



Planning &
Environment

2036

***Draft
Far West***

***Regional
Plan***

DRAFT FAR WEST REGIONAL PLAN 2036
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Cover image: Bushwalkers at Gundabooka National Park near Bourke, courtesy of the Office of Environment and Heritage

Foreword



The Far West is a unique region with a diverse environment, ranging from the 'outback' arid and semi-arid desert areas, to inland lakes and the Barwon–Darling river system. It is home to important Aboriginal and European heritage, and has thriving agricultural and mining sectors including Broken Hill, the birthplace of BHP Billiton, the world's largest mining company.

The *Draft Far West Regional Plan* outlines our vision for this region. Over the next 20 years, we want to diversify the economy, celebrate the amazing landscapes, protect the environmental and cultural heritage features, and build resilience in local communities.

The draft Plan outlines actions for strengthening the local economy by growing the agribusiness and manufacturing sectors, sustainably managing mining, capitalising on renewable energy opportunities, and promoting the region's unique tourist attractions.

The region is traversed by major freight routes, including those between Sydney and Adelaide. Improving rail and road infrastructure, as well as access to reliable telecommunications, will help unlock future economic potential.

Many of the Far West's outstanding environmental features have special significance for Aboriginal people and the draft Plan includes actions to protect these assets.

With changes in rainfall patterns and temperatures, we want to help Far West communities adapt to meet the challenges of a changing climate. Water security is critical, and the Plan includes provision of new water supply infrastructure at Broken Hill and Cobar. By coupling this with sustainable water resource management, we will improve water security, ensuring this precious resource is available for communities, industry and the environment into the future.

The draft Plan aims to meet the changing needs of the community, including the ageing population. We want to provide greater housing choice, support jobs growth and improve delivery of services to local service centres, towns and villages and the strategic centre of Broken Hill.

We want to know what you think of the vision, goals and actions in this draft Plan, so that we can work together to achieve a sustainable future for this important region.

Please have your say.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Sarah Mitchell".

Sarah Mitchell MLC

Parliamentary Secretary for Western NSW





Contents

Introduction	4
Delivering the Plan	6
Vision	8
Goal 1: A diverse economy with efficient transport and infrastructure networks	13
Direction 1: Grow the economic potential of the agribusiness sector	16
Direction 2: Increase value-adding opportunities	17
Direction 3: Sustainably manage mineral resources	18
Direction 4: Diversify energy supply through renewable energy generation	21
Direction 5: Promote tourism opportunities	24
Direction 6: Unlock economic potential through improved freight transport and other enabling infrastructure	25
Direction 7: Improve regional airport connections	29
Direction 8: Enhance access to telecommunications	32
Direction 9: Sustainably manage water resources for economic opportunities	32
Direction 10: Enhance the productivity of employment lands	33
Direction 11: Enhance the self-determination of Aboriginal communities	35
Direction 12: Support new planning and land management arrangements	36
Goal 2: An exceptional and distinctive natural environment	39
Direction 13: Protect the region's environmental assets	41
Direction 14: Manage and conserve water resources for the environment	42
Direction 15: Increase resilience to natural hazards and climate change	43
Goal 3: Strong and connected communities	47
Direction 16: Manage change in the region's settlements	47
Direction 17: Improve access to local health and aged care	50
Direction 18: Enhance access to skills and training	50
Direction 19: Improve public and community transport services	51
Direction 20: Manage and conserve water resources for communities	52
Direction 21: Increase housing choice	54
Direction 22: Improve the availability of affordable housing and worker accommodation options	56
Direction 23: Manage rural residential development	58
Direction 24: Create healthy built environments	59
Direction 25: Protect cultural heritage	60
Direction 26: Enhance planning between cross-border communities	61
Local Government Narratives	63
Glossary	69
Endnotes	72

Introduction



A region at the heart of south-east Australia, with abundant opportunities

Communities in the Far West are among Australia's most resilient, self-reliant and forward-looking. It is a vast region, stretching from the inland Aboriginal and mining communities of Lightning Ridge and Walgett, near the Queensland border, to Australia's old pioneer mining settlements of Cobar and Broken Hill, and the Murray River townships of Wentworth and Balranald, near the Victorian border.

Around 16 per cent of the Far West population identifies as Aboriginal, representing around 3 per cent of the total Aboriginal population of NSW.

The Far West is covered by the Western Division of NSW. Almost all the land in the Western Division is held under 6,400 Western Lands Leases for the purposes of grazing and pastoral production.¹

The Barwon–Darling river system, one of the longest in the world, connects the region's towns and communities to each other and to southern Australia's rural food bowl. Its western rivers flow through the nationally and internationally significant Willandra Lakes Region World Heritage Area, Menindee Lakes and the wetlands of the Murray–Darling Basin.

Distance is a constant challenge. Businesses and communities have relatively higher transport and input costs, poorer communication links and less choice in health, education and community services. By contrast, the Far West is connected to national highways and rail networks linking Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide, and is deeply integrated with global markets and trade flows.

Agriculture and mining are mainstays of the economy. Local supply chains start on farms and mines and reach markets in Asia, Europe and the US. Fruit, agricultural produce, mineral products and mineral sands are transported from the region to ports in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide.

The region is also at the forefront of climate change adaptation, and is developing large-scale renewable energy projects, including wind and solar.

Tourism, arts and cultural opportunities are abundant. Broken Hill is included on the Australian National Heritage List because of its significant role in Australia's mining industry and national development.² The Far West boasts many other culturally significant sites that lend themselves to heritage-based tourism, including the archaeological site of Mungo Lady and Mungo Man, the world's oldest human cremation remains.

This Draft Regional Plan aims to guide the NSW Government's land use planning priorities and decisions in the Far West over the next 20 years. It is not intended to be a step-by-step approach to all land use planning. Rather, it provides an overarching framework to guide subsequent and more detailed land use plans, development proposals and infrastructure funding decisions. While a series of priority actions are included, medium and longer-term actions will be identified to coincide with population and economic changes.

Priorities for councils are set out in Local Government Narratives, which will guide further investigations and implementation.

Population 2016

0.6%
NSW
Population



47,500

Largest Gross Regional Product Contributor 2011



Mining

\$783m | 9% Jobs

Broken Hill Pipeline 2011



Investment  **\$500m**
Pipe length **270km**
Employment **240 jobs**

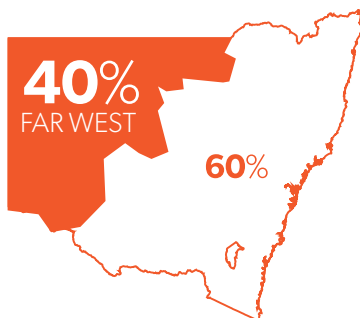
Second Largest Gross Regional Product Contributor 2011



Agriculture

\$334m | 15% Jobs

323,477 Square Kilometres



Major River Systems



The Barwon–Darling System
(one of the world's longest)

Investment in Far West communities

NSW Government investments in the Far West include:

- \$40.4 million for upgrade works on the Silver City and Cobb highways, and \$4.25 million for the widening of Kidman Way south of Cobar, funded by the *Restart NSW Western Freight Productivity Program*;³
- \$1.3 million from the *Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund*, for upgrades to Lightning Ridge and Bourke airports to help boost their capacity and safety, and increase their ability to attract visitors to regional NSW;⁴
- \$3.3 million for road projects that will eliminate constraints on connections in Broken Hill, Cobar and Walgett, funded under the *Fixing Country Roads* program for road projects; and
- a share of \$110 million in *Restart NSW* funding, under the *Regional Water and Wastewater Backlog Program*, for projects in Bourke, Central Darling, Cobar and Walgett.⁵

Delivering the Plan

The NSW Government's commitment



The NSW Government has consulted with councils and other stakeholders in the region during the development of this draft Plan, which is now provided for further consideration by stakeholders and the broader community.

The final Plan can be delivered in one of two ways: alongside the Far West Initiative (and embodying the Initiative's major reforms) or via the establishment of a Coordination and Monitoring Committee which would coordinate and be accountable for achieving the vision and goals of the Plan.

The NSW Government prefers the first option: delivery alongside the Far West Initiative (see over page). Accordingly, this draft Plan sets out a proposed new collaborative approach for planning vibrant places and sustainable communities.

Better place-based planning is a whole-of-government, whole-of-community undertaking. Done well, it will generate economic development, deliver more housing and infrastructure suited to the long-term needs and aspirations of the community, and enable better access to jobs, water, services and transport.

An implementation plan will be prepared for the final Plan, to assign accountabilities and time frames for implementing actions. An annual monitoring report will be prepared to assess progress on implementation.

A Government direction will be issued to councils so that when they prepare new planning proposals or update local planning controls, they are consistent with the vision and guiding principles of the final Regional Plan.

Every five years, or as necessary, the Plan will be reviewed and adjusted to make sure the vision for 2036 is realised.

The draft Plan:

- promotes economic opportunities, environmental management and social wellbeing;
- responds to the region's landscape, environmental assets, and natural and cultural resources;
- responds to long-term structural economic and demographic changes, with a focus on the ageing population and sustainable communities;
- promotes economic activities that take advantage of changing market demands and industry needs;
- encourages greater housing choice;
- coordinates land use and investment in infrastructure and services;
- assists communities to deal with the effects of a changing climate and natural hazards; and
- better coordinates development and services across borders.

Inputs to the draft Plan

Inputs to the draft Plan have been provided by councils and Regional Development Australia (RDA) committees and by drawing on the NSW Government's long-term strategic directions as outlined in the *State Infrastructure Strategy* (2012), the *Economic Development Strategy for Regional NSW* (2015), the *NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan* (2012), *Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW* (2016) and *OCHRE* (Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility and Empowerment) – the *NSW Government's plan for Aboriginal Affairs* (2013).

Strong local governance and leadership

With vast distances and small populations to service, governments and service providers face significant challenges in the Far West. Communities in the region face social, economic and environmental challenges that stretch across government boundaries.

The 2013 report of the Independent Local Government Review Panel identified a 'crisis of governance' in the Far West. 'One size fits all' policy approaches were found to be inadequate to the challenges facing western communities. The report noted that decentralised, locally coordinated whole-of-government service models would be required.

The Far West Initiative will be key to preparing the region's future leaders, connecting various levels of government and non-government organisations, and developing innovative solutions to provide sustainable and equitable services to western communities, taking advantage of new technology.

Many of the challenges facing the Far West are not the sole responsibility of any one agency or level of government.

Accordingly, the draft Plan proposes to coordinate and deliver land use and infrastructure outcomes by:

- promoting economic development and employment opportunities close to strategic corridors and infrastructure. This aims to match workers' skills to business needs;
- supporting housing and accommodation options that meet the needs of western communities, including Aboriginal people, and older people who wish to remain in their communities, as well as tourists;
- empowering local leaders and decision-makers to better meet the needs of remote communities and build the next generation of local leaders;
- ensuring that infrastructure, economic activity and housing development are complementary – through place-based coordination and planning, and aligning funding and planning functions – for example, providing affordable housing near employment centres, or co-locating education and health services near aged care housing; and
- accommodating new service and funding models, including shared business models that allow for savings to be reinvested in communities, and greater use of Voluntary Planning Agreements to support economic and housing development.

Far West Initiative

The NSW Government has established the Far West Initiative in response to recommendations from the Independent Local Government Review Panel (2013) as part of the Fit for the Future reform package.

The Initiative is intended to develop the region's future leaders, connect various levels of government and non-government organisations, and develop new ways of providing services to western communities, including through new technology.

A discussion paper has recently been released and a Far West Initiative Advisory Committee has been established to support the implementation of the Far West Initiative.

A new regional statutory body is proposed, which could have the following functions:

- strategic planning;
- community engagement;
- service delivery (such as health, safety, community services, infrastructure development and maintenance);
- environmental protection; and
- monitoring of development activity and infrastructure and service planning.

Vision



A diverse regional economy, supported by the right infrastructure, an exceptional natural environment and resilient communities

By 2036, communities across the Far West are still enjoying the distinctive rural character of their communities, with improvements in their standard of living.

The regional economy has grown due to greater diversification and the appeal of the region's primary and value-added products to domestic and global markets. High-value agricultural activities, including food and beverage manufacturing, broadacre cropping and grazing, and intensive agriculture and horticulture, are continuing to grow the economy.

A sustainable mining sector in Broken Hill, Cobar, Wentworth and Balranald is generating direct employment and providing flow-on benefits to communities.

Major improvements to inter-regional rail and road infrastructure are increasing choice and delivering more competitive freight costs for the agriculture and mining sectors.

The region is a leader in solar and wind energy generation and a hub for education and expertise in climate change adaptation. Communities have access to the latest information to manage natural hazard risks, and are more responsive to the impacts of climate change and water availability.

The Far West is meeting benchmarks for sustainable and innovative water resource management in agriculture, mining and community water supply, and water is being shared equitably among users and with new developments.

Major rivers, natural waterways, wetlands and environmental corridors have been protected. Together with the region's many other environmental and cultural heritage features, they continue to enrich the lives of residents and attract domestic and international tourists.

Innovative new public and community transport services are making it easier for people to travel to work, socialise and enjoy recreation options. Inter-regional, intra-regional and interstate travel is more affordable. Regular airline services are extending travel opportunities statewide.

Communication technologies are allowing more people to work and access services locally – particularly younger people. New residents are arriving and older people are finding it easier to age-in-place.

New jobs are attracting young families and skilled workers to relocate to, or return to, the communities where they grew up.

Well-designed housing is meeting the needs of communities, including the Aboriginal community, the ageing population, singles, families, low-income households, and seasonal and itinerant workers.

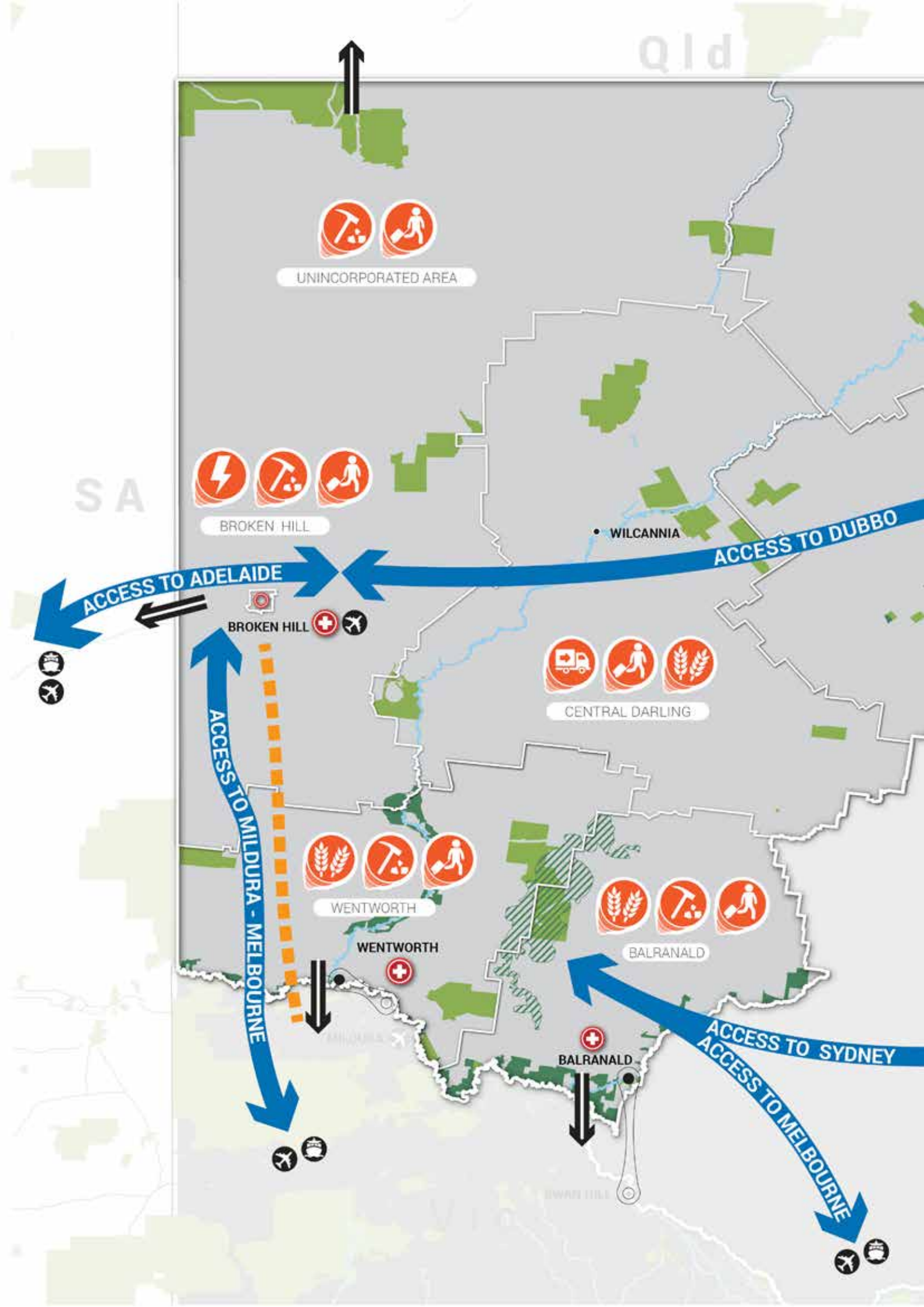
Broken Hill is a key strategic centre servicing the western part of the region, with strong connections to Central Darling. Walgett, Brewarrina, Bourke and Cobar local government areas have developed further connections with the Orana region and are taking advantage of services in Dubbo. The Wentworth and Balranald local government areas are benefiting from increased ties with other communities along the Murray River, including Mildura in Victoria.

***To achieve this vision,
the NSW Government has:***

***acknowledged the opportunities
for improved local governance
emerging from the Far West
Initiative and ...***

***set the following regionally
focused goals:***

- **A diverse economy with efficient transport and infrastructure networks**
- **An exceptional and distinctive natural environment**
- **Strong and connected communities**







GOAL 1

A diverse economy with efficient transport and infrastructure networks

Despite its relatively small population, the Far West is a significant regional economy. In 2011, the region generated \$2.8 billion in gross regional product.⁶ This represents 32 per cent more output per person than the average of \$44,588 per person in regional NSW. The region's economy is currently centred on agriculture and mining, which together directly contribute almost 40 per cent of gross regional product.⁷

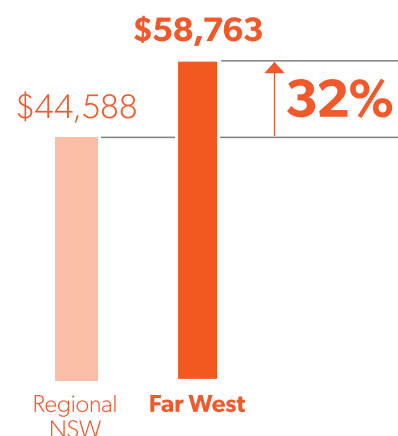
Mining is the largest contributor to gross regional product (\$783 million) and provides 9 per cent of the region's jobs.⁸ Agriculture is another major contributor to the regional economy and is well placed to help satisfy the growing global demand for food and fibre. As most communities in the region are largely focused around one industry, such as mining or agriculture, they can be more vulnerable to economic downturn.

The development of complex global supply chains means the region faces ongoing challenges to make its costs of transportation competitive and its infrastructure efficient enough to maximise its productive capacity.

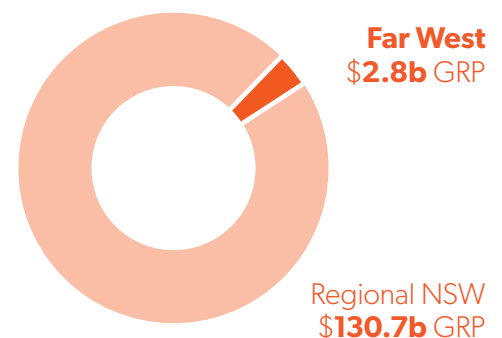
Major development proposals are already under way that would enable the region to produce value-added products or attract value-adding investments close to production sites; for example, food and beverage processing around Wentworth and Walgett and an abattoir in Bourke.

A large proportion of products are exported from the region in base commodity form, often for processing elsewhere within NSW or overseas. An opportunity exists to capitalise on this by attracting industries to the region to produce value-added products.

