

The background of the cover features a close-up of a book cover with a textured, light brown or tan surface. The cover has a circular embossed design in the lower-left quadrant. To the right, a portion of a teal-colored ceramic bowl is visible. The overall lighting is warm and soft, highlighting the textures of the book and the bowl.

**SOMERSET REGIONAL COUNCIL
ARTS, CULTURE &
HERITAGE PLAN
2023-2028**



Somerset
REGIONAL COUNCIL

OUR REGION

SOMERSET IS A REGION OF VIBRANT VILLAGES, IDENTIFIABLE BY THEIR ARTS AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES, CONNECTED COMMUNITIES AND RICH HISTORIES.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Country on which we meet. Further, we embrace and promote the Somerset region's heritage to incorporate all cultures, their beliefs and aspirations.

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BACKGROUND

THE SOMERSET ARTS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE PLAN 2023-2028 OUTLINES A VISION TO POSITION THE SOMERSET REGION AS A PLACE THAT EMBRACES LOCAL ARTS AND HISTORY AND IS POSITIONED TO BE A DESTINATION OFFERING A COMPLEMENT OF CULTURAL, RECREATIONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVITIES.

The purpose of the Somerset Arts, Culture and Heritage Plan 2023-2028 is:

- to guide the strategic development of the arts, culture and heritage in Somerset
- to support Council's role and responsibilities for arts, culture and heritage and direct its investment in projects, programs, services and infrastructure
- to make transparent Council's strategic direction and have a platform for investment and partnership, including its partnership with the community.

The Plan feeds into the vision of the Somerset Regional Council Corporate Plan 2021-2026 that encapsulates the community's aspirations to live in a prosperous region defined by the quality of its natural environment, the strength of its economy, the wellbeing of its people and its quality lifestyle.

The Somerset region, with its unique identity and proud heritage, is vibrant, cohesive and connected, providing the foundations for a prosperous rural lifestyle.

The Plan complements and works in chorus with related Somerset Regional Council strategies including The Somerset Tourism Strategy 2021-2025, Economic Development Strategy, and The Somerset Region Planning Scheme.

The Somerset Arts, Culture and Heritage Plan 2023-2028 sits as an overarching document that informs and contextualises the individual strategic plans of the Somerset Libraries, Somerset Civic Centre and The Condensery.

In adopting the Arts, Culture and Heritage Plan 2023-2028, Somerset Regional Council commits to:

- inform, seek feedback, and collaborate with the community
- deliver outcomes for the whole of the community that reflect and strengthen social and cultural diversity
- report against clear and measurable performance indicators
- inspire life-long learning, knowledge and connection as a cornerstone of wellbeing and inclusion
- celebrate local stories to enhance a sense of place and community pride
- acknowledge the value investment into arts, culture and heritage makes in achieving the outcomes of its Corporate Plan.

Actions set out in the Somerset Arts, Culture and Heritage Plan 2023-2028 inter relate to create a strategic approach to setting a strong foundation to achieve a more ambitious ten-year vision for Somerset's cultural landscape.

“Engagement in arts and cultural experiences fosters social connection and builds thriving communities.”

The Somerset region, with its unique identity and proud heritage, is vibrant, cohesive and connected, providing the foundations for a prosperous rural lifestyle.



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A RICH AND VIBRANT RURAL REGION

The Somerset region's main townships include Esk, Kilcoy, Fernvale, Lowood and Toogoolawah, which operate as hubs for the region's smaller villages including Linville, Jimna, Harlin, Moore, Coominya, Tarampa, and Minden.

Situated in the south-east corner of Queensland and just one and a quarter hour drive to Brisbane City, Somerset is a rural region bordered by the local government areas of Lockyer Valley, Ipswich City, Brisbane, Moreton Bay, Sunshine Coast, Gympie, South Burnett and Toowoomba. Together this is the fastest growing region of Australia and Queensland Government projects the population of the Somerset region to reach 36,530 by 2036.

The Somerset region takes in the Brisbane and Stanley River catchments with meandering waterways and great lakes. The beautiful natural environment provides for a diverse playground for residents and visitors with tourism a growing industry in the region. Somerset currently receives around 458,000 day-trip visitors and 162,000 domestic overnight visitors per annum.²

Australia's longest rail trail at 161 km long, Brisbane Valley Rail Trail follows the disused Brisbane Valley rail line that commenced construction at Wulkuraka near Ipswich in 1884 and was completed at Yarraman in 1913. It is one of the region's key visitor attractions, drawing visitors to journey Somerset by foot, bicycle and horse through Fernvale, Lowood, Coominya, Esk, Toogoolawah, Moore and Linville, and offering them a means to see into the region's past.

