



# *Somerset Tourism Strategy 2021-2025*

## *Volume 2: Supporting Analysis and Recommendations*



This report presents supporting analysis and recommendations to inform the *Somerset Tourism Strategy, 2021-2025*. It has been prepared by:



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Tourism Strategy Purpose and Objectives

The *Somerset Tourism Strategy, 2021-2025: Providing the Foundations for a Vibrant Visitor Economy* is Somerset Regional Council's five-year plan to support the vibrancy, diversity, resilience and sustainability of region's visitor economy. This document, *Volume 2: Supporting Analysis and Recommendations*, has been prepared to inform Somerset Regional Council in developing the Tourism Strategy. Specifically, Volume 2 presents the findings of the research, consultation and analysis used to inform the identification of strategic themes and individual opportunities for action for Council's consideration.

## 1.2 This Background Report

This background report presents information and recommendations to help guide Council in its efforts to develop a visionary yet practical strategy to promote and support Somerset visitor economy now and into the future. As an informing document prepared by the project consultants, it articulates the Somerset regions key socio-economic metrics as they relate to the size and nature of the visitor economy and its potential for growth and development.

To help inform Council's decision-making, this document presents a summary of Somerset tourism strengths and attributes, as articulated during the stakeholder consultations and from the findings of the desktop research and analysis. It acknowledges the challenges and opportunities for growing a vibrant visitor economy in the Somerset Region before refining these findings into a suite of key 'opportunities for action', which have been presented to Council for its further consideration. Following consultation with Council's senior staff and Councillors, priorities for action have been identified from this suite of opportunities. The priorities, as determined by Council, are presented in the concluding section of this supporting document.

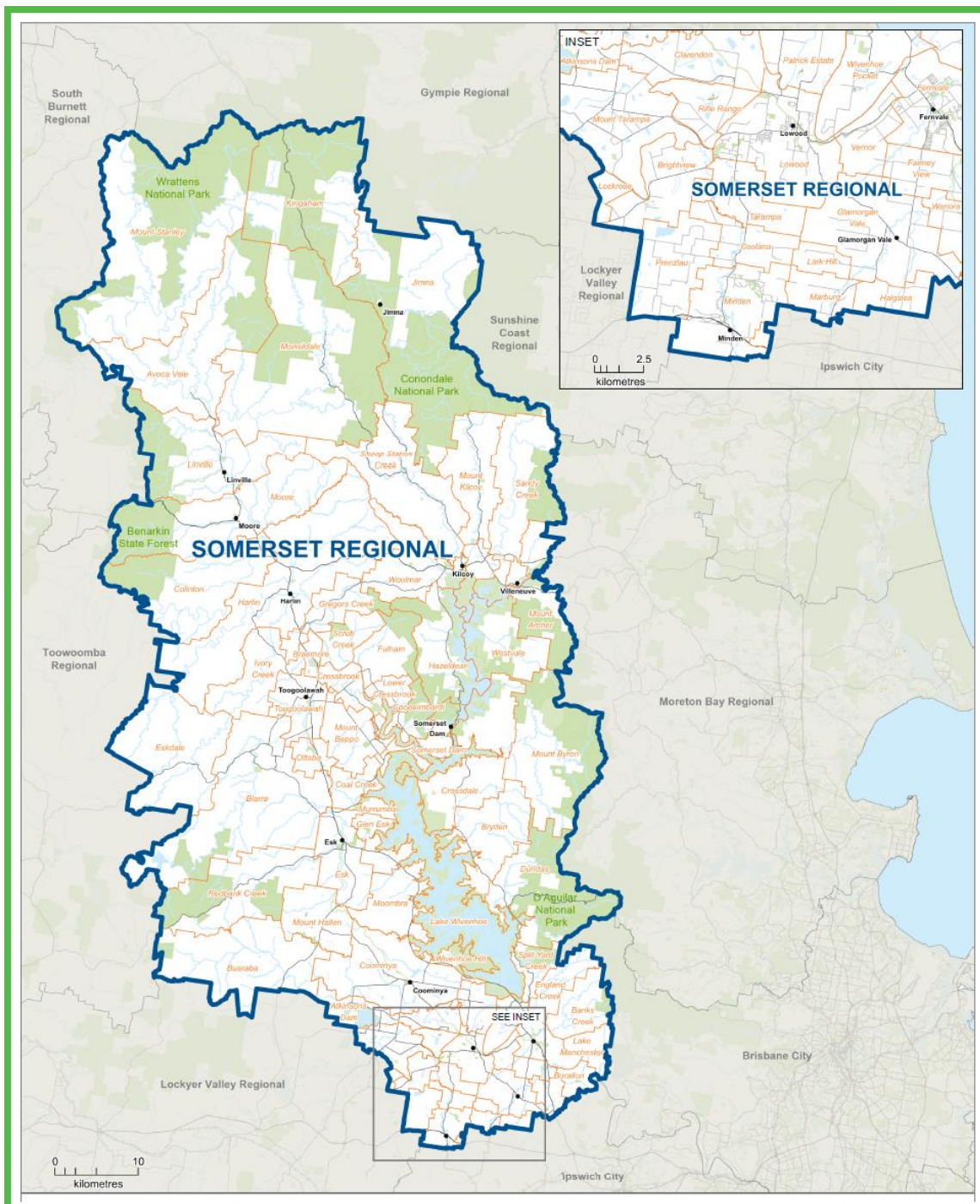
Somerset Regional Council is pro-active in its commitment to the design and delivery of initiatives which serve to support the local visitor economy and Somerset regions prosperity. It pro-actively works in collaboration with regional tourism agencies and the tourism industry to enhance the 'Experience Somerset' brand and to deliver associated marketing, product development, visitor servicing and support infrastructure programs. The aim is to promote the Somerset Region as a premier regional visitor destination defined by a diversity of authentic experiences built on its natural features, iconic attractions and its recreational, heritage and cultural assets. This background report is designed to help inform a strategic and targeted approach to realising this objective.

For Somerset Regional Council, supporting a vibrant visitor economy requires a strategic, informed and targeted approach. To this end, this support document:

- Establishes strategic themes and actions which reflect Somerset current economic status and performance, as well as relevant regional policy settings informing local tourism opportunities;
- Articulates key issues, challenges and opportunities for Somerset Regional Council to address in its role as a tourism industry supporter, facilitator and promoter; and
- Provides Somerset Regional Council with guidance to develop an informed, clear, actionable and achievable 'road map' for supporting and promoting Somerset visitor economy to 2025 and beyond.

Key government agency, industry stakeholder and community consultation was instrumental in informing the strategy's development.

Figure 1. The Somerset Region



Source: Queensland Government

### 1.3 A Consultative Approach to Informing Strategy Development

To inform the preparation of the Tourism Strategy, Somerset Regional Council consulted with a diversity of government, industry and community stakeholders via a series of meetings and forums. Consultation included:

- A ‘Scene-Setting’ Workshop with Councillors and the Executive;
- Presentation to and discussion with the Economic Development and Tourism Committee;
- One-on-one meetings with 27 external stakeholders including government agencies, tourism bodies, community organisations and local businesses;
- A Tourism Volunteers Workshop (21 participants); and
- A series of Somerset Regional Council Tourism Team focus group meetings.



The research, consultation and analysis has focussed on:

- Local tourism attractors, strengths and attributes, points of difference;
- Key issues or constraints presenting challenges for tourism promotion and development;
- Opportunities for growth;
- Key potential programs and projects; and
- Priority considerations for Somerset Regional Council as a promoter, facilitator and supporter of the local visitor economy.

The consultations have been instrumental in helping to establish a vision for the visitor economy of the future and to guide Somerset Regional Council’s efforts in tourism promotion and destination management. The consultations highlighted Somerset’s many strengths and attributes as well as pertinent challenges and opportunities for developing the region’s visitor economy in a sustainable manner consistent with Council’s Corporate Planning objectives.

### 1.4 Tourism Promotion and Development: A Council Priority

The Somerset Regional Council Corporate Plan 2021-2026 sets the direction for the communities of Somerset and Council decision-making for the period 2021 to 2026. It articulates Council’s vision for the region by providing a strategic framework for enhancing the quality lifestyle the community currently enjoys.

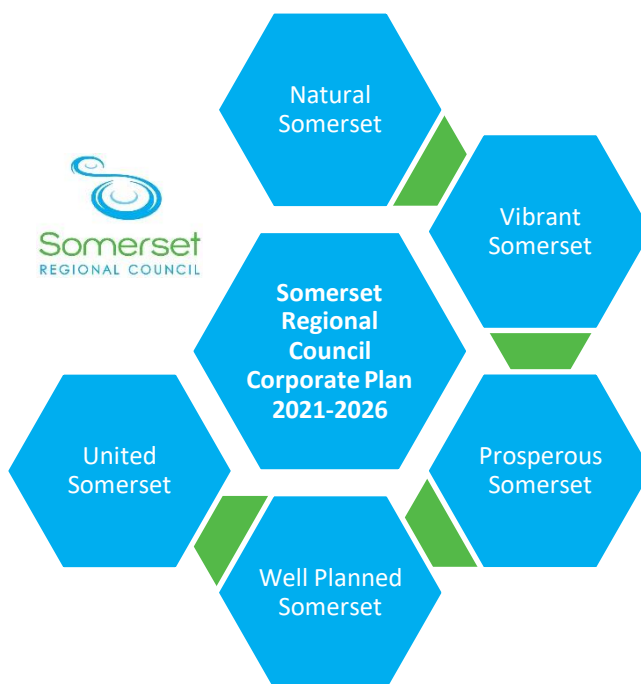
The Corporate Plan presents core values and key outcomes which are framed to guide Council in working towards its vision of being a vibrant, cohesive, connected and prosperous region. The strategies presented in the Corporate Plan address the five key outcomes Council aspires to realise, being:

- **Natural Somerset:** A place where the natural environment, scenic beauty and rural lifestyle are valued and protected.
- **Vibrant Somerset:** An integrated and welcoming place with something for everyone.
- **Prosperous Somerset:** A place that embraces economic opportunities.
- **Well Planned Somerset:** A place where planning and design look to the future.
- **United Somerset:** An active place which values participation.