Economic Output Per Person
2011

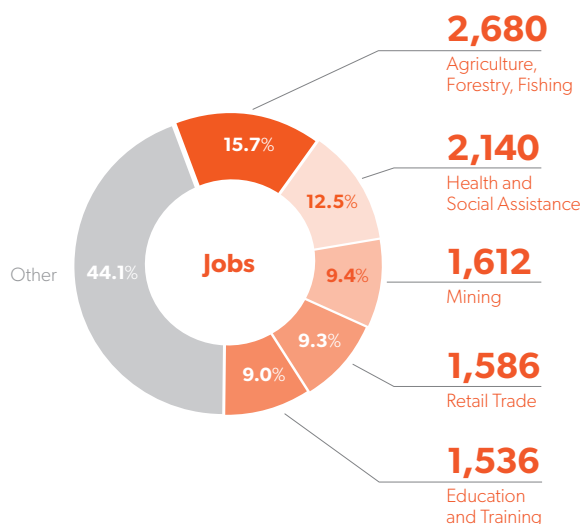


Economic Contribution
2011



Top Five Industries by Employment

2011



There are other potential value-adding opportunities; for example, through agritourism, which provides an additional revenue stream for farms, or the production of bioenergy and biofuels produced from agriculture and forestry waste.

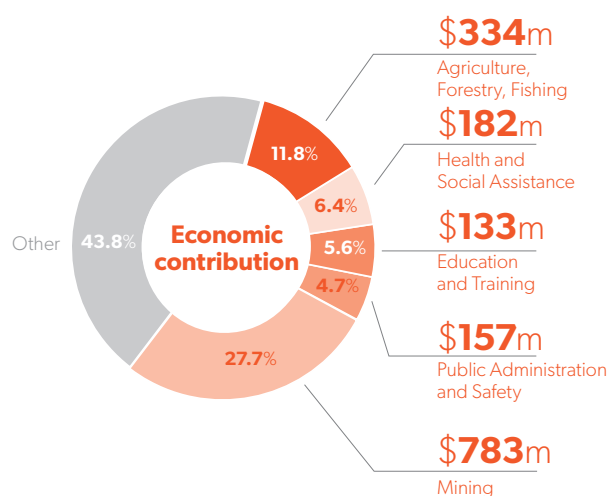
The focus for the future is to support the competitiveness and productivity of the region's industries by promoting the efficient use of infrastructure and clustering compatible land uses in the right places.

Delivering employment opportunities for Aboriginal communities

The Far West's semi-arid climate has traditionally fostered an agricultural and mining economy; however, emerging industries, such as tourism, are providing more diverse employment opportunities, particularly for Aboriginal communities. With the support of the NSW Government, local training for Aboriginal communities can build the skills necessary to compete for new job opportunities. This will improve employment options and increase opportunities for social participation across the Far West.

Top Five Industries by Economic Contribution

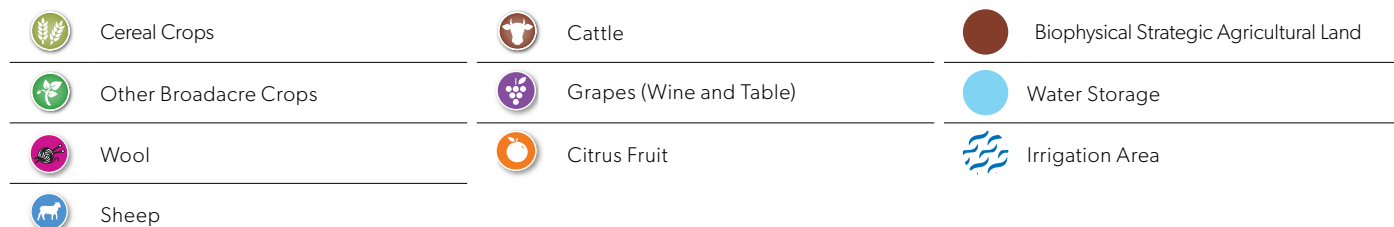
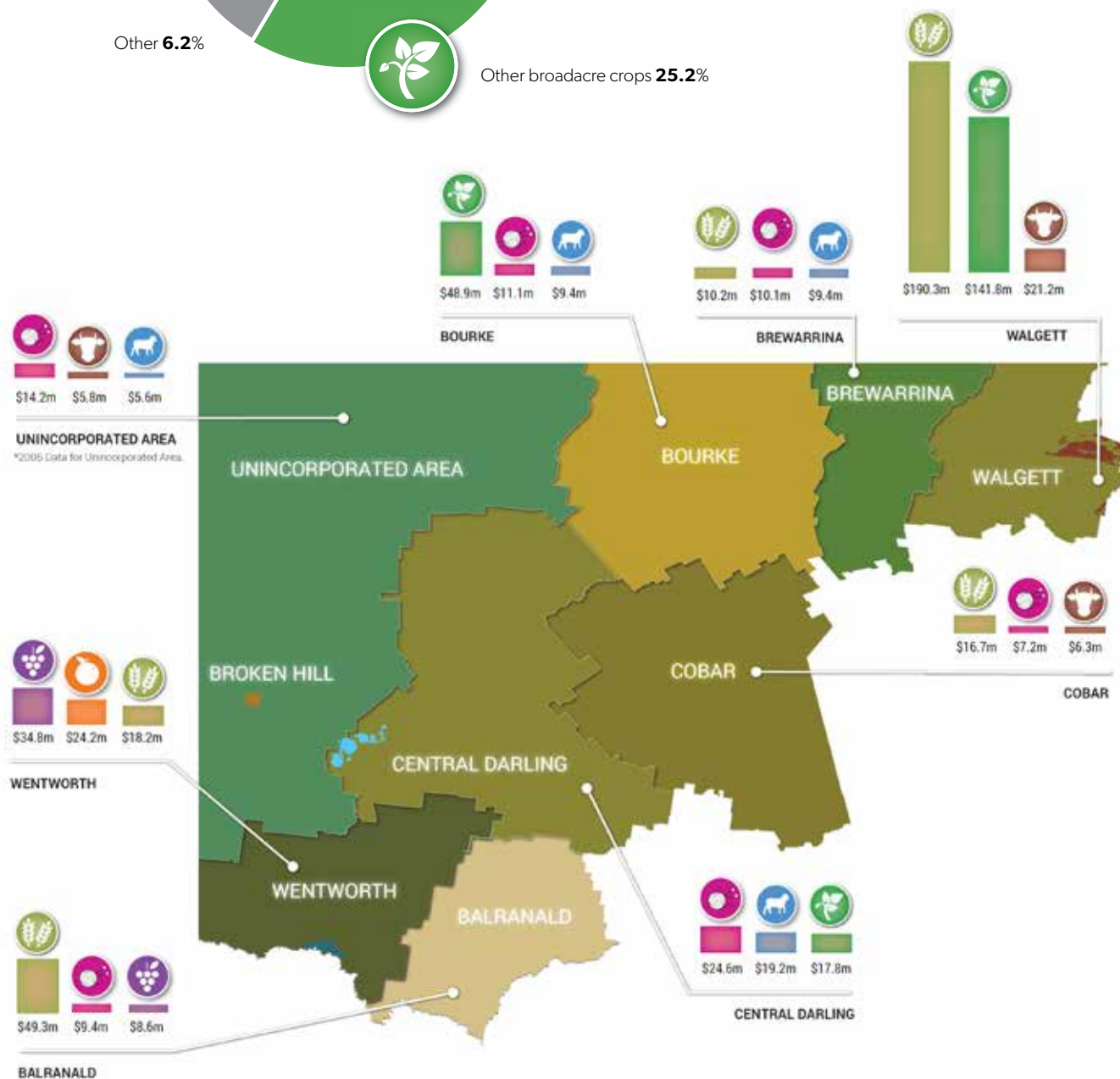
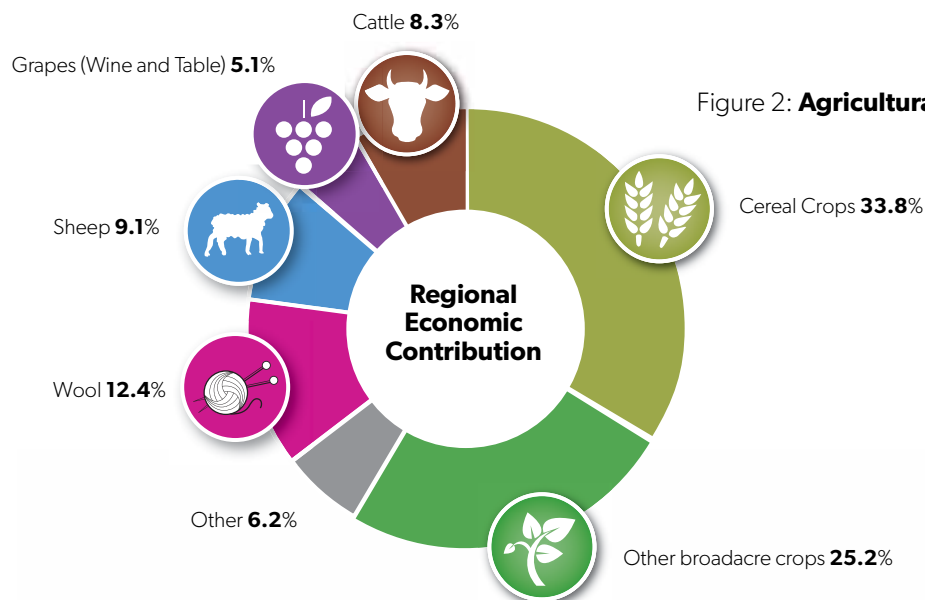
2011



Potential Far West projects

There are potential projects for the Far West that would benefit from long-term collaborative planning, infrastructure and servicing, including:

- the development of renewable energies and associated industries, particularly around Broken Hill, Wentworth and Balranald;
- the expansion of food and drink manufacturing industries in Wentworth and Balranald;
- the proposed Bourke abattoir;
- the potential kangaroo processing facilities in Cobar and Brewarrina; and
- a proposed BioHub facility in Cobar.





Direction 1: Grow the economic potential of the agribusiness sector

Agriculture in the Far West includes production of meat, cereal, and intensive irrigated crops (vegetables, fodder, horticulture, stone fruits, viticulture and cotton). There are also various agricultural hubs across the region, including wine and table grape production along the Murray River in the south and wool production in the north.

Significant agribusiness opportunities exist in the Far West in the horticultural industries of citrus, flower growing and grapes in irrigated areas, as well as wool production and organic farming of lamb, goats and beef in non-irrigated areas.

Growth in the economies of Asia is driving a forecast 77 per cent increase in food demand by 2050.⁹ In particular, the growing middle class in Asia is increasing demand for high-end agricultural products such as fruit, high-grade meats, grains and dairy. This presents opportunities for higher-value agricultural and food products from the Far West.

Advances in innovative technologies, such as automated farm vehicles and equipment, and the application of agricultural robotics for crop intelligence and autonomous farm surveillance, also have the potential to improve farm productivity.¹⁰

While the total area available for agriculture is vast, there are comparatively few districts with high productive capacity and access to surface water, labour, infrastructure, suitable soils and rainfall. The NSW Government will map highly productive, important agricultural land that could be developed for more intensive agriculture through irrigation, to support producers and councils in future growth planning. Protecting important agricultural land will also help to keep fresh food available locally.

The potential for land use conflict across the region's agricultural lands is high in some areas due to competing demands from mineral and energy resource extraction, and urban encroachment. This can inhibit farming practices and over time affect productivity and economies of scale. It can also contribute to biosecurity risks.

In contrast to much of NSW, the Far West has the potential to effectively manage biosecurity risks due to its substantial separation from major populations and intensive industries, and the semi-arid climate, which is challenging for exotic animals and plants. The region can also capitalise on its 'clean and green' organic farming and marketing advantage. The NSW Government's commitment to strengthening and maintaining biosecurity measures across NSW is reflected in the *NSW Biosecurity Strategy 2013-2021*, the *NSW Weeds Action Program 2015-2020*, and the *Draft NSW Invasive Species Plan 2015-22*.

The right policy settings have to be in place to provide the agricultural land and a 'critical mass' of agri-industries that will encourage investment in agriculture and the agricultural supply chains. This includes investment in key transport infrastructure and facilities such as silos, warehousing, abattoirs and saleyards, and marketing services, rural supplies outlets, secondary processing facilities, and transport and logistics industries.

The management of kangaroo populations presents both a challenge and an opportunity. Fluctuations in kangaroo populations can affect pastures, native vegetation, water resources and the viability of agricultural enterprises. During droughts, there are welfare issues associated with large populations of kangaroos, as well as their impact on the fragile landscape. By contrast, kangaroo meat can provide an alternative protein source for global markets, and supply domestic pet food markets.

The commercial harvest of wildlife has been widely advocated as a pathway for employment and economic development for Aboriginal people. There are opportunities to utilise local business knowledge, develop programs and offer incentives to encourage new people, particularly Aboriginal people, to enter the industry as professional harvesters. As kangaroos have cultural, social and economic significance for Aboriginal people, they need to be involved in the decision-making about commercial harvesting. A more collaborative approach to kangaroo management is required so that the issues can be managed sustainably.



*The outback,
courtesy of Destination NSW*



Actions

- 1.1 Map and protect important agricultural land from land use conflict arising from inappropriate and incompatible surrounding land uses, prevent fragmentation and manage the interface between agricultural lands and other land uses.
- 1.2 Promote agribusiness diversification by reviewing local plans and removing planning barriers.
- 1.3 Protect the agricultural supply chain from the encroachment of land uses that may cause land use conflicts and impede the growth of agribusiness.
- 1.4 Promote the sustainable management of kangaroo populations and investigate potential economic opportunities associated with kangaroo meat processing through policy and legislative mechanisms.
- 1.5 Minimise biosecurity risks for current and future industries through strategic planning, and by undertaking risk assessments, taking into account biosecurity plans, and applying appropriate buffer areas when assessing the potential impacts of new development.
- 1.6 Focus urban development outside of existing irrigation areas and areas with the potential for irrigated agriculture.

Direction 2: Increase value-adding opportunities

Identifying and supporting further value-added manufacturing and processing industries throughout the Far West will encourage greater industry diversification and associated job opportunities; build investor confidence; maximise infrastructure and communication networks; and ensure the region's contribution to satisfying the global demand for goods and services.

Value-adding has historically been inhibited by the distance to ports and markets, lack of infrastructure and skilled labour, and climatic uncertainty.

While the majority of food and beverage processing occurs outside the region, Wentworth and Balranald are processing table grapes, pistachios and almonds – and there is significant investment in vegetable production due to proximity to Mildura.

Leveraging recent agricultural free trade agreements should encourage the development of value-adding opportunities in the region and can also capitalise on marketing the origin of agricultural produce from 'outback NSW'.

The *Regional Development Australia Orana Regional Plan 2013-2016* identified potential opportunities from food and beverage manufacturing in the local government areas of Bourke, Brewarrina, Cobar and Walgett, including:

- the development of large-scale food processing operations, such as meat processing in Bourke and chickpea flour processing in Walgett;
- low-level value-adding of agricultural products; and
- niche and integrated developments.¹¹

Other opportunities include native and feral animal harvesting and processing in Cobar, Bourke, Brewarrina and Walgett, and a BioHub plant (carbon-rich materials are produced from the slow heating of biomass) at Cobar.

Value-adding enterprises need to be strategically located so they are protected from land use conflict and to make the most of the significant investment made in industry development and infrastructure. Co-location of related industries should be encouraged to maximise infrastructure use, decrease supply chain costs, increase economies of scale and attract further investment.



Actions

- 2.1 Promote advanced and value-added manufacturing opportunities by reviewing local plans and removing potential barriers to new investment, such as inappropriate zoning or land use permissibility.
- 2.2 Encourage co-location of related industries, to maximise efficiency and infrastructure use, decrease supply chain costs, increase economies of scale and attract further investment.
- 2.3 Protect the investment in advanced and value-added manufacturing industries and associated infrastructure by protecting manufacturing facilities from land use conflict arising from inappropriate and incompatible surrounding land uses.

Value-adding: Proposed Bourke abattoir

A state-of-the-art small stock abattoir for the processing of goats and lambs is proposed for north of Bourke to capitalise on growing export demand for these products. Livestock will be principally sourced from the Far West.

The facility will have the capacity to process up to 6,000 head of livestock a day and employ 200 staff when fully operational. It will service customer markets in the Middle East, Asia and North America.

The project represents a significant investment in Bourke, with a capital value of approximately \$60 million.

Direction 3: Sustainably manage mineral resources

Over coming decades, the region will continue to benefit from the economic and employment flow-on effects of the mining industry. The degree of benefit will vary across the lifecycle of a development, and can affect communities in different ways.

Mining is the primary economic driver at Broken Hill (silver, lead and zinc), Cobar (copper and gold), Lightning Ridge (opal) and White Cliffs (opal). Mining of mineral sands occurs within the Broken Hill, Balranald and Wentworth local government areas. There is also the possibility of iron ore, copper, gold and cobalt around Broken Hill, and magnetite and mineral sands near Balranald.

Competing land uses can restrict the ability for the region to take advantage of mineral resources. However, planning can be used to manage this issue.

The NSW Government has several policy and legislative tools to support the sustainable growth of the mining industry, including the:

- *Mining Act 1992 and Petroleum (Onshore) Act 1991*;
- Strategic Release Framework for Coal and Petroleum. This is a mechanism to review and define which lands may constitute new exploration release areas for coal and petroleum. New exploration licences will only be issued in areas released by the Minister for Resources and Energy after an assessment of resource potential and economic, environmental and social factors;
- *NSW Gas Plan (2014)*;
- *State Environmental Planning Policy (Mining, Petroleum Production and Extractive Industries) 2007*; and
- *Preliminary Regional Issues Assessment for Potential Coal and Petroleum Exploration Release Areas Guidelines (2015)*.



Fort Bourke open cut mine, Cobar



Communities need to be prepared to manage population changes and the economic fluctuations associated with the life cycle of mining operations. In the long-term, in areas where mineral extraction is declining, some regional communities will need to diversify and transition their economies. Rehabilitating former mines can provide an opportunity for a new development or use.

The nature of employment in mining operations (shift work and fly-in fly-out workers) can lead to ongoing changes in the resident populations, and create different demands for retail, health, education and emergency services.

Through the work of the Western NSW Mining and Resource Development Taskforce, the NSW Government is investigating ways that western NSW communities can capitalise on the economic benefits and manage the impacts of the mining sector. The Taskforce is working with councils across the Far West to review the social and economic benefits and impacts of mining on regional communities. It will identify ways to diversify and transition the community and economy in areas where resource and mineral extraction is slowing. Practical guidance and resources will be provided to communities to help them achieve a successful transition.

Actions

- 3.1 Implement a scenario planning or modelling tool to understand servicing needs and opportunities for communities to better capture the economic benefits of mining, and help communities plan for the implications of mining.
- 3.2 Protect areas of mineral and energy resource potential through land use zoning in local plans.
- 3.3 Consult the Division of Resources and Energy when assessing applications for land use changes and new developments or expansions, including the Common Ground website at: www.commonground.nsw.gov.au
- 3.4 Protect infrastructure that facilitates mining industries, such as road and rail freight

routes and energy transmission networks, from development that could affect current or future extraction.

- 3.5 Support communities that are transitioning out of mining operations and help them to plan for new economic opportunities.

Mining in Cobar Shire

Cobar Shire has been an important copper, gold, lead, zinc and silver mining district for nearly 140 years.¹²

Peak, CSA, Endeavour, Manuka and Hera mines are currently operating in the shire and there is potential for further development in the area, such as the Nymagee Copper mine, Mallee Bull prospect near Gilgunnia, and Mount Boppy near Canbelego.

Potential exists for further discoveries of gold, copper, silver, lead and zinc in two belts of north-west to south-east trending prospective rocks, referred to as the Cobar–Nymagee PRA and Mount Drouin PRA.

Silverton Wind Farm

The Silverton Wind Farm is located in the Barrier Ranges, 25 kilometres north-west of Broken Hill and has approval for up to 172 turbines and associated infrastructure. Turbines are proposed for the southern part of the Mundi Mundi Range and in the northern part of Mount Robe Range.¹³

Improvements in technology may also allow future development of wind infrastructure in areas currently less suited to wind energy generation.



