



# GYMPIE REGION ECONOMIC PROFILE



**2023**

The story of Gympie's economy from past to present and into the future

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Gympie region has developed from its mining and pastoral beginnings into a strong, growing and diverse economy that supports numerous service industries designed to meet the increasing needs of a larger population. Exports are still linked to historical strengths in agriculture, forestry, and manufacturing, but there are also strengths in aged care and tourism in key locations as well as strong growth potential in renewables.

The Gympie region generated \$2.4B in GRP in 2021/2022, was home to almost 5,000 local businesses, and supported an estimated 21,131 jobs.

### **From Primary Industry To Processing To A Service Based Economy**

The Gympie region's economy was largely related to livestock grazing after white settlement until the discovery of gold in 1867. Mining saw an increase of population and new facilities and towns open. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, dairy farming and other agriculture areas (particularly fruit growing) became the main economic drivers. Forestry and wood processing also proved a growth industry after early timber plantations (mainly pine) proved successful. From the 1950s onwards, Gympie industry moved into manufacturing strongly with new food processors setting up base. Tourism has expanded with coastal areas proving popular overnight getaway destinations. In recent years, health and aged care has become dominant as the population ages and more retirees move in.

### **Key Specialisations Across A Diverse Range Of Industries**

Agriculture, timber, manufacturing, engineering, construction are still considerable generators of value in the Gympie region and bring in wealth from outside the area via a strong level of exports - \$843M in 2021/2022. In terms of employment, health, education, and retail support over a third of all Gympie's jobs. Construction is the fourth largest employing industry within the region.

The region has several additional specialisations including in transport and logistics, engineering and maintenance.

### **Recent Growth Driven By Population Increases And Major Export Industries**

Gympie's economy has proved remarkably resilient even in the face of the impacts of some climatic events such as droughts and floods. Local GRP has grown at an average of 1.4 per cent p.a. over the last decade, but the last two years have seen growth exceed 6 per cent due to strong agricultural production. Employment growth has also increased seeing unemployment rates fall to 5 per cent.

The Gympie region has averaged 1.4 per cent population growth per year over the last decade, above the regional Queensland average (1.3 per cent p.a.) The urban area of Gympie experienced the eighth fastest growth in Queensland out of all Significant Urban Areas and higher than other places like Cairns, Townsville, and Bundaberg.

Agriculture rebounded strongly with value added for the industry increasing by just over \$70M in two years to reach \$196M in 2021/2022. Other key contributors to growth were wood manufacturing, forestry, social assistance, and engineering services.

Tourism has been growing steadily over the decade, mainly in the Cooloola area, especially in domestic overnight stays with visitor nights growing by 24 per cent, compared to 16 per cent for the state. The annual Gympie Music Muster also returned in 2022, bringing thousands of visitors to the region.

The Gympie region has also seen a strong expansion in new businesses in recent years. Net quarterly business growth at the end of 2022 was 50-60 per cent above that experienced five years ago.

### **Strong Future Built Off Continued Population Expansion And Major Renewables Projects**

The Gympie region is projected to grow by an extra 16,000 people in the next 25 years under the

Queensland Government’s high scenario. This would see the region hit 70,000 by 2046. Lifestyle, housing affordability, and regional connectivity are supporting population growth including net migration from high cost regions such as Noosa, Sunshine Coast and Brisbane.

The Gympie region has the potential to benefit from major investment in large-scale renewable projects coming on board over the next decade. For example, the \$16.4B Borumba Dam Hydro Project will support thousands of jobs while under construction and generate 2,000 megawatts (MW) of renewable energy upon completion.

**Existing Specialisations Will Continue To Have Growth Potential**

Future projections suggest growing demand for industries that the Gympie region already has demonstrated resources and expertise in. An ageing population will continue to drive growth in aged care and social services. Strong population growth will support demand for timber.

Demand for agriculture and processed food will grow as incomes in Asian markets continue to rise. Road freight volumes are projected to grow by around 77 per cent by 2050 to support freight needs.

**Transitioning To A Low Carbon Future**

The Gympie region will require planning and investment to support industry transition. This is key in areas like agriculture where State Government and industry have made pledges to work towards carbon neutrality.

Key focus areas include methane reduction options in stock feed; implementing pasture-based carbon sequestration practices and establishment of agroforestry systems. Investment in the reduction and reuse of waste will also help Gympie tap into the growing Circular Economy movement.

**Preparing For Economic Resilience**

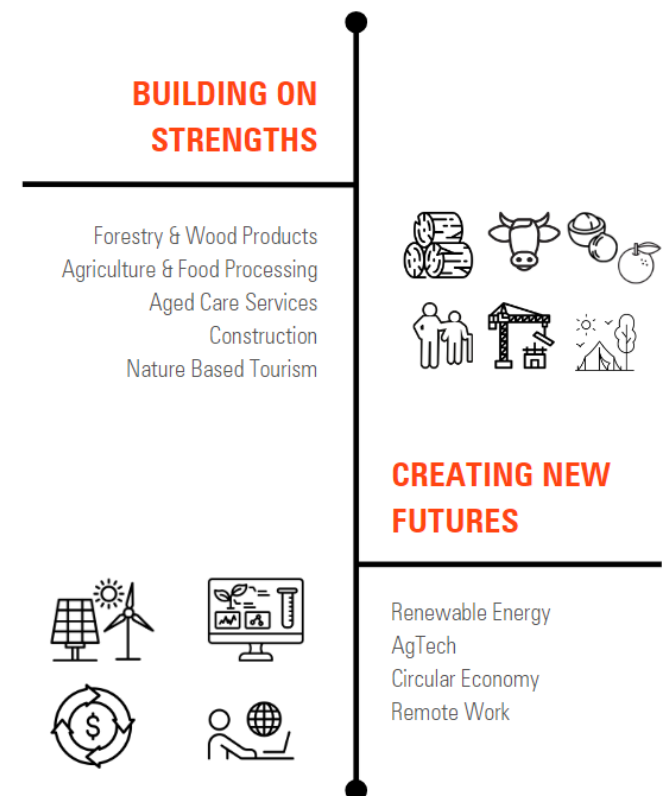
Active planning and infrastructure development are underway to ensure Gympie’s economy is better

protected from future flood events. This work includes the \$1B Gympie Bypass to provide a safer and protected transport route.

New industrial land has also been identified in areas like the Curra investigation area which has the potential to reasise over 300ha of development land with direct access to the Bruce Highway and rail line. It is development ready, not flood-prone, and can support long-term expansion.

**Towards The Future**

The Gympie region’s future lies in capitalising on existing specialisations to generate more value and expanding into growth industries. Investments in new technology, skills development, and renewable energy in particular can support the competitiveness of existing industries and act as an attractive proposition for new businesses.



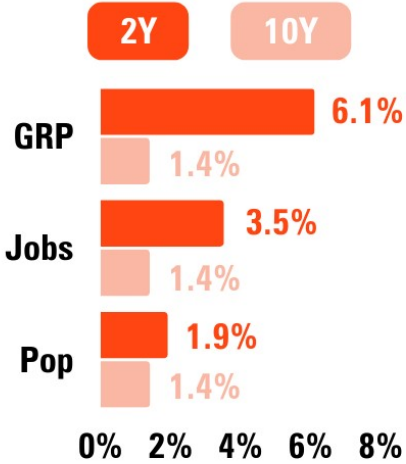
# Gympie Economic Overview 2021/22



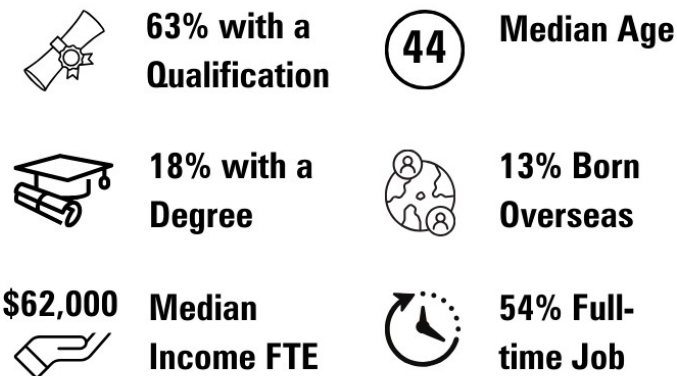
## KEY INDUSTRIES



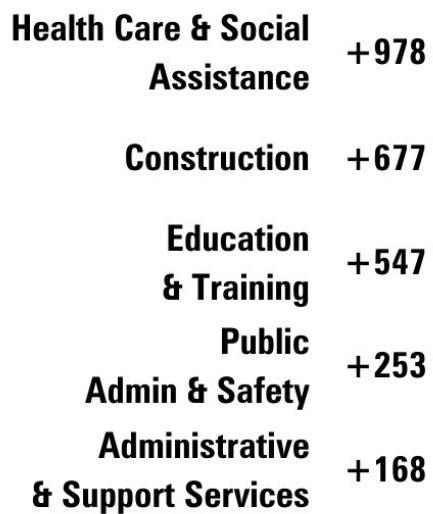
## GROWTH TRENDS



## WORKFORCE PROFILE



## Jobs Change Last Ten Years



# 1 INTRODUCTION

The Gympie regional Council area is located in the Wide Bay Burnett Region of southeast Queensland, about 170 kilometres north of the Brisbane CBD. The region has strong transport networks to the Sunshine Coast in the east and Maryborough to the north. The Gympie regional Council area encompasses a total land area of about 6,900 square kilometres.

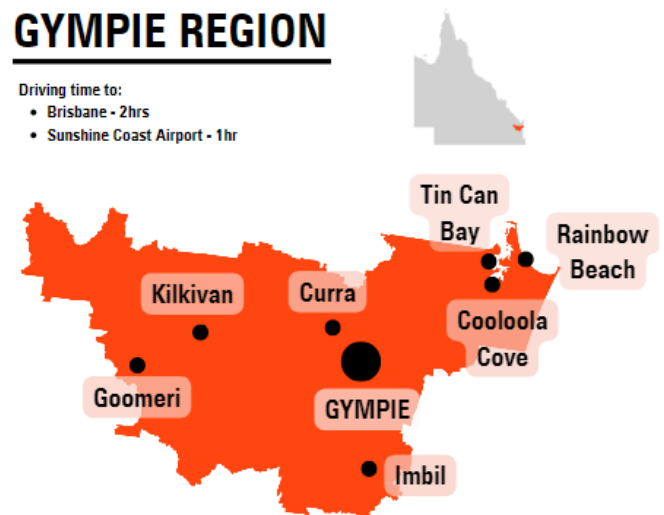
Home to just over 55,000 residents, the main population and service centre is Gympie, with small townships and communities at Amamoor, Cooloola Cove, Curra, Goomeri, Gunalda, Imbil, Kandanga, Kilkivan, Rainbow Beach, Tin Can Bay, Traveston and Woolooga.

