June 2014
Report from EDA Regional and Remote Areas Training Program
Charters Towers Queensland

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

Held in Charters Towers, Queensland, 9 - 11 May 2014
Background
The Charters Towers Regional Council (CTRC) of Queensland is part of the Regional Development Australia Townsville and North West Queensland region. CTRC is classed as being in the semi-arid tropical region of North Queensland. The Charters Towers region has a strong history associated with growing the wealth of the nation through the gold fields of the late 1800’s – early 1900’s. The economy of the region has been shaped by proven competitive strengths in mining, agriculture, education and tourism.

The main town is Charters Towers (known locally as ‘The World’) and there are several smaller communities including Greenvale, Pentland, Hervey Range, Ravenswood and Homestead. The indigenous community is the Kudjala people. Charters Towers is the retail and service centre with engineering and transport sectors that support the mining and agricultural industry. The CTRC covers an area in excess of 68,366 square kilometres and has a population of approximately 12,500 people. The CTRC was established in 2008 and was preceded by two previous local government areas which dated back to the 1870s (City of Charters Towers and the Shire of Dalrymple).

Charters Towers is 133 Kilometres west of Townsville and 772 kilometres east of Mount Isa within a broader regional population base of Northern Queensland of around 460,000 people, which is one of the fastest growing non metropolitan regions of Australia. This is not replicated in Charters Towers who have seen only a slight growth of 0.1 – 0.3 percent in their population over recent years. The Australian Government is currently placing a major focus on Northern Australia and the Queensland Government has a regionalisation population target.

In 2008 the CTRC undertook a Charters Towers Economic Development Plan Situation Analysis which led to the 2009 Economic Development Plan that was updated into the Charters Towers Region Economic Development Plan 2012-2017.

The CTRC is a member of Townsville Enterprise Limited (TEL) which is the Regional Tourism Organisation and also the Regional Economic Development Organisation. TEL are currently finalising the Townsville North Queensland Tourism Destination Plan and a regional Tourism Brand. The CTRC is also a member of the Regional Economic Development sub-committee of the Regional Organisation of Councils (RED-ROC) who in April 2014 completed the NQ2031 North Queensland Regional Economic Development Plan 2014-2031.

The Charters Towers Chamber of Commerce & Mines Inc. (CTCCM) is the peak membership based organisation for businesses in the CTRC. CTCCM is the leading advocate for the business community to raise and deal with the concerns of members and to encourage businesses to increase their levels of knowledge, training and performance. Along with its lobbying role to all levels of government over the years the Chamber has played a lead role in many initiatives including developing the Economic Development Plan and Business Retention and Expansion Project.

The CTCCM & CTRC together, organised for Economic Development Australia (EDA) members June Powell, Ling Geh and Simon Millcock to meet with the community and undertake the Regional and Remote Area Economic Development Training Program (RRATP) developed by EDA. The program was supported and promoted by both the Chamber and the Council and is designed to match communities interested in progressing their economy with economic development professionals who deliver the training. The program was delivered Fri 9 - Sun 11 May 2014. The CTRC provided the funding to support the EDA members attendance and their time was provide pro-bono.
North Queensland Regional Economic and Infrastructure 2031 Plan

The Regional Economic Development sub-committee of the North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils has developed a North Queensland Economic and Infrastructure Framework 2014 (EIF) and the North Queensland Economic Development Plan 2014 to 2031 (NQ2031). These documents address the local governments of Townsville, Hinchinbrook, Palm Island, Charters Towers and Burdekin. These documents identify the key economic drivers and opportunities and projects for the region to support the growth of the region to 2031.

Charters Towers Economic Development Plan 2012 – 2017

There is a Charters Towers Economic Development Plan which was used as reference with the following key headings. This report focusses 3.3.7.1 Priority Project of Council Business Engagement although some of the feedback could be used for reference to progressing actions within the other sections.

3.3.1 Reinforce the Region’s Proven Sectors of Mining, Agriculture, Education and Tourism

3.3.2 Develop Greater Two-Way Trade with the Greater Region

3.3.3 Position Charters Towers to be a Benchmark Country City and Rural Lifestyle

3.3.4 Build the Opportunity for Charters Towers to be the Major Service Centre to Rural North Queensland

3.3.5 Encourage people to visit and experience Charters Towers: Progressively update Charters Towers’ tourism collateral based on messages in the brief. Provide brief to local tourism businesses and to tourism partners (Tourism Queensland, Townsville Enterprise Limited, Overland Way).

