



# Economic Development Strategy

2021–2025







### **Acknowledgement of Country**

Federation Council recognises the traditional caretakers and custodians of the land and their unique position in the history and culture of the Federation region. The Bpangerang people were the original owners of the land and the influence and recognition of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is a vital aspect in supporting the future vibrancy and cultural heritage of the Federation region.



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## OUR ECONOMIC VISION

The Federation region will be dynamic, vibrant and inclusive. We will continue to actively support local business, empower local community participation, and provide diverse opportunities for investment, employment and economic growth.

## OUR TOP 10 ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES



1

Growing our **population** and attracting diverse and skilled people to the region



2

Retaining **youth** and creating a place that fosters the development of young people



3

Generating diverse opportunities for **education and employment**



4

Establishing robust **digital infrastructure** to keep our region connected to the digital economy



5

Leveraging existing **tourism** partnerships and branding to support a vibrant visitor economy

# FOREWORD

This *Economic Development Strategy 2021–2025* reflects the Federation region – diverse, innovative, forward thinking and full of exciting opportunities.

The Federation region we all know, is full of opportunity, and our future in terms of economic prosperity looks bright. There is still plenty of work to do as we continue to diversify and evolve to ensure our region is best placed to attract investment and capitalise on economic growth opportunities, but the time is right to build on some great foundations.



That's what we are outlining in this document. Within this Strategy, we have set a clear framework to strengthen local business, empower our community, leverage key industries and enhance economic diversity and resilience.

Council will support the local economy by delivering a range of specific initiatives and actions to demonstrate economic leadership and instil confidence in the local market. Attracting investment not only provides a significant economic stimulus, it also attracts new technology and innovation and drives additional investment and job creation through supply chains.

We see the region well placed to move forward and capitalise on new opportunities. We are confident of a sustainable economic future, and as a Council we are committed to act on the opportunities outlined throughout this Strategy.

**Cr Patrick Bourke**

*Federation Council Mayor*



6

Creating a connected **business community** that networks, shares ideas, and supports innovation



7

Unlocking the amenity and beauty of our abundant **public and open spaces**



8

Enhancing the capacity and capability of Council to better support **local economic development**



9

Maintaining our **strong foundation** in key/traditional industries (farming and manufacturing)



10

Committing to the use of **renewable and green energy** to secure our future

# INTRODUCTION

Nestled on the northern banks of the Murray River in south-western NSW, the Federation region is a productive hub for farming and manufacturing.

Strategically located between the capital cities of Sydney and Melbourne, the Federation region has a bounty of natural assets. These include fertile soils, the picturesque Murray River, Lake Mulwala, and the Urana Aquatic Centre. Our region has a strong agricultural history of broadacre cropping and livestock farming and is home to some of Australia's largest manufacturing organisations.

Like all regions, Federation faces unique economic challenges including population growth, employment diversity and youth retention. These challenges can be offset and mitigated by leveraging our key strengths, such as our vibrant regional lifestyle, strategic location and availability of land for growth and development.

Federation Council was formed in 2016 through the consolidation of the previous Corowa Shire and Urana Shire Councils. This Strategy reflects Council's ongoing commitment to the coordinated and strategic development of the regional economy. As the first of its kind for Federation Council, this Strategy aims to provide a comprehensive, holistic and inclusive strategic direction for developing the economy across the entire region.

This Strategy is the result of comprehensive research, community engagement and stakeholder consultation<sup>1</sup>. It will ensure the local economy is strategically positioned for success, and provide a framework for future economic growth, diversification, innovation, and addressing COVID-19 disruption.



1. More information on the research and engagement that informed the development of this Strategy is available in the 'Consultation Summary Report' and 'Preliminary Research Report' documents. These documents can be made available by emailing Council at [council@federationcouncil.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@federationcouncil.nsw.gov.au)





**Building on traditional economic strengths in agriculture and manufacturing, this Strategy will unlock new opportunities for investment, growth and diversification.**

# OUR ECONOMY

The Federation region has a long history of livestock farming and broadacre cropping.

