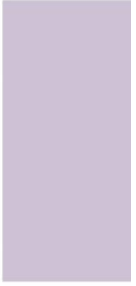
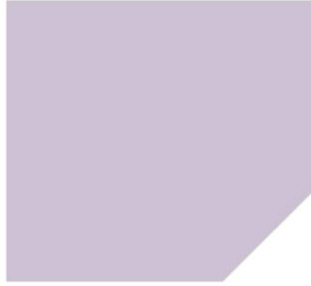
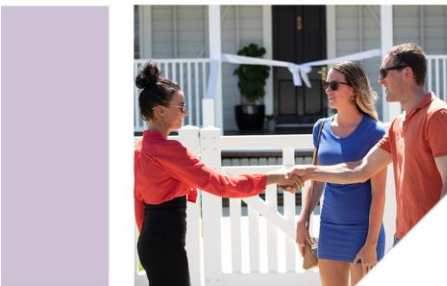
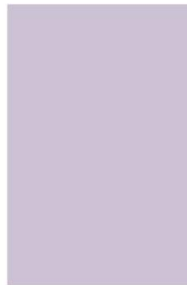


# Connecting Council and Community



## Longreach Regional Council ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHARTER



Delivering  
excellent service



**Longreach  
Regional Council**  
Ilfracombe Isisford Longreach Yaraka



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	3
Part 1 – Strategic Context .....	4
Three pillars of Economic Development .....	4
Council’s Role in Economic Development.....	4
Other Government Stakeholders in Economic Development .....	5
Global Megatrends .....	6
Macroeconomic Challenges .....	6
Climate.....	7
Distance.....	8
Lack of local small business association .....	8
Low competition .....	8
Data Availability.....	9
Council’s Capacity.....	9
Part 2 – The Longreach Region Economy.....	10
Population .....	10
Gross Regional Product .....	10
Industry Mix.....	11
Tourism.....	13
Specialisation.....	15
Part 3 – Opportunities for Economic Development.....	19
Business-driven opportunities .....	20
Community-driven opportunities .....	21
Civic Leadership.....	22
Infrastructure and Services.....	22
Land Use Planning .....	23
Procurement.....	24
Targeted Small Business Supports.....	24
Part 4 – Charter Outcomes .....	25
Outcomes.....	26





## Executive Summary

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The Longreach Regional Council's Economic Development Charter sets forth a framework aimed at fostering sustainable economic growth and improving the quality of life for residents. This Charter is designed to address both longstanding and emerging challenges within the region.

### Strategic Context

The Charter emphasises the distinct roles of the three pillars of economic development: business, community, and government. It highlights the critical contributions of each sector and underscores the importance of their interactions to achieve economic prosperity. The document also describes Council's renewed commitment to supporting small businesses through the Small Business Friendly Charter, recognising the essential role of small enterprises in the local economy.

### Regional Economy

The Longreach region, covering 40,638 square kilometres and home to approximately 3,737 residents, serves as the economic and social hub of Western Queensland. The regional economy is driven by agriculture and tourism, with health care and public administration also being significant employers. The region has shown resilience, rebounding sharply in Gross Regional Product (GRP) from \$259.747 million in 2021 to \$371.098 million in 2023, thanks to a combination of increased tourism and improved agricultural output.

### Strategic Challenges and External Influences

The Charter acknowledges several macroeconomic challenges, including population attraction and retention, housing shortages, and inflationary pressures. It also considers the impact of global megatrends such as urbanisation, globalisation, and demographic shifts on the region's economic landscape.

### Opportunities for Economic Development

The Charter identifies several key opportunities for economic development across three core pillars:

Local businesses are encouraged to reinvest profits, collaborate with each other, and actively participate in enterprise representation to drive regional growth.

The community's purchasing power, liveability, cultural vibrancy, and skill development are highlighted as vital factors for sustaining economic growth.

Council commits to strategic civic leadership, infrastructure and service investments, land use planning, procurement policies favouring local expenditure, and targeted supports for small businesses. These efforts aim to create a conducive environment for economic activity and attract investments.

### Implementation and Collaboration

Effective implementation of the Charter will require collaboration with regional organisations, government agencies, and community groups. The Council's advocacy efforts, regulatory environment, and service-level planning will need to align with the unique needs of the Longreach Region, ensuring that the economic development initiatives are both strategic and feasible.

### Conclusion

The Longreach Regional Council's Economic Development Charter provides a strategic framework aimed at leveraging the region's unique strengths, addressing its challenges, and fostering a resilient and prosperous local economy. By balancing the roles of community, government, and business, the Charter seeks to create a sustainable and thriving economic future for the Longreach region.





## Part 1 – Strategic Context

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Economic development, though lacking a single consistent definition, is generally understood as the process of enhancing the economic capacity of an area to achieve better social and environmental outcomes. Often, the goal of economic development is confused with economic growth. Although the two concepts can coexist, economic development prioritises quality of outcomes, whereas economic growth emphasises quantity.

While there is often a political expediency to the creation of jobs and growth, it is important to not allow these expediences to limit the goals of economic development in a region.

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*“The purpose of local economic development is to build up the capacity of a local area in order to improve its economic future and the quality of life for all. It is a process by which public, business, and non-governmental sector partners work collectively to create better conditions for economic growth and employment generation.” (World Bank, 2006).*

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### Three pillars of Economic Development

Contemporary theory considers the roles of three pillars of economic development – *community*, *government*, and *business* – as all three contribute to economic prosperity.

Business and other market actors are vital to economic development by creating wealth, innovation, and employment. Government, including local government, acts as an economic partner that supports both the community and the market. It provides public goods such as healthcare, education, infrastructure, and transportation, which are essential for a thriving economy. Additionally, government legislation and regulation guide the market towards optimal outcomes while protecting against negative consequences.

Economic development often emphasises the individual actions of government and businesses, overlooking how they interact with the contributions of community and social influences. The complex social components of economic development are frequently neglected. To effectively imagine an area's future investment,

and local prosperity, it is essential to consider insights and energy for change within the community and local businesses.

The three-pillar approach, advocated by Raghuram Rajan (Chief Economist and Director of Research at the International Monetary Fund), aims to restore the balance between these foundational pillars.

### Council's Role in Economic Development

In early 2016, Council appointed SC Lennon and Associates to create an economic development strategy for the region. The strategy, titled *Outback Prosperity 2021*, was adopted in July 2016. The strategy reached the end of its planning window having achieved mixed results. Council faced challenges resourcing the actions, and support for the strategy declined over the planning window. Some of these strategic challenges are discussed later in this charter.

Council has traditionally found it preferable to concentrate on its role supporting economic development in the region through the provision of core business infrastructure and services. Recently, a renewed commitment to considering





the needs of small business was made, with Council signing the Small Business Friendly Charter, administered by the Queensland Small Business Commissioner. This commitment recognises that Council has an important role to play in economic development through its procurement and hiring policies, land use planning and development, community services and regulatory activities.

### **Other Government Stakeholders in Economic Development**

The relationship between Council and its Regional Organisation of Councils (ROC), the Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD), is vital for economic development in the region. RAPAD was formed to help the seven councils of Central West Queensland work together to tackle regional development and economic issues specific to the area. It offers strategic support, advocacy, and promotes sustainable growth and resilience. Similarly, the Western Queensland Alliance of Councils (WQAC) brings together the three Western Queensland ROCs, 24 councils strong, from across Western Queensland to advocate for common interests, coordinate project development, and improve economic outcomes.

In addition to RAPAD and WQAC, other regional agencies play a significant role in the economic development of the Longreach region. Peak bodies, such as the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ), represent the interests of Queensland's local councils at the state and national levels. LGAQ advocates for policy changes, funding, and support that align with the needs of local governments. It provides councils with resources, training, and guidance on best practice.

State and federal departments also play a crucial role in the economic development of the region. These departments provide funding, policy direction, and strategic frameworks that guide local economic initiatives.

There are also many industry and community groups that have a role in economic development in the region. AgForce, for example, represents primary producers and advocates for policies and programs that support sustainable farming practices and economic viability. GroWQ is an initiative launched to promote adoption of advanced and value-added agriculture in Western Queensland, which emphasises innovation, investment, and technology in industry development. The Outback Queensland Tourism Association (OQTA), one of thirteen Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs) in Queensland, focuses on promoting tourism across a large region. Regional Development Australia Central and Western Queensland (RDA-CWQ), based in Rockhampton, coordinates with the commonwealth on funding and industry support.

Lastly, there are numerous government agencies, at the state and commonwealth level, who have a remit to shape economic development in our region. At the state level, the Department of State Development, the Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, and the Department of Premier and Cabinet all have sub-regional staff and resources tasked with coordinating on economic development within our region. There are also state government agencies that provide state-wide support to economic development outcomes such as Trade and Investment Queensland, Queensland Treasury Corporation, Queensland Investment Corporation, Tourism and Events Queensland, to name a few. Federally, the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts administers funding and supports that pertain to the region, and agencies such as AusIndustry have jurisdictional staff and resources tasked with coordinating on economic development within our region.





## Strategic Challenges



### Global Megatrends

Several global megatrends are shaping economies, societies, and environments worldwide. These trends have far-reaching implications and present both challenges and opportunities for regions like ours.

Climate change is a defining challenge of our time, impacting weather patterns, sea levels, and ecosystems globally. Rapid advancements in technology, including artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), big data, and automation, are transforming industries and daily life. These innovations enhance productivity and efficiency but also require significant adaptation in terms of workforce skills, regulatory frameworks, and infrastructure.

The global trend towards urbanisation continues, with more people living in cities than ever before. Changing demographics, including aging populations in developed countries and youth bulges in developing regions, impact economic development and social structures. These shifts affect labour markets, healthcare systems, and social security frameworks, requiring adaptive

strategies to address the needs of diverse age groups.

Despite some recent trends towards protectionism, globalisation continues to influence economic activities worldwide. Global supply chains, trade policies, and international cooperation shape market access and economic opportunities. Economic power continues to shift from traditional Western economies to emerging markets, particularly in Asia. This is manifested in global trade patterns, investment flows, and geopolitical relations.

Globalisation and technological connectivity are also driving significant social and cultural changes. Geopolitical tensions, changes in governance, and shifting alliances all affect global stability and macroeconomic conditions.

### Macroeconomic Challenges

The Longreach region faces several macroeconomic challenges that significantly impact its economic development and overall well-being. These nation-wide challenges manifest locally in unique and profound ways. Key





among these are issues related to attraction and retention, housing, and inflation.