Tourism promotion and development is a key area of focus under the *Prosperous Somerset* theme. Somerset Regional Council is committed to playing its part in supporting the region’s economic development with a number of initiatives designed to advance the region’s potential as a premier visitor destination and a region celebrated for its rich rural lifestyle.

The Somerset Tourism Strategy and the individual themes and actions it presents, should help realise this important objective, for the benefit of the community of Somerset.

**Figure 2. Strategic Alignment: Corporate Plan Goals**



Source: Somerset Regional Council



## 2. Informing Opportunities to Grow a Vibrant Visitor Economy

### 2.1 Somerset's Visitor Economy

#### Somerset's Tourism Offer

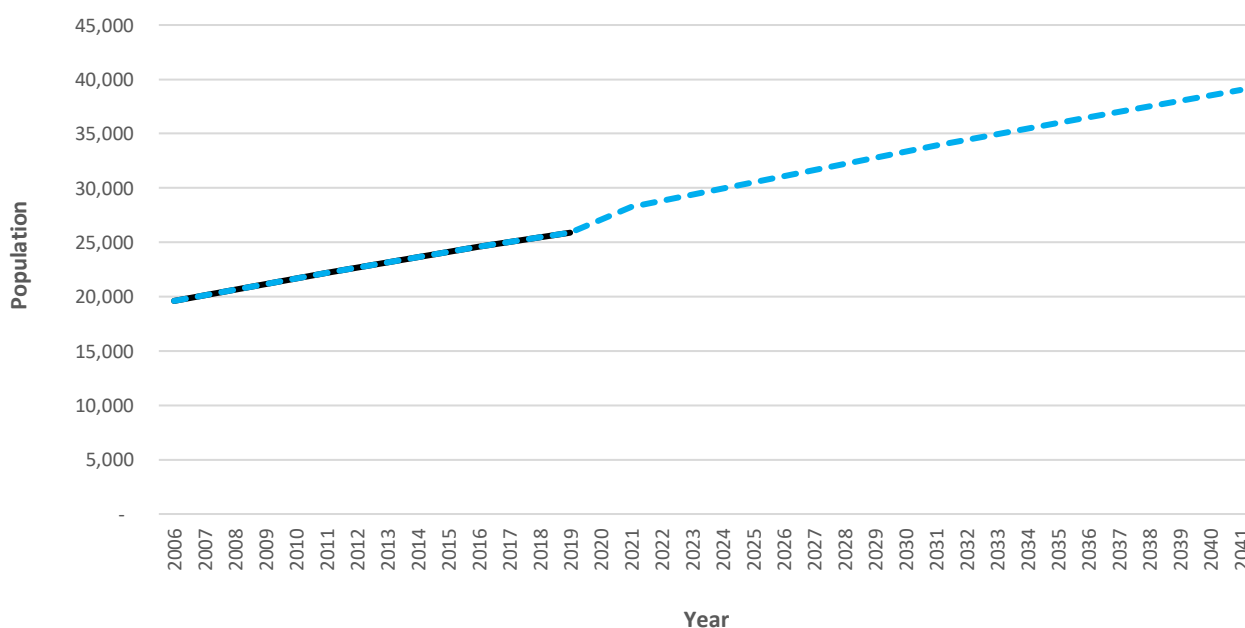
Defined by its warm and inviting local villages, its breath-taking mountain scenery, native forests, placid waterways and picturesque patchwork landscape, the Somerset Regional Council area covers 5,379 square kilometres. With a population of approximately 26,200, Somerset is home to almost 2,100 businesses and around 6,100 jobs. Somerset's key industries include agriculture, food product manufacturing, retail, health, education and construction services as well as a developing visitor economy.

Located just one hour and fifteen minutes' drive from central Brisbane, the Somerset Region, with its authentic country lifestyle, feels a world away. The region's five main townships include Esk, Kilcoy, Fernvale, Lowood and Toogoolawah, which are hubs for a diversity of communities dispersed throughout the region. The region's smaller villages including Linville, Jimna, Harlin, Moore and Coominya also play important roles in the social and economic lives of the region's residents.

Somerset takes in the Brisbane and Stanley river catchments with meandering waterways and great lakes surrounded by a beautiful natural environment providing a diverse playground for residents and visitors alike, including anglers, birdwatchers and water sports enthusiasts. The region's expansive wilderness is ideal for camping and four wheel driving, and with a diversity of walking trails and the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail, Somerset is a drawcard for walkers, trail runners, horse-riders and cyclists.

Situated in the south-east corner of Queensland and part of Australia's fastest-growing region, Somerset's neighbouring local government areas include Lockyer Valley, Ipswich City, Brisbane City, Moreton Bay, Sunshine Coast, Gympie, South Burnett and Toowoomba. According to Queensland Government projections, the population of Somerset is expected to reach 36,530 by 2036.

**Figure 3. Population Trend and Forecast, Somerset Region, 2006-2041**



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics and Queensland Government Population Projections

## Regional Economic Context

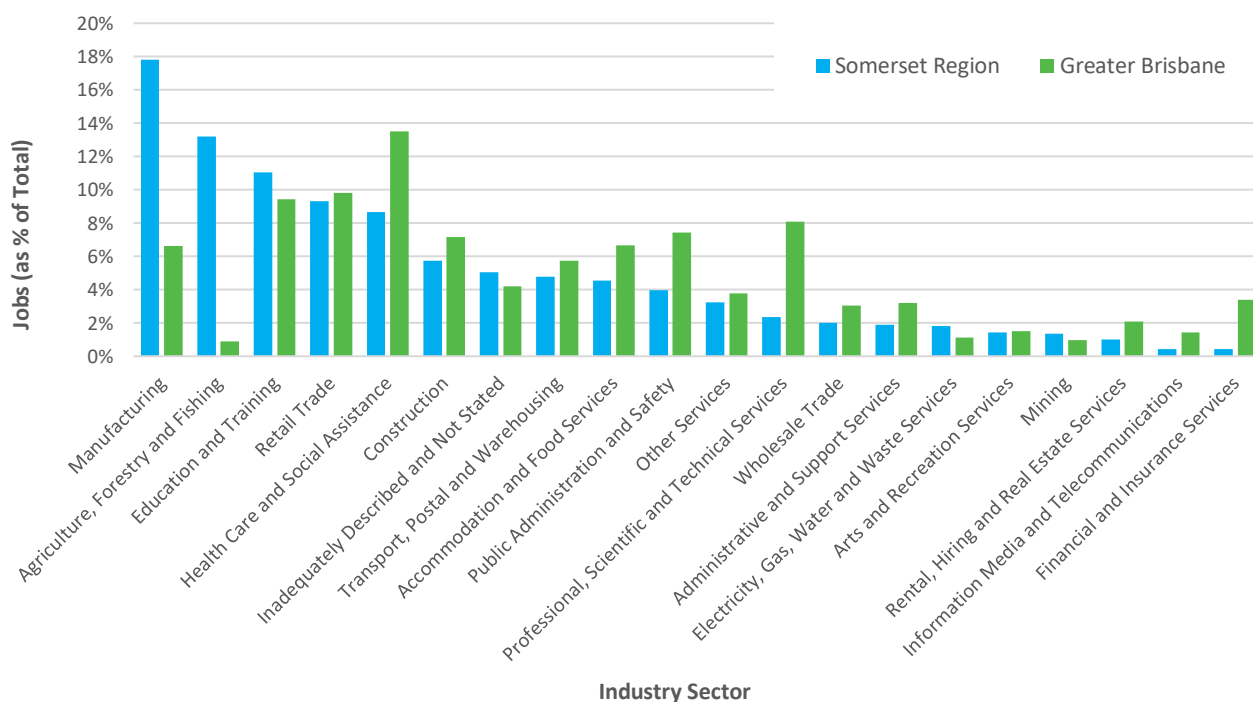
The tourism industry provides services to international and domestic visitors on day or overnight trips. Tourists include those who travel for leisure (holidays); those visiting friends and relatives; and those travelling for work-related purposes.

Tourism is one of the few sectors that Councils get directly involved in through their role in providing visitor information services, in marketing and promotion, infrastructure provision and destination management.

Somerset has approximately 26,200 residents and growing (as at 30th June 2019). There are approximately 6,100 jobs located in the Somerset LGA and 9,270 employed residents. Somerset has an unemployment rate of 8.2% compared to 6.4% for metro Brisbane and Queensland (June 2020).

Key industries are agriculture, food product manufacturing, retail, health, education and construction services. Almost three-quarters of visitors to the Somerset Region (73%) are domestic day-trippers. There are an estimated 205 'tourism businesses' (of 2,100) in the Somerset LGA, half of which are non-employing.

**Figure 4. Employment By Industry, Somerset Region and Greater Brisbane, 2016**



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of Population and Housing (2016), Working Population Profile, Cat. No. 2006.0

Somerset's socio-economic profile is one that is typical of a mature community with a strong reliance on the agricultural sector. This is reflected in an aged population with lower incomes and higher levels of social disadvantage, including educational attainment.

In this situation, the community is challenged in terms of its capacity to generate innovation, entrepreneurship and business investment, and there are implications associated with the capabilities and skills in the local workforce.

An additional 13,000 people moving into Somerset as forecast will have a direct effect on the situation as the socio-economic profile of the newcomers will be different. It is expected this new mix will be younger and less socially disadvantaged.