These agricultural strengths remain today, buoyed by a strong manufacturing sector based predominantly out of Corowa and Mulwala. Both agriculture and manufacturing represent a strong competitive advantage for the region, and act as key pillars in the local economy.

The Federation region is strategically located in close proximity to both Albury-Wodonga and Wagga Wagga, and has strong export potential to capital cities through established road and rail freight connections. The region also has dependable water assets and infrastructure, exemplified by the Murray River, Lake Mulwala, the Urana Aquatic Centre, and the rejuvenated Corowa Aquatic Centre.

Compared to NSW, the Federation region has a lower average income, lower bachelor's degree attainment, and a higher median age. Other key economic challenges include access to land for housing and industry expansion, and awareness of current local business opportunities and offerings.

However, these challenges are offset by the region's key strengths such as good climate, strong community connection, strategic location, affordability and lifestyle. Federation Council also has important partnerships with economic associations such as Regional Development Australia Murray (RDA Murray), Riverina & Murray Joint Organisation (RAMJO), Murray Regional Tourism, and Destination Riverina Murray.<sup>2</sup>

**Both agriculture and manufacturing represent a strong competitive advantage for the Federation region, and act as key pillars in the local economy.**

2. More information about our region's economy can be found in the 'Preliminary Research Report'. This document can be made available by emailing Council at [council@federationcouncil.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@federationcouncil.nsw.gov.au)



# Economic Snapshot



## POPULATION

**12,598**

PEOPLE<sup>3</sup>  
(2020)

**0.1%**

ANNUAL GROWTH RATE<sup>6</sup>  
(2014–19) NSW: 1.5%

**50.4**

MEDIAN AGE<sup>4</sup>  
(2019) NSW: 37.5 YEARS

**1.7%**

ABORIGINAL & TORRES  
STRAIT ISLANDER<sup>4</sup> (2016)



## INCOME & HOUSING

**\$42,484**

MEDIAN INCOME<sup>4</sup>  
(2018) NSW: \$50,153

**72.5%**

INTERNET CONNECTION  
AT HOME<sup>4</sup>  
(2016) NSW: 82.5%

**\$260,000**

MEDIAN HOUSE PRICE<sup>4</sup>  
(2019) NSW: \$650,000



## EMPLOYMENT

**6.0%**

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE<sup>5</sup>  
(MARCH 2021) NSW: 6.4%

**51.3%**

PARTICIPATION RATE<sup>4</sup>  
(2016) NSW: 59.2%

**76.5%**

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT RATE<sup>4,^</sup>  
(2016) NSW: 82.4%



## EDUCATION

**9.1%**

POPULATION WITH  
BACHELOR DEGREE<sup>4</sup>  
(2016) NSW: 16.0%

**23.5%**

POPULATION WITH  
CERTIFICATE QUALIFICATION<sup>4</sup>  
(2016) NSW: 18.1%



## KEY INDUSTRY

### TOP INDUSTRIES BY EMPLOYMENT<sup>7</sup>

AGRICULTURE FORESTRY & FISHING	18.9%
MANUFACTURING	16.6%
ACCOMMODATION & FOOD SERVICES	10.9%
CONSTRUCTION	8.7%
RETAIL TRADE	8.2%

(2019/20)

### INDUSTRY INTENSITY RATIO (RELATIVE TO NSW)<sup>7,\*</sup>

AGRICULTURE FORESTRY & FISHING	9.0
MANUFACTURING	2.5
ACCOMMODATION & FOOD SERVICES	1.6
ADMIN & SUPPORT SERVICES	1.2
OTHER SERVICES	1.0

(2019/20)

3. ABS ERP 2020 ([economy.id.com.au/federation](http://economy.id.com.au/federation))  
 4. ABS ([dbr.abs.gov.au](http://dbr.abs.gov.au))  
 5. ABS Labour force survey catalogue 6202.0 & SALM ([economy.id.com.au/federation/unemployment](http://economy.id.com.au/federation/unemployment))  
 6. ABS Regional Population Growth 3218.0 ([profile.id.com.au/federation](http://profile.id.com.au/federation))  
 7. National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR) ([economy.id.com.au/federation/employment-by-industry](http://economy.id.com.au/federation/employment-by-industry))

\* Industry Intensity Ratio is the ratio of a local industry to that of a broader economy (in this case, the Federation region economy compared to the whole of NSW). High numbers indicate a very high 'intensity' of industry for Federation, and numbers close to 1 indicate the same intensity as the rest of NSW.