DEFINED BY ITS LOCAL VILLAGES, MOUNTAIN SCENERY, NATIVE FORESTS, WATERWAYS AND RURAL LANDSCAPE, THE SOMERSET REGIONAL COUNCIL AREA COVERS 5,379 SQUARE KILOMETRES WITH A GROWING POPULATION OF APPROXIMATELY 26,000.

The story of Somerset is an engaging one with the region encompassing the lands of Jagera, Ugarapul, Yuggera, Kabi Kabi and Jinibara people. Matthew Flinders was the first European explorer to discover the Brisbane Valley in 1799, followed by John Oxley in 1823 and Allan Cunningham in 1829. This was quickly followed by the first colonial families: the McConnel family (Cressbrook), the Balfour family (Colinton), the North family (Fairney View) and the Mackenzie brothers (Kilcoy), who led the establishment of timber, grazing and dairy industries.

Australia's first condensed milk factory opened in 1898 on the banks of Cressbrook Creek and was first known as the Cressbrook Condensed Milk Factory prior to being purchased by Nestle and Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company of Australasia. The village of Cressbrook grew around the factory and with the arrival of the railway in 1904, the town was expanded and renamed Toogoolawah. After multiple owners and uses, Somerset Regional Council purchased the site in 2013. The remaining building was transformed into a regional art gallery, The Condensery, and opened to the public in late 2015.

Only three years prior, in September 2012, Somerset Regional Council opened the newly built Somerset Civic Centre following the loss of the Esk's community-loved 101 year-old Lyceum Hall through fire. Somerset Civic Centre alongside The Condensery, and Somerset Regional Council's four libraries in Lowood, Esk, Kilcoy and Toogoolawah, are the region's key cultural facilities.

However, the region's arts, culture and heritage offer is far greater than its venues. The true backbone is the region's committed and generous community who volunteer tens of thousands of hours per annum creating, preserving, hosting and celebrating culture and supporting the region's cultural infrastructure. Across Somerset there is a strong offering of artisans and artisan businesses, private galleries, community organisations, historical associations, art societies and progress associations, that together are the region's strength.



A CONSULTATIVE PROCESS

WHILE THE SOMERSET ARTS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE PLAN 2023-2028 IS A KEY MECHANISM IN DRIVING AND MANAGING COUNCIL'S COMMITMENT TO GROWING ARTS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE IN THE REGION, THE WHOLE COMMUNITY OWNS THE PLAN AND IT TAKES THE WHOLE COMMUNITY'S COMMITMENT FOR ARTS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE TO FLOURISH.

In keeping with Somerset Regional Council's Community Engagement Policy, the Somerset Arts, Culture and Heritage Plan 2023-2028 has been developed in consultation with the community and was facilitated by an engaged specialist consultant. In addition to consulting with staff across Council's business areas, the consultation included two Councillor workshops; seven public workshops in five townships; a tour of the region's townships, arts and heritage venues and landmarks; and additional individual meetings to gain a more comprehensive understanding of specific opportunities. In total 85 members of the community engaged in the process in person. In addition, an online survey was conducted to which 132 people responded.

In consulting with the community there were consistent themes drawn from across the region.

The community wants to see:

- investment in local artists and Somerset as a cultural destination
- preservation of local history
- engagement with children and young people
- the identity and character of the region's individual townships preserved and celebrated
- new public buildings to reflect the historic character of their surrounds
- engagement with First Nations peoples and their history and culture to be acknowledged and celebrated
- tourism initiatives to embrace arts and local history and complement recreational and environmental activities.

“ **We need to celebrate what is great about living in Somerset, [create] a sense of pride and a want to contribute to making this area an even better one to live in.** ”⁴



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THE CONTEXT

73% OF QUEENSLANDERS ATTENDED AN ARTS OR CULTURAL EVENT IN AUGUST 2022. 86% PLAN TO ATTEND LOCAL EVENTS, WITH ONLY 14% MAKING PLANS TO ATTEND INTERSTATE.⁵

There is a willingness to travel to destinations beyond capital cities to seek new and authentic experiences, including growing engagement with First Nations arts and craft – diverse expressions of the world’s oldest continuing living culture.⁷

The emotional, mental and social benefits of arts experiences are countless and well documented: from increased understanding of each other, stronger critical thinking skills, mental wellbeing and decreased stress levels; to significant public benefits such as social connection, expression of self and community identity, healthy childhood development and healthy ageing.⁸

Based on a survey responded to by 132 local residents:

- 97% engage in the cultural sector as practitioner, hobbyist or audience member
- 87% feel it is important to have arts and cultural offerings in the Somerset region

- 49% attend an arts and cultural activity on a monthly basis, while 21% attend on a weekly basis
- The most common discipline practiced is visual arts and design followed by writing and music
- The most popular disciplines engaged in as an audience member, are visual arts and design followed by Film, TV and cinema, and museums and history
- 47% of surveyed population say there is a need to embrace and promote First Nations Cultures.
- The top three ways the community values arts and culture are:
 1. Community and social connectedness
 2. Community pride
 3. Tourism and visitor attraction.³

“ **Somerset has a chance to revise its identity and I think arts/culture should be a big part of this.** ”



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THE VISION: SOMERSET IN 2033

IN 2033 SOMERSET IS A CULTURAL DESTINATION. THE REGION'S DISTINCT LOCAL VILLAGES ARE IN THEMSELVES CULTURAL EXPERIENCES WHERE ICONIC ARCHITECTURE IS ACTIVATED, HISTORY IS CELEBRATED, AND THE INDIVIDUAL IDENTITIES OF THE TOWNSHIPS CREATE A MOSAIC OF ACTIVITY ACROSS THE REGION.

The local community is at the forefront of the region's cultural activation which reflects and services the social and cultural demography of the region. Somerset is thriving. Visitors to the region are drawn to the complement of cultural, environmental and recreational experiences. Outside of the region The Condensery is known as an arts leader, exhibiting work and acting as the intersection for artists into and out of the region. Inside the region, and by collaborating with external artists, The Condensery and Somerset Civic Centre provide unique opportunities to develop and grow arts practice across the region. Somerset Regional Council values arts, culture and heritage for the role it plays in a vibrant rural lifestyle.

GOALS FOR THE NEXT 10 YEARS

- To feature the region's extensive pre and post-colonial history and leverage the vital role arts, culture and history play in the wellbeing, prosperity, and distinctiveness of the region
- To support local creatives in the development and sustainability of their practices and support them to collaborate, showcase and share experiences
- To harness the environment and cultural assets of the region to attract visitors

A FIVE YEAR PLAN

SOMERSET IS A REGION OF VIBRANT VILLAGES, IDENTIFIABLE BY THEIR ARTS AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES, CONNECTED COMMUNITIES AND RICH HISTORIES.

THE PRIORITIES

1. A RESILIENT AND CONNECTED CREATIVE COMMUNITY
2. A PLACE DISTINGUISHED BY ITS ENVIRONMENT AND HISTORY
3. A GROWING SUSTAINABLE CREATIVE REGION



Butter Factory, Esk

WORKING WITH SHARED VALUES

EXCELLENCE

We are committed to offering exceptional art and cultural experiences through programming and services.

ENGAGEMENT AND ACCESS FOR ALL

We offer space for everyone and believe that through engagement with art, culture and history we can know the world, each other and ourselves.

COUNTRY AND HERITAGE

We care for and enhance the unique historical narrative of the region, and embrace and promote the Somerset region's heritage, to incorporate both First Nations and European cultural heritage.

DARE TO DREAM

We aspire to evolve our programming and services to meet and exceed the cultural needs of our community. We demonstrate cultural leadership that builds the reputation and profile of our region.

A FOUNDATION FOR ARTS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE TO GROW

ACTIONS SET OUT IN THE SOMERSET ARTS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE PLAN 2023-2028 INTER-RELATE TO CREATE A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO SETTING A FOUNDATION TO GROW ARTS CULTURE AND HERITAGE IN THE REGION.

It sits as a living document that provides a road map to support the region to work together to achieve its vision.

The plan has been designed to deliver support to:

- work cohesively and strategically to achieve a shared vision
- build on the region's strengths
- build a resilient community that contributes to the region's economy and wellbeing
- develop local artists and artisans
- promote and preserve the region's significant social and architectural heritage
- enhance connectivity, capacity and accessibility of venues and grow audiences
- build the region's identity and activate cultural tourism.

The defining feature of the Somerset region is its iconic townships that sit geographically dispersed, offering the potential for individual but linked cultural experiences. All of them have distinct architecture and history and are a drawcard for visitors while concurrently being places for local connection and collaboration. This historic built environment, rich with social history, complements the beauty of the natural environment and if harnessed, offers a compelling cultural platform for place-based experiential arts.

The combination of art and environment is compelling and in the context of Somerset provides a means to celebrate place and build identity which feeds a tourism offering. The plan incorporates the establishment of a professional biannual art exhibition focussing on connection to the natural environment to be presented at The Condensery. Promoting the region to artists through residencies and creative programming, providing cultural development activities for local artists and the culmination of a curated exhibition at The Condensery, over time will build a cultural tourism product, one that has potential for private investment.