Nationally urbanisation trends and economic centralisation in major cities continue to drive population movements towards urban centres, even considering recent shifts away from capital cities. This trend results in challenges for remote areas in attracting and retaining residents and skilled workers. The allure of better job opportunities, education, and amenities in larger regional centres exacerbates local population decline. Consequently, Longreach experiences an aging population and a shrinking workforce, which hampers local businesses and the delivery of essential services.

Housing challenges in Longreach are also influenced by national economic conditions. High construction costs and logistical difficulties, heightened by the region's remoteness, result in a limited housing supply. National housing market trends, such as rising property prices and increased demand in urban areas, divert investment away from rural and remote regions. This lack of investment exacerbates the housing shortage in Longreach, making it even more difficult to attract and retain a skilled workforce.

National inflation trends, driven by factors such as monetary policy, global supply chain disruptions, and increased demand for goods and services, significantly impact the Longreach region. Being a remote area, Longreach faces additional inflationary pressures due to higher transportation and supply chain costs. These elevated costs translate into higher prices for goods and services locally, straining household budgets and reducing disposable income. For businesses, increased input costs reduce profitability and hinder expansion efforts. These inflation driven impacts also combine to influence the availability of finance, driving less favourable lending conditions in the region, further stifling expansion and reinvestment.

## Climate

The Longreach region, like much of western Queensland, is heavily influenced by the challenges posed by climate variability and the

increasing occurrence of drought. The arid environment, coupled with long periods of little to no rainfall, can place immense pressure on the region's agricultural sector—the traditional cornerstone of the local economy. Drought conditions severely reduce agricultural productivity, affecting yields and livestock numbers. This, in turn, disrupts the broader supply chains that depend on consistent agricultural output, impacting local businesses and the regional economy.

Climate variability further complicates the situation, with unpredictable rainfall patterns making it difficult for farmers and businesses to plan and invest for the future. The uncertainty around water availability forces businesses to make significant adjustments in their operations, leading to increased costs for water security measures such as the construction of dams, bore installations, and the use of water-saving technologies. Additionally, climate-related events such as heatwaves and extreme weather conditions add to operational difficulties, sometimes resulting in loss of livestock and infrastructure damage.

Commodity prices, intrinsically linked to climate conditions, also contribute to the region's economic volatility. During drought periods, reduced supply can drive up prices, while recovery periods can lead to oversupply and subsequent price drops. This fluctuation in commodity prices creates an unstable economic environment, making it difficult for producers to predict revenue streams and for businesses to manage cash flow. For instance, during prolonged droughts, livestock producers may be forced to destock, which can result in temporary spikes in meat prices but long-term losses in herd quality and productivity.

The combined effects of drought, climate variability, and fluctuating commodity prices pose a challenge to the sustainability of the region's economy. In response there has been a major focus on resilience-building initiatives, supporting diversification, investing in water security, and advocating for betterment projects. These efforts are critical to mitigating the economic





impacts of climate challenges and ensuring the long-term viability of the region.

## **Distance**

The region, covering over 40,000 square kilometres, exemplifies the profound challenges posed by distance. Known as the "tyranny of distance," the geographical isolation from major urban centres significantly impacts the fixed costs of doing business. Freight costs, in particular, are elevated due to the extended supply chains necessary to transport goods into the region. Businesses must account for higher transportation costs for both inputs and outputs, which in turn increases the prices of goods and services. These elevated logistics costs also extend to essential services such as utilities and the availability of construction materials, further driving up costs.

Additionally, the insurance industry imposes higher premiums on assets located in remote areas. The lack of nearby service providers for repairs, and the extended response times for claims, exacerbate the perception of risk, driving up insurance costs for businesses and households alike. Similarly, utilities in the region—especially electricity, and telecommunications—face higher operational costs due to the need to extend infrastructure across vast, sparsely populated areas.

These fixed costs, driven by the tyranny of distance, place additional financial pressure on businesses and residents. This, in turn, impacts the region's ability to attract new investment and hampers economic growth. The region must navigate these unique challenges, advocating for strategic interventions that reduce the costs associated with remoteness, such as subsidies, improved transportation networks, and more robust regional support services.

## **Lack of local small business association**

The absence of a Chamber of Commerce or equivalent in the region is negatively impacting local economic development and business operations. Without a Chamber, businesses lack effective advocacy and representation, making it harder to influence policy decisions and secure

favourable conditions. Networking and collaboration opportunities are also limited, leading to a fragmented business community and fewer partnerships.

Businesses miss out on crucial support and resources, such as training and development programs, hindering their growth and sustainability. Community engagement and tourism promotion efforts suffer, reducing the region's visibility and attractiveness to visitors. Without an engaged and active business sector, economic development initiatives may prove inadequate, resulting in missed opportunities for growth and investment.

## **Low competition**

Low competition in a small region like Longreach significantly stifles innovation, affecting the overall economic vitality and development of the area. With fewer competitors, businesses feel less pressure to improve their products, services, or processes. With no need to differentiate themselves to gain a competitive edge, businesses become complacent, leading to stagnation.

Competition fosters a diversity of ideas and approaches as businesses strive to outdo each other. In a low-competition environment, the drive to experiment with new concepts is diminished, resulting in less growth. The motivation to invest in and offer new product is weaker, slowing down growth and commercialisation.

Without competitive pressure, businesses are less compelled to offer better quality or lower prices. This leads to higher costs and lower-quality goods and services for consumers, which in turn reduces the overall attractiveness of the region for both residents and potential investors. New and existing businesses find it challenging to grow and innovate without a competitive environment that rewards risk-taking and innovation. This stifles the entrepreneurial spirit and limits economic development opportunities in the region.

This paradigm also contributes to protectionist attitudes that discourage competition and







growth. It is important for local decision making to strike a balance between supporting traditional businesses and creating an environment in which competition drives both new and existing businesses to innovate.

### **Data Availability**

Extremely low population density in the Longreach region makes accessing specialist data products challenging due to deidentification requirements, which aggregate data to protect individual privacy. This limits access to granular data, reducing the precision and actionability of insights, impairing the ability to identify local trends, allocate resources effectively, and benchmark performance.

Small sample sizes inherently limit statistical significance, increasing variability and errors, making it difficult to draw accurate conclusions and confirm trends. This leads to uncertainty and potential misinterpretation of data patterns. As a result, decision-makers often rely on broader, less relevant information and qualitative data, potentially leading to misguided decisions, inappropriate resource allocation, and ineffective interventions.

Inaccurate or imprecise data from small samples can also impair the evaluation of initiatives, making it challenging to assess outcomes and hinder continuous improvement. High data uncertainty can also lead to more conservative or risk-averse decision-making, stifling innovation and progress.

Furthermore, when data used for decision-making is perceived as unreliable, it can erode community trust, leading to resistance against

initiatives and ineffective community engagement.

### **Council's Capacity**

Council faces its own strategic challenges, particularly in its reliance on external funding and the availability of resources. With a low rate-base and large asset-base, the many internal demands on Council's finite resources are in constant competition with each other.

The professional abilities of local governments vary greatly and are not solely tied to their allocation of resources. This variance is influenced by factors such as the distribution of workload among staff, the ability to attract and retain relevant skills, organisational culture, and the outcomes of strategic decision-making over time.

Council's ability to resource and implement targeted program delivery in Economic Development is currently very limited. Few resources have historically been available for program delivery, with the focus instead on maintaining "business-as-usual" activities related to Economic Development, such as planning and development, advocacy, and policy.

This Economic Development Charter has been prepared with an understanding of these constraints, ensuring that it does not commit Council resources and capacity beyond what can realistically be supported by the current level of commitment within the organisation.





## Part 2 – The Longreach Region Economy

The iconic Longreach Region is defined by the Longreach (R) local government area, situated 700 kilometres from the coast, west of Rockhampton, and covering an area of 40,638 square kilometres. The region encompasses the townships of Ilfracombe, Isisford, Longreach, and Yaraka. It is home to approximately 3,737 people and boasts Outback Queensland’s most progressive and dynamic visitor and service economy, coupled with a high performing agriculture sector.

The Longreach Region is the economic and social hub of Western Queensland. It is a service hub for major government and non-government organisations servicing central and far western Queensland. Longreach is a major administrative and business hub for agriculture and tourism. It has a passenger and freight rail service to Rockhampton and Brisbane, as well as daily air services to Brisbane and bi-weekly service to Townsville. There are also local airstrips at Isisford and Yaraka.

### Population

According to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates, the region is home to 3,737 people. Approximately 3,000 people live in Longreach, about 310 live within the Ilfracombe bounded locality, and 218 people live in the combined Isisford and Yaraka bounded localities.

In the post Covid years, which were characterised by record visitor numbers and improved rainfall, the region has experienced modest population growth following significant declines over a decade long drought.

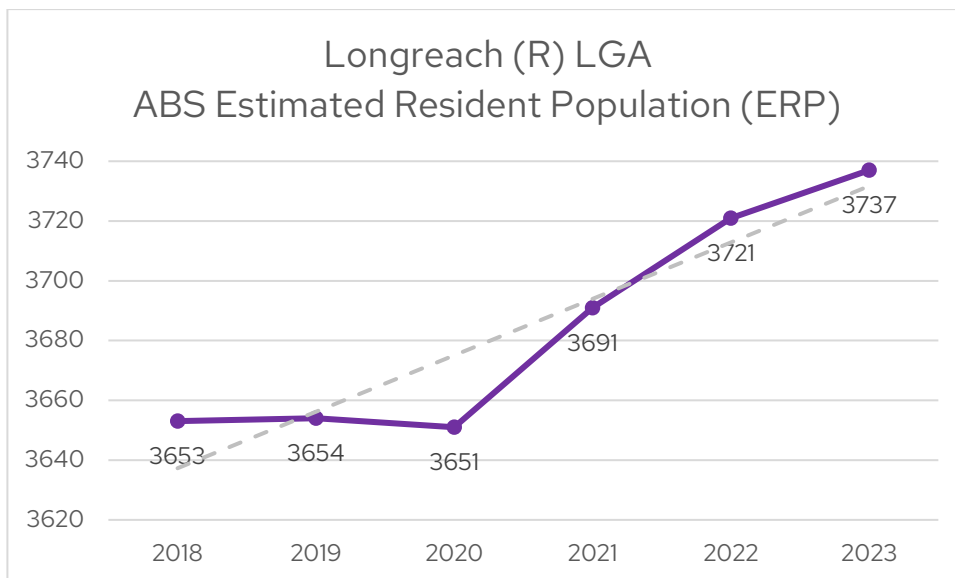


Figure 1 – Source: (ABS/REMPPLAN)

### Gross Regional Product

The region has experienced some fluctuations in its Gross Regional Product (GRP) over the past eight years, as depicted in Figure 1. Declines associated with drought bottomed out in 2017 before steadying 2019, at \$310.333 million. This steadying was interrupted by the global pandemic and associated economic disruptions in 2020, further plummeting to its lowest point of \$259.747 million in 2021.