^ Youth Engagement Rate is the percentage of youth (persons ages 16-19 years) engaged in either work or study.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

Seven principles will guide forward economic planning and action. These principles will keep us focused and proactive, ready to respond to emerging economic opportunities and risks, always working with the community to strengthen our economy.



## COMMUNICATION

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- » Enhanced communication from Council to local businesses, and within the local economy (i.e. business networks)
- » Sharing opportunities, information, knowledge, ideas
- » Increasing awareness of local strengths and offerings



## CLARITY

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- » Clear strategic direction for the economy
- » Roles and responsibilities for all key stakeholders, not just Council
- » Understanding of the goals and objectives of Council



## CAPACITY

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- » Increasing the capacity and skills in the local economy
- » Increase participation in the economy through education, skills development and training
- » Leverage our strong industries (agriculture and manufacturing) to support new and emerging sectors



## WELLBEING

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- » Building a vibrant and healthy community
- » Focusing on community wellbeing and the quadruple bottom line
- » Creating an inclusive economic environment





## DIVERSITY [RESILIENCE]

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- » Attracting new people
- » Diversifying the economy and job opportunities
- » Creating a more resilient economic foundation for the region



## COLLABORATION

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- » Collaboration, partnerships and networks
- » Sharing expertise and creating support networks
- » Co-design and co-investment in the economy



## SUSTAINABILITY

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- » Smart use of natural assets
- » Preserving our competitive advantage in agriculture
- » Using renewable energy, smart technology to enhance resource-use-efficiency and ensure sustainable practices



# ECONOMIC STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES

The main aims of this Strategy are to leverage local economic strengths, provide clear pathways for overcoming challenges, and take advantage of economic opportunities. Key strengths and opportunities are summarised below.

## Strength

### Agriculture & Manufacturing Industries

Agriculture and manufacturing are the top two industries in the region and contribute substantially to Gross Regional Product and local employment. These industries are complimentary in terms of their required road and freight infrastructure and can be leveraged to build and grow and diversify other sectors of the economy.

### Strategic Location

The Federation region is strategically located between Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne and Adelaide – with established road and rail transport infrastructure supporting strong economic exports. Close proximity to Albury-Wodonga also means Council has the potential to leverage key Government initiatives such as the Albury-Wodonga Regional Deal and the Inland Rail project that can enhance access to export markets.

### Lifestyle & Affordability

The Federation region boasts a vibrant lifestyle and relatively low cost of living. Both of these strengths can be leveraged to attract and retain people in the region, helping to grow the economy and breathe new life into communities.

## Opportunity

### Population Growth & Diversity

The population growth rate and youth retention rate in the Federation region is lower than neighbouring regions. In addition, the region has a population that is older than the NSW average. Taken together, these demographic factors present an opportunity for Council to attract and retain new people and talent in the region, and leverage our older population to create new industries (e.g. aged-care) and increase workforce participation.

### Digital Infrastructure

Digital infrastructure, such as internet access and mobile data, is vital for supporting a modern and diverse economy. Council has an opportunity to increase digital connectivity and enabling infrastructure across the region (e.g. through the NSW Regional Digital Connectivity Program).

### Land Development

With an abundance of land available for growth and development, Council has an opportunity to strategically allocate land for projects such as housing development and industry expansion.

### Education & Capacity Building

Access to education is vital for developing and maintaining human capital, particularly in regional economies. Council has an opportunity to improve access to education through advocacy and innovative partnerships with education institutions.

### The Visitor Economy

Tourism is a key element of the broader Riverina and Murray regional economy. Council has an opportunity to build on the visitor economy's strong foundation by leveraging existing partnerships, tourism branding, visitor attractions/assets, and industry development opportunities.