Somerset's anticipated expanded population base will increase demand from visitors who are Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR tourists) and Business Visitors. A proportion of Somerset's new population will seek to establish businesses, including in sectors related to tourism.

The success of the region in attracting holiday visitors will influence the number of businesses established. Enabling and facilitating this investment is an objective of the Somerset Tourism Strategy. The region's new population will bring with it development pressures which may have environmental consequences affecting the attractiveness of the area as a place to visit. If managed well, this growth can generate positive outcomes.

To help contextualise Somerset's tourism profile, data has been analysed and compared across neighbouring and nearby local government areas (LGAs) including South Burnett, Gympie, Noosa, Sunshine Coast, Ipswich, Lockyer Valley, Moreton Bay and Brisbane. The following points are made:

- Of ten LGAs considered, Somerset is the least populated with 26,200 people.
- Somerset has the lowest number of international visitors along with South Burnett. Noosa and the Sunshine Coast are standouts in this regard, reflecting the attraction of the coast.
- Somerset has the second-lowest number of domestic overnight visitors (to Lockyer Valley). Somerset lags behind other LGAs with regard to day trippers in a similar fashion to domestic overnight visitors.
- The average number of nights spent by visitors in Somerset is three, which is consistent with other inland LGAs. The coastal LGAs have four or more nights per visit.
- The per capita visitor expenditure figures (\$2,519 per person for Somerset) reflect the importance of visitor expenditure in the economy. On a per visitor basis, Somerset is higher than Ipswich, Lockyer Valley and Moreton Bay but significantly below the coastal LGAs.

### Short-term Considerations: COVID-19 Impacts

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic affecting cities and regions throughout Australia, the need to understand the local impacts on business and industry and to develop appropriate responses to help promote and support the local visitor economy and economic development more broadly, is critical.

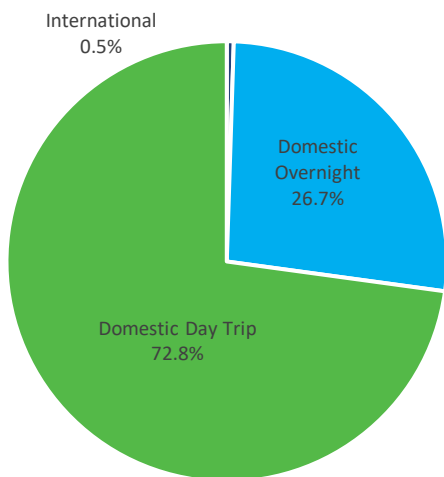
The Australian Bureau of Statistics (September 2, 2020) reported that Australia's Gross Domestic Product fell 7.0 per cent in the June quarter 2020, the largest quarterly fall on record.

According to Tourism Research Australia, Australian tourism has seen overall losses of \$33.7 billion for January to June 2020. This is made up of international tourism losses of \$12 billion (53%) and domestic tourism losses of \$21.7 billion from overnight travel (\$17.7 billion) and day travel (\$4 billion).

According to IBISWorld (June 2020), Australia-wide, those industries that are expected to be most adversely affected by the aftermath of COVID-19 include manufacturing, mining, agriculture, some store-based retailing and the accommodation and food services sector (including tourism operators).

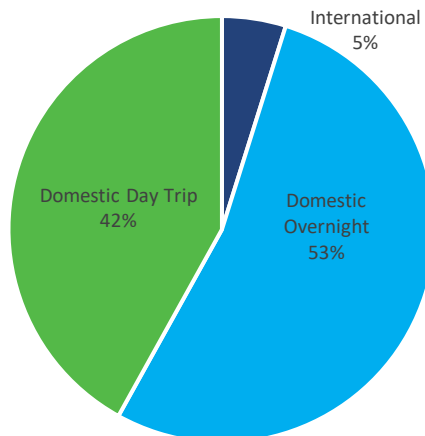
While the pandemic will impact on tourism movements in the short-term, over the medium to longer-term, growth prospects are positive. IBISWorld reports that domestic tourism is already beginning to slowly start back up, with tourism businesses expected to rely heavily on domestic leisure travellers in 2020-21.

**Figure 5. Share of Total Visitor Numbers By Type of Visitor, Somerset Region, 2018**



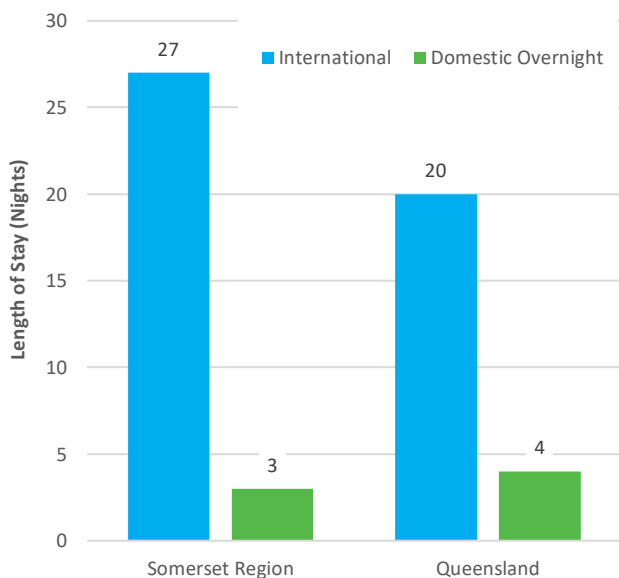
Source: Tourism Research Australia

**Figure 6. Share of Total Visitor Spend (\$) By Type of Visitor, Somerset Region, 2018**



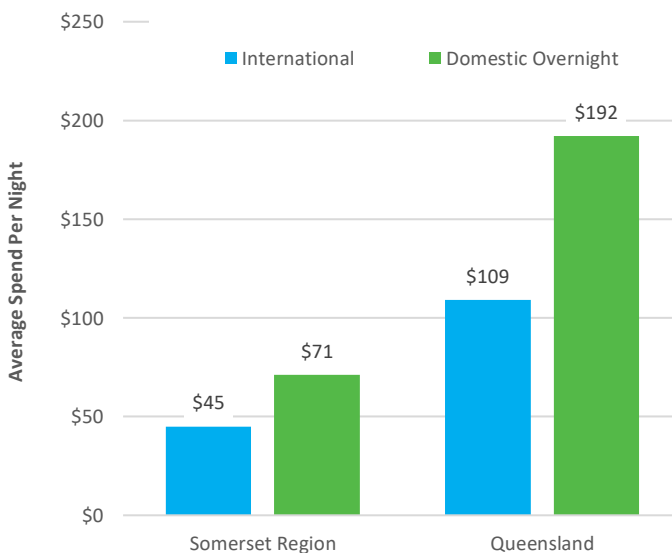
Source: Tourism Research Australia

**Figure 7. Average Visitor Length of Stay (Nights), Somerset Region and Queensland, 2018**



Source: Tourism Research Australia

**Figure 8. Average Visitor Spend Per Night, Somerset Region and Queensland, 2018**



Source: Tourism Research Australia

## 2.2 Somerset's Tourism Strengths, Attributes and Challenges

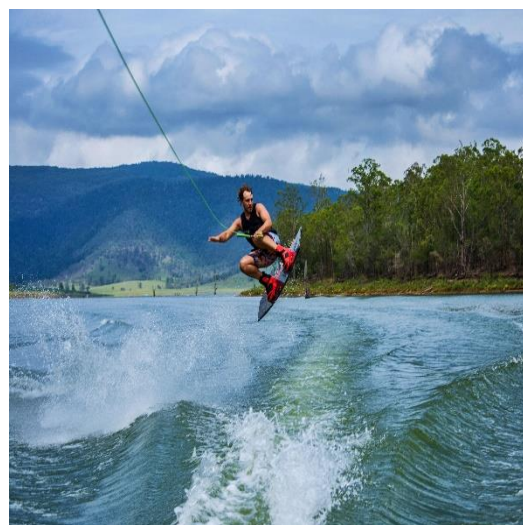
### Key Strengths and Attributes

The consultations highlighted Somerset's many strengths and attributes which can underpin efforts to support the development of a vibrant visitor economy, including:

- **Somerset's Proximity to Brisbane:** The fact that Somerset is only one hour and fifteen minutes from Brisbane means there is a huge day trip visitor market on the region's doorstep. (Proximity to the Toowoomba Region and to the Sunshine Coast is another plus).
- **Drive Market:** Somerset's proximity to Brisbane and to the west means it is well placed to capitalise on the growing drive tourism market. Day-trip tourism is Somerset's largest visitor market.
- **Nature-based Attractions are Local Points of Difference:** Somerset's wealth of natural attractions includes parks and natural landscape, the dam lakes, our agricultural heritage, birdwatching, walking trails, riding trails, etc.
- **A diversity of country towns and villages:** Somerset has a diversity of larger towns and smaller villages, like Jimna, Lowood or Linville for example, which could be better promoted as part of the region's experience offer and its 'personality brand'.
- **Brisbane River:** A point of difference for Somerset is its waterways. The Brisbane River in Somerset is navigable all year round because the water level doesn't vary. The river is perfect for undertaking river journeys.