Primarily through community organisations, Somerset has an active and engaged creative community that offers a rich platform for community wellbeing and contributes significantly to the cultural landscape. Currently they are capturing and preserving the region's history, activating historical architecture, showcasing the work of local artists and crafts people, and creating a means by which visitors can engage with the cultural identity of the region. These groups are mindful of the fact that their median age is increasing, and they are struggling to engage with youth. In particular, the historical societies, who are custodians of important local history and artefacts, are burdened by this issue. Council is supporting these organisations in their core administrative functions, providing space, resources and succession planning.



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Horses with carts waiting at Lowood railway yard

“ **The library has evolved into a hub around which the community grows, learns and communicates. It provides the space and the intellectual glue to allow communities, close knit urban and sparsely spread rural, to cohere and interact.** ”

Somerset Regional Council Libraries have locations across the region with broad audience reach. As multi-functional, cross-disciplinary, and cross-generational spaces for the community to gather to engage with ideas, information and lifelong learning, they have capacity to build connectivity within the region and play a pivotal role in growing arts, culture and heritage.

There is a shared commitment between the libraries and local history groups to collecting, preserving and promoting the history of the region and increased collaboration between them will strengthen capacity. Increased collaboration, information sharing and commitment to working together, offers the opportunity for a more comprehensive and strategic approach to the work, specifically, the urgent need to record undocumented stories. The use of the same specialist database software to record collections in a hub and spoke model that identifies ownership, will aide preservation, support increased access to collections and a platform for collaborative programming.

The region has a strong representation of visual artists and artisans, both professional and amateur, and this is reflected in the strong network of galleries and art societies in the region.

In 2021 Somerset Regional Council changed the operational structure of The Condensery to focus on professionally curated exhibitions and programs to raise the profile of the gallery. This is a milestone in the cultural development of the region. To dovetail this strategy, there is need for independent artist-run workspace for artists to create work, experiment and collaborate. Facilitating connection between local artists and artists from other regions is also vital to local artists’ development. The capacity to host visiting artists in a live-in studio space opens opportunity for longer residency periods, and more sharing of practice. This could be included in the plans for an expansion of The Condensery.

“ **People in Brisbane are becoming aware of The Condensery because of the artists being engaged and the promotion on Instagram. When uni peers talk about it, I’m like, ‘that’s where I volunteer’ and I’m really proud they’re talking about the place I grew up.** ”

“ **I had no idea what to expect (from the Inaugural Annual Dance Affair) and it was just amazing. We could have danced all night tonight!** ”

Management of the Somerset Civic Centre is now the direct responsibility of Somerset Regional Council. The priority is to build the venue’s community connection and audience. The venue’s 10-year celebration with the presentation of The Inaugural Annual Dance Affair demonstrated how community-engaged performing arts can connect and strengthen a community. Continuing an annual event of co-created work across genres and audiences, developed across the region in partnership with Libraries and presented at Somerset Civic Centre, will grow the venue’s relationship with the community and build an audience to be leveraged commercially.

Tourism is an opportunity to be embraced and the value of arts, culture and heritage is identified in the Somerset Tourism Strategy 2021-2025. The Brisbane Valley Rail Trail is not only an attraction to bring visitors into the region, it is a platform to tell the region’s stories through signage and complementary activities. Many of these activities already exist however would benefit from professional development to meet the expectations of travellers as well as promotion to build awareness.

It is noted that the community consistently promoted the desire for a festival offering and it is also an action of the Somerset Tourism Strategy 2021-2025. The current level of resourcing restricts Council’s capacity to present festivals. The exception is the opportunity to partner with QMF who is funded to work with Queensland communities to create and present music festivals that are an investment in local identity and tourism.



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FIVE YEAR ACTION PLAN

PRIORITIES	ACTION	WHO	COMMENCE	FUNDING
A resilient and connected creative community	1.1 Produce high quality, engaging and stimulating programs that connect and strengthen the community, enabling them to engage on multiple levels as practitioner and/or consumer.	ACP	Short term.	Core business. External grants and partnerships.
	1.2 Engage local practitioners in programs through showcase or audience engagement.	ACP	Short term.	Core business.
	1.3 Present annual curated shows of local artists' work as part of The Condensery's exhibition program.	TC	Medium to long term.	Core business.
	1.4 Establish an identified First Nations position at The Condensery that sits within the team however has responsibility for First Nations connection across SRC.	SRC	Medium term. Grant dependant.	Funding request. External grant.
	1.5 Facilitate inter-generational connections with community groups through partner programming such as that highlighted in the Youth Engagement strategy.	SL	Medium term.	Core business. Community groups.