**“The Federation region has strong economic foundations and an abundance of opportunities to diversify and grow into the future.”**

# STRATEGIC THEMES & PRIORITY ACTION AREAS

Federation Council has identified seven strategic themes to guide the delivery of this Economic Development Strategy.



## Strengthening Local Business

Local business is what makes the Federation region unique and vibrant. Local business is the engine room for the economy – supporting local jobs, investment and commerce. This Strategy commits to strengthening the local business community and supporting new businesses to grow and thrive across the region.

### KEY STRATEGIES

- Enhancing communication and collaboration mechanisms between Council and local businesses
- Promoting programs that build local business skills and capabilities
- Exploring options to increase innovation activity of the local business sector
- Reducing 'red tape' and streamlining approval processes, making it easier to do business in the region



## Empowering Our Community

One of the Federation region's greatest assets is its people. Investing in people and supporting all of our communities right across the region, increases the resilience and productivity of our economy. This Strategy commits to increasing engagement with the community and empowering our people to participate in economic development.

### KEY STRATEGIES

- Enhancing community engagement in local economic planning and decision-making
- Investigating local barriers to participating in, and benefiting from, our economy
- Promoting life-long learning and education opportunities for everyone
- Creating an economic framework which focuses on increasing our community's wellbeing





## Leveraging Key Industries

The Federation economy is supported by strong agriculture and manufacturing industries. These key industries provide significant employment opportunities and growth potential for the region. This Strategy will leverage our strategic location, and collaborate with key industry, to attract new investment to the region.

### KEY STRATEGIES

Promoting the region as a destination for agricultural and manufacturing investment and innovation

Working with key industries to identify and realise opportunities for new local investment, jobs and growth

Encouraging local innovation and technology deployment to enhance our competitive advantages

Exploring new markets, new trade relationships, and new local products for our key industries



## Enhancing Economic Diversity & Resilience

Diversity and resilience are core aspects of a strong and sustainable economy. Economic diversity can drive employment opportunities, facilitate innovation, and create new opportunities for growth. This Strategy commits to building the diversity and resilience of the local economy, and in turn, increasing economic opportunity.

### KEY STRATEGIES

Exploring options to build local innovation capacity, connections and confidence

Developing growth plans for emerging industries, such as aged-care

Promoting the region as a destination for smart/ remote working

Fostering digital and Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) skills to expand the region's 'digital economy'

Investigating options for mitigating the local economic impact of climate change and natural disasters

Investigating local economic opportunities presented by growth in the renewable energy sector



## Boosting the Visitor Economy

Tourism is a key element of the local economy and will play a key role in the future economic development of the region. The visitor economy attracts people to the region and increases broader awareness of local economic opportunities. This Strategy commits to creating a more dynamic tourism offering in the region and supporting growth in the visitor economy.

### KEY STRATEGIES

- Continued implementation of the North of the Murray 5 Year Destination Marketing Strategy & Implementation Plan 2020-2024
- Continuing to build our local tourism economy through promotion, partnerships, new tourism products, excellence in accommodation, and industry capacity building
- Strengthening collaboration with key tourism partners (e.g. Murray Regional Tourism, Destination Riverina Murray, Destination NSW and Visit Victoria)
- Exploring options to increase the utilisation and visitation of existing local assets
- Promoting diversity in local tourism attractions and experiences, such as eco-tourism and agri-tourism
- Unlocking the tourism potential of key natural assets, such as our rivers, lakes and waterways
- Capitalising on the events market (including weddings, conferences, sport, business, etc.) to attract people to the region



## Attracting Investment

To ensure the Federation region continues to grow and prosper, we must attract investment to the region. New investment in the economy creates more opportunities for growth and diversification and can significantly increase the number of jobs in the region. This Strategy commits to promoting the region as 'open for business' and securing high-value investments from both the public and private sector.

