



Planning &  
Environment

*Draft*  
**North**

**Coast**  
**Regional Plan**

*DRAFT NORTH COAST REGIONAL PLAN*

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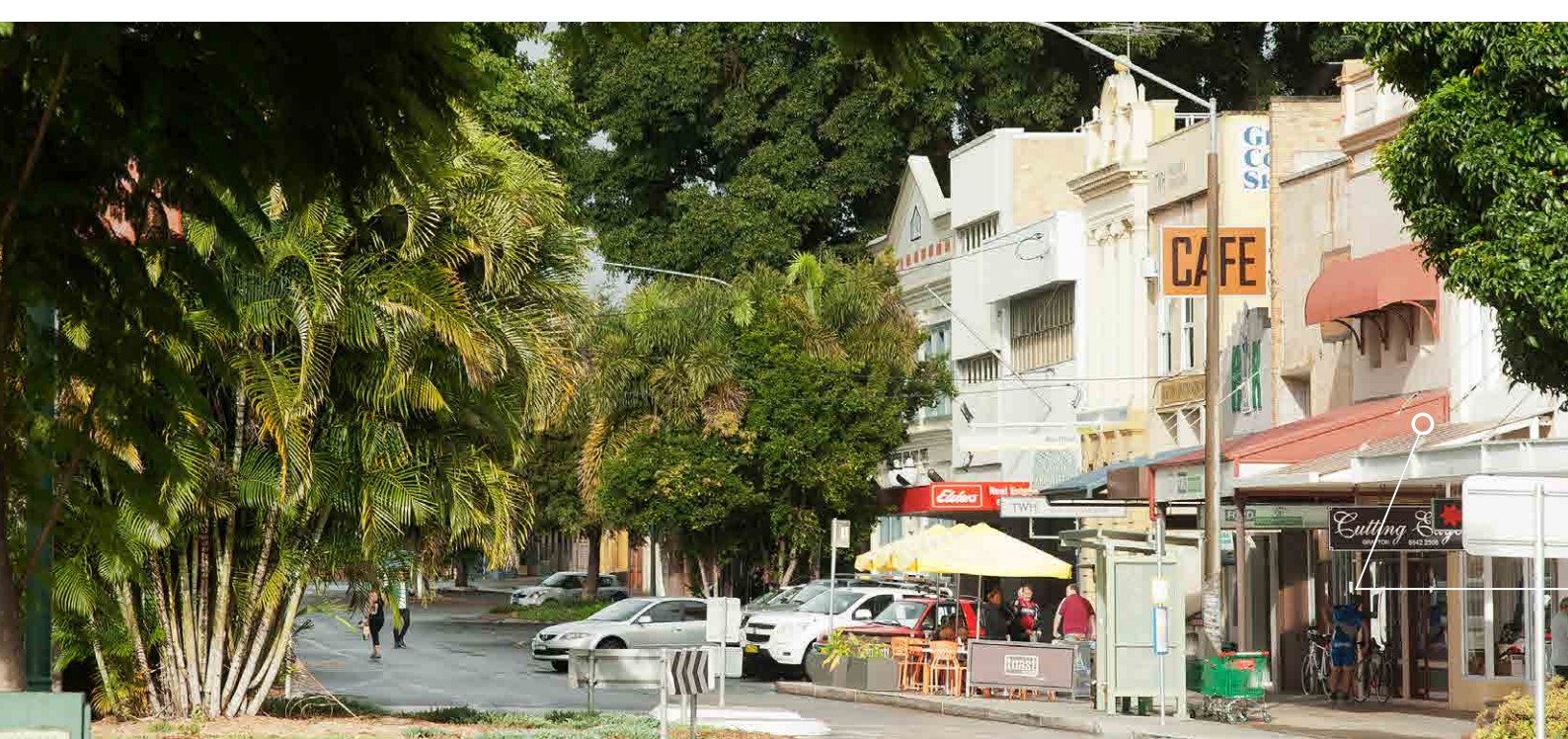
*Cover image: South West Rocks near Kempsey*

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## Foreword

The natural environment of the North Coast is one of the most popular features of the State. It is one of the main reasons residents choose to live in the region and 11 million tourists come to visit each year. The region will continue to be an appealing place for new residents and visitors and we need to plan for its future.

The *Draft North Coast Regional Plan* is our proposed blueprint for the next 20 years and it is a plan for both the Mid North Coast and the Far North Coast.

The draft Plan outlines a vision, goals and actions that focus on a sustainable future for the region as it grows that protects the environment, builds a prosperous community and offers attractive lifestyle choices for residents.

New homes, jobs and services will be directed primarily to the region's cities – Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour and Tweed Heads – where two-thirds of the population growth over the next 20 years will be accommodated.

New housing will be accelerated in the cities and in other centres across the region to make the most of existing services, to meet the community's different housing needs – particularly the ageing community – and to improve affordability. New release areas, including Cumbalum, Kings Forest, Cobaki, Brimbin and Thrumster will also provide for more housing and greater housing choice.

By focusing growth in cities and centres we can protect the sensitive coastal area with its productive farmland and significant environmental and cultural values.

The draft Plan proposes diversifying the economy by providing high-skilled job opportunities in health, education and aviation services; expanding nature-based activities, events and cultural tourism; and leveraging the Pacific Highway upgrade and connections to Sydney and South East Queensland to improve transport across the region and to identify suitable locations for freight facilities along the highway.

Let us know what you think about the proposals outlined in the *Draft North Coast Regional Plan* so that we can make sure the North Coast of NSW remains one of the great places to live and visit.

Have your say.

**Chris Gulaptis**

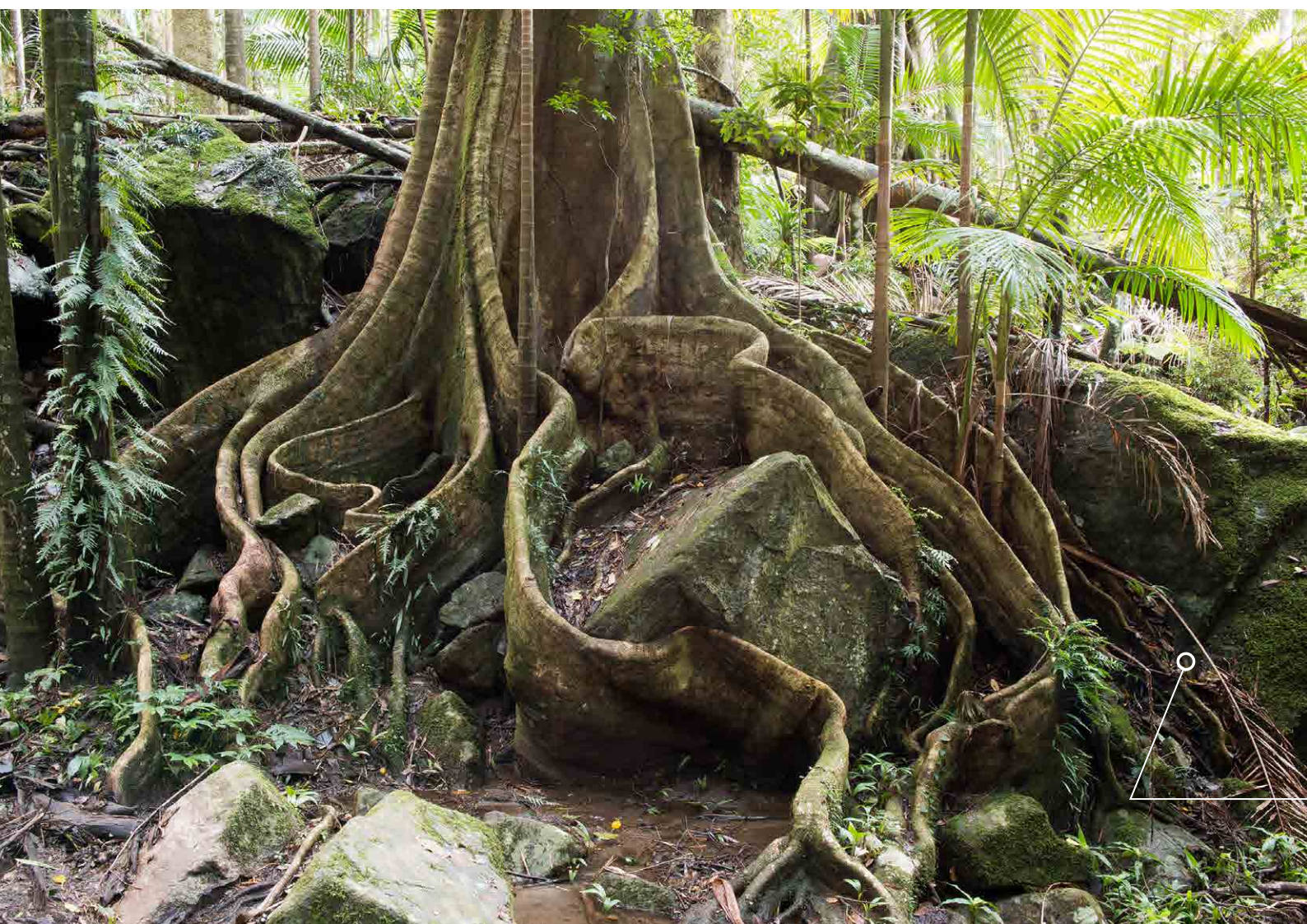
Parliamentary Secretary for the North Coast

Top:  
Coffs Harbour Jetty

Centre:  
Surfing at Evans Head

Bottom:  
Grafton







# Introduction

The *Draft North Coast Regional Plan* (draft Plan) applies to 13 councils - Tweed, Byron, Ballina, Lismore, Richmond Valley, Kyogle, Clarence Valley, Coffs Harbour, Bellingen, Nambucca, Kempsey, Port Macquarie-Hastings and Greater Taree.

The coastal and rural landscapes of the North Coast define the distinctive environment, character and lifestyles of this region. These areas also underpin the agriculture and tourism sectors which contribute \$4.1 billion each year to the economy and attract over 11 million visitors each year.<sup>1</sup> This is the most biologically diverse region in NSW and one of the most diverse in Australia. Fifteen of the region's reserves have World Heritage status (see Figure 1).

Most people live along the coastal strip, many in centres that are separated by rural or high value environmental land.

Over the next 20 years to 2036, the population is expected to grow by over 97,000 to almost 645,000. Tweed, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie-Hastings are experiencing the fastest population and economic growth rates in the region. Around 67 per cent of the growth is projected to occur in these three local government areas.

Over 90 per cent of the region's population growth to 2036 will comprise people aged over 65 years. Currently, 20 per cent of residents are aged over 65 years, but this will rise to 31 per cent by 2036. The people in this age group are likely to be healthier, more active and more productive than previous generations, which means there are opportunities to harness their skills and knowledge so they remain engaged in the workforce in varying capacities. There are also opportunities to expand the products and services on offer to this age group, including

education and training, supported housing, health and leisure, tourism and recreation, and home services. The ageing population will also have land use and transport implications.

Outside Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour and Tweed Heads, the proportion of young people (aged up to 19 years) and working-age people (20–64 years) will decline. This will have implications in terms of the number of people available for jobs, and the likely concentration of jobs growth in health care and social assistance.

Health and education are the fastest growing sectors on the North Coast – there were an extra 1,500 jobs each year in these sectors from 2006 to 2011. In the past five years, the NSW Government spent more than \$268 million on health and education infrastructure in the region.

The NSW and Australian Governments have already invested around \$8.6 billion on the Pacific Highway upgrade between Newcastle and Queensland. This is one of Australia's most significant infrastructure investments, with an estimated \$6.4 billion committed to complete the program.<sup>2</sup> Travel times and safety have improved on the highway, which carries the second-highest level of freight of any road in Australia, with volumes expected to increase.

The draft Plan provides the strategic policy, planning and decision-making framework to guide the region to sustainable growth over the next 20 years. It integrates economic, environmental and social considerations to achieve ecologically sustainable development – a high priority for the region.

The draft Plan integrates land use planning across State and Local Governments to strengthen partnerships and regional identity.

Top:  
*Bangalow Billycart  
Derby 2015*

Bottom:  
*Mt Warning rainforest*



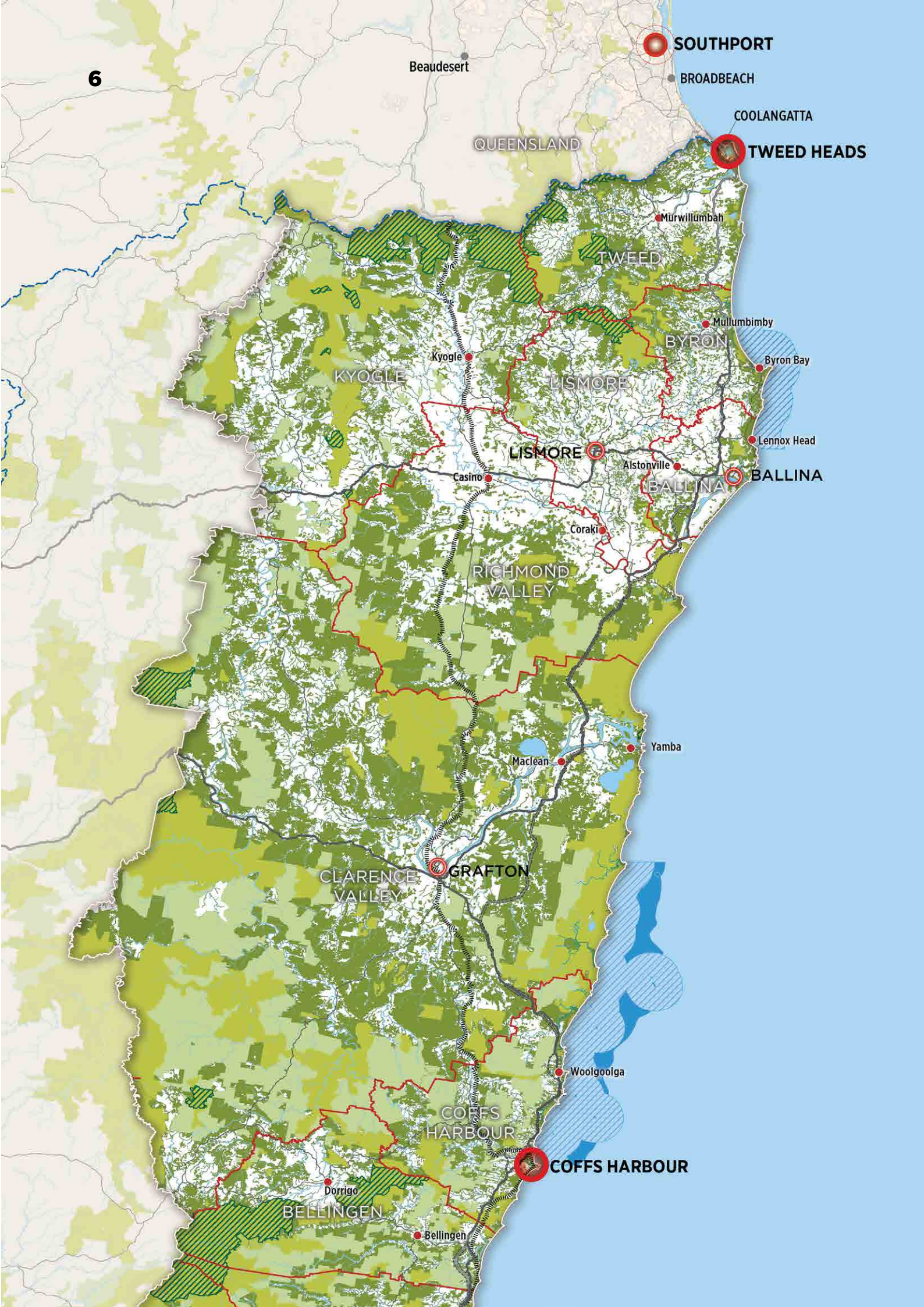






















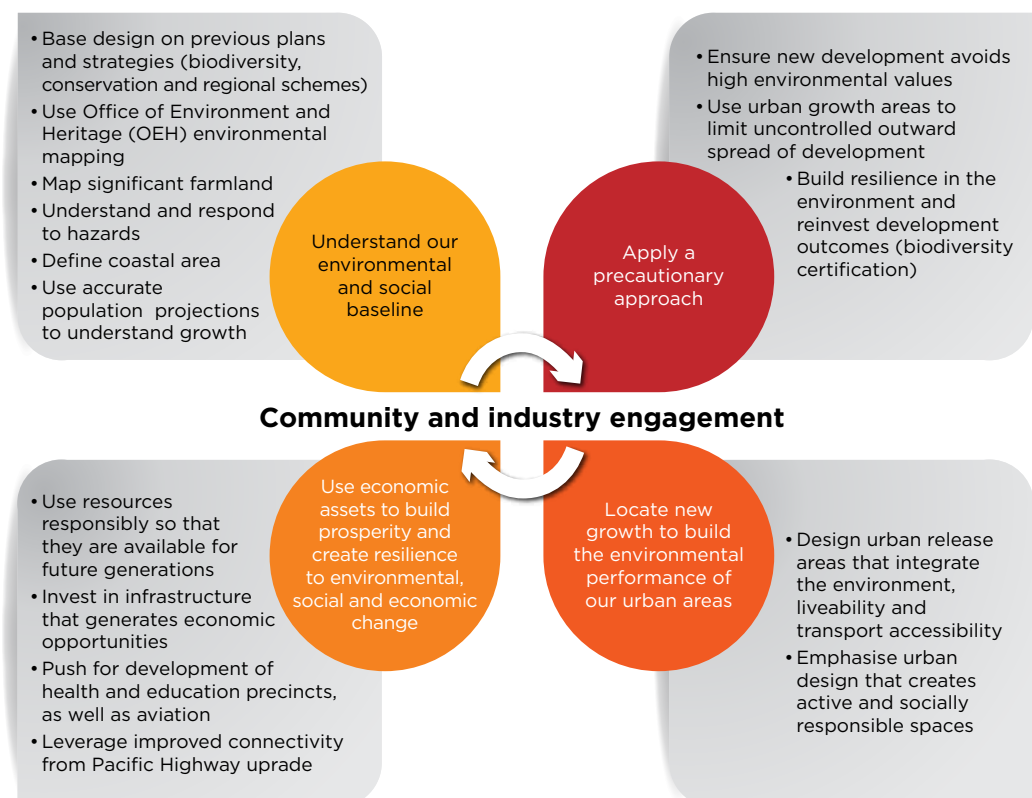
FIGURE 1: HIGH ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES

 Regional City	 Railway	 Proposed Highway Upgrade Corridor	 World Heritage Area
 Regional Centre	 Motorway	 Potential High Environmental Value	 National Park
 Town / Village	 State Highway	 Commonwealth Marine Park	 State Forest
 LGA Boundary	 Regional Road	 NSW Marine Park	 Watercourse

Underpinning the planning framework for this draft Plan are key principles. Regional plans will:

- facilitate economic growth, environmental management and social wellbeing;
- respond to the region's landscape, environmental assets, and natural and cultural resources;
- respond to long term structural, economic and demographic changes, with a focus on ageing, migration patterns and productivity;
- address the implications of a changing climate and build resilience to natural hazards;
- guide the locations for new housing and provide a diversity of housing choice;
- facilitate economic activities consistent with changing market demands and industry needs;
- inform infrastructure and services investment, coordinated with land use; and
- integrate cross-border drivers of change and coordinate responses Statewide and nationally.

FIGURE 2: BUILDING THE DRAFT PLAN





## North Coast subregions

The North Coast has three discrete landscapes that are focused on specific centres and reflect shared interests, geographical proximity, social links and existing services. These areas operate as subregions. The draft Plan highlights areas where the NSW Government will work with councils across these different landscapes to provide an adequate supply of housing and job opportunities.

These landscapes are:

- **Far North Coast** – comprising Tweed, Byron, Ballina, Lismore, Richmond Valley and Kyogle Councils;
- **Mid North Coast** – comprising Clarence Valley, Coffs Harbour, Bellingen and Nambucca Councils; and
- **Lower North Coast** – comprising Kempsey, Port Macquarie–Hastings and Greater Taree Councils.

## Developing the draft Plan

The *Draft North Coast Regional Plan* is underpinned by a strong evidence base. Data and evidence on population growth and change, the regional economy, the housing and employment markets, and the location of important environmental and resource areas, and natural hazards was gathered and analysed.

Background research that has informed the draft Plan includes:

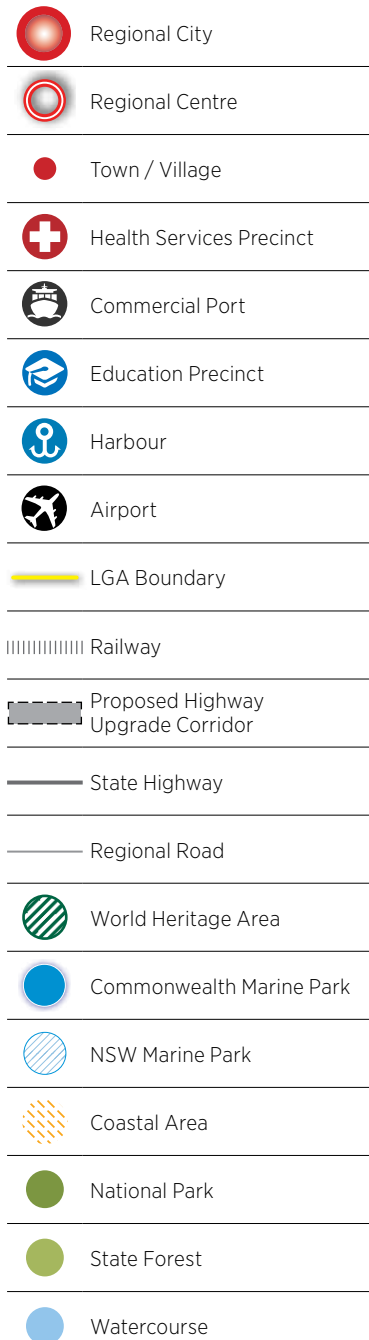
- Department of Planning and Environment (2014), *Population, Household and Dwelling Projections* – identifies the population and housing numbers for the North Coast to 2036;
- MacroPlan Dimasi (2015), *Mid North Coast and Far North Coast Housing Submarkets* – identifies the housing submarkets, the demographic profile of each, and the relationship to housing choice and the type of housing needed to meet future needs;
- MacroPlan Dimasi (2015), *North Coast Employment Land Review* – analysis of trends, drivers, and the supply and demand for employment lands;
- Department of Planning and Environment (2016), *Mid North Coast and Far North Coast Housing and Land Monitors* – monitors land and housing supply and is developed with input from all councils;
- Department of Planning and Environment (2006 and 2008 respectively), *Northern Rivers Farmland Protection Project and Mid North Coast Farmland Mapping Project* – identifies State or regionally significant land that is to be retained for existing or future agricultural production; and
- Department of Planning and Environment (2016), *North Coast Subregions Background Paper* – summarises strengths and opportunities for the three subregions, including journey to work, migration, land supply and economic sectors.

Additional evidence was also considered:

- Transport for NSW (2013), *Mid North Coast Regional Transport Plan and Northern Rivers NSW Regional Transport Plan* – provides a strategic direction for delivering transport infrastructure and services in the State's regions over the next 20 years;
- Bureau of Transport Statistics (2011), journey to work data – analyses and forecasts changes in employment and commuting patterns;
- Office of Environment and Heritage (2015), *Potential High Environmental Value Land Mapping* – identifies areas for conservation; native vegetation of high conservation value; threatened species and populations; significant wetlands, rivers, estuaries and coastal features; and sites of geological significance. The mapping provides guidance on regionally important conservation priority areas, along with potential regional priority offset areas that may have the same or similar biodiversity to that predicted in areas identified for future development; and
- Department of Industry (2015), *Economic Development Strategy for Regional NSW* – sets out clear goals, comprehensive actions, and an economic profile of the North Coast.



FIGURE 3: NORTH COAST REGIONAL PLAN







## Vision

The vision for the North Coast is for a sustainable future, centred on a prosperous community, healthy environment and attractive lifestyle choices.

Residents and visitors will continue to enjoy the region's natural environment, World Heritage-listed rainforests, rivers and waterways, landscapes and heritage. New housing will be located in identified regional cities and urban growth areas, to protect environmentally sensitive coastal and rural landscapes.

The coastal landscape and fertile floodplains that provide attractive lifestyles and support farming and fisheries will be managed so that future generations continue to benefit from the productive and environmental values that define this significant area of the North Coast.

The regional cities of Tweed Heads, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie will continue to grow and provide greater housing choice and jobs, supported by key services and educational opportunities.

The North Coast will have a diverse economy. Opportunities will be provided to cluster complementary health and education activities into growth precincts, more high-skilled jobs and provide better access to services. Nature-based and cultural heritage tourism will be expanded through complementary land uses, infrastructure and services.

The region's diverse agricultural sector will remain a major contributor to the economy and landscape values. Regionally significant farmland will be preserved to support a wide variety of farming practices.

The completion of the Pacific Highway upgrade will make it easier for residents to get to jobs, for visitors to access the wide range of tourist activities, and for industries to expand through better access from the region to Sydney and Brisbane.

The growth of South East Queensland will provide job opportunities and services for adjoining communities. The North Coast will capitalise on these economic opportunities as investors and business seek development opportunities to provide greater housing choice and affordability, and land with good access to local, national and international markets.

The Gold Coast Airport will continue to allow business and industry in the region to access international export and tourism markets, and major regional airports will continue to attract tourists and provide access to metropolitan centres.

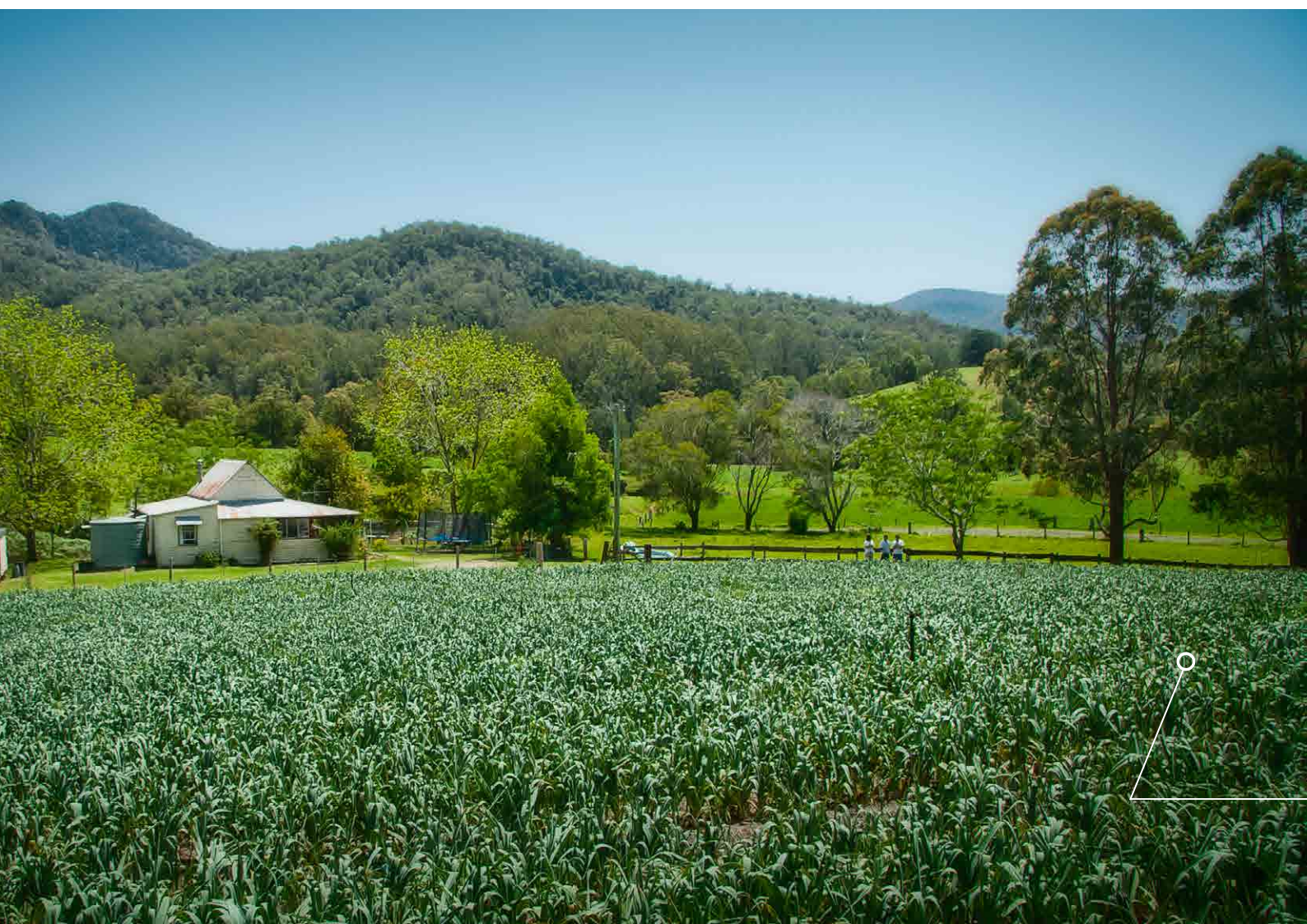
The competing demands of environmental protection, Aboriginal and historic heritage protection and conservation, population growth, and economic development will be sustainably managed so that sensitive environmental and coastal areas are protected for future generations. Future development will be directed to the least constrained areas.

### To achieve this vision, five goals have been set:

- GOAL 1 – A natural environment, and Aboriginal and historic heritage that is protected, and landscapes that are productive;
- GOAL 2 – Focus growth opportunities to create a great place to live and work;
- GOAL 3 – Housing choice, with homes that meet the needs of changing communities;
- GOAL 4 – A prosperous economy with services and infrastructure; and
- GOAL 5 – Improved transport connectivity and freight networks.

The vision will be achieved through this draft Plan and is reflected in the *Draft North Coast Regional Plan Map* (Figure 3).







# Delivering the Plan

Achieving the vision and the goals of the final North Coast Regional Plan (final Plan) will be a shared responsibility that will require the ongoing commitment of all stakeholders, including councils, State agencies and the development and services sectors.

## Governance

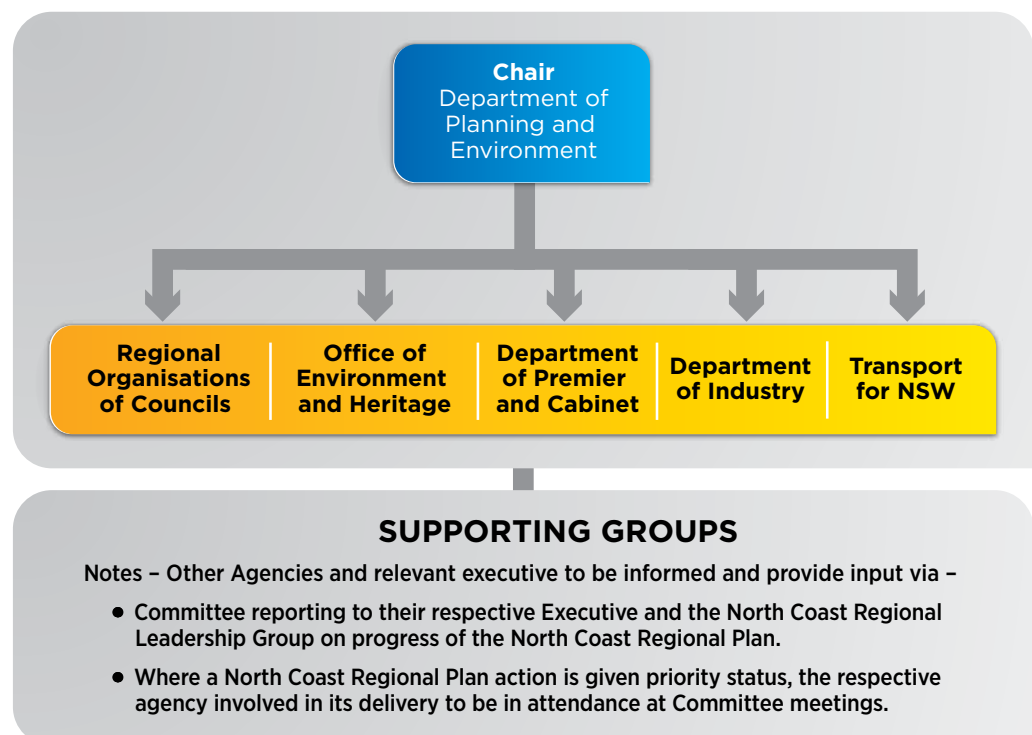
A Coordination and Monitoring Committee will be established to oversee the implementation of the final Plan. It will be chaired by the Department of Planning and Environment and comprise two Local Government representatives determined by the Regional Organisations of Councils (or Joint

Organisations once established), and representatives from the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Office of Environment and Heritage, Transport for NSW and the Department of Industry.