Encouragingly, the region's economy rebounded sharply in 2022, and this upward trajectory continued into 2023, reaching a peak of \$371.098 million. This recovery is attributable to a combination of record visitor numbers, on the back of international border closures, and a resurgent agricultural sector, on the back of improved rainfall figures.



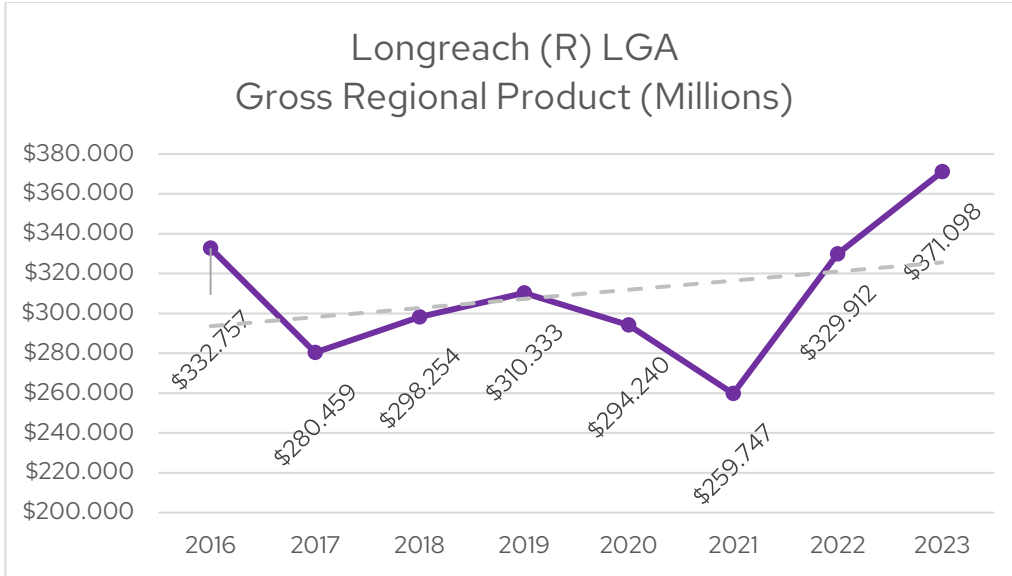


Figure 2 - Source: (ABS/REMPPLAN)

### Industry Mix

Agriculture and Tourism dominate the economy, however the importance of Longreach as a regional service hub is underlined by the prevalence of Health Care, and Public Administration, as the largest and third largest employers respectively.

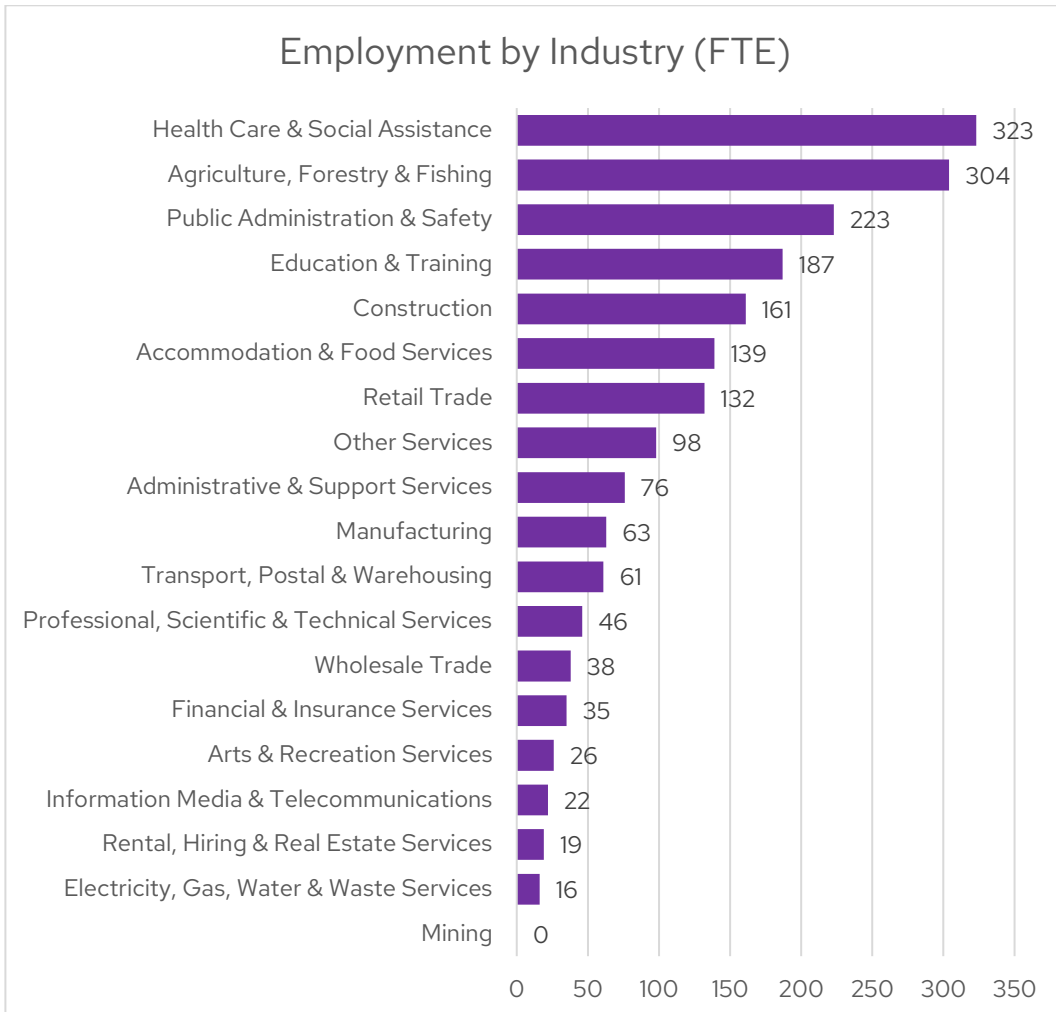


Figure 3 - Source: (ABS/REMPPLAN)





When examining economic output by industry (Figure 4) the importance of agriculture and service industries are reinforced. The Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing sector leads with the highest output at \$132.490 million, highlighting its significant contribution to the economy.

Following closely is the Construction sector, which generates \$102.556 million, reflecting robust public infrastructure development and associated activities. Public Administration & Safety also plays a crucial role, with an output of \$74.452 million, indicating a strong presence of public sector operations.

Other notable sectors include Rental, Hiring & Real Estate Services, with \$58.178 million, and Health Care & Social Assistance, contributing \$54.104 million. These figures suggest active markets in property, rental services, and a substantial investment in health and social services. The Manufacturing sector also shows significant activity with \$50.569 million in output.

Conversely, while other regional areas in Queensland benefit significantly from the

resources industry, Longreach experiences no such advantage. The complete absence of output from the Mining sector means that the region's economy does not benefit from the wealth, jobs, and infrastructure development typically associated with resource extraction. This lack of involvement in the mining industry contrasts sharply with many other regional areas, where the sector is a major economic driver. The absence of these benefits underscores a unique economic challenge, limiting growth opportunities and requiring a reliance on other industries for economic development.

Overall, this data provides a snapshot of the economic landscape, identifying key industries driving economic activity and areas with potential for growth or increased investment. The dominance of sectors like Agriculture and Tourism underscores the importance of these industries, while the presence of significant public sector output indicates strong government involvement in the economy.

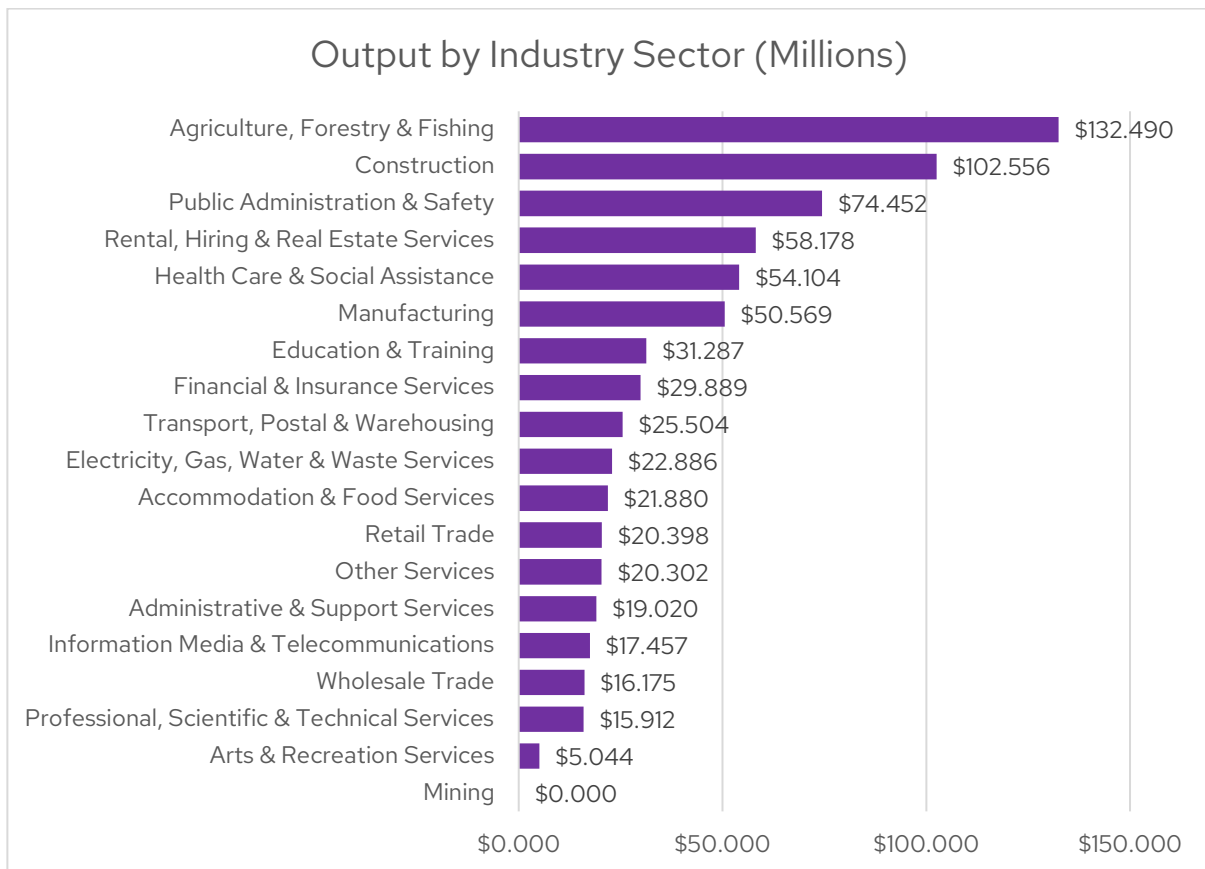


Figure 4 - Source: (ABS/REMPAN)





## Tourism

The significance of the Longreach Region's tourism sector is reflected in the size of the retail trade, arts and recreational services and accommodation and food services sectors, which combined account for more jobs than public administration. However, these industries collectively and in their entirety account for activity other than tourism.



