CASSOWARY COAST REGIONAL COUNCIL

April 2014 Report from EDA Regional and Remote Areas Training Program Cassowary Coast Regional Council
Cassowary Coast Queensland

Report of the Economic Development Australia (EDA) Regional and Remote Areas Training Program

Held in Tully and Innisfail, Queensland, 7-8 April 2014
INTRODUCTION

Background
The Cassowary Coast Regional Council (CCRC) of Queensland is part of the Regional Development Australia Far North Queensland & Torres Strait region. CCRC was established in 2008 following the amalgamation of the Cardwell and Johnstone Shire Councils. The CCRC is also part of the Tropical North Queensland Region covered by Advance Cairns which includes other Local Governments of Cairns Regional Council, Cook Shire Council and Tablelands Regional Council and since de-amalgamation it also includes Douglas and Mareeba Shires.

With a population of around 31,000 people it is situated within a broader region of 450,000+ people with the major regional cities of Cairns (to the north) and Townsville (to the south). It covers an area of approximately 4,700 square kilometres.

The CCRC contains four main townships, Innisfail, Tully, Mission Beach and Cardwell and other small rural and coastal communities with beautiful beaches, lush hinterland and scenic mountains. The most recognisable industries are tourism and primary industries and it is Australia’s premier banana-growing region and a well-known sugar cane-growing region. The high rainfall and humidity means this is one of the wettest and greenest places in Australia.

The Cassowary Coast is connected to other parts of the nation via the Bruce Highway which passes through many of the region's townships. The Palmerston Highway provides connectivity with the Tablelands region and is its major goods transport route.

The region’s economy and communities have suffered from two significant cyclones Larry (2006) and Yasi (2011) and only 4 days after the workshop the region was again impacted by Cyclone Ita.

In 2011 Council developed the CCRC Economic Development Plan ‘Tropical Futures 2016’ through research and some consultation with the local business community and with government and non-government partners. It was created to guide economic growth focused on five economic pillars:

1. Marketing the Cassowary Coast Region
2. Building Partnerships
3. Workforce Development
4. Enabling Infrastructure
5. Planning for the Future

A status report from March 2014 indicated that of the 45 priority actions about 1/3 were able to be commented on and of some of had seen little action.

In 2013 Council employed Margaret Darveniza Director Community Services and Economic Development Officer Peggy Veen who arranged for Economic Development Australia (EDA) members Neil Lethlean, Alex Lever-Shaw and Simon Millcock to undertake the EDA Regional and Remote Area Economic Development Training Program (RRATP). The attendees for the RRATP were elected members and the senior staff and a representative from Advance Cairns attended.

This RRATP was designed to assist Council have a greater understanding of what economic development is and to assist with developing actions for the CCRC 2014/2015 organisational plan in the area of economic development. The ‘Tropical Futures 2016’ plan was recognised for its research and consultation although observations were that there appeared to have been limited levels of engagement and the workshop did not focus on the priority actions although this report may be useful to cross reference with the ‘Tropical Futures 2016’ plan.
Acknowledgements
Thanks to Margaret Darveniza and Peggy Veen for their assistance in helping with the background information and planning. It was great to see both the Mayor and CEO and all elected members and senior staff join in during the program. The generous hospitality provided by the CCRC ensured there was very genuine interest and involvement from a highly committed and motivated group of people and this made the process extremely worthwhile.


Program
The RRATP was facilitated pro-bono by three highly experienced economic development practitioners who are currently all Queensland based members of EDA; Neil Lethlean the Economic Development Manager Capricorn Enterprise, Alex Lever-Shaw the Sunshine Coast Council’s Investment and Marketing Manager and Simon Millcock the Senior Economic Development Officer Townsville City Council.

Session One: (Monday evening – 7 April Tully)
The facilitators provided an introduction to the program and presented case studies based on:

- Investment – the in’s and out’s Delivering a Natural Advantage to Business Australia’s Sunshine Coast Investment Incentives Presentation (Alex)
- Regional Economic Development Experiences (Neil)
- Industry Diversification – Australia’s Pork and Poultry Industry growth move to SA lead by a small local council (Simon)

Attendees were given time to outline their reasons for attending and a dinner was held at Tyson Hotel, Tully with interaction undertaken between the presenters and attendees. There was genuine interest in having a better understanding of the process of approaches to economic development by understanding your region and how implementation occurs.