Rural land is used largely for agriculture, particularly beef production, and forestry. Local manufacturers are supported by these industries with a strong focus on food and wood product manufacturing. Tourism is also an important industry, especially in the region's east. A growing and ageing population base has led to an increasing role for construction and health and social assistance industries.

This report presents the profile of the Gympie region's economy - how it got to where it is today, and where the region may be heading. Section 1 focuses on the current state of the economy and its existing strengths.

Section 2 presents the recent economic trends leading up to 2022, while Section 3 outlines future drivers of economic growth and opportunities for the Gympie region's economy.

Figure 1.1 – Gympie Region And Main Towns



## 2 THE PAST TO TODAY

From early pastoral and gold mining activities, the Gympie region has developed into a more diversified economy. However, specialisations still have roots in rich endowments that have supported local industries for more than a hundred years. This section provides a profile of the Gympie region economy to highlight its economic role and key strengths.

### Early Beginnings And Striking Gold

The original inhabitants of the Gympie regional Council area were the Gubbi Gubbi (or Kabi Kabi) Aboriginal people. The Gubbi Gubbi people lived in and off the land for thousands of years before European settlement. A long history of fishing, hunting, and bush food collection is evident in local stories and tools and materials collected in the area.

The Gympie region's economy was largely related to livestock grazing after white settlement until the discovery of gold in 1867. The discovery came at a crucial time for the State that was heading for bankruptcy and Gympie became known as 'the town that saved Queensland'. Rapid expansion of buildings and railway links with Brisbane and Maryborough which had a major port subsequently occurred. Growth took place from the 1870s into the early 1900s, spurred by gold mining, with timber cutting and agriculture also being important industries. Townships grew around gold fossicking areas.

### Rise Of Agriculture

The state declared Gympie a town in 1903 just as gold mining began to wane. Dairy farming and agriculture (particularly fruit growing) became the main economies from the early 1900s complementing general livestock grazing. Development of the Mary River valley area in particular allowed for more irrigation of pastures. The

population of the council area increased during the interwar period, rising from about 15,000 in 1921 to about 21,000 in 1933.

### Development Growth Drives Demand For Timber

Early demand for timber in the region was driven by the need for safe construction of mine shafts. As other industries developed, harvesting of specialised timber and transportation across the region and upstream to Maryborough occurred.

State forests were developed in the early 1900s and sawmills flourished across the broad region. From the 1920s onwards, plantation timber (mainly pine) expanded after early trials proved successful. Today, the timber industry (logging and wood product processing) generates a quarter of all Gympie's export value and directly supports just over 850 jobs.

### Gympie Becomes A Manufacturing Base

With strong access to primary materials, the region eventually began to see the development of local processing facilities. Timber mills were early developments, but the industry has also expanded into other areas of specialised wood structural products and furniture. Laminex owns two manufacturing facilities in the region.

Nestle opened a factory in Gympie in 1953 producing powdered milk from local dairy suppliers. It now manufactures from two major facilities in the region and is the primary supplier of coffee to the whole of Australia and New Zealand. Meat processing facilities also grew to support the cattle industry, with Nolan Meats investing and expanding its facility in the region from the 1970s onwards to become the region's largest private employer.

### Population Growth And Changing Demographics

Gympie region saw strong population growth in the early 1990s, increasing by almost 8,000 people between 1991 and 1996. This brought demand for new schools and essential services.



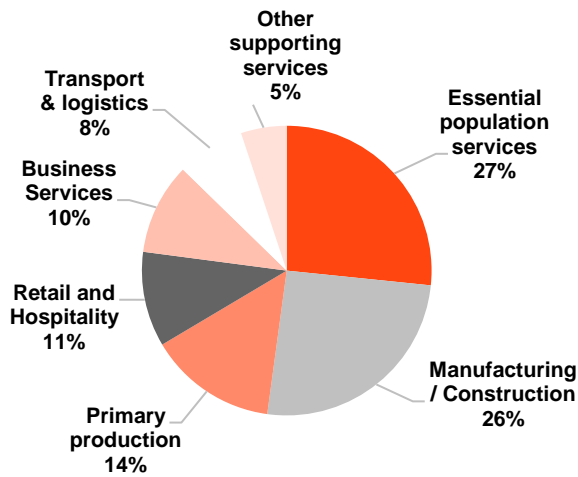
Population growth has continued in the 2000s and with it has come an ageing population and the demand for health and aged care services as older residents move to the coast and hinterland for lifestyle benefits.

**A Diversified Economy**

The Gympie region today is a diversified economy with a strong mix of export-orientated industries and also population servicing businesses supporting a growing resident base.

A quarter of the economic value in Gympie is supported by essential services such as health and education. Another quarter is generated from the transformation of goods – manufacturing and construction.

Figure 2.1 - Share Of Value Added, 2021/2022

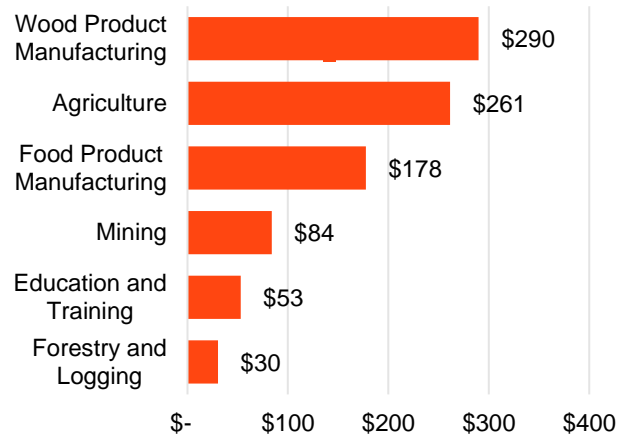


Source: NIEIR, 2023

**Historical Strengths Still Support Export Value**

Agriculture, manufacturing (especially wood and food product manufacturing), engineering, and mining are considerable generators of value in the Gympie region and bring in wealth from outside the area via a strong level of exports - \$843M in primary and processing areas in 2021/2022.

Figure 2., - Export Value \$M, 2021/2022



Source: NIEIR, 2023

**Population Servicing Industries Provide Most Employment Opportunities**

Like many areas in Australia, industries that provide essential household services have grown into significant employment areas. Health, education, and retail support over a third of all Gympie’s jobs. Construction is the fourth largest employing industry with Gympie businesses supporting the strong residential growth across the Wide Bay and Sunshine Coast regions. Manufacturing has not seen the large job losses experienced in other regions of Australia and still employs almost 1 in 10 people today.

Figure 2.2 – Top Employing Industries, 2021/2022

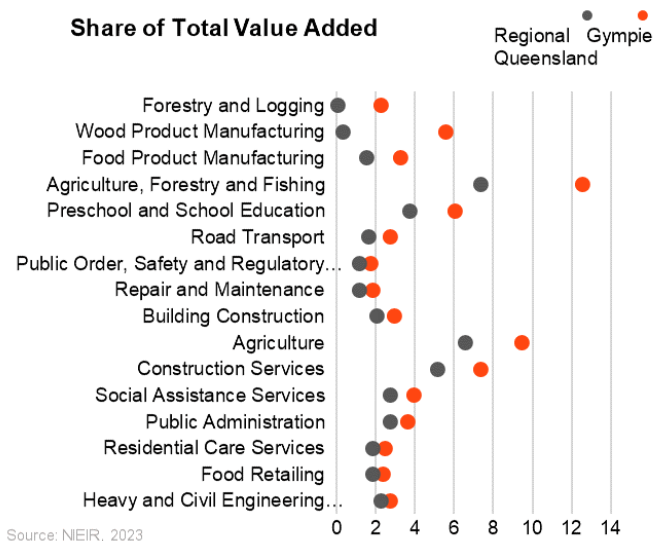
		Number of Jobs	% Share of Employment
	Health Care and Social Assistance	3,119	14.8%
	Education and Training	2,280	10.8%
	Retail Trade	2,257	10.7%
	Construction	2,217	10.5%
	Manufacturing	2,000	9.5%

**Specific Industry Competitiveness**

The Gympie region specialises in several economic activities that provide it a platform to maintain and grow its competitive position. Some like agriculture, forestry, and health have been touched on already. Other areas

such as school education and construction/engineering are also large parts of the economy where their impact is over-represented compared to the regional Queensland average. Road freight transport is also a specialisation with large companies such as the Corbert's Group providing logistics services well beyond the region's borders.

**Figure 2.3 - Industries With A Much Higher Share Of Value Added Compared To Regional Queensland**



### Specialised Roles Across The Region

Different localities across Gympie perform different economic roles and have specialisations built on historic locational advantages.

Gympie is a growing major service centre

The city of Gympie was home to an estimated 23,162 people in 2022, Queensland's thirteenth largest urban area. Residents have access to major facilities such as:

- Gympie Hospital
- Gympie Central Shopping Centre
- Goldfields Plaza
- Gympie Education Hub including TAFE Queensland Gympie Campus, UniSC Gympie

Campus and the Gympie Trade Training Centre

- Gympie Civic Centre
- Gympie Showgrounds.

The city has a workforce of just over 12,000 people with almost half being in core population servicing areas such as health, education, and retail.

Surrounded by lush forest and agricultural land with the potential for strong growth in renewables

The area to the north and south of Gympie encompasses hinterland area supporting local produce, timber harvesting, tourism, and other rural activities.

Over a quarter of the workforce (27 per cent) are in agriculture or forestry activities with another 13 per cent involved in processing food or wood products.

The south western townships including Imbil, Kandanga, Amamoor, and Dagan are the main service centres for industry. Imbil is expected to play a significant support role to the nearby \$14bn Borumba Dam Pumped Hydro-Electricity project.

Cooloola is an established tourism destination

The townships of Tin Can Bay and Rainbow Beach are well-known holiday spots today attracting almost 200,000 domestic overnight holidaymakers in 2021/2022. Visitors flock to the region for its natural beauty, lifestyle, and encounters with wildlife – Tin Can Bay is one of only two places in Queensland where you can hand feed a dolphin. About a third of the workforce in Cooloola SA2 work in accommodation and food or retail trade.

The west of the region reflects the traditional settler roots of the region

The area encompassing the townships and surrounds of Kilkivan and Goomeri is still focused predominately on cattle farming. More than 40 per cent of the workforce is directly involved in agriculture and food processing. Horses are still integral to the community with Kilkivan home to the Kilkivan Showgrounds and Equestrian Centre.