Australia's tourism data is predominately based on the International and National Visitor Surveys (IVS NVS). The smallest geographic level this data goes down to are SA 2 (Statistical Area 2) geographic boundaries. This is a challenge because the data provided through the IVS and NVS does not go down to an LGA level in the Central West Queensland (RAPAD) region. Furthermore, some of the sample sizes used at an SA 2 level are too small to be able to rely on the data with confidence. To better capture the true size and value of tourism in the Central West, RAPAD commissioned a report in 2019 which still

represents the most contemporary and reliable data available.

It indicates that in 2019, Longreach received just over 306,000 total visitors, some 40.7% of all visitation to Central West Queensland. Approximately 149,000 visitors were leisure travellers, 73,000 visitors were business travellers, and just over 46,000 visitors were travellers visiting friends and relatives (VFR). Total visitor spend was \$227.2m, with a majority of it attributable to domestic overnight visitor spend. Only 2% of visitors were international, and 19% were domestic day visitors.



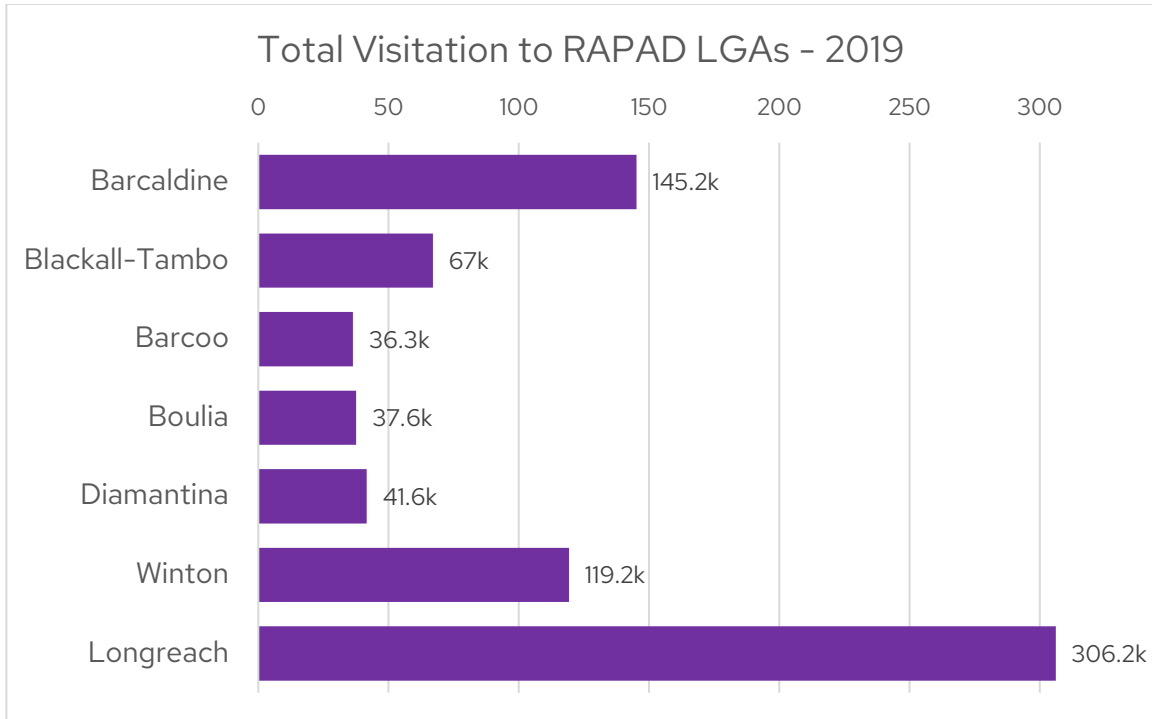


Figure 5 - Source: (Stafford, 2019)

The result of this research underscores the Longreach Region's dominance of the tourism industry in Central West Queensland, and a high degree of specialisation when compared to other neighbouring economies. This is important to consider, as it speaks to the unique trading environment of Longreach as compared to neighbouring centres.

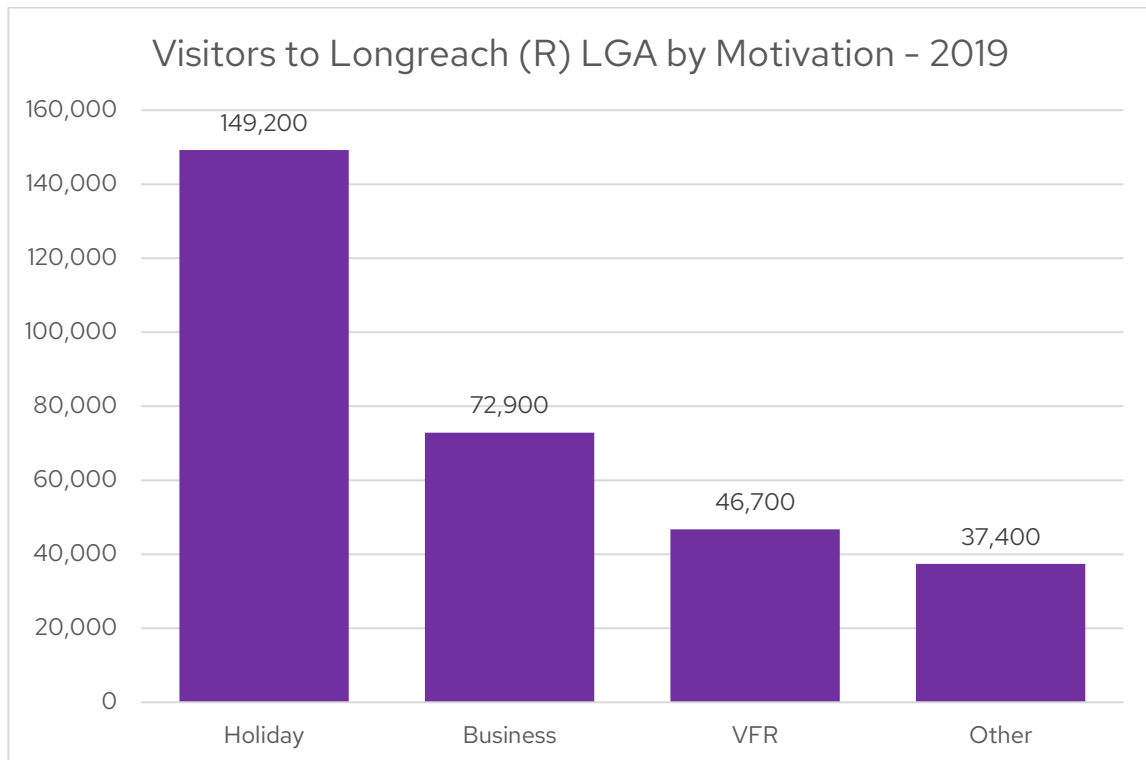


Figure 6- Source: (Stafford, 2019)





## Specialisation

There are many key economic and demographic differences between the Longreach Region and its fellow RAPAD LGAs. These differences speak to specialisation and diversity in the Longreach Region economy that is unique within Central West Queensland.

