



## **Economic Development Plan 2009/10**

### **Executive Summary**

The Plan provides an initial review of the Economic Development activities of Coonamble Shire. It identifies the general objectives of Council's Economic Development Office and a program for 2009/10 and beyond aimed at positively influencing the economic environment across the Shire.

This plan will contribute to the development of Council's 2009/10 Management Plan and reviewed quarterly as part of the management planning process. This Plan will also contribute to the development of the 2009-2012 Management Plan and be reviewed annually.

Key outcomes from this plan include:

1. Identification of Council's key priority areas for economic development across the Shire.
2. Identification of a range of strategies to address these priority areas.

### **Introduction**

Council have had a full-time permanent Economic Development position since 2002. It has now been five years since Council participated in the Sense of Place Program funded by NSW State & Regional Development (2002/03). This program identified key community priorities for Economic Development and resulted in :

- ◆ Business Action Plan,
- ◆ Agricultural Action Plan,
- ◆ Tourism Action Plan and
- ◆ Strategic Plans for the communities of Coonamble, Gulargambone and Quambone.

The Economic Development position was responsible for the implementation of each of these Plans, including the Tourism Action Plan until the creation of a full-time permanent Tourism Development position in 2004. The Tourism Development position is responsible for the implementation of the Tourism Action Plan and shares responsibility with the Economic Development position for implementation of each Community Strategic Plan.

This Plan aims to address each of the priority areas in a concise manner, capturing the key directions and information from the above plans that remain relevant and incomplete in 2009/10. Many of the strategies contained in the above Plans have already been implemented and in other cases the situation has altered, so new directions need to be set. This plan takes from and replaces the Business Action Plan, Agricultural Action Plan and Community Strategic Plans in relation to Economic Development.

Economic Development staff will refer to these former plans, as well as strategies and recommendations from:

- Coonamble Mainstreet Study 2000
- CBD Revitalisation Project 2006
- Abattoir Investment Analysis 2007
- Coonamble Shire Employment Strategy 2006 revised 2008.
- Heritage Management Strategy, 2008.

There is no 'one size fits all' method to generating economic development in a region. Each community will have different opportunities, capabilities and resources that will influence the opportunities it has for economic development. Economic development activity can be just as effective in areas with lower populations with a small amount of resources if they are used in the right way. Given the budgetary constraints currently being experienced by Coonamble Shire Council as a result of the global economic downturn, it is more important than ever that economic development initiatives be well-targeted and cost-effective.

### **Future Vision: Agriculture & Other Industry**

The Agriculture Action Plan (Feb 2004) stated that:

*'The existing agriculture, horticulture and aquaculture operations in the Coonamble Shire show significant diversity and form a solid foundation from which to build further opportunities and projects.'*

Priority Area 1:           ***Strengthen & Diversify the Shire's Industry Base***

### **Future Vision: Business, Employment & Population**

The key objectives of the 2004 Business Action Plan were:

- To retain, strengthen and grow existing businesses within the Shire.
- To attract new businesses to the Shire.
- To encourage residents of the Shire and surrounding region to support local businesses.

This will require having the infrastructure and resources in place to co-ordinate and support business related initiatives. Having viable local businesses is key to local employment generation and to retaining and attracting population.

Priority Area 2:           ***Support & Sustain Local Business, Employment & Population.***

### **Future Vision: Community Capacity Building**

The vision for each community contained in the *Sense of Place* Community Strategic Plans of 2003 were as follows:

*Coonamble is a prosperous regional centre with a vibrant community spirit.*

*Gulgambone is a friendly caring community with purpose  
and direction towards its own prosperity.*

*Quambone – a progressive, caring rural community striving for business  
and environmental growth.*

Economic development aims to deliver positive outcomes for communities in line with their wants, capacity and requirements. It is therefore critically important for Councils. Economic development outcomes are driven by the community's desire to innovate, develop and improve their unique local region and economy.