3.3.6 Capture Major Infrastructure and Industry Investments for the Region: Consult with existing businesses and investors in Charters Towers as to their desires from Council and update and finalise internal briefing paper.

3.3.7 Shape Charters Towers’ Investment-Friendly Reputation: Priority Project Business Engagement

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Wayne Miller President of the CTCCM and EDA member Martin Homisan the CTRC Economic Development Officer for their assistance in helping with the background information and planning. It was great to see both the Shire Mayor Frank Beveridge and Acting CEO Ramon Jayo and several elected members join during the program and many thanks also to those community members who contributed so generously of their time and expertise. The generous hospitality of both the Council and Chamber and the community ensured there was very genuine interest and involvement from a number of highly committed members from the community and this made the process extremely worthwhile.

Attendees:

There was a broad range of experiences around the room and it was noted that there was a good mix of people who have been long term residents / families of the region and those who had moved into set up business or gain employment. There was great goodwill amongst all who attended and a lot of capability within their knowledge base that made the process work smoothly.

Refer to attachment ‘A’ for the list of attendees.
**Program**
The RRATP was facilitated pro-bono by three highly experienced economic development practitioners and members of EDA from the Queensland State Practitioner Network June Powell and National Board members Ling Geh and Simon Millcock. The focus for the program was to assist the Chamber and Council to develop an Action Plan associated with *Project 3.3.7 Council – Business Engagement Program of the Charters Towers Economic Development Plan.*

**Session One: (Friday 9 May 2014)**

The facilitators provided an introduction to the program and June Powell outlined the process in developing the NQ2031 economic development plan, Ling Geh provided background and discussed the importance of land use and infrastructure planning and Simon Millcock provided a case study on diversifying an economy. Attendees were given time to outline their reasons for attending and there was a dinner held at Henry’s Cafe and Restaurant with some of the attendees taking time to meet and discuss their thoughts on the potential activities to support economic development in Charters Towers.

**Session Two: (Saturday 10 May 2014)**

This session saw the presentation of the “Economic Development toolkit” (refer to attachment ’B’) which was an interactive session with practical examples from the facilitators and was jointly presented by EDA members. Both sessions 1 and 2 included general feedback, questions and interaction by the attendees and notes were taken of key items raised.

**Session Three: (Saturday 10 May 2014)**

Held on the Saturday afternoon and facilitated by Simon Millcock and June Powell this session allowed attendees to raise their key areas of interest which Ling Geh helped record and the notes for this are contained within this report.

The workshop also spent time specifically on the action plan for business and council engagement and a consensus was agreed which is contained in this report. There was a visit to the new technical training centre and a visit to the Ghosts of Gold tour to watch the ghosts after dark film. A dinner was held on the Saturday night at Henry’s Cafe and Restaurant with representatives from the Council and Chamber. It was noted that a requiem was held on the Saturday afternoon which a number of the elected members were attending although all who had to leave were provided with the opportunity to contribute. A site visit to Dalrymple Trade Training Centre took place with Jodie Collins.

This session also included an agreement on the need for: *A broad representation Economic Development Action /Advisory / Reference Committee to be formed and chaired by the CTRC, The primary purpose of this group is to monitor and review the implementation of the Charters Towers Economic Development Plan.* This action will be a catalyst to progress the actions and ensuring engagement is occurring.
Session Four: (Sunday – 11 May 2014)

Held on the Sunday morning was a breakfast at the Stock Exchange Cafe in the beautiful Stock Exchange Arcade where Charters Towers first became connected with the rest of the World. The EDA facilitators and the Deputy Mayor Wally Brewer attended the breakfast.

Key points from stakeholders

All sessions included robust discussions and sharing of ideas. The following main themes emerged:

- That Charters Towers whilst not in serious decline has not been achieving the level of growth that is required for growing its economy.

- Noted that there are some growth opportunities in agriculture in areas such as meat processing and horticulture but these will require investment in infrastructure and support from all levels of Government and other organisations such as Townsville Enterprise.

- The focus for Chamber is to grow its membership and support capacity building for its members. It was identified opportunities to partner with all levels of government and other agencies to provide business development will help stimulate local business growth.

- Expansion of the tourism industry is an opportunity that can be further explored as the number of “Grey Nomads” visiting continues to increase and the location of Charters Towers on the junction of key routes in western Queensland provides an opportunity to capture a greater share of the drive tourism market. Education and developing Charters Towers as a local centre of excellence presented itself as an opportunity to be explored. There are already a number of international students receiving their education in Charters Towers. With Australia as a preferred education destination for many countries Charters Towers could seek to increase their market share for international education. The Townsville Enterprise Edu-tourism activities are another opportunity for Charters Towers to further pursue. Leveraging the regions schools and the linkage with the new trade training centre is a strength that can be further developed to include exchange students with Vietnam for scientists and students going overseas.