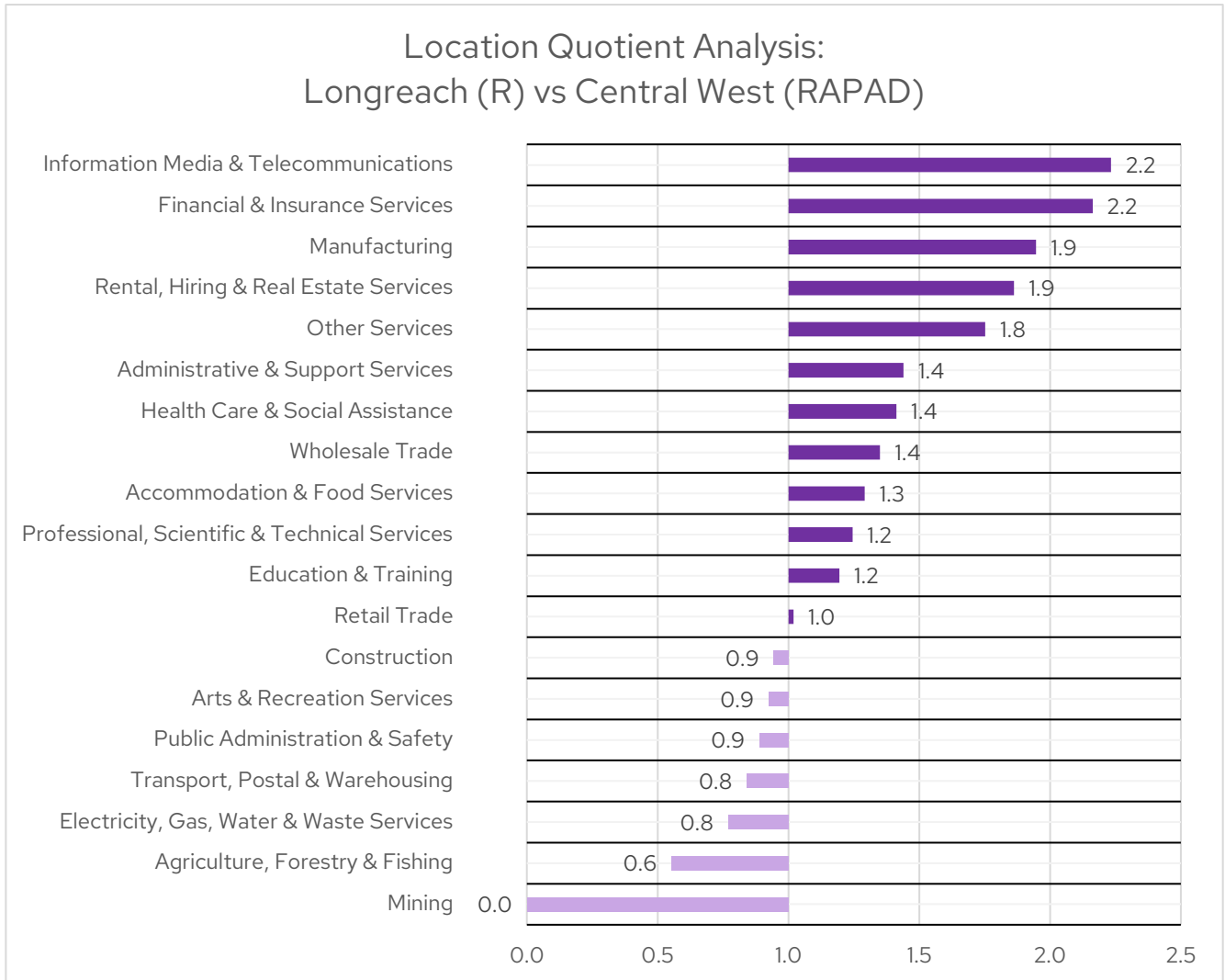


Figure 7 – Source: (REMPPLAN, with analysis by Longreach Regional Council)

The Location Quotient Analysis in Figure 7 highlights the distinct economic specialisations of the region compared to the broader Central West (RAPAD) area. The region demonstrates significant strengths in sectors such as Information Media & Telecommunications, Financial & Insurance Services, and Manufacturing, each with a location quotient of 1.9 or higher, indicating these industries are more concentrated in Longreach than in the surrounding areas. Other sectors such as Rental, Hiring & Real Estate Services, and Health Care & Social Assistance also exhibit higher-than-average specialisation. Conversely, industries like Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing, and Mining have

lower concentrations, reflecting the region’s economic diversity and reduced reliance on traditional resource-based industries. This analysis underscores the region’s unique economic profile, particularly its strength in service-oriented and value-added sectors.

Of notable strength is the manufacturing sector, which is nearly twice as concentrated in Longreach as it is in the surrounding areas. The significance of this industry highlights the region’s ability to produce goods and services that not only meet local demand but also contribute to broader economic output beyond the immediate area.





This specialisation is a vital asset to the local economy, providing stable employment opportunities and fostering innovation in the region. The robust manufacturing sector in Longreach has supported the development of a more diversified economic base, helping to insulate the community from climate variability and market fluctuations. It also underscores the region's potential to develop value-added industries, leveraging its existing capacity in manufacturing to drive growth in adjacent sectors.

The region's strength in manufacturing positions it as a critical player in the Central West, contributing to regional economic resilience and providing opportunities for continued investment and expansion. This sector's prominence suggests that with strategic support and infrastructure development, manufacturing can continue to be a cornerstone of the Longreach economy, supporting both local employment and broader regional economic growth.

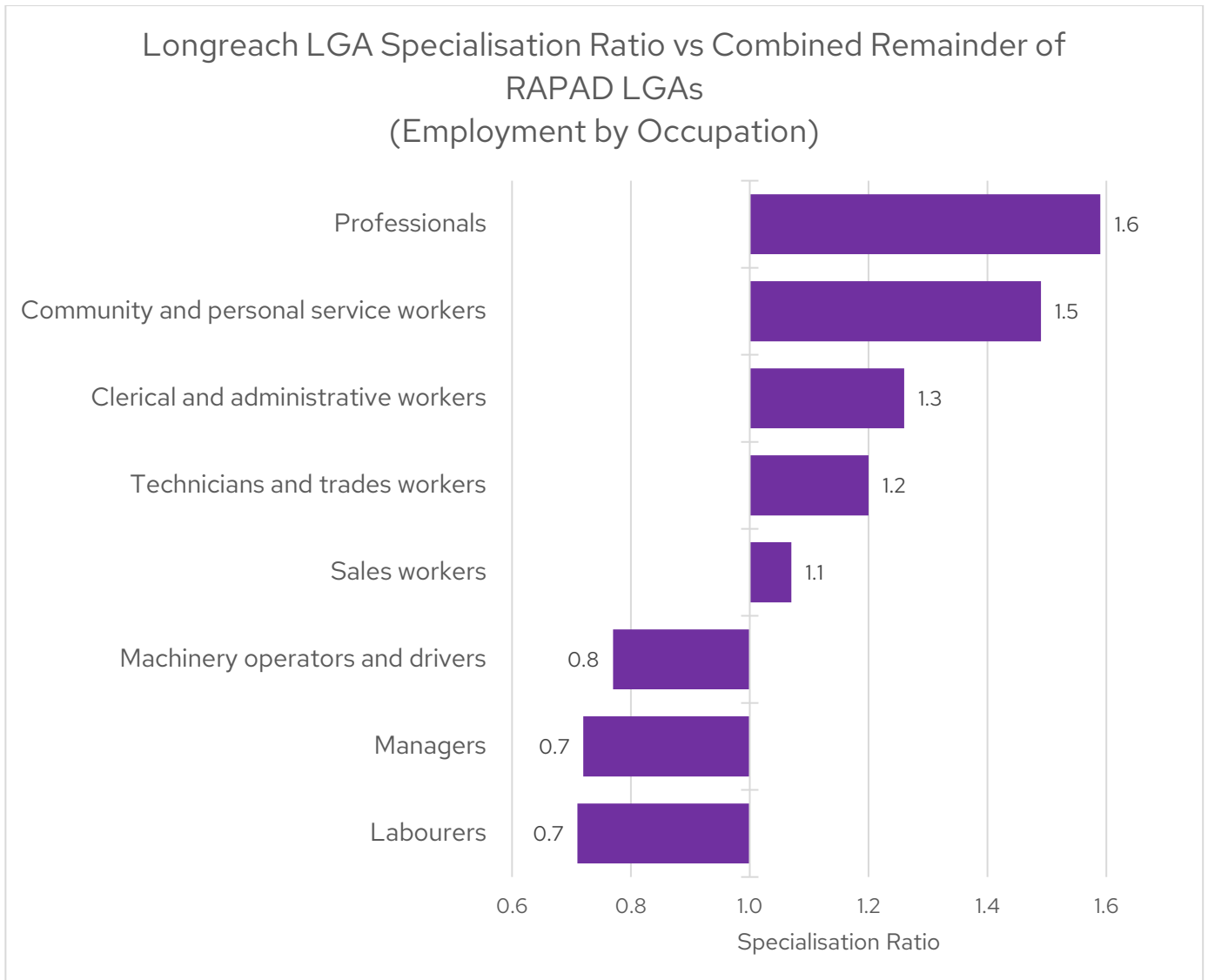


Figure 8- Source: (Queensland Government Statisticians Office)

Longreach shows a higher specialisation ratio in the fields of Professionals, Community and Personal Service Workers, and Clerical and Administrative Workers compared to other RAPAD LGAs. This indicates a stronger presence of skilled and service-oriented occupations in Longreach. Conversely, there is a lower representation of Labourers, and Machinery Operators and Drivers, suggesting that employment in the region is less dominated by manual roles.





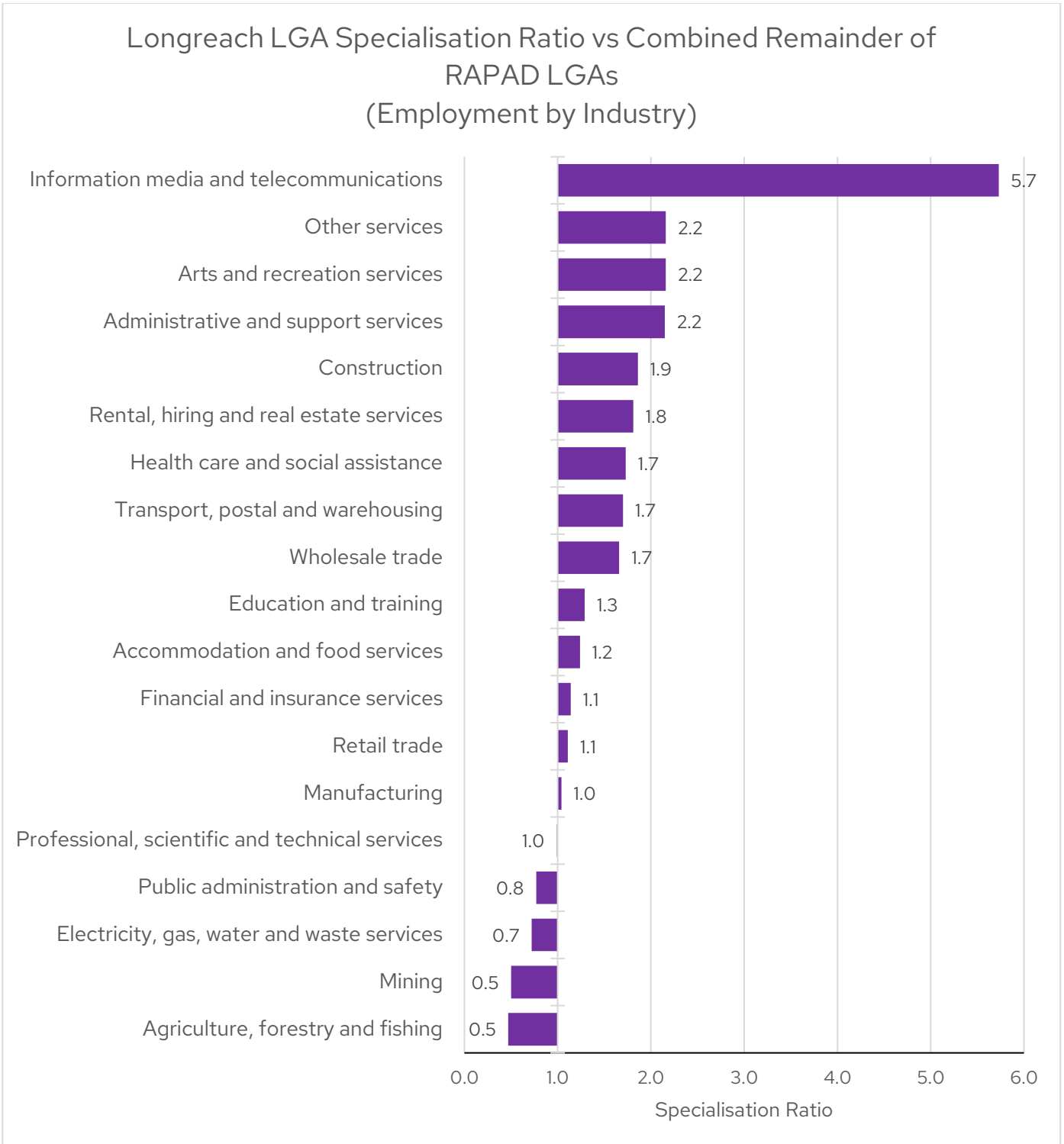


Figure 9 - Source: (Queensland Government Statisticians Office)

