworth and allow connections to the Port of Newcastle, Port Kembla, Port Botany and South Australia for mining equipment and infrastructure.

This network will also be important for infrastructure projects such as the REZ and other renewable energy projects that import wind turbines – this in turn creates demand for OSOM. There are opportunities to improve and leverage import accessibility of rail into townships such as Cobar, rather than solely exporting materials.

For communities like Buronga Gol Gol, Cobar and Ivanhoe, main streets are freight and transport corridors. We need to protect the effectiveness of the corridors and provide opportunities for local businesses to leverage the corridors. Planning for new or upgraded freight corridors should consider impacts on sensitive land uses such as schools.

While there will be opportunities for increased use of public transport, walking and cycling, on-demand transport and autonomous transport, the long distances between centres and dispersed population will continue to rely on personal and freight vehicles.

The Far West Regional Transport Plan will integrate land use, infrastructure and transport planning, to capitalise on and understand these benefits. Early and strategic analysis of land use and transport interactions will identify opportunities and provide appropriate planning and place-based responses.

Strategy 14.1



Strategic planning should protect supply chains, freight corridors and logistics facilities from future development impacts and identify and maintain buffers between freight infrastructure and incompatible land uses.

Collaboration Activity 19 (Ongoing)



DPE (Planning) will work with Transport for NSW, councils and the mining industry to:

- develop the Far West Regional Transport Plan to integrate land use, infrastructure and transport planning; and improve the freight and transport network, including walking and cycling networks
- identify and address any first and last mile freight limitations in the region's freight networks
- identify opportunities to activate and protect employment lands near freight infrastructure
- identify new freight network opportunities while understanding potential impacts on sensitive land uses
- adopt a precinct-based planning approach to complement the role and function of existing main streets, without detracting from the regional freight and transport network and identifying heavy vehicle town centre bypasses, where appropriate.

Question: Will these strategies and activities support integrated transport and land use planning?

OBJECTIVE 15:

Support the transition to net zero by 2050

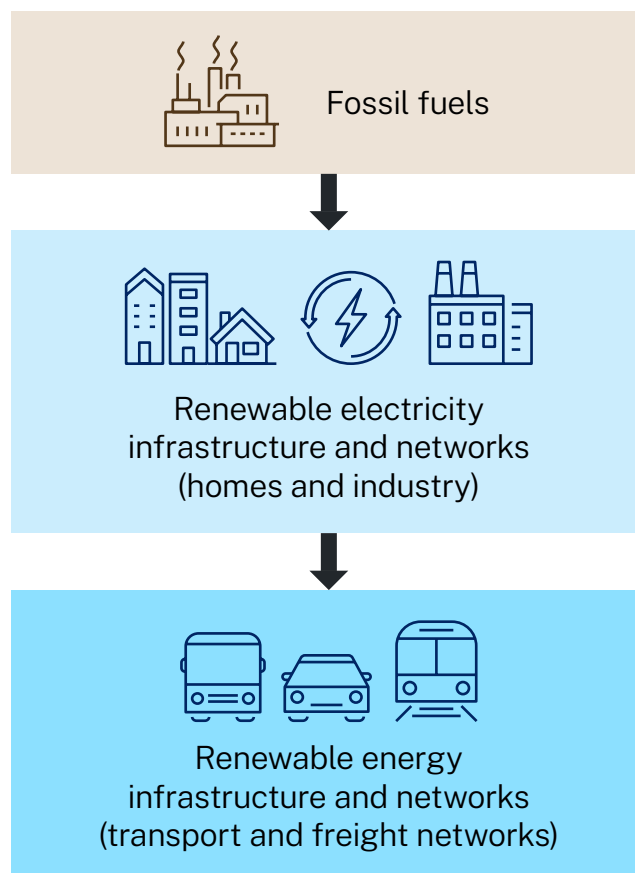
Within 15 years, 75% of the state's coal-powered electricity generation is expected to reach the end of its technical life.²² Replacing these energy sources and building the infrastructure needed to connect new energy sources is essential. The NSW Government has committed to net zero emissions by 2050, requiring greater renewable electricity generation, transmission and storage. Renewable energy is now becoming cost competitive with other forms of electricity generation and is key to NSW achieving net zero.²³

Electricity demand is expected to increase as people change the way they power their homes, transport, industry and centres. The Australian Energy Market Operator forecasts a step-change in the transition away from fossil fuels and higher electrical demand with recent events in the global energy market making this scenario more likely.