- CTRC is actively working with the State Government on markets to export cattle and meat works facilities based on the viability through owning the vertical supply chain.

It was observed that some people recognised their catchment area for business was beyond their council boundaries e.g. Townsville and also regional centres in areas such as retirement villages. Whilst some were taking up the opportunity this was not the case with everyone. The recent tourism
open day was discussed as a project that could be further developed to increase knowledge of people from the region on the assets of Charters Towers.

The presenters were extremely encouraged that the local indigenous community was represented by a member of the Body Corporate for Native Title. This organization has ideas and plans for the development of their business ventures which should be supported and encouraged.

The following general comments were raised:

- **Tourism growth opportunities:**
  - Product development around Military tourism WW2 and heritage.
  - Expanding the Overlanders Way and linkage with Outback Tourism Association
  - Further development of Fletchers Creek for low cost camping
  - Product development around authentic Indigenous experiences
  - Recreational vehicle friendly activities to support the retention of camping overflow stays

- **Links with regional industries** – connect with regional organisations to identify opportunities for CT and engage with Queensland and Australian Government to pursue opportunities

- **Support the growth in drive tourism as ‘grey nomads’ form a growth for retail**

- **What opportunities are there with the defence force?**

- **A desire to bring the community with us on the journey**

- **Increasing population needs to be high on agenda through a major development such as meatworks**

- **Look at what is not here then attract those businesses (gap analysis) is needed.**

- **Position CT to ensure it is part of the long term vision for inland transport route.**

- **Many trucks travel through CT – all potential business opportunities.**

- **Business community confidence and down – need to lift business confidence one big project could build confidence.**

- **Indigenous community could propel themselves with economic development and piggy back on current activities.**

- **Opportunity for Indigenous tourism need to see what economic development opportunities through land use agreements. Potential for overseas investment in Indigenous tourism such as White Mountains. Indigenous community needs to step forward. Sustain Indigenous community through jobs. Ngrrangoonda Aboriginal Corporation (traditional owners – Gudjala) has been formed to support and progress opportunities. Indigenous Business Australia has previously been engaged and could support in the future.**

- **Development of an Industrial park (including possible shared / incubator type space for various trades people) and town planning to support growth**

- **Opportunities for Fly In Fly Out’s to live here given we are so close to Townsville**

- **Manufacturing - attract new businesses**

- **CT can provide shopping experience different to Townsville**

- **Mining and agriculture and the grazing industry where increased water allocations would provide crop diversification and enhance grazing industry – many farmers are trialling new ideas but require support. When the grazing industry is doing well the town prospers. How can we value add to the current industries.**
• Energy and water are inhibitors – council is progressing to address the water issue. A number of constraints are being worked through.
• Water Infrastructure and access to the water is an issue, the development of an agriculture bowl in the Upper Burdekin is an investment project with MITEZ.
• CT need to sell themselves, need a digital directory and ‘my town’
• Opportunities for council and chamber to work more closely together – successful collaborative activities include recent resolution of parking issues.
• Need to understand capability of business. Could also identify which businesses want to grow - some business operators are there for lifestyle.
• Learn from the success of other centres such as the Dalby example as they encourage people to come to Dalby and bypass Toowoomba – opportunity to pursue – identify what other regions have done and what can be done in CT.
• Buy Local – perception that it is cheaper in the bigger cities – need to address may not be able to compete in price but can compete on service – need to provide very good service in CT to make shopping a personal service – keep money in town.
• Chamber has done a sign to encourage buying locally sign should be “before you shop out of town – give the locals a go”.
• Need for business support officer for business planning, manage budgets and finance and continuity planning.
• Goods go through CT to Townsville and return – potential for a storage hub, distribution centre as CT at the cross roads.
• Potential to market goods grown and sold in CT such as butcher sells local beef.
• Transport can provide extensive employment – through repairs. Identify quality services and promote these opportunities outside of the area.
• Develop clusters or hubs for transport services and distribution centre.
• Great Inland Way and Overland Way are tourism opportunities – promote as an economic development route.
• CT should be promoting that CT can provide the alternative inland route to Bruce Highway to counteract Hann Highway route.
• Digital economy – digital connectivity into CT needs to be addressed. Requirement of digital strategy for CT. CT will receive fibre to the node – will take 4 years.
• Fill empty shops by other business at a reduced rate to present as a more vibrant community – business incubators or creative industries (pop-up shops). Currently shops that are visually a problem – potential issue for owners of pop up shops for long time tenancy – potential to fill shop windows? Chamber already working on how to fill vacant space. Arts groups are looking for art spaces – Chamber happy to address.
• Affordable housing and health facilities need to be improved.
• Services such as child care needs to be available to encourage people. Support service needs are growing NDIS will increase demand for social services. Potential to base services in CT – job creation and training.
• More funding is coming into disability and need to lobby to get the big organisations in CT – sell the value proposition. Increased respite services in CT. One unit in Mossman Hall is being converted to respite care. Establishment of a community band is an opportunity. RSL club closed down in Tully – sporting clubs now run the club – funding still going into community.
• Chamber is doing capability statement on current capacity will identify new business opportunities, which businesses are at capacity (opening new business opportunities) council has new business opportunities and can create cluster of like businesses.
• Council continues to focus on what they can influence to grow the economy.
• What are the markets to export cattle including live and meatworks facility. Clarify what the Japan free trade agreement means for the markets to boxed beef.
• Exchange students with Vietnam for scientists and students going overseas, working with MLA.
• Possible connections through the Townsville City Sister Cities relationships and work collaboratively with other Mayors in the region
• Already have investors from Vietnam, investing in cattle.
• Health care is a downfall of CT other areas have new hospitals.
• Another planning day will be held to look at what is needed from State and Fed govts.
• Improved medical services as many people living west of CT want to relocate to CT to retire. Establishment of a Medicare Local in CT would benefit community.
• Graziers from west of CT are relocating to CT as they get older. Need for another retirement style village.