- **Mount Glen Rock:** Purchased by Council in 2020, Mount Glen Rock overlooking Esk is a major natural asset that could become a catalyst recreation and tourism iconic attraction for Somerset if well planned and managed.
- **The Brisbane Valley Rail Trail:** The BVRT is a major asset with the potential to grow Somerset’s visitor economy, subject to continued investment in infrastructure support, marketing and promotion and coordination / collaborative efforts on the part of the region’s stakeholders to capitalise on the opportunity presented.
- **Adventure Tourism Assets and Attractions:** For example, skydiving and water sports opportunities attract adventure tourists to Somerset. The region offers other nature-based adventure tourism opportunities such as mountain biking and trail running.
- **Dam Lakes:** Both Somerset Dam and Wivenhoe Dam are synonymous with the region’s image (though questions have been raised, is this what the region should ‘hang its tourism hat on’?). Other water features including Atkinson Dam for example are other important tourism assets.
- **Split Yard Creek Lookout:** The Split Yard Creek Dam borders the Wivenhoe-Somerset Road and there is a public carpark on the side of the road with access to the Split Yard Creek Lookout. It is home to the Wivenhoe Power Station located between the Split Yard Creek Dam and the Wivenhoe Dam.
- **Jensens Swamp Environmental Reserve:** Located at the corner of Brightview Road and Jensen’s Swamp Road at Lowood, these wetlands are a significant koala and wildlife habitat, providing breeding grounds for native birds and other fauna. Good quality facilities are available for day visitors and picnics.
- **Savages Crossing:** Located along Banks Creek Road, Savages Crossing is a short five-minute drive from Fernvale. The crossing is a tranquil fishing and kayaking location.
- **Arts and Culture:** Somerset has a vibrant community of artists and arts groups as well as various arts and craft markets. For example, the Kilcoy Craft Market is home to a selection of arts and craft, created by local artisans. Run by volunteers the market offers a range of products for sale including handmade gifts, cards, plants, felting, handmade clothing and timber products.



- Somerset Regional Art Gallery - The Condensery:** Located in Toogoolawah, The Condensery has a rich history, being the former home to the Nestle condensed milk factory packing facility. Now a unique cultural precinct, the Somerset Regional Art Gallery (SRAG) hosts rotating exhibitions featuring works across various mediums and is available for workshops and community art events. A Masterplan has been prepared which proposes extensions to the SRAG, including a sculpture garden and a workshop space for artists-in-residence.
- Toogoolawah Pictures:** Described as: *“A real country picture theatre, boasting authentic canvas seats, with modern digital projection. Operated by the Toogoolawah Progress Association, the Pictures are held most Saturday nights, offering admission, fresh popcorn and hot dogs at affordable prices”.*
- The Kilcoy VIC Environmental Interpretive Centre:** The Kilcoy Visitor Information Centre (VIC) provides tourist information along with an environmental interpretive centre and an 80-seat theatrette.
- Old Railway Turntable at Linville:** This old railway turntable, which was used to turn locomotives around for return trips, is located alongside the BVRT and presents an opportunity to explore options to integrate it into the rail trail experience.
- Watts Bridge Memorial Airfield:** This is an asset to the region and is currently undervalued. The airfield is the home base for several active aviation clubs. There is a lack of recognition of the airfield as an attraction to visitors. It is a well facilitated airfield - it has three good runways with a grass runway that doesn't stay wet. The size, length and area around the runways is unusually large for a regional airfield.
- History and Heritage including Indigenous Cultural Heritage:** As described on Council's web site, Somerset has a rich Indigenous cultural heritage and is home to the Aboriginal tribes of Jagera, Yuppera, Ugarapul, Yuggera and Jinibara people. Initial discovery by Europeans of the Brisbane Valley was made by Matthew Flinders in 1799 and John Oxley in 1823. The first European settlers to the region in 1841 were the McConnells at Cressbrook, now known as Toogoolawah, Balfours at Colinton and the Norths at Fairney View. The area soon flourished with the success of dairy farms, cattle farms and timber mills (source: <https://www.experiencesomerset.com.au/heritage-and-culture/>). The consultation findings suggested that Somerset's history and heritage could be further considered as an integral component of the region's tourism offer.
- Landcruiser Mountain Park:** North-west of Jimna, Landcruiser Mountain Park is a working cattle property and Queensland's first privately owned wilderness park designed for off-road and bush camping enthusiasts. The park has four main camping areas and there are 200 kilometres of specially designed 4WD trails, varying in standard to suit both the beginner and experienced off-road driver.
- Supportive 'tourism governance' in Somerset:** Consultation feedback suggests that in recent times, Somerset Regional Council has displayed a more pro-active, positive and supportive approach to tourism in Somerset, something which is being recognised and appreciated.
- The 2032 Olympic Games:** The winning bid to host the 2032 Olympic Games is scheduled to be announced by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) between 2021 and 2025. On 24 February 2021, Brisbane was named as the preferred bidder. With its natural assets and proximity to Brisbane, this presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity for Somerset to capitalise on the expected influx of national and international visitors to South East Queensland during and after the Games.

## Somerset’s Challenges for Growing a Vibrant Visitor Economy

The consultations highlighted the region’s challenges for developing a vibrant visitor economy, including:

- **Visitor accommodation is Lacking:** While Somerset has quality camping and caravan park facilities, there is arguably not enough and there is no diversity of accommodation to tap into new markets (e.g. eco-lodge accommodation). While an accommodation feasibility study was undertaken in 2015, it may be time to review the situation in light of market trends and prospects.
- **Accommodation and Other Facilities Needed to Support Brisbane Valley Rail Trail (BVRT) Users:** More accommodation is needed along the BVRT, including more camping options and more 3-4-star hotel accommodation. Accommodation at Lowood, Toogoolawah or Fernvale for example, would save rail trail users having to cycle back to Esk to stay overnight. Accommodation for large groups, e.g. cycle groups is needed, as current facilities don’t have enough rooms for large groups.
- **Restaurants and Cafes are Lacking:** Somerset has a number of pubs and cafes (some of which are excellent – e.g. Linville Hotel), but there are not licensed restaurants / quality dining venues.
- **State of Some Roads:** Some key State roads which traverse Somerset (e.g. sections of the Brisbane Valley Highway) are of a poor standard for carrying the volumes of tourism traffic and other vehicles, presenting safety issues.
- **A Lack of Some Tourism Product:** The region doesn’t have a lot of product to offer in the way of food and wine, specialty retail, experiences.
- **Lack of Access to the Brisbane River:** Access points are limited and poorly signed, for launching canoes, commencing or stopping on river tours. Access points are poorly maintained and are being abused.





- **Illegal Camping:** Related to the previous point, perhaps due to a lack of low-cost or free camping (or market knowledge), there are issues with illegal camping, for example, at Twin Bridges and Savages Crossing. Multiple ownership of riverbanks presents a challenge to solving these issues. If matters concerning land and asset management could be addressed, this problem could be converted into an attribute, building Somerset's profile as a destination for campers / drive tourists.
- **Major Tourism Assets Can't Be Fully Leveraged:** Somerset is known for its Dam Lakes, however, restrictions put in place by SEQ Water prohibit Lake Somerset and Lake Wivenhoe being used to their potential for recreation and visitation. Although Somerset Dam is good for powerboats and Wivenhoe Dam is good for paddling, they are not suitable for touring. SEQ Water doesn't want people travelling between dams.
- **Events are Under-sold:** Somerset doesn't have an iconic festival or event it can leverage (like a Birdsville Races or Woodford) which literally put those places on the map. How do we better promote / leverage our suite of existing events (e.g. races, BVRT fun run, rodeos, motor sports, skydiving events).
- **Events Planning and Promotion:** It is considered that a more strategic and coordinated approach to events planning and promotion would facilitate greater awareness and participation / visitation. Better connections with and planning around the wider SEQ region's calendar of events could be explored.
- **Somerset Civic Centre Underutilised:** Opportunities to improve the offering of the Somerset Civic Centre to attract touring shows could be explored.
- **Wayfinding / Directional Signage:** It is considered by many that signage is inadequate and of a poor standard; there is a lack of consistency which, if addressed, would promote the Somerset tourism brand throughout the region. Consistent signage which embraces the region's heritage and a shared understanding of 'who we are' could be explored. This does not necessarily suggest more signage, but rather better designed and placed signage with appropriate directional information.
- **Limited Facilities in Some Areas:** For example, while there is a good pub at Linville and camping in the park, there are no toilets or showers. (Other examples were also cited).
- **Infrastructure and Facilities Shortfalls along the BVRT:** There is a need for investment in, for example, shaded rest stops and bridges along the Rail Trail, though any new bridge needs to be authentic in design and material (i.e. timber not plastic) to ensure it supports the heritage appeal of the rail trail experience.
- **Stakeholder Engagement and Coordination of Information:** While engagement with visitors to Somerset (the demand side) is well catered for on the ground (primarily through the four VICs), there doesn't appear to be a strong foundation for a coordinated approach - amongst Council, tourism operators / businesses and other stakeholders - to tourism information-sharing, branding, marketing & promotion, business support and advocacy (i.e. the supply side).
- **Some Tourism Industry Operator Capacity is Lacking:** Not all tourism operators in Somerset are 'up to standard' regarding their approach to things like branding, marketing, web presence, online bookings, customer service and other standards. Many local operators are not registered with the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW). Council needs to continue its efforts to engage with tourism operators on this matter.