The committee will:

- coordinate and drive the delivery of actions, supported by an Implementation Plan;
- identify potential policy interventions or resourcing issues;
- establish a framework to monitor issues such as:
  - population;
  - housing;

FIGURE 4: COORDINATION AND MONITORING COMMITTEE



Top:  
Akubra hats, Kempsey

Bottom:  
Agriculture, Bellingen  
area





- economy and employment, and;
- natural environment and resources;
- prepare an annual report on the implementation of the actions identified in the final Plan, and to provide recommendations for land use and infrastructure funding priorities; and
- provide input to the review, and update and revise the Plan every five-years, or as necessary.

The committee will be supplemented by outcome-specific groups to provide advice on particular issues or projects in the Plan.

A Regional Cities Steering Committee will be established that will report to the Coordination and Monitoring Committee on progress towards meeting actions under Goal 2 of the final Plan.

### Implementing the actions in the Regional Plan

The actions in the final Plan will be implemented through a number of mechanisms including:

- local planning directions – under Section 117 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* – issued by the Minister for Planning that ensure council planning strategies and controls are consistent with the targets and aspirations of the final Plan;
- whole-of-government policy alignment; and
- regional collaboration across government, business, key stakeholders and the wider community for specific projects and processes.

The NSW Government will be responsible for implementing these actions and will work with councils on relevant initiatives.

### Infrastructure for the region's growth

The draft Plan aligns regional planning for housing and economic activity to existing and planned infrastructure investments. The infrastructure context and priorities in this draft Plan are drawn from the *Rebuilding NSW – State Infrastructure Strategy* (2014), *NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan* (2012), *Mid North Coast Regional Transport Plan* (2013), *Northern Rivers Regional Transport Plan* (2013), *NSW Freight and Ports Strategy* (2013), local water utilities' strategic business plans and the operational plans of electricity providers.

The NSW Government will use the final Plan and the annual monitoring of development activity to advise infrastructure agencies about the timing of new developments to inform ongoing planning and delivery of infrastructure, asset management and services. Opportunities for private sector delivery of infrastructure will also be explored to support growth.

The NSW Government will continue to work with State infrastructure providers to plan and deliver infrastructure that responds to place and community needs across regional NSW. This includes:

- aligning future infrastructure priorities to support planned growth and change;
- coordinating infrastructure delivery to support strategic employment and housing land; and
- exploring innovative design and delivery approaches across infrastructure sectors.

### Local Planning Initiatives

A Ministerial Direction will require all councils to implement the objectives and actions of the final Plan, appropriate to their local area, in their council planning strategies and local environmental plans.

Reviews of and amendments to planning strategies and local environmental plans will need to be consistent with the policies and actions in the final Plan.

In addition to implementing statutory mechanisms, councils will lead and participate in relevant strategic projects such as urban design and public domain improvement projects to deliver the outcomes of the final Plan.

Once finalised, the Plan will replace the following strategic plans in the region:

- *Far North Coast Regional Strategy 2006–31*, released by the NSW Government in 2006 for Tweed, Byron, Ballina, Lismore, Richmond Valley and Kyogle Local Government Areas; and
- *Mid North Coast Regional Strategy 2006–31*, released by the NSW Government in 2008 for Clarence Valley, Coffs Harbour, Bellingen, Nambucca, Kempsey, Port Macquarie-Hastings and Greater Taree Local Government Areas.







# GOAL 1 – A natural environment, and Aboriginal and historic heritage that is protected, and landscapes that are productive

The North Coast has a wealth of environmental, heritage and natural resources that underpin the region's economy and create a unique and enviable lifestyle for its residents.

The natural environment plays an important role in the identity, spirituality, and resource base of the Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr, Dunghutti, Biripi and Yaegl Aboriginal peoples.

The region's beaches, nature and outdoor activities are identified in *North Coast of NSW Destination Management Planning – June 2013* as key attractions. It is important that growth is managed sustainably to protect the region's environmental and cultural heritage for current and future generations.

The draft Plan:

- aims to protect potentially high environmental value areas and significant farmland by identifying them in planning strategies or local environmental plans;
- identifies and maps areas of potential environmental, Aboriginal and historic heritage and natural resources at the local scale in urban growth areas to inform future land release;
- reviews the methodology of the existing *Northern Rivers Farmland Protection Project* and *Mid North Coast Farmland Mapping Project* to apply consistent standards across the region;

## Urban Growth Areas and the Coastal Area

Coastal and other environmentally sensitive locations are under pressure due to high demand for housing and employment land. If not appropriately managed, population growth and the spread of low density urban and rural residential development could degrade these assets.

The draft Plan identifies and defines 'urban growth areas' and a 'coastal area' to achieve a balance between urban expansion and protecting coastal and other environmental assets. Limits are imposed on the location of additional rural residential development in the coastal area (see Goal 2).

Top:  
Clarence River, Grafton

Centre:  
Manning River at  
Manning Point

Bottom:  
Dairy farming, Casino



A Scar tree

- permits minor variations to the mapped farmland – prior to finalising the review – to allow isolated pockets of land to be included in urban growth areas where the land does not contribute to agricultural productivity. This provides flexibility and promotes efficient development outcomes;
- reduces potential land use conflict in rural areas by limiting rural fragmentation and additional rural dwellings; and
- limits potential conflicts over land use and impacts on the ability to extract resources.

600 KILOMETRES  
OF COASTLINE

49 COASTAL LAKES  
AND ESTUARIES

2 MARINE PARKS AND  
1 AQUATIC RESERVE

900 WETLANDS

70 LITTORAL RAINFORESTS

1,074 HECTARES OF  
ABORIGINAL PLACES OF  
CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

15 WORLD HERITAGE AREAS  
COVERING 117,282 HECTARES

## **DIRECTION 1.1 Protect the environment, and Aboriginal and historic heritage**

The North Coast is one of the most biologically diverse regions in Australia and contains the greatest number of endemic plants and animals of any region in NSW.<sup>3</sup> Fifteen of the region's reserves have World Heritage status. The World Heritage listed Gondwana Rainforests of Australia include the most extensive areas of

subtropical rainforest in the world, large areas of warm temperate rainforest and nearly all of the Antarctic beech cool temperate rainforest.

Many of these important environmental lands are protected in national parks, nature reserves and conservation areas. The NSW Government continues to expand its reserve system on the North Coast. The Everlasting Swamp National Park was created in late 2014 to protect around 1,700 hectares of coastal floodplain wetlands near Maclean. This park will protect and enhance internationally significant water bird habitats and estuarine biodiversity, and support sustainable fishery stocks.

The North Coast has a rich and diverse Aboriginal and historic heritage, with many important places, objects and landscapes. More than 2,500 important State or local items are heritage listed, including iconic sites such as the Cape Byron Lighthouse, Trial Bay Gaol and the convict-built St Thomas' Anglican Church in Port Macquarie. Over 70,000 hectares of Crown reserves has been set aside on behalf of the community for a wide range of public purposes.

Environmental features and heritage values define the distinctive character and lifestyles of the North Coast, and they underpin the tourism sector that attracts 11 million visitors each year<sup>4</sup> and an agricultural sector that generates around \$840 million.<sup>5</sup> Protecting these environmental values will keep the North Coast a great place to live and work.

### **ACTION 1.1.1 Identify and manage areas of high environmental value**

Many of the region's natural features and environmental values are already protected through existing legislation. Land use planning can assist by indicating locations where high environmental value areas are likely to occur. Strategic planning can assist in protecting these values by identifying and implementing controls to avoid or minimise impacts to these values from the outset.

Locations within the region with high environmental values have been mapped (see Figure 1) using criteria established by the Office of Environment and Heritage.



TABLE 1: NORTH COAST RESERVE SYSTEM

North Coast Reserve System	
LAND USE	SIZE - hectares
National Parks	552,256
Nature Reserves	101,876
State Conservation Areas	43,761
Historic Sites	934
Regional Parks	442
Aquatic Reserves & Marine Parks	94,728
<b>Total</b>	<b>793,997</b>

Groundwater dependent ecosystems and aquatic and marine habitats also have high environmental values. Maps of these areas are available from the Department of Primary Industries.

Identifying natural environment and heritage assets and using an evidence-based approach to planning will allow the region to meet its future housing and employment needs without adversely affecting the environment.

The NSW Government will:

- require councils when they are preparing planning strategies or local environmental plans for new or more intensive development to:
  - identify and implement appropriate planning controls to protect areas of high environmental value; and
  - implement the 'avoid, minimise, offset' hierarchy, by striving to avoid and minimise impacts on areas of high environmental value and where impacts cannot be avoided, identify and secure appropriate biodiversity offsets through an offset strategy.

The maps of high environmental value areas will also be used to consider opportunities for biodiversity certification and to inform council planning strategies and local environmental plans, as well as the fish community status and aquatic threatened species distributions, the key fish habitat, and marine protected areas maps from the Department of Primary Industries, Fisheries.

### Explanatory note: High Environmental Values map

A range of criteria were used to map high environmental values land including:

- existing conservation areas, including national parks and reserves, marine parks, declared wilderness areas, Crown reserves dedicated for environmental protection and conservation, and flora reserves;
- native vegetation of high conservation value, including vegetation types that have been over-cleared or occur within over-cleared landscapes, old growth forests and rainforests;
- threatened ecological communities and key habitats;
- important wetlands, coastal lakes and estuaries; and
- sites of geological significance.

Some areas not identified on the map, including terrestrial and aquatic environments, may still require environmental assessment.

The data used to identify high environmental values in this draft Plan is intended to provide a regional-level overview for the purposes of strategic planning. This data will continue to be updated as new information becomes available. Interested parties should contact relevant agencies, including the Office of Environment and Heritage, Local Land Services and the Department of Primary Industries, for current data and further support.



Left: Wetland, Evans Head  
Right: Macadamia farming, Lismore



### **ACTION 1.1.2 Identify and map areas of potential high environmental value and Aboriginal and historic heritage in proposed urban and employment land**

The Office of Environment and Heritage will review proposed urban and employment land identified in the urban growth area maps, to identify sites highly likely to have significant environmental, and Aboriginal and historic heritage values that may constrain development.

The NSW Government will:

- review proposed urban and employment land in the urban growth areas identified in the draft Plan; and
- prepare maps to identify sites of potentially high environmental value and, where culturally appropriate, areas of Aboriginal or historic heritage in urban growth areas. These maps will also be used to consider opportunities for biodiversity certification and to inform council planning strategies and local environmental plans.

### **ACTION 1.1.3 Review and update planning controls and heritage studies to protect Aboriginal and historic heritage assets**

Aboriginal and historic heritage items are generally protected by the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, the *Heritage Act 1977* or council local environmental plans. It is likely that the number of items, particularly Aboriginal items, is under-recorded and documented, and therefore vulnerable to damage or destruction.

When preparing planning strategies or local environmental plans, councils will review or prepare local cultural heritage studies to

identify and protect places of Aboriginal and historic heritage significance. This work will be undertaken in consultation with local communities.

Where impacts from new development near heritage items and areas cannot be avoided, proposals that reduce impacts through sympathetic design should be developed in accordance with relevant statutory processes.

The NSW Government will:

- work with councils to review and update their planning controls and heritage studies to identify and protect Aboriginal and historic heritage items and to make sure that appropriate opportunities for the adaptive or sympathetic use of heritage items are promoted and available.

## **DIRECTION 1.2 Protect and enhance productive farmland**

The North Coast's rich soils, relatively reliable rainfall and range of landscapes support a diverse and important agricultural sector. This includes over 20 different agricultural industries, including beef and sugar (Far North Coast), bananas, blueberries and fishing (Mid North Coast), and dairy and oyster farming (Lower North Coast). These industries support a range of value-adding industries, such as milk processing, abattoirs, sugar mills and packaging and processing. The NSW Government is committed to ensuring the long-term profitability and sustainability of our forests and forestry industries. The region's forests provide tourism and recreation activities, habitat and wood products through harvesting, and environmental services such as good water quality, native habitat and connectivity with other forests (such as national parks).



The NSW Government mapped approximately 420,600 hectares of State and regionally significant farmland through the *Northern Rivers Farmland Protection Project* and *Mid North Coast Farmland Mapping Project* in 2006 and 2008 respectively. This mapping identifies the region's important farmland, which is protected from future urban and rural residential development by council controls in planning strategies and local environmental plans. This mapping is shown in Figure 7.

Biophysical Strategic Agricultural Land on the North Coast was also mapped in 2014 as part of the NSW Government's *Strategic Regional Land Use Policy*. This land is capable of sustaining high levels of production for a variety of agricultural industries due to its high-quality soil and water resources. More than 248,000 hectares of this land has been mapped on the North Coast. The policy requires that any significant mining or coal seam gas proposals on this land have to be scrutinised through the independent Gateway process, before a development application can be lodged.

Protecting agricultural land has historically been achieved by limiting rural land subdivision. Councils will need to apply minimum subdivision standards for rural zones to limit rural land fragmentation. They will also need to apply provisions to limit dwellings in rural zones that are not associated with agriculture, or outside of rural residential areas, to avoid potential land use conflicts with agricultural activities.

Niche agriculture, such as horticulture, is common on smaller holdings throughout the North Coast. Identifying suitable areas for smaller agricultural holdings can minimise conflict between land uses. Councils should investigate mechanisms to support this type of agriculture, while preventing widespread fragmentation in the rural zone.

Councils that permit secondary dwellings or detached dual occupancies in their rural areas should consider, at the development application stage, possible land use conflicts, and the potential impacts on local agricultural activities.

The NSW Government will also implement the *Agriculture Industry Action Plan (2014)* prepared by the Department of Primary Industries to drive growth in the sector across the State.

### **ACTION 1.2.1 Investigate complementary activities in rural zones**

The NSW Government supports the development of farms that can adapt to changing agricultural trends and practices, while also accommodating agritourism, and processing, packaging and associated retail services.

Some councils permit with consent, a number of non-agricultural core activities, such as niche commercial, tourist and recreation activities, in primary production areas. These include:

- animal boarding and training establishments;
- bed and breakfast and farm stay accommodation;
- camping grounds and recreation areas;
- cellar door premises and roadside stalls;
- eco-tourism facilities;
- restaurants and cafes; and
- nurseries.

These activities will promote a stronger agricultural sector by building greater economic diversity within farm businesses, and providing greater resilience and capacity to adapt to changing circumstances.

The NSW Government will:

- work with councils to investigate appropriate complementary activities in rural zones that promote the development of a stronger agricultural sector and will not adversely affect agricultural activities.

### **ACTION 1.2.2 Increase the region's biosecurity through the use of buffers and land use conflict risk assessment**

Improving biosecurity is important to protect the economy, environment and community from the negative impacts of animal and plant, pests, diseases and weeds. Biosecurity issues can occur when extending the interface between urban and rural areas, increasing the risk of animal and plant pests and diseases affecting food production, the environment (particularly wildlife) and human health.

Left: Sugar Cane, North Coast  
Right: Dairy farming, Casino

These land use conflicts can often be avoided by applying buffers to separate different land uses, for example, through distance, vegetation or topography.

The NSW Government will:

- work with councils to identify opportunities to minimise biosecurity risks for current and future industries through biosecurity plans, and strategic planning, including the review of zones in local plans;
- promote the application of buffer areas to minimise biosecurity risks when assessing the potential impacts of new development; and
- apply consistent and coordinated regional planning and local delivery of the *NSW Biosecurity Strategy 2013-2021*, *NSW Weeds Action Program 2015-2020* and *Draft NSW Invasive Species Plan 2015 – 2022*.

### **ACTION 1.2.3 Review the Northern Rivers and Mid North Coast farmland mapping projects**

A review of the consistency, methodology and application of the *Northern Rivers Farmland Protection Project* and *Mid North Coast Farmland Mapping Project* will provide an opportunity to:

- finalise the current interim farmland mapping for the Greater Taree area; and
- establish consistent standards and application for regionally significant farmland across the North Coast.

The NSW Government will:

- review the *Northern Rivers Farmland Protection Project* and *Mid North Coast Farmland Mapping Project* to deliver appropriate management of regionally significant farmland across the region.

### **ACTION 1.2.4 Adopt State and regionally significant farmland interim variation criteria**

The NSW Government recognises that some small pockets of State and regionally significant mapped farmland may be more suited to other land uses. Pending finalisation of the farmland mapping review (discussed above), this draft Plan establishes interim significant farmland variation criteria. When councils are preparing planning strategies or local environmental plans they can use these criteria to assess suitability of the land for continued rural land use.

The NSW Government will:

- allow councils to make a minor variation to the mapped farmland boundary, where State or regionally significant farmland is unlikely to contribute significantly to future agricultural production.

## **Biosecurity**

Biosecurity means protecting the economy, environment and community from the negative impacts of pests, diseases and weeds. The Department of Primary Industries has developed the *Biosecurity Strategy 2013 – 2021*. The strategy identifies a number of outcomes for implementation to better manage the risks of pests, diseases and weeds entering, establishing and spreading in Australia, including the following:

- review existing NSW legislation, taking into consideration legislation in other jurisdictions;
- support the development of best practice guidelines; and
- develop clear guidelines outlining the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in biosecurity management.





## State and Regionally Significant Farmland Interim Variation Criteria

Land may be suitable for uses other than farmland if:

### AGRICULTURAL CAPABILITY

- the land is isolated from other important farmland and is not capable of supporting sustainable agricultural production;

### LAND USE CONFLICT

- the land use does not increase the likelihood of conflict and does not impact on current or future agricultural activities in the locality;\*

### INFRASTRUCTURE

- the provision of infrastructure (utilities, transport, open space, communications and stormwater) required to service the land is physically and economically feasible at no cost to State and Local Government. Adverse impacts on adjoining farmland must be avoided;

### ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

- the proposed land uses do not have an adverse impact on areas of high environmental value, and Aboriginal or historic heritage significance; and

### AVOIDING RISK

- risks associated with physically constrained land are avoided and identified, including:
  - flood prone;
  - bushfire prone;
  - highly erodible;
  - severe slope; and
  - acid sulfate soils.

\* An evaluation may be required in accordance with the NSW Department of Primary Industry *Land Use Conflict Risk Assessment Guide* (2011).



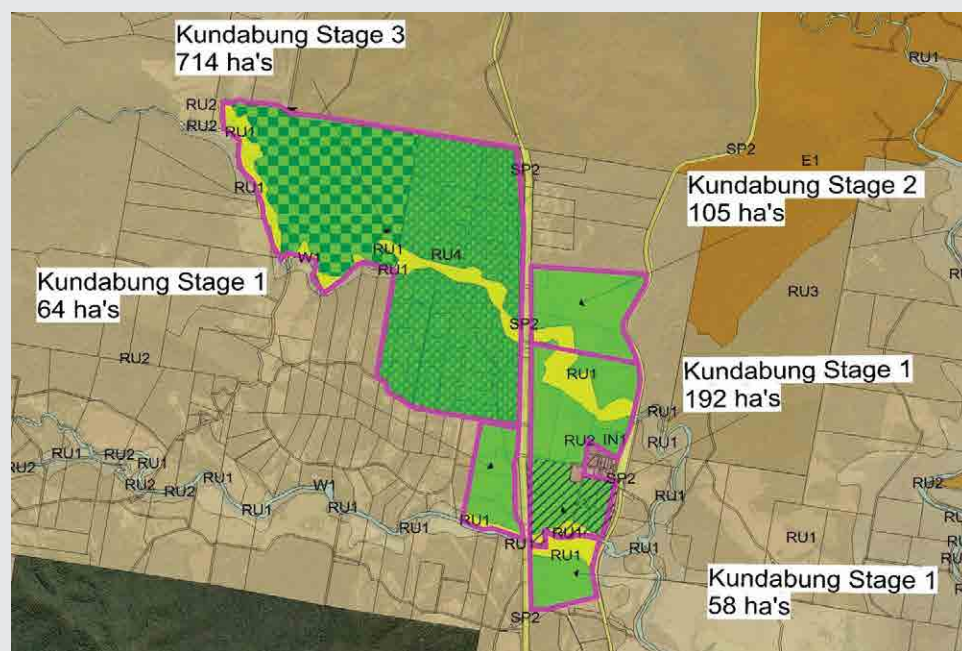
Manning River, Taree

### Case study: Kempsey

Kempsey Shire Council has identified a possible rural residential expansion area at Kundabung in its 2014 *Rural Residential Land Release Strategy*. This area contains two small and isolated corridors of regionally significant farmland, shown in yellow on the map. These corridors will eventually be surrounded by rural residential development (shown in green) and could be serviced effectively and efficiently by adjoining infrastructure as the surrounding land is developed.

Retention of these lands for agricultural purposes would not serve an economic or agricultural benefit and would miss the opportunity to take advantage of any adjoining infrastructure.

Current policy would prevent this outcome as the regionally significant farmland has been excluded from the rural residential release area. The new interim policy would allow Kempsey Shire Council to consider varying this mapped farmland by applying the criteria.



### DIRECTION 1.3 Safeguard aquatic habitats and water catchments

The region's aquatic habitats and water catchments contribute to the character of the North Coast; support urban and economic growth; offer significant aquaculture, commercial and recreational fishing opportunities; and are a major tourist attraction.

Aquaculture relies on high-quality fresh water catchments, along with estuarine and marine waters. Protecting the aquaculture environment

from activities that affect water quality is crucial to the long term future of the industry. New development will be appropriately located to minimise impacts, including downstream impacts, on fish and aquaculture, commercial and recreational fishing habitats (waterways, wetlands and tidal lands). The NSW Government has several strategies to protect aquatic resources. Councils should consider the following strategies when developing local planning strategies and local environmental plans:

- *Policy and Guidelines for Fish Habitat Conservation and Management* (2013) provides guidance and helps manage and protect important marine resources;



- *NSW Oyster Industry Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy (2014) and the NSW Land Based Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy (2009)* identify areas suitable for the development of marine-based aquaculture on the North Coast; and
- *Marine-Based Industry Policy – Far North Coast & Mid North Coast NSW (2015)* guides government and industry on the establishment of marine-based industries on North Coast navigable waterways, and identifies criteria to minimise the impact of this type of development on the environment, water quality and amenity.

### **ACTION 1.3.1 Protect marine environments, water catchment areas and groundwater sources**

The North Coast has a number of important aquatic environments, water catchments and groundwater aquifers that support its urban areas, agriculture, environment, economy and lifestyle. Protecting water quality, managing access to water supplies, and avoiding activities that interrupt natural ecological processes are essential for the health of the region's marine environments, water catchments and to support continued population and economic growth.

Ballina, Byron, Lismore, Richmond Valley, Clarence Valley, Coffs Harbour and Tweed Councils have already included planning provisions in their local environmental plans to avoid or mitigate potential impacts on drinking water catchments from developments. Any development should have a neutral or beneficial effect on the region's water quality.

The NSW Government will:

- work with councils to apply appropriate planning provisions in local environmental plans to protect marine environments, water catchment areas and groundwater sources from potential development impacts.

### **ACTION 1.3.2 Finalise water sharing plans for rivers and groundwater systems on the North Coast**

The NSW Department of Primary Industries is developing water sharing plans that form the basis for sharing and allocating water in NSW.

They establish rules for sharing water between the environmental needs of the river or aquifer and water users, and also between different types of water use such as town supply, rural domestic supply, stock watering, industry and irrigation.

These plans are being progressively developed for rivers and groundwater systems on the North Coast. The Tweed, Richmond and Coffs whole-of-catchment water sharing plans are already in use and a number of other plans are being prepared. These plans will set rules to regulate the extraction of surface water and groundwater, as well as the use of water. The plans provide increased opportunities to trade water through separation of land and water and will give security to licence holders through the application of equitable conditions and clear access rules.

The NSW Government will:

- finalise and continue to update water sharing plans for rivers and groundwater systems on the North Coast.

### **ACTION 1.3.3 Investigate opportunities to integrate the marine estate and adjacent coastal land uses**

The *Marine Estate Management Act 2014* provides for strategic and integrated management of the whole marine estate – marine waters, coasts and estuaries. The NSW Government will improve the coordination of marine and coastal (land-based) activities to minimise potential impacts that may influence natural systems along the coast.

The NSW Government will:

- prepare a Marine Estate Strategy for NSW in partnership with key stakeholders to respond to the outcomes of threat and risk assessments for the Manning Shelf bioregion. This will consider the marine estate, including its social, economic and ecological values, and will determine the management priorities for the estate; and
- develop regional boating plans to improve boating safety, boat storage and waterway access on major waterways.



Grafton Flood Sign  
on the Clarence River,  
January 2013

## DIRECTION 1.4 Adapt for natural hazards and climate change

The North Coast is prone to natural hazards, including bushfires, coastal erosion, rising sea levels, storms, floods, acid sulfate soils and landslips (see Figure 5). Climate change may worsen many of these hazards. The *2014 North Coast Climate Change Snapshot* estimates climate change will raise maximum temperatures on the North Coast by 0.7 degrees by 2030 and by 1.9 degrees by 2070. This is projected to increase the number of severe fire weather days in spring and summer, decrease rainfall in winter, and increase rainfall in spring and autumn.

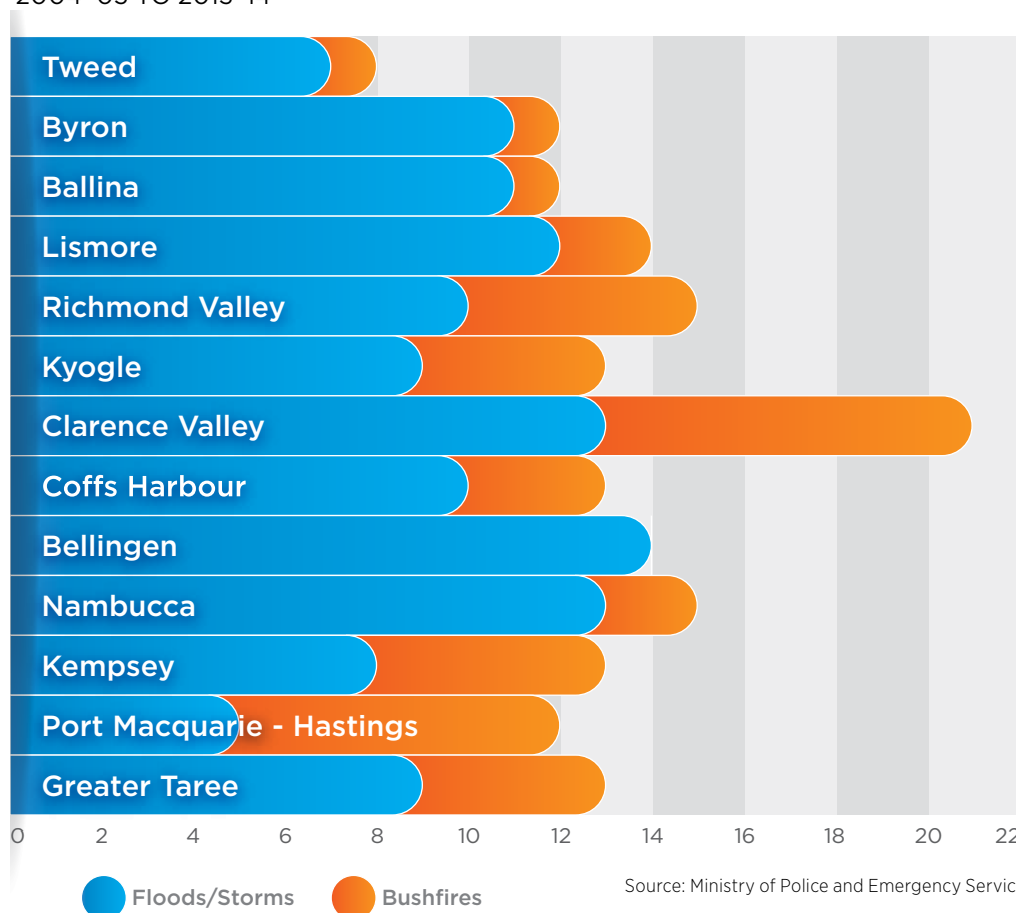
Built-up areas, infrastructure, and environmental and cultural assets along the coast may be at risk from storms, sea level rise, coastal erosion and inundation. Residential and

commercial property and services may also be at risk. A number of councils are preparing coastal zone management plans and associated controls to deal with current and potential erosion issues on the North Coast.

Land use planning can be an effective management tool in minimising or avoiding the impact of natural hazards. Land that is prone to hazards should not be developed unless the hazards can be managed appropriately. Local environmental plans, development control plans and council planning strategies can integrate adaptation to climate change in a number of ways, including by:

- providing flexible controls that allow for innovation in farming practices and new emerging industries as a result of climate change;
- creating more liveable conditions in more extreme weather events by developing building standards and urban design approaches that create resilient

FIGURE 5: NUMBER OF NATURAL DISASTER DECLARATIONS FROM 2004-05 TO 2013-14





environments for the future such as thermal efficient building design and creating greenways; and

- introducing policies that permit large-scale renewable energy projects.

It is important that natural hazard planning responds to the changing climate to minimise risks.

Flooding, in particular, is a major hazard on the North Coast due to topography and regional climate. The *NSW Floodplain Development Manual: the management of flood liable land* (2005) outlines the NSW Government's *Flood Prone Land Policy* (2005). The manual promotes a merit-based approach to flood risk management that balances social, economic, environmental and flood risk parameters to determine the appropriate and sustainable use of the floodplain.

Some developments (such as aged care facilities) can be sensitive to natural hazard events due to the difficulty of evacuation in an emergency. Local environmental plans will include appropriate controls for areas subject to natural hazard events to reflect the risks and limitations of the land. Port Macquarie–Hastings, Clarence Valley, Byron and Tweed Councils have already included provisions in their local environmental plans that require a consent authority to be satisfied that certain sensitive developments can be safely occupied or evacuated in a major flood event.

#### **ACTION 1.4.1 Build on regional understanding of projected climate impacts and implement opportunities to respond**

In 2014, the NSW Government undertook an Integrated Regional Vulnerability Assessment on the North Coast that identified regional climate change vulnerabilities and potential actions to respond. This process has provided an evidence-base to enable State and Local Governments to incorporate climate change considerations into service planning and delivery.

The impacts of rising sea levels and climate change will be critical to managing the coastal zone and floodplain risk. For example, saltmarsh and mangrove habitats may move landward with sea-level rise. Planning and

natural resource management authorities will need to consider mapping and modelling the impacts of sea-level rise, storm surge and inundation to provide adequate buffers for landward migration, protection of coastal saline wetlands, and to limit development in areas adjoining these wetlands.

The NSW Government will:

- continue to support regional decision-makers to address climate change vulnerabilities and minimise impacts on local communities by implementing the findings of the *North Coast Integrated Regional Vulnerability Assessment*;
- implement the Coastal Reform Program (see over);
- take a consistent and coordinated approach to plan and manage hazards by:
  - consolidating information and making this publicly available through the Department of Planning and Environment's Planning Portal and the Office of Environment and Heritage's *Adapt NSW* website; and
  - supporting joint council investigations into managing the threat of natural hazards in the region;
- work with councils to:
  - develop strategic plans, risk management plans and emergency management actions, including appropriate controls in local environmental plans to minimise the potential impacts of hazards, consistent with:
    - the *NSW Floodplain Development Manual*;
    - *Planning for Bush Fire Protection 2006*; and
    - all other relevant State and regional policies, strategies and plans;
  - map all vulnerable areas and hazards;
  - prioritise investigations into how hazard mitigation infrastructure may be improved; and
  - integrate planning for emergency response infrastructure to support the above.



## Coastal Reform Process

The NSW Government is responding to community concerns about coastal hazards through a coastal reform process. The reforms include:

### NEW COASTAL MANAGEMENT ACT

The NSW Government aims to replace the *Coastal Protection Act 1979* with a new act that is less complex and a better fit with land use planning and local government legislation. The new act will establish requirements for State, regional and local land use planning instruments. It will require councils to undertake coastal zone management planning within the local government Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework.

### IMPROVING SUPPORT TO COUNCILS

The coastal reform package is focused on improving the way NSW Government supports council decision-making. The NSW Government will work in partnership with councils to co-design a new coastal management manual. The manual will provide a single, consolidated source of tools for coastal management, to meet local circumstances.

### SUSTAINABLE FUNDING AND FINANCING ARRANGEMENTS

The reform package identifies more sustainable funding and financing arrangements for coastal management strategies. They will be based on a set of cost-sharing principles to fairly and transparently identify who benefits from proposed coastal management actions and who should contribute to the costs. To support the new approach, the Office of Environment and Heritage will review various funding and financing mechanisms for use by councils.

## **DIRECTION 1.5 Deliver economic growth through sustainable use of, and access to, mineral and energy resources**

The region's natural resources have the potential to drive regional economic development and prosperity. They include traditional and renewable energy sources and a broad range of mineral resources and construction materials. These mineral resources include hard rock aggregate, clay, sand and coarse aggregate. The development of these resources is necessary to support major infrastructure projects, the new housing needed for a growing population, and industrial and agricultural businesses. The extraction of these resources generates employment in the region. Local extraction of these resources is particularly important as transporting these bulky materials can be relatively expensive.

The North Coast also includes areas of the Clarence-Moreton Basin, which has potential coal seam gas resources that may be able to support the development and growth of new industries and provide economic benefits for the region.