### Large Companies Choose To Locate And Expand Operations In Gympie

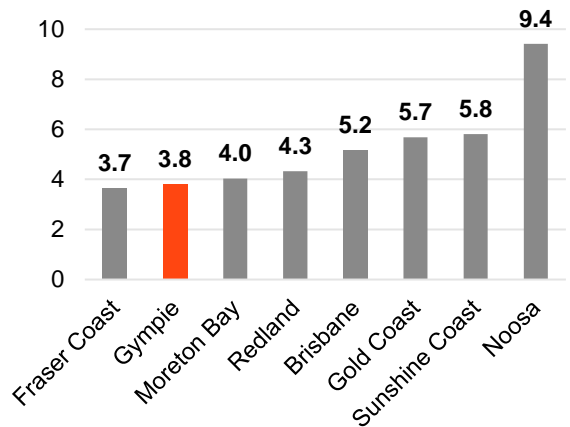
The Gympie region’s proximity to natural resources, a strong service centre, local skills and connections to ports (Bundaberg, Brisbane) and airports provides a strong case for investment by larger companies. Some example include:

- Nestle – the company’s main coffee processing plant for Australia is located in Gympie.
- Nolan’s Meats – major processor with the capability to process over 2,500 cattle per week from breeding to distribution and wholesaling.
- Suncoast Gold Macadamias – one of Australia’s largest processors of Macadamias as well a global marketer of processed macadamias.
- Laminex Industries - one of Australia's biggest makers of wood and paper products runs two processing facilities in the Gympie region.

### Affordable Living Close To Job Opportunities And Natural Amenity

The Gympie region has a growing resident base and offers one of the most affordable quality lifestyles in South East Queensland. Many areas are within an hour’s drive of world-class beaches (e.g. Noosa Heads) and major facilities such as Sunshine Coast Airport. However, dwelling prices are much lower than in nearby coastal areas. In 2021, the dwelling price to median household ratio for an average couple with children was 3.8. This compares to Sunshine Coast where median houses were almost six times the median income, and Noosa where they were over nine times.

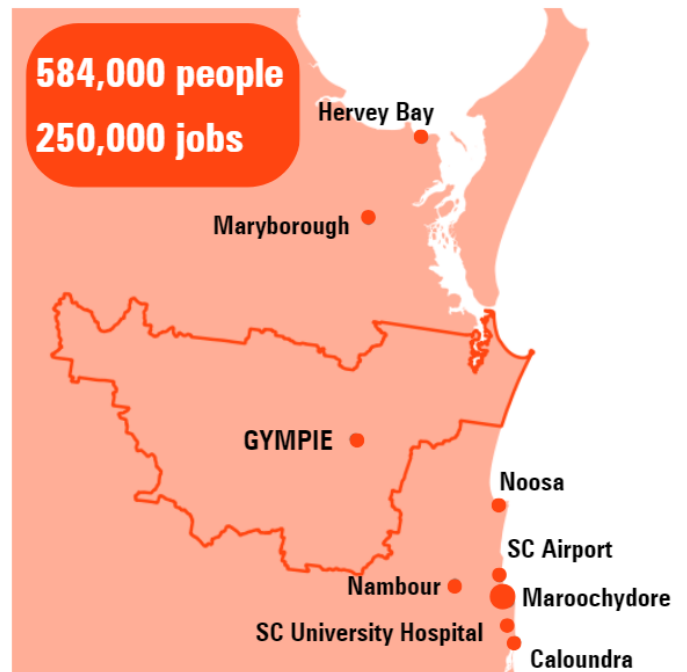
Figure 2.4 - Median Dwelling Price To Median Household Income (Couple With Children), 2021



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021 ; REIQ

While Gympie is home to 55,000 people and 21,000 jobs, residents and businesses can access a much larger pool of potential employment and customer opportunities. The Fraser Coast, Noosa, and Sunshine Coast regions cover an additional half a million residents and 229,000 jobs.

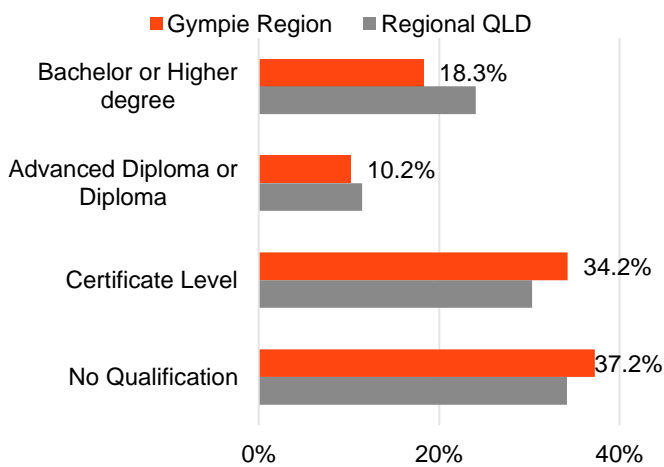
Figure 2.5 - Employment And Resident Nodes Surrounding Regions



### A Workforce With Strong Technical Skills And Applied Management Experience

The Gympie region’s workforce is slightly less educated as a whole than the regional Queensland average. However, they have strong trade and technical qualifications. Like most locations, the majority of degree educated workers (56 per cent) had qualifications in health and education. Certificate level qualifications were centred on engineering/construction (24 per cent), management (19 per cent), social/welfare (13 per cent; linked to aged care) and hospitality (12 per cent).

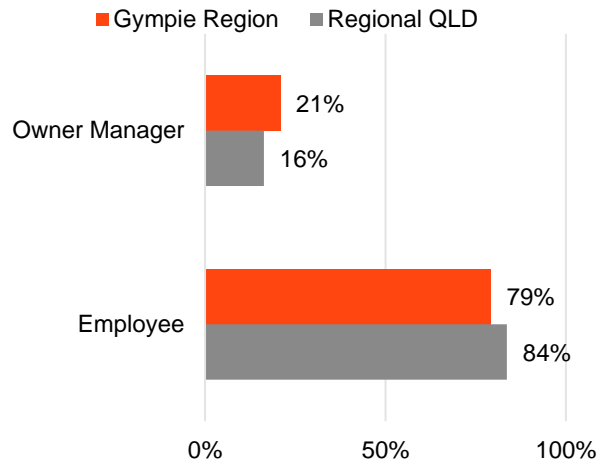
Figure 2.6 - Qualification Attainment, Gympie Region Workers



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

Qualification attainment rates are distorted somewhat by the abundance of farmers in the Gympie region (4.8 per cent of the workforce, compared to 2.1 per cent for Regional Queensland). Farmers tend to have exceptional management and technical skills that are not often recognised formally. The high rates of farmers contributes to Gympie having a much higher share of workers who are acting as owner/managers rather than employees (21 per cent or one in five) in 2021.

Figure 2.7 - Status In Employment, Gympie Workforce 2021



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

# AGRICULTURE

Agriculture is an important contributor to the Gympie economy. In 2021/22, it supported 6.5% of the region's employment and more importantly generated 21.1% of Gympie's export value.



**\$261M**

Exports



**\$186M**

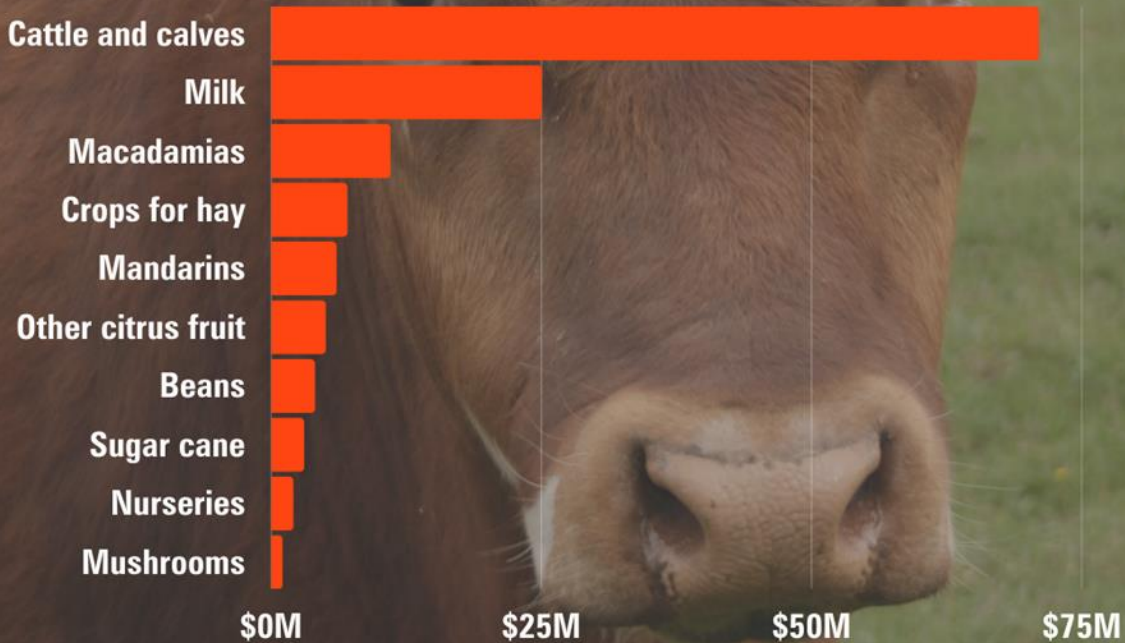
Value Added



**1,373**

Local Jobs

## Value of Agricultural Production, Gympie Region 2021



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Value of Agricultural Commodities Produced, Australia, 2020/21](#)



**12% of QLD's**  
Milk



**6% of QLD's**  
Macademia  
nuts



**5% of QLD's**  
Oranges



**4.5% of QLD's**  
Hay crops



**4.5% of QLD's**  
Beans

# TIMBER INDUSTRY

Logging and timber processing is still a strong contributor to the region and generates substantial export value - 26% of Gympie's total in 2021/22.