Economic development has many diverse stakeholders. Stakeholders are individuals, groups of individuals, organisations or political entities with an interest in the outcomes of a project. Stakeholders must be recognised for a project to be successful.

Economic Development requires partnerships. Economic development initiatives require co-ordination and co-operation with stakeholders and other organisations to achieve outcomes. Council's role is not only to initiate partnerships by engaging local groups, but also to be open to engaging in partnerships when invited.

Economic Development requires resources. Typically there is a process that converts a range of raw inputs to a desired output. Inputs typically include labour, land, materials, services, capital, knowledge. Councils currently supply, or have the potential to supply, many of these resources.

Economic development infiltrates all parts of Council.

Most of what a Council does has some impact on the local economic environment. Councils manage and influence the economic assets that deliver important services to local communities. These include roads and footpaths, drainage, water supply and reticulation, waste water reticulation and treatment, waste management, parks, natural areas, productive agricultural land, saleyards, quarry etc. All of these assets and actions influence economic development.

Councils can also influence economic development through processes, plans and engagement with the local area and through their ability to influence those things that drive economic growth. The main way that local government can influence these drivers is through their functions as advocate, facilitator, investigator, planner and service provider for their local community.

Regardless of size, all Councils have the following capabilities and tools available to them to influence economic development:

- Leadership/advocacy
- Corporate/operational plan
- Infrastructure
- Planning scheme
- Local laws/regulations
- Relationships/networks
- Promotion
- Information
- Investment capability
- Incentives

It is the skill and ability of Councils to use available tools and capabilities to leverage additional resources through partnerships, and expand the way they use these resources and external influences, that will ultimately lead to successful economic development initiatives.

Information flow is critical

The success of any activity designed to enhance the local economic environment will be greatly helped by good information flows through the Council hierarchy – from the Mayor to the outside workforce, and across the range of departments and staff – from engineering and planning to customer service and between partner organisations and the local community. Good information flows help business, community, governments and their partners to make well-informed decisions about their economic future.

**Priority Area 3: Economic development is community driven and outcome focused.**

## **Economic Overview/Assessment**

The district has been in the grip of drought from 2002/03 to 2007/08. Due to the reliance on income from agriculture, the drought resulted in a widespread downturn impacting small businesses across the Shire and accelerating the district's population decline and loss of workforce. The forestry industry experienced enforced industry restructure which saw the closure of mills in neighbouring Shires, the departure of staff and contractors based within the Shire, and culminated in the closure in May 2008 of the Shire's largest private employer, Gulargambone Cypress.

At the same time, interest in diversified or intensified agricultural production remains strong. The 10,000 head Coonamble Feedlot was established in 2005/06, followed by a small number of smaller beef cattle feedlots. Interest in and potential for new enterprises based on aquaculture, sheep feedlotting, and intensive horticulture remains unrealised in the local economy. As a counter to the loss of agricultural workforce, independent services to agriculture is one of the few industry sectors showing growth in the Shire in recent years despite extreme pressure of drought. The international focus on Climate Change has also created a raft of potential opportunities for industry across the Shire. Along with activities for farmers to participate in carbon trading, investigations into new crop varieties for biodiesel production, solar power generation, and some areas of waste management/recycling show early promise.

The commercial and retail sector have shown a fair level of resilience but the downturn has resulted in the loss of some key businesses in the Shire. In Coonamble the impact has largely been absorbed by other existing businesses and some new businesses have opened, however, some businesses which impact on the profitability and resilience of other local businesses eg. Auto electrician, remain closed. In Gulargambone, the rate of new business start-ups is low, existing businesses have almost exhausted their capacity to take on additional roles and volunteer community enterprises have had to fill the gaps in service or supply. Long term sustainability is a critical issue for this community. Retail and commercial leakage to larger centres remains a longstanding problem for the shire's businesses, exacerbated by increasing centralisation of government services and rapid growth in internet-based shopping.