In employment by industry, the region stands out in Information Media and Telecommunications, with a specialisation ratio significantly higher than other RAPAD areas. This is attributable to the presence of one newspaper and three regional radio stations in Longreach. Other notable industries with high specialisation include Other Services, Arts and Recreation Services, and Administrative and Support Services. These sectors likely contribute to a diverse economic base in Longreach, contrasting with lower specialisation in traditional sectors like Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, and Mining, indicating these industries are less dominant because the region is more diverse.



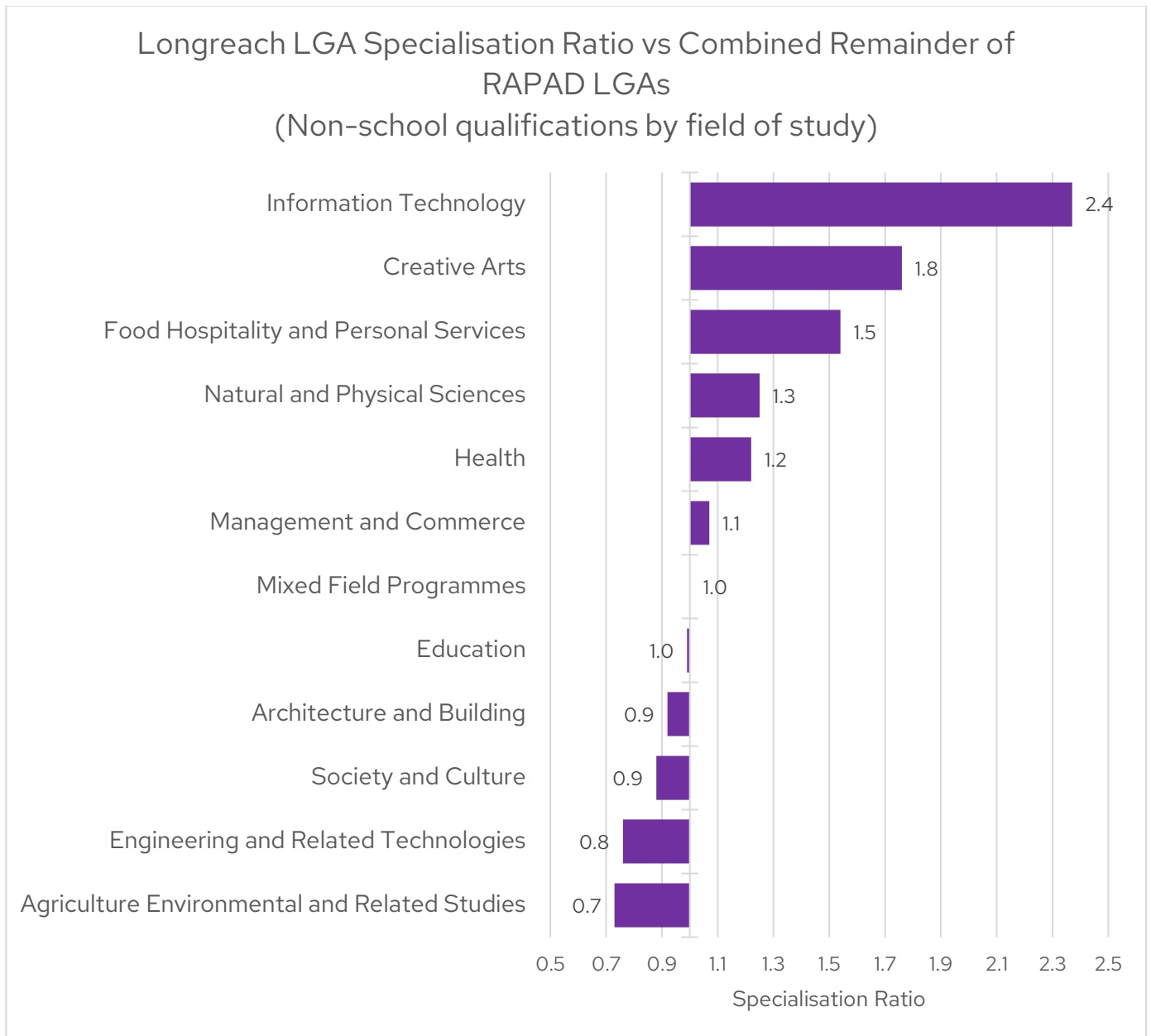


Figure 10 - Source: (Queensland Government Statisticians Office)

Educational qualifications also reveal distinctive trends. There is a notable concentration of qualifications in Information Technology, Creative Arts, and Food Hospitality and Personal Services in Longreach, highlighting a workforce with skills tailored to specific, perhaps more modern and urban-oriented industries. This differs from the broader RAPAD LGAs, where traditional fields are more dominant.

Recognising these differences is crucial for understanding the unique economic and occupational landscape of Longreach compared to its surrounding regions. The approach taken by RAPAD, which often aims to address the broader

needs of the entire region, may not always align with the specific needs and unique potential of the Longreach Region.

This disparity highlights the importance of tailored policies and strategies that consider the Longreach Region's unique strengths in specialised services, while also identifying and developing opportunities in underrepresented sectors. By acknowledging these distinctions, regional planning can be more effectively customised to leverage the Longreach Region's assets, ensuring that the area's specific economic and social needs are met.





## Part 3 – Opportunities for Economic Development

This section will explore opportunities for economic development across three key pillars: Business, Community, and Government. Each represents a vital aspect of the local economy, with unique potential to drive growth and prosperity. It is crucial to acknowledge that while only briefly touching on suggestions for business and community driven opportunities, as well as opportunities driven by other levels of government, this charter will focus specifically on actions for Council that are feasible within the current level of commitment and resources.

By concentrating on practical and achievable measures, the aim is to provide a realistic framework that Council can implement to effectively support and enhance the local economic landscape. This approach ensures that outcomes are not only strategic but grounded in the realities of the existing municipal framework, allowing for steady progress towards economic development outcomes.

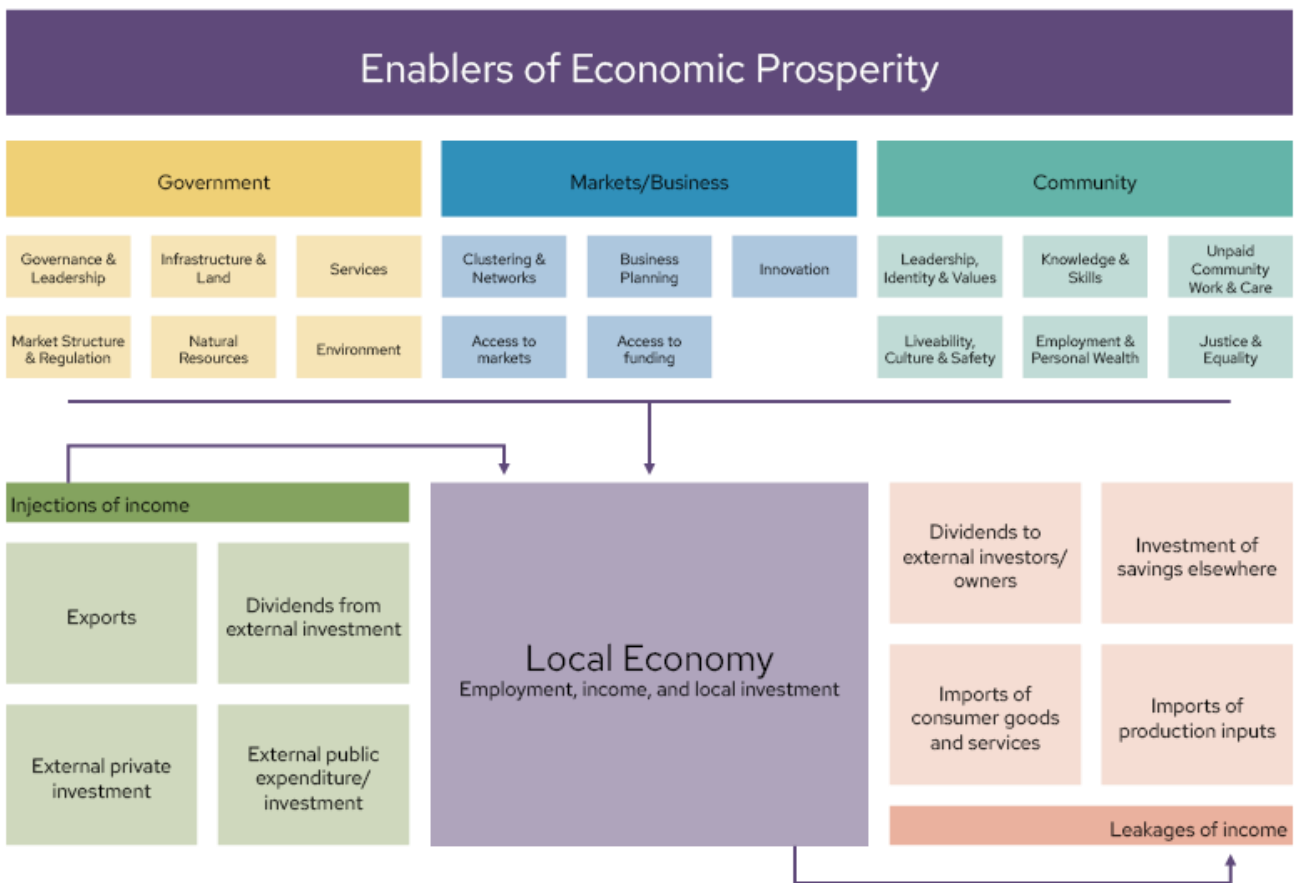


Figure 11 - Source: (SGS Economics & Planning)

Figure 11, above, illustrates the interconnected elements that contribute to the health and growth of the local economy. At the centre of this model is the "Local Economy," which encompasses employment, income, and local investment. Surrounding the local economy are

three primary pillars: Government, Markets/Business, and Community. Each pillar represents a set of enablers that drive economic prosperity. The Government section highlights aspects such as governance and leadership, infrastructure and land, services, market structure





and regulation, natural resources, and environment. These elements establish the foundational support required for a thriving economy, emphasising the importance of strategic leadership, regulatory frameworks, and resource management.