Session Two: (Tuesday morning - 8 April 2014 Innisfail)
This session saw the presentation of the “Economic Development toolkit” which was an interactive session with practical examples from the facilitators and was jointly presented by Alex, Neil and Simon. Both sessions 1 and 2 included general feedback, questions and interaction by the attendees and notes were taken of key items raised.
Session Three: (Tuesday afternoon – 8 April 2014)

Held on the afternoon and facilitated by Simon with support from Neil and Alex this session allowed attendees to raise their key areas of interest. Kellie Jordan from Advance Cairns outlined the work being undertaken by Advance Cairns and the need for CCRC to feed into the regional planning and ensure that Advance Cairns is part of the CCRC engagement strategy. Following this session the presenters were then given a brief tour of Mission Beach.

Discussions continued throughout all sessions centering on the need for change and that whilst the area is experiencing growth and that CCRC has the leadership opportunity to help progress economic development a core value of the Cassowary Coast included reducing the unemployment and retaining people. The following main themes emerged with regards to the role of the CCRC in leading this economic development:

1. Be cohesive – act and communicate on the actions
2. Involve partners – internal and external in the economic development process
3. Assist the community to build on the identified assets and change what can be changed
4. Strengthen the ability for the communities to work and think regionally

It should be noted that as there was no business or industry representatives at the sessions so the following information is different to other RRATP reports as it will focus on the CCRC requirements as opposed to all aspects of an economic development strategy or broader actions. The following key points flowed from the conversations:

- Local communities have shown resilience and an ability to continue to operate after some tough times and that CCRC leadership role during these times could now move towards assisting with proactive business capacity building (the soft infrastructure).

- The current CCRC economic development plan is not owned by the community and that the vision and goals need to be further articulated to the community.

- There are a number of major investments and the attracting of further requires a partnership approach from all levels of Government with assistance from organisations such as Advance Cairns. There are good news stories occurring and CCRC can help with delivering the positive messages.

- The need for engagement with local business by CCRC could be focused on engagement with Chambers / Business groups and focusing support on those who are and those who
wanting to grow including ensuring assistance comes from all levels of government and 
other agencies to provide targeted support.

- CCRC needs to recognise the opportunities which are occurring through the Queensland 
Plan and the Northern Australia White paper and then be able to communicate the role that 
the Cassowary Coast can provide.

- The business catchment area is beyond the CCRC boundaries and to identify ways to 
increase knowledge of the assets of Cassowary Coast to the 450,000+ people in the region.

- CCRC could play a role in the area of employment for the region by engaging with industry 
as a number of businesses operating in the area are owned by people from outside the 
area and they are reliant on international workers.

The following general comments were raised:

- CCRC is delivering the core infrastructure needs through essential services and roads which 
consume large parts of the budget and assist with the industry and business needs. There is a 
need to Council to consider how it ensures that this is understood better within the business 
community.

- Whilst there is an agreed regional approach there could be better regional prioritising that 
allows for a consistent approach.

- Many of the communities are welcoming and there is a great lifestyle.

- Some established locals are investing outside of the region as opposed to in the region.

- It is difficult to juggle providing the same level of service for each of the communities and 
precinct.

- Better understand the demographics of those moving to CCRC and ensure that they are 
welcomed to not just their town but the whole of the region.

- The ability to retain youth and build families and communities could be assisted by marketing 
and recognising the strengths of the location as part of a significant growing broader Northern 
Queensland region.

- Assistance to business / start-ups and incubators could be focused on identifying 
what Council assets could be used to assist.

- Ensure that there is a better understanding of the leakages that are occurring and then 
working with business to place strategies in place to better capture the dollars which are in the 
region.

- Work with the regional education providers such as: schools, Tafe and James Cook University 
to focus on the key industries and assist with facilitating collaboration between them.

- Identify the role CCRC could play in assisting with the development of local tourism 
organisation through liaison with Tourism Tropical North Queensland.

- Better understand how the key resource of water can provide greater value to the 
region’s economy.

- Assist the traditional horticulture to industry to diversify through growth of tropical foods 
expertise and research and development.