The NSW Government released the *NSW Gas Plan* in November 2014, which established a clear strategic framework to deliver world's-best-practice standards and regulation for the coal seam gas industry. The plan adopted all of the recommendations in the final report of the





Left: Rock crushing operation, Pacific Highway upgrade  
Right: Electricity network, AusGrid

*Independent Review of Coal Seam Gas Activities in NSW*, undertaken by the NSW Chief Scientist in 2014. Coal seam gas exclusion zones apply within 2 kilometres of residential areas; identified future residential growth areas, and certain areas that meet 'village criteria'.

The region also has a number of potential sources of alternative or renewable energy - including solar, bio-waste and wave power - which could contribute to electricity generation, reduce the region's carbon footprint and create new economic opportunities and industries.

The existing electricity market and regional electricity infrastructure has the capacity to support and grow the renewable energy sector in the region. The NSW Government's *Renewable Energy Action Plan*, released in September 2013, guides renewable energy development in the State and supports the national target of 20 per cent renewable energy by 2020.

### **Explanatory note: Areas where Exploration Titles have been bought back by the NSW Government 2011-2016 map**

Figure 6 shows where exploration titles have been bought back by the NSW Government, following the release of the *NSW Gas Plan* in 2014.

The data shown on this map draws on information relating to existing title approvals and is correct at January 2016. The data does not indicate the nature, timing or location of specific mining activities. Further information about recent or current development applications for mining projects in specific locations can be found on the Department of Planning and Environment's Major Projects website at: <http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/>.



FIGURE 6: AREAS WHERE EXPLORATION TITLES HAVE BEEN BOUGHT BACK BY THE NSW GOVERNMENT 2011-2016

#### Disclaimer:

Exploration titles show where applications can be made for mining activities. They do not infer a right to mine.

Mining is excluded in National Parks and Historic Sites.



### The upgrade of the Pacific Highway from Woolgoolga to Ballina alone is expected to require:<sup>6</sup>

1.2 million tonnes of road base ▼	800,000 tonnes of sand ▼	1.4 million tonnes of aggregate ▼	600,000 tonnes of earthworks material ▼
4 million tonnes of materials in total will be needed from local quarries			

#### ACTION 1.5.1 Facilitate investment in the resources and energy sector

Improving information available on the location, value and attributes of resources can support expansion of the sector. The NSW Government's *Mineral Resource Audit* has been used to show the known potential mineral resource sites on the North Coast (see Figure 7).

Transition areas surround identified resource areas and were formerly referred to as buffer or separation zones. They are areas that may be affected by activities associated with resource extraction and are identified to minimise the potential for encroachment and land use conflict.

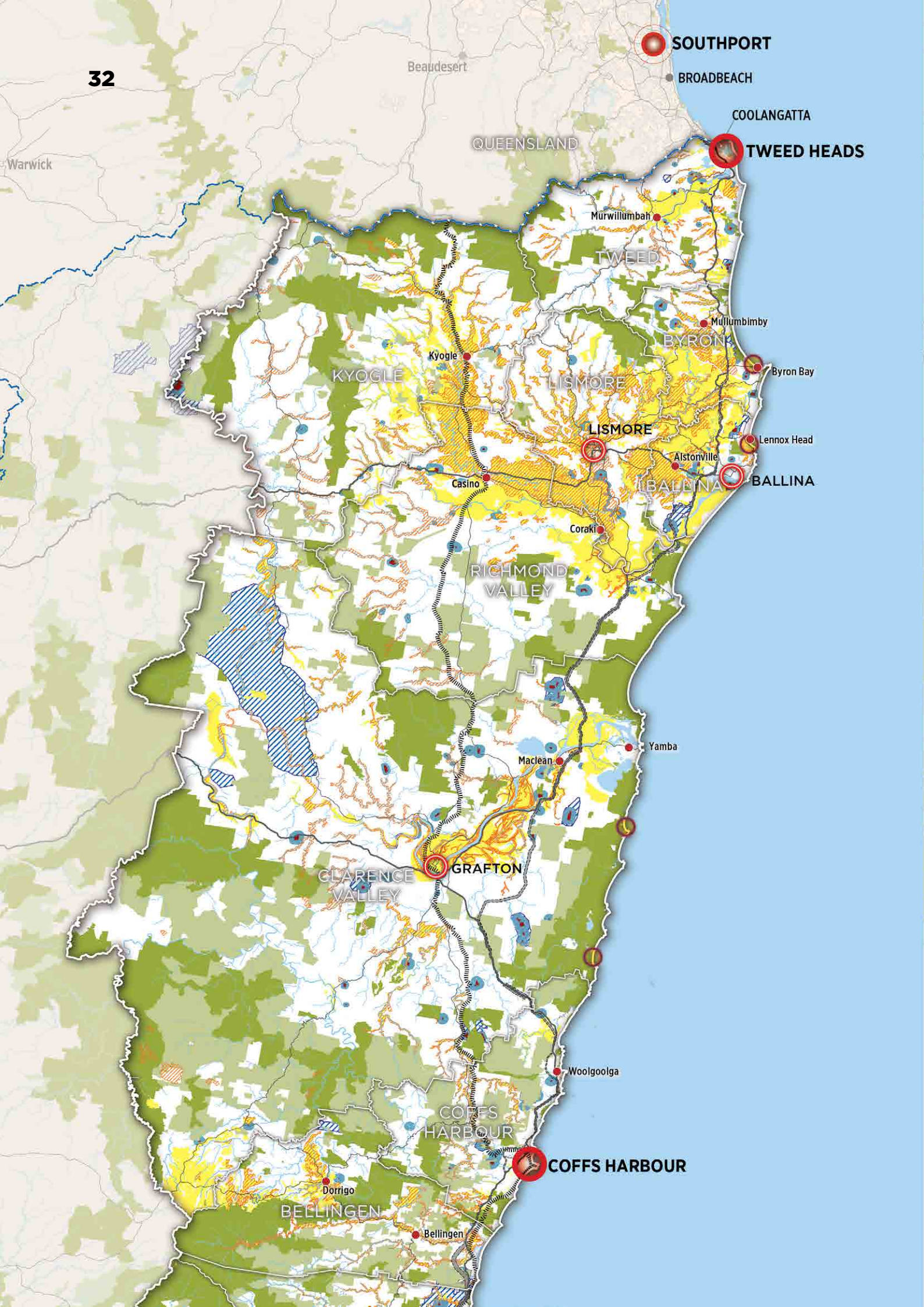
These resource sites need to be protected from encroachment and land use conflict as they will underpin growth and infrastructure delivery in the region. Mining and energy production have specific operational needs based on the productive life of the facility or resource. This provides opportunities for sequential or staged land uses that maximise the productive use of the land over time. An important element of this is promoting the early development of long-term landscape goals for the area.

Councils should consider the *Mineral Resource Audit* and the Department of Industry's exploration and mining activity maps (including Common Ground) when assessing applications for land use changes.

The NSW Department of Industry is mapping coal and coal seam gas resources in the region. Once completed, this information will inform future regional and local planning by providing updated information on the location of resources.

The NSW Government will:

- maintain the best available geoscience information related to the resources and energy sectors in NSW and transparently monitor development activity. Up to date mapping is available on the geoscientific data warehouse and Common Ground website, which is maintained by Division of Resources and Energy;
- identify and plan for the infrastructure needs and requirements of the resources and energy sector;
- work with councils and industry to implement the integrated mining policy, including finalising the economic assessment guidelines;
- plan for landscapes to support other uses and new economic opportunities; and
- develop analytical tools to identify and map renewable energy potential, including wind, large-scale solar, bioenergy and geothermal, building on existing information such as the Australian Government's *Renewable Energy Mapping Infrastructure*.





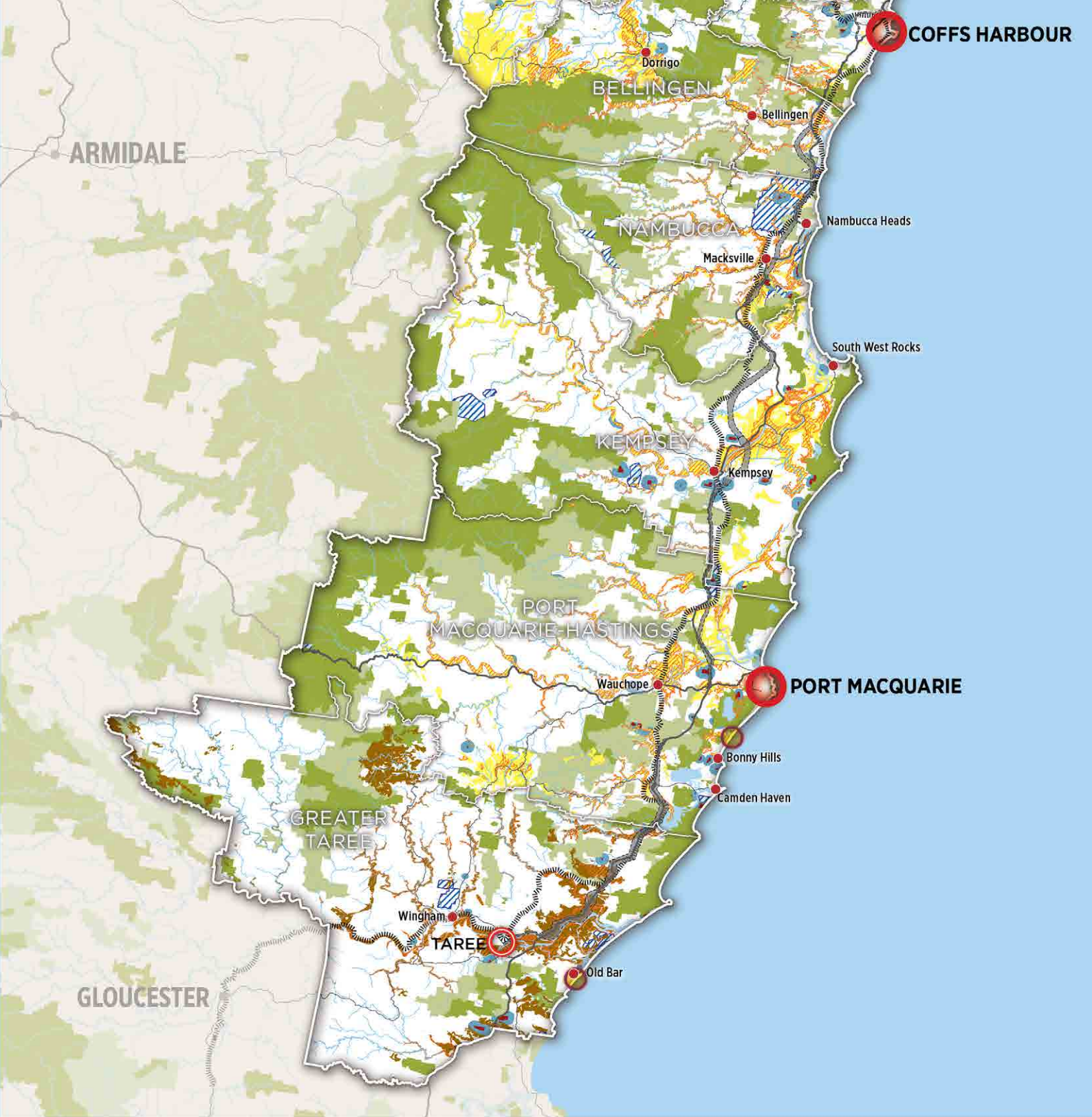
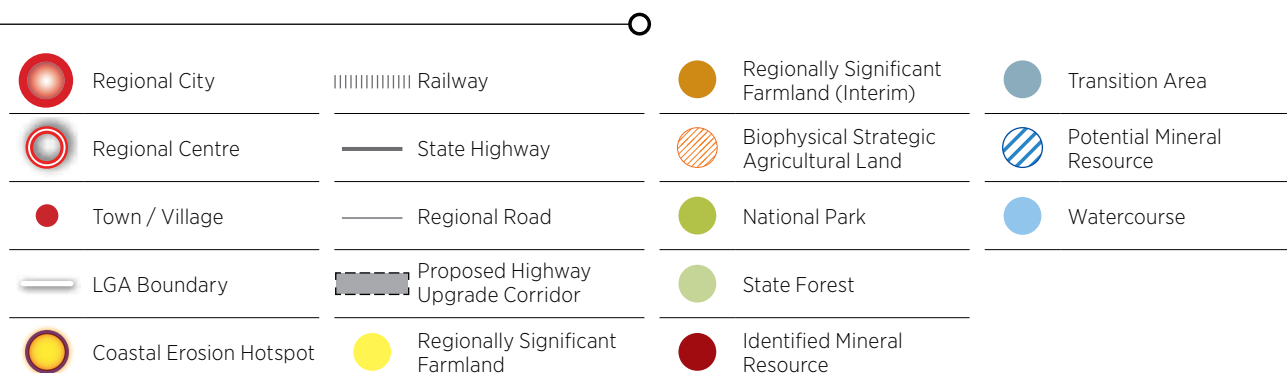


FIGURE 7: NORTH COAST RESOURCES AND FARMLAND









## GOAL 2 – Focus growth opportunities to create a great place to live and work

The North Coast is well known for its diverse rural and coastal landscapes and world-class natural environment. The draft Plan will manage growth to protect the conservation and economic value of these important assets so that the region remains a great place to live and work.

The population of the North Coast is growing, especially in the three regional cities – Tweed, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie – and in the coastal area. The draft Plan adopts a balanced approach to managing this growth by directing development to less environmentally constrained areas, planning for increased growth of the North Coast's three regional cities, and introducing controls on development in the environmentally sensitive coastal area.

Over the next 20 years to 2036, it is projected that around 67 per cent of future population growth will occur in three high-growth areas: Tweed Heads, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie (see Figure 8).<sup>7</sup> The natural qualities of these cities have made them desirable places to live and contributed to their status as the region's largest urban centres, with the highest rates of economic and population growth.

The draft Plan promotes the development of these regional cities to drive future prosperity for the North Coast. This will be achieved by providing opportunities for greater housing choice; promoting employment growth in health, education, aviation and other services; and improving the public domain and open space to promote healthier urban environments. The growth of surrounding regional centres and towns will be integrated with that of the regional cities by reinforcing transport and other links.

Strong growth has placed pressure on the coastal area, which contains some of the most sensitive environmental areas. Sustainably managing the coastal area is vital to protecting the region's highly valued environmental assets and cultural heritage for future generations.

The draft Plan aims to direct urban growth to the most suitable areas to preserve biodiversity. Natural constraints mean incremental outward growth of urban areas in coastal areas cannot continue indefinitely. Areas for urban growth are identified and mapped in Appendix B. These areas will accommodate a range of uses, including housing, industry, business, infrastructure, community facilities, tourism and parks. Development in these locations will take account of the mapped areas of potential high environmental value and regionally significant farmland. The draft Plan provides a framework for considering minor variations to urban growth areas when criteria are met.

Local growth management strategies, prepared by councils, will allow for new land release areas to be carefully examined and planned. The growth of inland centres and towns will be encouraged.

The NSW Government will work with councils to deliver housing, industrial and commercial activities, and supporting infrastructure, in locations that manage the potential impacts of this development on the natural environment, cultural heritage and significant farmland. Urban design will have an important role in creating inclusive, attractive and liveable places.

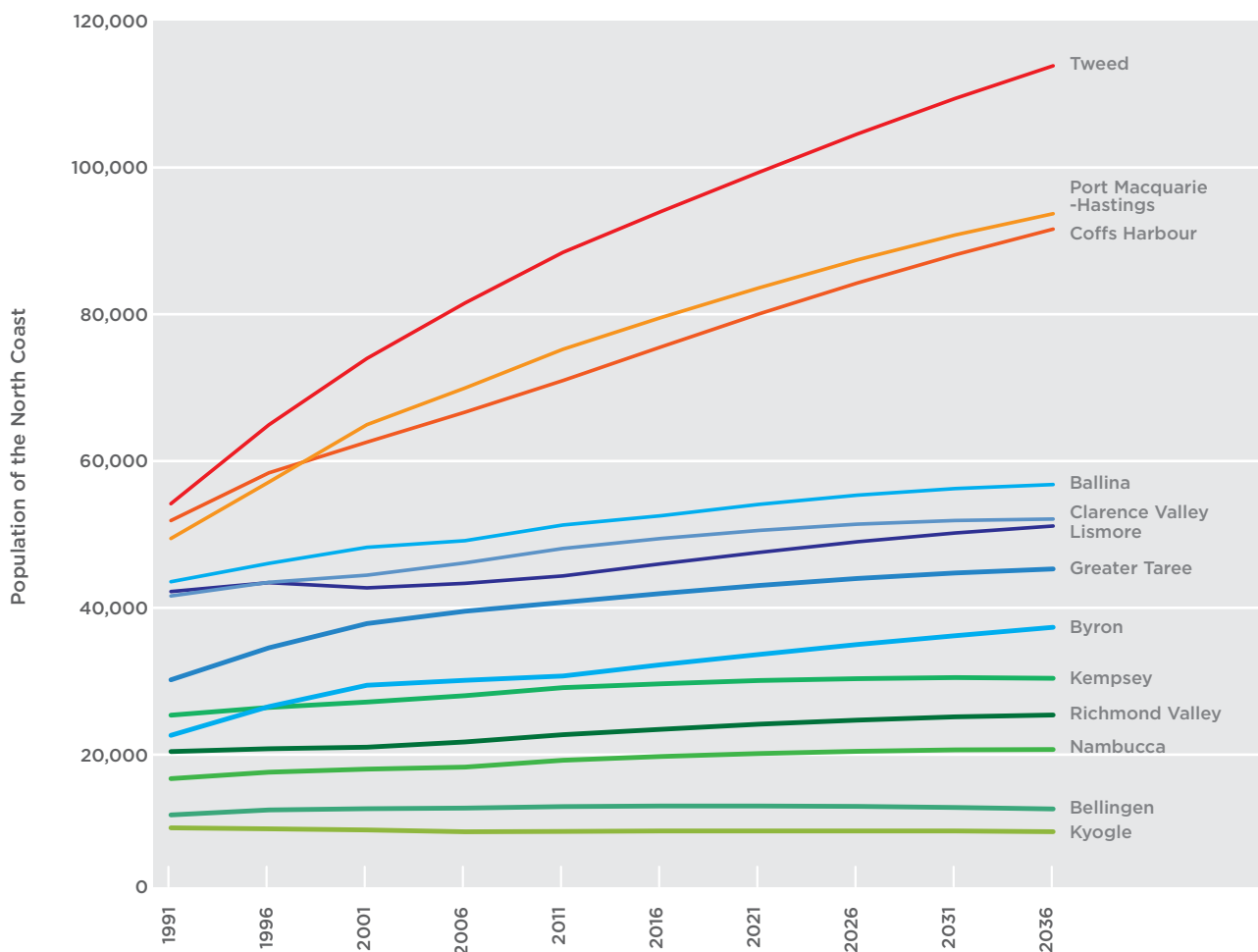


Coffs Harbour  
International Marina

#### The draft Plan:

- consolidates Tweed Heads, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie as regional cities for jobs growth, supported by high-quality residential development and higher-order cultural and government services;
- directs urban and rural residential development to protect high environmental value areas and focus new housing in and around existing towns;
- includes 57,400 hectares of land in urban growth areas, with the capacity to accommodate more than the forecast 72,200 additional dwellings needed by 2036;
- permits variations to urban growth areas where councils identify insufficient available land and the proposal is minor and contiguous (if located in the coastal area), it does not significantly affect areas of high environmental value, or Aboriginal and historic heritage, and infrastructure needs present no cost to Government; and
- commits to a review of the *North Coast Urban Design Guidelines* to promote high-quality development that complements the region's climate, natural features, landscape and character.

FIGURE 8: POPULATION OF THE NORTH COAST 1991-2036



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics and Department of Planning and Environment's population projections



## **DIRECTION 2.1 Grow the North Coast's regional cities as a focus for economic activity and population growth**

Over the last decade, almost 60 per cent of the region's population growth has taken place in the local government areas of Port Macquarie-Hastings, Coffs Harbour and Tweed.<sup>8</sup> Together, these local government areas support more than 234,600 residents, or 43 per cent of the region's population (see Table 2).<sup>9</sup> Each of these local government areas has a large and growing regional city. Many of the people moving to the regional cities are from Sydney, Queensland and overseas.

In 2011, 42 per cent of the region's jobs were concentrated in the regional cities,<sup>10</sup> and journey to work data from the same period

shows net daily inflows from surrounding areas to Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie. The Tweed experiences an outflow of workers to Queensland due to the city's proximity to the Gold Coast (see Figure 9). The higher-order commercial services and institutions located in the regional cities provide many of the high-value and high-skill employment opportunities. These institutions will continue to drive employment growth.

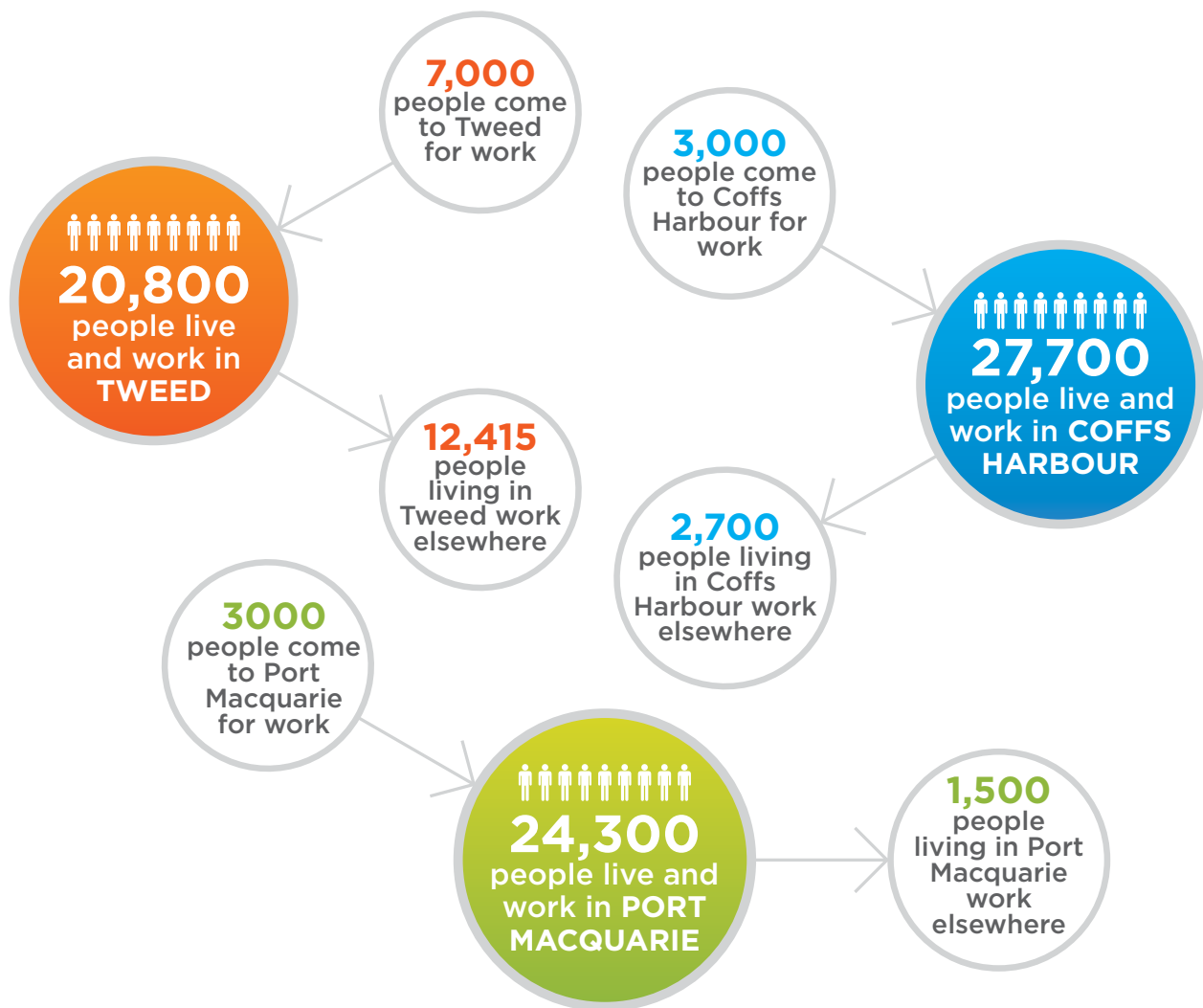
The NSW Government's vision is that the regional cities continue to be the focus for jobs growth, supported by liveable, high-quality residential development and a range of higher-order cultural and civic services. Tweed Heads, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie will continue to serve not only local communities, but also the residents of the broader region.

TABLE 2: SHARE OF POPULATION, HOUSING AND JOBS IN REGIONAL CITIES<sup>11</sup>

	<b>Tweed Shire</b>	<b>Coffs Harbour</b>	<b>Port Macquarie- Hastings</b>
Share of regional population (2014)	16.5%	13.1%	14%
Projected share of regional population (2036)	17.8%	14.3%	14.6%
Share of regional housing (2011)	16.1%	12.5%	13.8%
Projected share of regional housing (2036)	17.6%	13.7%	14.7%
Share of jobs (2013-14)	14%	15.2%	14.7%
Share of Gross Regional Product (2013-14)	14.1%	14.6%	15.1%



FIGURE 9: REGIONAL CITIES JOURNEY-TO-WORK DATA, NORTH COAST, 2011



Source: Bureau of Transport Statistics and Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011





Left: Glasshouse, Port Macquarie.

Right: Tweed Heads

### Increasing the residential population of the regional cities

Urban renewal in the regional cities will encourage a greater mix of dwelling types, a more diverse range of activities and more vibrant precincts.

The regional cities include prime locations for greater housing choice, particularly townhouses, villas and apartments that can take advantage of the services and transport already available. Providing more housing opportunities in the regional cities will also promote the efficient use of existing and new infrastructure and provide greater access to jobs, services and lifestyle opportunities for a broader range of people.

Urban feasibility modelling undertaken by the NSW Government and councils has identified areas where multi-unit development can realistically occur and where a review of planning and development controls (such as parking requirements and height controls) will be effective in renewing regional cities.

These findings will be used to review and update local planning and development controls to make the regional cities more attractive for higher-density residential development and to meet the 40 per cent target for additional multi-unit housing outlined in Goal 3.

### Support the growth and renewal of growth precincts

Each regional city has a number of growth precincts that shape how it will develop into the future (see Figure 10). The growth precincts contribute significantly to the wider regional economy and influence the region more broadly through the services and opportunities they provide. They are job generators and can drive sustainable employment growth for the North Coast.

The NSW Government aims to strengthen the interactions between precincts to support the regional cities as centres for jobs and housing and to underpin growth.

More information on the work the NSW Government will do in these growth precincts is provided in Goal 4 (Directions 4.2 and 4.3) and Goal 5 (Direction 5.2).

### Regional cities, regional centres and towns support each other's growth

Regional centres and towns are often within commuting distance of the regional cities and offer complementary housing and employment opportunities. Reinforcing the links between these places will help accommodate projected population and housing growth by providing a wide range of lifestyle choices and employment lands supply across the subregions (see Figure 11). For example, some employment activities, such as large lot industrial uses, may be best suited to certain regional centres and towns where there may be fewer constraints and cheaper land supply.

FIGURE 10: REGIONAL CITY GROWTH PRECINCTS



**City Centres** – These are core civic, employment and service hubs. They offer greater housing choice close to services. Other growth precincts have developed in locations that are accessible to or near city centres to benefit from the activities and networks they offer.



**Urban Release Areas** – These will support the growing population, and will in turn drive demand for the services offered in growth precincts, as well as housing some of the working population.



**Employment Lands** – These will support employment capacity and a growing economy by encouraging the establishment of new industries and expansion of existing operations.



**Education Precincts** – These will accommodate the growing demand for tertiary education on the North Coast and build on existing strong links with industry sectors to provide a skilled workforce and student housing options.



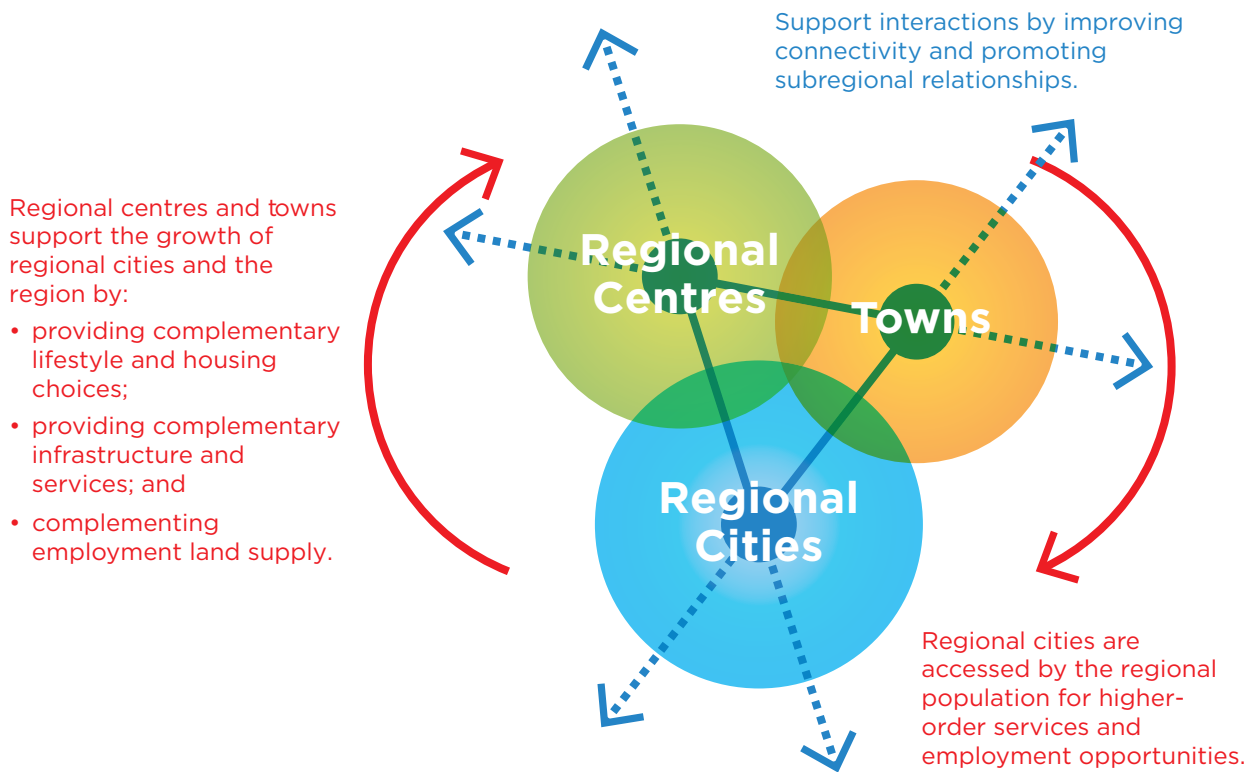
**Health Services Precincts** – These will underpin the strength of the health sector by addressing increasing pressure from population growth and ensuring the wellbeing of North Coast residents.



**Airport Precincts** – These tourism and business gateways to all growth precincts and the wider subregions will improve access to and from the North Coast.



FIGURE 11: CENTRE RELATIONSHIPS – REGIONAL CITIES, REGIONAL CENTRES AND TOWNS



### **ACTION 2.1.1** Establish governance arrangements for the delivery of investment and infrastructure in the regional cities

The NSW Government will prioritise planning for housing and infrastructure in areas where demand from population growth is the greatest – the regional cities. By investing in services and infrastructure in regional cities, the NSW Government and councils can help create a wider variety of jobs and a high-quality living environment for the entire region.

A Regional Cities Steering Committee will oversee the delivery of the Regional Cities

Action Plan (see Action 2.1.2). The Department of Planning and Environment will chair the steering committee, which will include council officers and representatives from relevant State agencies, and will report to the Regional Plan Coordination and Monitoring Committee.


























The NSW Government will:

- establish a Regional Cities Steering Committee with councils to coordinate delivery of investment and infrastructure in Coffs Harbour, Tweed Heads and Port Macquarie.