The Markets/Business pillar focuses on factors critical for commercial success and innovation. This includes clustering and networks, business planning, innovation, access to markets, and access to funding. These components are essential for fostering a dynamic business environment where enterprises can collaborate, innovate, and expand their reach. Effective business planning and access to finance are crucial for businesses to grow and contribute to the local economy. Furthermore, access to internal and external markets enables businesses to scale and diversify their operations, thereby enhancing economic stability and growth.

The Community pillar underscores the role of social factors in economic prosperity. Leadership, identity and values, knowledge and skills, unpaid community work and care, liveability, culture and safety, employment and personal wealth, and justice and equality are highlighted as vital contributors. These elements ensure that the community is engaged, skilled, and resilient. A community that values education, equality, and safety provides a robust workforce and a supportive environment for businesses. Moreover, unpaid community work and care reflect the social capital that strengthens community bonds and supports economic activities. Overall, the integration of government policies, business strategies, and community values creates a comprehensive framework that drives sustainable economic development.

### **Business-driven opportunities**

The business community in the Longreach region holds the most significant potential to drive economic development through reinvestment, collaboration, and enterprise representation. To capitalise on these opportunities, local businesses can focus on several key strategies.

Firstly, reinvestment is crucial for sustaining and expanding the local economy. Businesses can reinvest profits into upgrading facilities, enhancing services, or expanding operations. This not only improves the performance of individual businesses but also stimulates competition and commercialisation. Encouraging a culture of reinvestment can lead to a more robust and diversified economic base, reducing reliance on external investment, and increasing buy-in and securing tenure for local businesses.

Secondly, collaboration among businesses can lead to synergistic benefits that are greater than the sum of individual efforts. By working together, businesses can share resources, knowledge, and networks, fostering an environment of mutual support and innovation. For instance, businesses can engage in joint marketing efforts, co-host events, or share logistical resources to reduce costs. Collaborative initiatives, such as local referral programs, can also play a vital role in sharing customer resources and promoting value adding.

Lastly, enterprise representation is an essential aspect of ensuring that the interests and needs of the local business community are adequately voiced and addressed. The absence of a dedicated regional chamber of commerce is a missed opportunity for businesses in the region to actively participate in collective governance and advocacy platforms. Through effective enterprise representation businesses can influence regional processes that affect the economic landscape. Furthermore, it empowers businesses to take charge of their narrative, promoting the region's unique strengths and opportunities to attract investment, customers, and talent.

In summary, the business community in Longreach can significantly impact regional economic development by focusing on reinvestment, fostering collaboration, and taking a proactive approach to enterprise representation. These strategies not only enhance the immediate economic environment but also build a foundation for sustained growth and resilience.





## Community-driven opportunities

The community in the Longreach region plays a vital role in driving economic development through several key avenues: its purchasing power, liveability, culture and safety, and the development of people and skills.

Purchasing power is a critical aspect of economic development, as it directly influences the vitality of local businesses. By choosing to spend their money locally, residents can support small businesses and stimulate the local economy. This can be encouraged through campaigns that promote buying local products and services, highlighting the benefits of keeping money within the community. Local spending not only supports jobs and business growth but also contributes to a stronger and more resilient economy by reducing dependence on external markets.

Liveability, culture, and safety are also significant factors in fostering economic development. A community that is safe, culturally vibrant, and offers a high quality of life attracts new residents, businesses, and tourists. Investing in public spaces, cultural events, and community safety measures enhances the overall appeal of the region. By nurturing a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere, Longreach can become a desirable place to live and visit, boosting local businesses

and attracting talent. Community events, arts, and cultural festivals not only enrich the local lifestyle but also provide economic benefits through tourism and increased local spending.

Finally, the development of people and skills is crucial for sustaining economic growth. A skilled and educated workforce attracts businesses and supports innovation. The community can promote skills development through local community groups, vocational training programs, and partnerships with businesses to provide internships and apprenticeships. Encouraging lifelong learning and professional development helps ensure that the local workforce can meet the evolving demands of the job market. Additionally, initiatives to attract and retain skilled individuals, such as providing attractive living conditions and career opportunities, can help build a robust economic foundation.

In summary, the community's proactive engagement in supporting local businesses, promoting social cohesion, and participation in ongoing social development are all essential components of economic development in the Longreach region. These efforts collectively contribute to creating a thriving, dynamic, and sustainable local economy.

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## Council-driven opportunities

There are many ways in which the core business of Council can contribute to Economic Development. This charter sets out the key levers at Council's disposal, exploring how Civic Leadership, Infrastructure and Services, Land Use Planning, Procurement, and Targeted Small Business Supports can collectively drive economic progress within our community.

Civic Leadership involves setting a clear vision and strategic direction for the region, ensuring cohesive policymaking and regional engagement. Infrastructure and Services are essential to supporting a thriving economy by investing in roads, utilities, and public amenities that enhance the region's attractiveness to businesses and residents. Land Use Planning ensures that

development is sustainable and aligned with community needs, balancing growth with environmental stewardship and quality of life considerations.

Procurement policies can stimulate local economic activity by prioritising local suppliers and contractors, thereby fostering the growth of small and medium enterprises. Targeted Small Business Supports provide tailored assistance to local businesses, helping them overcome challenges, innovate, and expand, which in turn contributes to job creation and economic diversification. By strategically leveraging these five areas, Council can effectively drive economic development and build a robust, sustainable future for our community.





## Civic Leadership

Leadership and advocacy are vital roles of local government, enabling them to develop, communicate, and implement a long-term vision for the region's future. The Longreach Region's Mayor and Councillors act as the public faces of the region, representing the local community on both regional and national stages. Through strategic leadership and the development of corporate and operational plans, Council articulates a clear vision for sustainable growth and development.

A key aspect of Council's leadership involves creating and progressing advocacy agendas that address the specific needs and opportunities of the community. This includes collaborating closely with political representatives and bureaucrats from other levels of government to secure external funding, deliver jointly funded projects, and undertake strategic initiatives that align with the region's goals. For instance, Mayor Rayner's role as Chair of RAPAD exemplifies how Council leadership can leverage regional organisations to form cohesive advocacy platforms, effectively engaging with higher levels of government to advance the region's interests.

Partnerships with regional organisations and other levels of government are crucial for Council's advocacy efforts. By contributing to regional groups and participating in joint projects, Council can pool resources and present a unified voice that amplifies the region's needs and priorities. These collaborations often involve joint submissions, reports, and representations, which are critical for securing support and investment from external stakeholders.

Council regularly engages with other key stakeholders involved in the region's economic development, including industry, business and community groups, and State and Federal elected representatives. Often by working together, these stakeholders can achieve a greater impact than any single entity could accomplish alone.

There exists though, an opportunity to set out an advocacy agenda that represents those interests that are unique to our region and are not likely to

be addressed at the regional organisation level. As we have already established, the Longreach Region has unique economic and social characteristics that set it apart from its neighbours. Similarly, there exists an opportunity to engage the individual communities of the region to develop holistic community plans that capture and articulate their diverse needs.

As the voice of the region, Council's civic leadership plays a pivotal role in influencing economic outcomes locally. Through this civic leadership, Council can lay out a vision for the region that secures a prosperous future for its community.

## Infrastructure and Services

Council is a major investor in the region through its core business infrastructure and services. In turn, these investments in public goods encourage and facilitate private investment in the region.

Longreach Regional Council is the custodian of community assets valued at approximately \$410 million on behalf of the community. In developing service level planning for these assets and services, Council can play a crucial role in fostering and enhancing economic development within the Longreach region. These essential services not only improve the quality of life for residents but also create an attractive environment for businesses and investors.

Libraries are more than just repositories of books; they serve as vital community hubs that provide access to information, technology, and educational resources. By offering free internet access, business resources, and spaces for meetings and workshops, libraries support local entrepreneurs, job seekers, and students. They contribute to workforce development and lifelong learning, which are critical components of a thriving economy.

Childcare facilities are essential for enabling parents to participate fully in the workforce. Access to affordable, high-quality childcare allows parents to pursue employment opportunities, further their education, and engage in entrepreneurial activities without the





burden of securing adequate care for their children. This increases the local labour pool and enhances productivity, which are key drivers of economic growth.

Parks and gardens contribute significantly to the liveability of a region, making it more attractive to residents, tourists, and potential investors. Well-maintained green spaces provide recreational opportunities, improve public health, and enhance the aesthetic appeal of the area, impacting retention and attraction outcomes. These spaces can also host community events, markets, and festivals, which not only boost local commerce but also strengthen community bonds and attract visitors, further stimulating economic activity.

Water and waste management services are fundamental to sustainable development. Reliable water services support liveability and productivity that is essential to realising economic opportunities in the region. Effective waste management practices reduce environmental impact, improve public health, and enhance the region's attractiveness as a place to live and do business. There are also economic opportunities to be explored in managing waste and water, driven by innovations in sustainability and renewable energy.

Public facilities such as community centres, sports complexes, and event venues provide essential spaces for social interaction, recreation, and business activities. These facilities can host conferences, trade shows, and community events that attract visitors and stimulate local spending. Additionally, public facilities that are well-maintained and accessible contribute to the overall quality of life, making the region more appealing to potential residents and investors.