Short term; Year 1 and 2 | Medium term; Year 2 and 3 | Long term; Year 4 and 5

PRIORITIES	ACTION	WHO	COMMENCE	FUNDING
A resilient and connected creative community	1.6 Establish a cross-disciplinary and cross portfolio creative wellbeing program.	ACP	Medium term.	Core business. External grants and partnerships.
	1.7 Connect the community and Somerset Civic Centre through presentation of one professional community theatre project per year, created in collaboration with professional theatre makers who are specialists in this field under a distributed development model.	ACP	Medium to long term.	Core business. External grants and partnerships.
	1.8 Bring practitioners to the region to support, connect and contextualise local arts practice and foster dialogue and collaboration.	ACP	Short term.	Core business.
	1.9 Position Libraries to perform the integral role of providing resources and programs to deliver lifelong learning and improve skills in digital, financial and health literacies, and living sustainably.	SL	Short to medium term.	Core business.
	1.10 Provide library services where people gather through pop-up facilities and co-location.	SL	Short term.	Funding request. External grant.

PRIORITIES	ACTION	WHO	COMMENCE	FUNDING
A place distinguished by its environment and history	2.1 Utilise RADF to assist with networking the region's heritage groups, for information sharing and learning as well as take a joint strategic approach to history preservation.	ACP Heritage groups	Long term.	RADF.
	2.2 Secure and increase accessibility to the region's heritage and history collections through deployment of a collections database across Council and heritage groups with no transfer of ownership.	SL Heritage groups	Long term.	External grant.
	2.3 Review and republish 'Confidence and Tradition' (last published in 1988) to capture and record the region's stories including people, architecture and events.	SL Heritage groups	Long term.	External grants.
	2.4 Celebrate Somerset's history through collaboration across cultural venues, to develop diverse exhibitions and programming.	ACP Community groups	Long term.	Core business. RADF. External grants and partnerships.
	2.5 Value and protect the identity and character of the region's individual townships as per Council Economic Strategy.	SRC ACP	Long term.	Core business.

PRIORITIES	ACTION	WHO	COMMENCE	FUNDING
A place distinguished by its environment and history	2.6 Establish a biannual art exhibition supported by a program that attracts artists and supports the making of works that showcase the region's natural environment.	TC	Medium term.	External grants and partnerships.
	2.7 Activate and contemporise the Kilcoy Visitor Information Centre and integrate the visitor experience with the surrounding parkland to present a place of history, creativity and environment leveraging neighbouring community groups.	SRC	Long term.	Grant Dependent.
	2.8 Explore a partnership with QMF to present a local place-based music festival that attracts tourists.	SRC ACP QMF	Long term.	Core business. External grants and partnerships.



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PRIORITIES	ACTION	WHO	COMMENCE	FUNDING
A growing sustainable creative sector	3.1 Increase cross-portfolio and cross-Council collaboration to strengthen services to community and build the value of the arts, culture and heritage in the region.	SRC	Medium term.	Core business.
	3.2 Establish a communication and audience engagement plan that's employed across the arts and cultural portfolio to promote events and activities including the establishment of a shared brand and appropriate digital and social media channels.	ACP	Short term.	Core business.
	3.3 Leverage and extend the newly established Somerset Arts and Cultural communication platforms to promote community events and programs.	ACP	Short to medium term.	Core business.
	3.4 Establish a cross-portfolio engagement and communications plan to collectively target specific markets (e.g. schools), and consider extending the art trails brochure to include complementary activities such as markets and food.	ACP	Medium term.	Core business.

PRIORITIES	ACTION	WHO	COMMENCE	FUNDING
A growing sustainable creative sector	3.5 Establish a multi artform, independent artists' space for connection, ideas and new work development.	ACP	Long term.	External grants and partnerships.
	3.6 Leverage Brisbane Valley Rail Trail to promote the arts, culture and history of the region.	SRC	Medium term.	Core business.
	3.7 Facilitate skills training to strengthen artists creative business practice.	ACP	Short term.	RADF.
	3.8 Position region and venues for investment from state and federal governments and grow private support.	SRC	Short to medium term.	Core business.

ACP Arts and Culture Portfolio
 TC The Condensery
 SL Somerset Libraries
 SCC Somerset Civic Centre
 SRC Somerset Regional Council and refers to a whole of Council commitment
 QMF (formally Queensland Music Festival)
 RADF Regional Arts Development Fund

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