This transition will require fundamental changes to how electricity is generated, transported, stored and used. Careful management of this transition will ensure the region benefits from economic diversification opportunities while supporting existing industries. Land use planning can help to guide an orderly transition and maximise these benefits.

The Far West's climate, natural assets and strategic connections to utility infrastructure will support the transition to net zero while maintaining supply. Upgrades to existing infrastructure are required to facilitate expansion of electricity infrastructure. Solar and renewable projects in Balranald and Walgett, battery energy storage in Broken Hill and the EnergyConnect project—described below—are worth more than \$1.5 billion and will provide 155 megawatts capable of powering around 60,000 homes.

The EnergyConnect project is an interconnector being built by Transgrid and ElectraNet between Wagga Wagga and Robertstown in South Australia, with a connection to Red Cliffs in Victoria. The project will upgrade the 33kV transmission line to 500kV between Wagga Wagga and Dinawan, which links to the eastern edge of the South West REZ and will unlock additional transmission capacity.



Part of the South West REZ will be in Balranald Shire, connecting multiple generators and storage in one location and capitalising on economies of scale to deliver cheap, reliable and clean electricity. While we expect the REZ to be developed in the medium to long term, it may be needed earlier if the transition away from fossil fuels is faster than forecast.

Energy efficient buildings

Improving energy-efficient building design or retrofitting existing buildings with low emissions energy

Circular economy

Planning for circular economies and optimising waste management and resource recovery across sectors

Electric vehicles

Improving policy to ensure buildings are electric vehicle-ready and stimulating investment in green energy refuelling stations.

Renewable energy generation

Complementing solar power with wind power and storage (battery) systems to manage intermittency (as wind blows more at night and in winter, and battery provides more energy when solar energy is weaker). Co-locating renewable energy infrastructure and land intensive businesses, including agricultural and mining activities.

Emissions reduction

Implementing greenhouse gas abatement schemes through the Australian Government's Emissions Reduction Fund, and the biodiversity offset scheme and carbon market under development in NSW.

Renewable energy for industry

Integrating renewable energy into mining, agriculture, freight and logistics, and manufacturing operations through the *NSW Hydrogen Strategy* and Net Zero Industry and Innovation Program.

Strategy 15.1

Strategic and statutory planning should identify opportunities to facilitate the energy transition of housing, industry and transport.

Collaboration Activity 20 (Longer-term)

DPE (Planning) and DPE (Environment) will work with Energy Corporation of NSW, the Renewable Energy Sector Board, councils and Aboriginal and community stakeholders to develop the South West REZ.

Collaboration Activity 21 (Longer-term)

DPE (Planning), DPE (Environment), Energy Corporation of NSW, Department of Regional NSW and councils will identify economic diversification and land use planning issues, opportunities, and actions to respond to changes in energy generation, transmission, storage and use.

Resources

The following NSW Government policies and guidelines can guide the regions transition to net zero:

- Large-Scale Solar Energy Guideline for State Significant Development
- NSW Hydrogen Strategy and Net Zero Industry and Innovation Program

OBJECTIVE 16:

Ensure government and community service provision



The NSW Government funds and provides a range of infrastructure and services in the Far West, including roads and transport, schools, police stations and courts, health services, social housing, and public order and safety. Councils also provide infrastructure, services and local employment.

There are several challenges to the provision of these services in the Far West. While smaller towns and communities rely on regional and strategic centres for government services, centres and larger towns often lack either basic or higher-order services. Residents often travel great distances to cities in other regions such as Griffith, Dubbo and Mildura.

