HAWKESBURY CITY COUNCIL

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

2022 - 2024

Hawkesbury City Council

www.hawkesbury.nsw.gov.au

Acknowledgement of Country

Hawkesbury City Council acknowledges the Darug and Darkinjung people as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Hawkesbury.

We pay respect to all Elders, past, present and emerging and acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first people of this Country.

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

Purpose

The Destination Management Plan provides a framework to support the ongoing development of a differentiated region making it appealing for locals and visitors alike. It does this by encouraging a collaborative environment and one that supports businesses to thrive.

Challenges

- Destination awareness and connection
- Pandemic uncertainty and desirability
- Fatigued and disconnected operators
- Lack of leadership and ownership of destination management causing missed opportunities

Opportunites

- Enhance existing and create new unique experiences
- Proximity to Sydney and regional cities
- Events that showcase Hawkesbury experiences
- Support businesses to thrive in a suitable, resilient business community
- Agritourism opportunities including planning amendments through NSW state government

STRATEGIC PILLARS

Visitor Engagement

Continually develop a Hawkesbury region that demonstrates its depths in experiences and engages with the visitor to drive advocacy and repeat visitiation.

Destination branding	Enhance the region's strengths	Leveraging partnerships

Business Confidence

Work in collaboration with businesses to deliver an outstanding visitor experience. Connect and communicate with the industry to support viable and confident businesses.

Build business confidence	Connect the industry	Flexibility in visitor servicing

Advocacy and Governance

Build a united Visitor Economy through strong frameworks and structure. Use research and engagement to guide decisions making and to advocate for the region.

Clear Destination Management Structure	Decision making tools	Leveraging grant opportunities

EXPERIENCE PILLARS

Adventure **Agri & Artisan** **Nature** **Heritage & Culture**

- This plan is **for** tourism businesses of the Hawkesbury region
- The plan w**orks with** State agencies, neighbouring Councils and Association groups
- The delivery of the plan is **by** Hawkesbury City Council

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CONTEXT

From late 2019 the Australian and global visitor economy has endured a significantly challenging time. Fire, floods and the COVID-19 pandemic disruptions and closures throughout the NSW State and the Hawkesbury region, has had and continues to have a major impact on the visitor economy. These back to back events left little time for recovery from one to the other for the industry and community at large. During this period however businesses have demonstrated resilience, innovation and the ability to pivot.

The Destination Management Plan is an action from the Hawkesbury City Council adopted Business Recovery Plan. The Business Recovery Plan was prepared to help businesses recover from these recent external shocks. Since the plan was adopted, Hawkesbury City Council has received a Bushfire Local Economic Recovery Fund grant to enable implementation of the various actions stemming from the Recovery Plan including the development of an updated Destination Management Plan.

The Destination Management Plan works within the Regroup, Reactivate and Rediscover framework of the existing council adopted Business Recovery Plan.

The Destination Management Plan outlines the priority actions to aid the recovery and to build resilience of the visitor economy sector across the region. This plan is a combination of targeted and tactical short term responses, as well as long term actions to work towards, to help the sector recover and thrive moving forward.

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Destination Management Plan aims to create a unique Hawkesbury experience for the people that live here and for the people that visit. It aims to reconnect the businesses and build their capacity going forward.

To achieve this it works with the existing strengths of the region including natural, built and its people to leverage the recovery of the Visitor Economy. It will support key experiences and attractions, identify and nurture new experiences and attractions, and work together as a region to create a unique visitor experience.

The Destination Management Plan works on improving resilience, skills and networking opportunities for the region's operators to connect the people responsible for creating the Hawkesbury visitor experience. The plan works on connecting the Hawkesbury region with its neighbours and partners, working to leverage these connections for the benefit of the visitor.

IMAGE: Destination NSW

SITUATION ANALYSIS – SUMMARY

The Hawkesbury Local Government Area (LGA) is located in the north west of the Sydney Metropolitan area approximately 50 kms and one hours drive from the Sydney CBD. The Hawkesbury has many towns and villages, each with distinctive identities, communities and stories. Hawkesbury City Council is the largest local government area by landmass in metropolitan Sydney covering an area of 2,793km[2].

Statewide, the NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030 sets the roadmap for the vision for the NSW Economy to 2030. The major outcome is for NSW to be the premier visitor economy in the Asia Pacific contributing $65 billion in total visitor expenditure by 2030, with $25 billion in regional expenditure.[1]

The phases outlined to achieve these outcomes includes the immediate phase of recovery for NSW (now to 2024) post major disruptive events for the State. Bushfires, floods and COVID-19 affected the momentum of the Visitor Economy for the State and for Regional NSW including the Hawkesbury. The recovery Phase is followed by the Momentum phase (to 2026) and the Accelerator phase (to 2030).[2]

Hawkesbury City Council previously sat within Destination Sydney Surrounds North within the State wide Destination Networks. From July 2022, however, Hawkesbury will move into the Greater Sydney Destination Network as part of the state-wide Destination Network review. This will better align with Western Parkland City and City Deals program that Hawkesbury City Council is a member of.

The Western City District Plan sets out planning priorities and actions for improving quality of life for residents as the district grows and changes.[3] The plan covers the eight councils as part of the Western Sydney City Deals which sets the investment foundation for the Western Parkland City. Signed in 2018, the City Deals is a collaborative approach to building and coordinating investment to create world-class jobs and a great quality of life[4] for Western Sydney residents. It includes planning priorities for leveraging opportunities for local councils from the Western Sydney International Airport and Badgerys Creek Aerotropolis.[5]

Hawkesbury City Council is well placed to build and leverage off these strategies and plans to develop an integrated Destination Management Plan focused on meeting State and LGA outcomes.

A detailed Situation Summary can be found in Appendix 1.

[1] NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030
[2] NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030 pg.12
[3] Western Sydney District Plan pg. 3
[4] https://www.wscd.sydney/city-deal
[5] Western Sydney District Plan pg. 19

THE ROLE OF TOURISM IN THE HAWKESBURY

Tourism is a vital contributor to Australia's economy with over 9 million international visitors and 100 million domestic trips annually (2017/18). However regional dispersal is still considered a challenge with visitors choosing to stay close to major centres. 61% of these visitors were overnight visitors to regional Australia and 44% of total visitor spend was made within regional Australia.[6]

Regional tourism drives $60.8 billion into the economy annually and is a focal point for each state tourism organisation as part of their regional dispersal objective.[7] In 2020 regional tourism, despite the challenges of COVID-19, has benefited from an increase in visitation and advocacy from Australians who would not ordinarily choose regional destinations.