### KEY STRATEGIES

- Working with NSW, Victorian and Australian Governments to increase investment in local infrastructure
- Advocating for improvements in the coverage and quality of digital connectivity across the region
- Exploring options to enhance local transport and logistics infrastructure, including the Corowa Aerodrome
- Developing a long-term infrastructure plan for the region
- Preparing a land release plan to encourage and catalyse local development (residential, commercial and industrial)
- Leveraging tourism partnerships to encourage new investment





## Increasing Skills & Economic Capacity

Sustainable economic development requires educated, talented and skilful people. Education and training provide the economy with a more diverse and talented workforce. This Strategy is committed to investing in human resources in the region and providing access to training and skills development opportunities.

- KEY STRATEGIES**
- Promoting local awareness and participation in education and skills development
  - Identifying options to attract and retain skills, talent, ideas and innovation
  - Building Council's own economic development capacity
  - Working with the NSW and Australian Governments, and education partners, to increase investment in local education and training facilities
  - Fostering efforts to increase local digital and STEM skills



# STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Located on the NSW-Victorian border, the Federation region has a unique strategic and policy context that necessitates consideration of policies from both NSW and Victoria.

## Policy Context

There are a number of local, regional, state, and national policies and strategies that will influence and provide context for this Economic Development Strategy. Of these, a selection of key policies are noted in the table below.

LOCAL	<b>Federation Council Community Strategic Plan 2018–2028</b>	Outlines the community's aspirations and long-term vision for the Federation region.
	<b>Federation Council Delivery Program 2018–2022</b> <b>Operational Plan 2020–2021</b>	Outlines the major projects underway in the region, and how Council aims to deliver on the community objectives and vision from the Community Strategic Plan.
	<b>Federation Council Local Strategic Planning Statement 2020–2040</b>	Defines the land-use planning priorities for the Federation region and provides a framework for building on the strengths of the region.
	<b>Federation Council Tourism Brand Strategy</b>	Establishes the new tourism brand and strategic positioning for the visitor economy through the 'North of the Murray' branding.
REGIONAL	<b>Regional Development Australia Murray Strategic Plan 2019–2021</b>	Outlines strategies, priorities and economic opportunities for the communities across the RDA Murray region.
	<b>Destination Riverina Murray Strategic Plan &amp; Destination Management Plan</b>	Aims to reactivate the visitor economy in the Murray region through decisive and strategic action.
	<b>Riverina Murray Regional Plan</b>	Establishes a framework to grow the region's cities and local centres and supports the protection of high-value environmental assets in the region.
STATE	<b>Murray Darling Association Vision Strategic Plan 2020–2025</b>	Aims to drive key environmental, economic, social and wellbeing outcomes for communities across the entire Murray Darling Basin region.
	<b>20 Year Economic Vision for Regional NSW (2021 Refresh)</b>	Aims to drive economic recovery and rebound from drought, bushfires, floods and the COVID-19 pandemic that effected the regional economy from 2018-2020. The Vision aims to guide regional NSW towards a sustainable and resilient future economy through clear priority actions.
	<b>NSW Premier's Priorities</b>	NSW Government priorities to enhance quality of life and address big challenges.





## Regional Policy Context: Case Studies

### Murray Regional Tourism – Destination Management Plan

The Murray Regional Tourism (MRT) Destination Management Plan (DMP) provides a strategic approach to the ongoing development and growth of the visitor economy in the Murray region. The Plan also provides strategic guidance for local tourism operators to enhance and develop their products, services, and offerings.

A key aspect of Murray Regional Tourism’s investment in the local visitor economy in the Federation Council region is the North of The Murray Destination Branding. The North of the Murray brand highlights the visitor economy in the ‘Eastern Murray’ region, promoting locations such as Corowa, Mulwala, Howlong, Urana, Oaklands, and other villages across the Federation region.

MRT’s investment in the ongoing growth of the local economy means they are key stakeholders in the development of the local economy. As such, this Economic Development Strategy will align with the key strategies and objectives outlined in the MRT DMP.

### Albury-Wodonga Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS) 2018–2022

The Albury-Wodonga REDS sets out a long-term economic vision for the Albury-Wodonga Functional Economic Region. The REDS aims to build on the economic endowments and opportunities of the region to guide investment and growth.