**\$320M**

Exports



**\$156M**

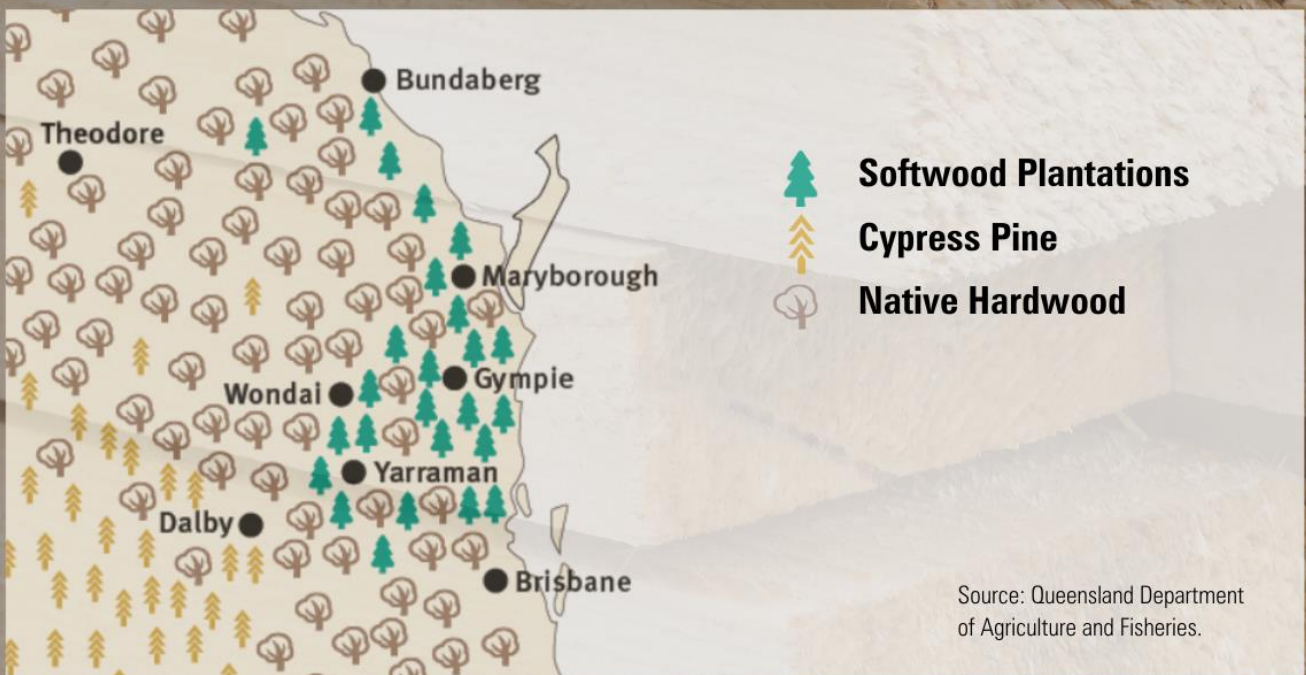
Value Added



**853**

Local Jobs

## QLD Forest Resources



## In 2021/22, the Gympie Region supported:



**17% of QLD's  
Forestry and  
Logging Value**



**10% of QLD's Wood  
Product  
Manufacturing Value**

# Health & Aged Care

Healthcare and Social Assistance is Gympie's largest employing industry and fastest growing in terms of jobs. In 2021/22, it supported 15% of the region's employment and 11% of Gympie's value added. Growth has been particularly strong in residential care and social assistance.



**\$220M**

Value Added



**3,119**

Local Jobs



**216**

Businesses

## Share of Local Employment, Health Industries, 2021/22



Source: NIEIR, 2023



**Personal Carers and Assistants were the largest growing occupation between 2016 and 2021**



**Health qualifications, especially nursing, rehabilitation and public health, were the fastest growing study field**

# Tourism

Visitors to the Gympie region bring in wealth from outside the region and directly support local accommodation, food and retail while also having flow on impacts to other industries. In 2021/22, direct and indirect tourism employment represented 6.5% of the region's total.

**DIRECT & FLOW-  
ON IMPACTS**



**\$91M**

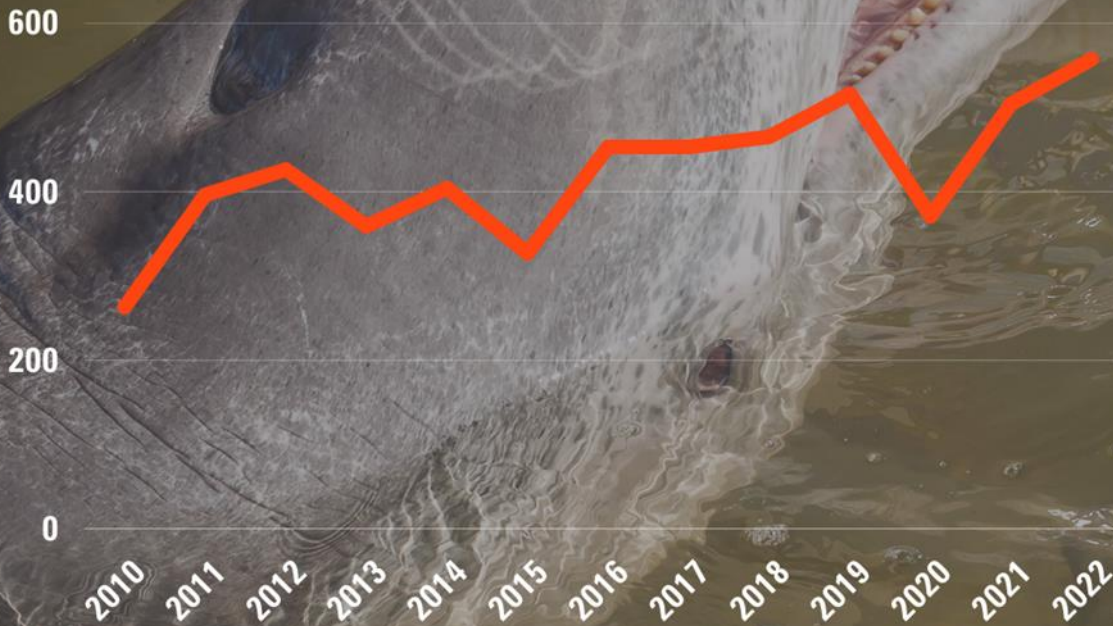
Value Added



**1,379**

Local Jobs

## Domestic Overnight Visitors, Gympie Region '000s



Source: Tourism Research Australia, 2023



**Over 200,000 visitors holiday overnight in the Cooloola area every year - 85% engage in an outdoor / nature based activity on their stay**



**Almost 90,000 visitors catch up with friends and family in Gympie each year - 70% engage in social activities**



### 3 RECENT TRENDS

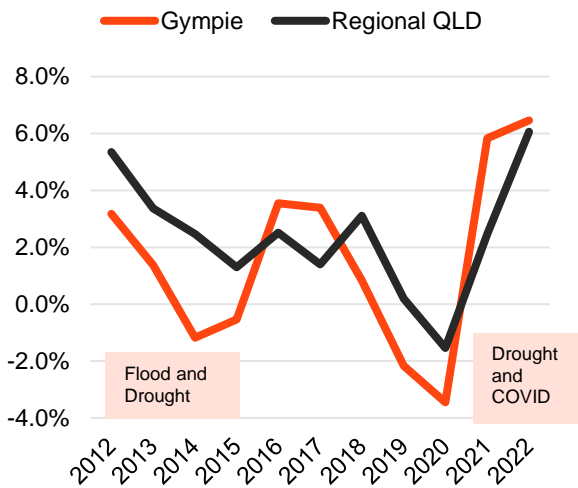
The Gympie region has experienced some fluctuating economic and social impacts over the last decade, but has still managed to maintain growth. This section provides a profile of recent changes in the Gympie economy and what is influencing the change.

#### Sustained Economic Growth Even Through Periods Of Flood And Drought

Gympie region LGA's economic growth (GRP terms) increased by 1.4 per cent per year between 2017 and 2022, in line with the decade average growth rate (1.4 per cent p.a.).

While this was below the regional Queensland average (2.1 per cent p.a. over the decade), it was a remarkable achievement given the impacts of flood and drought on key industries in the region.

Figure 3.1 - Annual Change In Gross Regional Product



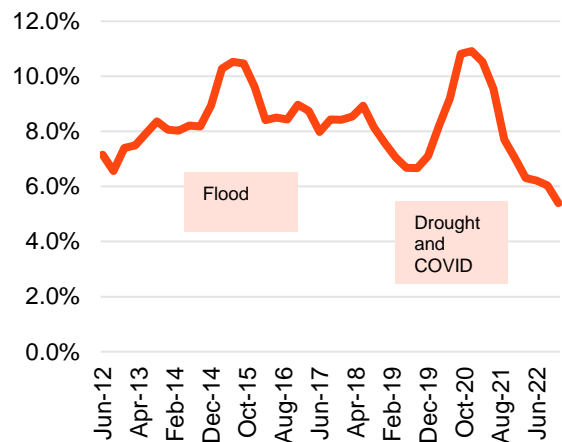
Source: NIEIR, 2023

#### Unemployment Rates Have Fallen To Five Per Cent

The Gympie region's labour force was impacted hard like many areas during COVID-19 with unemployment levels rising above 10 per cent. However, jobs growth

and tighter labour markets since have seen unemployment rates halve. Employment outcomes for young people have improved even more with the unemployment rate for 15 to 24 year olds falling by 7.4 per cent between 2016 and 2021.

Figure 3.2 - Four Quarter Smoothed Unemployment Rate, Gympie Region

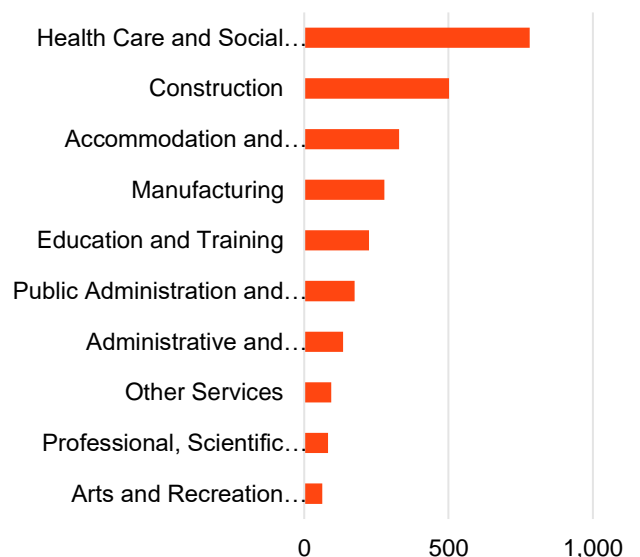


Source: Department of Employment, Small Area Labour Markets, 2023

#### Construction And Healthcare Driving Employment

Key industry drivers of growth in recent times are diverse. Healthcare and social assistance has contributed to the largest jobs growth, but other industrial areas such as construction and manufacturing have also been strong.