Top: Tweed town centre  
Bottom: Kingscliff town centre

FIGURE 12: TWEED REGIONAL CITY AND GROWTH PRECINCTS

-  Existing Urban Release Area
-  Urban Renewal
-  Employment Land
-  Proposed Employment Land
-  Business Centre
-  Proposed Business Corridor
-  City Centre
-  Mixed Tourism/Residential
-  Future Knowledge Precinct
-  Education Precinct
-  Future Education Precinct
-  Health Services Precinct
-  Civic Precinct
-  Regional Sports Precinct
-  Airport Precinct
-  Urban Area
-  National Park
-  Watercourse
-  Non-Urban Area
-  Regional Connection
-  Future Gold Coast Rapid Transit Link
-  Local Connection
-  Proposed Rail Alignment
-  Pacific Highway
-  Major Roads



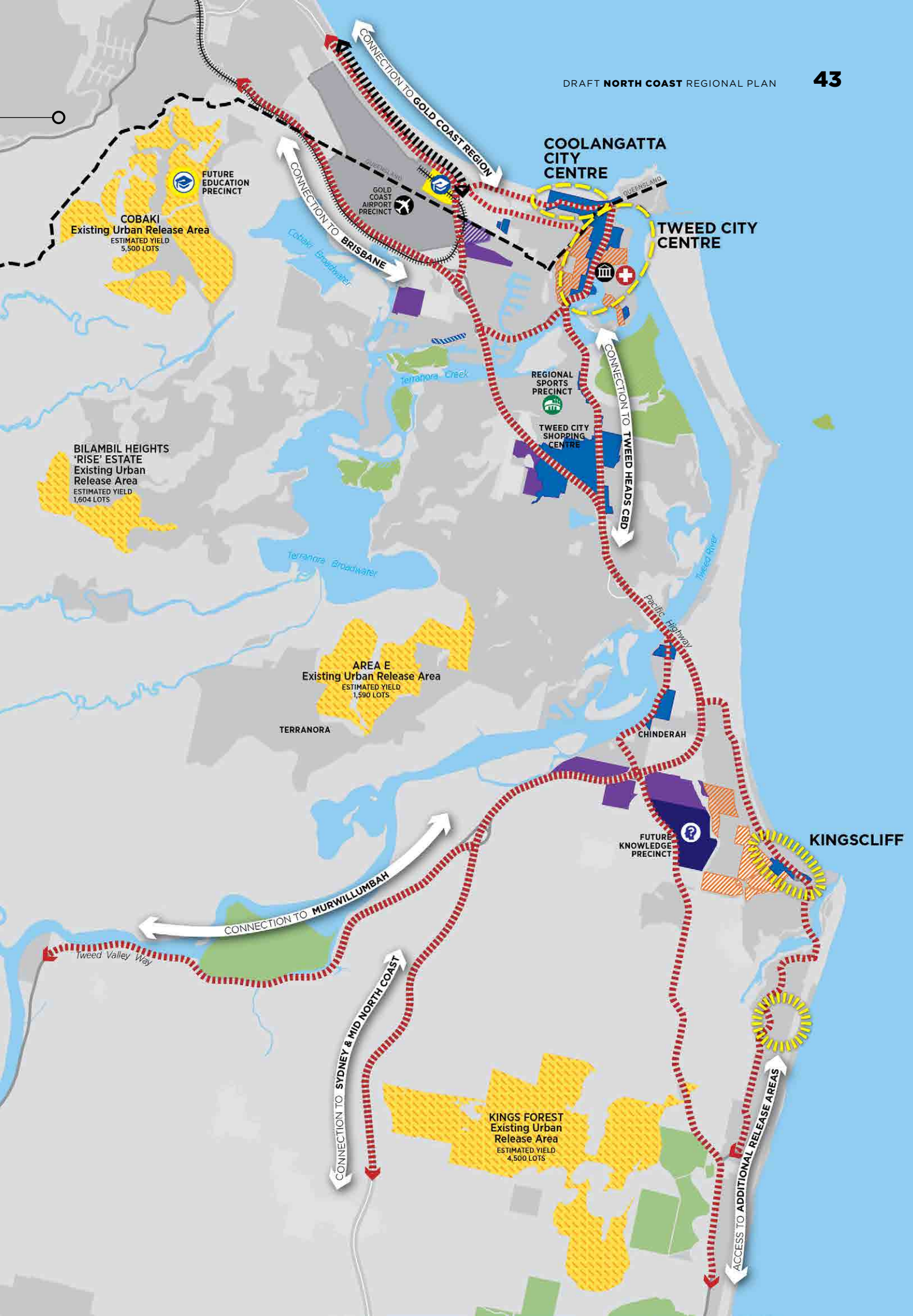


FIGURE 13: COFFS HARBOUR REGIONAL CITY AND GROWTH PRECINCTS

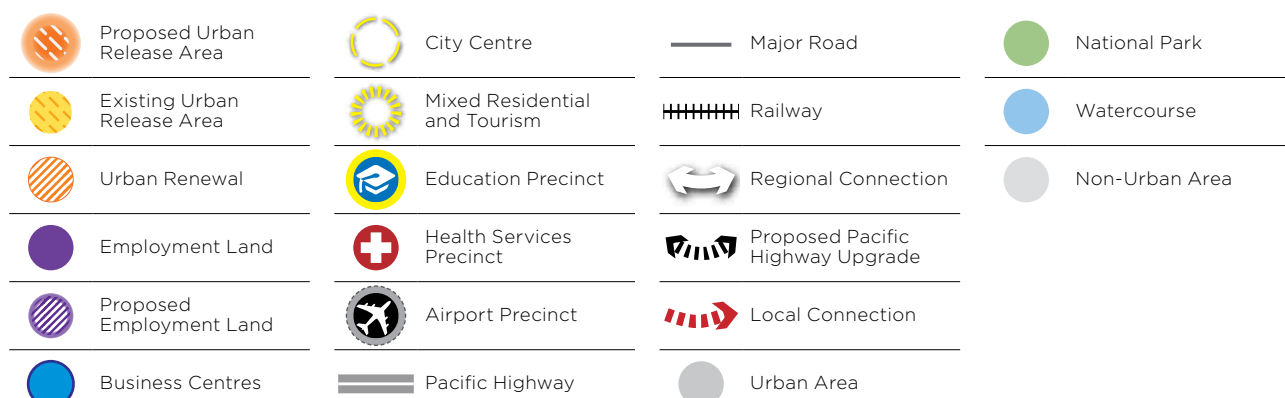
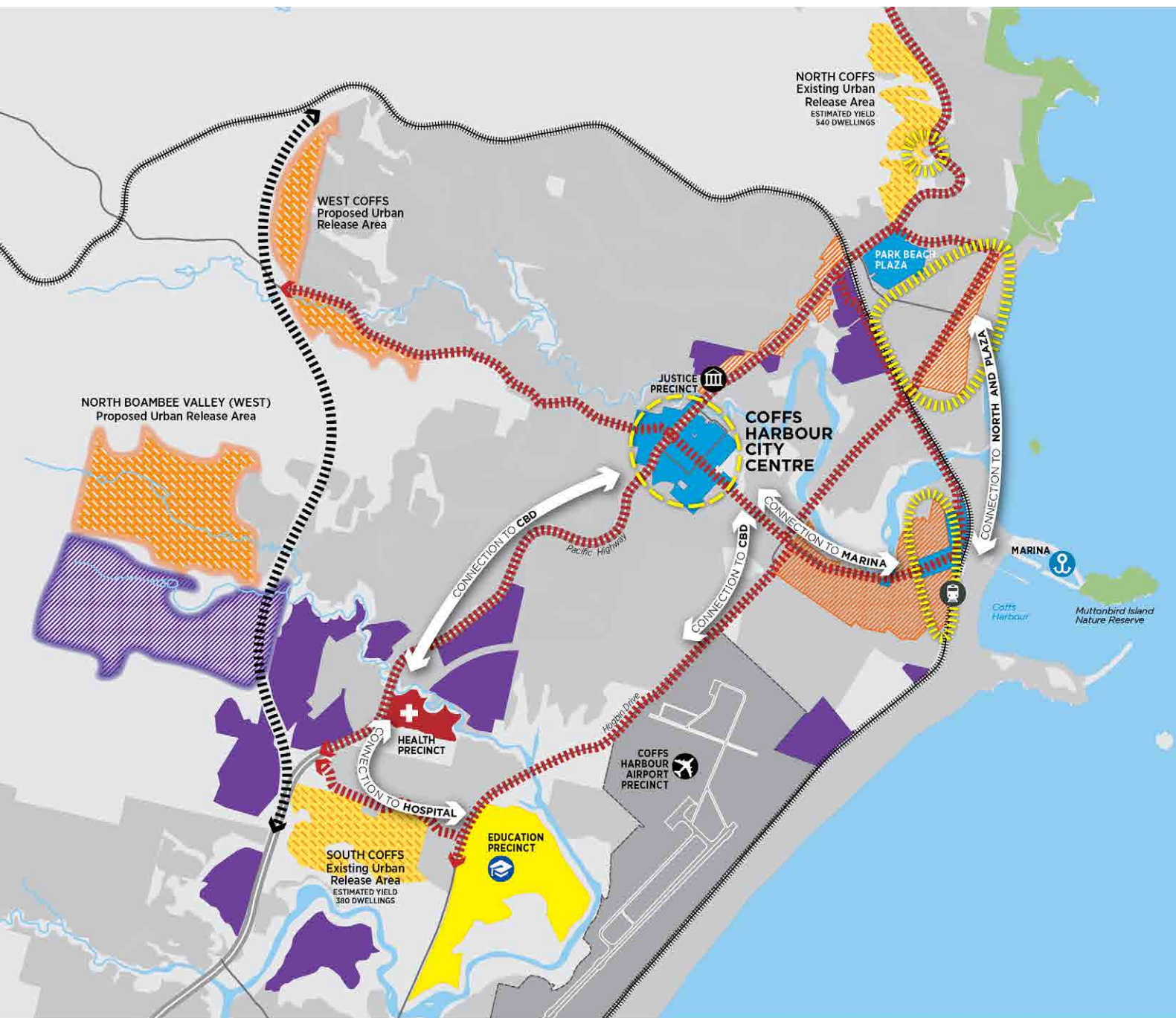
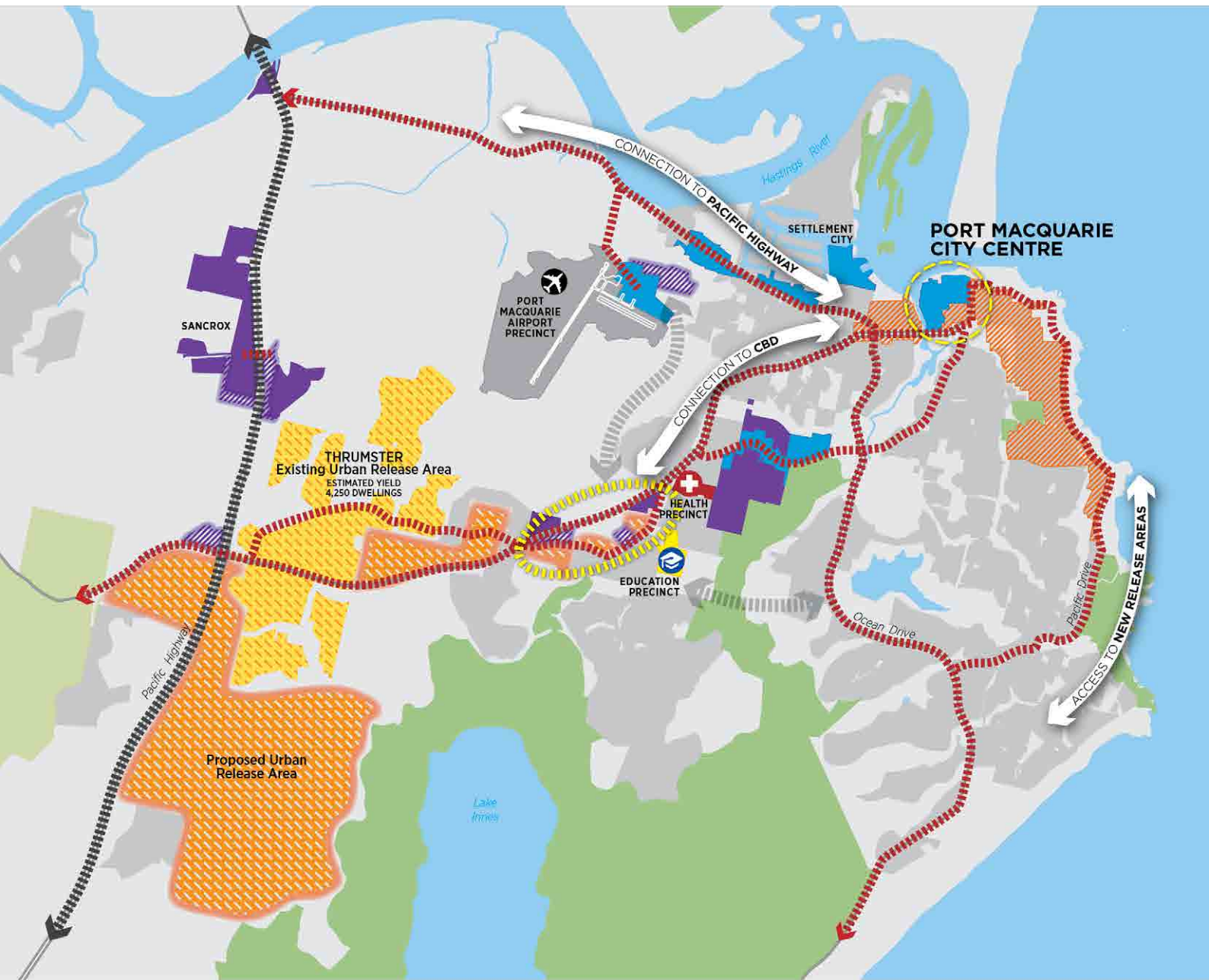




FIGURE 14: PORT MACQUARIE REGIONAL CITY AND GROWTH PRECINCTS





Port Macquarie

### **ACTION 2.1.2** Prepare a Regional Cities Action Plan

The Regional Cities Action Plan will identify opportunities to attract additional investment in the regional cities and growth precincts, such as infrastructure and public domain projects to support new development. Scope exists to increase the range of compatible land uses in each growth precinct to promote economic viability and vitality.

The plan will also consider opportunities to unlock surplus and under-used government land to deliver locations for more housing and jobs.

The infrastructure to support housing and jobs growth will be identified, and the most appropriate staging and sequencing of investments will be established.

Where necessary, transport modelling will be used to highlight the implications of growth for infrastructure.

The NSW Government will continue to partner with councils to:

- improve planning provisions to promote renewal and housing diversity;
- identify infrastructure constraints and public domain improvements that can make areas more attractive for investment;
- coordinate infrastructure delivery and establish the most appropriate staging and sequencing of development; and
- undertake transport modelling to understand the implications of growth.

## **DIRECTION 2.2** Align cross-border planning with South East Queensland

Growth in South East Queensland is expected to have an increasing influence on the development of the NSW Far North Coast.

In the 30 years to 2011, the population of South East Queensland doubled from 1.5 million to over 3.1 million.<sup>12</sup> The Queensland Government projects the population in this area is expected to grow to around 5.5 million by 2041.<sup>13</sup> By 2041, an extra 470,000 people are expected to be living on the Gold Coast,<sup>14</sup> which adjoins the Tweed Shire.

The Tweed has become an integral part of the South East Queensland urban area, which provides many higher-order services and facilities to the Far North Coast. In many ways, Tweed Heads and Coolangatta function as 'twin towns', for example, retail and business opportunities and healthcare and education services are accessed by residents from either side of the state border.

Development on the Tweed Coast will continue to provide housing and job opportunities to support growth in South East Queensland, particularly for new residential land release areas and employment lands supply. Conversely, South East Queensland residents are increasingly using the NSW North Coast for tourism and recreational activities.

The influence of South East Queensland on the North Coast diminishes with increasing distance from the Gold Coast. In the southern portion of the Far North Coast, Lismore and Ballina operate as regional centres with greater autonomy from Tweed Heads, compared to the regional centres of other subregions. These centres have catchments that are big enough to support major facilities like the Lismore Base Hospital, Southern Cross University and Ballina Byron Gateway Airport. The influence of South East Queensland is expected to spread further south as growth pressures increase and accessibility improves.



### **ACTION 2.2.1 Collaborate with relevant authorities to understand the implications of growth in South East Queensland on the Far North Coast**

Cross-border servicing and land use relationships will need to be considered when planning for the growth of Tweed Heads as a regional city and for the Far North Coast over the next 20 years.

The NSW Government will:

- work with Tweed Shire Council, Gold Coast City Council and the Queensland Government to better integrate cross-border land use planning; and
- work with the NSW Cross-Border Commissioner and Tweed Shire Council to investigate barriers to economic, housing and jobs growth.

### **DIRECTION 2.3 Focus growth to the least sensitive and constrained areas to protect natural assets**

The North Coast has had a low-density settlement pattern that has exacerbated growth pressure on farmland and sensitive coastal environments. The demand for urban development remains strongest in coastal locations; however, continued development along the coast could result in the underuse of infrastructure and services in major centres outside the coastal area, and increase pressure on the fragile coastal environment.

The draft Plan manages growth to protect the region's rural and natural landscapes, and make the most efficient use of land allocated for urban development. It provides certainty for future urban development; manages pressures on the coastal environment; creates opportunities for innovative responses to changing housing needs; provides a choice of housing; and maximises the use of existing urban areas and services.

## **Coastal Area**

The draft Plan identifies a coastal area comprising land east of the planned Pacific Highway alignment, plus the urban areas of Tweed Heads around the Cobaki Broadwater. The coastal area covers 13 per cent of the region and is home to 49 per cent of the population, and is subject to the greatest growth pressures on the North Coast.<sup>15</sup>

The coastal area is ecologically diverse, containing wetlands, lakes, estuaries, aquifers and significant farmland, and is of local, State, national and international environmental significance. Much of this land is also subject to natural hazards, including flooding, coastal inundation, erosion and recession.

As the region grows, development pressure is expected to continue in this area. A balanced approach to the use of this land is necessary to safeguard the sensitive coastal environment.

The NSW Government and councils will manage the growth of new land release in the coastal area by directing development to the mapped urban growth areas. This will distribute housing across the region and strengthen the growth of non-coastal regional centres, towns and villages. These non-coastal areas have capacity for additional rural residential and urban housing and will help to avoid pressure on the sensitive coastal environment. This will help to maintain the 'green breaks' between the coastal settlements and the coastal area's distinctive character.

### **ACTION 2.3.1 Focus future growth into the mapped urban growth areas**

Urban growth areas (see Appendix B) are identified to accommodate growth; to protect important farmland, fragile and vulnerable ecosystems, and heritage assets; and to reduce potential land use conflict.



Cumbalum

Most of the urban settlements in the region are separated by farmland, bushland, floodplains or environmental features that give the region its distinctive character. The urban growth areas will maintain this separation to protect the important environmental values that attract people to the region.

The proposed urban and employment land in the urban growth areas represent new land release development opportunities that will require rezoning. Not all these areas will be suitable for urban use. Further assessment will be needed to determine capability, environmental and heritage impacts and potential yield. The urban growth areas will be used by councils to define the land available to investigate for release as they prepare their local growth management strategies (see Action 2.3.2).

Councils may identify a need for variations to the urban growth areas as new information becomes available or to correct anomalies. Any proposed variations will be in accordance with the Urban Growth Area Variation Principles (see Table 3) and will need to be considered and justified through councils' strategic planning or rezoning processes.

Only minor and contiguous variations to urban growth areas in the coastal area will be considered due to its environmental sensitivity, and the range of land uses competing for this limited area.

To provide maximum potential for urban development, active and passive open spaces may be located outside the urban growth areas. When deciding whether to locate future open space outside the urban growth areas, high value environmental, heritage or natural resource areas should be avoided.

The NSW Government will:

- work with councils to direct future urban growth into mapped urban growth areas; and
- require that variations to the urban growth areas are consistent with the Urban Growth Area Variation Principles.

### **ACTION 2.3.2 Identify residential, commercial and industrial uses in urban growth areas by developing local growth management strategies**

It is important that growth is sustainable and strikes a balance between competing land uses so there are positive environmental, economic and social outcomes for the community. In growing communities, planning is essential to provide infrastructure and facilities in the most effective and efficient way.

Directing future growth to locations that can sustain additional development, and are readily serviced, will facilitate efficient and sustainable growth. For instance, housing should be located close to centres and in the least constrained areas; industrial development should consider potential land use conflicts; and commercial development should be focused in existing centres.

Local growth management strategies will enable communities to assess the broader implications and consequences of identifying locations for certain land uses in proposed urban and employment land.

The NSW Government will:

- require that councils only zone land for residential, commercial or industrial use if it is consistent with a local growth management strategy agreed between council and the Department of Planning and Environment, and
- prepare Statewide land release criteria to assess locations for residential, commercial, rural residential and industrial uses across regional NSW.

### **ACTION 2.3.3 Minimise the impact of rural residential development**

More than 32,600 hectares of land is currently zoned for rural residential development across the region. Rural residential development should occur in appropriate locations to manage and minimise the potential impacts on farming activities, environmental and heritage assets, and landscape values.

No new rural residential development will be permitted in the coastal area, other than development already zoned, or in an approved



TABLE 3: URBAN GROWTH AREA VARIATION PRINCIPLES

Urban Growth Area Variation Principles	
POLICY	
	The variation needs to be consistent with the objectives and outcomes in the <i>Draft North Coast Regional Plan</i> and any relevant Section 117 Directions and State Environmental Planning Policies.
INFRASTRUCTURE	
	The variation needs to consider the use of committed and planned major transport, water and sewerage infrastructure and have no cost to government.
	The variation should only be permitted if adequate and cost-effective infrastructure can be provided to match the expected population.
ENVIRONMENTAL AND FARMLAND PROTECTION	
	The variation should avoid areas of high environmental or heritage value.
	The variation should avoid areas mapped as significant farmland, unless consistent with the interim variation criteria prior to finalising the farmland mapping review.
LAND USE CONFLICT	
	The variation must be appropriately separated from incompatible land uses, including agricultural activities, sewage treatment plants, waste facilities and productive resource lands.
AVOIDING RISK	
	<p>The variation must avoid physically constrained land identified as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ flood prone;</li> <li>■ bushfire prone;</li> <li>■ highly erodible;</li> <li>■ having a severe slope; and</li> <li>■ having acid sulfate soils.</li> </ul>
HERITAGE	
	The variation must protect and manage Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage.
COASTAL AREA	
	Only minor and contiguous variations to urban growth areas in the coastal area will be considered due to its environmental sensitivity, and the range of land uses competing for this limited area.



current or future local growth management strategy (or rural residential land release strategy).

The NSW Government's *Settlement Planning Guidelines* (2007) guide councils on the North Coast about planning for rural residential development and the issues they need to consider, such as:

- avoiding areas prone to natural hazards, including bushfire and flood;
- avoiding areas of high environmental value and Aboriginal and historic heritage significance;
- potential impacts on, and land use conflict risks to agricultural activities and productive natural resources;
- the proximity and access to employment and higher-order services in the region;
- the location of declared water catchments and potential impacts on water quality or supply; and
- the existing supply and demand for rural residential lots in the area, including in neighbouring local government areas.

The NSW Government will require that:

- land is only zoned for future rural residential development if it is consistent with a strategy that is:
  - agreed between council and the Department of Planning and Environment; and
  - consistent with the *Settlement Planning Guidelines*.

## **DIRECTION 2.4 Provide great places to live through good design**

The North Coast has a range of settlements that offer a variety of lifestyles. Well-designed settlements help residents develop a sense of community and wellbeing. High-quality urban design can increase the economic viability of development and deliver social and environmental benefits, for example, by providing more walking and cycling opportunities that have flow-on benefits in terms of healthy lifestyles.

Urban areas should have access to natural features, such as coastal foreshore and riparian land, to maintain their ecological values. There should also be sufficient open space for community recreation and social interaction, and nature conservation.

### **ACTION 2.4.1 Support council-led precinct planning**

Councils should consider precinct planning as a way of promoting new developments that enrich the quality of life and wellbeing of residents. Precinct planning can guide the expansion of specific places and establish a framework for achieving goals, such as attracting new housing development or investment in renewal. Precinct planning should be considered for areas that may undergo change as a result of bypasses from the Pacific Highway upgrade.

The NSW Government will:

- improve coordination between State agencies, councils and the private sector to support council-led precinct planning.





Left: Coast walk, Byron Bay  
Right: Kingscliff, Tweed Heads

### Case study: Kingscliff Locality Planning, Tweed Heads

The urban coastal areas of the Tweed Shire have experienced some of the strongest growth on the North Coast. The area offers a high-quality lifestyle and more affordable housing than is found in South East Queensland. The popularity of the Tweed Coast is expected to continue, particularly as opportunities for greenfield development on the Gold Coast become limited.

Tweed Shire Council has planned for the population of the Kingscliff local centre to grow to 20,000 people. This will make it the service centre for the Tweed Coast's network of villages.

Council has begun planning for Kingscliff as it transitions into this new role, to plan for growth that meets community expectations while still retaining the area's local character and identity.

The Council's early findings suggest that Kingscliff can play a stronger role beyond simply providing local services. Large areas of relatively unconstrained land exist close to Kingscliff that may be used for significant residential, tourism and employment development, which could contribute to the growth of Tweed Heads as a regional city.

Council's land use planning will focus on consolidating and expanding the town centre, identifying infill and greenfield residential development opportunities, establishing a knowledge precinct that will offer jobs and commercial investment opportunities, and growing the aquaculture industry.

#### **ACTION 2.4.2** Encourage healthy living by increasing options for public transport, walking and cycling

Transport for NSW, in partnership with councils, has created a number of programs in regional cities, centres and towns to increase opportunities for people to be more active and therefore healthier. They include the *Community Transport Program*, *Cycling Towns*

*Program*, *Walking Communities Program*, the *Connecting Centres Cycling Program* and *NSW Bike Week*.

These programs focus on:

- prioritising infrastructure improvements for two-kilometre footpaths and five-kilometre cycling tracks that lead to town centres, as well as improving access to transport interchanges; and
- using information and events to promote walking and cycling as a form of transport.

The NSW Government will:

- work with councils to develop and implement programs that improve opportunities for walking and cycling, focusing first on regional cities.

#### **ACTION 2.4.3** Review the North Coast Urban Design Guidelines

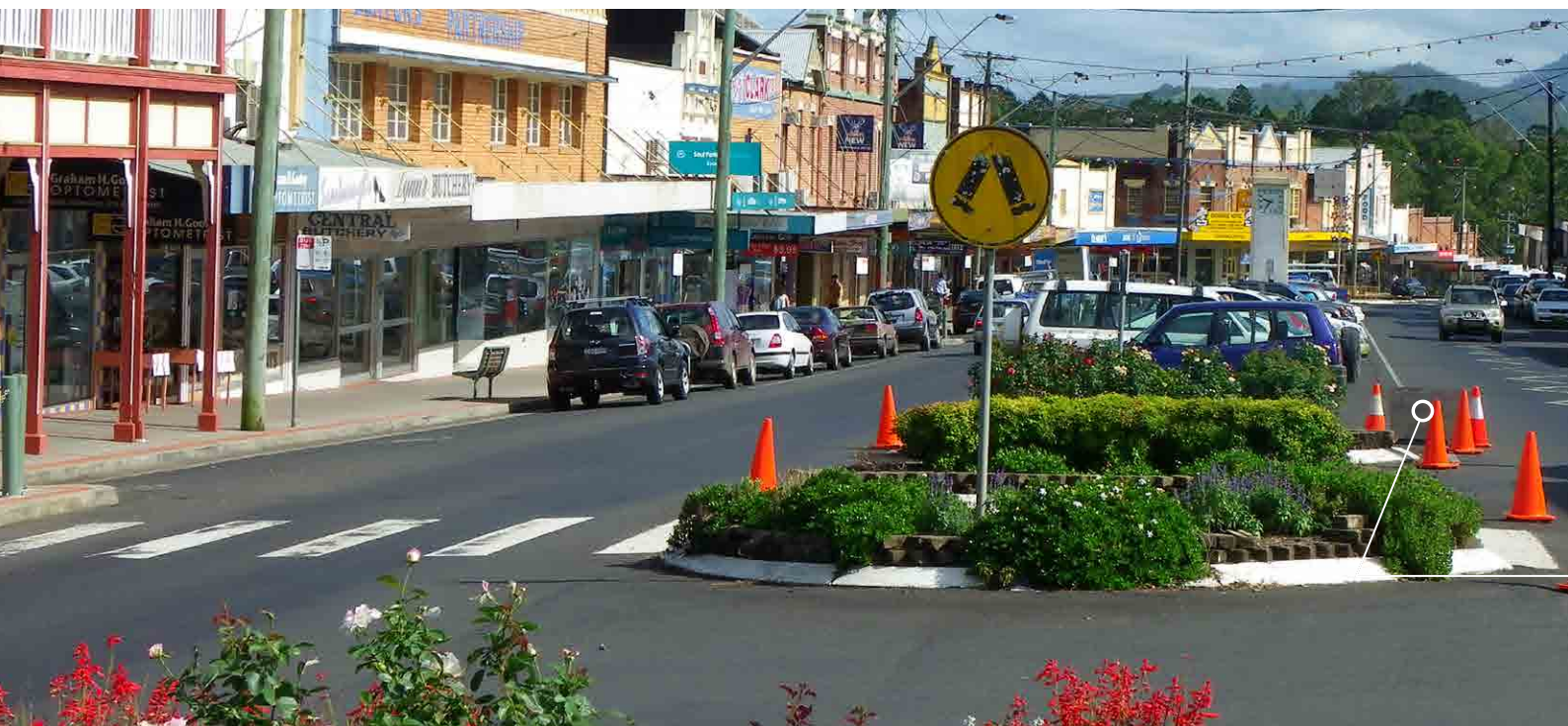
The distinctive character of the region's settlements sets it apart from other parts of NSW and brings tourists back to the region year after year. New development needs to be sympathetic to the character of certain areas. The *North Coast Urban Design Guidelines* (2008) help planners and designers recognise the distinctive character of the region's centres and encourage high-quality development that is sensitive to the area's climate, natural features, landscape and character.

Urban design continues to evolve over time. The review will be made to support further improvements in housing design, help improve sustainable living and respond to the North Coast's changing climate.

The NSW Government will:

- review the North Coast Urban Design Guidelines.







## GOAL 3 – Housing choice, with homes that meet the needs of changing communities

The draft Plan aims to provide housing choice to meet the community's needs into the future. By 2036, the North Coast will need to accommodate an additional 97,000 people.

This growth, along with demographic change and changing household needs, is projected to generate demand for an additional 72,200 dwellings. The draft Plan sets out the supply of housing needed for the future population.

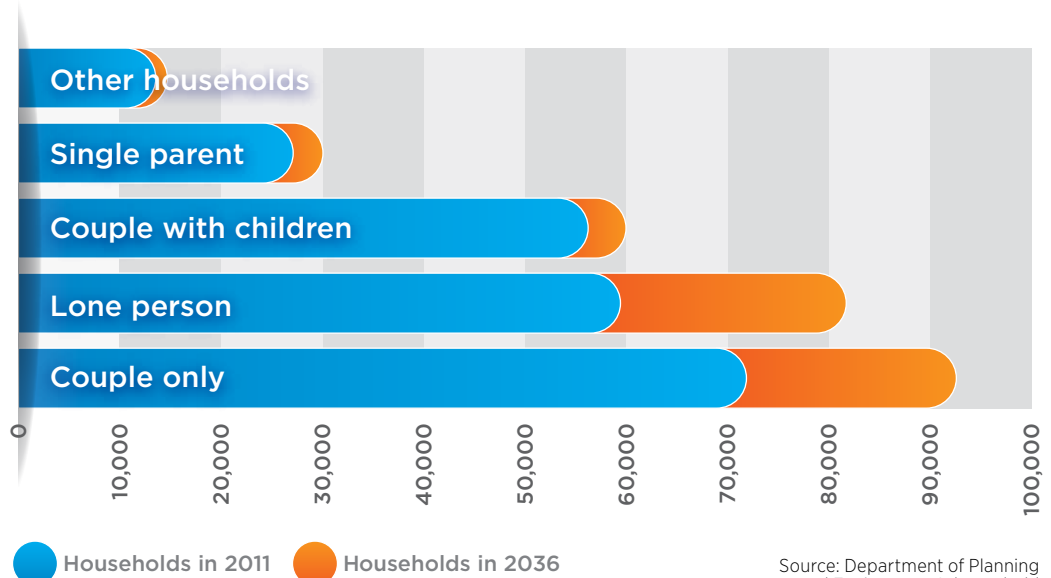
In addition to overall population growth, other demographic drivers of change will influence housing needs. Over 90 per cent of the region's population growth to 2036 will be people aged over 65 years. This represents an increase in the proportion of this age group from the current 20 per cent to 31 per cent. As people age they

may want a choice about whether to remain in their family home or to relocate to smaller, more affordable housing closer to services.

The projected growth in couple-only and single-person households is also expected to increase demand for smaller and multi-dwelling housing such as townhouses and residential flats in regional cities, regional centres and towns (see Figure 15).

The cost of housing affects where people in the community are able to live. From 2001 to 2011, owner-occupied dwellings on the North Coast fell from 46 per cent to 39 per cent and the number of homeowners with a mortgage rose from 20 per cent to 27 per cent.

FIGURE 15: FORECAST HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION ON THE NORTH COAST



Top:  
Ballina Heights,  
Cumbalum

Centre:  
Port Macquarie

Bottom:  
Kyogle town centre

Source: Department of Planning and Environment's household projections, 2011 and 2036



Fothering Park, Taree

The draft Plan:

- accelerates the development of proposed urban land, with potential for 36,500 lots near the regional cities and regional centres;
- retains the current policy for multi-unit housing to represent 40 per cent of new housing (an additional 28,900 townhouses, villas and residential flats across the region by 2036);
- promotes planning outcomes that encourage housing for people at different stages of their lives, including through Livable Housing Australia's Livable Housing Design Guidelines (2015);
- provides for a range of smaller lot housing when preparing local environmental plans or planning strategies; and
- develops a comprehensive approach to affordable housing that involves all stakeholders – the NSW Government, councils and the private and community sectors.