Direction 4: Diversify energy supply through renewable energy generation

The Far West has excellent solar capability and opportunities for investment in renewable energy, including large-scale wind and solar in Wentworth and Balranald shires where electricity network connections exist.¹⁴

Broken Hill has an opportunity to capitalise on the current investment in renewable energy to develop generation and associated secondary industries, including research, project management, installation and asset maintenance. Opportunities exist to co-locate renewable energy generation at resource or industry sites, which can attract other similar industries. Technical and financial electrical grid access issues can be managed for new industries by co-generation.

The benefits that can be realised by supporting this sector in the Far West include:

- diversifying energy production in the region, providing energy security and managing issues with transmission over distances;
- locational advantages for supplying other regions and states with energy from the grid;
- helping to deliver the objectives of the *NSW Renewable Energy Action Plan* (2013); and
- establishing new employment-generating industries; for example, Silverton Wind Farm, which will support an estimated 150 jobs during construction.

The NSW Government is committed to providing a diverse, affordable and clean energy mix for NSW. It is delivering the *NSW Renewable Energy Action Plan* (2013) to help achieve the national renewable energy target of 33,000 GW hours of renewable energy by 2020. These targets have been a driver of wind and solar proposals across the State, including the existing 53 MW Broken Hill Solar Voltaic Power Project and the Silverton Wind Farm. An interactive map of renewable energy potential is available at www.resourcesandenergy.nsw.gov.au/energy-supply-industry/renewable-energy/renewable-resources-map

Actions

- 4.1 Identify areas and project sites with renewable energy potential, and infrastructure corridors with access to the electricity network, to inform land use planning.
- 4.2 Promote best practice community engagement to ensure community benefits are realised for all utility-scale renewable energy projects.
- 4.3 Promote smaller-scale renewable energy projects using bioenergy, solar, small-scale hydro, geothermal or other innovative storage technologies.
- 4.4 Identify research partnerships with universities and renewable energy companies to develop a centre of excellence in renewable energy in the Far West.

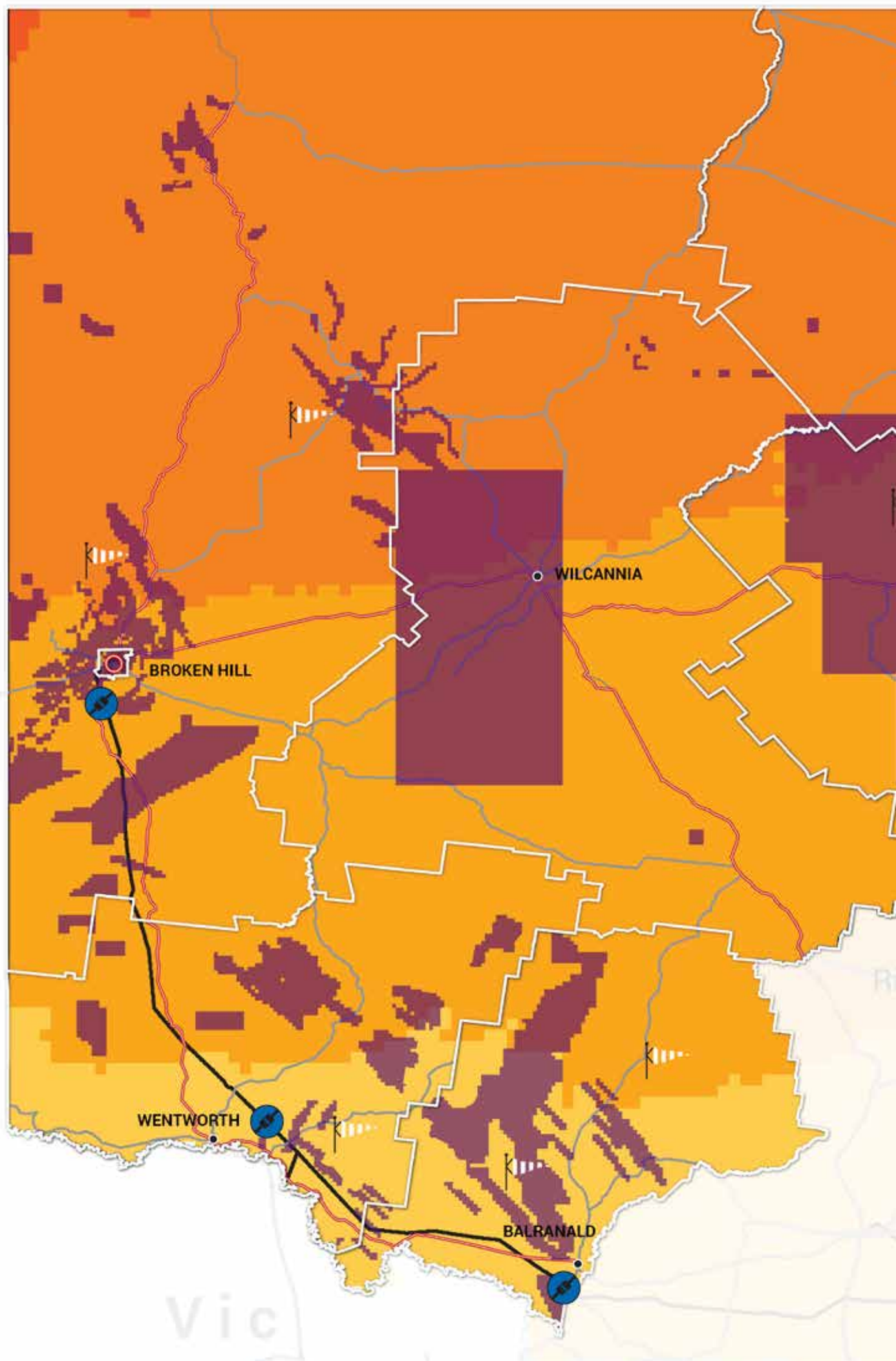
Solar Energy eXchange Initiative

This initiative, established by a group of 31 councils, including all the councils in the Far West and the Unincorporated Area, aims to use Australian Government funding to construct six solar energy projects across inland NSW.

One project involves the installation of \$1 million worth of photovoltaic panels in each council area, with ownership residing with the councils.

The five other projects involve installing five solar power plants – each costing \$20 million to \$40 million – capable of supplying most of the electricity for a typical country town. Each project would employ a different solar technology.

The Solar Energy eXchange Initiative aims to provide demonstration plants for a future solar energy industry in western NSW that would supply electricity to Sydney and Melbourne.



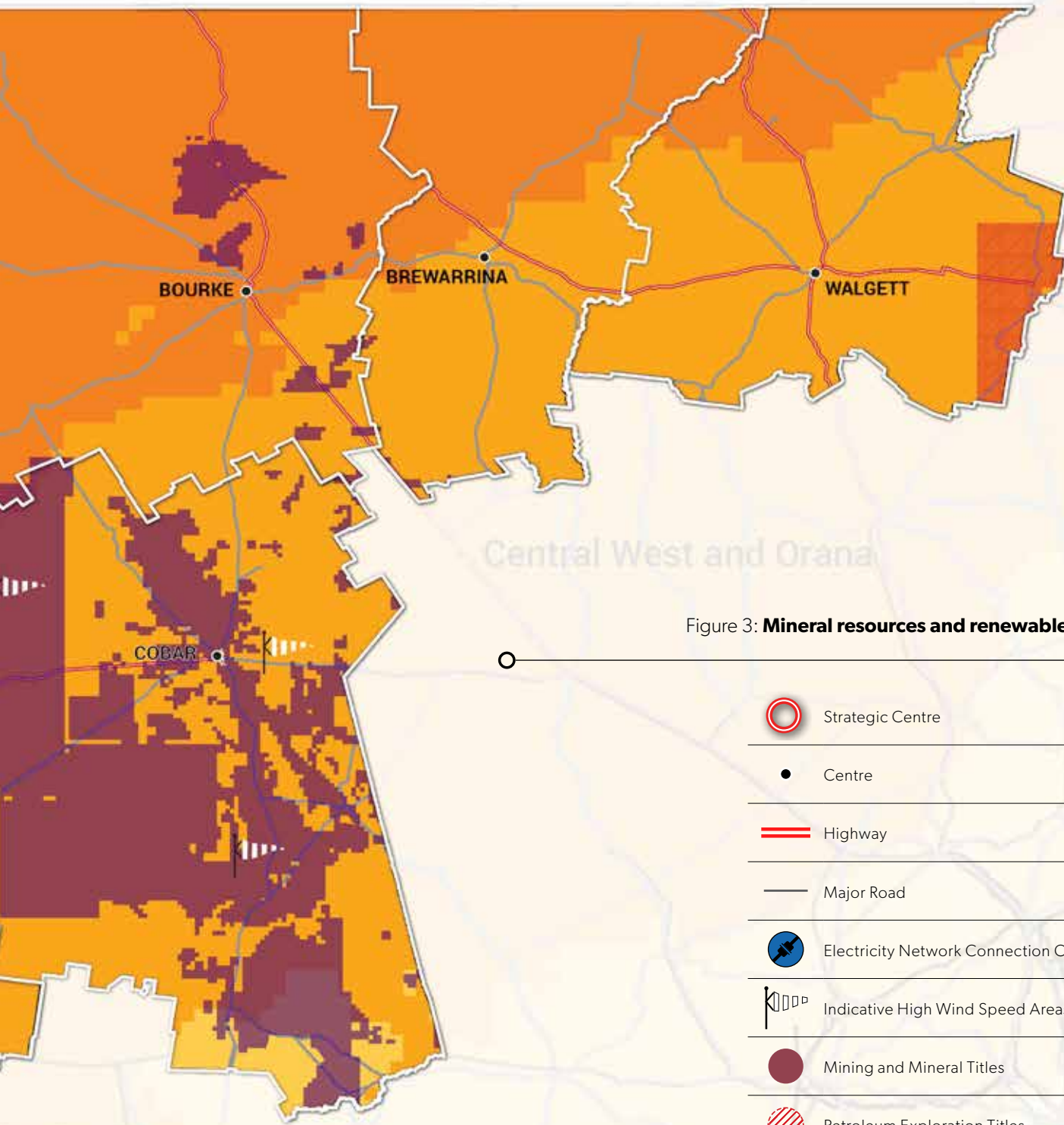
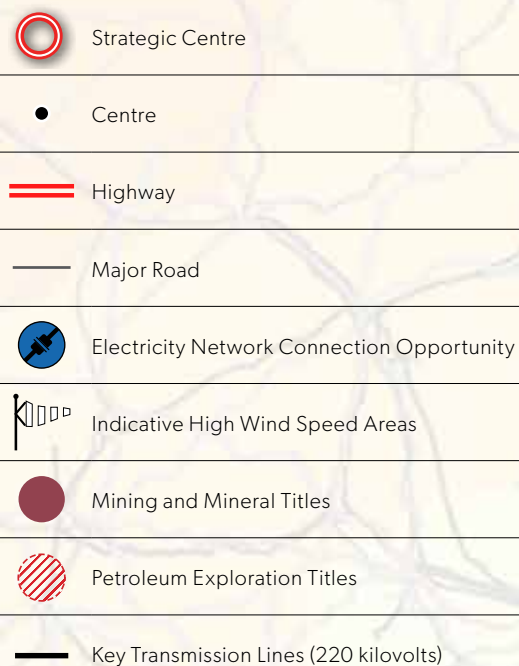
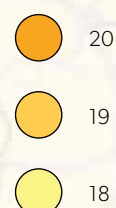


Figure 3: **Mineral resources and renewable energy**



**Average daily solar exposure
(megajoules per square metre)**



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.



Direction 5: Promote tourism opportunities

The region has wide-ranging appeal to both domestic and international visitors as it offers an authentic outback experience. Some of the unique features of the region include the Brewarrina Aboriginal Fish Traps, heritage trails, the Louth Races and Gundabooka, Sturt and Mungo national parks.

Domestic visitors to outback NSW have increased in recent years, mainly due to an increase in popularity for camping/driving holidays in the more remote parts of Australia, the growing number of 'grey nomads', improved mobility and a general appreciation of the unique landscape.

Tourism opportunities that help to extend the length of time that visitors spend in the region need to be further explored. They could include a focus on the region's organic and native produce, natural landscape and scientific and paleo-archaeological-focused tourism around the region's Aboriginal heritage.

Tourism can generate employment and business growth that contributes to better economic outcomes for Aboriginal communities.

The *Aboriginal Tourism Action Plan 2013-2016* supports the development of Aboriginal tourism experiences and businesses that will lead to economic and social benefits for Aboriginal people, both as operators and employees.

Heritage trails

Heritage trails can combine the attraction of significant heritage items with the remote outback experience. A Far West Sculpture Trail encompassing four major sites is being proposed to increase tourism to the Far West.¹⁵ Two of the sites, at Broken Hill and Mutawintji, are already in place, and planning is under way for a further two sites at White Cliffs and Wilcannia.

Increasing economic participation and development for Aboriginal communities in the Far West can result in better preservation and celebration of Aboriginal heritage and culture.

The limited transport and access connections, both within and outside the region, appeals to some visitors because it adds to the 'remote' experience; however, maintaining and improving transport connections for visitors, managing the seasonal fluctuations in local employment, and a greater investment in attractions will make the region a more popular tourist destination.

Potential tourism attractions include:

- developing a sealed, all-weather tourism loop to Lake Mungo, connecting to Mildura and Balranald;
- developing a Far West Sculpture Trail;
- developing a regional tourism trail with associated signage and marketing between Balranald, Wentworth, Mallee Cliffs, Mungo and Yanga floodplains; and between White Cliffs, Menindee, Tibooburra and Silverton;
- improving management of, and access to, national parks; and
- promoting Broken Hill City Council's film studio precinct.

Actions

- 5.1 Align local land use and tourism strategies with the relevant Destination Management Plan.
- 5.2 Prepare a tourism growth strategy serving peak and off-peak markets.
- 5.3 Identify opportunities for tourism and associated land uses in local plans.
- 5.4 Identify and plan for the access and infrastructure needs of the tourism sector.

Above: Mad Max Museum, Silverton, courtesy of Broken Hill City Council

Right: Freight crossing the Darling River



Access to tourism assets

The *Murray-Mallee Regional Transport Study 2011 Final Report* recommended developing a sealed, all-weather tourist loop road to Mungo National Park, connecting to Mildura and Balranald. Currently, routes into Mungo National Park are via two-wheel-drive accessible unsealed roads, which are heavily affected by wet weather. Roads can be closed on short notice for preservation, affecting the unsealed section of the main entrance to Mungo National Park via Arumpo Road. This can reduce visitor numbers.¹⁶

Direction 6: Unlock economic potential through improved freight transport and other enabling infrastructure

Agriculture, tourism and mining all rely on an efficient freight network (road, rail and air) and access to infrastructure. Given the vastness of the region, and the distances to ports and markets, this is a challenge on purely economic grounds.

Two of the State's eight strategic regional corridors cross the region. One connects Mildura and the Wentworth Shire to Wagga Wagga, and the other connects Broken Hill to Dubbo, and then on to Sydney.¹⁷ The nationally significant rail corridor between Adelaide and Sydney also passes through the region.¹⁸

Many of the routes and services used for freight transport are also important for passenger travel by residents, drive-in drive-out employees and tourists.

The *NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan* puts the focus for the region on ensuring that realistic travel options exist. It requires ongoing commitment to investment to maintain and upgrade transport routes. The NSW Government will continue to support coordinated investment in freight, priority road infrastructure and airline services because of their importance to the regional economy.¹⁹

Historically, infrastructure investment has been provided in a piecemeal way, resulting in ad hoc or misaligned priorities across the region. Infrastructure requirements and investment need to be coordinated to deliver maximum benefit to the economy and the broader regional community.

Opportunities exist to collaborate with regional stakeholders to develop a regional economic development strategy, which will identify key enabling infrastructure, investigate policy interventions and provide recommendations to support future economic development of the Far West.

Many local roads in the region are unsealed due to the expensive cost of sealing and maintenance. For example, the Central Darling Shire Council has estimated that approximately 93 per cent of the roads within its boundaries remain unsealed or without an all-weather surface. Unsealed roads are generally more vulnerable to closure than sealed roads during weather events, which may cause lengthy detours. There is an increased risk of tourists and residents, as well as drivers of industrial vehicles, having an accident on unsealed roads.

Local road connections that feed into the State and national road freight network are important for transporting agricultural produce and mining products.

Restrictions on certain freight vehicles using local roads, and the cost of local road maintenance, are significant impediments to the road freight network. The NSW Government acknowledges that these constraints can substantially affect economic productivity.²⁰

Identifying and resolving the region's freight and road pressure points will support the growth of agricultural and mining activities in the region.

Transport for NSW administers two coordinated programs aimed at tackling this issue:

- *Fixing Country Rail* is a program to remove productivity and efficiency constraints on the regional rail network; and