Figure 3.3 - Change In Employment, Top 10, 2017 To 2022



Source: NIEIR, 2023

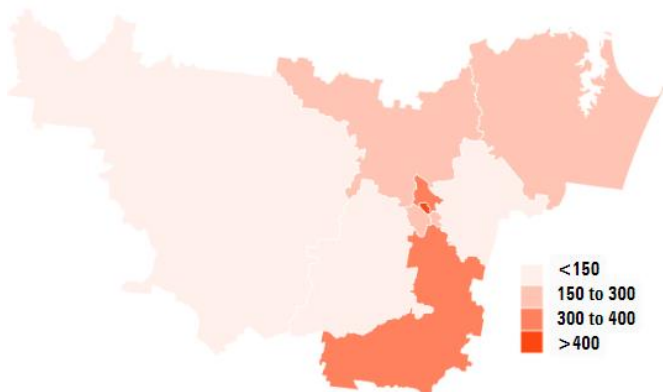
Looking at a disaggregated level, the strongest growth in terms of job numbers were in:

- Other Social Assistance Services,
- Cafes, Restaurants and Takeaway Food Services,
- Heavy and Civil Engineering Construction,
- School Education,
- Building Completion Services, and
- Hospitals.

### Different Locations Seeing Employment Growth In Specific Industries

The location which saw the largest estimated jobs growth between 2016 and 2021 was Gympie Central with almost 500 extra people (+493) stating they work in the area in the 2021 census compared to 2016. Gympie North saw the second largest growth, followed by the Southern areas of Gympie region. The area that saw the largest growth in per cent terms was actually Curra and the surrounding rural area which saw people stating they work there grow by 55 per cent in the same period.

Figure 3.4 - Change In Number Of Workers Stating Place Of Work, 2016 To 2021



Source: ABS Censuses 2016 and 2021; Destination Zones (DZNs)

Change in Gympie Central was overwhelmingly led by Health Care and Social Assistance (68 per cent of change), followed by Accommodation/Food (28 per cent). In Gympie North growth in numbers was driven by a mixture of Healthcare, Other Services, Construction, and Transport/Logistics. The Southern Gympie region (Long Flat down to Brooloo) saw strong growth in Accommodation and Food Services.

Table 3.1 - Stated Place Of Work Change By Area/DZN, 2016 To 2021

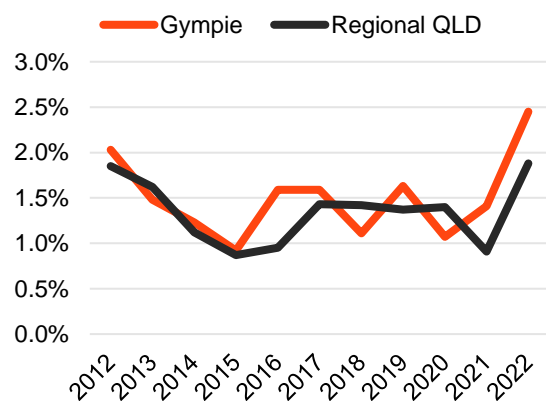
Area	Number	per cent	Industries driving growth
Gympie Central	493	8.9 per cent	Health Care and Social Assistance; Accommodation and Food Services; Construction
Gympie North	364	13.3 per cent	Health Care and Social Assistance; Other Services; Construction
Southern Gympie region	334	29.7 per cent	Accommodation and Food Services; Manufacturing; Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing
Cooloola	290	23.9 per cent	Manufacturing; Construction; Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing
Curra & Surrounds	289	55.0 per cent	Construction; Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing; Accommodation and Food Services
Southside	198	16.9 per cent	Health Care and Social Assistance; Retail Trade; Education and Training
Monkland/Glanmire	158	12.3 per cent	Construction (nearly all change); Retail Trade; Health Care and Social Assistance
Eastern Gympie region	79	8.1 per cent	Manufacturing; Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing; Education and Training
Amamoor Forest & Surrounds	54	17.0 per cent	Education and Training; Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing; Construction
Western Gympie region	36	4.3 per cent	Construction; Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing; Retail Trade

Source: ABS Censuses 2016 and 2021; Destination Zones (DZNs)

### A Growing Resident Base

The Gympie region has averaged 1.4 per cent population growth per year over the last decade. Growth was above the regional Queensland average (1.3 per cent p.a.) and has been considerably higher in recent years.

Figure 3.5 - Annual Population Growth



Source: ABS, Regional Population Growth, Australia

The urban area of Gympie grew by 13 per cent over the decade. This was the eighth fastest growth in Queensland out of all Significant Urban Areas and higher than other places like Cairns, Townsville, and Bundaberg.

Table 3.2 – Largest Population Growth (Per Cent), Top 10, 2012 To 2022

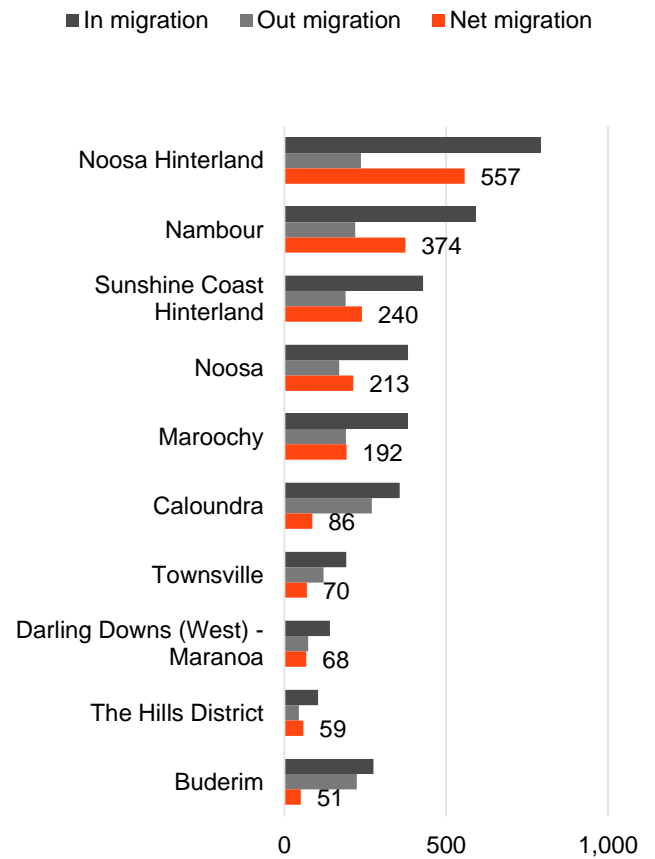
Significant Urban Area	Per cent change
Airlie Beach - Cannonvale	30 per cent
Sunshine Coast	27 per cent
Yeppoon	22 per cent
Gold Coast - Tweed Heads	21 per cent
Brisbane	20 per cent
Hervey Bay	18 per cent
Toowoomba	14 per cent
Gympie	13 per cent
Cairns	11 per cent
Bundaberg	9 per cent

Source: ABS, Regional Population Growth, 2023

### Attracting Early Retirees And Young Families

The region continues to attract retirees and pre-retirees (55 to 64 year olds had the largest net-in migration between 2016 and 2021), mainly from nearby Noosa and Sunshine Coast. In fact, almost 800 people are estimated to have moved to the Gympie region from the Noosa Hinterland area between 2016 to 2021.

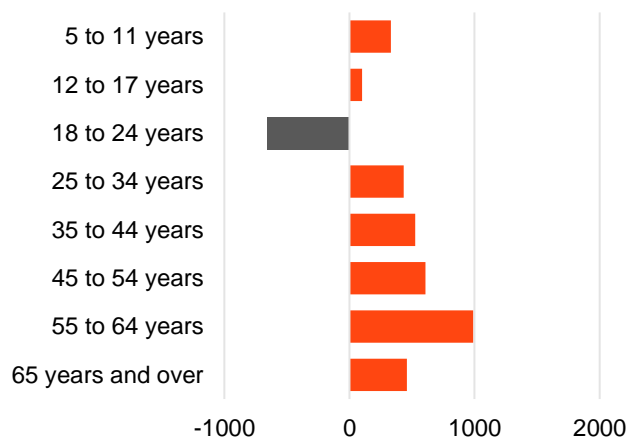
Figure 3.6 – Top Areas By Net Domestic Migration To Gympie Region, 2016 To 2021



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021; Statistical Area 2s

Young families are also attracted to the lifestyle affordability and access to facilities/infrastructure. There was positive net migration for five to eleven year olds and their parents between 2016 and 2021.

Figure 3.7 - Net Migration To Gympie Region By Age, 2016 To 2021

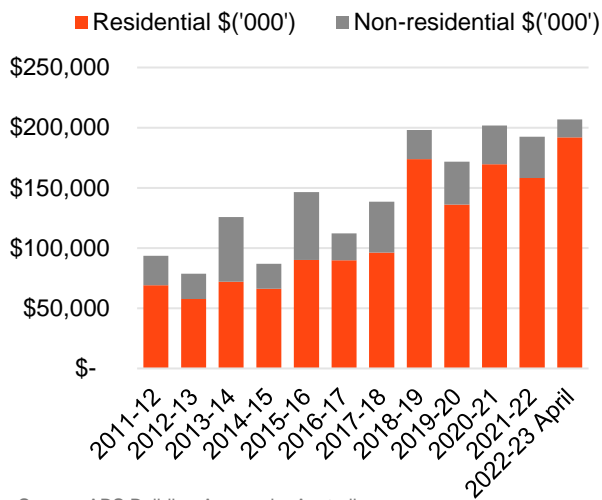


Source: ABS, Census of Population and Housing 2021

### Strong Residential Development

Population growth has been supported by the continued release of land for development. The average annual value of residential approvals in the five years to April 2023 was \$166M. This was double the average for the five years prior (\$83M).

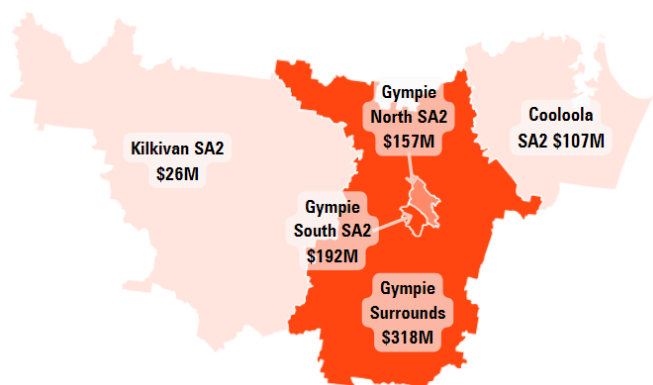
Figure 3.8 - Building Approvals



Source: ABS, Building Approvals, Australia

Most building approvals in the last five years have been centred on the expanding Gympie township and surrounds with almost \$350M in residential approvals in Gympie North and South SA2s. Gympie Surrounds had \$318M in approvals but this includes estates such as Greendowns Estate in Pie Creek which lies just 12 minutes drive from Gympie.