### **DIRECTION 3.1 Provide sufficient housing supply to meet the demands of the North Coast**

Local growth management strategies should identify an adequate supply of residential land to accommodate population growth and demand for housing (see Figure 16). This will:

- create downward pressure on house prices;
- maximise the efficiency and effective use of existing infrastructure; and
- provide work and build confidence in the construction industry, which employs more than 19,000 people on the North Coast.

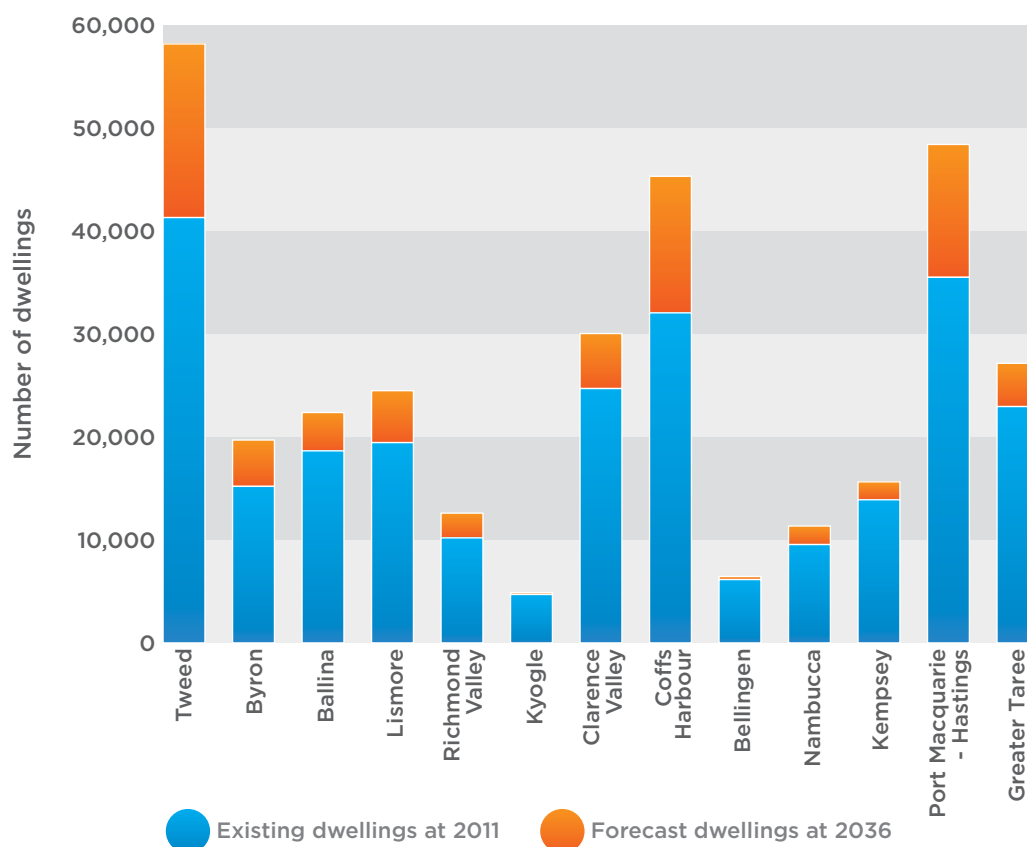
Table 4 shows the minimum housing supply each council should plan for in their local strategic planning to 2036. This takes into account projected population growth; housing demand and mix to meet different household needs; allowances for tourism opportunities; and a surplus to address any changes in growth projections. Provision has been made for councils to plan for a range of additional dwellings by 2036 to satisfy possible supply shortfalls or changes in the market over this period.

Councils should consider providing surplus supply, additional to that shown in Table 4, to provide a range of development opportunities. Factoring in a modest housing surplus makes for a more robust housing policy that is able to deal with unforeseen constraints to development, including delays in the supply of housing, uneven rates of development, or unexpected population growth.

Some popular holiday destinations on the North Coast experience significant seasonal fluctuations in population. Holiday dwellings have been included in the housing supply numbers to allow councils to manage tourism-related growth.



FIGURE 16: DWELLING DISTRIBUTION BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA TO 2036



Source: Department of Planning and Environment and Australian Bureau of Statistics

TABLE 4: ADDITIONAL DWELLINGS NEEDED BY 2036 FOR EACH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

Local Government Area	Number of dwellings in 2011	Additional dwellings needed by 2036
Tweed	41,300	14,000 – 16,860
Byron	15,200	3,750 – 4,500
Ballina	18,650	3,100 – 3,700
Lismore	19,450	4,200 – 5,000
Richmond Valley	10,200	2,000 – 2,400
Kyogle	4,700	150 – 180
Clarence Valley	24,700	4,450 – 5,300
Coffs Harbour	32,050	11,000 – 13,200
Bellingen	6,150	250 – 300
Nambucca	9,550	1,500 – 1,800
Kempsey	13,900	1,400 – 1,700
Port Macquarie-Hastings	35,500	10,750 – 12,900
Greater Taree	22,950	3,500 – 4,200

Source: NSW Planning and Environment, 'Population, Household and Dwelling Projections', 2014

### ACTION 3.1.1 Review land supply to identify proposed urban land for extra dwellings

A review of land within the urban growth areas was completed to evaluate the prospects of meeting the need for the extra 72,200 dwellings by 2036. The review results, shown in Figure 17 approximate the current supply of zoned and unzoned land across the North Coast.

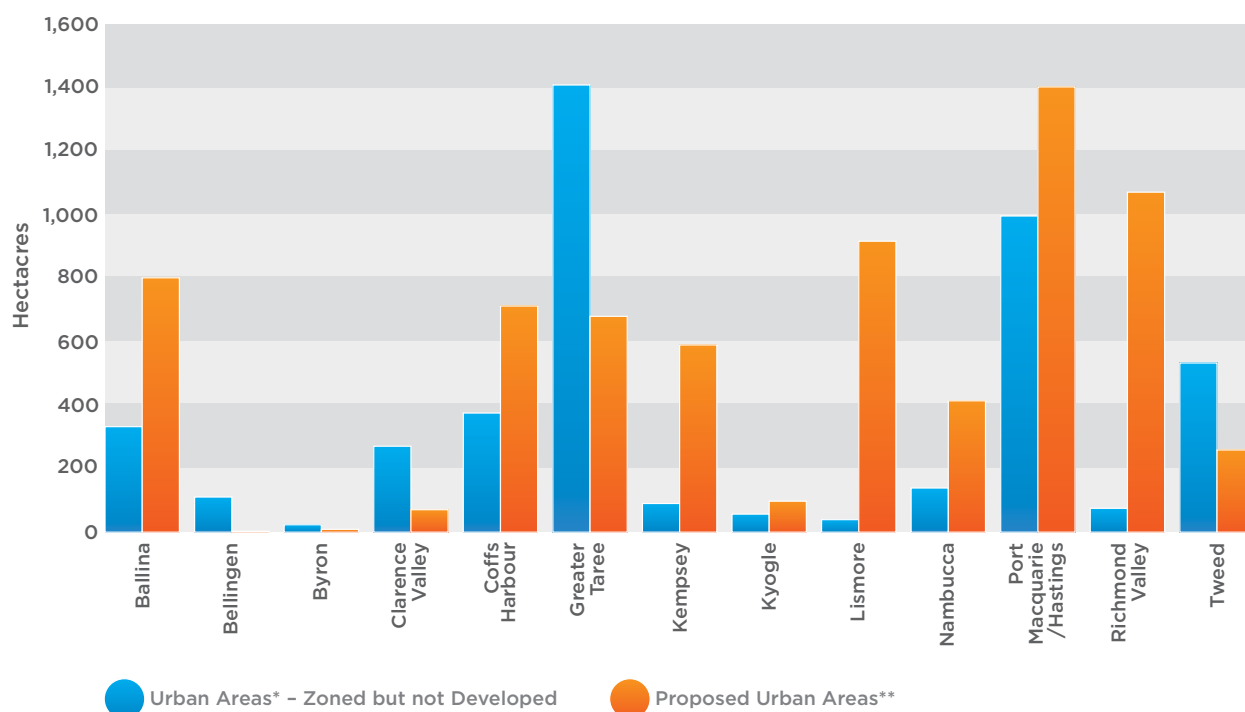
Not all the land in Figure 17 can be developed for urban uses. Land that is subject to significant natural hazards and/or environmental and heritage constraints will be excluded from development.

The review identified that Byron and Bellingen may not have sufficient capacity in their urban growth areas to achieve a 20-year supply of housing. The NSW Government will work with the relevant councils to identify proposed urban land to help meet demand for housing and amend the relevant urban growth area maps.

The NSW Government will:

- work with Byron and Bellingen Councils to identify proposed urban land for inclusion in the urban growth areas to deliver a supply of housing.

FIGURE 17: URBAN LAND SUPPLY WITHIN THE URBAN GROWTH AREAS IN EACH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, DECEMBER 2015



Notes:

\* Excludes environmental, recreational, special purpose and waterways, as well as employment lands.

\*\* Includes new land release areas only, not infill or brownfield areas.



### Case study: Byron Shire Council Rural Land Use Strategy and Rural and Residential Lands Strategy

The NSW Government is proposing that additional land can be considered to include in the existing urban growth areas. This will allow each local government area to have an adequate supply of land over the next 20 years in the right locations. Byron Shire has land immediately available at West Byron Bay and some infill opportunities in Byron, Mullumbimby and Bangalow. The strong demand for housing in the shire means this supply is likely to be exhausted in the short term.

The Council has begun work on rural lands and residential lands strategies to consider the future housing needs of the community. This work should be completed before the Council seeks to rezone any land outside the urban growth areas. It will guide future land rezoning and other planning instruments such as local environmental plans.

#### **ACTION 3.1.2 Accelerate the supply of proposed urban land to meet demand in high growth areas**

There are a number of sites on the North Coast, including Cumbalum, Kings Forest, Cobaki, Brimbin and Thrumster identified for future housing. These sites have potential for around 36,500 lots that will help meet housing demand in the higher growth cities and centres across the North Coast. The NSW Government will work with councils to identify where upfront investment in local infrastructure can accelerate the take-up of housing commencements in a number of these priority sites. The NSW Government's *Housing Acceleration Fund* also provides funding for new infrastructure projects that support housing supply.

The preliminary list of new land release areas for further investigation is contained in Appendix A.

The NSW Government will:

- investigate policies and provisions that can accelerate housing supply and diversity in certain new land release areas through a precinct-based approach, which introduces site-specific complying development standards; and
- work with councils to identify where upfront investment in local infrastructure can accelerate housing commencements in priority sites of proposed urban land.

### Case study: Thrumster Urban Release Area, Port Macquarie

The Thrumster Urban Release Area is the western expansion area of Port Macquarie and is located in the Port Macquarie–Wauchope Growth Corridor. When completed, the 800-hectare area is expected to accommodate 4,250 dwellings, or about 10,000 people. It will include retail, commercial, sporting and entertainment facilities, schools, neighbourhood centres and a light industrial area.

Thrumster will provide much of the housing needed to support the projected population growth in Port Macquarie and across the Lower North Coast subregion. It will allow people to live close to employment areas, such as the Sancroix industrial precinct and Port Macquarie's tertiary education and health services precincts. Its location on the Pacific and Oxley Highways also gives residents ready access to other employment centres across the subregion, including Kempsey, Taree and the Port Macquarie City Centre.

The NSW Government provided \$3 million in 2012, from the *Housing Acceleration Fund* for a new water tower in the area.

#### **ACTION 3.1.3 Monitor land and housing supply through the North Coast Housing and Land Monitors**

The current *Far North Coast Housing and Land Monitor* (2016) and *Mid North Coast Housing and Land Monitor* (2016) are the NSW Government's tools for monitoring land and housing supply for each council. In future, a single monitor will be developed each year for the whole region, covering all the local government areas on the North Coast.

The NSW Government will:

- continue to monitor and coordinate the development of land releases through a North Coast Housing and Land Monitor.



## **DIRECTION 3.2 Deliver housing choice to suit changing needs**

Over the next 20 years, the population of the North Coast will change significantly. The ageing population will influence the demand for new housing and the desire of people to downsize and potentially age-in-place. In a well-functioning market, the supply of housing should reflect shifts in the community's needs and preferences. The region is also expected to attract new residents relocating after retirement to take advantage of the environmental and lifestyle offerings on the coast.

With an ageing population, housing choice on the North Coast is increasingly about 'universal housing' that allows people to stay in their home as they age. Livable Housing Australia's *Livable Housing Design Guidelines* set the national benchmark for home design and provide guidance on meeting the needs of people throughout their lifecycle. They were created to encourage the development of liveable homes that are easy to enter and to navigate; responsive to the changing needs of occupants; and relatively easy to adapt (for injured, disabled or elderly residents). Councils will need to consider the guidelines when preparing local environmental plans or planning strategies.

Councils can use land release and local growth management strategies to identify housing needs, plan for a range of housing types and identify the local infrastructure necessary to support local communities.

Many new land releases incorporate blocks that are bigger than 600 square metres. This can limit smaller, more innovative house and land design. The North Sapphire Beach development in Coffs Harbour is an example of

more diverse land design, with almost 50 per cent of the subdivided lots around 400 square metres in size.

### **ACTION 3.2.1 Investigate the policies, plans and investments that would support greater housing diversity**

Natural constraints and servicing make it unlikely that incremental outward growth of urban areas can continue indefinitely on the North Coast. It is important to plan for more housing in the urban growth areas to protect significant environmental lands by creating a more compact urban form.

By 2036, 40 per cent of the new housing supply across the region should be in multi-unit dwellings. This equates to around 28,900 extra multi-unit dwellings. This target is higher than the historical levels for multi-unit approvals on the North Coast (see Figure 18).

This region-wide target will help deliver a greater choice of housing, which can improve affordability, cater for the demands of an ageing population and meet the growth in the number of smaller households.

Urban feasibility modelling has shown that multi-unit dwellings in regional cities and regional centres are feasible under existing development controls and current market conditions. A place-based planning approach will be adopted to consider multi-unit housing for areas that have access to transport.

The NSW Government will:

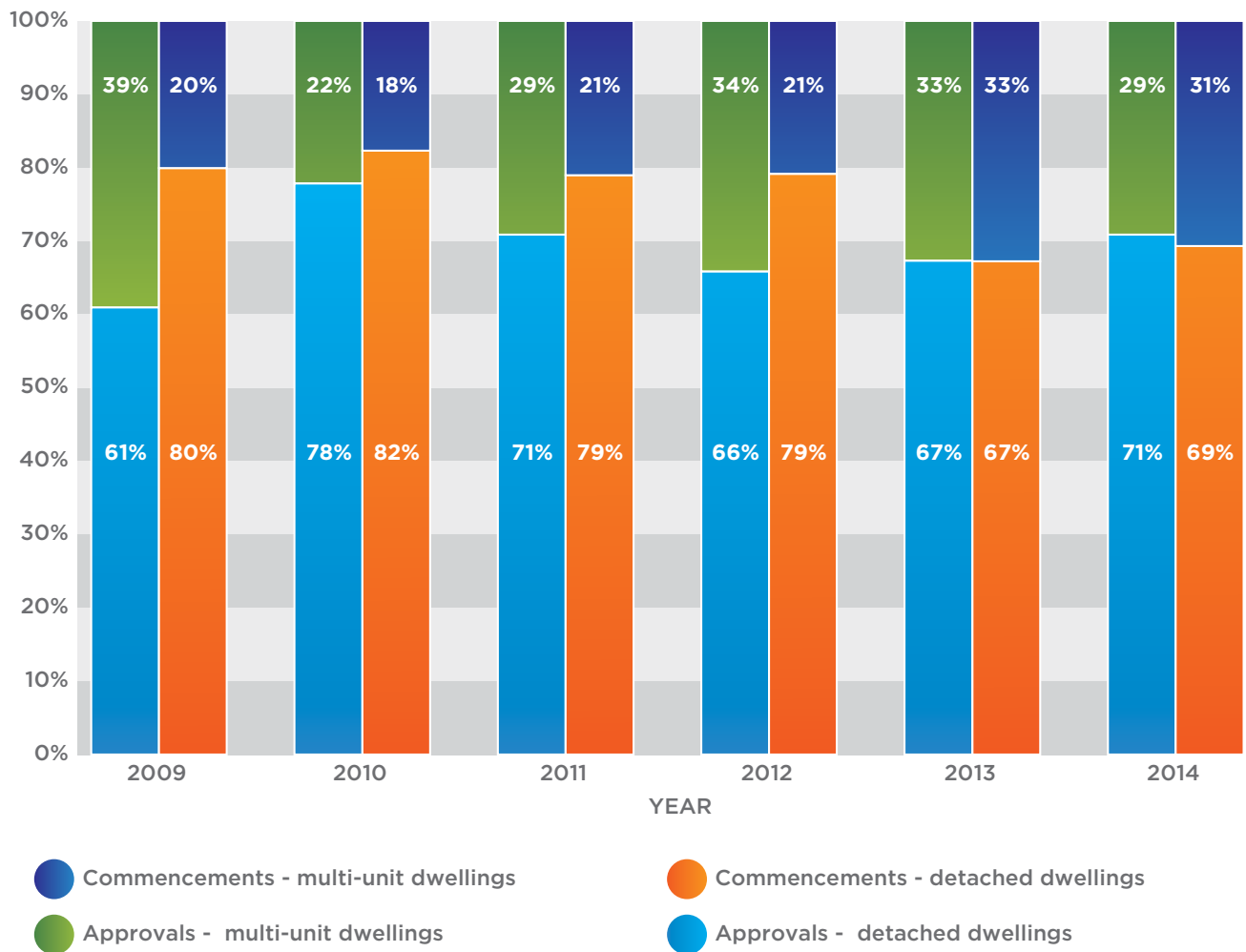
- work with councils to apply appropriate local planning controls within local environmental plans to deliver a minimum supply of 28,900 multi-unit dwellings across the region.





Left: Thrumster, Port Macquarie  
Right: Kingscliff beachfront

FIGURE 18: DWELLING APPROVALS AND COMMENCEMENTS ON THE NORTH COAST



Source: Mid North Coast and Far North Coast housing and land monitors.

### **ACTION 3.2.2** Work with Local Aboriginal Land Councils to conduct a strategic assessment of their landholdings to identify priority sites for further investigation of their economic opportunities

OCHRE (Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment) is the NSW Government's plan for Aboriginal communities. It focuses on revitalising and promoting Aboriginal languages and culture; creating opportunities; increasing the Aboriginal community's capacity; providing choice; and empowering Aboriginal people to exercise that choice, as well as giving them the tools to take responsibility for their own future.

Many of the OCHRE actions are outside the planning system; however, there is an opportunity to work with Local Aboriginal Land Councils to see how they can best plan, manage and develop their landholdings for the benefit of the local Aboriginal community. This will allow Aboriginal people the opportunity to gain real economic benefit from their land and provide greater opportunities for economic independence.

Together, Aboriginal Affairs NSW and the Department of Planning and Environment, will work with the Local Aboriginal Land Councils to identify their landholdings and to map the level of constraints for each site. This information can be used by Aboriginal communities to consider potential uses of the land for housing and employment opportunities. It has potential to provide economic returns to the Land Councils, which can be invested in assistance programs in the region.

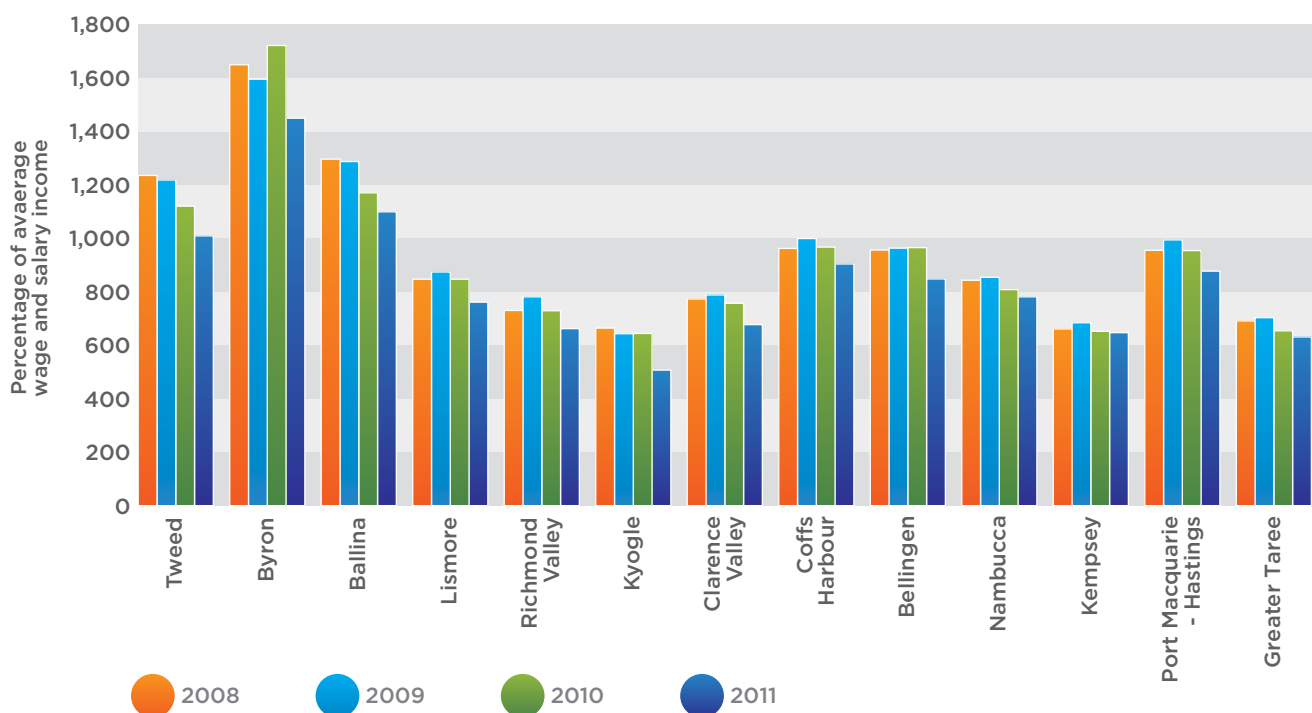
The NSW Government will:

- work with Local Aboriginal Land Councils to identify priority sites for potential housing and employment development.

### **DIRECTION 3.3** Deliver more opportunities for affordable housing

Affordable housing is an issue across the North Coast. Housing stress occurs when lower income households spend more than 30 per cent of their income on rent or mortgage costs. Rising house prices have put more pressure on

FIGURE 19: MEDIAN HOUSE PRICES AS A PERCENTAGE OF AVERAGE WAGE AND SALARY INCOME



Sources: RP Data and Australian Bureau of Statistics

many of these households, particularly low-income earning households (see Figure 19).

The planning system can help improve housing affordability by providing a range of housing opportunities. A limited supply of residential land in areas with high demand places upward pressure on housing prices.

The NSW Land and Housing Corporation is reviewing public housing estates across the State. The information from this draft Plan will be provided to the review to inform understanding about housing supply, demand and affordability issues in the region.

### **ACTION 3.3.1 Facilitate the supply of more affordable housing**

The NSW Government recognises that more needs to be done to meet the housing needs of people on very low, low and moderate incomes. The Government aims to develop a comprehensive approach to affordable housing that involves all stakeholders – the Government, councils and the private and community sectors.

Councils can help to improve housing affordability by including the following in their planning strategies and local environmental plans:

- model controls in local environmental plans that require that affordable housing is included in developments. For instance, councils may consider a bonus provision requirement to deliver a percentage of affordable housing in a development;
- development controls and reduced contributions or other development incentives that may boost construction of secondary dwellings as alternative affordable housing. Councils could also consider planning incentives under the *State Environmental Planning Policy Affordable Rental Housing* (2009); and
- promotion of new caravan parks and manufactured home estates on unconstrained land in existing settlements and new land release areas in the urban growth areas. Councils can identify sites strategically through their local planning strategies.

The NSW Government is also working on a whole-of-government strategy for affordable

housing. The strategy will assess the need for social, public and affordable housing across NSW, provide greater planning certainty, and facilitate complementary activities such as partnering with affordable housing providers.

The NSW Government will:

- prepare guidelines for local housing strategies;
- work with councils to prepare local housing strategies that plan for a range of housing types and that consider local affordable housing needs and strategies; and
- consider amendments to relevant environmental planning instruments, informed by updated strategies.

### **Case study: Lismore City and Clarence Valley Councils**

Lismore City Council has developed a *Contributions Discount Policy* that promotes the development of affordable housing by giving concessions on Section 64 and Section 94 developer contributions for secondary dwellings and dual occupancies that meet relevant criteria. Council developed the policy to expand the choice of smaller, more affordable accommodation in existing residential areas to help the growing number of single people and couples without children. It also helps elderly residents to 'age in place' and live independently while having the support of family close by.

Clarence Valley Council has taken a strategic approach to increase affordable housing options in the Clarence Valley. The Council has conducted detailed housing studies and explored appropriate policy options based on an examination of local housing needs, housing market factors, other local conditions, and stakeholder consultations. Based on these studies, the Council has established an Affordable Housing Advisory Committee and prepared an *Affordable Housing Strategy*, *Affordable Housing Policy* and *Adaptable Housing Guidelines* to provide more affordable housing that is appropriate to the future needs of the community.



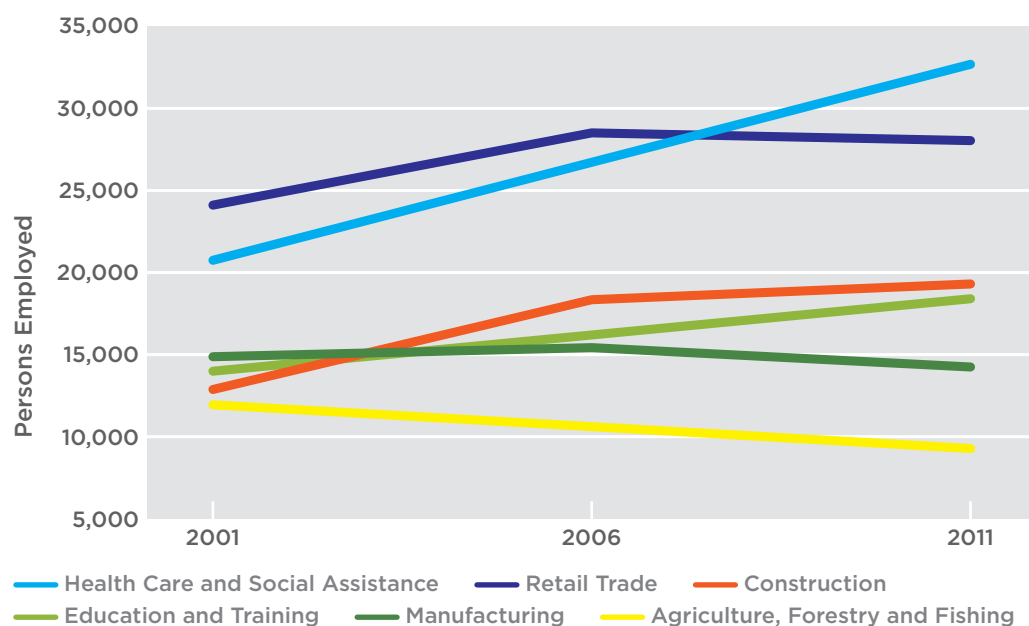


## GOAL 4 – A prosperous economy with services and infrastructure

The North Coast offers residents job opportunities across a diverse range of industries. Major investment in traditional sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing will remain important, however, healthcare, education, tourism and retail have great potential to drive employment growth (see Figure 20). This is particularly the case with the health sector, which will provide services for the ageing population. The draft Plan is focused on providing greater job opportunities in these growing service sectors, and giving the community better access to more health, education and tourism services.

The economy will continue to rely on a sufficient supply of employment land for investment, as well as freight and transport networks that provide efficient access to markets. The Gold Coast will need around 150,000 new jobs<sup>16</sup> to support its population growth over the next 20 years and – with the upgrade of the Pacific Highway – the North Coast is expected to provide the necessary employment land to assist in underpinning this growth.

FIGURE 20: CHANGING EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY ON THE NORTH COAST







Cabarita, Tweed

Infrastructure delivery will be essential to support the growth of the North Coast. Growth has already been matched by increased health and education services, and investment in transport services and water and electricity infrastructure. Given the current infrastructure networks and planned upgrades, the North Coast is in a strong position to meet the needs of the growing and changing population. The NSW Government will support councils and infrastructure providers to identify appropriate sites and infrastructure, such as cemeteries and crematoria.

Utility providers are planning infrastructure at local and regional levels to provide reliable water security and electricity supply. Long term planning for a secure water supply should be based on integrated water cycle management planning on a subregional scale to maximise benefits from the interconnection of schemes, and to improve management and financial results. The \$180 million Clarence Valley and Coffs Harbour Regional Water Supply Scheme and the *Northern Rivers Regional Bulk Water Supply Strategy* are examples of this type of initiative.

The NSW Government will use the *North Coast Housing and Land Monitor* to guide infrastructure providers about the capacity and forecast capability of existing infrastructure and the need for any upgrades.

The draft Plan aims to:

- develop an action plan to expand nature-based and cultural tourism on the North Coast;
- prepare for the expansion of services, as necessary, at major hospitals in the region;
- apply planning controls that encourage and promote clusters of health and education-related activities, and plan for the transport services associated with the growth of these precincts;

- aid the creation of extra primary and secondary school places across the North Coast to support projected population growth;
- maintain an adequate supply of industrial and business-zoned land over the long term; and
- establish business parks that can support the growth of knowledge industries.

## **DIRECTION 4.1 Expand the tourism sector on the North Coast**

Tourism on the North Coast is worth more than \$3.4 billion annually<sup>17</sup> and supports around one in three jobs in the region. The tourism industry will continue to make a significant contribution to jobs growth on the North Coast as the number of visitors to the region continues to increase.

Coastal harbour and river entrance assets on the North Coast are valued at around \$1 billion and support tourism charters, commercial fishing and recreational boating. A program of repair, upgrade and/or replacement is being implemented through the NSW Government's Coastal Infrastructure Program.

The NSW Government recognises that tourism can increase pressure on the environment and on small communities. The draft Plan provides a framework for sustainable tourism management. Future large-scale tourism facilities will be focused in the appropriately serviced prime tourism development areas of Tweed Heads/Kingscliff, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie, Ballina and Byron Bay. Medium to smaller-scale sustainable, nature-based and coastal tourism accommodation – outside these prime tourism development areas – will be located in towns such as Yamba, South West



Rocks, Old Bar, Nambucca and Bellingen. Accommodation should aim to be high-quality and showcase the natural environment.

Councils should provide zoning, floor space ratios and height requirements for the facilities, consistent with their location. This will support investment and provide the necessary infrastructure to accommodate a range of tourism opportunities.

#### **ACTION 4.1.1 Facilitate the nature-based, events and cultural tourism sectors on the North Coast**

The region will need to maintain and enhance the broad range of tourism experiences on offer; encourage investment in facilities for nature-based and cultural tourism; invigorate existing tourism assets, including conference facilities; and develop new assets.

Facilitating tourism through appropriate development controls and public transport will be at the core of growing the sector.

The NSW Government will:

- identify opportunities to expand visitation to regionally significant nature-based tourism places, such as Ellenborough Falls, Dorrig National Park, Wollumbin-Mount Warning National Park, Iluka Nature Reserve and Yuraygir Coastal Walk;
- identify ways to develop the Casino to Murwillumbah rail corridor for environmentally friendly tourism and leisure activities, particularly cycling and walking;
- improve tourism-related transport services, including seasonal transport options such as holiday bus services and park-and-ride facilities;
- develop servicing plans for major annual festivals to encourage public transport use; and
- work with councils to provide flexible local planning controls for diverse cultural heritage tourism activities, including opportunities to engage with Aboriginal communities and their culture.

### **Tourism on the North Coast**

In June 2014, the North Coast was ranked third in Australia for the number of overnight visitors and trip expenditure. Destination NSW estimates that over 11 million people visit the North Coast annually.<sup>17</sup> The region supports both domestic and international tourism, including iconic destinations like Byron Bay which had 1.4 million visitors in the year to September 2014.

The *North Coast of NSW Destination Management Planning – June 2013* identifies the region's coastal areas, beaches, nature and outdoor-based activities as unique attractions.

In 2014, around 8.8 million people visited national parks and reserves on the North Coast.<sup>18</sup> Nature-based tourism is continuing to grow on the North Coast and there are opportunities to develop complementary land uses, infrastructure and services to support and build on these activities and cultural heritage attractions.