To Cameron Corner

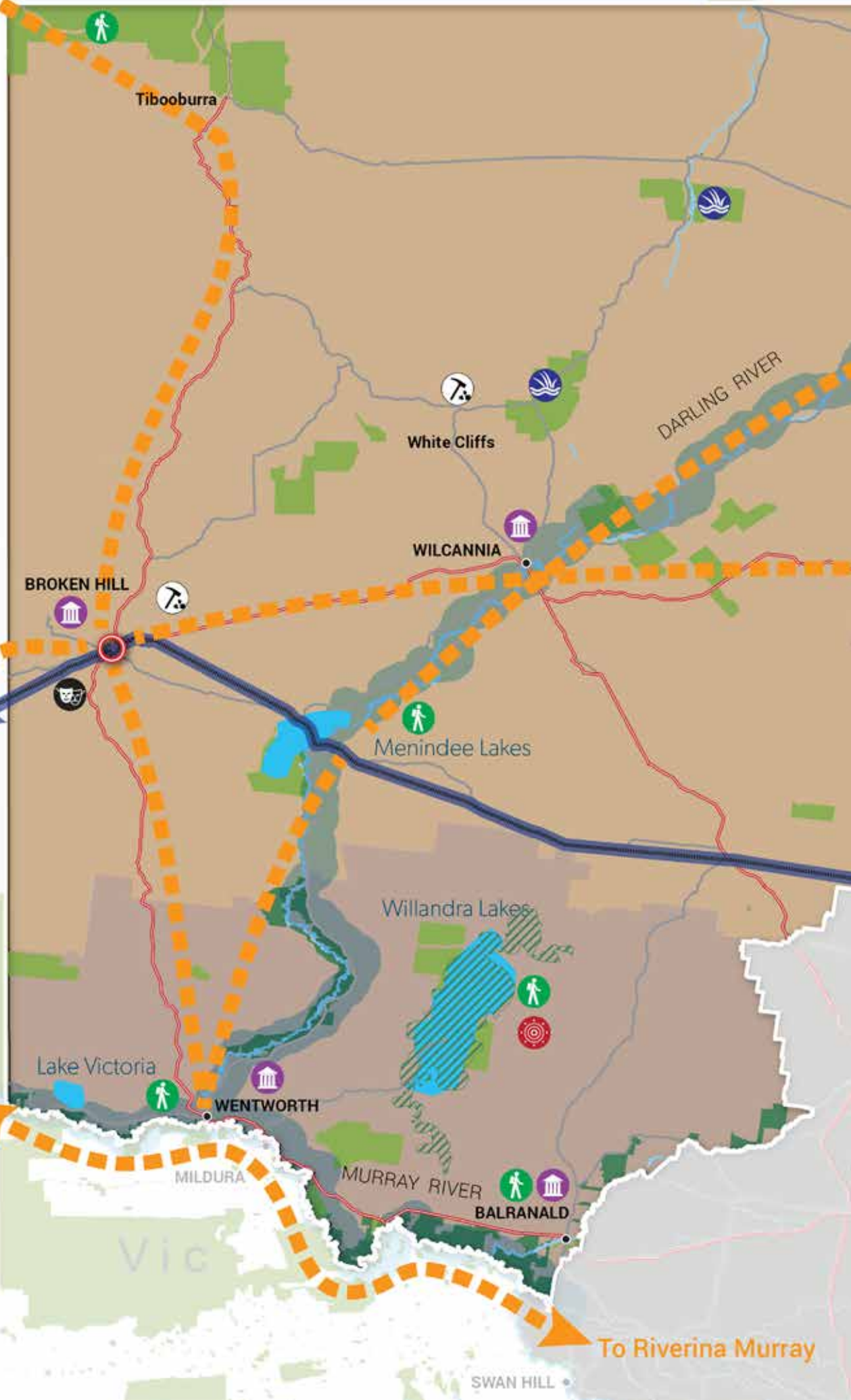
Qld

SA

To Adelaide

To Adelaide

To Riverina Murray



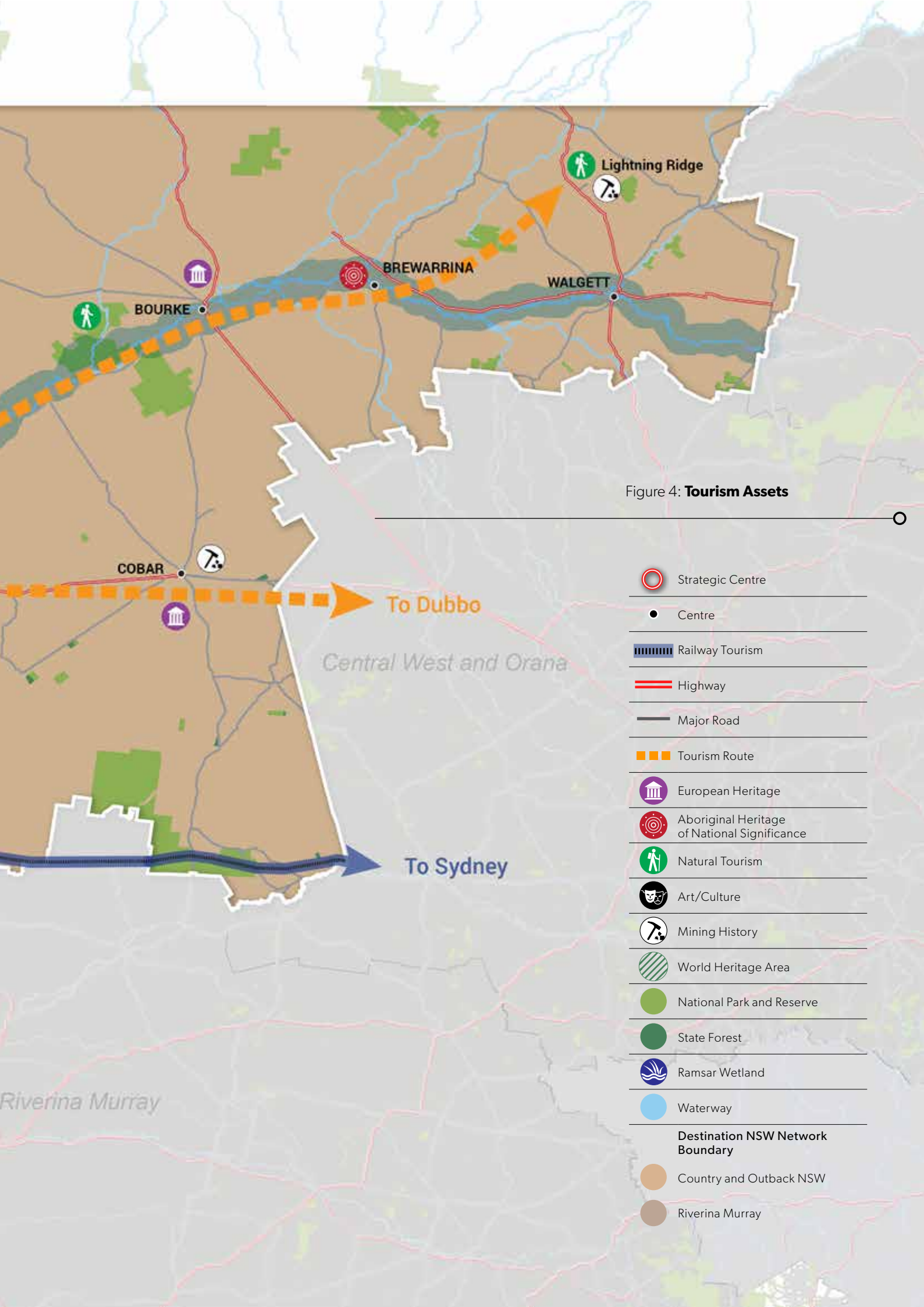




















Figure 4: **Tourism Assets**

-  Strategic Centre
-  Centre
-  Railway Tourism
-  Highway
-  Major Road
-  Tourism Route
-  European Heritage
-  Aboriginal Heritage of National Significance
-  Natural Tourism
-  Art/Culture
-  Mining History
-  World Heritage Area
-  National Park and Reserve
-  State Forest
-  Ramsar Wetland
-  Waterway
- Destination NSW Network Boundary**
 -  Country and Outback NSW
 -  Riverina Murray



- *Fixing Country Roads* is a program to provide targeted funding to local councils for road projects that will eliminate connectivity constraints on local roads in NSW.

Some councils in the region may not have sufficient resources or capacity to prepare detailed business cases to support infrastructure investment, and government and infrastructure agencies will need to work with councils to share skills and expertise. Identifying freight network corridors can help to promote economically valuable land uses nearby. Private investment can be directed at road and rail pressure points, as is occurring in the program commenced by GrainCorp at railway sidings in NSW and Victoria.

The rise of autonomous (or driverless) vehicles will have implications for freight transport. Enabling trucks to drive 24 hours a day and conduct deliveries at any time may result in safer, more reliable and lower cost deliveries. Potential adverse impacts associated with job losses as a result of automation will need to be considered.

Actions

- 6.1 Work with stakeholders to identify the regional freight network (including key national, State, regional and local roads and the rail network).
- 6.2 Investigate and prioritise projects to address impediments to the regional freight network to improve capacity and opportunities in the network.
- 6.3 Identify, coordinate and prioritise the delivery of local and regional road projects forming part of the regional freight network.
- 6.4 Protect freight and transport corridors from the encroachment of incompatible land uses, and strategically locate freight hubs to support further industry development.
- 6.5 Implement the Department of Planning and Environment's *Planning Guideline for Major Infrastructure Corridors* (2016).

- 6.6 Prepare a regional economic development strategy that drives economic growth opportunities by identifying key enabling infrastructure and other policy interventions to unlock growth.

GrainCorp investment in the agricultural supply chain

Private organisations are rationalising grain storage and distribution facilities in the region. GrainCorp has a major investment at Burren Junction (Walgett Local Government Area) for the construction of additional storage facilities and railway sidings. The improvements will reduce shunting, allow for faster train loading and save a projected \$6 per tonne in freight costs to port.²¹ The siding will be lengthened to allow up to 50 wagons and the facilities upgraded so that a train can be loaded in 24 hours. The project responds to the need to supply grain rapidly and to facilitate containerised grain for export to countries that do not have bulk grain handling facilities.

Broken Hill Airport

Broken Hill Airport is located about six kilometres south of the central business district and includes the following facilities: Regional Express Airlines, Express Freight, charter companies, general aviation and the Royal Flying Doctor Service base. Regional Express is the only daily operator and links Broken Hill to Sydney, Adelaide, Dubbo and Mildura.

The airport has considerable strategic value to the region, and its growth as the major inland airport in regional NSW is one of seven long-term goals contained in the *Regional Development Australia Far West NSW Regional Plan 2013-2023*. It may require improvements to the runway, taxiway and apron areas, to allow for use by larger aircraft.



Strategic planning for key corridors

Transport for NSW and Roads and Maritime Services will develop a corridor strategy to provide a 20-year plan for the Silver City Highway. The strategy will identify current challenges and future improvements and investment priorities.

It will also consider heavy vehicle movements around Broken Hill and options to improve urban amenity and connectivity for local residents and commercial uses, as well as mining and agricultural industries around town. The *Western Regional Transport Plan* identifies support for the Broken Hill heavy vehicle bypass.

A commitment of \$30.5 million has been made to seal the next stage of the Silver City Highway, between Broken Hill and Tibooburra. Five to 10 kilometres of the road is being sealed per year. High-priority sections are being sealed first and other sections are being gravelled.

A commitment of \$9.9 million has been allocated to the Cobb Highway which connects Wilcannia and Ivanhoe. Significant areas of this corridor are currently unsealed.

Corridor strategies are also being developed for other key roads in the Far West, including the Sturt, Kamilaroi and Mitchell highways, and Kidman Way.

Direction 7: Improve regional airport connections

Regional economic growth can be influenced by the extent of available air travel options. Due to the distance from capital cities, air travel is crucial in connecting the region to other areas quickly. For example, Broken Hill is a 90-minute flight from Dubbo compared to an eight hour drive.

Regular commercial passenger air services operate to and from Broken Hill and Cobar. Some residents of the Far West access regular passenger services that operate from Dubbo, Mildura, Moree and Griffith in adjacent regional areas. Local airports also provide aviation access for the Royal Flying Doctor Service, along with private aircraft services for business, industry and tourism.

Airport operations need to be protected from the encroachment of incompatible uses through strategic planning and land use zoning in local plans.

The NSW Legislative Assembly recently conducted the *Inquiry into Regional Aviation Services* (2014). The Government's response noted that the Department of Premier and Cabinet had led a feasibility study into expanding commercial air services to remote communities in western NSW, including Lightning Ridge, Walgett, Brewarrina and Bourke.²² The *Western Regional Transport Plan* (2013) proposed a similar investigation into commercial air services to the western region.²³

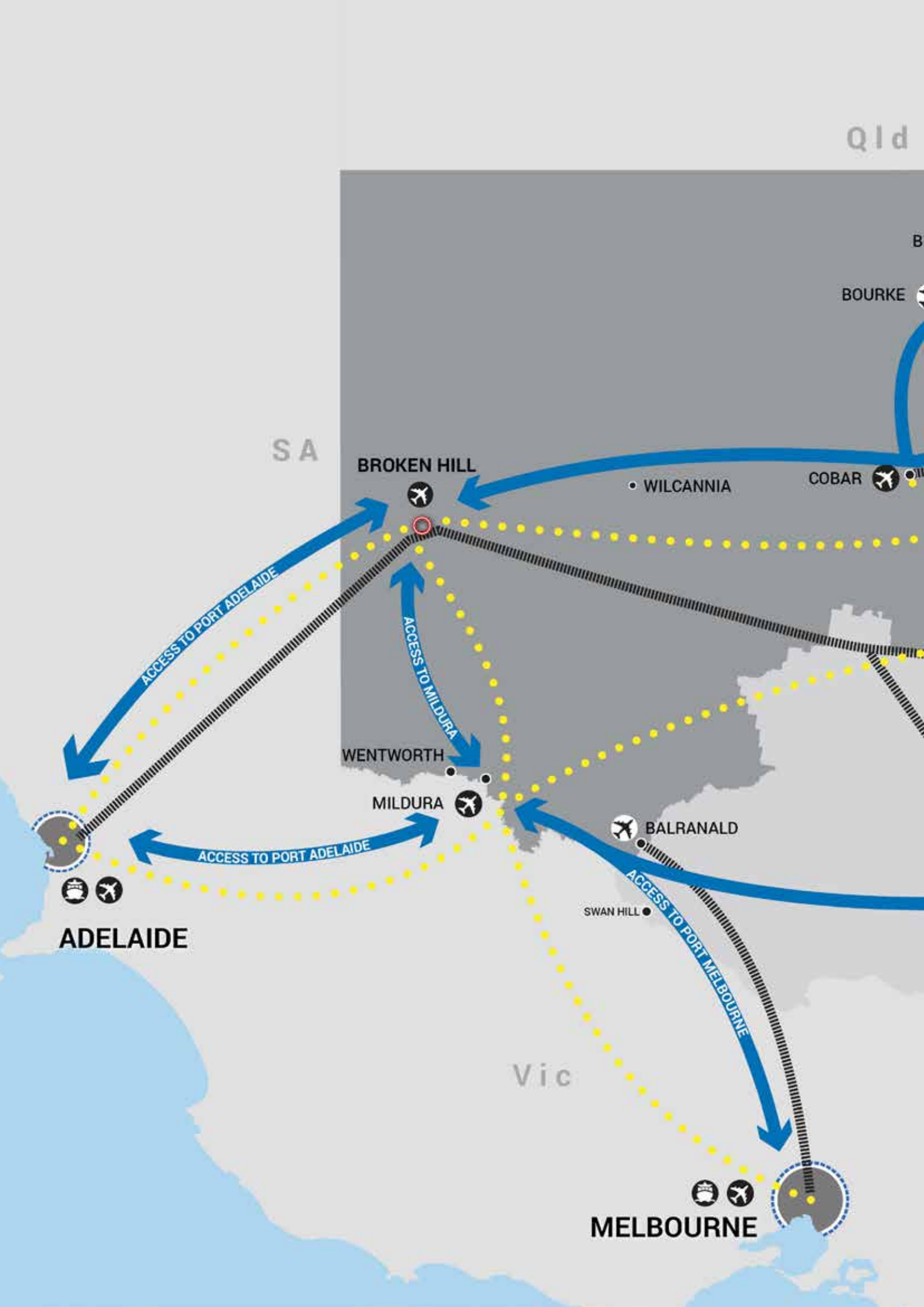
The NSW Government supports the allocation of 20 per cent of flight slots into Sydney Airport for regional NSW services, and is aiming for a greater allocation in peak periods. These slots are critical to support regional business and enable access to Sydney.

Actions

- 7.1 Protect airports and airfields from the encroachment of incompatible development.
- 7.2 Support the continued allocation of 20 per cent of flight slots at Sydney Airport to regional NSW services and seek a greater allocation in peak periods.

Left: Pp Blore Graziers,
courtesy of Western Local Land Services

Above: Royal Flying Doctor Service, Broken Hill,
courtesy of Broken Hill City Council



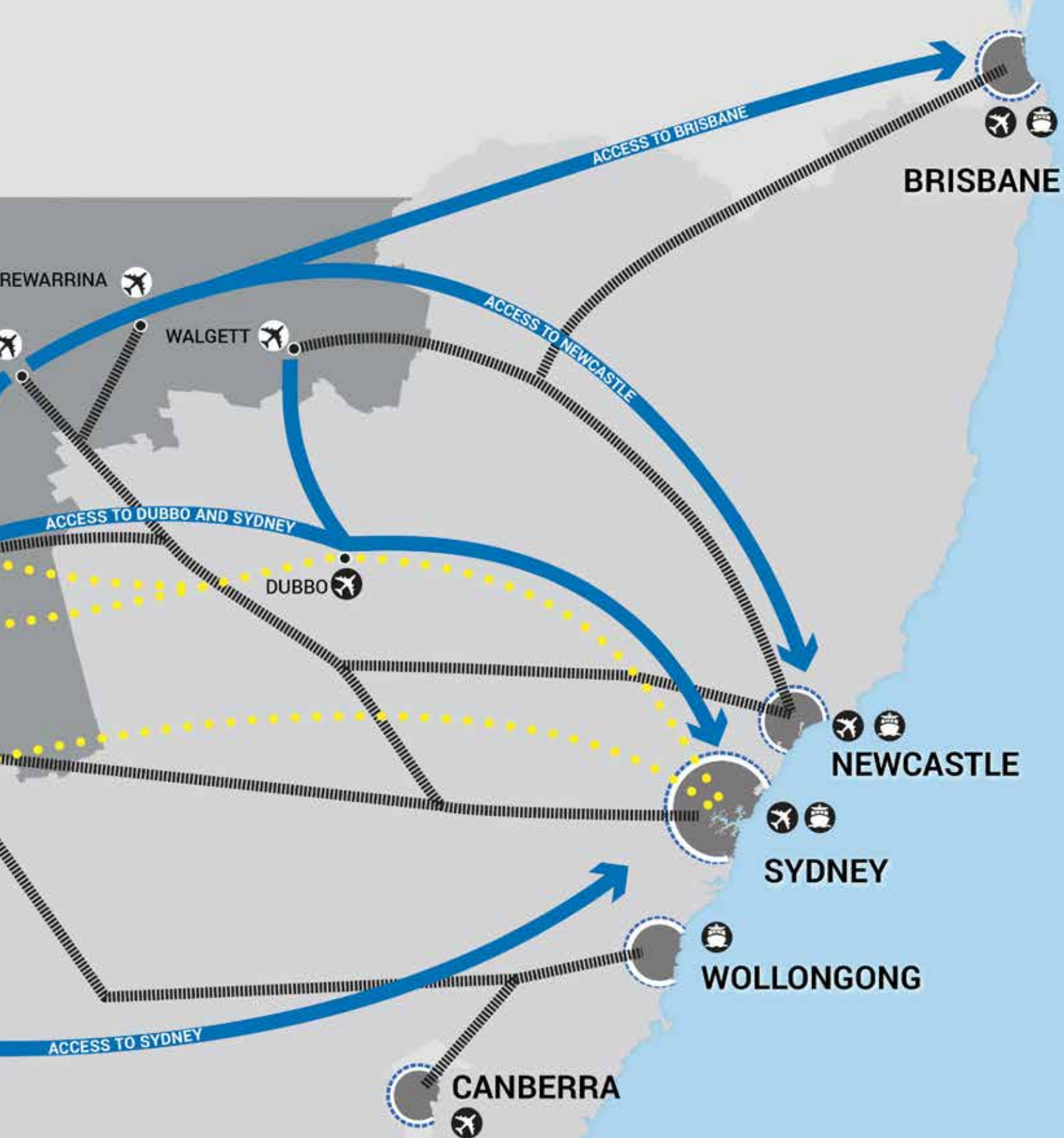





Figure 5: **Inter-regional transport connections**

 Strategic Centre


 Centre

 Railway

 Airport

 Aerodrome

 Port

 Key Strategic Regional Corridor

 Air Transport Passenger Route

Direction 8: Enhance access to telecommunications

Internet connectivity is critical to the growth and wellbeing of the region from social, community and economic perspectives; however, more than one-third of households in the Far West do not have access to the internet at home.²⁴

Far West Regional Development Australia identified a lack of access to high-speed broadband as the overwhelming major barrier to small business development, distance education delivery and growth in the region.²⁵ High-speed internet is universally acknowledged by councils in the region as a key service to facilitate business opportunities.²⁶

Better telecommunications and internet can unlock a range of benefits, including the delivery of health, education, tourism and cultural services,²⁷ in addition to providing an essential service to some remote communities during emergencies.

Health services are increasingly delivered through telecommunications technology. Emergency room observation and remote doctor video-conferencing narrow the gap in services within the region. Similarly, students rely on being able to access course content online. Growth in these two sectors is heavily dependent on access to reliable telecommunications.

Lightning Ridge and Wentworth currently have National Broadband Network access, with Balranald, Bourke, Broken Hill, Cobar and Walgett scheduled for access under current planned roll-outs. Much of the Far West is limited to 3G network coverage, with some 4G services available in the larger centres and smaller townships. The centres in the Unincorporated Area have the least connectivity. The roll-out of the National Broadband Network will be critical for the region, and in the long-term will enable the wider take-up of technology. Over the next 20 years, the Far West could benefit significantly from the use of new technology in freight and passenger transport; for example, through autonomous freight, agricultural and passenger vehicles, as well as in agricultural and mining production. Infrastructure development should not jeopardise the potential use in the future of this technology.

Actions

- 8.1 Identify options to improve access to shared telecommunication and internet services, including public access to services at community centres and schools.
- 8.2 Establish trial sites for the use of automated freight, agricultural and passenger vehicles with Transport for NSW and other stakeholders.

Direction 9: Sustainably manage water resources for economic opportunities

The availability of water and the security of its supply is critical for the region. Water is a key input for agriculture and mining, as well as for community sustainability. Climate change is already affecting water availability across the region, significantly so in smaller communities and those already vulnerable to water shortages.

Broken Hill and Cobar have been given high priority for infrastructure upgrades to improve their water security.²⁸

The Barwon and Darling rivers overlay the Great Artesian Basin, one of the largest groundwater reservoirs in the world.²⁹ The Barwon–Darling system is one of the longest in the world and connects waters flowing from Queensland through NSW to the Murray River.

The irrigation communities of Menindee, Wentworth and Balranald require greater certainty about seasonal water allocations as it allows producers to increase investment and take advantage of global demand for agricultural products.