While the propensity to visit regional Australia is affected by a number of factors (such as an individual's life stage, spending power, travel purpose, available time, and whether they are a domestic or international visitor), generally, the following visitor types are more likely to travel to regional areas:

• domestic visitors

• older domestic and international visitors

• holiday visitors

• leisure visitors (those traveling for the purpose of holiday and/or visiting friends and relatives).

Within NSW specifically, for the Year Ending June 2020, there were 60,282,000 visitors and 81,652,000 nights, accounting for $16,397,000 in regional expenditure.[8]

[6] Tourism Research Australia 2019, The Beach, Bush and Beyond: Understanding Regional Dispersal of Australian Tourists, https://www.tra.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/185/Regional%20Dispersal%20-%20Summary%20-%20October%202019.pdf.aspx
[7] Tourism Research Australia, National Tourism Satellite Account, https://www.tra.gov.au/economic-analysis/economic-value/national-tourism-satellite-account/national-tourism-satellite-account
[8] Destination NSW 2020, Travel to Regional NSW - June 2020, https://www.destinationnsw.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/travel-to-regional-nsw-time-series-jun-2020.pdf

TOURISM BUSINESSES IN THE HAWKESBURY

288[9] businesses represent tourism in the Hawkesbury LGA (2021).

Taste - Pub 5.9%
Taste 21.5%
Taste- Wineries &… 2.4%
Markets 1.0%
Heritage/Museums 2.1%
Farmgate 8.3%
Tours/River/Activit… 1.0%
Tours 3.5%
Gardens 1.4%
Stay 35.8%
Adventure/Action 2.1%
Adventure/Horse… 1.4%
Adventure/Sport… 4.9%
Art & Galleries 1.7%
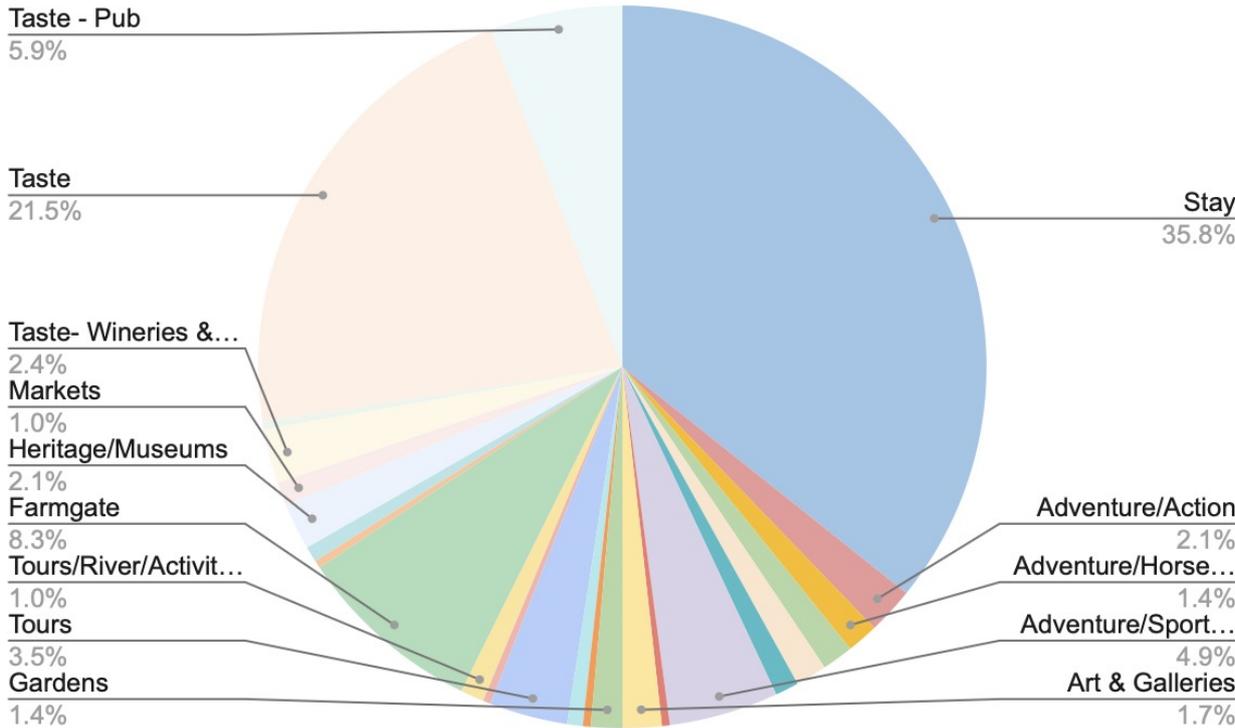
Figure 1 - Businesses in the Hawkesbury LGA by category

Visitors to the Hawkesbury Region

The Hawkesbury area was severely impacted by the bushfires of 2019, Floods in February 2020, 2021 and 2022, COVID-19 during 2020 and 2021 and the associated lockdowns. The border closures both domestically and internationally also affected visitation statistics during this period.