Figure 3.9 - Value Of Residential Approvals, Five Years To Dec 2022

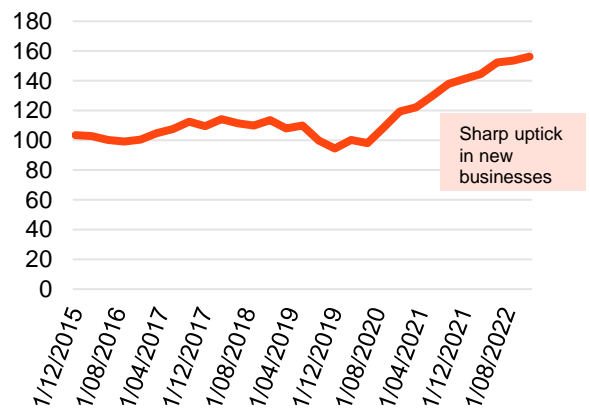


Source: ABS Building Approvals, 2023

### Boost In New Businesses

The Gympie region has also seen a strong expansion in new businesses in recent years. At the end of 2022, there were almost 160 net GST-registered businesses per quarter (new registrations minus cancellations). This was 50-60 per cent above that experienced five years ago.

Figure 3.10 - Net Growth In New GST Registrations, Gympie Region, Rolling 4 Quarter Average



Source: Australian Business Register, 2023

While the largest growth in numbers has been in Construction businesses, other industries such as Health, Administration, Finance, Professional Services, and Arts and Recreation have all seen strong per cent growth.

Table 3.3 - Net Business Growth By Industry, Top 10, 2020 To 2022

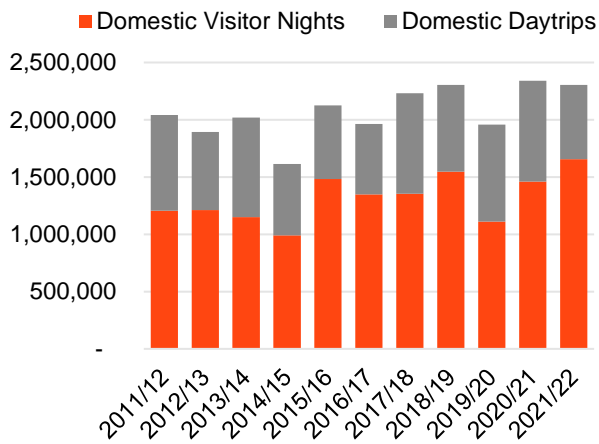
Industry	Numbers	Per cent
Construction	122	16.4 per cent
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	54	4.5 per cent
Health Care and Social Assistance	49	29.3 per cent
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	45	17.6 per cent
Administrative and Support Services	34	23.8 per cent
Other Services	31	11.9 per cent
Manufacturing	20	10.9 per cent
Accommodation and Food Services	20	12.0 per cent
Financial and Insurance Services	17	24.6 per cent
Arts and Recreation Services	14	43.8 per cent

Source: ABS, Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits, 2023

### Increase In Visitation

Gympie is increasingly drawing visitors from around Queensland and interstate. Domestic visitor nights and day trips were estimated to average 2.3 million in the two years to June 2022. Visitation is a mixture of people holidaying (especially Cooloola area) and visiting family and friends (Gympie City area).

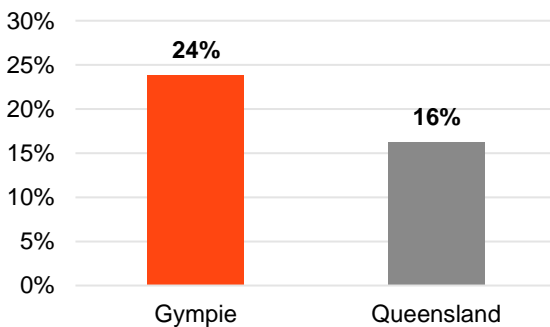
Figure 3.11 - Domestic Visitation, Gympie Region



Source: Tourism Research Australia, 2023

Most of the growth over the decade has been in overnight stays with visitor nights growing at well above the Queensland average. Since 2012, the number of nights increased by 24 per cent, compared to 16 per cent for the State.

Figure 3.12 - Increase In Domestic Overnight Visitor Nights, 2012 To 2022 (Two-Year Average)



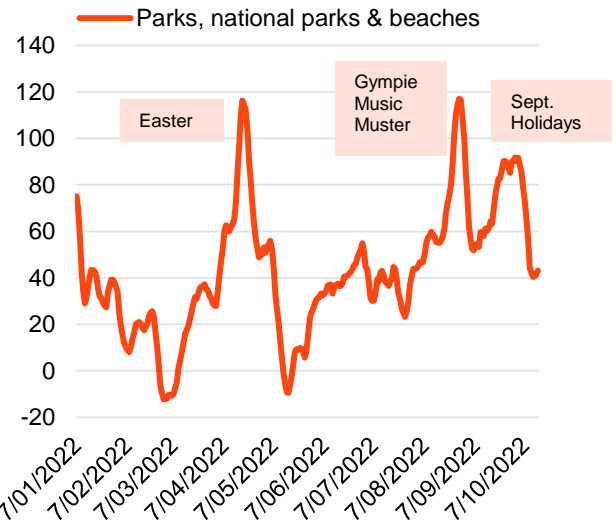
Source: Tourism Research Australia, 2023

Many visitors come to the region to engage in outdoor activities and enjoy the natural amenity, especially in the Cooloola area where 85 per cent of all domestic overnight visitors did just this in 2021/2022. One of

Gympie's largest events is the annual Gympie Music Muster which attracts approximately 10,000 attendees each day of the multi-day event in the Amamoor State Forest.

Figure 3.13 - Visitation To Park Areas In 2022

7 day rolling average, Baseline in early 2020

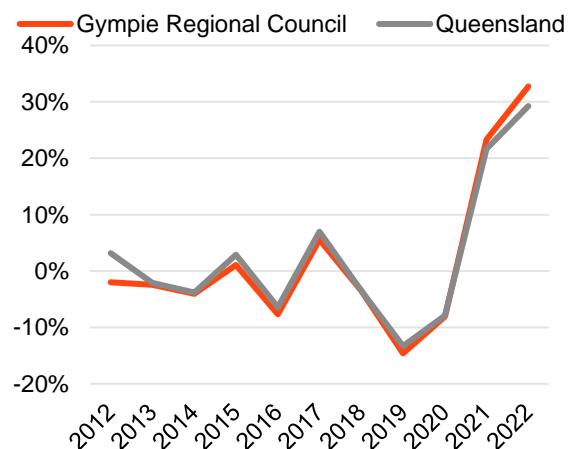


Source: Google Mobility Data, 2022

### Agriculture Returns To Growth

After some difficult years, agriculture value increased in 2021 and 2022. Total value added for the industry increased by just over \$70M in the two-year period to reach \$196M in 2021/2022. The value of production in livestock and fruit and nut areas (mandarins, macademias) was estimated to be particularly strong.

Figure 3.14 - Annual % Change In Value Added - Agriculture

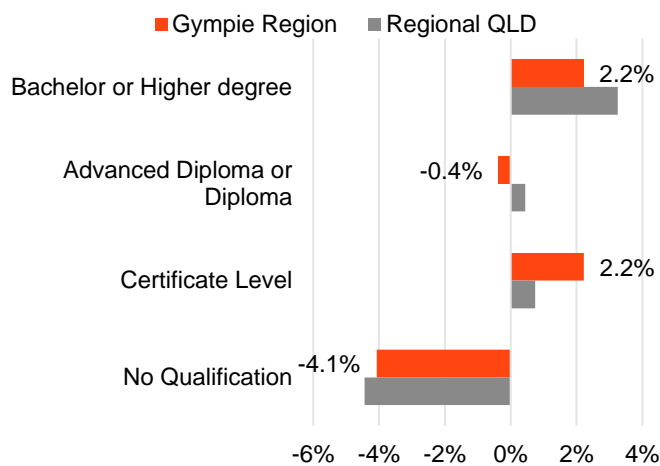


Source: NIEIR, 2023

### Attracting A Higher-Skilled Labourforce

Like many regions in Australia, the Gympie region workforce is becoming more educated. The share of the workforce with degrees increased by 2.2 per cent between 2016 and 2021. This was below the regional Queensland average, however this is a strong result considering regional Queensland includes large cities with major facilities like the Gold Coast and Cairns. The strong increase in certificate level qualifications reflects the growth in aged care, hospitality and construction.

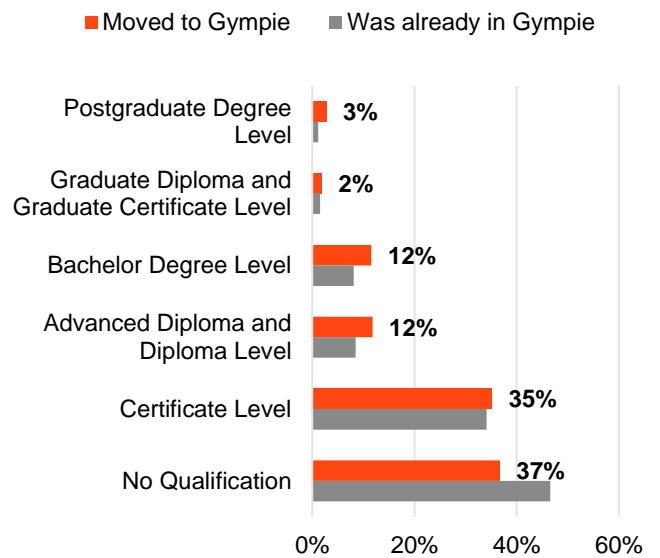
Figure 3.15 - Change In Share Of Workforce With Qualifications, 2016 To 2021



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

Contributing to the skills uplift is the fact that the Gympie region is attracting residents who are more qualified and more likely to be working in professional roles. An estimated 17 per cent of residents aged 15 to 64 who moved to Gympie in the five years leading up to 2021 had a degree. This is compared to only 11 per cent of those residents who were already living in Gympie five years previous. An estimated 28 per cent of new residents were in managerial or professional roles, compared to 23 per cent of existing ones.