The NSW Government will adopt a coordinated approach to water resource management that provides greater certainty to the Far West by managing environmental, industrial and residential water requirements in consultation with all stakeholders.

The NSW Government has developed water sharing plans that set limits on extraction and rules for sharing water sustainably between water users and the environment. The Commonwealth's *Murray–Darling Basin Plan* (2012) has set lower

extraction limits for surface water that will be implemented through water resource plans to be completed by 2019.³⁰

This presents challenges for the region given the demands for water for business, industry and the environment.

The focus for the future is to appropriately locate, monitor and manage development to protect the security of the region's water supplies.

Water resource management relies on the cooperation of three tiers of government. The NSW Government will coordinate water resource management, in consultation with all stakeholders, to increase transparency in decision-making and provide investors with greater security to proceed with projects.

Water sharing plans

Water sharing plans and water resource plans currently being updated by the Department of Primary Industries set out the rules for sustainable diversion limits in NSW. The plans share water between the environmental needs of the river and other water uses, such as town water supplies, rural domestic supplies and stock and watering, and industry and irrigation. The plans also establish rules to protect the health of the river system.

This system establishes tradeable property rights in water, which provide a means for people and water-dependent businesses to gain access to water through buying allocations or water licences. The granting of a perpetual licence under the water sharing plans provides greater certainty for investment. Water sharing plans for groundwater use also apply within the Great Artesian Basin.³¹ The plans that apply to the Far West region can be found at www.water.nsw.gov.au/water-management/water-sharing/plans-commenced

Actions

- 9.1 Implement the *Murray–Darling Basin Plan* to ensure a balance of social, economic and environmental outcomes.
- 9.2 Finalise water resource plans for rivers and groundwater systems as part of the *Murray–Darling Basin Plan* and implement water sharing plans.
- 9.3 Appropriately zone and protect irrigated land from inappropriate development.
- 9.4 Investigate potential for additional water storage solutions to support agriculture in Walgett, Bourke and Central Darling.

Direction 10: Enhance the productivity of employment lands

The timely supply of well-located and serviced land to establish new processing and manufacturing facilities is essential to support the projected growth of agribusiness, and provide regional-scale facilities that can process regional agricultural produce.

The region's largest towns are expected to have the highest take-up of commercial and industrial employment lands, primarily focused in central business districts and zoned industrial areas. Smaller towns and villages will also need to provide land for local business and industrial activities.

Councils have indicated there is a sufficient supply of employment and industrial land across the region to meet projected demand over the next 20 years.³² In some cases, however, this land may not be adequately located, zoned or serviced. Councils will need to provide a sufficient supply of this land, protect it from incompatible land uses, and identify infrastructure requirements in their planning strategies and local plans to support economic growth.

Strengthening the commercial core of Broken Hill is essential to sustain and attract new business investment. Clustering commercial activities in centres creates a more vibrant and sustainable main street and a focus for community activities. The NSW Government's preference is to locate



retail activity in existing centres to capitalise on infrastructure and strengthen the role and function of these areas. Strengthening commercial centres will:

- attract retail and other supporting commercial infrastructure;
- strengthen the local economy;
- make the best use of existing infrastructure and services (including public transport and community facilities);
- facilitate tourism and visitors; and
- enhance the value of public space and consider net community benefit.

The Government will monitor employment lands to help identify when and where infrastructure is needed to promote economic development.

Councils have reported capacity issues within some parts of the electricity supply network in the region,³³ which are discouraging large energy users from locating in industrial lands.³⁴ There may be opportunities for stand-alone alternative energy generation and the use of renewable energy options, such as wind and solar generation, to meet local energy needs in these areas.

Actions

- 10.1 Encourage the consolidation of isolated, unused or under-utilised pockets of industrial zoned land to create new economic opportunities over the long term.
- 10.2 Protect industrial zoned land from potential land use conflicts arising from inappropriate and incompatible surrounding land uses.
- 10.3 Ensure an adequate supply of industrial land with the capacity to enable the development of specialised industry clusters and encourage co-location of related industries to decrease supply chain costs.

- 10.4 Encourage the sustainable development of industrial land to maximise the use of infrastructure, including access to markets and workers, and connectivity to the existing freight network.
- 10.5 Investigate barriers to industrial land take-up in Wentworth.
- 10.6 Accommodate future commercial and retail activity in existing commercial centres, unless there is a demonstrated need and positive social and economic benefits for the community.
- 10.7 Require proposals for new retail developments to demonstrate how they:
 - respond to retail supply and demand needs;
 - respond to innovation 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 public places.

Above: Line Lode, Broken Hill,
courtesy of Broken Hill City Council

Right: Mulgowan Aboriginal art site, Gundabooka National Park,
courtesy of D Haskard, Office of Environment and Heritage



Direction 11: Enhance the self-determination of Aboriginal communities

OCHRE is the NSW Government plan for Aboriginal Affairs. 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.

The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly is a regional non-incorporated body that represents the interests of Aboriginal people in 16 communities across western NSW. Many of these communities are located within the Far West. The Assembly's membership comprises representatives from the Local Aboriginal Land Councils, community working parties and a young leaders program.³⁵

Local Aboriginal Land Councils within the region are autonomous bodies governed by boards elected by local Aboriginal community members every two years. The Land Councils work for their members and the wider Aboriginal community living in their local area. They provide support to Aboriginal communities for housing, legal and employment matters.³⁶ The NSW Aboriginal Land Council also provides for the development of land rights for Aboriginal people in NSW, in conjunction with a network of Local Aboriginal Land Councils.

In the *Murdi Paaki Local Decision Making Accord*, agreed between the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly and the NSW Government in February 2015, both parties made commitments in the following key priority areas:

- affordable and appropriate housing;
- economic development;
- education;
- early childhood services; and
- governance capacity and support.

Many OCHRE actions are outside the scope of the planning system. However, there is an opportunity to look at the landholdings of Local Aboriginal Land Councils to see how they can best be planned, managed and developed for the benefit of the local Aboriginal communities. This will allow Aboriginal people to have greater input into planning and development, encourage Aboriginal enterprises to gain economic benefit from their land, and provide greater opportunities for their economic independence and self-determination.

Together, Aboriginal Affairs NSW, the Department of Primary Industries and the Department of Planning and Environment, will work with the Land Councils to identify their landholdings and to map the level of constraint at a strategic scale for each site.

This information can be used to develop practical solutions for the potential commercial use of the land, such as for Aboriginal housing and employment. It has the potential to provide economic returns to the Local Aboriginal Land Councils that can be invested in assistance programs in the region.



Actions

- 11.1 Work with the Local Aboriginal Land Councils in the region to identify landholdings and map the level of constraint for each site at a strategic scale to develop options for the potential commercial use of the land.
- 11.2 Identify priority sites that can create a pipeline of potential projects that the Local Aboriginal Land Councils may wish to consider.

Direction 12: Support new planning and land management arrangements

Crown Lands Management – Western Division of NSW

The Western Division of NSW includes all local government areas and the Unincorporated Area in the Far West and parts of Bogan and Carrathool local government areas in adjoining regions.

The Western Division of NSW is defined in Crown Land legislation for the purpose of the management and administration of Crown Land in Far Western NSW. Approximately 96 per cent of this land is held as Western Lands leases granted for purposes such as grazing, mixed farming and horticulture, and residential and business development.

Western Lands leases are currently administered by the Minister for Lands and Water under the *Western Lands Act 1901*.³⁷ The NSW Department of Industry – Lands works cooperatively with communities, including Aboriginal communities, and councils in the region to administer the Crown estate and ensure that sustainable land management activities and programs are implemented and that opportunities for regional development on Crown Land are advanced.

Crown Land management review

In 2012, the NSW Government initiated a comprehensive review of Crown Land management. The most significant finding of this review (published in 2014) was that NSW needed new Crown Land legislation.

The NSW Government introduced the Crown Land Management Bill 2016 in response to this review and a further Parliamentary inquiry into Crown Land management. The Bill was the first stage in a process that will consolidate eight pieces of legislation into one harmonised and clear piece of legislation. The Bill will reduce complexity and duplication, deliver better social, environmental and economic outcomes, and facilitate community involvement with Crown Land.

In November 2016, the Bill passed through NSW Parliament and it is anticipated that the new Act will commence in early 2018.

The new *Crown Lands Management Act 2016* contains provisions to deliver modern, streamlined and transparent management of the State's vast Crown Lands. It simplifies the management of Crown Land and reduces red tape.

The Act will support economic growth and investment across the region, including opportunities for certain Western lands leaseholders to purchase their land in freehold, while maintaining environmental protections of the sensitive lands in the Western Division. In addition, the Far West Initiative is being undertaken, which may have a role in implementing the changes to Crown Land management.



Outback life,
courtesy of Peter Elfes and Western Local Land Services



In early 2018, the *Western Lands Act 1901* will be repealed and the provisions to manage the leasehold land within the Western Division will be administered through the new *Crown Land Management Act 2016*.

In Lightning Ridge, historic residential mineral claims will continue to apply. *Walgett Local Environmental Plan 2013* allows the building and rebuilding of dwellings and subdivisions on existing residential mineral claims, consistent with the *Walgett Shire Growth Management Strategy* (2010) and advice from Crown Lands and the Division of Resources and Energy.

The Unincorporated Area

The Unincorporated Area is not governed by a local council and forms part of the Western Division, which occupies around 40 per cent of the Far West region (93,000 square kilometres). It includes Silverton, Tibooburra and Milparinka, which receive community services coordinated by the Department of Industry – Lands. The Area surrounds, but does not include, the city of Broken Hill.

The Unincorporated Area is predominantly pastoral lease holdings held under the *Western Lands Act 1901*. There are about 264 pastoral properties in the area; the average size is 35,000 hectares and the largest is 271,000 hectares. The Department of Industry – Lands is only responsible for management and administration of Crown Land within this area. It works with the community to administer these lands to ensure sustainable land management activities and programs are implemented and to provide opportunities for regional development. There are currently no planning controls on freehold land in the Unincorporated Area.³⁸

Within the Unincorporated Area, the towns of Silverton and Tibooburra have village committees, which are incorporated under the *Associations Incorporation Act 1984*. They receive some funding from both the NSW and Australian Governments for local services.³⁹ The Unincorporated Area also has many Local Aboriginal Land Council groups, including Tibooburra, Wanaaring, Mutawintji, Wilcannia, Menindee, Broken Hill and Dareton.

Access to some parts of the Unincorporated Area can only occur by air, particularly if roads have been closed by rainfall or flooding. The Royal Flying Doctor Service in Broken Hill is an important provider of health services to remote areas of Australia, including the Unincorporated Area.

No formal governance and planning arrangements apply to the Unincorporated Area and, from a planning perspective, this is evident in the lack of a community-led strategic land use strategy, local plan and related decision-making. The Unincorporated Area has significant heritage features and environmental assets that have very limited protection. Similarly, there are no planning controls or guidance on development thresholds and the community has a limited say in the delivery of services, land use development and management.

In the absence of a local government authority, the Western Lands Commissioner has a consent authority role for various pieces of legislation relating to the Unincorporated Area. With the commencement of the *Crown Land Management Act* in early 2018, the role of the Western Lands Commissioner will cease to exist and these responsibilities will be managed by appropriate government agencies.

Action

- 12.1 Prepare a local plan for the Unincorporated Area.



GOAL 2

An exceptional and distinctive natural environment

The Far West has some of the most exceptional natural landscapes in Australia, including vast semi-arid rangelands that are traversed by the rich Barwon–Darling river system floodplain. The Barwon–Darling system is crucial in connecting waters flowing from Queensland through NSW to the Murray River and the Great Artesian Basin, which provides water for the northern part of the region.

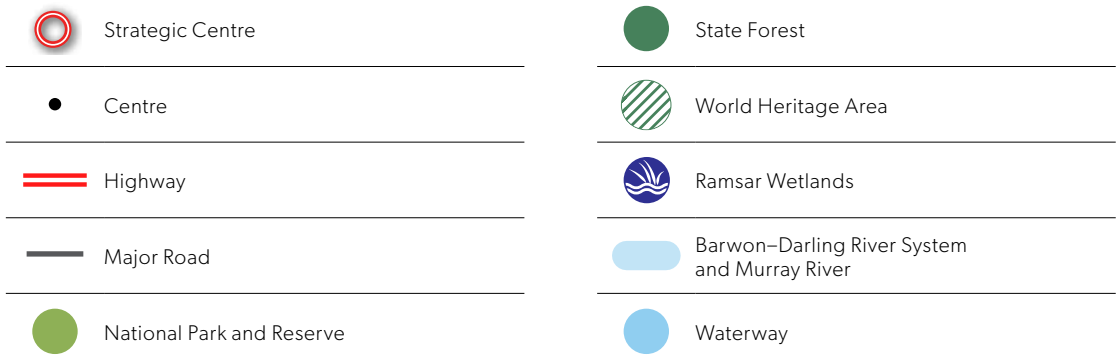
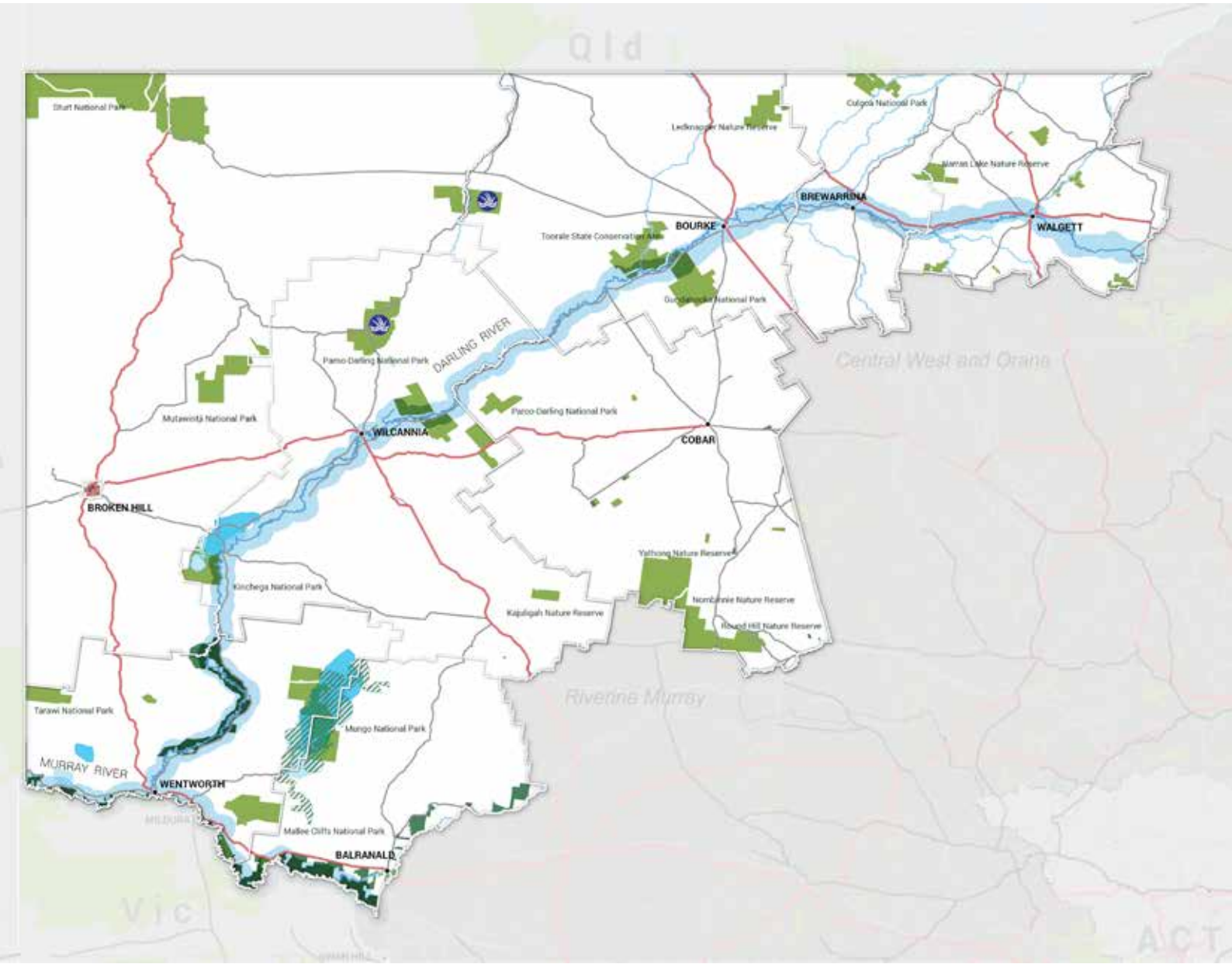
The Murray River and the Menindee Lakes are nationally significant, while Narran Lake and Paroo River wetlands on the Darling Riverine Plains, and Lake Pinnaroo in the Bulloo Overflow, are internationally significant as Ramsar-listed wetlands. Major conservation reserves include the Sturt, Paroo–Darling, Mutawintji, Kinchega and Mungo national parks.

The landscape supports a great diversity of species and ecosystems. Some of these ecosystems are fragile and susceptible to disturbance. Most vegetation has been substantially modified through the expansion of pastoralism and the effects of feral animals, particularly goats. Development of irrigation infrastructure has also modified floodplains and lakes.

Climate change will have an impact on this region – with predicted seasonal shifts in rainfall, more hot days, fewer cold days and an increase in fire danger. Rainfall distribution will increase in summer and autumn, particularly in the north. As a result of these changes, living and working in the region is likely to become more challenging.

The region's communities have shown great capacity to adapt to what can be a harsh environment, using generations of knowledge, skills, hard work and innovation. The landscape of the Far West has special significance for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Coupled with the role the landscape plays in the economic activity of the region, it must be managed sustainably.

Figure 6: **Environmental Assets**



Direction 13: Protect the region's environmental assets

Protecting the region's environmental assets will have flow-on economic benefits to communities; for example, through tourism, particularly nature-based tourism.

Many ecosystems in the region are not currently protected within formal reserve systems and can face development pressures.⁴⁰ Waterways and wetlands can be disturbed through water use changes, the clearing of vegetation, and feral animal populations such as goats that inhabit the rangelands and pigs that locate near waterways and wetlands.⁴¹

The Government will introduce more consistent protection for environmental assets in the region, including updating mapping for potential high environmental value areas, through regulation and conservation measures. All development activities will have to be assessed in accordance with relevant legislation.

Local plans will need to consider measures to protect these areas. Maps of groundwater-dependent ecosystems and aquatic habitats are available from the Department of Primary Industries.

The *NSW Biodiversity Offsets Policy for Major Projects* (2014) applies to all biodiversity in NSW, including aquatic biodiversity. All other offsets or compensation requirements are covered by the Department of Primary Industries' *Policy and guidelines for fish habitat conservation and management* (2013).

A number of Travelling Stock Reserves are located within the Far West and are used primarily to move livestock and as supplementary grazing areas in times of drought. These reserves are parcels of Crown Land that are generally managed under trust by Local Land Services and can contain significant biodiversity values. These lands need to be managed carefully to protect them from the encroachment of incompatible uses.

Actions

13.1 Map potential high environmental value areas.

- 13.2 Protect high environmental value assets through local plans.
- 13.3 Minimise potential impacts arising from development in areas of high environmental value, and consider appropriate mechanisms to identify offsets or other mitigation mechanisms for unavoidable impacts.
- 13.4 Improve the quality of, and access to, information relating to high environmental values.
- 13.5 Work with councils to identify Travelling Stock Reserves in local land use strategies.

High environmental value areas

Potential high environmental value areas include:

- existing conservation areas, including national parks and reserves, declared wilderness areas, Crown reserves dedicated to 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 and old-growth vegetation;
- threatened ecological communities and key habitats;
- wetlands and lagoons, such as the Ramsar-listed Lake Pinaroo, Willandra Lakes Region World Heritage Area, which has Aboriginal and cultural heritage significance, and Menindee Lakes;
- the Barwon–Darling, Murray, Culgoa, Menindee Lakes, Paroo, Warrego, Narran, Bokara and Birrie river catchments;⁴² and
- areas of geological significance.