In 2019/20 there were 794,137 domestic daytrippers to the Hawkesbury region and 600,506 domestic visitors nights. This was a significant reduction from the previous year of 935,424 daytrippers and 642,395 domestic visitor nights.[10]

The primary reason for domestic daytrippers coming to the Hawkesbury was for a holiday (422,000) followed by visiting friends and relatives (237,000). This was also reflected in the domestic overnight with the majority (83,000) coming to the Hawkesbury for a holiday.[11]

[9] Figure from HCC Visitor Information Centre Contact list 2021
[10] Economic id
[11] Tourism Research Australia Local Government Area Profiles 2017

VISITOR NIGHTS BY REASON FOR TRIP
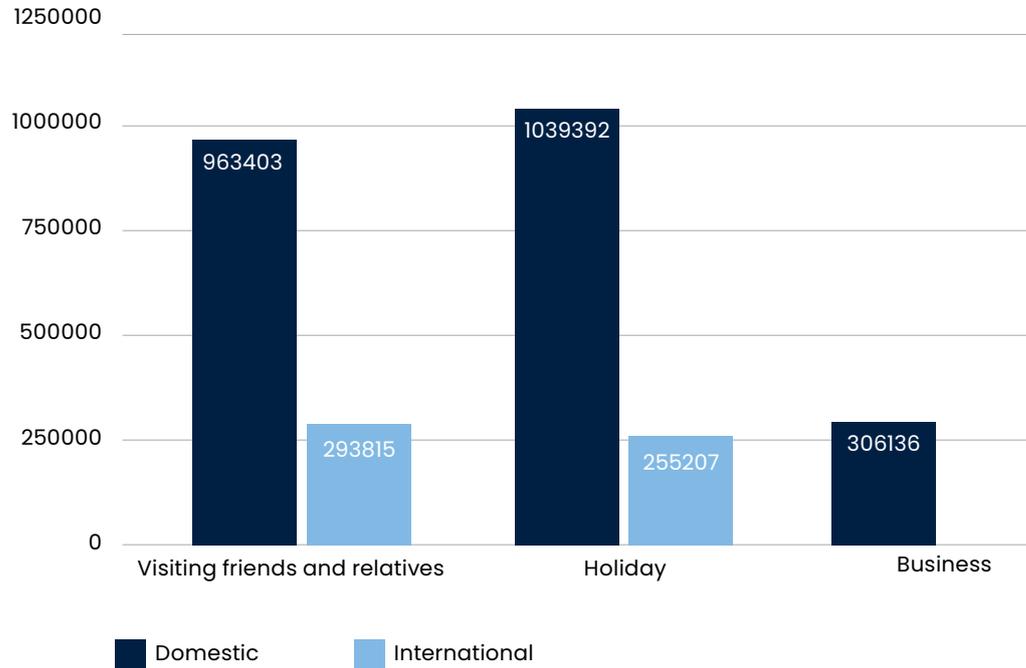
Figure 2 - Domestic nights in Hawkesbury by reason for trip (total trips 2014/15 to 2019/20)

HAWKESBURY CITY DOMESTIC DAY TRIPS
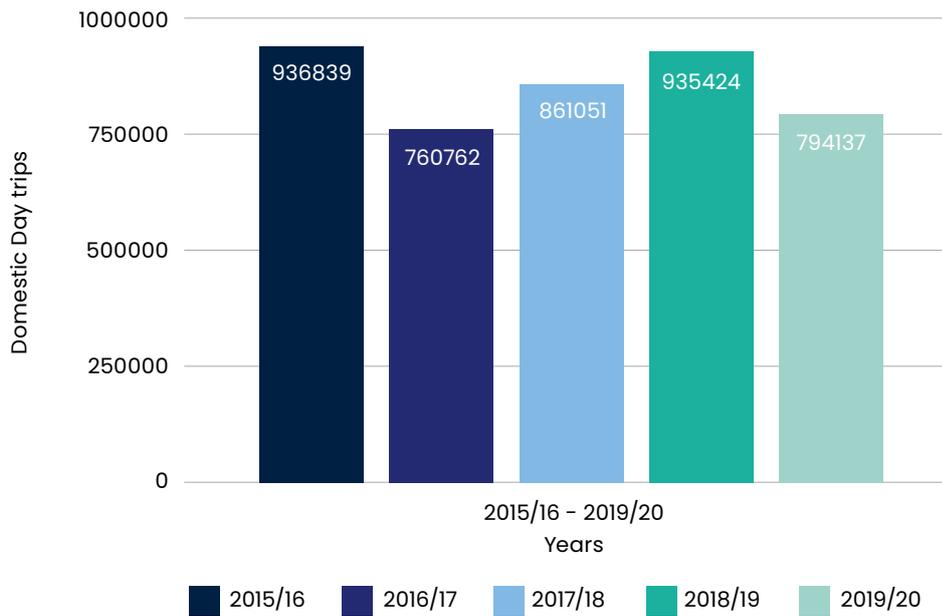
Figure 3 - Domestic day trips to Hawkesbury 2015/16 to 2019/20

HAWKESBURY CITY DOMESTIC VISITOR NIGHTS

Figure 4 - Domestic visitor nights to Hawkesbury 2015/16 to 2019/20

Tourism Value of the Region

The tourism industry contributes significantly to the overall economy of the Hawkesbury. It directly employs 733 people in Hawkesbury and indirectly employs 274 people.[12] The economic benefits are split into output/sales generated as a result of tourism and productivity value added to the economy by tourism business activity. The chart below summarises the 2019/20 values of these economic benefits in Hawkesbury.

OUTPUT/SALES AND VALUE ADDED
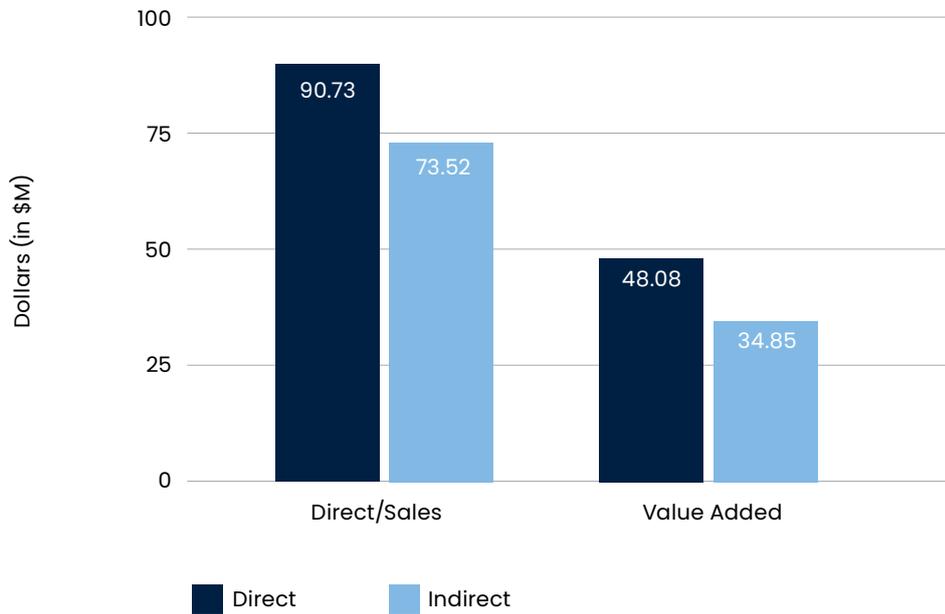
Figure 5 - Output/Sales and Value added of tourism and hospitality as economic productivity measures.