Investing in and maintaining these community assets and services not only improves the standard of living but also creates a supportive environment for economic activity. High-quality infrastructure and services attract businesses by providing the necessary support systems for operations and growth. They also enhance the region's competitiveness by fostering a well-educated, healthy, and engaged workforce.

Council should be mindful of these economic outcomes when undertaking service-level planning for infrastructure and services.

## Land Use Planning

The role of Council in land use planning has a direct impact on economic opportunities within the region. Planning covers a diversity of activities including the approval of individual development applications, high-level strategic planning around precincts and using zoning controls to protect important land uses. The operation of the planning approval system also directly influences the capacity of the region to attract new investment and assure potential investors that projects can be delivered in a timely manner.

The availability of land for a variety of uses is an essential element of the region's potential to attract investment. Commercial and Industrial land in the region is tightly held, and the geography of the region and pattern of development over time have led to constraints in the ability to expand the region's communities. Council has a vital role to play in resolving land tenure issues and securing land for future development, ensuring that its communities are not 'land locked'.

The recent Major Amendment to the Longreach Region Planning Scheme aimed to ensure that the scheme was responsive to contemporary trends. Ongoing consideration of the planning scheme will continue to be essential to Economic Development in the region.

Council's proactive approach to land use planning is fundamental to unlocking economic opportunities in the Longreach region. By efficiently managing the planning process, and securing land for future development, Council can create a conducive environment for investment.





## Procurement

Local councils are major purchasers of goods and services in the economy via extensive procurement programs. In 2023-24 Council spent over \$14.1 million with local businesses, representing 39% of total expenditure.

The value of this spending is significant and provides an opportunity to directly support local businesses, presenting a significant opportunity to ensure that this expenditure and its associated multiplier effects are retained in the region, to provide a boost for jobs, investment, and local businesses.

Many state/territory governments and local councils around Australia have a local preference policy in place to support their local economies. There are a number of benefits from implementing such a policy, including:

- Retaining local government spend (and its expansive multiplier effects) within the local area;
- Supporting local businesses, employers and employees;
- Encouraging businesses to relocate/establish in the area;
- Creating jobs in the local area and helping reduce unemployment;
- Investing in the local community and building local capacity;
- Shorter supply chains, greater predictability of delivery times and lower cost; and
- Increasing Gross Regional Product.

One challenge in implementing a local procurement policy is ensuring that local businesses are aware of the opportunities and have the skills and accreditation to complete the tender process. There is an opportunity for Council to address these issues, alongside regular reviews of the procurement policy, to maximise the local uplift from Council's purchasing power.

## Targeted Small Business Supports

Targeted Small Business Supports, delivered by Council as part of its commitment to the Small Business Friendly Program, can significantly enhance the economic landscape of the Longreach region with a relatively modest investment. By implementing strategic, cost-effective initiatives, Council can incentivise and stimulate the small business community, driving economic growth and resilience.

One effective initiative could be the establishment of a Small Business Grant Program. With a modest allocation of funds, Council can offer micro-grants to local small businesses. These grants can be used to incentivise outcomes that align with regional priorities, such as investments in customer experience and commercialisation. By providing financial support using a co-contribution model, Council can help incentivise re-investment and competitive growth, thereby stimulating local economic activity.

Another potentially impactful initiative would be to convene quarterly networking events that provide the opportunity to share knowledge and expertise. These events could support the delivery of specialist knowledge in essential business skills such as financial management, marketing, digital literacy, and customer service. By partnering with independent experts and government agencies, Council can encourage learning and development in areas that are relevant to the regional economy such as succession planning, investment attraction and commercialisation, divestment and exit strategies, and customer experience.

In summary, with a targeted minor investment, Council can implement a program of supports for small businesses that drive economic development. By incentivising investment, collaboration, and learning, these initiatives help create a robust and dynamic small business sector, essential for the region's economic growth and sustainability.





## Part 4 – Charter Outcomes



The outcomes presented in this section represent the tangible goals that Council is committing to through this Economic Development Charter. These outcomes reflect Council's strategic priorities in contributing to a resilient, diverse, and thriving local economy. By establishing clear benchmarks for civic leadership, infrastructure development, land use planning, procurement practices, and small business support, Council is committed to playing its role in driving economic progress and enhancing the quality of life for all residents.

The outcomes are structured to align with the broader goals outlined in the Charter. They focus on enabling the region to adapt to contemporary

challenges while capitalising on unique local opportunities. This includes improving collaboration across government, business, and community sectors, as well as advocating for the Longreach Region's distinct needs on the regional and national stage. These efforts ensure that economic growth is inclusive, sustainable, and built on a foundation of strategic planning and long-term resilience.

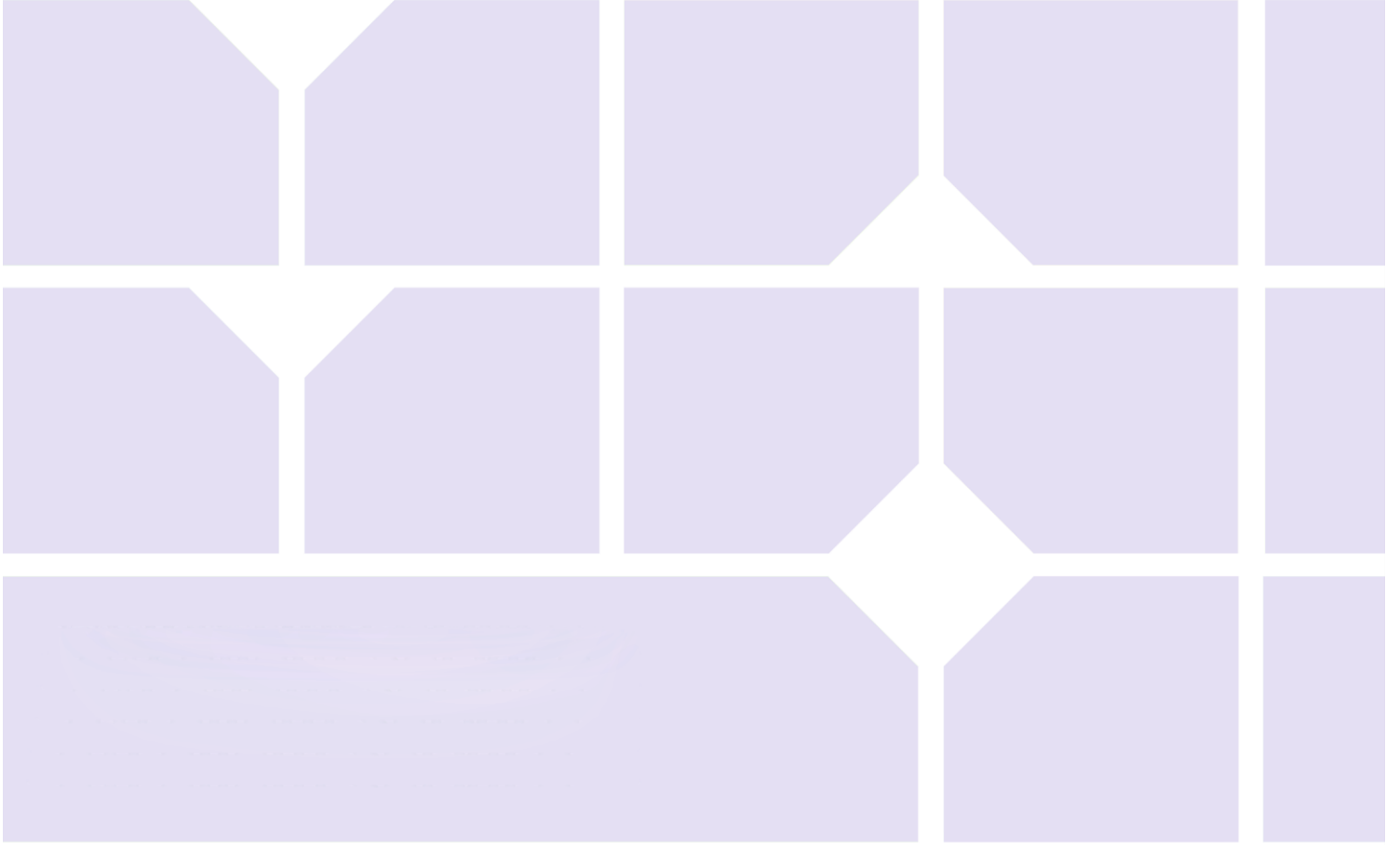
The following table details the specific outcomes under each key focus area, outlining how the Council will deliver on its commitment to economic development and community well-being.

## Outcomes

Longreach Regional Council, in the course of its ongoing operations, will support Economic Development within the Longreach Region in the following ways:

<b>Civic Leadership</b>	
Advocacy Plan	Council's advocacy will address the unique needs of our region as compared to our neighbours.
Community Plan	Council will seek to capture and articulate the unique needs of the Ilfracombe, Isisford, Longreach, and Yaraka communities in a cohesive community plan.
Regional Coordination	Council will continue to play a leadership role in regional coordination with other councils, agencies, and departments.
<b>Infrastructure and Services</b>	
Service-Level Planning	Council will consider ways it can support economic development as part of a holistic approach to service level planning.
Regulatory Environment	Council will review and adjust its regulatory environment to ensure policy settings are fair, competitive, and conducive to business growth.
Social Cohesion	Council will promote social cohesion by supporting community-led initiatives, facilitating inclusive activities, and creating public spaces that encourage interaction and connectivity among residents.
<b>Land Use Planning</b>	
Land Tenure	Council will seek to resolve land tenure and availability issues, ensuring continuity of developable land within the region.
Application Process	Council will seek to ensure the development application process is fair, transparent, and responsive to the needs of businesses and investors.
Planning Scheme	Council will regularly review and update the planning scheme to reflect current and future needs, incentivising sustainable and strategic land use.
<b>Procurement</b>	
Increase local spend	Council will implement policies that prioritise local suppliers and businesses in procurement processes, seeking to increase its proportion of local expenditure.
Doing business with Council	Council will provide clear guidelines, resources, and support to help local businesses navigate the procurement process and secure contracts.
Capacity building	Council will consider ways to support the capabilities of local business through its procurement programs.
<b>Small Business Supports</b>	
Grants	Council will offer targeted grant funding to small business that incentivises re-investment and commercialisation.
Networking	Council will facilitate regular networking events for small business that support learning and development.
Referral to other supports	Council will distribute regular news and information about third-party small business support and initiatives.

*Intentionally Blank*



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