- **A Shared Vision and Somerset Region ‘Personality Brand’ is Lacking:** The lack of supply-side coordination is reflected in the lack of a shared tourism narrative for Somerset, i.e. knowing and articulating ‘who we are’ and ‘our target markets’, both existing and emerging, including the local drive market, interstate travellers to South East Queensland and international visitors.
- **Brand confusion:** The question has been raised, are we the ‘Somerset Region’, ‘Experience Somerset’, the ‘Brisbane Valley’, the ‘Valley of The Lakes’ or something else? This suggests more could be done to consolidate the ‘Experience Somerset’ brand. Tourists don’t really recognise local government area (LGA) boundaries, and multiple names dilutes the region’s identity in the marketplace. The question needs to be asked, how does “Affordable rates – effective services” help grow the visitor economy? The region needs a strong and widely-recognised ‘tourism destination’ brand.
- **Regional Identity is Lacking:** Further to the point above, prospective visitors often don’t know where / what the Somerset Region is.
- **Marketing / (In)effective Information Management:** Marketing needs to be directed at the relevant market segments in an effective way, using the full range of media available, including importantly, social media.
- **A Single Online Entry Point / Portal is Lacking:** Council’s tourism team is responsible for the Experience Somerset website’s upkeep. Is this the right approach given other ‘core’ activities and available expertise? Contracting out web site management might be a worthwhile investment to consider.
- **Regional Tourism Networks / Representation:** Questions have been raised as to whether the Brisbane Economic Development Agency (EDA) serves the Somerset Region’s needs well (many think not). What are the alternatives? Southern Queensland Country Tourism? The question has been asked, what difference would that make and is it more a case of building local capacity first?
- **Leveraging Regional Tourism Organisation (RTO) Membership:** How do we get more out of the region’s Brisbane EDA membership? Is it about our capacity to connect? What other partnerships can we nurture and leverage? How do we move forward in a way where we have more control and influence over our Experience Somerset brand and our capacity to promote and attract visitors?
- **Limited Knowledge / Understanding amongst Residents of the Value of the Visitor Economy’s Potential:** It has been suggested that some residents don’t see the value of the visitor economy and Council’s efforts through its Visitor Information Centres (VICs). More engagement with residents (when a strategy is in place) could be warranted.

## 2.3 The Wider Tourism Planning and Promotion Challenge

Brisbane Economic Development Agency (EDA) is a wholly owned subsidiary of Brisbane City Council and is the city's official economic development board. Brisbane EDA's role is to grow Brisbane's economy, drive demand for Brisbane and create growth and trade opportunities for local Brisbane businesses.

Amongst other things, Brisbane EDA is responsible for serving as the regional tourism organisation (RTO) for Brisbane, Logan, Ipswich, Scenic Rim, Lockyer Valley, Moreton Bay, Redlands and Somerset. Brisbane EDA focuses on new growth opportunities in the Brisbane region in areas as diverse as business events, tourism, major events, business support and investment. It is noted that the nine headline news events on the web site relate to Brisbane with no mention of surrounding Council areas.

The 'Visit Brisbane' website has banners under the headings 'get inspiration', 'this is Brisbane' and then 'start planning'. Under the last heading there are five banners focused on Brisbane City and one titled 'explore the regions'. This link goes to a page with the heading 'Brisbane's Local Neighbourhoods' and at the bottom the page one finds links to the nine smaller Councils with a link to attractions in Somerset. A potential issue with the way the website is organised is that Somerset finds itself at the end of a links trail - a user must go through 'start planning' to access information on the regions and this takes some time.

Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ) is a statutory body of the Queensland Government and the State's lead marketing, destination and experience development and major events agency. In partnership with government, regional tourism organisations, industry and commercial stakeholders, TEQ aims to build Queensland's tourism and events industry to foster innovation, drive industry growth and boost visitor expenditure.

TEQ identifies 'hero' experiences throughout its regional network. The Brisbane Valley Rail Trail (BVRT) is an example of what could be considered a hero experience. The challenge is, how to monetise that experience for the benefit of the local visitor economy and its multitude of stakeholders.

Discussions held between the consultants and representatives of TEQ for the purposes of informing the Somerset Tourism Strategy highlighted the fact that TEQ "doesn't do a lot of work with Somerset Regional Council". It was also noted that Council is one of the "least vocal" Councils in the SEQ region.

In order to attract holiday visitors to the Somerset Region, TEQ highlighted a number of opportunities, including:

- Establish and articulate a unique point of difference / a 'personality brand' for the Somerset Region based on the natural environment / features.
- Work with operators – establish a shared vision and narrative for tourism in the Somerset Region (help them be the best they can be / build capacity).
- Ensure the approach to the BVRT is well-coordinated.
- Maximise the value of day-trippers and entice them to stay longer.
- Focus on 'experience design' based on an understanding of visitor expectations and values (understand and promote 'travel for good').
- Develop and maintain a strong web presence and 'landing page' (and don't waste money on expensive advertising).

As a local enabler and promoter of Somerset's visitor economy, Council has a key role to play in addressing the enablers of a vibrant visitor economy.

### 3. Opportunities to Support a Vibrant Visitor Economy

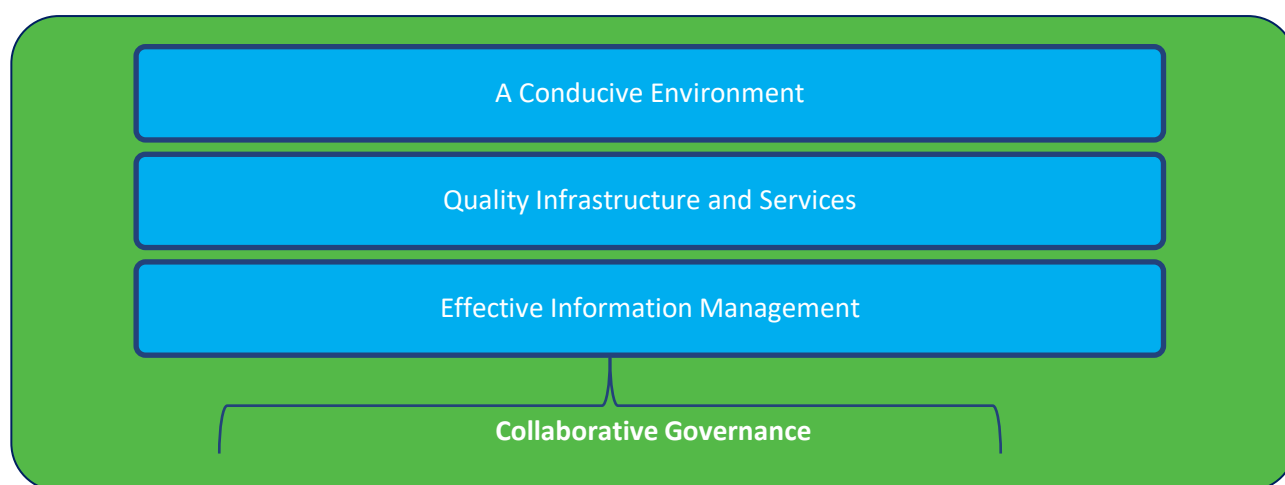
#### 3.1 A Focus on the Enablers of a Vibrant Visitor Economy

In order to grow the tourism sector in Somerset, Council has a key role to play in addressing the ‘enablers’ of a vibrant visitor economy. These enablers of a vibrant regional visitor economy include:

- A conducive natural, built and social/cultural environment;
- Quality infrastructure and services (including transport and communications, hospitality services, accommodation, entertainment and events and cultural attractions);
- Effective information management (including research, marketing, visitor information and wayfinding); and
- Business support (e.g. customer service training, digital learning, marketing and branding).

The development of a strong and sustainable visitor economy also requires Somerset to embrace its connections with the wider region. This means leveraging the marketing and promotional power of the region’s location within South East Queensland and its proximity to major attractions and events. This is particularly important in light of Brisbane’s status as the preferred candidate city / bidder to host the 2032 Olympic Games. This requires Somerset Regional Council to be pro-active in addressing the wider regional tourism planning and promotion challenges referred to above.

**Figure 9. The Enablers of a Vibrant Visitor Economy**



Source: Lennon, S. and Gibbins, R. (April 2019)

In identifying opportunities for action, the role of Somerset Regional Council and other tourism support agencies in supporting the enabling environment for tourism businesses to operate and consumers to visit and experience the region is recognised.

While focusing on the enablers of a vibrant visitor economy, for Somerset Regional Council, successful tourism strategy planning and implementation will require Somerset Regional Council and local stakeholders to:

- **Understand our markets:** Identify current and emerging markets and understand what they're looking for / what they want and expect.
- **Understand our offer:** Collaboratively identify our 'personality brand' and build a positive narrative about Somerset's tourism offer.
- **Be strategic:** Have a strategic, informed and targeted plan of action to address priorities for implementation.
- **Be organised:** Define, appropriately resource and communicate Council's tourism services support roles and functions and integrate these activities across the organisation; build partnerships with industry and key agencies to build capacity.
- **Be informed:** Continue to monitor our markets and our offer; measure and monitor strategy implementation progress using a combination of output and outcome measures.

These considerations inform strategy development. They represent what could be considered Somerset Regional Council's tourism planning, promotion and destination management planning principles. They also underpin the vision and charter for tourism in Somerset.

### 3.2 A Vision and Charter for Tourism in Somerset

The strategic themes and directions reflect stakeholder views regarding the region's tourism issues, challenges and opportunities for growth, which combined, inform the vision for a vibrant visitor economy. The vision is supported by the tourism charter, which describes Council's commitment to promoting, facilitating and co-ordinating tourism promotion and support activities in Somerset.