- The planning scheme's flexibility and the need to finalise the new scheme.

- Ability for using headwork’s requirements as part of the mix in business support.

- Planning based on the regional needs and priorities via better promotion of the operational 
aspects of council as they fit into the strategies.

- Continue prioritising of urban developments and master plans for towns and encourage 
business and communities to contribute and embrace these spaces as they will instil greater
confidence and are placing making. Ensure that there is a celebration after each component of streetscapes is achieved.

- Recognise the current economic development strategy has delivered on a number of the 7 phases outlined during session 2 but that many of the matters required within the outputs need to be further addressed.

- Be an active participant in the Regional Organisation of Council and potentially look at being the leader in bringing together the broader region of North Queensland and Far North Queensland. This could include LGAQ and RDA’s.

- Consider how Council can be less reactive by taking a more strategic approach.

- Unemployment numbers are factor limiting the CCRC to be able to grow its rate base and places increased pressure on services.

- Time of CCRC to actively take up the branding / storytelling and develop the new identity. It has been 6 years since amalgamation and time to get the region working together and this can be achieved through work with local businesses to help change perceptions.

- Focus on the areas of difference that the region has for the marketing and selling of the region including:
  - Environment
  - Safety
  - Land availability / Water
  - Great Barrier Reef
  - Rivers
  - Adventure Sports

- CCRC can develop a culture of thinking and developing on targeted areas for supporting business growth.

- City centre renewal making the town’s key areas for attracting and retaining residents.

- Re consider the types of residential requirements to allow for transitional housing for those entering the housing market for the first time.

- Support and encourage an entrepreneurial spirit.

- Need to be brave and show leadership through decisive decision making.

- Look at the communication tools available through web sites for information sharing.

- What commercial opportunities are there that CCRC could be including into its thinking around its assets.

- There are many stories of growth and expansion and the need for CCRC to communicate these.

- Understand the needs of the changing demographics – not what it currently looks like but what it will look like in 10 years from now as population’s age.

- Better understand what the key industries trends are and what they will also look like in 10 years’ time.

- Ensure that support is provided through engagement by economic development with developments so that development applications can proceed as quickly as possible.
Industry/Business

As outlined previously this RRATP did not include engagement with industry or business groups so this report will not attempt to make comments regarding these areas. Whilst it was recognised during the program that Local Government and Regional Development Agencies do have a major role to assist industry and business and that CCRC was using the program to clear its thinking about progressing in this space.

**Recommendation for consideration in 2014/2015**

As outlined there are a number of actions occurring within the current ‘Tropical Futures 2016’ plan and these should be encouraged to continue and a workshop specific to the relevance of each priority action could allow for some priority settings. This RRATP report could be the catalyst to undertake a review and update of the ‘Tropical Futures 2016’ plan in partnership with a Cassowary Coast Economic Development Action Group, Advance Cairns and Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning.

It needs to be recognised that the CCRC cannot by itself implement any economic development plans or strategies and a focus for 2014/2015 should centre on bringing everyone together. As such the following 2 areas would go a long way towards being able to achieve further growth.

There is not a need to reinvent but there is a need to reassess, engage and set practical and realistic achievements based on the resources that are available.

1. **Engagement/Communication:**

   This has the ability to then assist with developing the marketing / investment stories and collateral including selling the region internally and externally it will assist in delivering against Pillars 1 & 2 of the ‘Tropical Futures 2016’.

   a. Local:
      i. That CCRC develops a Cassowary Coast Economic Development Action Group that includes Cr Kylie Farinelli through her Portfolio of Economic Development along with 2 other Councillors plus representatives from business across all
towns and from each of the key industries by providing the resources of the economic development officer as their secretariat. This group to also look at investment attraction including encouraging local investment.

ii. That CCRC engages with each of the Chambers of Commerce and develops MoU's to provide assistance in capacity building and develop local actions plans.

iii. CCRC supports business open days in each of the four main centres during the year with invites to other communities to visit and experience what they each have to offer.

iv. CCRC works with local community groups to develop welcome events.

b. Regional:
   i. Through the Regional Organisation of Council approaches the North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils to offer to host a regional economic development and industry information sharing forum.

   ii. CCRC in partnership with Advance Cairns and Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning undertakes a series of business and industry information events to promote and celebrate the regional businesses and industries.

   iii. Partner with RDA and Advance Cairns to host a workshop on Northern Australia and the Queensland Plan and its specific implications to Cassowary Coast.

   iv. Ensure Advance Cairns present to Council on their activities on a regular basis including on any agreed funding/service agreement with a realistic view of services given.

c. National/International:
   i. Partner with Advance Cairns, Trade and Invest Queensland and Austrade to ensure that CCRC features in local trade and investment missions to the region.