Figure 3.16 - Qualification Level Of Residents Who Moved To Gympie In The Five Years Before 2021 (15 To 64 Year Olds)



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

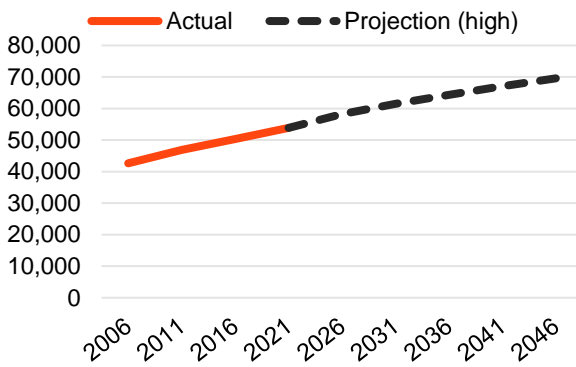
## 4 THE FUTURE

The Gympie region will continue to rely on its industry specialisations for competitiveness, but at the same time, new opportunities are emerging. This section provides a profile of what future trends will shape the region.

### Projected To Be 70,000 Living In Gympie In 2046

The Gympie region is projected to grow by an extra 16,000 people in the 25 years to 2046 under the Queensland Government’s high scenario. Recent population increases and the release of new land for development suggests this growth is highly feasible.

Figure 4.1 - Population Projection To 2046

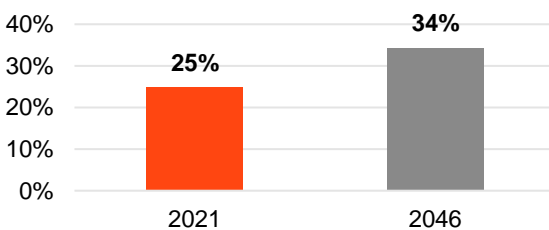


Source: ABS, 2023; QLD Government, 2023

### Ageing Population Will Drive Demand For Aged Care

In 2021, roughly a quarter of Gympie’s residents were aged 65 years and over. By 2046, it could be that one in every three residents is in this age group. This would equate to almost an extra 10,000 residents aged over 64 years.

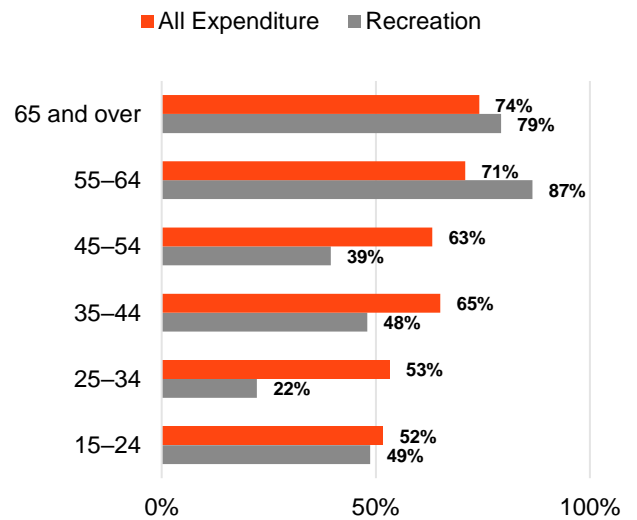
Figure 4.2 - Over 65 Year Olds As Per Cent Of Population



Source: ABS, 2023; QLD Government, 2023

The ageing population will increase the demand for health and aged care services. It also presents an opportunity for new types of retail and hospitality services. While older residents usually spend less, the age group that has seen the largest increase in average expenditure over the last decade has been 65 years and over. It is not just essential services, older people are spending a lot more on recreation than they did in the past too.

Figure 4.3 - Increase In Average Household Expenditure By Age Group 2004 To 2016



Source: ABS, Household Expenditure Survey, 2006 and 2017

### Queensland’s Renewable Energy Capital

The Gympie region is on the cusp of becoming Queensland’s renewables capital. In addition to the existing solar farms, the following major projects are proposed or in planning for the region:

**Borumba Pumped Hydro project:** the Queensland Government has announced \$6B for Queensland Hydro to progress the development of this [project](#) subject to the planning and approvals process. Located at Lake Borumba, it will be capable of generating 2,000MW (capacity to supply up to 2 million homes) and storing up to 24 hours of energy. The total project cost is estimated to be \$14.2B and be capable of generating power from 2030.

**Forest Wind:** This planned wind farm has the capacity to generate enough electricity to supply one in four Queensland homes with a local wind energy resource that blows in from the Pacific Ocean. The project is a joint venture between Tilt Renewables and Clean Sight. That is about half a million homes supplied by up to 1,200MW of power-generating capacity. Up to 226 wind turbines will be embedded in exotic pine plantation between Maryborough and Gympie. Forest Wind is a joint venture proposed by CleanSight and Tilt Renewables.

**EQUIS Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS):** This \$280m project is scheduled to commence construction during 2024/2025. Located at Woolooga, it will have a battery energy storage capacity of up to 200MW and discharge capacity up to 800MWh, which is sufficient power to supply electricity for up to 53,000 homes for four hours.

Bioenergy is also a particular growth area in Gympie with working examples and projects including:

- Suncoast Gold Macadamias is the world’s first ever plant to produce electricity from waste macadamia nut shells,
- Nescafe’s Gympie Plant uses locally sourced sawdust, and waste coffee grounds to fuel a boiler used to provide energy for the processing facilities, and
- Laminex heat plants produce 40MW per hour by burning process waste and bio fuel to produce heat for the pressess.

Investment in renewable energy will provide a consistent and secure clean energy supply for existing local businesses and be an attractive propistion for new companies in the future.

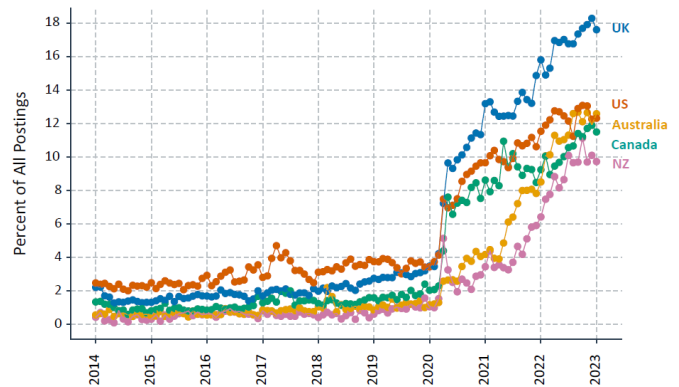
### Other Industry Developments

#### Remote Work

COVID-19 has accelerated the transition to remote work and this shift has the potential to increase demand for residential properties in high amenity lifestyle locations. This is especially the case for professional occupations

such as IT operations, software development, media and communications, marketing, and social science roles. It is estimated that 12 per cent of all jobs advertised online in Australia in 2023 allowed for at least one day of remote work. This is a substantial increase from pre-COVID-19 where it was closer to 1 per cent.

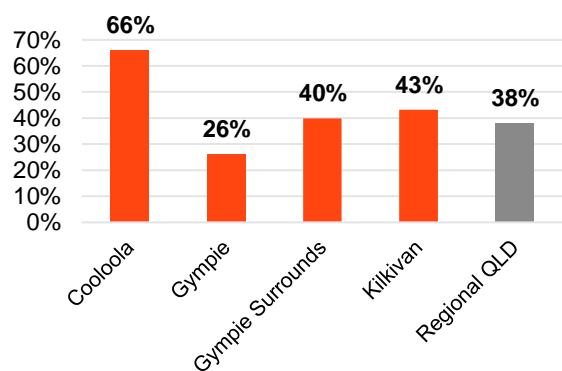
**Figure 4.4 – Share Of Job Postings Allowing At Least One Day Of Remote Work**



Source: National Bureau of Economic Research. Hansen et al, 2023

Gympie can benefit from this demand, especially in coastal locations where evidence suggests there are greater shares of remote working professionals. In 2021, the coastal and more rural areas of Gympie had higher shares of ‘white collar’ industry workers working from home than the regional Queensland average.

**Figure 4.5 - Share Of Business Service Industry Workers Working From Home**



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021



# RENEWABLE ENERGY

Major investments in the Gympie Region have the potential to unlock major industry development in renewables, as well as provide a sustainable energy source for other businesses in the area.

## Borumba Dam Pumped Hydro

The Queensland Government has made a commitment to fund the \$14.2B Borumba Pumped Hydro Project, the biggest single investment in Queensland's energy infrastructure in decades.



**2,000 MW**

## Forest Wind

A major wind farm embedded in a large pine plantation is planned for development in the North East.



**1,200 MW**

## Woolooga Energy Park

LightsourceBP are developing and constructing a major solar farm in Lower Wonga which will also incorporate a large Battery Energy Storage System (BESS).



**200 MW**



Source: Queensland Department of Energy & Public Works

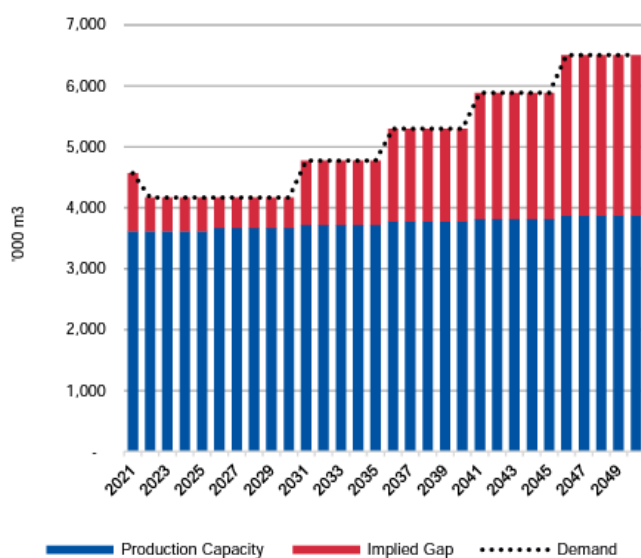
Image source: QLD Hydro

### Continued Demand For Plantation Timber

Australia and in particular South East Queensland's population is projected to continue to grow rapidly over the next 30 years. Millions of new dwellings will be needed to meet demand and despite increased construction of apartments, free standing houses will still dominate approvals. There has also been very strong growth in demand for sawn soft timber for non-structural purposes (fences, landscaping) that is set to continue. This will contribute to sustained demand for softwood timber in the future.

There are growing calls for the expansion or establishment of new plantations to meet this future demand. Plantation production has been static for many years and large residential approvals in 2021 led to a massive shortfall in timber that was only partly met by import increases. In the longer term, domestic production will need to be increased if Australia wants to prevent severe supply constraints and increased prices. Based on existing stable production capacity and no plantation expansion, modelling suggests that the gap between demand and production capacity will increase by 1.691 million m<sup>3</sup> or 179 per cent by 2050, lifting to 2.638 million m<sup>3</sup> per annum.