Currently, Broken Hill has the largest concentration of government services providing health, education and community services to the region. Smaller concentrations of services are also present in other centres in the region. This ranges from small schools and single manned police stations to district nurses and/or clustered health facilities.

Providing access to government services and clustering services can support people living in these areas. This must occur in a coordinated cost-effective way, through:

- clustering or co-locating government services (including emergency services) to share the available workforce and facilities and potentially support other services like cafés or shops
- clustering training facilities for services to maintain and encourage local skills in the region

- providing appropriate housing and locating aged care and health services close to town, to provide transition options as people get older or need to overcome reduced mobility
- investing in multi-purpose community facilities, reducing public investment and making best use of a community assets
- investing in the local education services, to retain and train a skilled workforce and create employment opportunities for teachers and associated services.

Improvements in digital connectivity for services such as education and telehealth can provide faster access to services and reduce the need to travel for basic services. Innovative and coordinated travel to allow residents in more remote communities to access services in larger centres will also facilitate better access and care.

Strategy 16.1

Strategic planning and local plans should investigate opportunities to:

- cluster/co-locate government services including health and educational facilities through flexible planning controls that encourage complementary uses
- facilitate telecommunications improvements to support better connectivity and basic service delivery, including access to the NBN.

Glossary

Active transport

Transport that is human powered, such as walking, cycling or using a wheelchair.

Affordable housing

Housing for very low-income households, low-income households or moderate-income households, as prescribed by regulations or provided for in an environmental planning instrument.

Agribusiness

A business that earns most or all of its revenues from agriculture, such as food and fibre production, agrichemicals, seed supply, farm machinery wholesale and distribution, freight, logistics, processing, marketing or retail sales.

Biodiversity

The variety of life on Earth. The life forms, the different plants, animals and microorganisms, the genes they contain and the ecosystems they form.

Biodiversity corridor

An identified area of land that connects flora and fauna populations, separated by human developments and activities.

Circular economy

A model that redesigns current linear systems (take-make-waste) to a closed loop or circular system which maximises resource efficiencies, reduces waste and improves natural systems.

Employment lands

Areas zoned for industrial or similar purposes. Generally lower density employment areas that provide space for utilities and urban services, including depots, repair trades and service centres, as well as the research, design, and manufacturing of goods through to their warehousing, distribution, and sale.

First mile/last mile

The first and final stage of a journey in which people or goods travel to a broad range of origins or destinations, such as the trip between a train station and the final destination of a shopping centre or place of work.

Green infrastructure

The network of green spaces, natural systems and semi-natural systems that support sustainable communities, including waterways; bushland; tree canopy and green ground cover; parks; and open spaces.

High environmental value land

Land with:

- sensitive biodiversity values
- native vegetation of high conservation value
- key habitat of threatened species
- important wetlands
- areas of geological significance

Household size

The average number of people living in a dwelling.

Housing affordability

The capacity of individuals or households to enter the rental and privately owned housing markets.

Housing diversity

The mix of housing types such as detached dwellings, boarding houses, purpose-built rentals, dual occupancies, group homes, hostels, multi-dwelling housing, residential flat buildings, secondary dwellings, semi-detached dwellings, seniors housing and shop top housing.

Infill development

Development in areas used for urban purposes, including the re-use of a site within the existing urban footprint for new housing, businesses, or other urban development.

Intensive agriculture

Agriculture activities such as horticulture, irrigated crops, glass housing, feedlots, poultry farms that rely on high levels of inputs such as labour and capital to increase yield.

Local Environmental Plan (LEP)

The main statutory instrument to guide planning decisions for LGAs through zoning and development controls.

Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS)

Sets out the 20-year vision for a local government area, demonstrates how change will be managed and identifies local priorities for updating council Local Environmental Plans

Population projections

Projections of future size and structure of a population based on past trends and assumptions about the future, such as births, deaths and migration.