The REDS is a key mechanism in supporting regional collaboration between neighbouring Council organisations, by leveraging the strengths of the broader region to attract investment and grow the economy. Additionally, these inter-Council relationships provide an opportunity for Federation Council to become tertiary beneficiaries of key projects such as the Albury-Wodonga Regional Deal, and Inland Rail.

Overall, the REDS provides Federation Council with a clear framework regional for economic development, connection with the Albury-Wodonga regional hub, and a basis for ongoing collaboration with neighbouring local government areas.

# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Successful economic planning requires meaningful buy-in from the community and key economic stakeholders. To support the development of a clear and consolidated Strategy, Federation Council conducted a comprehensive suite of engagement with community, Council staff, and key economic stakeholders

The engagement process consisted of community workshops in Urana, Corowa, Mulwala and Howlong, and dedicated engagement sessions with council staff and Councillors. These sessions were supplemented by an online community survey, an online council staff survey, and targeted follow-up interviews and discussions with key stakeholders.<sup>3</sup>

## Key Engagement Insights



### TOURISM

Tourism is a key element of the local economy. Tourism can support economic development by bringing investment and increasing awareness of local opportunities.



### PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATION

Council is not the only stakeholder responsible for implementing the Strategy. Partnerships and collaboration can support an inclusive and coordinated approach to developing a dynamic and resilient economy.



### INFRASTRUCTURE

Local infrastructure, such as roads, utilities, communications networks, buildings, among other assets, are critical drivers of the economy. There are opportunities to review and assess our local infrastructure base to improve utilisation, identify gaps and prioritise upgrades.



### NETWORKING & COMMUNICATION

Communication is a key issue for the region. Enhanced interconnection, communication and sharing of information within the local economy can enable a more coordinated approach to economic development.

<sup>3</sup>. More information about the stakeholder engagement process, and key community insights, can be found in the 'Consultation Summary Report'. This document can be made available by emailing Council at [council@federationcouncil.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@federationcouncil.nsw.gov.au)





### **SUPPORT FOR LOCAL BUSINESS**

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The Federation region is home to a strong and dynamic business sector. To support ongoing sectoral growth and diversification, there are opportunities for improved Council-business collaboration, capacity development, and business-oriented reforms/programs.



### **ATTRACTION & RETENTION**

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Low youth retention, and low availability of skilled labour are inherent challenges for the economy. Attracting and retaining the right people/ demographics to the region will increase the resilience and diversity of the economy.



### **DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY & LITERACY**

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To support a modern and diverse economy, the Federation region requires a solid foundation of digital infrastructure. This relies on widespread access to quality internet and mobile data, but also the digital literacy (skills and capacity) to best utilise digital technology.



### **PROMOTION & MARKETING**

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While the Federation region has a lot to offer, people, business and potential investors may not be aware of these opportunities. Promotion and marketing of local strengths and assets can increase awareness both locally, and across the wider region.

# IMPLEMENTATION & NEXT STEPS

To deliver this Strategy, Federation Council has developed an Internal Resourcing & Implementation Plan. This document will allow Council to coordinate implementation in collaboration with key stakeholders.

The Internal Resourcing & Implementation Plan will also provide Council with clear actions, milestones, resourcing requirements, responsibilities and accountabilities.

This Plan will be updated annually and provide an opportunity to measure progress and report on key changes in the economy.

## Economic Development Document List

In developing this Strategy, Federation Council also developed a number of supporting documents. These include:

- » **Consultation Summary Report**  
Provides an outline of the key themes and insights gathered throughout the stakeholder engagement process.
- » **Preliminary Research Report**  
Provides in-depth research into the local economy and analyses the key economic challenges and opportunities for the region.
- » **Resourcing & Implementation Plan [Council Internal]**  
Provides Council with a clear plan for delivering the objectives of this Strategy, and outlines the resourcing, funding and time requirements for key economic development actions.

Other than the Resourcing & Implementation Plan, each of these documents are available to the public and can be made available by contacting Council.





## Get in Touch

Federation Council welcomes the opportunity to continue collaborative discussion about economic development with key stakeholders from across the region.

To get in touch, send us an email at [council@federationcouncil.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@federationcouncil.nsw.gov.au), or call us on 02 6033 8999.

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