There is an opportunity to create a rail trail for cyclists and walkers along the Casino to Murwillumbah rail corridor. This will develop the region's green/active and nature-based tourism base. This project can use existing infrastructure (subject to safety upgrades) to provide economic benefits through job creation, as well as support existing and emerging business ventures. The *Casino to Murwillumbah Rail Trail Study* (2014) estimated a minimum of around 88,300 visitors a year.

There will also be opportunities to build on the region's ability to host major sporting events and festivals such as the Saltwater Freshwater Festival, Byron Bay Bluesfest, Ironman Port Macquarie and the FIA World Rally in Coffs Harbour.



Anatomy laboratory, Southern Cross University, Coffs Harbour

## **DIRECTION 4.2 Develop health services precincts**

The draft Plan is focused on providing more high-skilled job opportunities and better access to services from the region's growing healthcare sector.

The healthcare sector now employs more than 32,000 people in the region.<sup>19</sup> Employment in this sector has grown 37 per cent over the last 10 years, making it the largest and fastest growing jobs sector on the North Coast. This trend is set to continue as the region's population grows and ages.

Between 2010 and 2015, investment in health infrastructure on the North Coast has increased and this is reflected in a number of recent projects to support the region's growing and ageing population, including the Kempsey Hospital redevelopment (Stage 1), Port Macquarie Hospital expansion, the new Byron Central Hospital and the Lismore Base Hospital redevelopment (Stage 3A).

The *Rebuilding NSW - State Infrastructure Strategy* (2014) identified \$100 million for the *Care Co-Location Program* which integrates a range of allied health services. These services include oral health, physiotherapy and podiatry, early childhood, youth, nursing, mental health and Aboriginal health services. The NSW Government is developing options to deliver the program to achieve the best outcomes for the region.

The role of some health facilities in the region will be defined for infrastructure planning purposes, and services devolved to smaller facilities that can support the major hospitals. The NSW Government will identify the capacity of hospitals to expand their functions and services in response to the changing needs of the population.

NSW Health has a range of prevention measures in place that promote a healthy lifestyle and is looking at early intervention and integration of aged care services to reduce demand for hospital services. More emphasis will be given to keeping patients out of hospital by managing their health in community settings.

Health facilities across the North Coast need to be easily accessible by car and, where possible, by public transport. Adequate car parking and traffic management are important considerations when planning upgrades to health facilities. The NSW Government will prioritise health facilities as important destinations when planning future bus routes and networks.

### **ACTION 4.2.1 Support health services precincts by attracting complementary uses in these precincts**

The NSW Government aims to identify opportunities to cluster pharmacy, allied health and specialised care services that can support the major referral hospitals, and make it easier to access health services. In addition to health services, other supporting land uses should be encouraged in these precincts, including accommodation options for health staff, patients and carers.

The NSW Government will work with councils to:

- identify land for health services precincts and infrastructure needs at Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour, Tweed Heads, Lismore and Taree; and
- introduce planning controls that encourage clusters of related activity such as higher education facilities; specialist and allied health infrastructure; research institutions; patient and carer accommodation; and housing choices for employees and patients.



### Case study: Lismore Health Precinct

Lismore Base Hospital is an important health asset for the Far North Coast subregion. It is a centre for specialist medical advice and treatment for acute and complex health conditions, integrated community healthcare services and medical training. St Vincent's Private Hospital, University Centre for Rural Health and Southern Cross University are all located near the Base Hospital.

Lismore City Council and the Northern NSW Local Health District are investigating the potential for housing and employment activity that is compatible with their major health infrastructure in the central business district. The *Lismore City Health, Wellbeing and Medium Density Precinct Project* currently under way will identify the best ways to modify zoning and design parameters to enable flexible housing density and amenity for residents and patients visiting health facilities in the Lismore CBD.

### DIRECTION 4.3 Enhance education precincts

Education is the second-fastest growth sector on the North Coast and made the second-largest (7.3 per cent) contribution to gross regional product in 2013.<sup>20</sup>

A number of major universities have campuses in the region, including Charles Sturt University and the University of Newcastle at Port Macquarie; Southern Cross University at Coffs Harbour, Lismore and the Gold Coast (on the Queensland border with Tweed Shire); and the University of NSW at Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie.

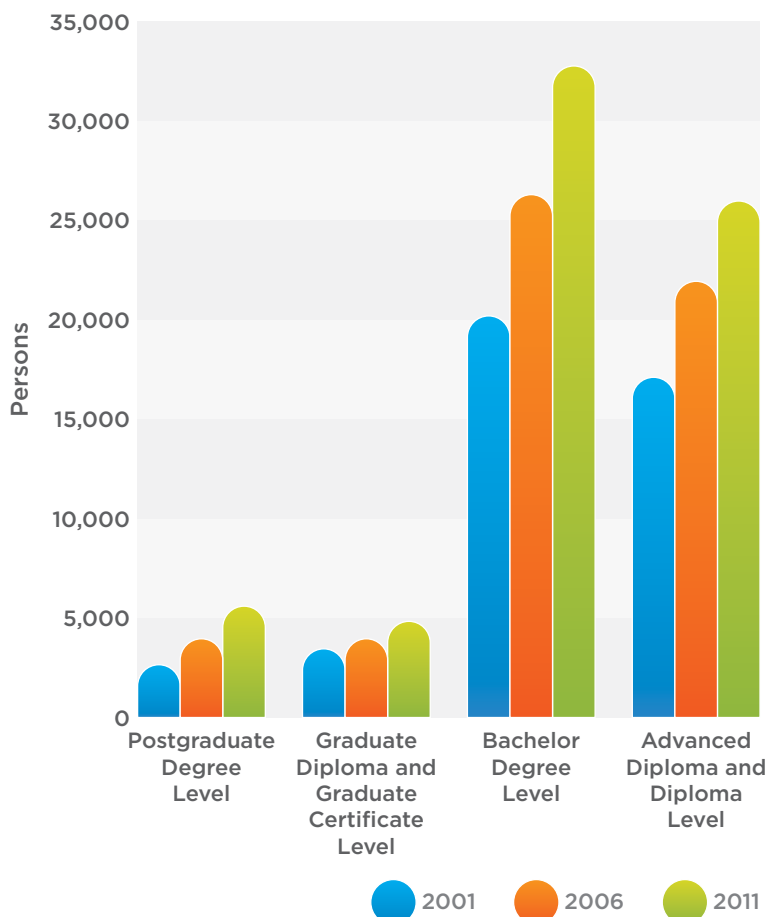
Currently, more than 440,000 people on the North Coast have a tertiary education, an increase of 7 per cent in 10 years (see Figure 21).<sup>21</sup> Demand for vocational and tertiary education is expected to continue as the region's population increases.

The North Coast TAFE is one of the largest regional training providers in Australia and enrolls more than 45,000 students annually in nationally recognised courses and training.

The TAFE has plans for greater and more efficient use of current assets and the deployment of more mobile, multi-purpose and onsite classrooms. These facilities will be introduced across industry areas and into communities that have never had access to campuses, and for workplaces needing short-term learning services. To complement the change to more mobile learning, investments will be made in digital infrastructure to support online and self-service options and increase remote learning opportunities.

The NSW Government will prioritise vocational and tertiary educational facilities when planning future bus routes and networks.

FIGURE 21: HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS ON THE NORTH COAST



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics



Manildra Harwood Sugars, Harwood

#### **ACTION 4.3.1 Facilitate planning for additional primary and secondary school places to meet the region's growing needs**

The Department of Education is preparing a long term strategic plan to 2031, as well as regional plans and school cluster plans to respond to changing demands in schools throughout the State.

By 2031, there are expected to be around 4,050 more primary school places and 1,720 more high school places in public schools on the North Coast. The projected growth in the number of school-aged children is likely to be accommodated in existing schools. The Department of Education will monitor changes in demand in all North Coast public schools over time and plan for additional school places, as required.

Private schools make an important contribution to primary and secondary education and will continue to do so throughout the North Coast.

The NSW Government will:

- continue to develop a revised service model and approach to asset planning; and
- monitor the rate and take-up of development in regional centres and new release areas to respond to increased school enrolments.

#### **ACTION 4.3.2 Work with education providers and councils to create education precincts that support campuses**

Education precincts have been identified for the regional cities and regional centres that will build on the strong links that exist between institutions and industry sectors to grow the

economy and skilled local jobs. Opportunities will be provided for applied research and development jobs and innovative businesses to operate in the education precincts.

The region's ageing health workforce highlights the need for training and development opportunities to maintain an adequate supply of skilled staff. Creating links between health services and education precincts could help in this respect. In Port Macquarie, the University of NSW, University of Newcastle and North Coast TAFE are establishing a Joint Health Education Facility to expand tertiary education opportunities in health care.

The NSW Government will:

- work with universities, North Coast TAFE and councils to plan for education-related land uses around educational institutions in Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour, Lismore and Tweed Heads; and
- introduce planning controls that encourage clusters of related activities such as research institutions, applied research and development organisations, and student accommodation.

#### **DIRECTION 4.4 Provide well-located and serviced supplies of employment land to expand industry investment opportunities**

The availability of industrial land throughout the region is an important component of a growing economy. Establishing an adequate supply of employment land will improve confidence in the economy, increase job opportunities, encourage the establishment of new industries, and allow the expansion of existing operations.

Previous investment has unlocked strategically located and relatively affordable employment land that has provided opportunities for private sector investment, strengthened productivity benefits, and increased investor and business confidence. New employment areas will be needed in the long term to support the expansion of food processing, manufacturing, and freight and logistics operations throughout the region.

#### **ACTION 4.4.1** Provide an adequate supply of employment land aligned with demand

The *North Coast Employment Lands Study* (2014) was undertaken to determine the factors influencing industry growth and employment change throughout the region, and to identify the trends that determine future industrial land needs. The study found that, overall, there is sufficient supply of employment land to accommodate projected employment growth on the North Coast for the next 20 years;

however some locations have a limited surplus and will need further investigation (see Figure 22).

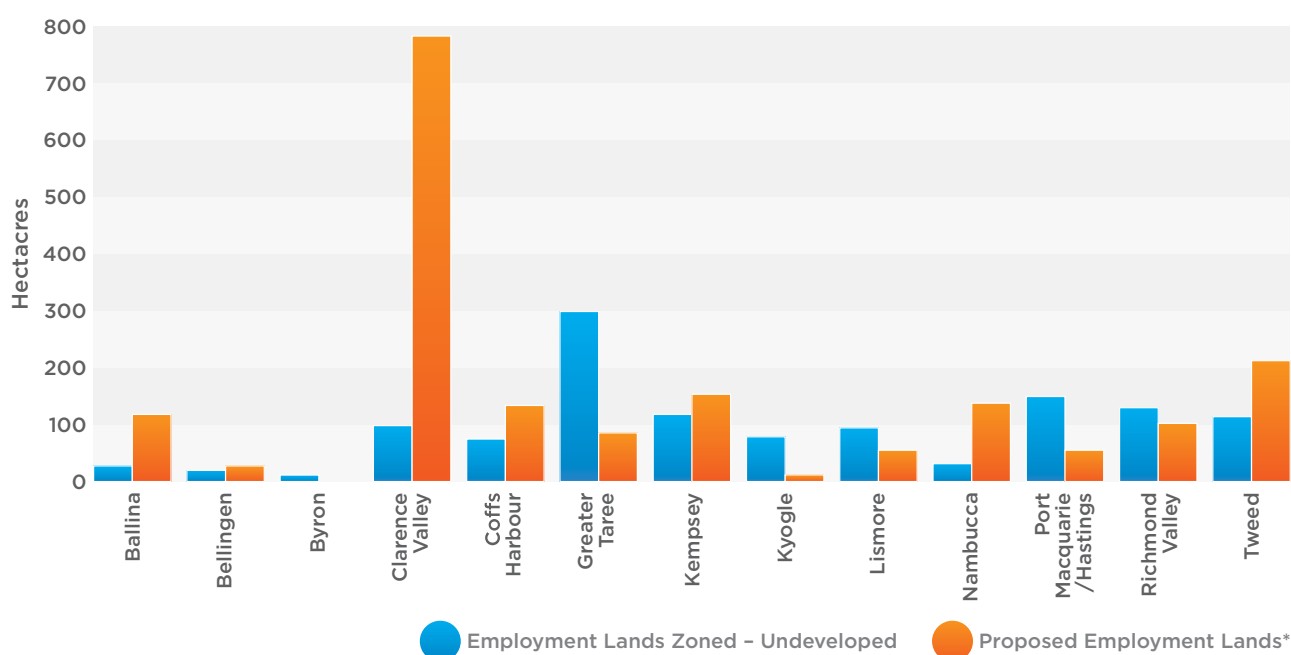
Where suitable employment land is not readily available, coordination across local government areas at a subregional level will support the delivery of the employment and economic development objectives of the draft Plan.

Local manufacturing will continue to generate the need for oversize and overmass trucks to transport metal fabrication, concrete girders and similar loads. Councils should incorporate planning for freight access when releasing new industrial areas, including applying Austroads' *Guidelines for Planning and Assessment of Road Freight Access in Industrial Areas* (2014).

The NSW Government will:

- work with councils to provide adequate employment land to prevent potential restrictions to business investment.

FIGURE 22: EXISTING AND PROPOSED EMPLOYMENT LAND IN URBAN GROWTH AREAS (HECTARES)



\*Includes greenfield areas only  
Source: MacroPlan DiMasi North Coast Employment Land Review, 2015





#### **ACTION 4.4.2** Encourage well-located employment land with suitable buffers to minimise land use conflicts

Employment land needs to be protected from encroachment by incompatible development that is sensitive to the real or potential impacts of noise, smoke, dust, odour, vibration and light, and/or because it generates potential risks.

Due to their type, scale and nature, certain heavy industries – such as concrete batching plants – may need to be located away from some traditional mixed-use employment areas that have a greater mix of bulky goods and light industrial uses. Councils should do this through their local planning strategies.

Marine-based industry such as shipbuilding is an example of development that may need to be located outside traditional industrial areas. To help councils plan for marine-based industries, the Department of Planning and Environment has released the *Marine-Based Industry Policy – Far North Coast and Mid North Coast* (2015).

The NSW Government will:

- encourage councils to minimise potential for land use conflict by locating employment land in appropriate areas with suitable buffers, prevent sensitive uses encroaching on existing areas, and apply design guidelines in local planning policies.

#### **DIRECTION 4.5** Grow the region's commercial and business centres

The region's settlements have naturally developed over time so that higher-order commercial and retail functions are located in Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour and Tweed Heads, while regional centres and towns continue to provide certain retail functions to their local areas. Further afield, the Gold Coast and Newcastle offer wider retail opportunities.

Within each settlement, commercial centres are a focus for activity and support residential and employment growth. Considerable investment in social, economic and transport infrastructure has been made in these areas. They contribute to the quality of life of residents, and create a sense of place and wellbeing for the community.

Knowledge-intensive industries are a potential growth sector in the region. The roll-out of the national broadband network will increase access to knowledge and customers. Demand is growing on the North Coast for more highly skilled workers in the knowledge-based economy. The Far North Coast has a high concentration of creative professionals, particularly in the fields of visual arts, design, literature, publishing, screen and digital content. Between 2001 and 2006, the creative industries were one of the Far North Coast's top four growth industries.<sup>22</sup>



Left: Retail business, Byron Bay

Right: Food production and logistics, Murwillumbah

Technological advances have allowed knowledge industries to set up in agglomerated business parks. Demand is increasing for purpose-built business facilities in well-located and easily accessible areas that offer the benefits of agglomeration, corporate prestige, amenity, proximity to labour, and cost-effectiveness.

Councils should support the growth of knowledge industries by applying flexible planning controls and providing business park development opportunities. By having greater locational choice, knowledge industries can decide what best suits their needs, which will help improve productivity and access to a range of jobs for residents.

#### **ACTION 4.5.1 Plan for future retail and commercial needs**

It is important to support retail and business activity in existing commercial centres that have sufficient zoned and appropriately located land. Councils should regularly review their retail and commercial land supply and demand in areas experiencing population growth, to plan for sufficient zoned land.

Where it is not possible to expand or accommodate growth in existing centres, or where there is significant market demand, councils may need to consider new centres of

an appropriate size and scale relative to their purpose, and the area to be served, to permit additional retail and commercial development. Proposals for new centres (including retail proposals) will need to demonstrate how they:

- respond to retail supply and demand;
- respond to innovations in the retail sector;
- maximise the use of existing infrastructure (including public transport and community facilities) commensurate with the scale of the proposal; and
- enhance the value of the public realm.

The net community benefit should be a factor when assessing these proposals.

The NSW Government will:

- work with councils to focus retail activity in existing commercial centres, unless there is a demonstrated need for new centres, with positive social and economic benefits for the community.







## GOAL 5 - Improved transport connectivity and freight networks

Transport and freight infrastructure on the North Coast supports jobs; provides business with good access to South East Queensland, the Hunter, Sydney, and international markets; and allows residents, who enjoy coastal and rural lifestyles, to move around the region and to other metropolitan centres.

The region continues to benefit from access to important domestic and international airports and the upgrade of the Pacific Highway.

Freight movement, freight transport facilities, and warehousing and distribution centres are well represented on the North Coast. The Pacific Highway carries the second-highest level of freight of any road in Australia. In 2011, 5.8 million tonnes of freight travelled along the highway into the North Coast and more than 3.3 million tonnes travelled out of the region. Total freight on the Pacific Highway is forecast to increase by 83 per cent over the next 20 years to 29.1 million tonnes a year.<sup>23</sup>

The draft Plan aims to:

- limit development with direct access to the Pacific Highway to allow the free flow of traffic and retain the travel time savings and safety benefits from the upgrade;
- designate highway service centre locations close to bypassed towns to deliver economic benefits and to encourage motorists to take breaks;
- provide guidelines for locating freight facilities along the Pacific Highway to support the cost-effective and efficient movement of freight;

- undertake corridor studies across State roads to set a 20-year framework for managing transport demands, including freight transport; and
- zone land close to the Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour, Ballina and Gold Coast airports to allow for their continued development as aviation precincts.

### **DIRECTION 5.1 Strengthen the Pacific Highway's function as a key road corridor of State and national significance**

Since 1995, the Pacific Highway upgrade program has cut travel times between Newcastle and the Queensland border by almost 90 minutes for heavy vehicles and about 60 minutes for light vehicles (see Figure 23). Future Pacific Highway upgrades are expected to cut travel times by another hour or more while also increasing safety.

The NSW and Australian Governments have already invested \$8.6 billion in upgrading the Pacific Highway. An estimated \$6.4 billion will be spent completing the upgrade program, with \$1.4 billion committed in 2015. This is one of Australia's most significant investments in transport and freight infrastructure, and should be finished by the end of the decade.



Tintenbar to Ewingsdale roadworks under the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program

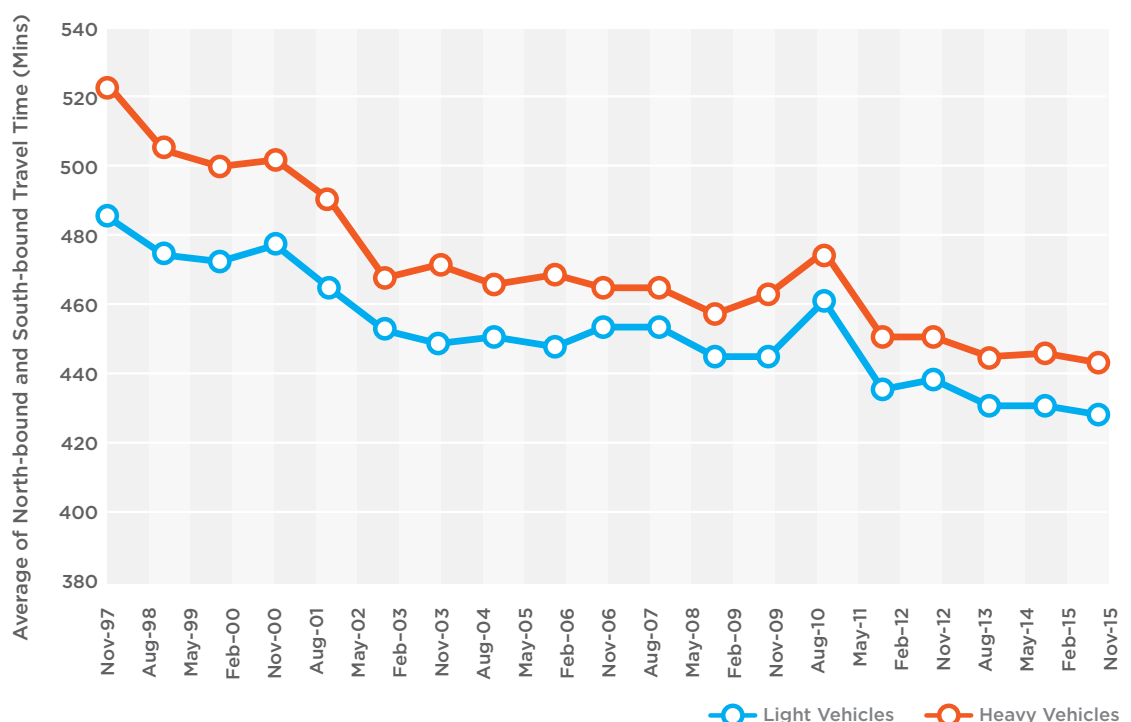
Funding has been committed to complete the duplication of the highway between Newcastle and Woolgoolga, and between Ballina and the Queensland border, by late 2017. The remaining 155-kilometre section between Woolgoolga and Ballina is in the planning and pre-construction stage. The Coffs Harbour bypass is also moving ahead, with around \$37 million expended to acquire land in the proposed corridor.

As additional sections of the Pacific Highway upgrade are completed, industries on the North Coast will have more opportunities to supply products to other markets, which will act as a catalyst for employment growth.

### **ACTION 5.1.1** Protect the travel time and safety improvements from the upgrade program

One of the many factors contributing to the time-savings on the Pacific Highway is the grade-separated access on motorway-class sections where the speed limit is generally 110 km/h. These sections optimise the safe and efficient movement of major regional and inter-regional traffic. In addition, strict traffic control, via grade-separated interchanges, delivers superior conditions for capacity, congestion, speed and safety. Local traffic can use alternative routes along service roads or the local arterial road networks.

**FIGURE 23: PACIFIC HIGHWAY TRAVEL TIMES BETWEEN NEWCASTLE AND THE QUEENSLAND BORDER, 1997-2015<sup>24</sup>**



Access to motorway-class sections of the highway will only be allowed via grade-separated interchanges. The NSW Government and councils will prevent additional direct 'at grade' access to motorway-class sections of the upgraded highway, as this will gradually erode the safety, travel time and economic benefits.

The NSW Government will:

- work with councils to limit development directly accessing the Pacific Highway; and
- consider the need to provide additional grade-separated interchanges along the Pacific Highway.

### **ACTION 5.1.2** Designate highway service centres along the Pacific Highway

There is an extensive rest stop network across major road corridors in NSW. Facilities provided at each rest stop vary and typically depend on the local environment and site characteristics. Highway service centres, one type of rest stop, encourage motorists to take breaks and therefore contribute to travel safety and efficiency.

The following sites have been identified as potential locations for Highway Service Centres along the Pacific Highway:

- Chinderah (at Chinderah Bay Road and Tweed Valley Way);
- Ballina (at Teven interchange);
- Maclean (at the interchange near Ferry Park);
- Woolgoolga (at the Arrawarra interchange);
- Nambucca Heads (at the Nambucca Heads interchange);
- Kempsey (at the South Kempsey interchange);
- Port Macquarie (at Oxley Highway); and
- Taree (at Old Bar Road).

These locations are close to bypassed towns, which will retain the economic benefits.

The NSW Government will:

- work with councils to appropriately locate service centres along the highway.

TABLE 5: VOLUME OF FREIGHT IMPORTED ALONG THE PACIFIC HIGHWAY IN 2011 (FROM QUEENSLAND AND GREATER TAREE) IN KILOTONNES PER YEAR

Destination	From South	From North	Total
Far North Coast subregion	70	2,840	2,910
Mid North Coast subregion	900	470	1,370
Lower North Coast subregion	1,060	440	1,500

TABLE 6: VOLUME OF FREIGHT EXPORTED ALONG THE PACIFIC HIGHWAY IN 2011 (FROM QUEENSLAND AND GREATER TAREE) IN KILOTONNES PER YEAR

Destination	To the South	To the North	Total
Far North Coast subregion	90	980	1,070
Mid North Coast subregion	350	360	710
Lower North Coast subregion	890	230	1,120



### **ACTION 5.1.3** Identify freight transport facilities along the Pacific Highway

Freight transport facilities, warehousing and distribution centres have locational needs that depend on efficient supply chains, access to customers, land availability and access to main roads. The upgrade of the Pacific Highway has highlighted the need for a coordinated regional approach to locating freight facilities along this nationally important corridor. Freight Transport Facilities Locational Guidelines (see below) have been developed to guide the development of freight facilities along the Pacific Highway.

The NSW Government will:

- encourage councils to identify strategic sites for freight transport facilities that link to existing and future transport-related industry.

### **DIRECTION 5.2** Expand the region's aviation services

Airports on the North Coast are important gateways for business, tourism and personal travel, as well as for high-value airfreight. In 2014, Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour and Ballina Byron Gateway airports handled more than 850,000 passenger movements with Sydney Airport – placing them in the top five busiest regional NSW routes (see Figure 24).<sup>25</sup> Gold Coast Airport is an international gateway with direct flights to New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia, Japan and China. The draft Plan seeks to sustainably manage an increase in services at the region's airports, while providing opportunities for aviation-related business growth by activating aviation precincts.

## Freight Transport Facilities Locational Guidelines

Development needs to be consistent with the *Draft North Coast Regional Plan* and relevant Section 117 Directions and State Environmental Planning Policies.

### ACCESS

Access to the site, to and from the Pacific Highway, should have interchange capability for heavy vehicles.

The site is to be on relatively flat land to minimise cut and fill.

### LOCATION

The site should avoid physically constrained land.

The site should avoid potential areas of high environmental value, significant farmland and natural resources mapped in the draft Plan.

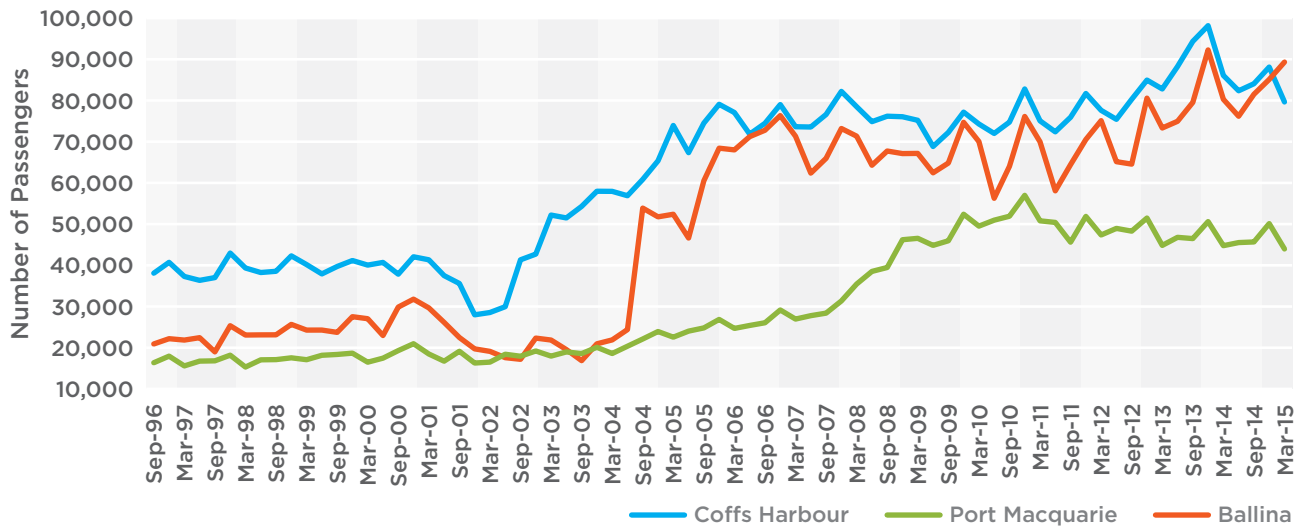
### SETTLEMENT

The site should not adjoin urban areas or sensitive land uses, such as residential development, or be located where land use conflict may limit future expansion.

### SERVICING

Infrastructure needed to service the land should be physically and financially feasible.

FIGURE 24: QUARTERLY PASSENGER NUMBERS TO AND FROM SYDNEY AIRPORT 1996-2015



Source: Transport for NSW's quarterly passenger statistics for NSW air routes to and from Sydney Airport

Expanding regional airports will enhance the region's reputation as a major tourism destination, and help to boost economic growth. Gold Coast, Ballina Byron Gateway, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie airports need to be able to expand to meet demand, as well as the Civil Aviation Safety Authority's additional requirements for increasing services, passenger numbers and larger aircraft.

These four airports are near residential and other urban uses which mean there are potential noise and traffic issues, and land use conflicts from the possible expansion or development of airport services. It will be important that councils consider ways to protect the expansion of services at these airports from inappropriate surrounding development.

#### **ACTION 5.2.1** Develop aviation precincts with compatible and complementary uses

In addition to Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour, Ballina Byron Gateway and Gold Coast airports, a number of other airports service the North Coast, including those at Taree, Kempsey, Grafton, Casino and Lismore. These airports have limited commercial flights and could provide other aviation-related services. Some councils have masterplans to capitalise on opportunities to diversify and maximise the potential of value-adding industries close to these airports.

The operational aspects of airports need to be protected to provide efficient access for passengers and freight, and to provide land for aviation-related activities. The development of retail and bulky goods uses should be avoided in these areas.

The NSW Government will:

- work with councils to encourage the development of aviation precincts with compatible and complementary industry and business uses.



Pacific Highway upgrade, Valla

### Case study: Ballina Byron Gateway Airport and Port Macquarie Airport Aviation Precincts

The Ballina Byron Gateway Airport is adjacent to the Southern Cross Industrial Estate and close to the Pacific Highway and Ballina CBD, making it well-located for an aviation precinct.

A masterplan is being developed to expand and upgrade the airport's facilities, including a new passenger terminal and access road. It will also focus on developing an aviation precinct. Ballina Shire Council has been identifying opportunities for industrial activity in the area.

Port Macquarie Airport is close to the Pacific Highway and the city's CBD. A masterplan for an airport precinct business park recommends upgrading the Hastings River Drive-Boundary Street intersection in the short to medium term to cater for increased traffic from the airport and the precinct. More traffic, transport and land use planning will be needed to identify the scope of road infrastructure improvements.

## **DIRECTION 5.3 Enhance the connectivity of the region's road and rail freight and transport services**

In addition to the Pacific Highway, transport in the region is focused on both the north-south connections provided by the Summerland Way, Mount Lindesay Road and the North Coast Rail Line to South East Queensland and the Hunter; and the east-west connections to the New England North West via the Oxley Highway, Gwydir Highway, Bruxner Highway and Waterfall Way.

The regional rail and coach network provides important freight and passenger transport links with Sydney and Brisbane. Enhancements are

### Case study: Casino Meat Production and Cross-border Connections

The Northern Co-operative Meat Company Ltd has been based in Casino for 79 years, employs more than 1,000 local people and contributes \$55 million in wages annually to Richmond Valley.<sup>26</sup> It operates an international export and domestic service abattoir and boning complex, which produces more than 49 million kilograms of meat and meat products each year.

Up to 10, twenty-foot equivalent unit containers are transported daily from Casino to the Port of Brisbane for export. The meatworks draw cattle from the New England North West region of NSW, and from the Darling Downs in Queensland. Some 80 per cent of pigs processed at the abattoir are sourced from South East Queensland.

The *NSW Freight and Ports Strategy* identified transport restrictions as a challenge for industries on the Far North Coast. These affect both raw materials being transported into the area and finished products transported out of the area, particularly to the Brisbane market and port. Due to terrain constraints, the number of east-west links between the North Coast, the New England Tablelands and the Darling Downs is limited.

The proposed Casino rail freight terminal may help cut the number of long-haul heavy vehicle trips and allow for around 250,000 tonnes of additional rail freight. It will provide a facility that can act as a base for manufacturing, processing and distribution industries, with excellent transport connections for domestic and international markets.

being made to infrastructure to increase the freight carried via rail, expand capacity, remove pinch points and modernise the freight network. This will provide opportunities for intermodal and rail freight terminals to support the region's manufacturing and agricultural sectors.



Noise from freight movements on road and rail is a sensitive issue for communities close to freight corridors. The freight network needs to be buffered from encroaching development, to allow freight activity to continue outside peak hours. While the industry has a role in minimising the impacts of freight operations, buffers can help reduce noise problems for communities.

Councils will identify buffer measures in local environmental plans to minimise the impact of development on the efficient functioning of the freight industry.

### **ACTION 5.3.1 Identify connectivity improvements for key State roads on the North Coast**

Transport for NSW, in conjunction with Roads and Maritime Services, is preparing corridor strategies for State roads in NSW to consistently manage and plan the State road network. The Department of Planning and Environment will work with Transport for NSW and Roads and Maritime Services to develop these strategies for all State roads on the North Coast.