Issues which were raised during the sessions that could be further explored:

- Is there a role for Council to identify and support applications for relevant grants for community and business?
- A communications plan for engagement is needed.
- Business confidence and monitoring the local economy (scorecard) is required to measure performance.
- Gap analysis on the business needs
- Identify the leakage for the region.
- CTRC has worked closely with TEL (the Regional Tourism Organisation) to develop the Townsville, North Queensland Destination Tourism Plan. As TEL was not present at the workshop there is a need to provide TEL with an update from the workshop and discuss potential support for a way forward.

Potential support for future actions

A number of resources are available to assist in the development of the area such as:

- JCU offer numerous tourism related courses – there may be opportunities to partner with the university to share information or in relation to student placement.
- The Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre has developed a Five Step Pathway to Sustainable Tourism for Local Governments. This program is now available through the Local Government Association of Queensland. There is an opportunity for either the Council to undertake this program or join with other local governments in the region to work to access this program.
- The Department of State Development Infrastructure and Planning (DSDIP) delivers on behalf of the Department of Tourism, Small Business and the Commonwealth Games. Staff would be willing to support council and the chamber to develop and action plan.
- DSDIP support the North Queensland Economic Development Practitioners Network that has recently included a focus on regional tourism development.
- CTRC provides a financial contribution to Townsville Enterprise, negotiations in relation to the support this organisation could provide could be pursued.

Some of the possible areas to consider becoming involved with are:

- Cooperative Research Centres and University engagement: Specific interest in enterprise development, regional climate change, and tourism projects through literature reviews and regional structures.