Direction 14: Manage and conserve water resources for the environment

The health of the region relies on maintaining and protecting water catchments, waterways, floodplains and riparian land. Healthy water systems underpin good water quality, biodiversity, recreation and a strong economy. Responding to water allocation and climate change impacts will be a major challenge for the region and its producers.

Sustainable use of water resources

The region's water supply is mostly delivered through its major rivers, which are susceptible to rainfall deficiencies and interruptions upstream. Surface water in some areas may not be suitable for drinking water and could place pressure on groundwater to meet community needs.

Significant volumes of water have been recovered for the environment through the environmental rules set out in water sharing plans and significant water recovery programs, such as *The Living Murray* and the Commonwealth's *Murray–Darling Basin Plan*.

Water use needs to be carefully and equitably managed, taking into account the welfare of current and future residents, environmental needs and long-term economic prosperity.

Healthy waterways and wetlands

Water quality in waterways and aquifers is essential to sustain healthy aquatic ecosystems. The Department of Primary Industries' *Policy and guidelines for fish habitat conservation and management* (2013) provides guidance and assists in managing and protecting valuable aquatic resources.

Key fish habitats include freshwater habitats that are important to preserve fish communities and the ongoing recreation and productivity of commercial fishing and aquaculture industries. Key fish habitats have been mapped by the Department of Primary Industries and, together with fish community status and aquatic threatened species distribution maps, will be used by councils during strategic planning and when they are developing local plans.

While the risk to water quality from a small population and development pressures is low, the fragility of the landscape means that water resources are even more vulnerable to individual and cumulative impacts. New development, particularly along the Murray and Darling rivers, needs to be located to reduce negative effects on aquatic habitat, waterways and wetlands.

Rural floodplain management plans, administered by the Department of Primary Industries, identify water flows and protect water flow connectivity to wetlands to support the floodplain environment.

Manage land uses along river corridors

It is important to manage settlement along the nationally important Murray, Darling and Barwon rivers corridors so that future generations are also able to use and benefit from these rivers.

These rivers provide attractive locations for residential development, tourist accommodation and river-based recreation. Historically, development along these rivers has been ad hoc, and has in some cases resulted in undesirable development (such as extensive ribbon development along the Murray River in NSW).

More recently, local land use planning has been more strategic and resulted in better development outcomes adjacent to the Murray River. Generally, settlement is directed away from the river bank, in accordance with setback provisions contained in local plans.

The NSW Government will work with councils and relevant stakeholders to develop a waterfront management strategy to achieve a sustainable outcome for the future of the region's rivers, particularly the Murray River. It will consider the complex, sometimes competing relationship between land uses; the objectives of various policies and legislative requirements; areas subject to growth pressures; heritage protection; and climate variability impacts.



Menindee Lakes,
courtesy of Department of Primary Industries–Water



Actions

- 14.1 Locate, design, construct and manage new developments to minimise impacts on water catchments, including downstream impacts and groundwater sources.
- 14.2 Minimise the impacts of development on fish habitat, aquaculture and waterways (including watercourses, wetlands and riparian lands) and meet the NSW Government's Water Quality and River Flow Objectives.
- 14.3 Prepare and implement a waterfront management strategy for the Murray River.
- 14.4 Protect the biodiversity, water quality and aesthetic values of the Murray River by retaining riverfront setback provisions in local plans and limiting ribbon development along the river.
- 14.5 Assess the potential impacts new development may have on biodiversity along river corridors and establish plans to manage offsets.

Review of Murray River planning controls

The Department of Planning and Environment commissioned a study to review the planning controls that apply to the Murray River and the issues affecting its users. The study identified the importance of continuing the use of river setback provisions to protect riverine values and to provide a wide range of benefits to the environment. It will form part of the evidence base required to support the review of the *Murray Regional Environmental Plan No. 2–Riverine Land* (2009).

Direction 15: Increase resilience to natural hazards and climate change

The Far West will experience an increase in average temperatures, more hot days, fewer cold nights, changes in rainfall patterns and more intense bushfires due to climate change (see box over).

These changes will affect the business cycles of farms and their productivity, with potential flow-on effects for the regional economy; create health problems for residents, particularly ageing populations; and threaten ecosystems and biodiversity by putting some native species at risk, particularly where feral and exotic species are competing with native plants and animals.

Natural hazards

Natural hazard mapping for flood and bushfire-prone land is undertaken by most councils, with the assistance of the NSW Government. Mapping is generally based on local historical data or information from individual site assessments. A more robust, strategic approach to identifying and mapping regional hazards is needed to help councils and other stakeholders make planning decisions. Climate change will make the regular review and updating of data essential.

Bushfire hazards and risks are identified on maps prepared by councils and certified by the Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service. The extent of bushfire-prone land may increase with climate change; therefore, mapping will need to be reviewed and monitored at regular intervals.

The *NSW Floodplain Development Manual* (2005) guides development of flood liable land for the purposes of section 733 of the *Local Government Act 1993*. This manual refers to both urban and rural floodplain management and incorporates the *NSW Flood Prone Land Policy*, which aims to reduce the impact of flooding on individual owners and occupiers of flood-prone property, and private and public losses resulting from floods.



Councils are responsible for managing flood risks in urban areas, including the development and implementation of floodplain risk management plans to manage flood risk in their local communities. The Office of Environment and Heritage provides both financial and technical support to councils.

The NSW Government will review floodplain risk studies and plans, and climate change data, and determine acceptable limits on development in vulnerable areas to reduce exposure to flood hazards.

Preparing and adapting to climate change

In 2016, the NSW Government, in partnership with the University of Technology Sydney, consulted local decision-makers in the region, including in Wentworth and Balranald, to identify and better understand regional vulnerabilities and emerging risks from a changing climate. This work is known as the Far West Enabling Regional Adaptation project.

The project identifies adaptation pathways and opportunities to minimise climate change impacts on local communities. It will help to identify responses to vulnerabilities, identify the region's ability to cope (known as its 'adaptive capacity') and inform government service delivery at a regional and subregional scale.

The Office of Environment and Heritage will continue to develop information to help councils protect and manage ecosystems, and minimise risks to local communities.

The NSW Climate Change Policy Framework and the *Climate Change Fund Draft Strategic Plan 2017 to 2022* also set policy directions and prioritise investment to reduce carbon emissions and adapt and mitigate impacts of climate change.

Better weather data for regional communities

Agricultural and mining activities, and aviation and emergency services (including fire and flood management) all rely on accurate and real-time weather information.

Regional Development Australia has conducted a preliminary investigation into the feasibility of the installation of a weather radar service in the Orana region, which would significantly improve the accuracy of weather data in the Far West and Central West and Orana regions. Not having real-time weather data impacts on the preparedness of the community to deal with natural hazards.

A high-resolution weather radar helps to predict the direction of storm cells and the intensity of rainfall. It also allows emergency services, aviation, businesses, authorities, tourists and residents to make better decisions on immediate weather conditions. Weather information can also be added to existing meteorological record-keeping to give a clearer picture of rainfall in the region.

The possibility of remote power sourcing through renewable energy may allow the optimum location of a weather radar to service the region from a central position.



Climate change

To manage and respond to climate change risks, communities need the best information to inform adaptive responses.

The NSW Government is providing information and investing in technology, research and a policy review to help communities prepare for climate change. The Office of Environment and Heritage is identifying communities at risk from climate change and prioritising adaptation responses in NSW. This will help local decision-makers build their capacity to respond to climate change, and is reflected in programs such as the Western Enabling Regional Adaptation project, which will include the Far West.⁴³

Actions

- 15.1 Incorporate the findings of the Far West Enabling Regional Adaptation project to inform land use and planning decisions.
- 15.2 Adopt a whole-of-government approach to information exchange, to support climate change adaptation and preparedness.
- 15.3 Respond to climate-related risks by applying and communicating fine-scale climate information to support decision-making.
- 15.4 Locate developments, including new urban release areas, away from areas of known high biodiversity value, high bushfire and flooding hazards, and designated waterways, to reduce the community's exposure to natural hazards.
- 15.5 Implement the requirements of the *NSW Floodplain Development Manual 2005* by updating flood studies and floodplain risk management plans.
- 15.6 Incorporate the best available hazard information in local plans consistent with current flood studies, flood planning levels, modelling and floodplain risk management plans.

- 15.7 Update and share current information on environmental assets and natural hazards with councils to inform planning decisions.
- 15.8 Manage the risks of disturbance in areas affected by naturally occurring asbestos.

Projected climate change impacts in the Far West

The Far West, like other NSW regions, is projected to be affected by climate change in a number of ways including:

- experiencing an increase in both minimum and maximum temperatures of up to 0.7° C by 2030 and 2.1° C by 2070, particularly in the far north-west;
- experiencing an increase in the number of hot days (above 35° C) per year, particularly in the northern parts of the region, with an extra 10–20 hot days in the near future, and around 30 in the far future;
- experiencing fewer cold nights (below 2° C) on average, with the greatest decrease in the number of cold nights likely to be in the south-east – between five and 10 fewer nights in the near future, and 10 and 20 fewer nights in the far future;
- having reduced rainfall in spring, and more rainfall in autumn, with the largest reduction in rainfall within the southern areas; and
- having more intense periods of fire weather in the near future, including increased risk of bushfires and bushfire weather in spring and summer.⁴⁴



GOAL 3

Strong and connected communities

The success of the region is linked to the strength and character of its communities. The capacity of communities to adapt to change (for example, population and climate) and promote greater social cohesion and wellbeing will be increasingly important into the future. Communities need to be informed, proactive and collaborative in meeting the challenges ahead.

Building community resilience and capacity will depend on establishing networks between communities in the region and with centres in adjoining regions and adjoining states.

Bourke, Central Darling and the Unincorporated Area are projected to experience slight population growth over the next 20 years. Other local government areas will experience a stable or slight decline in population.⁴⁵

Communities that are heavily dependent on mining will experience population change across different phases of the mining life cycle, as well as fluctuations linked to the demand and supply of commodities. Some communities will also experience population fluctuations as a result of seasonal activities such as fruit picking, harvesting, special events and tourism.

As with most of NSW, the ageing population is increasing in the Far West. The proportion of people aged 65 years and over is projected to increase from 19 per cent in 2016 to 28 per cent in 2036. By comparison, the younger adult population is expected to decline more than other age groups.

Population changes will increase demands on the health, aged care, education and training, and public and community transport sectors. These changes also present opportunities; for example, to improve the design of seniors housing, social housing and accommodation for seasonal and itinerant workers.

Leveraging community strengths, such as cultural and heritage assets, the appeal of the region's lifestyles and environment, and specialised services and products, present other opportunities to strengthen communities.

Direction 16: Manage change in the region's settlements

Proactively planning for change can produce many benefits for communities. For example, expanding the services available to seniors, such as health and leisure, information technology, tourism and recreation, supported by housing and home services, can enable seniors to remain healthy, productive and actively engaged in their communities. Similarly, younger people can be encouraged to remain in their communities by improving the services and employment opportunities available.

The region has many successful examples of collaborative partnerships and innovative solutions to meet the challenges of demographic change and service delivery, and this work should continue.

The NSW Government will work collaboratively with councils and other stakeholders to support communities, to promote resource sharing, and to pursue common issues and goals. Tools and resources, such as the *NSW Strengthening Rural Communities: Resource Kit* (2001), can be used to help communities become more self-sufficient. This resource needs updating to accurately reflect the current challenges facing communities.

The NSW Government is helping rural communities that are vulnerable to climate-related economic downturns to build resilience through the *NSW Drought Strategy*. This Strategy will support the State's farmers to become more resilient and better prepared for future droughts, to improve their business and reduce risks, by delivering a more transparent and targeted system of drought support.

Councils across the region need to ensure there is sufficient space for cemeteries and crematoria to meet future local and regional demand. Planning for these spaces should be considered as part of future land use planning.

Actions

- 16.1 Update the *Strengthening Rural Communities: Resource Kit* as a resource for councils to help rural communities build capacity and resilience.
- 16.2 Undertake scenario planning with local communities to better understand the implications and factors contributing to population change.
- 16.3 Build drought resilience in rural communities by providing targeted support to primary producers and communities to improve preparedness and improve decision-making.

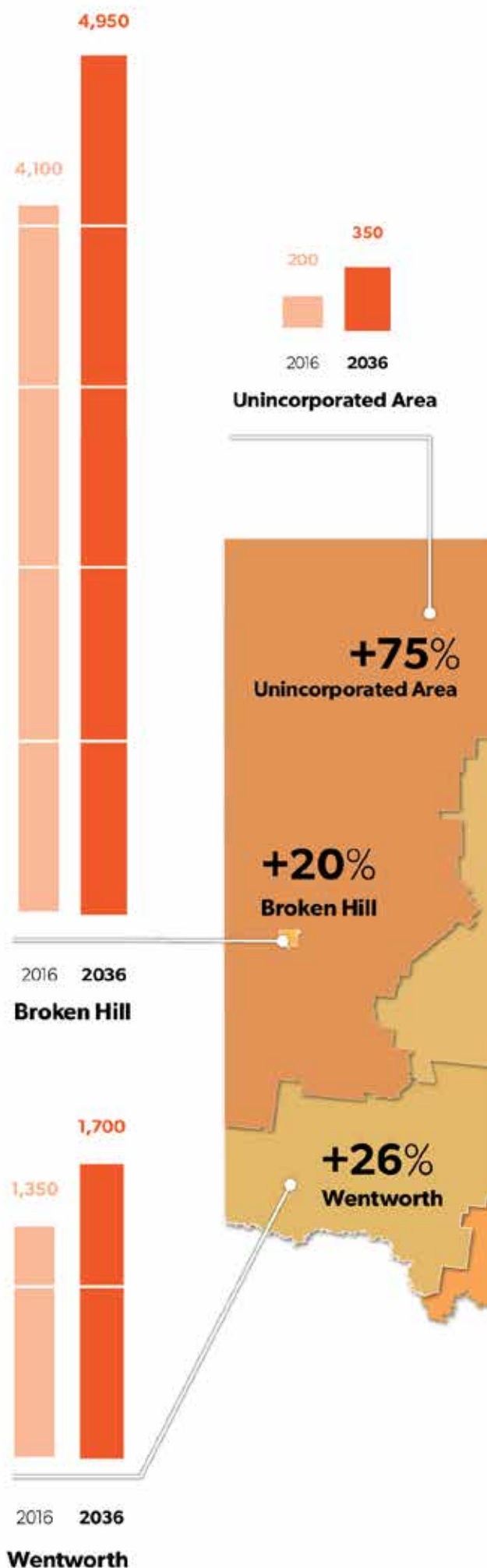
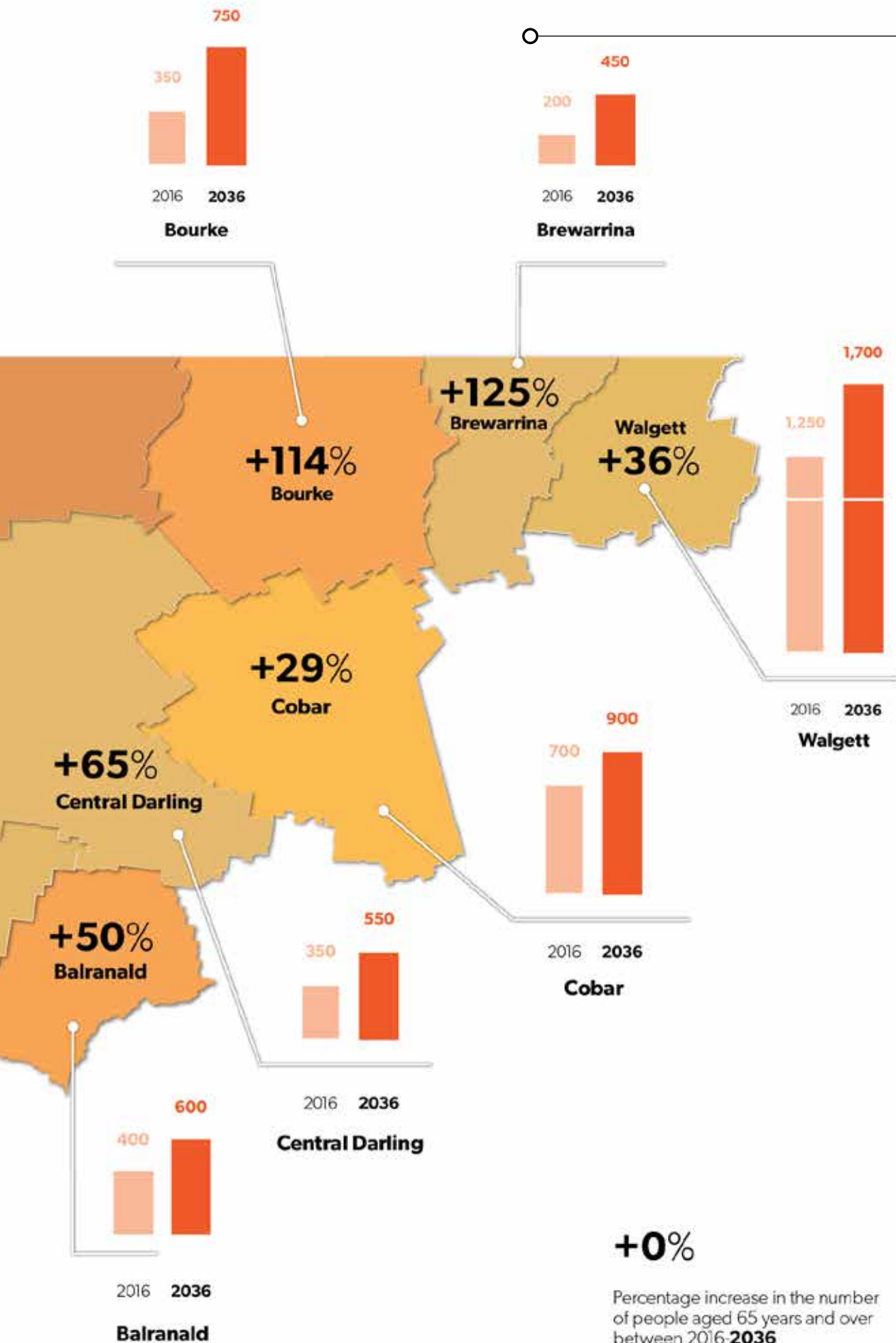


Figure 7: Ageing population: 65 years and over 2016-2036





Direction 17: Improve access to local health and aged care

Health services in the Far West need to be tailored to meet the needs of remote communities, including Aboriginal communities, people with a disability, young people and families.

Community-based health care and the roll-out of e-health initiatives and distance education to smaller and isolated communities are examples of integrated service delivery in the Far West.

Ongoing and equitable access to aged care services across the region will help smaller regional communities retain and potentially grow their population and enable people to age-in-place.

Opportunities exist in Broken Hill, Bourke and Cobar to leverage investment in existing public health facilities to provide complementary health services that meet community need and support local employment.

Actions

- 17.1 Investigate the opportunities for establishing health precincts around existing hospitals and leverage opportunities from public hospitals for private sector investment in health services.
- 17.2 Identify and plan for multipurpose, flexible and adaptable health infrastructure that can respond to changing and emerging community needs.
- 17.3 Improve access to health facilities for cross-border communities through improved transport connections.
- 17.4 Protect health facilities from incompatible surrounding land uses.

Direction 18: Enhance access to skills and training

As the economy and population profile of the region change, so too will the demand for skilled workers, particularly in the health, education, manufacturing, mining and renewable energy sectors.

The region has experienced difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled professionals, such as general practitioners. Remote communities obtain services from Broken Hill, Cobar or Dubbo, with most primary health care services provided only on a visiting basis. Regional Development Australia Far West has advised that the recruitment and retention of health professionals remains problematic, and retention grants do not give general practitioners enough incentives to remain in isolated areas.

Attracting and retaining skilled tradespeople across the region is also difficult, given they often have to travel long distances.

Long distances and limited and expensive air services make it difficult for training providers to reach the region, compromising the professional development of students and staff. Limited internet connectivity is also a major constraint to distance education. Within cross-border communities, such as Wentworth, some education and training services are accessed in neighbouring Victorian settlements, such as Mildura.

Improving internet access through the National Broadband Network is a priority for education, health and emergency services, and economic drivers such as agribusiness, mining and tourism.