**Figure 4.6 - Australian Sawn Softwood Demand, Local Production & Implied Gap: 2021 – 2050**



Source: Forest & Wood Products Australia, 2022, *Future market dynamics and potential impacts on Australian timber imports*

Agriculture's Future Tied To Technology And Processes To Improve Climate Adaptability And Reduce Carbon Emissions Domestic and global demand for primary and processed food products will continue to grow due to population growth in Australia and continued income growth in key Asian markets. As always, export potential for commodities will be dependent on market access (reduced tariffs), climatic conditions in Australia and product volumes of key competitors. For example, as the United States is currently in a herd liquidation phase before a rebuild, this will prop up beef exports demand in the next few years.

Longer term industry change is reliant on adaption to new technology, resilience against climatic impacts, and implementation of low carbon processes.

The agriculture industry was at the forefront of technological and productivity enhancements in Australia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Improved productive capacity is still key to meet growing demand and in 2015 the Australian Farm Institute estimated that the full uptake of digital technologies could help the agriculture industry in Australia increase the gross value of production by more than \$20 billion or 25 per cent annually. Key to improvements in the sector are needed for this to happen including:

- Better connectivity – full roll out of 5G coverage is required to support digital technology in areas outside of Gympie central;
- Awareness and understanding of implementation of technology – partnerships with industry bodies and clusters to showcase technology; and
- Skills uplift – specific training in digital technologies and the implementation of agritech, or pathways to attract talent from outside the region.

The community and local businesses in Gympie are well aware of the impacts of major climatic events. In 2019, and adaptation plan was produced by the Queensland

Farmers federation for the East Coast North Sub-cluster which includes the Gympie region.

The Queensland Government has published a Low Emissions Agriculture Roadmap for the next 10 years focused on reducing production-based emissions and increasing carbon farming. In addition, industry groups like the Red Meat Advisory Council have made pledges to be carbon neutral by 2030 (CN30).

Key focus areas that could be considered in the region include:

- Exploring and utilising methane reduction options in stock feed;
- Increasing the use of renewables within the industry's energy mix;
- Researching and implementing pasture-based carbon sequestration practices;
- Establishment of agroforestry systems including silvopasture to optimise both timber and livestock production; and
- Reducing production, processing and consumption waste.

#### Meeting The Needs Of A Circular Economy

There is growing demand for communities and businesses to reduce and reuse waste which has obvious environmental benefits, but also provides the potential for new industry development. Queensland has set waste reduction targets for 2050 including:

- 25 per cent reduction in household waste,
- 90 per cent of waste is recovered and does not go to landfill, and
- 75 per cent recycling rates across all waste types.

The Gympie region is primed to support growth in areas such as industrial and construction waste recycling, recycled food product packaging, timber waste reuse, and of course bioproducts.

#### Tapping Into Demand For New Products

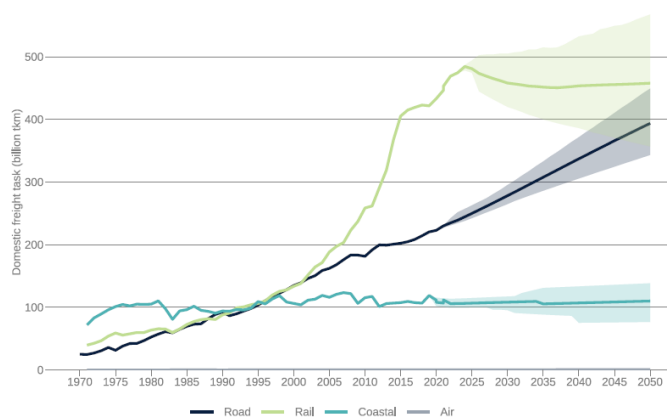
The Gympie region has the ability to utilise its resources and existing competitive skillsets and facilities to produce new products with high growth potential including:

- Engineered wood products,
- Niche high value processed food,
- Organic-products, and
- Plant based pharmaceuticals.

#### Potential Logistics Growth To Meet Growing Demand For Road Freight

The Gympie region already has a specialisation in road transport and this can grow in the future. Total domestic freight volumes in Australia are projected to grow by approximately 26 per cent between 2020 and 2050, largely driven by increases in road freight. Rail freight is expected to grow weaker due to softening demand for iron ore and coal exports. Road freight volumes are projected to grow by around 77 per cent due to obvious door-to-door advantages and lower transfer costs than rail freight. Gympie's location along the key Bruce Highway corridor can tap into this growth.

Figure 4.7 - Freight Task By Mode, Actual And Projected, To 2050



Sources: BITRE estimates.

#### Building More Customised Experiences To Attract Visitors

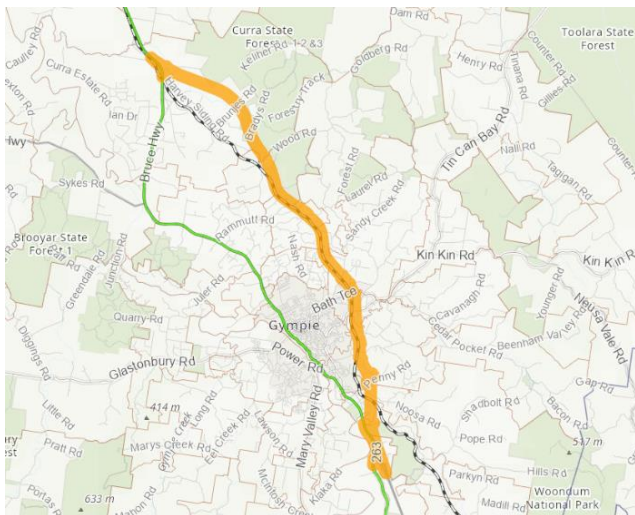
The Gympie region already has a diverse range of experiences to offer potential visitors, but there is potential to build upon this. Three of the most popular tourism trends cited by a recent industry survey for Australian Travellers currently are food tourism,

wellness tourism and sustainable travel (*Luxury Escapes, 2023*). Eco-tourism, agri-tourism, nature based activities and First Nations tourism demand also continue to grow. Gympie has all the natural assets to meet every one of these growing trends, the key will be building a competitive brand in a contested south east Queensland market place and supporting an adequate supply of modern accommodation to meet changing demographic needs.

### Future Proofing Transport Connections

The \$1B Gympie Bypass project is due for completion during 2024. The major transport project involves the upgrade of the Bruce Highway from Cooroy to Curra to provide a safer route and one that is protected from potential flood damage. The new section of the National Highway will stand 27 metres above the regular Mary River water height in Gympie, at its lowest point. The new four lane highway provides a continuous connection to the Sunshine Coast (Airport), Brisbane (CBD, International Airport, Port) and further south to Sydney.

Figure 4.8 - Gympie Bypass Route



Source: Australian Department of Infrastructure

### Long-Term Land Supply For Development

Gympie Regional Council is currently in the process of developing its new planning scheme, including reviewing the supply of future industrial and commercial land. The aim is to ensure a sufficient supply of

physically suitable, well-located industrial land is available to meet the needs of the community, and to facilitate economic growth and employment generation.

#### Curra Industrial Land

A key development investigation area has been identified just to the north of Curra. The site can provide readily developable land which provides flood free access. Curra could also provide direct access to both the Bruce Highway and rail line with the potential for a road / rail modal interchange. Council is working with the Queensland Government to progress investigations to bring the site forward and as a first step the site will form part of the draft new planning scheme.

Figure 4.9 - Location Of Planned Curra Industrial Land



Source: Gympie regional Council

### Upskilling For New Industries

Australia's future workforce will be shaped by trends that have been unfolding for some time. The global shift to a knowledge based economy, including robotics and AI, will require an increasing investment in up-skilling and support to access new forms of employment.

An extra two million employees occupied in professional roles have been added to the labour force in Australia since the year 2000. Occupations requiring level 1 skills (bachelor degree or above) are estimated to have grown the fastest, by 88 per cent, in the first two decades of this century. The lowest growth was in low-skill areas.

Growth in demand for higher skilled workers will continue. If local education providers and/or industry do not sufficiently support up-skilling, overseas migration will need to increase to address persistent and emerging skills shortages and specialist skillsets.

**Figure 4.10 - Nature Of National Jobs Growth Next Five Years**



Jobs in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) are predicted to grow by 14.2%, twice as fast as non-STEM jobs (7.4%).



More than nine out of 10 new jobs will require a post-secondary school education

Source: National Skills Commission

The National Skills Commission identified key areas driving future skills including Care, Computing (tech) and Climate (Green Jobs). The Gympie region will support industry development if it identifies and enables training in health/tech/green skills that align with its industry specialisations. For example, renewable energy maintenance, energy efficiency engineering, sustainable and low carbon farming, occupational therapy (for aged care), environmental science, and modular building.

Gympie's existing education hub (Uni SC, TAFE Queensland, Trade Training Centre) could be expanded to allow more efficient online based education in courses not provided within a suitable commuting distance. This also means students studying virtually benefit from the relationships and networks formed in campus based learning.

### **Improved Facilities For Residents**

Extensive flooding in the region in 2022 caused damage to several community facilities in the area. As a result, Government funding has been attained to not only rebuild, but also improve the quality of these facilities. This includes:

- \$2.3M repair and betterment works for netball facilities;
- Playing field restoration and lighting upgrades at

Albert Park Complex; and

- Repair and refurbishment of Gympie Civic Centre.

## BUILDING ON STRENGTHS AND CREATING NEW FUTURES

The Gympie region today covers a diverse range of localities with their own specialisations, from the pastoral lands out west, to the bustling regional service centre of Gympie, to the hinterland supporting agriculture and forestry, to the coastal tourism hotspots in the east. The region's population is growing and supporting strong growth in health, construction, education and hospitality. However, traditional industries like agriculture, food and timber processing, manufacturing, and engineering are also still thriving.

The Gympie region's future lies in capitalising on existing specialisations to generate more value and expanding into growth industries. Investments in new technology, skills development, and renewable energy in particular can support the competitiveness of existing industries and act as an attractive proposition for new businesses.

### More information

For further information, please refer to the Gympie region's online demographic, economic and social mapping tools:

**[economy.id](#) [profile.id](#) [atlas.id](#)**

For a detailed strategic analysis of recent trends in our economy access the [Gympie Economic Health Check](#)

### Contact us

For a confidential discussion regarding investing in the Gympie region and the available opportunities, contact:

**Andrew Quain**  
**Coordinator Economic Strategy & Advocacy**  
**Gympie Regional Council**  
**Phone:** 1300 307 800  
**Email:** [invest@gympie.qld.gov.au](mailto:invest@gympie.qld.gov.au)

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