There are actions that can be taken to attract new business and assist existing businesses to expand. Among these is addressing the availability of suitable premises and land with appropriate zoning and utilities, improving the visual appeal of the towns and their commercial centres, marketing and providing information on local strengths and opportunities, and supporting businesses in the establishment or growth phases.

The 'liveability' of local communities remains a key factor in retaining and attracting population. There have been some gains in recent years with improvements to community facilities, infrastructure and recreational amenities. Parks, playgrounds, streetscapes, pools, footpaths, halls, sporting and other facilities are key to liveability, along with social and cultural activities and the retention and improvement of services and infrastructure such as health, education, transport, communication and childcare.

Council's role as an advocate and lobbyist is crucial in relation to the latter and as a key financial contributor or sponsor in regards the former. A reduction in standard or capacity in any of these areas disadvantages the existing population and hinders the 'marketability' of the district to new residents. Sadly, Council has been called upon with increasing frequency in recent years to lobby for the reinstatement of key government positions, maintenance of existing infrastructure such as rail lines, or to replace lost services such as air services.

## Strategies/Projects

The table below provides a brief summary of the projects and strategies planned or recommended by the EDO for 2009/10 towards improvement in priority areas:

Key Actions	Strategies/Projects 2009/10	Budget Estimate
Support and assist current business, and Attract and encourage new business.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Information and referrals to business start-ups and expansions.</li> <li>◆ Provide incentives through Business Assistance Fund</li> <li>◆ Pursue improvements to physical infrastructure ie. Rail, power.</li> <li>◆ Update and supply investor briefs for specific sectors/opportunities eg. Abattoir, supermarket</li> <li>◆ Promote identified business/employment opportunities eg. Auto electrician and dentist</li> <li>◆ Support the establishment of a permanent fuel outlet and mechanical repairs business in Gulargambone.</li> <li>◆ Regional Skills Attraction Strategy</li> <li>◆ Employment Circle – VIBE Careers Market/Employment Expo</li> <li>◆ Maintain local business database and distribute relevant information to businesses via newsletter, Shire news, radio and email.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: right;">*</p> <p style="text-align: right;">\$20,000</p> <p style="text-align: center;">See Country Week.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">\$3000</p> <p style="text-align: right;">\$500</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Newsletter \$1500</p>
Expand the local market through promotion and marketing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Promote local business, economic and lifestyle assets and opportunities through a range of media and events to attract new business and residents.</li> <li>- Country Week advertising;</li> <li>- websites;</li> <li>- supply information to events</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: right;">\$3000</p> <p style="text-align: right;">\$1500</p> <p style="text-align: right;">\$500</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Raise the profile of existing businesses</li> <li>- Welcome Pack for New Residents 50@ \$30</li> <li>- Signage at entrance to Buckley Drive industrial precinct</li> <li>- support 'buy local' campaign/s</li> <li>- co-ordinate local participation in regional business awards</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: right;">\$1500</p> <p style="text-align: right;">\$5000</p> <p style="text-align: right;">\$1500</p> <p style="text-align: right;">\$3000</p>
Stimulation through direct investment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expansion of Industrial Precinct</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: right;">\$750,000</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(stage 1 only: \$430,000)</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Support improvements to hard and soft infrastructure that will improve local amenity; attract visitors and encourage spending in local business</li> <li>- Pursue opportunities for local power generation using solar or solar thermal technology</li> <li>- MTM expansion of service area</li> <li>- Wireless community broadband in Coonamble, Gular and Quambone</li> <li>◆ Nickname Hall of Fame – additional portraits 5 @ \$600 (co-funded by Streets Ahead)</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: right;">0</p> <p style="text-align: right;">0</p> <p style="text-align: right;">\$1500</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Survey and cost subdivision of The Meglo to strategic rural/industrial businesses.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: right;">\$10,000</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Promote and manage Local Heritage Fund</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: right;">\$5000</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Heritage Advisor Services</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: right;">\$7500</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Facilitate improvements to the collection and marketing of Coonamble Museum through Museums Advisor (50/50 with Gilgandra Shire)</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: right;">\$3000</p> <p style="text-align: right;">[Match grant from MGA]</p>