With a total of $82.93 million of value added to the economy, tourism and hospitality hold a 3% share of the total productivity of the region. Some comparable industry sectors are:

• Financial and Insurance Services ($81.8 million)

• Wholesale Trade ($83.3 million)

• Administrative and Support Services ($87.9 million).

DESTINATION COMPARISON

Similar to the Hawkesbury region, Bendigo is a regional town within driving distance of a capital/major city destination and receives a large proportion of day-trip visitors. However Bendigo outperforms the Hawkesbury on their domestic day trip visitation significantly.

Bendigo has similar endowments of nature, food/wine and history to the Hawkesbury however, the location has taken these in different directions and have developed them and their reflective product offering quite substantially. The region has a primary strength of Arts and Culture as well as Food and Wine, with an emerging dining scene as well as wineries throughout the region. It also has a strong nature-based tourism including being an established cycling destination.

Bendigo is a destination that showcases similar endowments and opportunities to the Hawkesbury that can be leveraged and achieved.

Bendigo uses the tourism 'hub and spoke' approach to their destination. This is a destination as the primary visitor location and then it disperses the visitor on a day's trip to nearby locations. Leveraging and collaborating with nearby regions to benefit the visitor ecosystem, by providing more experiences for the visitor the visitors needs are fulfilled. By dispersing visitors through to neighbouring regions, the visitor economy is spread broadly and benefits all the regions.

The tourism governance model in Bendigo is an external model run by regional tourism body, Bendigo Regional Tourism. Different governance models are explored later in this document.
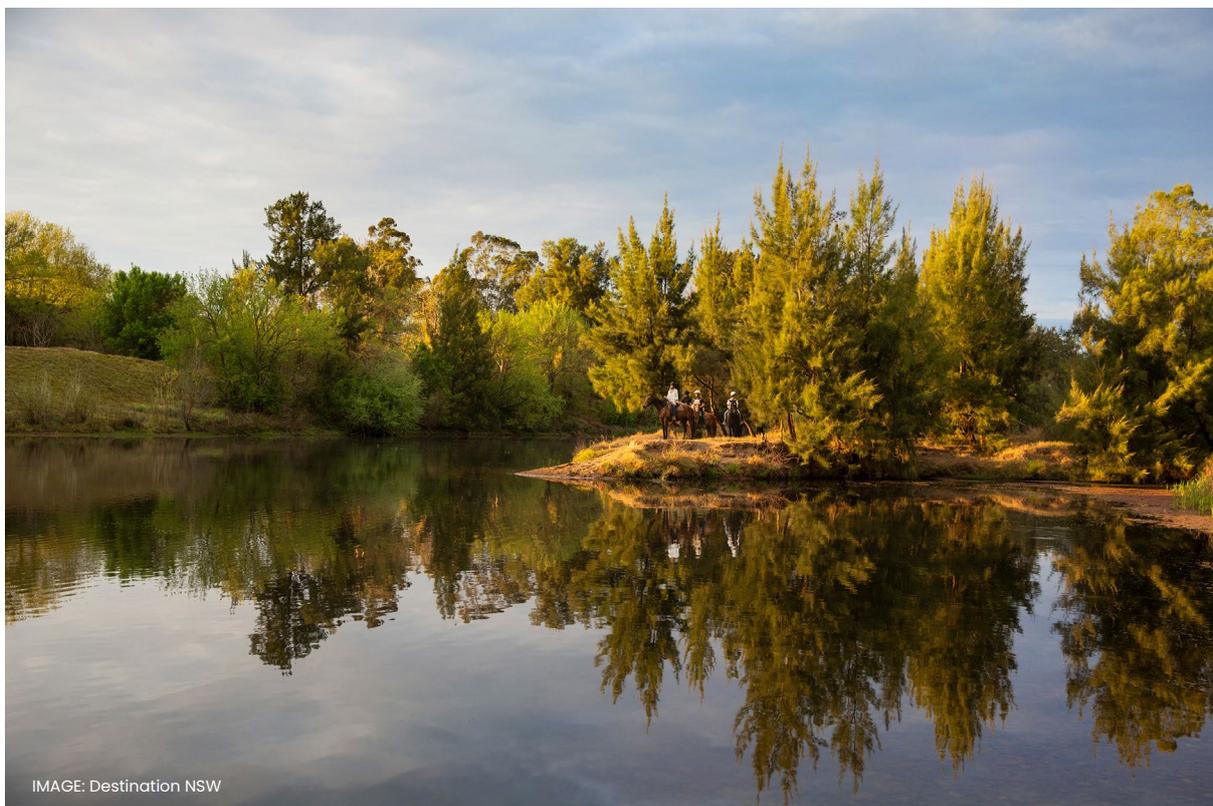
IMAGE: Destination NSW

HAWKESBURY VISITOR ECONOMY CHALLENGES

The challenges of the past years have affected the Hawkesbury region and its stakeholders, as well as the broader State, Country and World. The effects of these challenges have left businesses and the people of the Hawkesbury fatigued and feeling disconnected.

With the international borders closed and slowly reopening, the intra and interstate competition the Hawkesbury destination faces is significant. Being able to 'stand out' from other destinations and to be able to sell its unique proposition is a challenge that will continue for a significant time to come. Being able to build brand awareness and brand loyalty is key to building repeat visitation and reputation. The lack of 'official' consolidated consumer facing and customer focused collateral increases the confusion for the visitor when looking for experiences in the Hawkesbury.

For businesses, the lack of clarity and guidance around who is driving tourism in the Hawkesbury has and continues to contribute to the unconnected approach for the consumer. Not fully understanding the customer journey as well as a lack of consistent communication directly to the business owner also add to the challenges.

