

**Building Sustainable Small Business
Whole of Shire Workshop – December 1 2008
Regional SWOT and Futures Feedback from Small Business**

This document has been developed from the Building Sustainable Small Business whole of shire workshop held on Monday December 1 2008. It is the combined thinking of approximately 25 local businesses from industry sectors including: tourism, accommodation, education, transport, health and wellbeing, community development, built environment/development, consulting, and facilities management. Many participants had attended the BSSB workshops held throughout the Scenic Rim Region during 2008.

The workshop focused on two key areas:

1. Small business perspectives about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the Scenic Rim Region (including the regional economy);
2. Small business preferred futures for the Scenic Rim Region by about 2030 (including the regional economy, government, communities and planning).

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1. Regional SWOT – Where are we now?

(a) Strengths in and of the Scenic Rim Region

- Location near large population bases (Brisbane and the Gold Coast)
- The region's natural landscape – mountains, waterfalls, waterways, forests etc
- Community spirit based in towns and villages across the region
- Nature based activities and recreation already available
- Sense of belonging in communities – passion and parochialism in our communities
- Large geographical area
- Existing regional events including the Drumley Walk, Beaudesert Eco Expo, Boonah Arts Festival etc
- Connectivity between people and homogenous economy – ability to share common goals and resources (both tangible and intangible)
- Diversity of opportunities
- Proximity of rural experiences close to large urban centres
- Blazing Arts Trail
- Council's strengths in arts development and support
- Collective knowledge and skills
- Resourcefulness – ability to make do; self-sufficient culture in the region

- Connection to the natural environment – personal greening; community greening; interconnections between people and communities through appreciation of the regional natural environment
- Strong community culture – personal connections
- Still strongly existing indigenous culture and leaders (both young people and Elders) – also the opportunity to learn about local traditional culture
- Youth
- Emerging economic opportunities (eg) Bromelton
- Opportunities for cooperation
- Opportunity to build a new brand for the Scenic Rim
- Unique identity of the region, particularly in comparison to the two nearest tourism centres of Gold Coast and Brisbane (of particular relevance to tourism)

(b) Weaknesses in and of the Scenic Rim Region

- Tyranny of distance across the region
- Isolation within communities and between communities
- Sense of powerlessness and hopelessness in communities
- Continuing mass consumerism
- Lack of cohesion
- Little or no long-term planning (ie) 40-50 year planning processes
- Governance (finance) – small rate base in the region and problems with funding for infrastructure
- Lack of opportunity for young people
- Lack of educational infrastructure
- Lack of public transport or regional mobility to assist people to get to work, education, for other choices and needs
- Rising real estate prices
- Increasing cost of living
- Lack of regional corporate sponsorship
- Silo mentality in different levels of government when working with/dealing with community
- Weak community (splintered communities)
- Governance – both passive community acceptance of who and what is governing us and a lack of community proactivity and voice participating in regional direction-setting
- Struggle to adapt to change
- Absence of a maternity hospital
- Lack of accommodation
- Declining volunteer base in communities
- Lack of infrastructure for large groups (eg) conference venue
- Lack of meaningful community engagement
- Erosion of goodwill and community boundaries through the amalgamation process
- Decline of rural families
- Lack of local transport/mobility connections between communities

- Cultural brain drain from the region to the cities (the bane of rural communities)

(c) Opportunities for the Region

- We need to capitalise on the physical location of the Scenic Rim and its position as the green belt in SEQ
- Build on the strengths of our regional and rural lifestyle – become more self sufficient in food, energy, water; integrate our resources vertically and horizontally
- Our region is easier to mobilize because small is still beautiful here and there is a human economy of scale
- Personal relationships and connections are well defined and can be linked together
- The region has the opportunity to lead a new way of living, business and economy
- There is a need to have education for new residents about rural and sustainable living
- The new council boundaries give the opportunity to unite the community and work together collectively
- Local tourism is an opportunity – visit your own backyard from Brisbane and the Gold Coast
- Spin-offs and clustering for economic areas (eg) Bromelton/freight
- Still strong cultural capital in areas of the region. This needs to be shared, showcased, promoted and opened for further participation
- The close proximity to the Gold Coast and Brisbane needs to be well marketed for appropriate visitation
- We have a diversity of ideas in the region that should be linked and shared
- More meaningful community involvement, participation and influence is required in planning for the region and catering for growth
- We need community to point the direction for the future – engaging the community to come along for the ride
- Clustering – bringing passionate villages and regions together under a new banner and umbrella organisation
- We need to capitalise on local products (eg) paddock to plate opportunities
- The region could attract new, green infrastructure, businesses, industries, institutions, research and government departments
- We need to identify and stop local economic leakage and ensure the region is as self-sufficient as possible
- Industrial hemp industry is an emerging opportunity
- Old Kooralbyn Resort is an opportunity for a regional enterprise or facility
- We need to define and maintain our cultural, built and social heritage
- Kooralbyn Airstrip
- Development at Bromelton to be world's best practice clean, green and sustainable industry
- We need to research and identify other community and regional sustainability models that are available to us
- Explore the potential for arts and cultural development models in industrial precincts