Agreed business engagement program for July 2014 – December 2015

The workshop agreed on the need to adopt a business engagement plan for an 18 month period through a program of business engagement activities that are realistic, worthwhile and that will be supported. A process to monitor and review the implementation of the plan is a critical step to be determined. The following activities and actions were agreed at the workshop. Further work needs to be undertaken to identify the lead agency and timeframes.
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<th>No.</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Partners</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Business Register</td>
<td>Identification;</td>
<td>CTCCM</td>
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<td>1. Business Capability Study of CT township – Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td>CTRC</td>
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<td>2. Consider surrounding towns. Council to be approached to assist support.</td>
<td>Service Groups</td>
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<td>3. Primary Producers Database</td>
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<td>a. Development of a survey</td>
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<td>b. Explore industry bodies that may be able to provide this</td>
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<td>4. Explore use of ABR data</td>
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<td>5. Identify and prioritise the industry sectors and their contact details</td>
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<td>Consideration of resources for the management/upkeep of data which will</td>
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<td>require a Project Brief. The project brief will identify resources</td>
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<td>required to pursue funding (if required).</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Detailed Charters Towers business program</td>
<td>1. EDA Regional and Remote Area Workshops held and report prepared –</td>
<td>CTRC</td>
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<td>follow up required in 12 months</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Business engagement activities</td>
<td>1. Develop a calendar of business functions in Charters Towers</td>
<td>CTCCM</td>
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<td>• High calibre and visionary guest speakers to be invited to speak</td>
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<td>regarding relevant topics to the Charters Towers economy and businesses</td>
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<td>• Informal information sharing sessions via a mixture of breakfast,</td>
<td>CTRC</td>
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<td>after hours events which could be sponsored by local business wishing</td>
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<td>to promote to others</td>
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<td>• Speaker for selected Chamber meeting</td>
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<td>• Develop partnership events</td>
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<td>Action item: Set dates and identify responsibilities</td>
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<td>2. Annual Council – Chamber of Commerce and Mines formal event that</td>
<td>CTCCM</td>
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<td>highlights and promote the importance of local business and to include:</td>
<td>Media</td>
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<td>• Business/Tourism Awards</td>
<td>CTRC</td>
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<td>• Council and Chamber presentations of their achievements</td>
<td>TEL</td>
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3. Hold 2 business / economy themed conferences with focus on CT industries
   - 1 x High quality speakers that aims to attract interest for investors from outside of CT (example Diggers and Dealers Conference in Kalgoorlie)
   - 1 x regional conference focus on the Qld Plan and Northern Australia and its linkages with MIETZ and NQ2031

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<td>RDA TEL CTRC Austrade TIQ JCU MIETZ RED-ROC</td>
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4. Charters Towers’ business delegations to key regional events
   - RED-ROC
   - Regional Chambers group

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<td>Charters Towers’ business delegations to key regional events</td>
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<td>• RED-ROC</td>
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<td>• Regional Chambers group</td>
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<td>Action to investigate and identify regional events through engagement with TEL, DISDIP and TIQ</td>
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4 New business growth

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<td>New business growth</td>
<td>Gap analysis via engagement</td>
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<td>1. Identify who wants to establish/ grow locally.</td>
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<td>3. What does CT currently have</td>
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<td>4. Relocation of businesses to CT</td>
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<td>5. Invest Charters Towers strategy</td>
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<td>b. Marketing tools: eg websites, case studies.</td>
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5 Review EDA workshop

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<td>Review EDA workshop</td>
<td>Prepare a report for additional actions</td>
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**Consideration then for measuring the success was to establish a set of key performance indicators based on:**

- a. Attendance of businesses at functions and events
- b. Attendance at regional business forums
- c. Numbers of investors/businesses attracted to CT and regional events
- d. New businesses queries/ started
- e. Retention of current business
- f. Recording the number of business related development applications
- g. New members of CTCCM with a target of 15% increase in 2014/2015
- h. The agreed activities are staged

**Other areas for consideration dependant on ability to resource:**

1. Youth Entrepreneurial Leadership Program: Link with other regional councils and develop a program for youth 18-25 seeking to establish businesses.
2. Vacant Buildings: Engage with the owners to establish what opportunities for other use may exist.

3. The Regional and Local plans and now in place and for the next 18 months these should be embraced, supported, monitored and reviewed.

4. There was a gap in the attendees which will need this report to be further progressed with engagement with the Education / Schools / Trade Training Centre to help with linkages with JCU.

5. Consideration needs to be around the value for engagement with TEL due to the possible growth and role of RED-ROC.

6. Business Support Officer could be considered with regards sharing roles with other Chambers in the Region and working with organisations such as the Townsville Business Development Centre: A structured capacity building program based on areas such as: Business planning – how to manage budgets finance – continuity planning – customer service - referring people to other businesses

7. Explore the opportunities for Indigenous development by engaging with Indigenous Business Australia and exploring models for community enterprises such as those being development by GHD and also identifying Co-Op models.

8. Undertake a detailed Community Capacity Assessment Audit to ensure that the community has the capacity to undertake what is being sought to achieve.

**Recommendation for consideration**

**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.

There are a number of actions to improve the local and regional economic outcomes and the prioritising using the economic development strategy needs to have a compelling vision, a realistic understanding of the economy and well-thought through strategies that will have the ability to capture the imagination of the community, investors and Government. EDA also provides a number of resources and professional development. Council should consider actively supporting its staff and elected members to access the resources available and participate in professional development and increased awareness of economic development. This will help ensure that Charters Towers can live up to its tag of being ‘The World’

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Appendix:
1. Attach attendance spreadsheet
2. Workshop presentation