Above: Tibbooburra Health Services, courtesy of Far West Health

Right: Community transport



The NSW Department of Education is reviewing its approach to asset and network planning. It is preparing a long-term strategic plan to 2031 to identify schooling needs and improve education delivery. Managing declining enrolments while providing infrastructure to improve education delivery is a key challenge. Opportunities for resource pooling and cost-sharing between schools and councils will be explored to make the best use of community assets.

Education and training providers may also be able to partner with government and private industry to provide tailored training programs, including vocational training and retraining opportunities. For example, the Broken Hill base of the Royal Flying Doctor Service offers training for medical and health science students in partnership with the University of Sydney, and provides essential remote health services.

Expanding online access to tertiary and distance education will be necessary to take advantage of these opportunities.

Opportunities also exist to better harness transferable skills across different industries, and provide better incentives to attract and retain skilled workers, such as housing, travel and holiday leave.

Actions

- 18.1 Identify and remove barriers to the expansion of the education and training sector.
- 18.2 Work with councils, industry, research institutes, and education and training providers to identify opportunities to align skill shortages with tailored regional training programs.
- 18.3 Facilitate joint venture opportunities for the development of shared community/school facilities on school sites.

Direction 19: Improve public and community transport services

Public and community transport services connect people to jobs, housing and services (including health care and education), both within the region and with centres in adjoining regions and states. These services are essential to remote communities.

Transport for NSW will work with bus operators to improve bus service connections and provide the necessary transport services between regional communities and for regional communities. Transport for NSW is also committed to developing a long-term plan for regional rail to improve services to towns and villages, and connections to metropolitan cities, including Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne.⁴⁶

The *NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan* highlighted that the western region has the highest per capita use of community transport in regional NSW. Community transport providers need to identify and plan for future community transport needs.

Actions

- 19.1 Investigate opportunities to improve bus operations in strategic centres and their connections with regional communities.
- 19.2 Work with local transport operators and community transport providers to investigate a range of delivery models for flexible transport and determine what works best for different areas.
- 19.3 Prepare strategies to better link the region's towns and villages to strategic centres and other major centres.

Direction 20: Manage and conserve water resources for communities

Water supply is critical for communities and to support development and industry growth. Investment in water security infrastructure can be a catalyst for new industries such as agribusiness, value-added manufacturing and mining.

At the local level, water supply and sewerage services are provided by councils as well as a NSW Government-owned corporation in Broken Hill. These services operate within guidelines issued by the Department of Industry to secure drinking water supplies for country towns and to assist regional water utilities to meet standards for water supply and sewerage services. In Bourke, issues with town water supply have been ongoing and need to be resolved.

The costs associated with servicing water infrastructure can be a major barrier to new development and industry growth in many communities in the region. Opportunities for establishing partnerships and sharing the cost of capital between industries need to be explored to overcome this barrier.

Even with investment in water security infrastructure, innovative and adaptive measures will still be needed, given the potential effects of climate change.

Actions

- 20.1 Identify and protect the Broken Hill pipeline corridor to enable delivery of a secure long-term water supply to Broken Hill and its surrounding communities.
- 20.2 Adopt an integrated approach to water cycle management across the region.
- 20.3 Incorporate water sensitive urban design in new development.

Water security projects at Broken Hill and Cobar

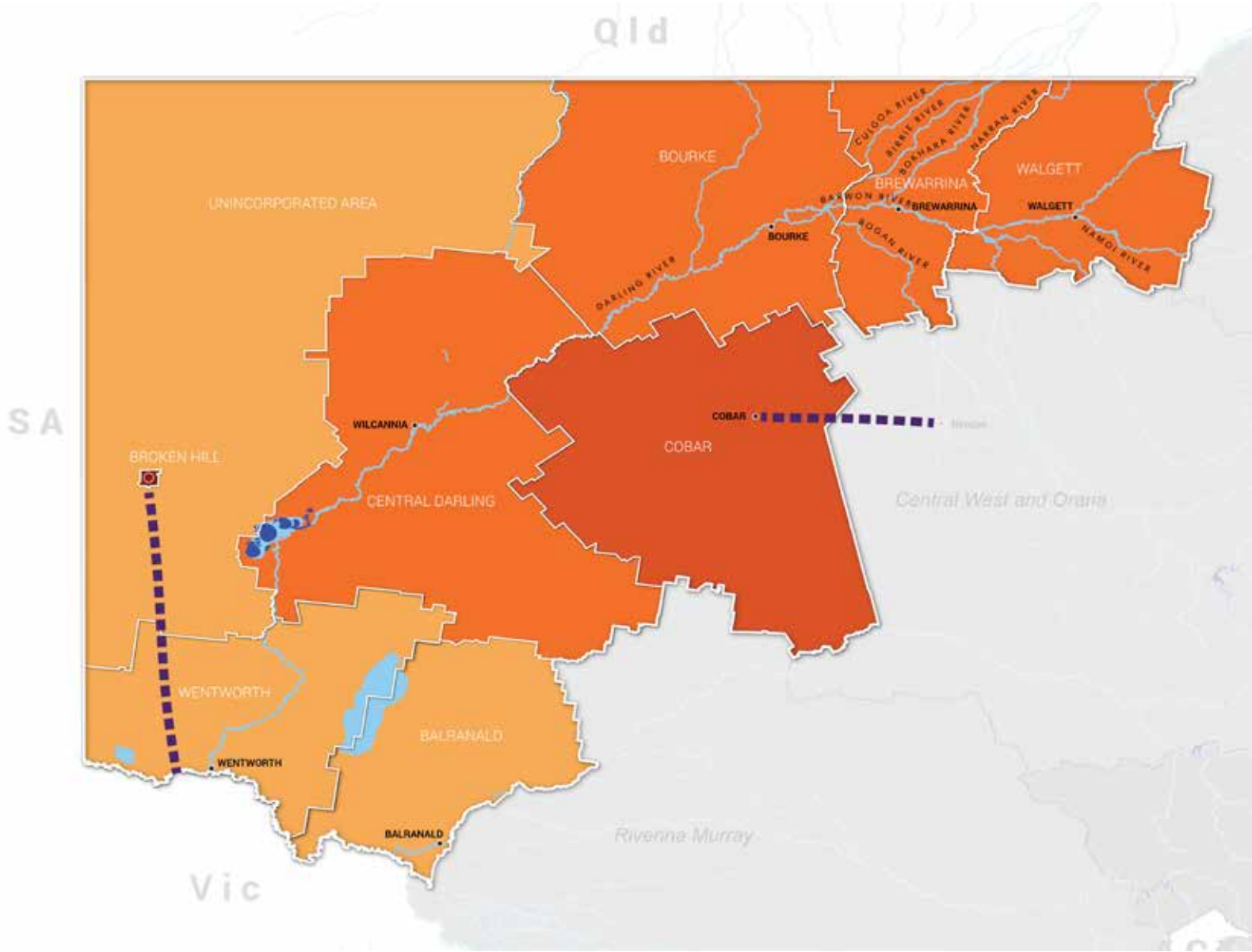
Broken Hill's water supply has traditionally been drawn from the Darling River and Menindee Lakes, and pumped over 120 kilometres, with alternative sources including Stephens Creek Reservoir, Umberumberka Reservoir and Imperial Lake. These sources have been insufficient to sustain a secure water supply.






In June 2016, the NSW Government announced that it would build a 270-kilometre pipeline from the Murray River to Broken Hill. Scheduled for completion by 2018,⁴⁷ it is part of a \$500 million strategy to ensure that Broken Hill and nearby communities have a secure, long-term supply of water. The project will contribute to meeting water recovery targets under the *Murray-Darling Basin Plan*, and will help irrigation industries across the State.

Cobar's water supply is provided via the ageing Albert Priest Channel pipeline and delivery system, which relies primarily on the Macquarie River. This source has also been deficient and unreliable. Cobar has received funding to secure its water supply through the *Resources for Regions* program and *Restart NSW*,⁴⁸ including \$7.8 million towards a new water treatment plant, \$2.1 million towards a new sewerage treatment plant and \$5 million towards replacing twin pipelines between Cobar and Nyngan.




Restart NSW funding has also provided for a feasibility assessment of piping the Albert Priest Channel.

Figure 8: **Urban water security**



-  Strategic Centre
-  Centre
-  Proposed Water Security Infrastructure Projects
-  Water Storage
-  Waterway

Forecast urban water supply deficiency 2036

-  0 to 20%
-  21 to 50%
-  51 to 98%

Source: *State Infrastructure Strategy 2014*

Direction 21: Increase housing choice

Over time, demand will increase for both new and more varied housing. Seniors, single people, split households, students, professionals and itinerant workers all require housing to suit their specific needs. Older residents need housing that allows them to retain a connection to their community and transition into higher-needs care, if necessary.

New housing needs to be designed to cope with temperature extremes, heavy rainfall, drought, bushfires and flooding. Building design that incorporates passive solar access, water-efficient features and thermal qualities will contribute to lower energy costs and a more comfortable lifestyle.

Guidelines for regional areas should be developed to ensure that housing is conveniently located, economical and sensitive to a changing climate.

Housing diversity

More than 80 per cent of housing in the region is single detached houses, with caravans, cabins and houseboats the next most common type of residence. Some larger residential lots and rural lifestyle options are located on the edge of settlements.

Large residential lots in villages provide opportunities for new housing that can use existing infrastructure, services and access laneways.

The traditional street grid pattern in towns and villages provides opportunities for 'infill' housing and homes for seniors or smaller homes in some areas. Many towns and villages can support extra housing in already serviced areas. This will allow for the best use of existing infrastructure.

Innovative design can be applied to redundant former commercial or administrative buildings in town centres to provide medium density housing and to help activate and revitalise town centres. Heritage studies will help councils obtain funding for upgrading/refurbishment of built heritage items.

Even in areas with stable populations, demand is still likely for new dwellings, with smaller households seeking a greater variety of housing types. Where it is no longer viable to maintain existing dwellings, there is also likely to be some demand for construction of new dwellings. This presents difficulties in that some centres have to access building and construction tradespeople from neighbouring areas in the region or from outside the region.

The Department of Planning and Environment is currently undertaking two initiatives to simplify and streamline the approval pathways for residential and other types of development in regional areas. These initiatives include investigating the potential to develop low-rise medium density housing as complying developments in areas where this type of housing is already permissible under council's local plan. It is also investigating simplifying complying and exempt development controls via a new Inland Code for local government areas west of the Great Dividing Range.

Housing for seniors

There is potential to provide housing for seniors through specifically designed low and medium density development close to existing town centres, to make best use of existing infrastructure and services. This will allow residents to downsize to smaller, more manageable homes close to the services they require.

State planning policies that streamline approval processes for seniors housing are used by developers to provide larger-scale public and aged care housing. The incentive provisions contained in these policies need to be reviewed to better suit regional circumstances.

Councils, non-government and local not-for-profit organisations have a role to develop and operate seniors housing facilities to meet increasing demand, and to enable ageing-in-place.



*Bourke,
courtesy of Josh Smith and Murray–Darling Basin Authority*





Actions

- 21.1 Review planning controls in existing urban areas to identify opportunities to increase the range of housing options, including townhouses, villas and apartments in centres and locations close to existing services and jobs.
- 21.2 Align infrastructure planning with land release areas to provide new developments with adequate infrastructure.
- 21.3 Locate higher density development in close proximity to town centres and villages to capitalise on existing infrastructure and to provide increased housing choice close to services and amenities.
- 21.4 Identify and remove planning barriers to provide a range of low-care and independent seniors accommodation options across the region.
- 21.5 Review the *State Environmental Planning Policy (Housing for Seniors or People with a Disability) 2004* to identify opportunities to make it more applicable for developers in regional areas.
- 21.6 Provide opportunities for retirement villages, nursing homes and similar housing needs of seniors in local land use strategies.
- 21.7 Locate new housing for seniors in close proximity to existing services and facilities, and on land free from hazards, including floods and bushfires.
- 21.8 Promote ageing-in-place by adopting relevant components of Living Housing Australia's *Livable Housing Design Guidelines* in development controls for housing, where possible.

Direction 22: Improve the availability of affordable housing and worker accommodation options

The cost of housing needs to be affordable to enable low-income households to enter the housing market. The Government can help councils to improve the availability of affordable housing by:

- expanding the range of model provisions that promote or require the inclusion of affordable housing in developments. For instance, councils may consider floor space bonuses to deliver a percentage of affordable housing in a development;
- providing additional development incentives and reduced contributions, or using other mechanisms 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
- promoting new caravan parks and manufactured housing estates on unconstrained land in existing settlements and new land release areas. Councils can identify appropriate sites that meet the needs of residents and tourists through their local planning strategies.

The region also has demand for both seasonal and itinerant worker accommodation during harvest periods, particularly in the irrigation areas. In the mining communities of Broken Hill and Cobar, demand for housing can fluctuate, with high demand during the mining construction phase. An undersupply of housing and accommodation options for these workers increases rents, affects housing affordability and may cause health and safety issues from overcrowding and makeshift housing. It can also put pressure on tourism and visitor accommodation, and on caravan and camping grounds.



In isolated areas, temporary worker accommodation is often provided in purpose-built accommodation camps, which can create land use conflicts with existing uses and increase pressure on limited services and amenities.⁴⁹

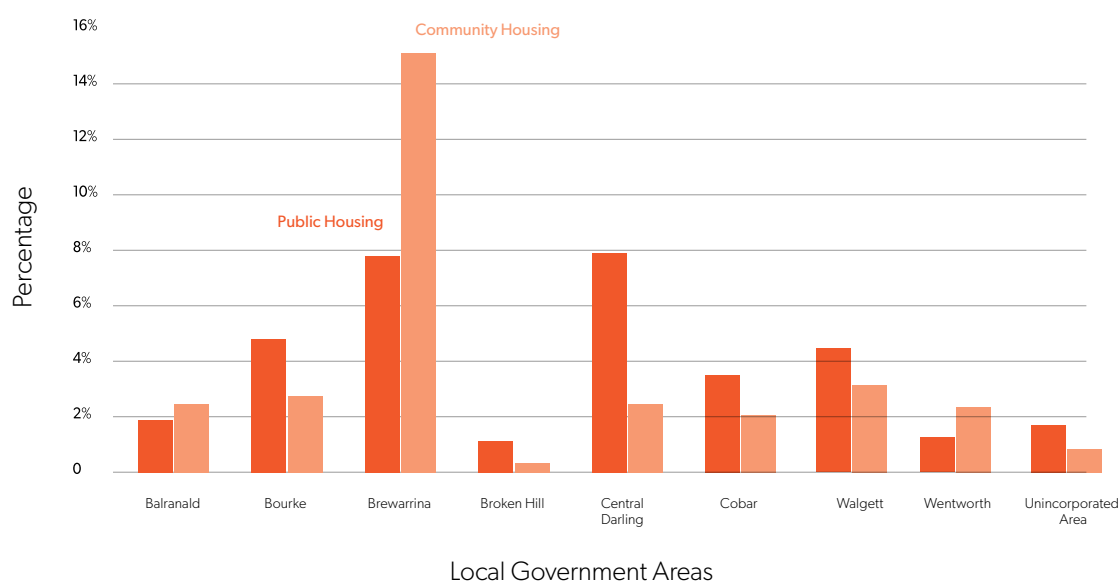
The economic and community benefits of purpose-built accommodation camps (otherwise known as fly-in fly-out or drive-in drive-out) are sometimes reduced when construction labour and materials are sourced from outside the region. The NSW Government will work with councils and other stakeholders to guide the development of temporary mining accommodation.

There is a significant amount of public and community housing in the region. In 2011, in Brewarrina, 15 per cent of the housing stock was community housing and a further 8 per cent was public housing.

Overcrowding has been identified as an issue in some communities, including in Brewarrina where close to 10 per cent of homes were occupied by six or more people in 2011. Overcrowding can lead to social problems and poor health, education and community wellbeing.

The NSW Government has recently announced a new 10-year strategy for social housing, *Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW* (2016). Included in the strategy is the management transfer of government-owned public housing to community housing providers and other non-government organisations. The NSW Department of Family and Community Services and the NSW Aboriginal Housing Office will be required to work closely with mainstream and non-Aboriginal housing providers to maintain access to affordable housing.⁵⁰

Figure 9: **Public and community housing by local government area (2011)**



Actions

- 22.1 Prepare guidelines to help councils plan and manage seasonal and itinerant worker accommodation.
- 22.2 Promote incentives to encourage greater housing affordability, including a greater mix of housing in new release areas.
- 22.3 Prepare planning guidelines for local affordable housing needs in local housing strategies.
- 22.4 Promote a range of housing types and affordable housing options in local housing strategies.
- 22.5 Work with Family and Community Services, including the NSW Land and Housing Corporation, and Aboriginal housing providers, to identify opportunities for social and affordable housing.

Temporary housing villages

Temporary housing has been used to provide short-term accommodation for construction and mining employees during peak demand periods.

Temporary housing villages should avoid duplicating services and facilities available in existing townships. In some circumstances, locating temporary populations on the outskirts of established centres may be preferable, to enable temporary residents to use and contribute positively to facilities that serve the entire community, as well as to better integrate into these communities.

Direction 23: Manage rural residential development

Demand for rural residential development is driven by a desire for a semi-rural lifestyle, and a larger block of land (lots generally range between 2,000 square metres and 21 hectares) than is generally available in urban areas. Demand for rural residential living is higher in areas close to waterways, such as the Murray and Darling rivers.

The cumulative impact of inappropriate rural residential development can impact on the viability of current and future agricultural activities. Managing this type of development will become increasingly important as the regional economy diversifies and as development pressure for this type of housing increases.

When not located appropriately, rural residential development can create conflicts with other land uses such as agriculture or mining. It can result in the loss or alienation of agricultural lands, contribute to social isolation, increase the demand and cost for services, facilities and infrastructure, and harm the environment.

Typically, cost recovery for this type of housing does not occur through rates or developer contributions and extra costs are subsidised by councils and the broader community. The cost of providing and maintaining services and infrastructure for rural residential development must be carefully considered.

Councils need to ensure that proposals for new rural residential developments are supported by a local housing strategy and that they will not result in land use conflicts, or land speculation, or place pressure on the infrastructure and services used by primary producers, and the resources and energy sector.

Actions

- 23.1 Provide opportunities for new rural residential development only where it has been identified in a local housing strategy prepared by council and approved by the Department of Planning and Environment.
- 23.2 Ensure the design of new rural residential areas respects the semi-rural character of the area.
- 23.3 Locate new rural residential areas:
 - in close proximity to existing urban settlements to maximise the efficient use of existing infrastructure and services, including roads, water, sewer and waste services, and social and community infrastructure;
 - to avoid and minimise the potential for land use conflicts with productive, zoned agricultural land and natural resources; and
 - to avoid areas of high environmental, cultural and heritage significance, important agricultural land or areas affected by natural hazards.
- 23.4 Manage land use conflict that can result from cumulative impacts of successive rural residential development decisions.

Direction 24: Create healthy built environments

Good urban design can add to the community's cultural, economic and physical wellbeing by creating safe, healthy and socially inclusive places that meet the different needs of children, young people, families, singles, people with a disability and seniors.

When planning and redeveloping town centres, design and environmental considerations should be incorporated into the decision-making process. These considerations include pedestrian movement, vegetation and infrastructure for public spaces. New and existing development in the region should be designed to provide opportunities for walking and cycling, where appropriate.

Councils need to promote water sensitive urban design techniques to improve water use planning and supply, and water security. Wastewater can be re-used on parks, gardens and reserves, or to supplement agricultural uses. The Far West can become a leader in applying water sensitive design techniques.

Urban design guidelines are commonly developed with a metropolitan focus and are not applicable to regional and rural environments. Developing regional urban design guidelines will help councils when they are preparing their local plans and development control plans to respond to the climate and water security challenges within the region.

Actions

- 24.1 Develop regional urban design guidelines to create healthy built environments that reflect water and climate sensitive development, and which can be used to guide local decision-making.
- 24.2 Enhance the quality of neighbourhoods by providing and promoting accessible, adaptable and well-connected open spaces that support physical activity, including recreational walking and cycling networks, in the design of new communities.