- More cross-fertilisation between local arts, food, culture etc
- School and education-based visitation/tourism is an important opportunity for the region
- We need to build on our existing strengths in outdoor and environmental education venues, organisations and businesses
- Our region is home to many best practice public and private facilities, organisations, people, businesses etc and we need to better promote and link them

(d) Threats to our Region

- Lack of tertiary education and job opportunities to encourage young people to stay in the region
- We need to bridge the gap between old and new ways and learn how to engage our communities in this process
- External forces can create the loss of identity, amenity and connection in our communities and natural landscape
- Government overlays, processes and bureaucracy can stifle the local economy and entrepreneurial ideas
- Isolation of businesses and communities in the region
- Loss of local identity through homogenization
- Lack of finances to create infrastructure
- Innate conservatism leading to attitudes of fear of the unknown
- Lack of long-term planning for most things
- Possible loss of regional TAFE college (already there is a decline in the promotion of the TAFE and its classes...if we lose this facility it will be extremely hard to regain in future)
- Current economic climate
- Disconnected and disparate advertising and marketing pathways in the region for business – restrictive and expensive for small businesses to advertise effectively
- Problems in the capacity and pathways of intra-regional media outlets and across-community communication in general
- Government regulations that are barriers to local goods and services (eg) food legislation
- Travel is expensive for limited budgets and transportation of goods and services is expensive
- Bromelton industrial area is a threat if it is not developed as a world's best practice sustainability site – potential pollution and misalignment with the region's landscape values are a real threat
- Public transport limitation
- Lack of long-term planning for population growth is a threat
- Power of the State Government and other levels of government to 'bulldoze' inappropriate decisions for the region, particularly around development, water, transport etc. There is a need for a strong, assertive community voice to grow
- Attraction of large companies which don't appreciate or value local community needs

- Increasing rates and costs for land and facilities purchasing (the ‘Byron Bay’ syndrome where only cashed up professionals etc can afford to live in an area and everyone else is forced out economically)
- URBANISATION – a key threat to the tourism industry and local communities

2. Future Scenarios – Where do we want to be in 20-30 years as a region?

The group of businesses imagined their preferred region in 20-30 years time, from a small business and personal values perspective. The following items were identified as priorities:

- A green economy and a green region that interface and interrelate in ongoing and cohesive ways
- Strong resilient communities from cradle to grave – all ages of people belong and are welcome in our communities
- A powered-down region (ie, not dependent on fossil fuel-based energy) that is built on localisation, local living economy and local community
- Green and sustainable employment opportunities (focus on opportunities for young people)
- Diverse communities (all ages)
- A new model of government in place that is ‘horizontal’ ie enabling community to participate actively with local governance, planning, decision making etc. Transparent and nimble-footed (adaptive) governance
- Caring communities based on connected relationships and a safe environment
- Real life education/life skilled education for children and adults, that re-skills people in competencies for healthy, community-based lives
- A natural environment, landscape and rural amenity that is maintained and restored
- Sustainable access to National Parks and natural areas
- Connected, efficient, accessible local transport and mobility – physical and other (eg) virtual connectivity
- Personal fulfillment and achievement for residents – key place of education
- Cohesive, progressive communities
- Economically viable communities
- Participatory community engagement within planning processes for the economy, growth, business and industry, land, development, the future etc
- Grassroots participation and models in place
- Council supporting and encouraging small and home-based businesses and providing subsidies and incentives
- New models of planning in place that also address social and scenic amenity in the region

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