Other challenges for the businesses are around connectivity in the region – connectivity through mobile coverage and connectivity moving through the region for visitors. The lack of reliable mobile coverage in certain areas makes it not only hard to undertake day to day business (e.g. take bookings via phone or internet), it also puts them in a vulnerable position during events like bushfires or floods.

VISITOR	BUSINESS
Destination awareness and connection	Fatigued and disconnected operators
Pandemic uncertainty and desirability	Lack of leadership and ownership of destination management causing missed opportunities
No real sense of place for the region	Connectivity - digitally as well as moving through the region
Lack of insight of visitor experiences available	Lack of understanding of the broader visitor economy ecosystem and the visitor journey and their role

HAWKESBURY VISITOR ECONOMY OPPORTUNITIES

The Visitor Economy of the Hawkesbury has significant potential if positioned consistently and as part of a broader narrative. This increased opportunity is not necessarily around a direct increase in numbers, it's about the opportunity to drive high yield visitation through targeted marketing and experience development.

The development and enhancement of the existing assets and pillars of the Hawkesbury, and leveraging off the hero experiences within and even extending beyond the region into neighbouring areas would create opportunities for the heightened recognition of the region. Increasing the awareness of the unique experiences that the Hawkesbury has to offer and building on these will aid in increasing visitation yield by increasing time spent in the region.

The Hawkesbury has a large and growing event calendar, both Council curated as well as a growing number of expos and events curated by operators. Leveraging off the region's strengths and unique selling proposition to create events that showcase these to drive visitation to the area is an opportunity. Creating an event that reinforces the Hawkesbury brand helps to create consumer confidence in the region and links to the key experiences like Agritourism, to be a signature event. The success of previous events in the region like the Polo World Championships and the events like Savour the Flavour upcoming, gives the opportunity for the region to shine and for the operators something to leverage.

For businesses, the opportunity to build on their strengths through training and development will help to create resilient and sustainable businesses for the future. Creating business networking opportunities and increasing communication for the operators is an opportunity to create a connected visitor economy ecosystem. Helping operators to understand where they fit in the ecosystem and how they can leverage off all the mechanisms within it is necessary. Additionally, opening the communication channels for Council to share information, relevant data and resources with industry as well as navigate Council planning processes will help them to improve their business decisions.

The Western Sydney International Airport also presents opportunities for the region as part of the Western Sydney City Deal to attract international and interstate visitation. Aligning and working with the airport and the Western Parkland City councils will be paramount in realising this opportunity.

VISITOR	BUSINESS
Enhance existing and create new unique experiences	Support businesses to thrive in a sustainable, resilient business community
Proximity to Sydney and Regional cities	Leverage the opportunities that present with the growth and development of Western Sydney
Micro and major events that showcase the Hawkesbury experiences and build affinity with the region and connections with the experiences on offer	Foster and develop the region's strength in agritourism optimising changes in planning through NSW Government
Leverage visitation of new interstate and international visitors via Western Sydney Airport	Support businesses through ongoing education and access to opportunities to foster stronger relationships across the tourism ecosystem

The Hawkesbury City Council adopted Recovery Plan aims to 'Increase levels of visitation and spending by Sydneysiders' and help them 'Rediscover the Region'.

The three Strategic Pillars for this Destination Management Plan reflect the areas of need for the region with key themes within these pillars the focus priorities to fulfil these needs.

IMAGE: Destination NSW

Visitor Engagement

Continually develop a Hawkesbury region that demonstrates its depths in experiences and engages with the visitor to drive advocacy and repeat visitation.

Destination branding	Enhance the region's strengths	Leveraging partnerships

Business Confidence

Work in collaboration with businesses to deliver an outstanding visitor experience. Connect and communicate with the industry to support viable and confident businesses.

Build business confidence	Connect the industry	Flexibility in visitor servicing

Advocacy and Governance

Build a united Visitor Economy through strong frameworks and structure. Use research and engagement to guide decisions making and to advocate for the region.

Clear Destination Management Structure	Decision making tools	Leveraging grant opportunities

1. STRATEGIC PILLAR – VISITOR ENGAGEMENT

1.1 DESTINATION BRANDING

Visitor Engagement
Continually develop a Hawkesbury region that demonstrates its depths in experiences and engages with the visitor to drive advocacy and repeat visitation.

Destination branding	Enhance the region's strengths	Leveraging partnerships

The Hawkesbury Brand needs to be strong and competitive in the market. It needs to be used consistently in all messaging across touchpoints. The brand includes (but is not limited to) logos, tagline, social media hashtags, colour palette, content development and messaging. The brand work for 'Hawkesbury - The River's Just the Beginning' was undertaken by Destination NSW in 2018. This work can be leveraged and utilised to unite the industry and clarify the offering for the consumer. Increasing awareness and building on brand identity and affinity of the Hawkesbury will attract new and returning visitors.

The brand and associated tools need to be developed and the operators need to be able to easily access these. Creation of a digital content asset library would be optimum for results.

To amplify the brand and the key experiences, investment and delivery of consistent public relations and advertising is key. Working in collaboration with Destination NSW will be key to leverage State activity and resources to enable greater reach.

To increase the online presence of the region, training for businesses in increasing and owning their digital footprint will be undertaken as part of ongoing capacity building.

1.2 ENHANCE THE REGIONS STRENGTHS

Visitor Engagement
Continually develop a Hawkesbury region that demonstrates its depths in experiences and engages with the visitor to drive advocacy and repeat visitation.

| Destination branding | Enhance the region's strengths | Leveraging partnerships |

Focusing on the key strengths and experiences pillars of the Hawkesbury region will create a compelling value proposition for the visitor.

Enhancing the existing and creating new experiences around these pillars, will cement the Hawkesbury brand and will build consumer confidence.

The key experience pillars for the Hawkesbury are:

Agri & Artisan

Products and experiences that highlight the Hawkesbury's rural lifestyle and rich growing soils. From vegetables to fruit the paddock to plate experience comes to life in the Hawkesbury through growers markets, road side stalls to commercial and boutique distilleries and breweries, the artisan and agri tourism experiences are a highlight of the Hawkesbury.