	◆ Showground/Rodeo Arena Redevelopment (application submitted to federal government's Strategic Regional Infrastructure Projects)	\$261,070 [Cash \$131,070 Project Mgt/Site Est.: \$130,000]
	◆ Support and assist proponents of new agricultural, horticultural and aquaculture enterprises including sheep feedlot, MPREC bush tucker/intensive horticulture	See Survey & Cost Meglo Subdivision
Utilising natural resources	◆ Support and encourage development opportunities for Bore Baths facility in Coonamble	0
	◆ Promote and support opportunities for value-adding to local produce in partnership with local producers, Dept of Primary Industries, and other stakeholders.	
	◆ Support and promote projects enhancing and marketing local natural assets to encourage business and tourism including Castlereagh River, Warrena Weir, Macquarie Marshes.	
	◆ Encourage rehabilitation and re-use of prime commercial sites that have been contaminated.	
New uses for old facilities	◆ Promote sale of former youth centre and facilitate relocation of current tenants	
	◆ Support restoration and re-use of Coonamble Railway Station precinct	
Building Community Capacity	◆ Co-ordinate business workshops and seminars in partnership with local business, Dept of State & Regional Development and other stakeholders. 2 per year @ \$500	\$1000
	◆ Support strategic business planning for community-owned enterprises eg. Gular RTC	\$500
	◆ Encourage good information flows between Council, existing businesses and community organisations by attending meetings of relevant groups where possible/appropriate	Time and travel
	◆ Assist Councillors and senior staff to advocate on behalf of businesses and communities by providing information and liaison as needed.	Time
	◆ Actively seek to engage community members in economic development activities through existing groups.	Time and Travel
	◆ Participate in regional and other networks and events to support local economic development. Eg. Orana EDO Network, Barwon Darling Alliance, Economic Development Australia	Time and Travel

**See Budget Summary next page.**

**Economic Development Budget Summary 2009/10**

<b>Project/Activity</b>	<b>Vote for 09/10</b>
Business assistance fund	\$20,000
Skills attraction and development	\$5,000
Promote and market local business, lifestyle, tourism assets	\$16,000
Expand industrial precinct – stage 1 only	\$430,000 <sup>1</sup>
Nickname Hall of Fame	\$1,500
The Meglo – survey and cost subdivision	\$10,000
Heritage projects including assistance to local property owners, museum <sup>2</sup> .	\$15,500
Indoor Arena - [Cash \$131,070; In-kind \$130,000] [Note: total project cost \$3,336,418.50]	\$261,070 <sup>3</sup>
Build community capacity	\$1,500
<b>Total estimated vote</b>	<b>\$760,570</b>

Author: Lee O'Connor, March 2009.

References:

'Self Help Module 9: Business and Economic Development, NSW State & Regional Development

'Incorporating Economic Development into Local Government Planning', Queensland Government, Department of State Development & Trade'

Western Council's Sub Regional Land Use Strategy (Draft – February 2009)

Department of Planning Demographic Profile, Coonamble (A), Updated 2/4/08.

Coonamble CBD Revitalisation Program, Final Report, RATIO Consultants, 2006.

Coonamble Business Action Plan, de Greenlaw & Associates, 2004

Coonamble Agriculture Action Plan, R Gordon, 2004

Sense of Place Program, Community Strategic Plans, De Greenlaw & Associates, 2003

Coonamble Main Street Study, Barbara Hickson Architect, 2000

<sup>1</sup> Note: Expression of Interest has been submitted to NSW Government's Local Infrastructure Support Fund.

<sup>2</sup> Museum Advisor position matched by Museums & Galleries Association funding for 2 years. Commenced 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Application has been submitted to Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program – Strategic Projects