Corridor strategies will set a vision and objectives; respond to current and future challenges and issues; and set short, medium and long term priorities and actions to manage the corridors. The strategies set a 20-year framework to align road safety, traffic efficiency and asset management with policy on freight access.

The NSW Government will:

- continue to deliver corridor strategies for all State roads on the North Coast.

### **ACTION 5.3.2 Provide improved transport services between larger settlements and regional communities**

The *Mid North Coast* and *Northern Rivers Regional Transport Plans* recognise the importance of investing in public transport infrastructure and services to improve connections with urban areas and to help reduce social disadvantage. Detailed plans to implement and deliver these strategies are being developed.

Transport for NSW will work with bus operators to develop routes and timetables to improve bus services in the region's major centres and their connections with regional communities. It will also work with local transport operators and councils to develop programs that focus on serving the unique characteristics of each town.

Flexible transport services are likely to be more useful in smaller towns and villages. Transport for NSW will investigate what works best for each area and will liaise with local transport operators and providers to implement these services.

The NSW Government will:

- investigate opportunities to improve bus operations in the region's regional cities and regional centres, and their connections with regional communities in towns and villages; and
- work with local transport operators and community transport providers to investigate a range of delivery models for flexible transport, to determine what works best for different areas.

### **ACTION 5.3.3 Identify and protect future rail corridors on the North Coast**

The Australian Government is investigating opportunities for a high-speed rail network to reduce travel time between capital cities along the east coast. This may generate new opportunities for economic development in the region.

Another potential rail corridor for the longer term is located south of the Gold Coast along the coastal corridor. This aligns with the Queensland Government's *Connecting SEQ 2031 An Integrated Regional Transport Plan for South East Queensland* (2011), which has identified an extension of the Brisbane heavy rail line to the Gold Coast Airport.

The NSW Government will:

- work with other governments to plan for future rail corridors on the North Coast.



# Appendix A - Infrastructure Investigation Locations for Priority Land Release Areas

The Department of Planning and Environment will work with councils to identify where investment in local infrastructure may create housing supply in the preliminary list of priority land release areas shown below.

Site	Local Government Area	Potential No. of lots
Cumbulum Precinct B	Ballina	2,480
Thrumster	Port Macquarie-Hastings	4,250
Lake Cathie-Bonny Hills	Port Macquarie-Hastings	2,000
Kew	Port Macquarie-Hastings	900
Cobaki	Tweed	5,000
Bilambil	Tweed	1,696
Area E-Terranora	Tweed	1,590
Kings Forest	Tweed	4,500
Brimbin	Greater Taree	8,000
Old Bar	Greater Taree	2,000
Valla Urban Growth Area	Nambucca Valley	800
Casino	Richmond Valley	1,300
Junction Hill	Clarence Valley	1,000
West Yamba	Clarence Valley	1,000



## Appendix B - Urban Growth Area maps

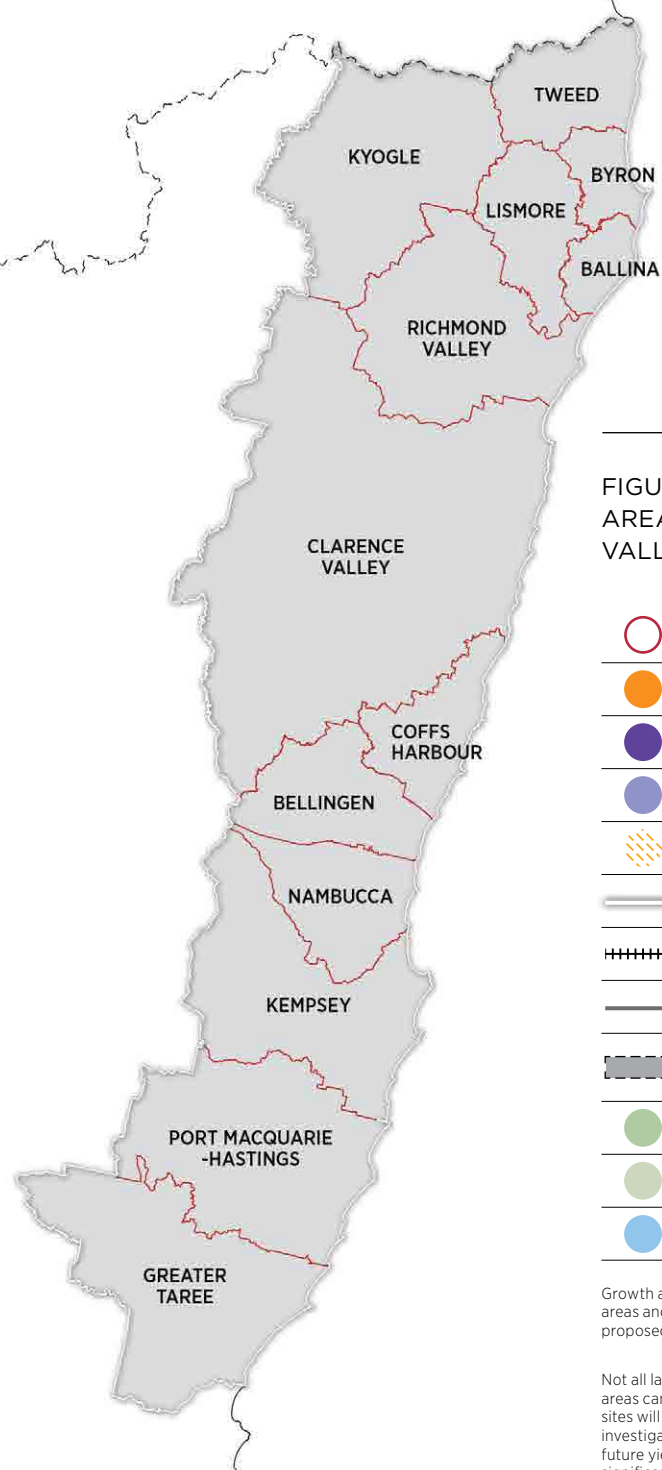
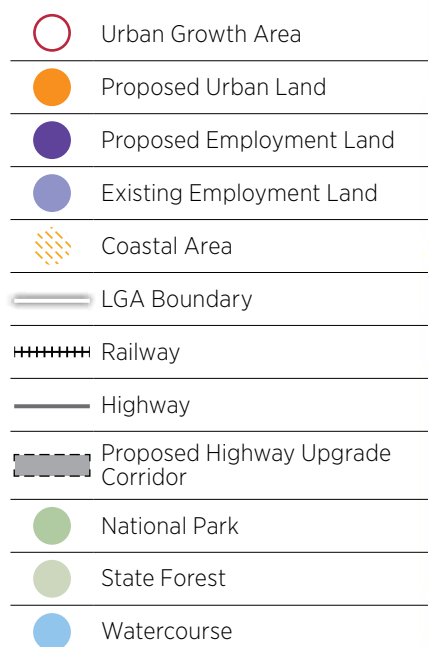
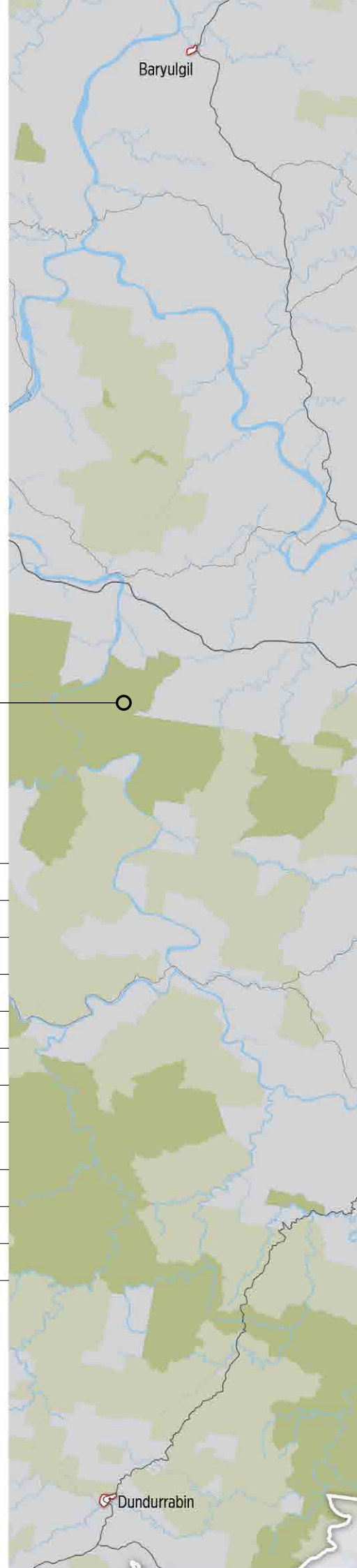


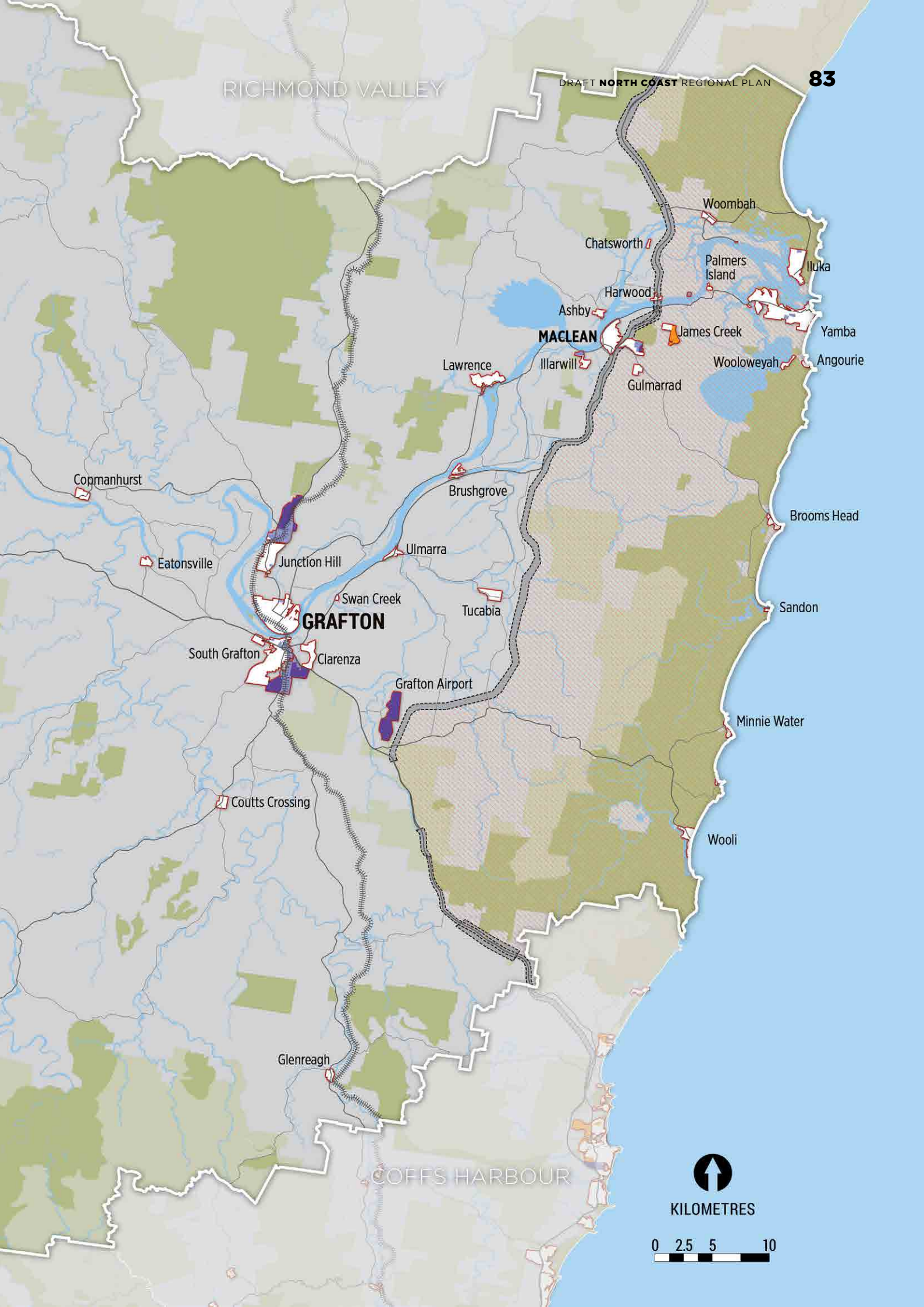
FIGURE 25: URBAN GROWTH  
AREA MAP FOR CLARENCE  
VALLEY LGA



Growth areas show the boundaries of urban areas and, as such, identify both existing and proposed urban lands.

Not all land identified within the growth areas can be developed for urban uses. All sites will be subject to more detailed investigations to determine capability and future yield. Land that is subject to significant natural hazards and/or environmental constraints will be excluded from development.





KILOMETRES

0 2.5 5 10



FIGURE 26: URBAN GROWTH AREA MAP FOR  
TWEED LGA

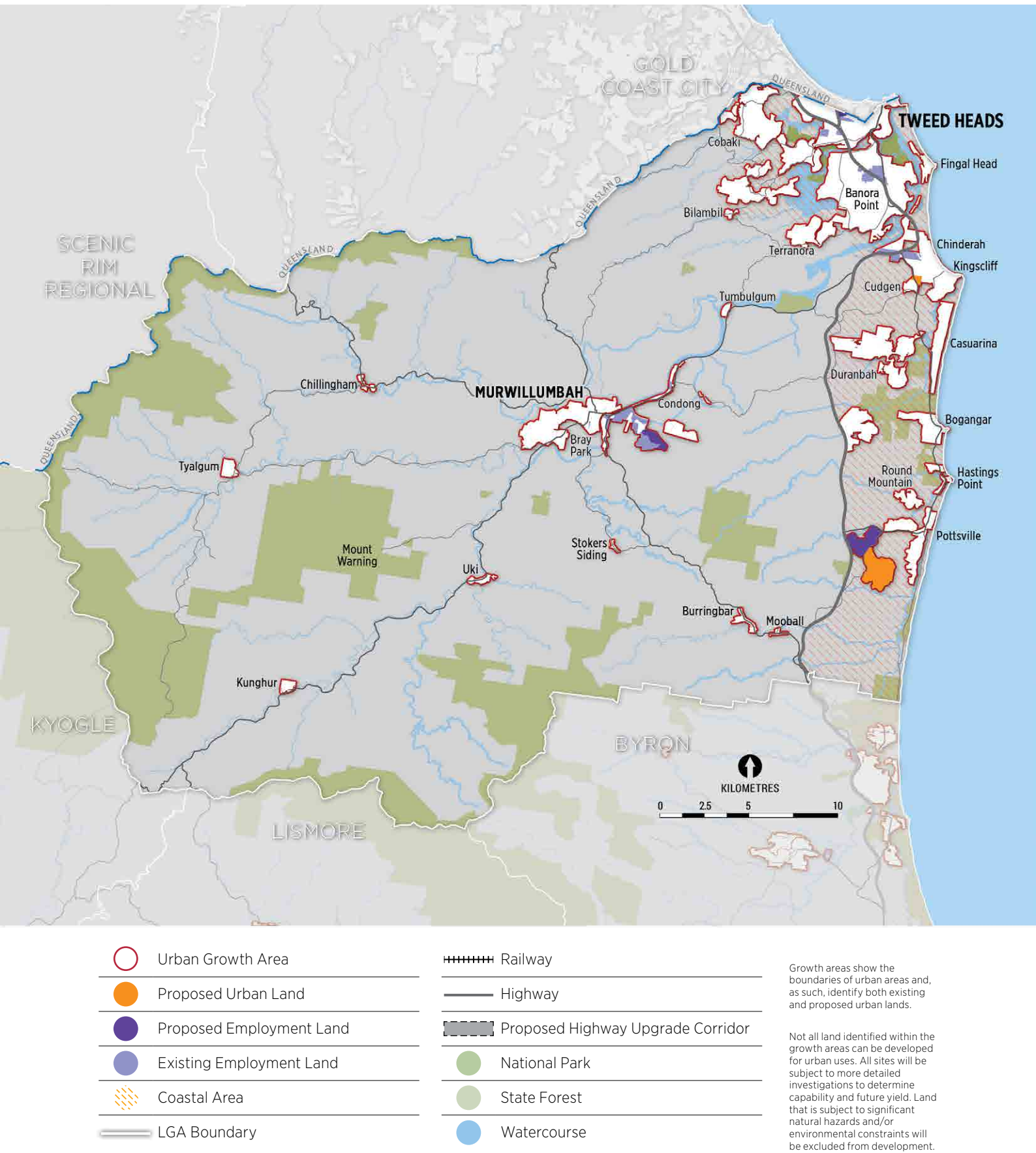
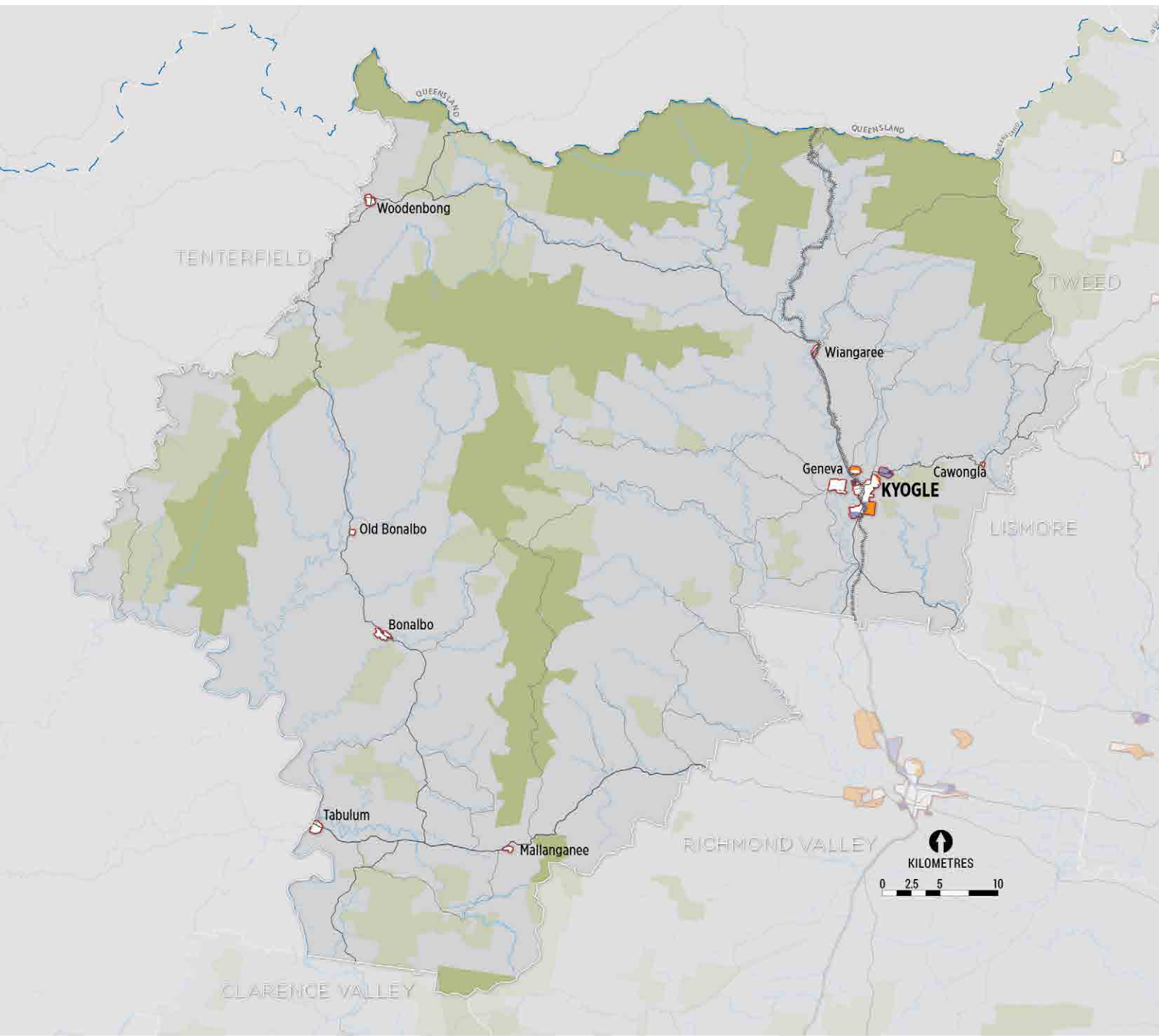
















FIGURE 27: URBAN GROWTH AREA MAP FOR KYOGLE LGA



- |                                                                                     |                          |                                                                                     |                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
|  | Urban Growth Area        |  | Railway                           |
|  | Proposed Urban Land      |  | Highway                           |
|  | Proposed Employment Land |  | Proposed Highway Upgrade Corridor |
|  | Existing Employment Land |  | National Park                     |
|  | Coastal Area             |  | State Forest                      |
|  | LGA Boundary             |  | Watercourse                       |

Growth areas show the boundaries of urban areas and, as such, identify both existing and proposed urban lands.

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FIGURE 28: URBAN GROWTH AREA MAP FOR BYRON LGA

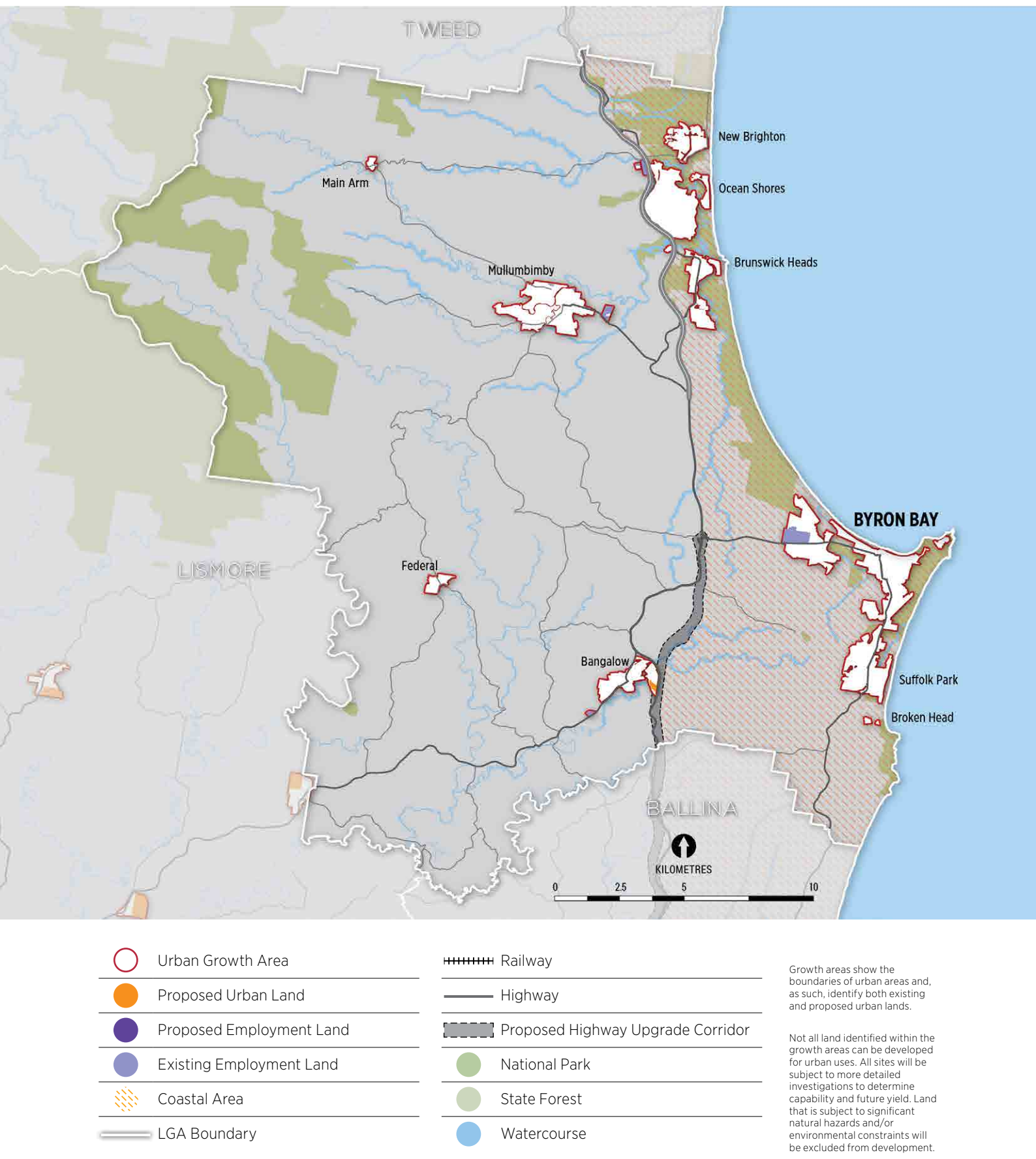


FIGURE 29: URBAN GROWTH AREA MAP FOR LISMORE LGA

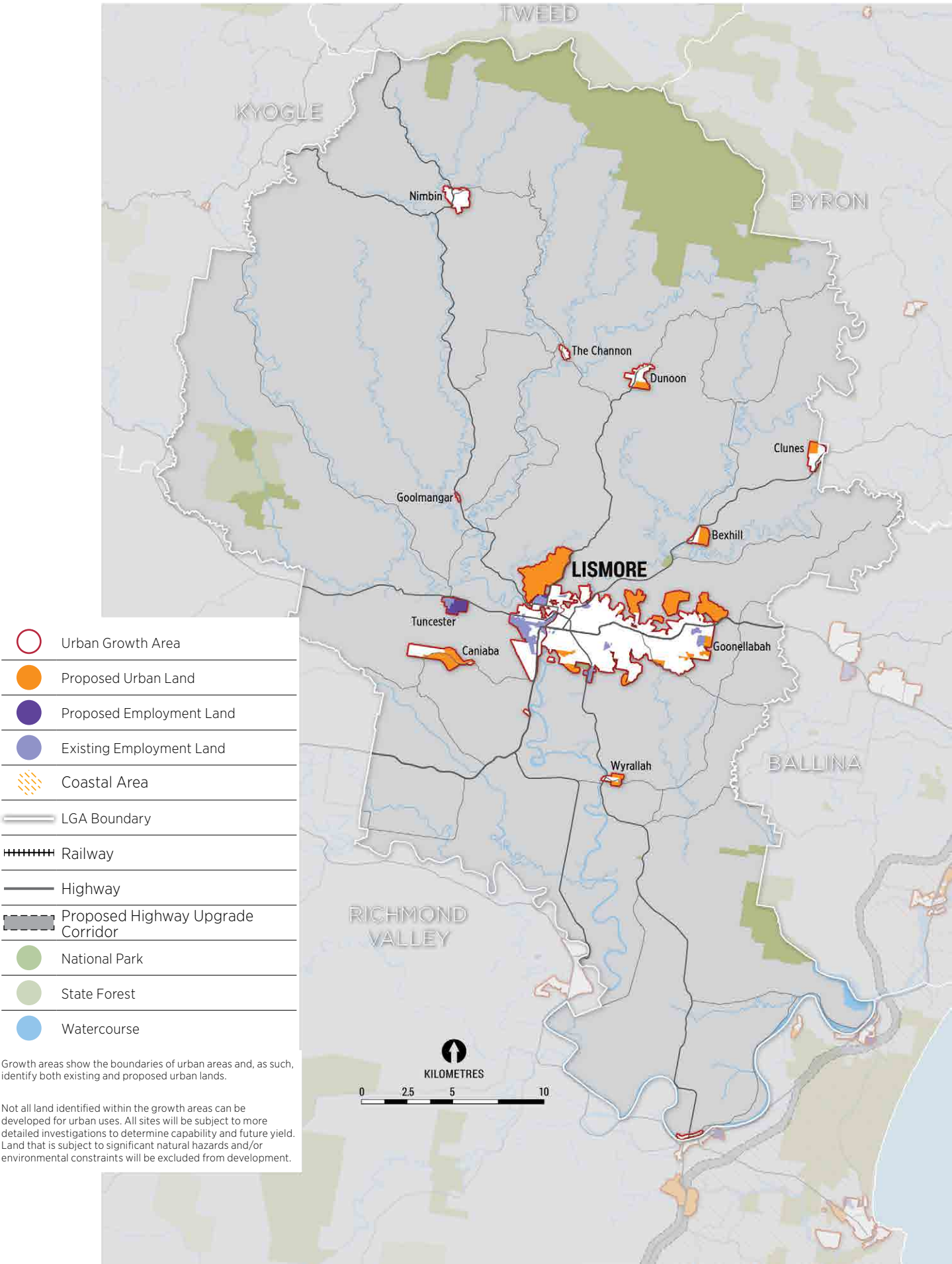
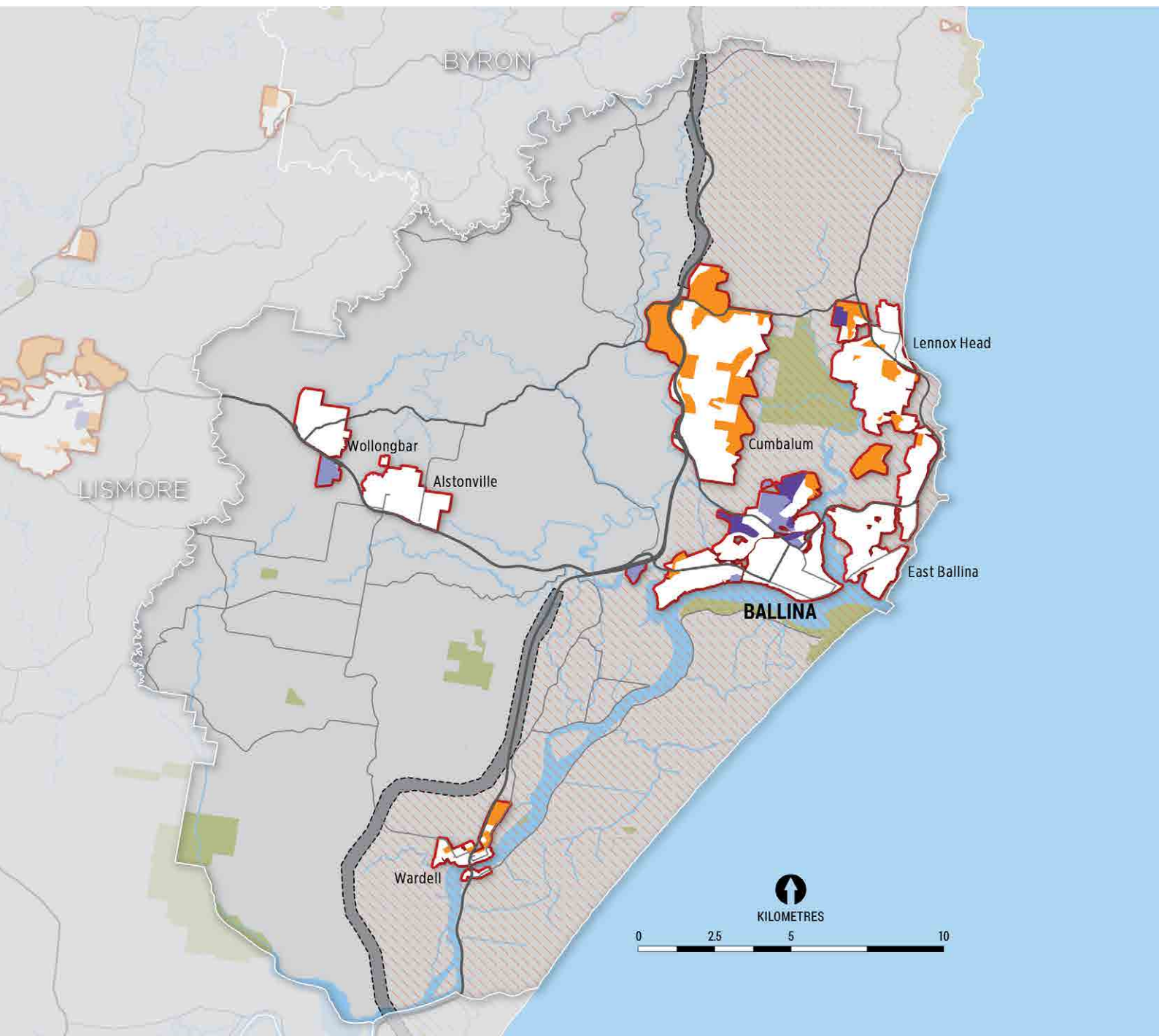
















FIGURE 30: URBAN GROWTH AREA MAP FOR BALLINA LGA

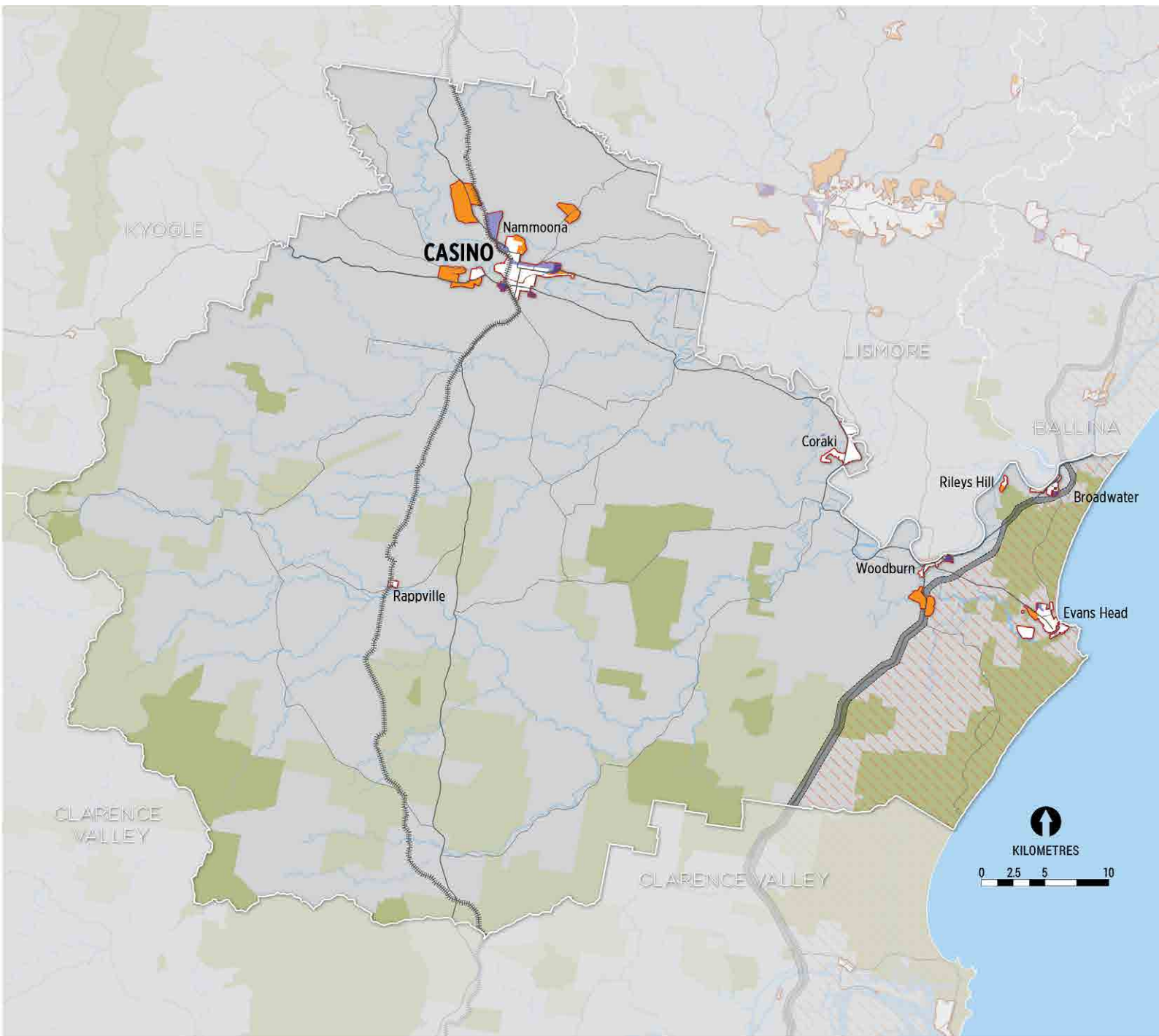














	Urban Growth Area		Railway
	Proposed Urban Land		Highway
	Proposed Employment Land		Proposed Highway Upgrade Corridor
	Existing Employment Land		National Park
	Coastal Area		State Forest
	LGA Boundary		Watercourse

Growth areas show the boundaries of urban areas and, as such, identify both existing and proposed urban lands.