Adventure

Bushwalking, horse riding, adventure parks and looking for hidden waterholes in the Hawkesbury has a level of adventure for all. The Hawkesbury River is the backdrop for adventure from kayaking to faster forms of river transport. If adventure is getting away from it all in a remote cabin and being 'off the grid' or if it's climbing in the treetops, the Hawkesbury has the adventure that's right for everyone.

Nature

The Hawkesbury is surrounded by an abundance of natural assets in the National Park areas (Cattai, Blue Mountains, Scheyville and Wollemi) and the Hawkesbury River. It has a significant amount of rural land that contributes to a scenic character setting it apart from its neighbouring cities. The connection to nature and the river and the rejuvenating nature of these is a highlight for the Hawkesbury.

Heritage & Culture

The story of the Hawkesbury is diverse and deep. From the connection of the Darug and Darkinjung people with the River and its rich soils, to the modern creatives and artists telling their stories. There is more to Hawkesbury than just its heritage buildings, it is the experiences that tell the stories from the past, present and the future and the connections to them.
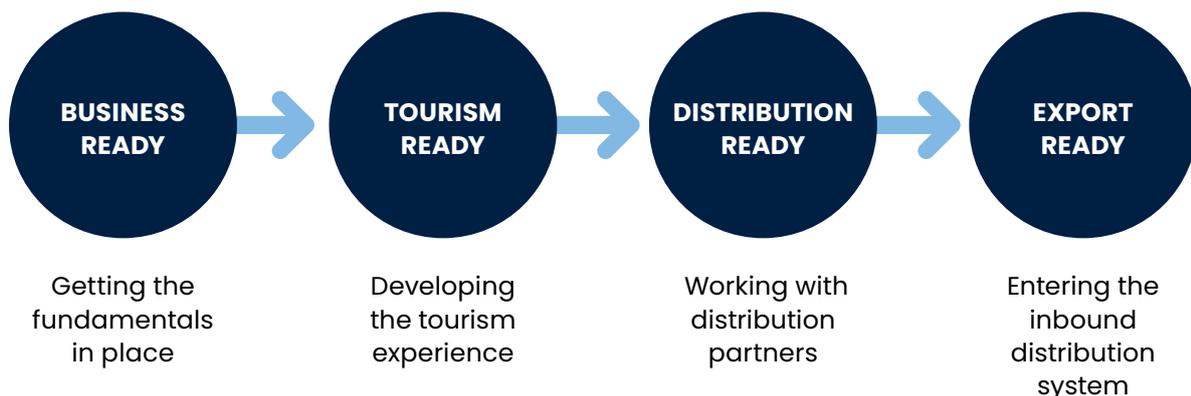
1.2.1 OPTIMISING THE EXPERIENCE PILLARS

Leveraging these experience pillars internally and externally with operators is the key to a positive outcome for the economic development of the region.

Developing and leveraging strong partnerships with neighbouring local government areas help to expand the visitor experience across the regions. Visitors do not see regional boundaries, they travel for the experiences. Linking with similar experiences across the region helps to encourage day visitation as well as extending stay in the region through engagement the visitor has with the area.

Helping businesses to create and enhance experiences around these experience pillars is key and supporting them through the business, tourism, distribution and export ready journey.

THE TOURISM BUSINESS JOURNEY

BUSINESS READY → **TOURISM READY** → **DISTRIBUTION READY** → **EXPORT READY**

Getting the fundamentals in place

Developing the tourism experience

Working with distribution partners

Entering the inbound distribution system

Leveraging off the experience pillars and events within the region, both consumer and business events, work to position and enhance the region's experiences. They help to align the visitor with the experience of the region. Business conference events leverage off the unique selling proposition of the region to entice conferences to increase economic growth across the region. The flow on from events such as extended stays, famil attendance and linkages with conferencing events sectors like creatives work to develop this economic multiplier effect. Networking within conferencing operators in the region to work to develop an ecosystem and support the network to attract events in the region.

There is a current events strategy and an updated version being developed. There has been significant work in this space and many successful events have been undertaken.

1.3 LEVERAGING PARTNERSHIPS

Visitor Engagement
Continually develop a Hawkesbury region that demonstrates its depths in experiences and engages with the visitor to drive advocacy and repeat visitation.

Destination branding	Enhance the region's strengths	Leveraging partnerships

The Visitor Economy is part of a large ecosystem that, when leveraged by a destination, plays a significant role in the effective and sustainable destination management. The residents, visitors and businesses are all part of the ecosystem, however the ecosystem stretches beyond the immediate stakeholders and into other stakeholders who the Hawkesbury can work with to expand existing and develop new relationships.

Forming partnerships and leveraging these help to build on the existing assets that the Hawkesbury has as well as helping the region to develop and thrive. Developing visitor centric programs that run across several LGA's and are experience based help to push the region as an overnight destination or a daytrip visit from one of the major adjacent cities and towns.

Connecting with State agencies like Destination NSW, Department of Regional NSW and the Destination Networks allows for a suite of benefits including industry training and development, grant funding, connections with media through dedicated famil programs and cooperative marketing opportunities all whilst enhancing and amplifying Hawkesbury as a destination.

Stakeholder engagement mapping has been developed as follows.

STATE AGENCIES

Who	Level of Engagement	Method of Engagement	Timing	Resources
Destination NSW	Inform Consult Involve Collaborate	• As needed - proactive and responsive meetings	Quarterly	• Resources as required through the various departments of DNSW • Information sharing
Department of Regional NSW	Consult	• As needed - proactive and responsive meeting	Initial/then as required	• Resources as required
Western Sydney Parklands Authority	Inform Consult Involve Collaborate	• Quarterly meeting with Councils • As needed - proactive and responsive meeting	Initial/then as required	• Information sharing • Resources as required • Leverage opportunities
Western Parkland City Councils	Inform Collaborate	• Regular meeting with Councils	Monthly	• Resources as required • Collaborate on projects • Information sharing
Department of Planning and Environment- Agritourism	Consult	• As needed - proactive and responsive meeting	Initial/then as required	• Resources as required
NSW National Parks and Wildlife	Inform Consult Involve Collaborate Enpower	• As needed - proactive and responsive meeting	Initial/then as required	• Work with Council • Information sharing • Collaboration

NEIGHBOURING COUNCILS

Who	Level of Engagement	Method of Engagement	Timing	Resources
Penrith, Lithgow, Blue Mountains, Blacktown, The Hills Shire, Gosford, Singleton and Cessnock	Inform Consult Collaborate	• As needed - proactive and responsive meeting	Initial/ then as required	• Establish Key Contacts • Understand key priorities and projects

ASSOCIATION GROUPS

Association groups like Outdoors NSW/ACT, Accommodations Association of Australia and Australia Hotels Association for example are partnerships that can be leveraged and groups that can be worked with for industry to achieve better outcomes.