Renewable Energy Zone (REZ)

Zones of energy generation alternatives as power stations close that connect renewable energy such as wind and solar, storage such as batteries, and high voltage power poles and wires in the same location to capitalise on economies of scale to deliver cheap, reliable and clean electricity for NSW.

Resilience

The capacity of a place, town, city or region's systems, businesses, institutions, communities and individuals to survive, adapt and grow, no matter what chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience.

Riverine environments

Land identified on a riparian lands and waterways map in an LEP and land within 40 m to the top of the bank of a watercourse.

Ribbon development

Extensive residential/commercial/industrial development occurring in a linear pattern along a river corridor.

Smart technology

Self-Monitoring Analysis and Reporting Technology (SMART) technology that provides cognitive awareness to objects by making use of advanced technologies like internet of things, artificial intelligence, machine learning and big data.

Statutory planning

Includes planning proposals, development applications and other statutory processes that require planning decisions.

Strategic planning

Includes local strategies for issues such as housing, employment, retail, conservation, rural land, recreation and transport; precinct plans; structure plans; master plans and other activities that support statutory planning, such as LEPs and development control plans, and decisions.

Sustainability

Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Urban land

Land zoned under any of the following land use zones

- RU5 Village
- R1 General Residential
- R2 Low Density Residential
- R3 Medium Density Residential
- R4 High Density Residential
- R5 Large Lot Residential
- E1 Local Centre
- E2 Commercial Centre
- E3 Productivity Support
- E4 General Industrial
- E5 Heavy Industrial
- B1 Neighbourhood Centre
- B2 Local Centre
- B3 Commercial Core
- B4 Mixed Use
- B5 Business Development
- B6 Enterprise Corridor
- B7 Business Park
- IN1 General Industrial
- IN2 Light Industrial
- IN3 Heavy Industrial
- SP3 Tourist

Value-added

data represents the economic value that is added by each industry sector in a defined region. It can be calculated by subtracting local expenditure and expenditure on regional imports from the output generated by industry sector.

References

- 1 NSW Treasury Economic Blueprint 2040
- 2 NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, NSW Water Strategy August 2021
- 3 NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, NSW Draft Groundwater Strategy July 2022
- 4 Transport for NSW Future Transport Strategy 2056
- 5 Transport for NSW Regional NSW Services and Infrastructure Plan
- 6 NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, Housing 2041
- 7 Commonwealth of Australia, Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009-2030
- 8 State of NSW and Office of Environment and Heritage, Western Enabling Regional Adaption: Far West region report 2017
- 9 State of NSW and Office of Environment and Heritage, Western Enabling Regional Adaption: Far West region report 2017
- 10 Media Release Construction starts on new Doppler radars in Western NSW 2020, NSW Government
- 11 Australian Bureau of Statistics data
- 12 Australian Bureau of Statistics data
- 13 REMPLAN Economy (2022 Release 1)
- 14 NSW Government, 2022-23 Budget
- 15 Destination Riverina Murray NSW 2018, Riverina Murray Destination Management Plan 2018, Destination NSW
- 16 Destination Country and Outback NSW 2018, Destination NSW
- 17 Cobar Sound Chapel <https://www.cobarsoundchapel.com/the-chapel.html>
- 18 Destination NSW, Aboriginal Tourism Action Plan 2017-2020, NSW Government
- 19 NSW Department of Planning and Environment, Planning amendments for agriculture 2021
- 20 NSW Government, Department of Regional NSW, Critical Minerals and High-Tech Metals Strategy 2021
- 21 Transport for NSW, NSW Freight and Ports Plan 2018-2023
- 22 Energy Networks Australia, Energy Insider 2019
- 23 Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, Net Zero Plan Stage 1: 2020-2030

Planning and Environment

dpie.nsw.gov.au

Postal Address:
Department of Planning
and Environment
Locked Bag 5022
Parramatta NSW 2124

Street Address:
4 Parramatta Square
12 Darcy Street
Parramatta NSW 2150