#### *Vision for a Vibrant Visitor Economy in Somerset*

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*Connecting country and the coast, Somerset, in the heart of South East Queensland, is a premier visitor destination, defined by a diversity of authentic experiences which capitalise on the region's natural features and iconic attractions, as well as its recreational, heritage and cultural assets, driving sustainable tourism.*

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#### *Somerset Regional Council's Tourism Charter*

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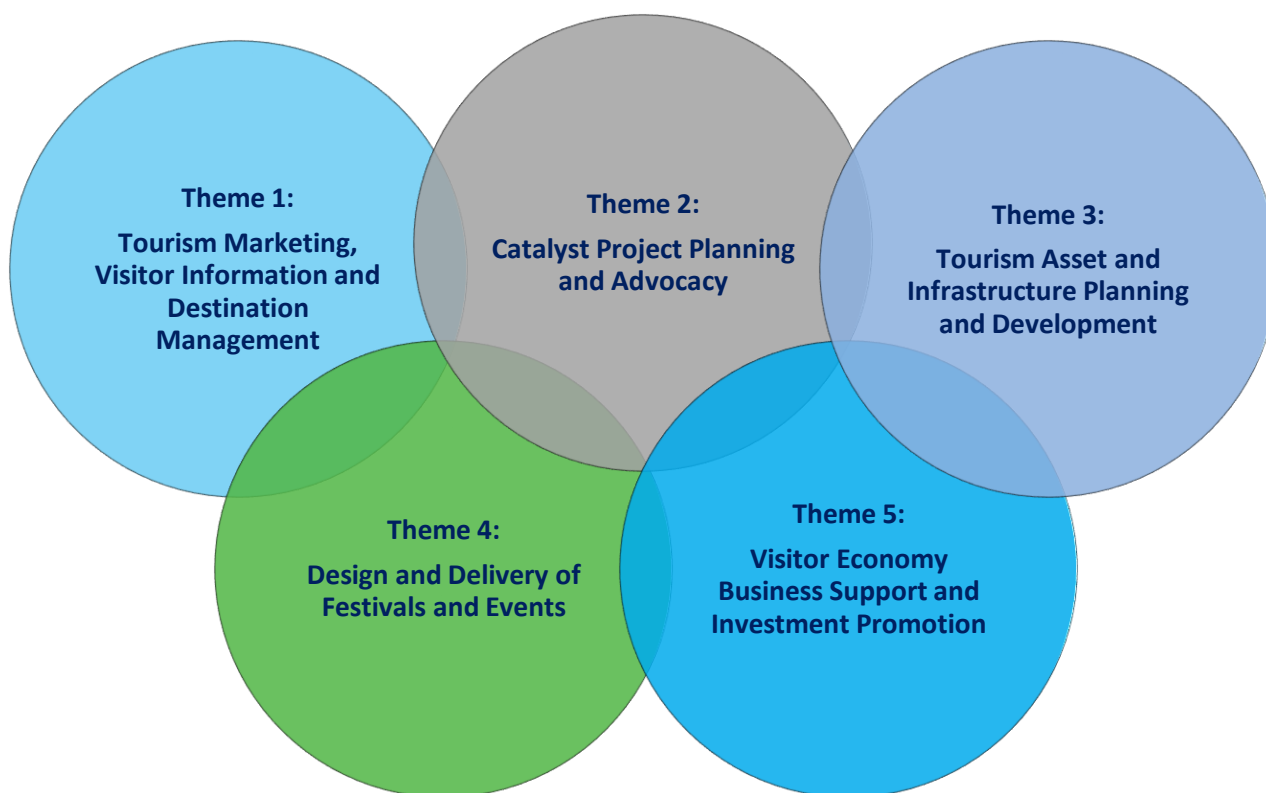
*Somerset Regional Council supports and promotes tourism in the region through sound strategic planning, infrastructure delivery and asset management. It takes a partnership approach to tourism promotion and development, working in collaboration with tourism agencies and operators to enhance the 'Experience Somerset', brand, through collaborative marketing, product development, visitor servicing and industry engagement.*

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### 3.3 Tourism Strategy Themes

The identified opportunities, presented herein, are informed by the findings of the research, consultation and analysis, together with the recommended tourism vision and charter. The opportunities are presented for the consideration of Council under five themes as follows.

**Figure 10. Somerset Tourism Strategy Themes**



A total of 36 individual opportunities have been identified and categorised under the five strategic themes, to help develop and grow Somerset’s visitor economy.

For each opportunity, a brief rationale is provided, as informed by the research, consultation and analysis. Collectively, the opportunities represent a ‘long list’ for further consideration by Council, in developing its Tourism Strategy and action plan.

## 3.4 Long List of Opportunities for Consideration

### Theme 1: Tourism Marketing, Visitor Information and Destination Management

#### Opportunities

- 1.1 **Prepare a Somerset Region Tourism Marketing Plan:** Scope the preparation of a *Somerset Region Tourism Marketing Plan*, beginning with a review and assessment of current marketing activities including social media marketing and tourism website content and structure. A marketing plan would identify appropriate approaches to developing, amongst other things, a targeted multi-platform tourism advertising campaign. Ensure branding clearly articulates Somerset's point of difference while connecting and promoting the local tourism offer's place in the wider SEQ branding and destination management framework.
- 1.2 **Develop a Brand Toolkit for Tourism Operators:** To support the implementation of the Somerset Region's Tourism Marketing Plan, develop a branding toolkit and engage with local operators and other tourism industry stakeholders to use the region's branding in their own marketing.
- 1.3 **Develop a Single Online Entry Point / Website Landing Page:** As part of the proposed marketing plan, review the *Experience Somerset* website in conjunction with an audit of other tourism promotional websites with a view to enhancing the region's digital presence with an easy-to-find (search engine-optimised), well-designed and branded, easy-to-navigate and regularly updated landing page.
- 1.4 **Prepare a Town Centre Entry Enhancement and Wayfinding Strategy:** Prepare a strategy which identifies streetscaping and place-making initiatives to enhance the entrance to Somerset's towns and villages and support with consistent branded town entry statement signage and clear and simple directional signage at strategic junctures throughout the region.
- 1.5 **Investigate Opportunities to Tap Into the Large Tour Group Market:** Explore opportunities to work with Somerset's tourism operators to improve the offering for large group tours including international visitor tours, caravan and camping clubs, car clubs and the motorcycle club drive market.
- 1.6 **Further Develop the Region's Itinerary Planning and Promotion:** Explore the concept of downloadable itineraries, that could feature on a new regional tourism promotion landing web page as described above. This would include a list of the region's identified 'hero' experiences.
- 1.7 **Explore the Concept of a Somerset Region Tourism Ambassador:** Explore the concept of a high-profile Somerset Region Tourism Ambassador role to extend the marketing reach of the region in mainstream media.
- 1.8 **Support Visitation to Somerset and Wivenhoe Dams:** Continue to engage with SEQ Water by supporting it in master planning work for its recreation sites in the Somerset region, which is intended to guide future decision-making on investment in those sites based on agreed service standards, capacities and desired visitor experience.

- 1.9 Develop Arts and Cultural Tourism including Indigenous Cultural Tourism:** Work with industry to identify, prioritise and develop arts and cultural experiences including First Nations projects. Seek out government funding support for priority projects.
- 1.10 Promote and Support Somerset’s Network of Small Towns and Villages as a Key Component of the ‘Personality Brand’:** There is an opportunity to promote small towns and their attractions in Somerset. Invest in an electronic version of Council’s booklet ‘Somerset – Real Country, Real Adventure’ with maps showing, for example, where to charge e-bikes and services available in each town, to inform visitors before they arrive in the region. Explore concepts for online maps could show driving routes highlighting attractions in the region’s small towns and villages.
- 1.11 Explore Food Trail Opportunities:** Leveraging the SEQ Food Trails concept, in collaboration with local producers, accommodation providers and others working in the tourism space, explore the concept of a developing and promoting a Somerset Region / Brisbane Valley Food Trail. This could focus on farm gate opportunities or leverage other features of the region in the retail space (e.g. a pie trail).
- 1.12 Create a Compelling Vision and Identity for Agriculture in Somerset:** Engage with the region’s key industry stakeholders to empower local innovation and identify and exploit synergies between agriculture and tourism.





## Theme 2: Catalyst Project Planning and Advocacy

### Opportunities

- 2.1 Activate the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail to Make it a Cultural as Well as a Recreational Experience:** Quality, well-designed and consistent directional and interpretive signage on the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail (BVRT), for example, information boards about local flora and fauna, or themed fixed photo frame installations, would help guide riders and encourage them to stop and observe their surroundings. The concept of an arts and heritage interpretive trail, with historically and culturally-significant pieces or sculptures on the BVRT would help promote a consistent, authentic identity across the Somerset section of the trail.
- 2.2 Implement a Program of Rail Trail Infrastructure Improvements:** Improve the BVRT experience with a program to establish more resting facilities, tree plantings and shade structures, water fountains and toilet facilities.
- 2.3 Develop Rail Trail and River Tourism:** Explore opportunities to organise paddling tours on the Brisbane River with booked camping along the way, including integration of school-based adventure and camping tourism. Visitors could be attracted to organised tours which could include cycling the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail, camping and drop-off for river paddle tours. Pick-up and drop-off points located at campsites would be necessary.
- 2.4 Prepare a Mount Glen Rock Tourism Concept Plan:** With Council having recently purchased Mount Glen Rock for a multi-use recreational park, there is an opportunity to explore concepts that would elevate this asset to an attraction of international standard. For example, it could be developed into an attraction for visitors similar to the off-season activities that take place in the snowfields of Victoria, such as mountain biking. A concept plan could address opportunities for formal walking / riding tracks and visitor information points and other facilities.
- 2.5 Progress Plans to Upgrade The Condensery:** Building on The Condensery Masterplan, determine priorities for investment and prepare the necessary business cases to inform applications for State and Federal Government funding support.
- 2.6 Progress Plans to Upgrade the Kilcoy Environmental Interpretive Centre:** Identify priorities for investment in the Interpretive Centre and undertake the necessary planning and business case preparation to inform applications for State and Federal Government funding support.