Not all land identified within the growth areas can be developed for urban uses. All sites will be subject to more detailed investigations to determine capability and future yield. Land that is subject to significant natural hazards and/or environmental constraints will be excluded from development.

FIGURE 31: URBAN GROWTH AREA MAP FOR RICHMOND VALLEY LGA

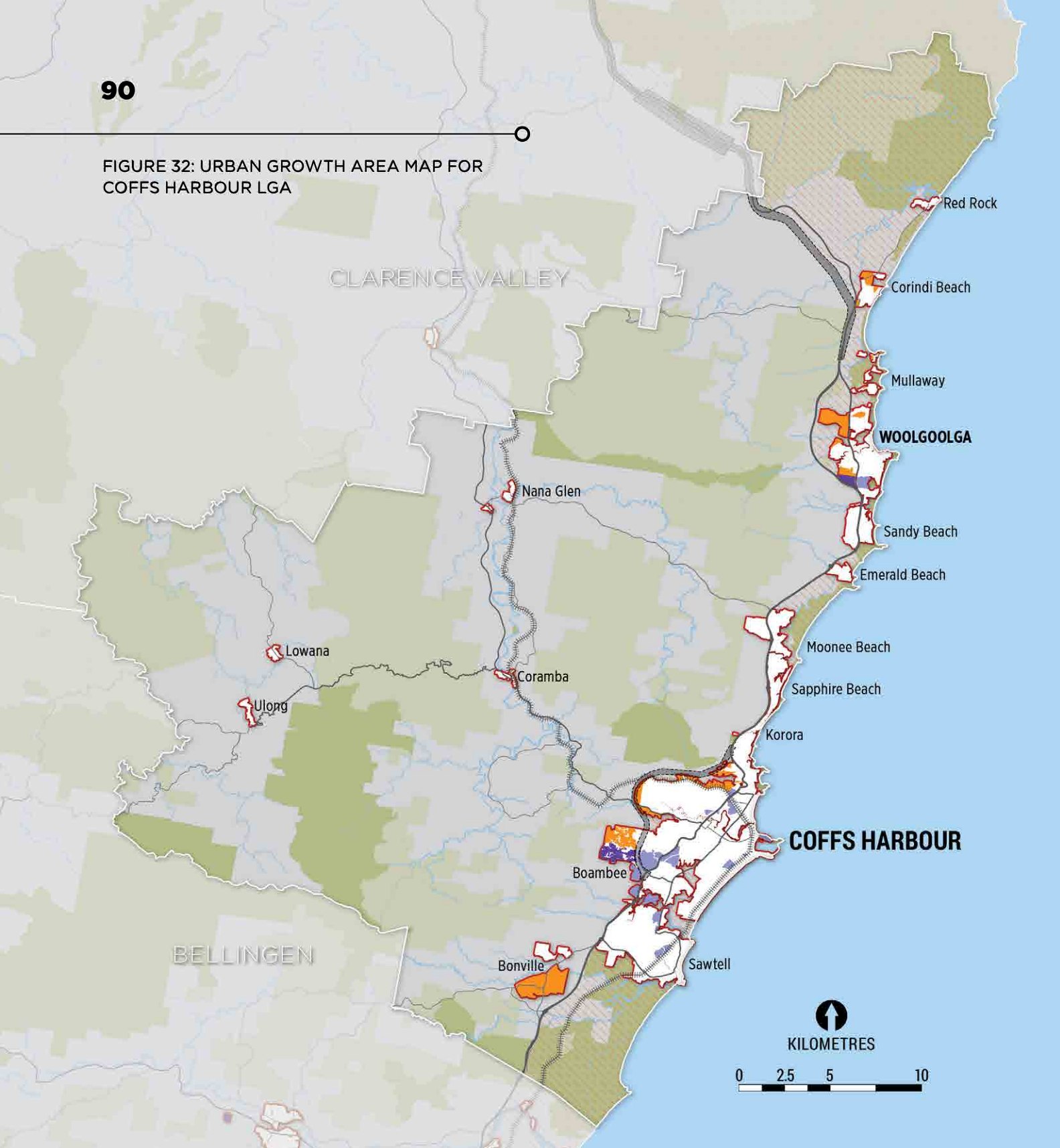


	Urban Growth Area		Railway
	Proposed Urban Land		Highway
	Proposed Employment Land		Proposed Highway Upgrade Corridor
	Existing Employment Land		National Park
	Coastal Area		State Forest
	LGA Boundary		Watercourse

Growth areas show the boundaries of urban areas and, as such, identify both existing and proposed urban lands.

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FIGURE 32: URBAN GROWTH AREA MAP FOR COFFS HARBOUR LGA



Urban Growth Area



Proposed Urban Land



Proposed Employment Land



Existing Employment Land



Coastal Area

— LGA Boundary



Railway



Highway



Proposed Highway Upgrade Corridor



National Park



State Forest



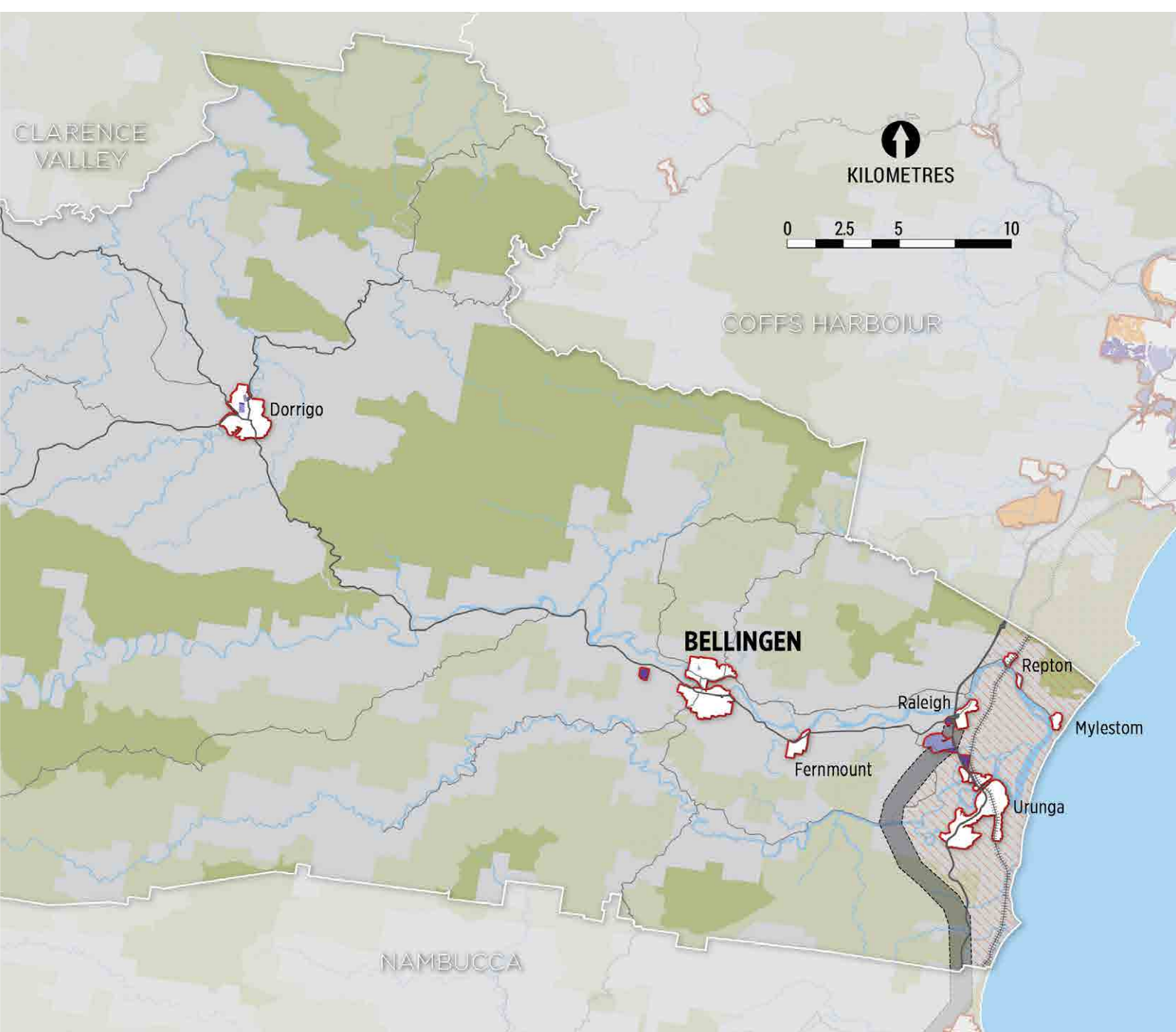
Watercourse

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FIGURE 33: URBAN GROWTH AREA MAP FOR BELLINGEN LGA

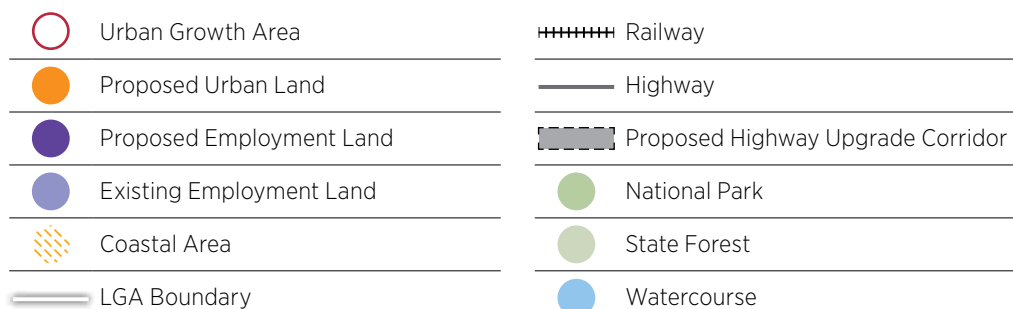
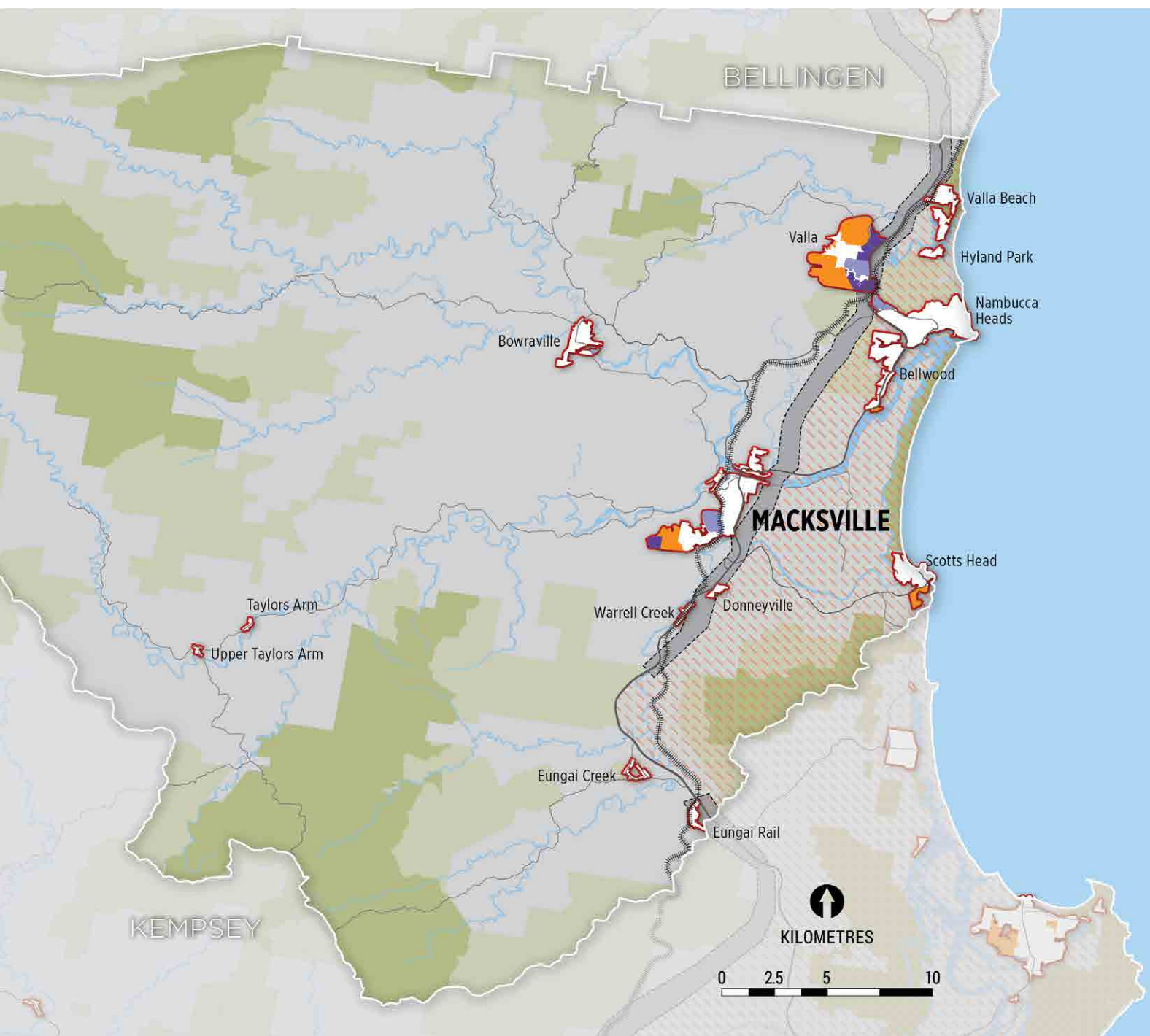


- |                          |                                   |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Urban Growth Area        | Railway                           |
| Proposed Urban Land      | Highway                           |
| Proposed Employment Land | Proposed Highway Upgrade Corridor |
| Existing Employment Land | National Park                     |
| Coastal Area             | State Forest                      |
| LGA Boundary             | Watercourse                       |

Growth areas show the boundaries of urban areas and, as such, identify both existing and proposed urban lands.

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FIGURE 34: URBAN GROWTH AREA MAP FOR NAMBUCCA LGA

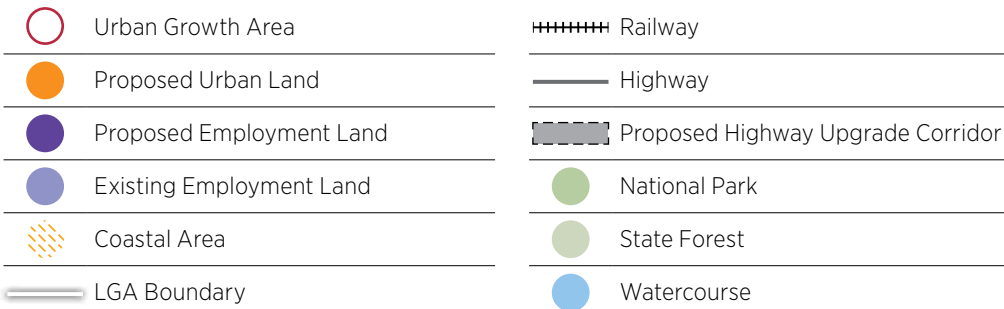


Growth areas show the boundaries of urban areas and, as such, identify both existing and proposed urban lands.

Not all land identified within the growth areas can be developed for urban uses. All sites will be subject to more detailed investigations to determine capability and future yield. Land that is subject to significant natural hazards and/or environmental constraints will be excluded from development.



FIGURE 35: URBAN GROWTH AREA MAP FOR KEMPSEY LGA



Growth areas show the boundaries of urban areas and, as such, identify both existing and proposed urban lands.

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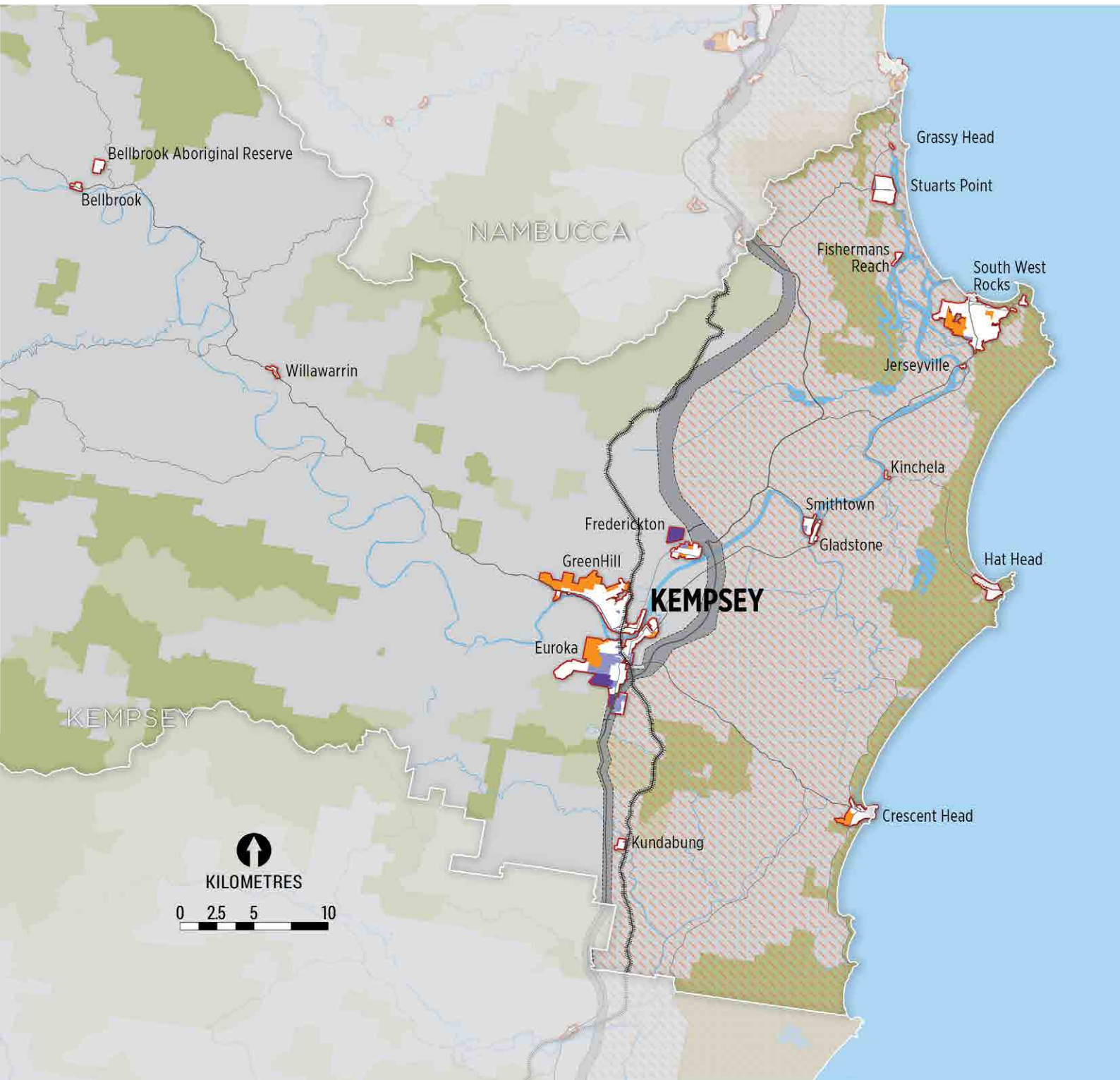
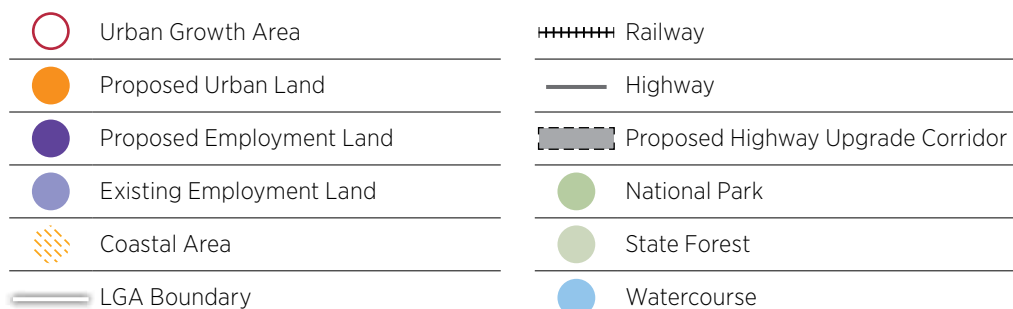
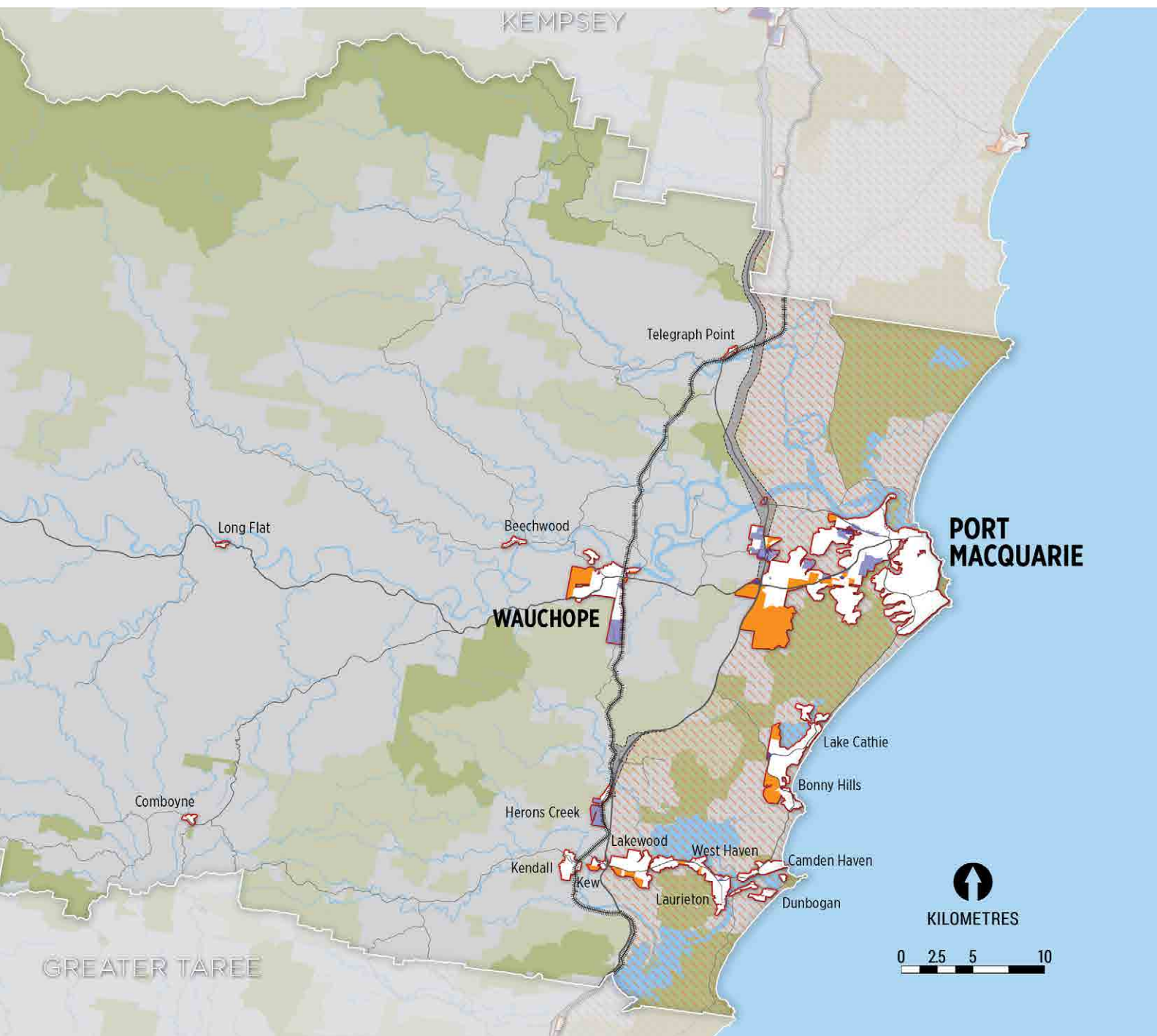




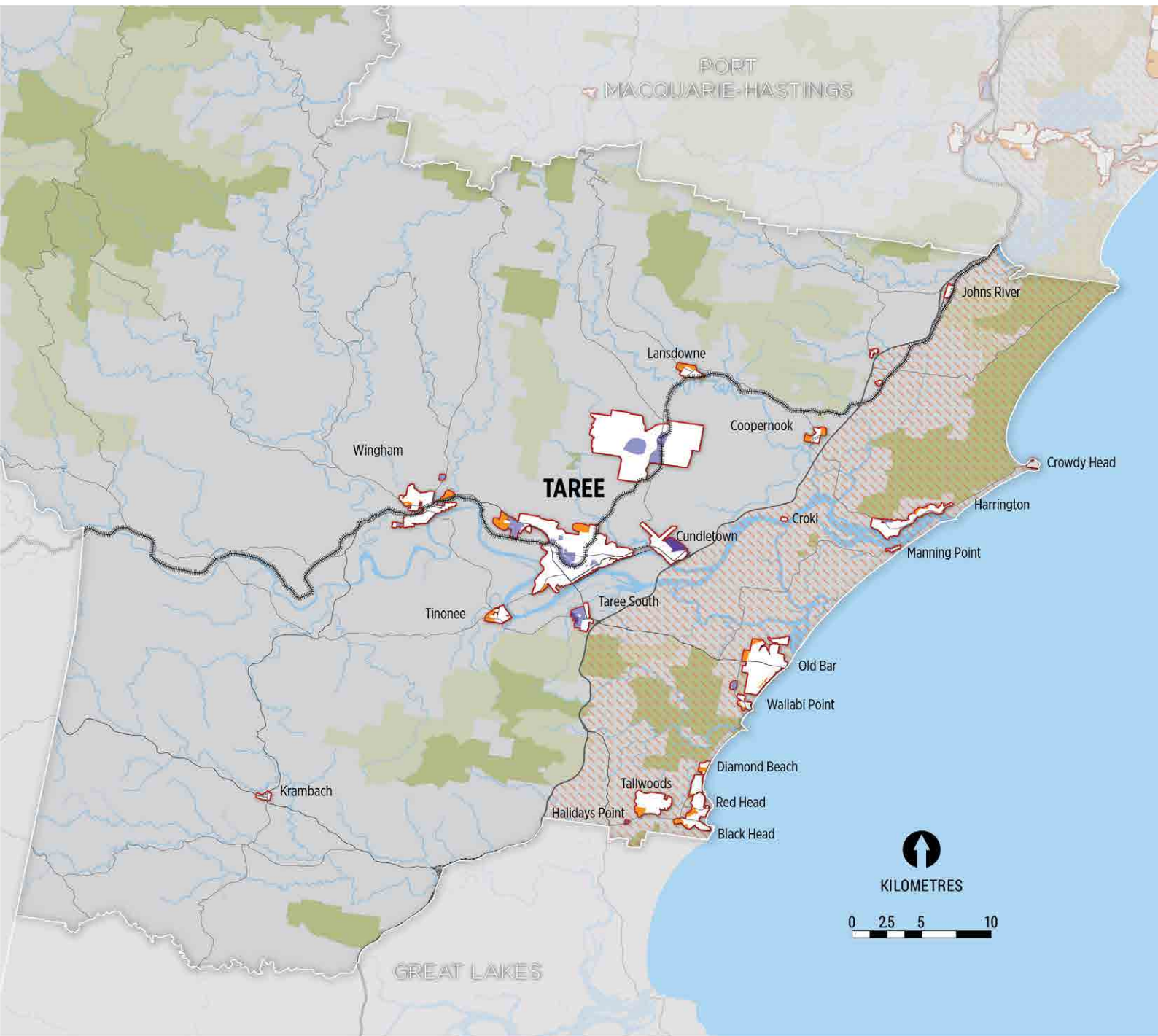
FIGURE 36: URBAN GROWTH AREA MAP FOR  
PORT MACQUARIE - HASTINGS LGA















Growth areas show the boundaries of urban areas and, as such, identify both existing and proposed urban lands.

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FIGURE 37: URBAN GROWTH AREA MAP FOR GREATER TAREE LGA



	Urban Growth Area		Railway
	Proposed Urban Land		Highway
	Proposed Employment Land		Proposed Highway Upgrade Corridor
	Existing Employment Land		National Park
	Coastal Area		State Forest
	LGA Boundary		Watercourse

Growth areas show the boundaries of urban areas and, as such, identify both existing and proposed urban lands.

Not all land identified within the growth areas can be developed for urban uses. All sites will be subject to more detailed investigations to determine capability and future yield. Land that is subject to significant natural hazards and/or environmental constraints will be excluded from development.

## Endnotes

- 1 Calculation based on data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011) and Destination NSW (2015), *North Coast NSW region snapshot year ending September 2015*, <http://www.destinationnsw.com.au/tourism/facts-and-figures/regional-tourism-statistics/north-coast-region>
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- 24 Transport for NSW, (2013), Preserving the Travel Time Gains of the Pacific Highway Upgrade, Sydney
- 25 Calculation based on data from Transport for NSW, (2015), NSW Intrastate Regional Aviation Statistics, Patronage Summary September 1996 to June 2015
- 26 Richmond Valley Council (2013), *We're Open for Business*, Casino

## **PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS**

Akubra  
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 Destination NSW  
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 Greg Yeates  
 Manildra Harwood Sugars  
 Macadamia Growers Association  
 Office of Environment and Heritage  
 Richmond Valley Council  
 Roads and Maritime Services  
 Rob Cleary  
 Seen Australia