2. Support for business

As employment is the backbone for any economic development this will only be achieved through growth of businesses and the CCRC can provide an atmosphere that is supportive and encourages business growth.

a. Identify Council / community assets that could be utilised to assist start-up businesses and explore the option for the development of a Cassowary Coast Business Development Organisation.

b. Develop a Youth (16-25) Entrepreneurial Leadership and Mentoring Program

c. Ensure sufficient quantity and diversity of residential, commercial, industrial and retail property options to foster a stable and competitive supply of property for business development.

d. Explore the options that would suit Cassowary Coast for incentives package for business investments in identified areas.

e. Establish a business and government advisory group to build local labour market intelligence and identify skills shortages and develop a regional skills and employment strategy

3. Marketing

To realise the Cassowary Coast comparative economic advantages will require a marketing and investment attraction strategy (including to locals) as opposed to tourism marketing to attract visitors. This will also assist the CCRC in being recognised as a major player in the
development of Queensland and Northern Australia and it may require targeted campaigns for identified audiences.

- Conduct market research to identify key industry trends as well as prospective investors.
- Establish a dedicated investment attraction budget within the CCRC Economic Development budget to allow further partner with Advance Cairns to resource and execute targeted marketing and business development programs geared to raise the profile of Cassowary Coast as a key location for investment.
- Approach national figureheads to considering championing the Cassowary Coast at state, national and international audiences including the use of video-testimonials.
- Ensure Cassowary Coast is represented at economic development forums, workshops and conferences including supporting at least two regional economic development forums.
- Ensure that the planning scheme is seen as an enabler of investment by providing a quarterly public document that shows applications received and the number approved under delegation. (This will help reduce the perceptions that applications get road blocked)

**For further consideration**

- Consideration of undertake a community capacity assessment audit may assist with understanding the ability of the communities within the CCRC to undertake actions which may be asked for them.
- Develop a MoU with James Cook University to attract research activities to occur in the local area and opportunities to partner with businesses for projects or internships.

EDA also provided a number of resources and professional development. Council could consider expanding its involvement with EDA to assist staff and elected members access to the resources available for professional development and increased awareness of economic development.

**Economic Development Planning**


> Central to embedding a common approach to regional development is understanding the factors that contribute to strong regional economies. The five key determinants of long-term regional economic development can provide a firm foundation on which regional analysis, planning and initiatives are built. While there are other factors that influence economic development, these determinants are considered the most common across regions. The key determinants provide a starting point to collect information and analyse data to understand the strength and direction of each region’s economy. Targeting the key determinants in regional plans and with collective actions can help to maximise each region’s economic potential.

### The key determinants of long-term regional economic development

1. **Human capital, particularly education and skills**

   Human capital is the stock of knowledge, expertise and abilities of a population.
2 Sustainable communities (economically, environmentally and socially) and population growth
Sustainable communities refer to the ability of a region to endure in the long-term. It has economic, environmental and social dimensions. Population growth refers to change in the size of a population over time, caused by migration and natural change through births and deaths.

3 Access to international, national and regional markets
Access to international, national and regional markets is the ability to trade goods and services in a given market.

4 Comparative advantage and business competitiveness
A region has a comparative advantage when it can produce a product, good or service at a lower opportunity cost than other regions. Business competitiveness is the ability of a business to sell and supply goods and services compared to a competitor. A business has a competitive advantage when its products or services cannot be easily duplicated by competitors.

5 Effective cross-sectoral and intergovernmental partnerships (including through place-based approaches) and integrated regional planning
Effective cross-sectoral and intergovernmental partnerships are areas of formal and informal cooperation between stakeholders, which can help deliver on shared priorities. Integrated regional planning aligns the objectives of government, businesses and the community to coordinate development efforts at different levels.

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