## Theme 3: Tourism Asset and Infrastructure Planning and Development

### Opportunities

- 3.1 **Investigate Old Railway Assets Options:** Explore options to utilise old railways assets in community ownership, such as stations, for the BVRT experience (e.g. cafes, museums, etc.). For example, the old railway turntable at Linville, which is situated along the rail trail in a natural amphitheatre, could be investigated for its potential as an open-air performance space.
- 3.2 **Undertake an Updated Visitor Accommodation Investigation:** Explore opportunities to enhance the visitor accommodation offer in Somerset by confirming visitor segment needs and expectations, undertaking market assessments and preparing business cases. Re-visit the need and opportunity for additional caravan park facilities and explore the concept of a business case for an ‘eco-lodge’ accommodation facility in a location with access to the BVRT and / or dam lakes.
- 3.3 **Explore Opportunity for Watts Bridge Memorial Airfield to Facilitate Fly-in Tourists:** Watts Bridge could be the ‘Somerset Regional Airport’ with a small terminal. Archerfield and Caboolture airports are reportedly likely to close soon. Watts Bridge could become the primary airport for the region subject to a business case to consider infrastructure upgrade requirements (and costs) and market potential.
- 3.4 **Promote a Somerset Regional Camping Trail:** Establish and publish online (via Experience Somerset) a regularly updated list of all campsites in the Somerset Region, including at the various showgrounds.
- 3.5 **Address the Region’s Camping and River Access Management Priorities:** Working with other responsible agencies, explore options to address matters concerning multiple ownership issues (land and asset management, river access, facilities, waste management, etc.) at Twin Bridges and Savages Crossing in order to ‘formalise’ these spaces / locations into key tourism assets.
- 3.6 **Explore Options for ‘Wild Camping’ / ‘Bush Camping’ and Farm Stays:** Explore options for regulating and promoting ‘wild camping’ / ‘bush camping’ on private property, such as at One Tree Canoe. As just one example to consider, this has an area that could be used for camping near 6km of the Brisbane River that is good for paddling.
- 3.7 **Undertake a ‘State of the State Roads’ Audit in the Somerset Region:** Prepare a ‘State of the State Roads in the Somerset Region’ report and update annually, to support lobbying for improvements in the network and to inform grant funding applications focussed on tour route road infrastructure upgrades.

## Theme 4: Design and Delivery of Festivals and Events

### Opportunities

- 4.1 Explore a More Strategic and Coordinated Approach to Events Planning and Promotion:** Review existing festivals and events (e.g. water events (sailing, fishing, rowing, water-skiing), sporting events (trail runs / rides utilising the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail, race days, rodeos, skydiving events / days, motorsports), food and wine and identify opportunities for existing and emerging events throughout the Somerset Region to become part of a wider, coordinated calendar of events. As part of this initiative, investigate a strategic and targeted approach to leverage opportunities presented by the potential hosting of the 2032 Olympic Games in Brisbane.
- 4.2 Promote Somerset as a Location for Sporting Events:** Promote Somerset's existing sporting facilities to attract key sporting events such as schools-based events and Masters Games.
- 4.3 Explore Opportunities for More Events at the Somerset Civic Centre:** Explore opportunities to improve the offering of the Somerset Civic Centre to attract touring shows.
- 4.4 Develop Somerset's Connections with a Wider Regional Festivals Network:** Engage with the organisers of festivals such as the *Big Day Out*, *Anywhere Festival*, *Festival of Small Halls* and *Brisbane Festival* to include Somerset Region venues in their programming and promotion.
- 4.5 Promote and Leverage the Brisbane Air Show:** Bringing the Brisbane Air Show and other activities to the Watts Bridge Airfield (e.g. Red Thunder Warbirds, Brisbane Valley Sport Aircraft Club) presents an opportunity to showcase Somerset as a tourist attraction with national and international appeal.

## Theme 5: Visitor Economy Business Support and Investment Promotion

### Opportunities

- 5.1 **Develop Council's Capacity for Tourism Research and Information Dissemination:** Research is an essential aspect of business development that is best carried out centrally. Explore means for compiling, synthesising and disseminating up-to-date data on visitor markets, trends and preferences, to assist local operators in their planning and promotion.
- 5.2 **Connect Local Operators with Business Support Programs:** Investigate the means by which Somerset Regional Council can facilitate access to business support and training resources in the tourism sector, leveraging Queensland and Federal Government programs where available.
- 5.3 **Facilitate Access to TEQ's 'Best of Queensland Experiences' Program:** Engage with local tourism operators to support them in improving their businesses to ensure they meet a certain quality and service standard. Specifically, encourage local operators to register with the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) and participate in the Best of Queensland Experiences Program operated by TEQ, to help them *“deliver exceptional customer experiences, create positive word of mouth, help attract more visitors, grow expenditure and increase market share”*.
- 5.4 **Formalise a Strategic Approach to Grant Funding Applications for Catalyst Project Opportunities:** Confirm priority advocacy projects for funding support applications and liaise with State and Federal funding agencies to monitor availability of tourism industry grants programs. Ensure that business cases for priority tourism projects are at the ready.
- 5.5 **Review the Local Planning and Regulatory Regime to Facilitate Tourism Industry Development:** To support tourism industry investment, review land use planning and regulatory processes as they apply to the tourism sector (businesses, festivals and events, accommodation providers, not-for-profits such as Arts groups, etc.) to facilitate (and promote) an enabling environment for sustainable tourism industry development in Somerset.
- 5.6 **Build Local Tourism Partnerships Including Agri-Tourism:** Investigate ways to build the region's collective capacity to connect and grow the Somerset visitor economy. Explore collaborative ways to nurture and develop stakeholder partnerships – Council, operators, tourism bodies, government – in a strategic, informed and targeted manner which articulates a shared vision about the future of the visitor economy and a how to get there.

### 3.5 Informing Priorities for Action

Determining which opportunities to address (and which ones to prioritise), either as part of Council’s operations or in a support role, depends on the anticipated benefits and Somerset Regional Council’s capacity to implement.

‘Benefit Assessment’ considerations include:

- Does the opportunity or initiative build on our existing strengths and attributes?
- Does it address a key gap or constraint?
- Will the opportunity or initiative bring more visitors to Somerset?
- Will it encourage the sorts of visitors we want?
- Will it help generate more tourism spend in the local economy?
- Will it help generate new business opportunities?
- Will it help support the creation of opportunities for employment?
- Are there other considerations – social, environmental, cultural – to consider?

‘Capacity to Implement’ considerations include:

- Is the opportunity or initiative consistent with Council’s vision and values as articulated in the 2021-2026 Corporate Plan?
- Does it have the support of the community?
- Does Council have the organisational capacity to implement the project?
- Does Council have the necessary financial resources and the human resources?
- Is the support infrastructure available (e.g. power, water, energy, roads, communications, amenities)?
- Implementation - who is best placed to drive the opportunity? Is it Somerset Regional Council as the lead, as a partner or is it the responsibility of other organisations with support from Council?

**Figure 11. Opportunity Prioritisation Matrix**



Source: SC Lennon & Associates

Strategy implementation priorities will be determined by Council through the application of these broad set of assessment criteria, determining to what extent the opportunity in question concerned is a higher, medium or lower priority. Applying the assessment criteria and effectively ‘rating’ and ‘ranking’ each opportunity determines those that are considered the highest priority and which, as a result, are short-term actions.

### 3.6 Somerset Regional Council’s Priority Opportunities for Action

From the long-list of opportunities presented in the preceding sub-section of this supporting document and following consultation with and direction from Somerset Regional Council’s senior staff and Councillors, 13 opportunities have been identified by Council as being those which could be progressed as priorities over the life of the strategy’s implementation, beginning with an annual review of implementation priorities.

Some of these priorities, as determined by Council, are focused on catalyst project planning and development initiatives which require action combined with a well-planned course of project implementation for the desired outcomes to be realised over time. Others are focussed on strategic program implementation and are initiatives that can be addressed as part of Somerset Regional Council’s day-to-day strategic planning and facilitation functions.

The priorities, as identified by Council, are categorised under three ‘activity areas’ as follows:

- Strategy Monitoring and Review;
- Catalyst Project Planning and Development; and
- Strategic Program Implementation.

Council’s nominated priority opportunities for action are documented as follows.

#### Strategy Monitoring and Review:

1. **Undertake an Annual Review of Tourism Strategy Implementation Priorities** - To ensure Council’s resources are directed to those projects and programs which generate the greatest return on investment, consistent with the vision for tourism in Somerset and Council’s Tourism Charter, it is recommended an annual review of strategy implementation priorities be undertaken and that Council: renew its commitment to on-going priority initiatives; and identify and commit to new opportunities - including those which capitalise on the 2032 Olympic Games - as circumstances and resources warrant.

#### Catalyst Project Planning and Development:

2. **Implement a Program of Rail Trail Infrastructure Improvements** - Improve the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail experience with a program to establish more resting facilities, tree plantings and shade structures, water fountains and toilet facilities.
3. **Prepare a Mount Glen Rock Tourism Concept Plan** - Following Somerset Regional Council’s purchase of Mount Glen Rock for a multi-use recreational park, explore concepts that would elevate this asset to an attraction of international standard. A concept plan would consider and address opportunities for a diversity of recreational activities including mountain biking, formal walking / riding tracks and visitor information points and other support facilities.

4. **Promote and Leverage the Brisbane Air Show** - Leveraging the profile of the Brisbane Air Show and other activities at the Watts Bridge Airfield, develop and implement a strategy to showcase Somerset as a tourist attraction with national and international appeal.