Direction 25: Protect cultural heritage

The region's rich Aboriginal and European cultural heritage is integral to the identity and character of the Far West. Aboriginal cultural heritage includes places and items that are of significance to Aboriginal people because of their traditions, observances, lore, customs, beliefs and history. It relates to the connection and sense of belonging that Aboriginal people have with the landscape and each other.

Within the region, 11 Aboriginal places are protected under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* and 29 listed in the NSW State Heritage Register.⁵¹ Sites of cultural importance to the Aboriginal community must be recognised and appropriately managed.

Harm to Aboriginal objects and places, or areas of significance to Aboriginal people, should be avoided. Heritage is irreplaceable and should be appreciated, valued and protected for the benefit of current and future generations. Appropriate heritage management mechanisms must be implemented in consultation with the Aboriginal community.

Many buildings from the early settlement of towns are heritage-listed and include religious buildings, institutional buildings and railway stations. The entire town of Broken Hill is on the National Heritage List for its significant role in Australia's mining industry and national development, and the planning, design and landscaping of the town, as well as its iconic isolation in the desert.⁵²

Development can have a cumulative impact on both Aboriginal cultural heritage values and historic places. Protecting and preserving heritage at the strategic planning stage will provide greater certainty for all stakeholders in the development assessment process.

Council strategies and local plans should be consistent with heritage legislation, including:

- directions issued under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*; for example, local planning direction 2.3 Heritage Conservation;

- the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* (and any outcomes from the NSW Government's Aboriginal cultural heritage reforms); and
- guides and principles for heritage protection, released by the NSW Heritage Council.

Other priorities for councils when preparing local planning controls include:

- developing cultural heritage studies to prioritise proposed development in consultation with the NSW Government;
- conducting ongoing consultation with the community, including the Aboriginal community, to identify and protect places of significance;
- acknowledging cultural heritage assets, where appropriate, as a 'value addition' in development, including the adaptive re-use of heritage resources; and
- avoiding impacts to heritage, particularly rare examples of cultural heritage such as scarred (modified) trees, rock engravings, stone arrangements, rock art, fish traps and burials.

Communities can adaptively re-use heritage items to leverage tourism opportunities. Better promotion and targeted community education initiatives may help to increase community support for adaptive re-use, and managing and protecting heritage assets.

Actions

- 25.1 Support councils to undertake and implement heritage studies, including regional Aboriginal cultural heritage studies in consultation with Aboriginal communities, to inform local land use strategies.
- 25.2 Consult with Aboriginal people and the broader community to identify heritage values at the strategic planning stage for new developments.



Above and Right: Historic Woolshed, Kinchega National Park, courtesy of Broken Hill City Council



- 25.3 Investigate opportunities to increase the protection of heritage items and the revitalisation of main streets and town centres, through community education and development incentives in local plans.
- 25.4 Recognise and conserve heritage assets that have Aboriginal or European cultural significance, by including appropriate heritage provisions in local plans and consulting with Indigenous communities.
- 25.5 Provide resources to obtain heritage advice to inform planning processes.

Direction 26: Enhance planning between cross-border communities

A number of the region's settlements are located along the Murray River, with neighbouring settlements located across the river in Victoria (for example, Wentworth and Mildura, and Balranald and Swan Hill). These communities are subject to different laws, policies and service delivery models to neighbouring Victorian settlements. This in turn influences their role, function, lifestyle options, and competition for housing, employment and investment.

People often move between settlements in these communities, with some people working in NSW and living in Victoria and others working in Victoria and accessing services in NSW. Infrastructure networks, including road and rail bridges and ferry crossings, are critical for facilitating these relationships and cross-border flows.

The Cross-Border Commissioner was appointed in 2014 to address cross-border issues facing communities, businesses and organisations that live, work and operate in NSW. The *Business Plan 2015–2018 NSW Cross-Border Commissioner* identifies the strategic direction for the NSW Cross-Border Commissioner. The business plan aims to resolve legislative, regulatory and policy impediments to business, economic and social development, for the benefit of cross-border communities.

Councils will need to consider cross-border strategies, including land use, infrastructure and tourism, when planning for the region.

There is a strong relationship between the demand and supply of land and housing for both NSW and Victorian Murray River councils, as they both operate within the same housing market. This relationship affects infrastructure and servicing for both jurisdictions. Matching investment incentives between the states can produce complementary development outcomes in cross-border settlements.

Actions

- 26.1 Work with cross-border councils to investigate:
 - barriers to, and enablers of, economic, housing and jobs growth;
 - service delivery models; and
 - infrastructure delivery, including transport infrastructure.
- 26.2 Work with the Victorian Government and adjoining Victorian councils to develop a cross-border land and housing monitor.
- 26.3 Investigate opportunities to standardise development standards in NSW and Victoria, focusing on seniors and affordable housing developments.
- 26.4 Work with the Victorian Government to make travel across the NSW–Victorian border easier and more convenient.
- 26.5 Consider cross-border strategies, including land use, infrastructure and tourism, when planning for the region.



Local Government Narratives

Local Government Narratives have been prepared for the region's eastern, western and southern areas that identify:

- priorities that will guide plan implementation;
- population, housing and employment information; and
- strategic aspirations and opportunities for centres and economic opportunities.

The NSW Government will assist councils to translate these priorities into local plans.

The region's east – the gateway to outback NSW

The eastern area comprises Bourke, Brewarrina, Cobar and Walgett local government areas.

The region's east is known as the gateway to outback NSW and is recognised for its productive and diverse agriculture and mining sectors.

It is home to approximately 34 per cent of the population of the Far West – and Cobar is the largest local centre in the district, providing services to surrounding local government areas. Local centres collectively provide business, office, retail, health, education, arts, culture, recreation and entertainment uses, which support the needs of smaller settlements across the area. The region's east also has a strong cross-regional relationship with the Central West and Orana, and residents access higher-order health, education, retail, commercial and transport services in Dubbo.

The area is traversed by major transport and freight links, including the Kamilaroi, Mitchell, Castlereagh, Gwydir and Barrier highways and Kidman Way, which provide strong links to Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane. Cobar also provides a regular airline passenger service to Dubbo, with connecting flights to Sydney.

The economy of the area is underpinned by mining and agriculture, with significant mineral deposits in Cobar (including gold, copper, lead and zinc), opal mining in Lightning Ridge, and diverse broadacre cropping and grazing. Local centres provide ancillary service industries to support agriculture and mining. Tourism also supports the economy with diverse and unique tourist attractions, including the National Heritage-listed Brewarrina Aboriginal Fish Traps, Old Barwon Bridge, Culgoa National Park, Aboriginal Cultural Centre, Back O' Bourke Exhibition Centre and Gundabooka National Park, as well as mining tourism in Cobar, boat trips on the Darling River and outback tourist routes – including via Cobar as a stopover destination.

There are diverse landscapes and environmental features, from fertile black soil plains that support productive agriculture around Walgett, to semi-arid rangelands and desert areas, major river systems such as the Macquarie, Castlereagh, Barwon and Darling rivers, and associated flood plain areas and tributaries.

The traditional owners of this land are the Wiradjuri, Wailwan, Kamilaroi, Muruwari, Barranbinja, Wongaibon, Gunu and Barundji people,⁵³ who maintain a strong and proud connection to country, which is celebrated through a variety of cultural heritage sites and experiences.

Priorities

- Support the growth and diversification of agribusiness.
- Support the establishment of value-added manufacturing industries.
- Grow Cobar as a service hub for the region's east.
- Capture economic benefits from mining.
- Promote tourism opportunities.
- Sustainably manage water resources, including the Macquarie, Castlereagh, Barwon and Darling rivers.

- Build community resilience to population and demographic change.
- Resolve skilled worker shortages.
- Build resilience to climate change and natural hazards.
- Capitalise on key freight corridors, including the Kamilaroi, Mitchell, Castlereagh, Gwydir and Barrier highways and Kidman Way.

Centres and employment

- **Local centres:** Bourke, Brewarrina, Cobar and Walgett.
- **Main economic drivers:** Agriculture, agribusiness, mining and tourism.

Priorities:

- Support industrial land development in local centres for ancillary service industries to agricultural and mining sectors, and to protect industrial areas from incompatible land uses.
- Reinforce existing centres as the primary locations for retail and commercial activities, including revitalisation of main street areas.
- Support the delivery of increased housing choice, including seniors housing, aged care, and social and affordable housing.
- Appropriately locate future rural residential development.
- Support the continued provision of health and education services.
- Support improvements to public and community transport services to connect smaller towns and villages to local centres, and to connect the area to Dubbo for access to higher-order services.
- Identify opportunities to expand tourism opportunities and enhance visitor experiences.
- Improve telecommunications to support business activities and service delivery such as e-health and education services.

Economic opportunities

Priorities:

- Establish kangaroo meat harvesting facilities.
- Promote value-added manufacturing in Walgett and Brewarrina.
- Establish new mining operations in areas of mineral potential.
- Develop renewable energy industries, including solar.
- Expand tourism opportunities and experiences.
- Establish new businesses linked to improvements in telecommunication services.
- Establish a freight and logistics hub in Cobar.

The region's west – the vast outback NSW

The western area comprises the Broken Hill and Central Darling local government areas and the Unincorporated Area.

The western area is well known for its mining heritage as the birthplace of the world's largest mining company.

The area is home to approximately 46 per cent of the population of the Far West. Most people (85 per cent) live in the strategic centre of Broken Hill, which is the largest centre in the Far West. Broken Hill and Wilcannia collectively provide services including business, office and retail uses, with arts, culture, recreation and entertainment uses that support the needs of smaller settlements. A strong cross-border relationship exists with Adelaide and a cross-regional relationship with Dubbo to access higher-order health, education, retail, commercial and transport services.

The Unincorporated Area covers around 40 per cent of the Far West region and surrounds, but does not include Broken Hill. It comprises predominantly pastoral leaseholdings and includes a number of small, dispersed settlements such as Silverton, Tibooburra and Milparinka.

The major transport and freight links include the Barrier, Silver City and Cobb highways and the Sydney to Adelaide rail route, which provide good links to Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. Broken Hill also provides a regular airline passenger service to Dubbo, with connecting flights to Sydney. Broken Hill is also the headquarters of the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

The economy of the area is underpinned by mining, agriculture, tourism and renewable energy, with significant mineral deposits around Broken Hill (including iron ore, zinc, lead, cobalt and mineral sands), and meat and wool production. Broken Hill and Wilcannia provide ancillary service industries to support agriculture and mining in the area.

Tourism also supports the economy, with diverse and unique tourist attractions including the National Heritage-listed Broken Hill, a range of historic mining and European heritage sites, Aboriginal heritage sites, Mutawintji and Kinchega national parks, Menindee Lakes, art and film production sites at Silverton, and outback tourist routes to Cameron Corner and the Darling River Run. Opportunities for capitalising on arts and culture-related tourism are significant. The area has an emerging renewable energy sector, with some of the highest levels of solar radiation in NSW and a 53 MW solar farm operating to the south-west of Broken Hill.

Broken Hill has experienced water security issues over many years, and a 270-kilometre pipeline will be constructed from the Murray River to Broken Hill to secure long-term water supplies. This infrastructure will open up opportunities for new development and new industries.

The area has diverse landscapes and environmental features, arid and semi-arid desert areas, inland freshwater lake systems at Menindee, and the Darling River and associated floodplain areas and tributaries.

The traditional owners of this land are the Barundji, Karenggapa, Wadilgali, Malyangaba, Bandjigalia, Wandjiwalgu, Wiljali, Danggali, Barkindji, Barindji and Wongaibon people,⁵⁴ who maintain a strong and proud connection to country, which is celebrated through a variety of cultural heritage sites and experiences.

Priorities

- Support Broken Hill as a service centre for the wider Far West region.
- Capture economic benefits from mining.
- Support the growth of renewable energy industries.
- Support the growth and diversification of agribusiness and irrigated agricultural areas.
- Support the establishment of value-added manufacturing industries.
- Promote tourism opportunities.
- Sustainably manage water resources, including the Darling River.
- Build community resilience to population and demographic change.
- Resolve skilled worker shortages.
- Build resilience to climate change and natural hazards.
- Capitalise on key freight corridors, including the Barrier, Silver City and Cobb highways and the Sydney to Adelaide rail route.

Centres and employment

- **Strategic centre:** Broken Hill.
- **Local centres:** Wilcannia. (Cobar, in the region's eastern area, is also a local centre servicing the region's western area.)
- **Main economic drivers:** Mining, agriculture, tourism and renewable energy.

Priorities:

- Support industrial land development and protect industrial areas from incompatible land uses.

- Reinforce existing centres and commercial precincts as the primary locations for retail and commercial activities, including the revitalisation of main street areas.
- Identify opportunities to expand tourism and enhance visitor experiences.
- Support the delivery of increased housing choice, including seniors housing, aged care, and social and affordable housing.
- Appropriately locate future rural residential development.
- Support the continued provision of health and education services.
- Support improvements to public and community transport services to connect smaller towns and villages to local centres, and to connect the area to Dubbo, Sydney and Adelaide to access higher-order services.
- Improve telecommunications to support business activities and service delivery such as e-health and education services.

Economic opportunities

Priorities:

- Establish new mining operations in areas of mineral potential.
- Develop renewable energy industries, including solar.
- Expand tourism opportunities and experiences.
- Establish new businesses linked to improvements in telecommunication services.
- Establish new industries following improvements to water security from the Murray River to Broken Hill pipeline.

The region's south – the meeting point of the Murray and Darling rivers

The southern area comprises the Balranald and Wentworth local government areas.

The area is well known for its diverse agriculture, strong connections to the nationally significant Murray River and connections with Victoria.

The southern area is home to approximately 19 per cent of the population of the Far West – and Wentworth is the largest local centre. Both Wentworth and Balranald collectively provide services including business, office and retail uses, with arts, culture, recreation and entertainment uses that support the needs of smaller settlements. The area also has strong cross-border relationships with Victoria, and accesses higher-order health, education, retail, commercial and transport services in Mildura.

Major transport and freight links include the Silver City and Sturt highways, providing strong links between Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. The neighbouring Victorian settlement of Mildura also provides regular airline passenger services to Sydney, Melbourne, Broken Hill and Adelaide.

The area has a growing and diverse economic base underpinned by agriculture, mining and tourism. It supports irrigated agriculture linked to the Murray and Darling rivers, including horticultural and viticultural industries such as grapes, citrus and nuts, as well as broadacre cropping, meat and wool production, and organic farming. There is an emerging mineral sands mining industry. Products are exported via freight links to ports in Victoria and South Australia.

Tourism also supports the economy, with diverse and unique attractions, including outback tourist routes, Murray and Darling river experiences, food and wine tourism, Mungo National Park – the site of the archaeological remains of Mungo Lady and Mungo Man, the world's oldest human cremations – and Aboriginal cultural heritage sites and experiences.

The area has diverse landscapes and environmental features, from arid and semi-arid desert areas, productive areas of irrigated agriculture, the Murray and Darling rivers and associated floodplain areas and tributaries.

The traditional owners of this land are the Latje Latje, Dadi Dadi, Madi Madi, Yitha Yitha, Kureinji, Barkindji, Barindji and Danggali people,⁵⁵ who maintain a strong and proud connection to country, which is celebrated through a variety of cultural heritage sites and experiences.

Priorities

- Capture economic benefits from mining.
- Support the growth of renewable energy industries.
- Support the growth and diversification of agribusiness.
- Support the establishment of value-added manufacturing industries.
- Promote tourism opportunities.
- Sustainably manage water resources, including the Murray and Darling rivers.
- Build community resilience to population and demographic change.
- Resolve skilled worker shortages.
- Build resilience to climate change and natural hazards.
- Foster strong cross-border networks and connections with neighbouring Victorian settlements, including Mildura.
- Capitalise on key freight corridors, including the Silver City and Sturt highways.

Centres and employment

- **Local centres:** Wentworth and Balranald.
- **Main economic drivers:** Agriculture, mining and tourism.

Priorities:

- Support industrial land development and protect industrial areas from incompatible land uses.

- Reinforce existing centres and commercial precincts as the primary locations for retail and commercial activities, including the revitalisation of main street areas.
- Identify opportunities to expand tourism activities and enhance visitor experiences.
- Support the delivery of increased housing choice, including seniors housing, aged care, and social and affordable housing.
- Appropriately locate future rural residential development.
- Support the continued provision of health and education services.
- Support improvements to public and community transport services to connect smaller towns and villages to local centres, and to connect to Mildura, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide to access higher-order services.
- Improve telecommunications to support business activities and service delivery such as e-health and education services.

Economic opportunities

Priorities:

- Establish new mining operations in areas of mineral potential.
- Diversify agribusiness and capitalise on value-added manufacturing opportunities for agricultural produce.
- Develop renewable energy industries, including solar.
- Expand tourism opportunities and experiences.
- Establish new businesses linked to improvements in telecommunication services.
- Support the growth of irrigated agriculture.



Glossary

Affordable housing

Housing for very low and low-income households where rent or mortgage payments are below 30 per cent of gross household income or the household is eligible to occupy rental accommodation under the National Rental Affordability Scheme.

Agribusiness

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

Agricultural supply chain

Comprises input supply (seed, fertilizers, energy), production, storage, processing, transport, marketing and distribution of agricultural produce.

Biodiversity

‘Biodiversity’ or ‘biological diversity’ describes the variety of life on Earth – the life forms, the different plants, animals and micro-organisms, the genes they contain and the ecosystems they form. It is usually considered at three levels: genetic, species and ecosystem diversity.

Biodiversity offsets

Measures that benefit biodiversity by compensating elsewhere for the adverse impacts of an action, such as clearing for development. Biodiversity offsets work by protecting and managing biodiversity values in one area in exchange for impacts on biodiversity values in another.

Biophysical Strategic Agricultural Lands

Lands with high-quality soil and water resources, capable of sustaining high levels of productivity.

Biosecurity

Biosecurity is the term used to apply to measures that are taken to protect the economy, environment and community from the negative impacts of pests, diseases and weeds.

Central business district

The main cluster of business found within a town or city.

Employment lands

Land zoned for industrial or similar purposes in planning instruments. These are generally lower-density employment areas containing concentrations of businesses involved in manufacturing; transport and warehousing; service and repair trades and industries; integrated enterprises with a mix of administration, production, warehousing, research and development; and urban services and utilities.

Enabling infrastructure

Essential services that are required for a development to occur, such as water supply, energy supply, wastewater systems, stormwater drainage and vehicular access.

Far West region

The local government areas of Balranald, Brewarrina, Bourke, Broken Hill, Central Darling, Cobar, Walgett, Wentworth and the Unincorporated Area.

Gross domestic product (GDP)

A measure of the size of a country’s economy and productivity. GDP is defined as the market value of all final goods and services produced in a country within a given period of time.

Gross regional product (GRP)

A measure of the size of a region’s economy and productivity. Similar to gross domestic product, GRP is defined as the market value of all final goods and services produced in a region within a given period of time.

Household size

The average number of people living in a dwelling in a state, region or locality.

Housing affordability

The term refers broadly to a person's ability to pay for their housing.

Housing choice

The types of housing available to meet the current or future needs of the community. Housing diversity is driven by factors such as the make-up of the population, affordability and lifestyle trends.

Housing density

One of several measures that describe how intensively an urban area is developed. It is normally measured as the number of dwelling units in a given area.

Housing types

Forms of housing, such as single dwellings, boarding houses, dual occupancies, group homes, hostels, multi-dwelling homes, residential flat buildings, secondary dwellings, semi-detached dwellings, seniors housing and shop top housing.

Important agricultural land

The existing or future location of local or regionally important agricultural industries or agricultural resources, mapped using the NSW Department of Primary Industries important agricultural lands methodology.

Infill development

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

Local centres

Local centres provide jobs and services such as shopping, dining, entertainment, health and personal services to meet the daily and weekly needs of the local community.

Local plans

A statutory, spatial plan, typically prepared for a local government area by a council, and endorsed by the Minister for Planning. Through the use of land zoning and other development controls, a local plan is typically the main mechanism for determining the type and amount of development that can occur on each parcel of land in NSW. Local plans are the main planning tool that shape the future of communities and ensure local development is appropriate. They guide planning decisions by local councils.

Strategic Centres

Centres of regional strategic importance. Broken Hill is the only Strategic Centre in the Far West Region.

Sustainability

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



*Mutawintji National Park,
courtesy of Office of Environment and Heritage*



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