Who	Level of Engagement	Method of Engagement	Timing	Resources
Accommodation Australia	Inform Consult Collaborate	• As needed - proactive and responsive meeting	Initial/ then as required	• Establish Key Contacts • Understand key priorities and projects
Outdoor Association NSW/ACT	Inform Consult Collaborate	• As needed - proactive and responsive meeting	Initial/ then as required	• Establish Key Contacts • Understand key priorities and projects

ACTION PLAN – VISITOR ENGAGEMENT

Strategic Pillar	Strategic Action	Action 1	Action 2	Action 3
Visitor Engagement	**Destination branding**	Increase brand awareness and build brand identity for instance by using consistent branding across all channels	Develop consistent key consumer messaging and channels for instance by developing a brand tool kit for use by all operators	Increase regions awareness leveraging opportunities for instance by constructing a media famil plan
Visitor Engagement	**Enhance the regions strengths**	Review existing opportunities and look for potential opportunities to enhance and develop the regions strengths	Develop consumer facing and consumer driven experiences to showcase regions endowments	Work with existing regional visitor attractions events to enhance businesses partnerships and grow visitor engagement
Visitor Engagement	**Leveraging partnerships**	Work with existing and develop key relationships with industry and other agencies to promote the region	Work with businesses to develop key relationships and partnerships to increase visitation	Work with other LGA's to leverage and partner in opportunities for instance by working with Destination Network

IMAGE: Destination NSW

2. STRATEGIC PILLAR – BUSINESS CONFIDENCE

2.1 BUILD BUSINESS CONFIDENCE

Business Confidence

Work in collaboration with businesses to deliver an outstanding visitor experience. Connect and communicate with the industry to support viable and confident businesses.

| Build business confidence | Connect the industry | Flexibility in visitor servicing |

CAPACITY AND RESILIENCE

Capacity and resilience come from designing and delivering ongoing business capacity and resilience programs to help in the recovery and rebuild after the recent shocks to the visitor economy. Following on from the success of the Business Bounce Back Mentoring Program and evolving in response to business needs, a group mentoring program will provide not only capacity building but reignite and create an ongoing forum for networking and collaboration.

TRAINING AND LEVERAGING

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has not only disrupted the number of leisure visitors coming into the country, it has also had a flow on effect on the scarcity of employees in many sectors predominantly the hospitality and tourism sectors. Relying on a casual and part-time workforce these industries have been feeling the impacts and during consultation the scarcity of workers was highlighted.

Linking in with the education sector established within the Hawkesbury and Western Sydney can bring positive benefits to the business as well as locals. The Department of Education NSW (through their Regional Industry Partnerships Program), TAFE, Western Sydney University and Torrens University Blue Mountains Campus offer tourism and hospitality focused courses and programs. Connecting business with these providers and helping to facilitate introductions will bring additional economic benefits.

Accessible and Inclusive tourism in a growing sector. Educational resources and links to programs will be offered to tourism businesses across the region to promote a more inclusive tourism offering for the Hawkesbury. Partnerships with programs such as WheelEasy or Briometrix to map the destination as an accessible destination and also the accessible experiences available will provide benefits not only for the visitor economy, but local residents.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

There are a number of potential infrastructure development opportunities that could be pursued to create opportunities for the community as well as to ensure visitor demand could be matched with the right supply and experience. Based on previous work undertaken in the region as well as consultation undertaken as part of the development of this plan, there are a number of possibilities for development. Infrastructure projects that work for the visitor and the community are key to provide the development of a well planned experience for all. This includes installation of visitor signage and heritage trails.

IMAGE: Destination NSW

2.2 CONNECT THE INDUSTRY

Business Confidence
Work in collaboration with businesses to deliver an outstanding visitor experience. Connect and communicate with the industry to support viable and confident businesses.

| Build business confidence | Connect the industry | Flexibility in visitor servicing |

Providing industry meetup networking sessions through business mentoring and extending these into a more formal quarterly meeting held rotationally across the region and that involves all operators in the region, will set up an environment for improved connection with operators and industry at large.

These networking sessions would also provide opportunities for speakers such as from Hawkesbury City Council, Destination NSW, Department of Regional NSW and Business NSW to talk more about the tourism ecosystem, as well as be able to link operators in with other programs happening within the area and state. This can provide industry education as well as connectedness.

It is important for Hawkesbury City Council to deliver the industry engagement and educational sessions ongoing with the aim to connect with the broader tourism industry and build relationships between Council and the industry. This will demonstrate Council's ongoing commitment to supporting businesses and helps industry and Council to learn about other operators.

2.3 FLEXIBILITY IN VISITOR SERVICES

Business Confidence
Work in collaboration with businesses to deliver an outstanding visitor experience. Connect and communicate with the industry to support viable and confident businesses.

Build business confidence	Connect the industry	Flexibility in visitor servicing

The customer journey into the region is complex and varied. The Visitor Information Centre has trained staff that are able to provide not only information to the visitor but also provide the conduit between the experience and the visitors making sure businesses within the region are linked directly to the visitor. The Visitor Centre is currently undertaking a review and needs analysis to ensure there is a focus on ensuring it is responsive to consumer demand and visitor trends.

There may be scope to explore the Visitor Information Centre staff expanding the current services they provide to businesses to be able to help businesses with basic training around things like Google My Business listings, Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) profiles and review sites like Tripadvisor. Using the resources available from the NSW First Program (Destination NSW), the Visitor Information Centre can help link businesses with these resources and provide basic training. This additional business connection will be beneficial into the future with business networking as well as providing opportunities for group learning.