#### Strategic Program Implementation:

5. **Prepare a Somerset Region Tourism Marketing Plan** - Scope the preparation of a *Somerset Region Tourism Marketing Plan*, beginning with a review and assessment of current marketing activities including social media marketing and tourism website content and structure. A marketing plan would identify appropriate approaches to developing, amongst other things, a targeted multi-platform tourism advertising campaign. Ensure branding clearly articulates Somerset's point of difference while connecting and promoting the local tourism offer's place in the wider SEQ branding and destination management framework.
6. **Develop a Single Online Entry Point / Website Landing Page** - As part of the proposed marketing plan, review the Experience Somerset website in conjunction with an audit of other tourism promotional websites with a view to enhancing the region's digital presence with an easy-to-find (search engine-optimised), well-designed and branded, easy-to-navigate and regularly updated landing page.
7. **Create a Compelling Vision and Identity for Agriculture in Somerset** – Engage with the region's key industry stakeholders to empower local innovation and identify and exploit synergies between agriculture and tourism.
8. **Investigate Opportunities to Tap Into the Large Tour Group Market** - Explore opportunities to work with the Somerset's tourism operators to improve the offering for large group tours including international visitor tours, caravan and camping clubs, car clubs and the motorcycle club drive market.
9. **Develop Rail Trail and River Tourism** - Explore opportunities to organise paddling tours on the Brisbane River with booked camping along the way, including integration of school-based adventure and camping tourism. Visitors could be attracted to organised tours which could include cycling the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail, camping and drop-off for river paddle tours. Pick-up and drop-off points located at campsites would be necessary.
10. **Undertake an Updated Visitor Accommodation Investigation** - Explore opportunities to enhance the visitor accommodation offer in Somerset by confirming visitor segment needs and expectations, undertaking market assessments and preparing business cases. Re-visit the need and opportunity for additional caravan park facilities and explore the concept of a business case for an 'eco-lodge' accommodation facility in a location with access to the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail and / or dam lakes.
11. **Prepare a Town Centre Entry Enhancement and Wayfinding Strategy** - Prepare a strategy which identifies streetscaping and place-making initiatives to enhance the entrance to Somerset's towns and villages and support with consistent branded town entry statement signage and clear and simple directional signage at strategic junctures throughout the region.
12. **Explore a More Strategic and Coordinated Approach to Events Planning and Promotion** - Review existing festivals and events (e.g. water events (sailing, fishing, rowing, water-skiing), sporting events (trail runs / rides utilising the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail, race days, rodeos, skydiving events / days, motorsports), food and wine and identify opportunities for existing and emerging events throughout Somerset to become part of a wider, coordinated calendar of events.
13. **Build Local Tourism Partnerships** - Investigate ways to build the region's collective capacity to connect and grow the Somerset visitor economy. Explore collaborative ways to nurture and develop

stakeholder partnerships – Council, operators, tourism bodies, government – in a strategic, informed and targeted manner which articulates a shared vision about the future of the visitor economy and a how to get there.

### 3.7 Monitoring Council's Return on Investment

Somerset Regional Council will be required to monitor the progress of the Tourism Strategy to achieve the recommendations it ultimately commits to, consistent with the vision and charter. One of Council's strategic goals as articulated in its Corporate Plan is for a 'Prosperous Somerset', with a desired outcome being for the region to be celebrated for its prosperous rural lifestyle, its agricultural strengths, its natural assets and its potential as a premier regional visitor destination.

Somerset's key industries are agriculture, food product manufacturing, retail, health, education and construction services. The visitor economy is a burgeoning sector, with almost three-quarters of visitors to Somerset (73%) being domestic day-trippers. There are an estimated 205 'tourism businesses' (of 2,100 businesses in total) in Somerset, half of which are non-employing.

Business development and wealth creation are important drivers of economic prosperity. A desire to see more Somerset Region tourism operators build their capacity, develop their offer and grow their market was highlighted throughout the strategy consultation process. The success of Somerset in attracting more holiday visitors (tourists) will influence the number of businesses established in the region and their capacity to grow. Enabling and facilitating business investment should be an objective of the Somerset Tourism Strategy.

Somerset's growing population will also bring with it development pressures, which may have environmental consequences affecting the attractiveness of the area as a place to visit. If managed well, this growth can generate positive economic development outcomes.

As highlighted throughout this report, the role of Somerset Regional Council in promoting and facilitating positive change is to influence the enablers of a vibrant visitor economy. The twelve priorities for action as determined by Council, are designed to help it deliver on its commitment to the design and delivery of initiatives which serve to support the local visitor economy and Somerset's prosperity.

Somerset currently receives around 458,000 day-trip visitors, 162,000 domestic overnight visitors and just 3,000 international visitors. A (conservative) strategic target is to generate an uplift in visitation to the region by 10%. The initiatives put forward in this report, if implemented by Council, will help realise a desired economic outcome defined by a 10% increase in visitation to the region, which would see visitor expenditure increase from \$66 million per annum to approximately \$73 million.

Economic modelling suggests that the direct addition (uplift) in visitor expenditure of \$7 million in Somerset would lead to a corresponding direct addition of 57 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs in the local economy and a further 27 FTE jobs resulting indirectly through production and consumption multipliers, for a total estimated increase of 84 FTE jobs in Somerset.

These anticipated economic output and employment impacts represent a strong return on investment from Council's commitment to the implementation of the Somerset Tourism Strategy. These desired outcomes, along with progress made on individual actions, will need to be monitored through the following methods and sources:



- Regular (annual) Somerset Region tourism operator surveys and customer / visitor satisfaction surveys;
- Subscription to regularly updated data sources such as profile.id and economy.id or REMPLAN; and
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data and Business Register data.

The set performance measures will be reported annually. The *Somerset Tourism Strategy* should be reviewed annually and updated in five years. This will require the necessary resourcing.

### 3.8 Tourism Strategy Resourcing

Somerset Regional Council's resourcing of its tourism promotion and support effort, as well as access to resource support via other government agencies, will be key to its capacity to deliver on the initiatives put forward in the Tourism Strategy.

While engagement with visitors to Somerset is well catered for on the ground (through the VICs), Council currently has limited capacity to deliver effective tourism branding, marketing & promotion, catalyst project planning and support and advocacy/lobbying, or to engage effectively with local tourism operators / businesses throughout the region.

Council's Tourism Team is constrained in its capacity to do all that is expected of it as Somerset's principal tourism promotion and support agency. Council's human resources for tourism facilitation and promotion programs comprise the Communications and Marketing Manager (full-time), supported by three full-time Visitor Information Centre (VIC) Officers, one contracted Events Officer (until August 2021) and one part-time Visitor Information Centre Officer. The VICs are also nominally supported by 50 volunteers across Somerset. A trainee will also join the team for 12 months from March 2021.

Council's tourism section is responsible for media management and engagement, marketing, branding and promotion of Council's corporate functions, advertising, social media management, event management and event delivery (approximately seven events per year), tourism promotion and operator engagement, visitor information centre (VIC) management, art gallery functions and more.

Having regard for the priority opportunities described above, consideration has been made and estimate provided, of Council's in-house human resource requirements to ensure effective strategy implementation, as shown in the Table 1 overleaf.

**Table 1. Council’s Priority Opportunities – Resourcing Requirements**

Priority Actions	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
<b>Projects</b>					
General Administration	20	20	20	20	20
1. Annual Review of Key Priorities	2	2	2	2	2
2. Implement a Program of Rail Trail Infrastructure Improvements	10	10	10	10	10
3. Prepare a Mount Glen Rock Tourism Concept Plan		25			
4. Promote and Leverage the Brisbane Air Show	10	10	10	10	10
5. Prepare a Somerset Region Tourism Marketing Plan	35				
6. Develop a Single Online Entry Point / Website Landing Page		10			
7. Investigate Opportunities to Tap Into the Large Tour Group Market				20	
8. Develop Rail Trail and River Tourism	10	10	10	10	10
9. Undertake an Updated Visitor Accommodation Investigation			20		
10. Prepare a Town Centre Entry Enhancement and Wayfinding Strategy			15		
11. Explore a More Strategic and Coordinated Approach to Events Planning and Promotion		10			
12. Build Local Tourism Partnerships	20	20	20	20	20
Scope for Other Projects	10		10	25	15
<b>Research</b>					
Regular (annual) Somerset Region tourism operator surveys	10	10	10	10	10
Customer / visitor satisfaction surveys	6	6	6	6	6
Subscription to regularly updated and tailored data sources	2	2	2	2	2
Total Weeks	135	135	135	135	105
Weeks per Full-time Equivalent (FTE)	45	45	45	45	45
FTE Positions	3	3	3	3	2

Source: SC Lennon &amp; Associates

It is important to note that not all initiatives contained in a tourism strategy are necessarily the primary responsibility of the Tourism Team as certain Council-led initiatives will require lead input from other sections of Council, such as its Planning Department. Nevertheless, It is recommended that Somerset Regional Council consider reviewing and increasing its tourism services resource allocation so that the full suite of ‘core’ tourism support and promotion tasks can be addressed. These tasks include:

- **Business Engagement and Investment Attraction**, that is, information and assistance to tourism businesses (businesses providing visitor services) and investment attraction / facilitation for events, entertainment and cultural attractions, hospitality services and accommodation.
- **Information Management / Brokerage** including research, marketing, visitor information and wayfinding.
- **Collaborative Governance** including stakeholder co-ordination, community consultation and advocacy.

There is strong alignment between Council tourism promotion and support objectives and initiatives as articulated in this report, and the organisation’s broader economic development objective. As described above, one of Council’s strategic goals as articulated in its Corporate Plan is for a ‘Prosperous Somerset’, with a desired outcome being for the region to be celebrated for its prosperous rural lifestyle, its agricultural strengths, its natural assets and its potential as a premier regional visitor destination.

To realise this objective, Somerset Regional Council is committed to playing its part in supporting business innovation and economic development to advance the region’s potential as a premier visitor destination and a region celebrated for its rich rural lifestyle.

Having regard for the human resource requirements as estimated in Table 1, it is recommended that **three full-time positions** are a minimum requirement of Council’s, with responsibilities distributed according to skills. For example, responsibilities may be distributed as follows:

- **Manager** - Strategy development and oversight, investment attraction and facilitation, corporate buy-in, oversight of VICs and collaborative governance.
- **Senior Economic Development and Tourism Officer** - Business liaison / support and information management - including research, marketing and promotion, visitor information and wayfinding.
- **Marketing and Events Officer** - Including maintaining the festivals and events calendar and acting in a support role to Council's Marketing Manager the above.

Visitor Information Services Officers should continue to be a key Council resource. In addition, there could be a projects coordinator depending on the need - this could be a contracted 'on demand' service. There will need to be a budget for supplementary specialist services such as in the areas of videography, photography and market research, including surveys.

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