Visitor servicing however goes beyond the walls of the physical visitor centre as the visitor moves through the large dispersed region visiting experiences sometimes hours apart. Whilst the Visitor Information Centre can provide maps and information at a certain point in the visitor journey (pre-planning via the website to in person), the opportunity for businesses to provide a more formalised visitor servicing experience is a necessity for an enhanced visitor experience.

Providing visitor information to key experiences in outlying locations as well as linking experiences through networking will help to enhance and provide a seamless customer journey. Also taking the information to where the visitor is, such as events, also helps to extend stay and increase the number of experiences a visitor will have while in the region.

VISITOR SERVICES INTO THE FUTURE

An approach and focus on 'Visitor Servicing' and not 'Visitor Information Centres' into the future is recommended for the service to be successful and sustainable. Undertaking the development of a Visitor Servicing Strategy to plan all their activities and develop a business plan for the business is recommended. Developing a business plan that looks at diversified income streams, potential partnerships to leverage as well as the visitor journey mapping will help to build a sustainable business.

The visitor journey[13] begins long before they are in the region through a variety of channels and even when in the region the Visitor Information Centre is only one of the locations they will receive information.

Successful visitor centres understand that visitors come for an experience not an information centre. They are often located either at the destination (Echo Point Visitor Centre located at Katoomba), are located within a Visitor Experience (Canberra Regional Visitor Centre located at the National Capital Exhibition) or create their own experience in the centre (Southern Highlands Welcome Centre in Bowral).[14] However, the Hawkesbury region however does not consist of one iconic destination. Moving to where the visitors are or cohabiting with another visitor experience helps to make the service sustainable and more useful to the visitor.

[13] Destination NSW
[14] https://tourismeschool.com/blog/12-things-successful-visitor-centres-do-differently/

Successful visitor centres also embrace online opportunities to help visitors who prefer to find information online. To capture the uptake on buying, booking and searching, online visitor centres invest in training their staff to be able to:

- Manage online reviews and location based services of the visitor centres and key visitor assets

- Social marketing to tell the region's stories, undertake targeted advertising and leverage opportunities in building engagement

- Online messaging and chat services via the website

- Develop regional brochures and factsheets in a digital format

- Manage the website to inspire, attract and convert visitors to the region[15]

- Visitor Servicing also looks at increased relationships with the servicing team and industry. Regular industry newsletters are recommended that can be used to keep the industry informed at what is happening in the region, what Council is currently undertaking in general works, what grants are available and what research can be shared to help the industry make more informed decisions. Increasing the relationship between the Servicing team and industry requires regular staff famils to operators. Staff need to be able to talk confidently about experiences visitors will have in the region as well as be able to meet with industry to form relationships for future networking events. Visitor Servicing staff need to be leading the networking opportunities, training and helping businesses to develop their visitor experience and be developing the relationships with stakeholders like State agencies.

Improvement in communication channels are underway, but there is an opportunity to build upon this to realise the true potential.

They also review and audit what they are doing with mystery shoppers and customer surveys to help them improve the service and look at doing things in a better way.

[15] https://tourismeschool.com/blog/12-things-successful-visitor-centres-do-differently/

ACTION PLAN – BUSINESS CONFIDENCE

Strategic Pillar	Strategic Action	Action 1	Action 2	Action 3
Business Confidence	**Build business confidence**	Build business resilience and strength through training, mentoring and sharing of knowledge	Connect businesses together with other agencies to develop strong industry links	Assess and review possible infrastructure projects that increase and enhance the region as a basis for a strong region
Business Confidence	**Connect the industry**	Council to facilitate Industry engagement and networking sessions to help connect the industry	Use existing resources to enhance business training and mentoring internally to provide better service to businesses and visitors	Develop and implement regular communications with industry and visitors for instance by developing a monthly Tourism Business e-newsletter
Business Confidence	**Flexibility in Visitor Services**	Conduct a service review to identify governance and resourcing in the Visitor Servicing area to deliver best service to visitor and businesses in the region	Increase profile of Visitor Information Centres in region with industry for instance through a staff famil program	Undertake development of a Visitor Service Strategy to develop a sustainable visitor service into the future

3. STRATEGIC PILLAR – ADVOCACY AND GOVERNANCE

3.1 CLEAR DESTINATION MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Advocacy and Governance
Build a united Visitor Economy through strong frameworks and structure. Use research and engagement to guide decisions making and to advocate for the region.

| **Clear Destination Management Structure** | **Decision making tools** | **Leveraging grant opportunities** |

There has been significant state funds injected into destination management for the Hawkesbury since 2017, above and beyond the standard investment made across regional NSW by Destination NSW. This has included two years dedicated project management with two personnel - one senior and one junior tourism specialist to the equivalent of 1.75 FTE, in addition to resourcing from Destination NSW to deliver the DMP.

As such, to build on the momentum and to drive demand to the Hawkesbury region, nurture partner and stakeholder relationships and build the supply side through capacity building and broader capital projects, dedicated and qualified resourcing needs to be considered.

Whilst there has been progress by Hawkesbury City Council in building relationships and programs to support the tourism industry, for the large part, they still remain faceless to the industry, yet play an important role in the tourism development in particular planning. The Hawkesbury region is still relatively new to destination management.

Considering the above, and, while there are typically three management/governance structures for tourism bodies – industry, outsource and Council, it is recommended that this region focus on building out a solid Council internal model structure.

This role should be given autonomy to deliver programming day-to-day and would typically manage the relationships within Council, with operators (alongside the Visitor Information Centre team), with Western Sydney Parkland City, Destination NSW and Tourism Australia. As well as interface with local, state and federal government members with an understanding for the future growth and infrastructure planning, to act as an advocate for the visitor economy.

It is suggested that a dedicated, experienced tourism resource for ongoing delivery of destination management should be considered. Employed with the visitor information team and working closely with marketing and communications, with regards to the development of a destination marketing programming.

Regardless of the management model moving forward, there are two critical elements that must be recognised, understood and maintained:

1. Funding a Regional Tourism Organisation (RTO); as such, the destination should be seen as an investment not a cost.

2. There needs to be clarity on roles and responsibilities to avoid duplication and enable understanding, appreciation and respect of the working relationships.

Ultimately, there is no one-size-fits-all model and regardless of model, all require a level of Council investment. It needs to be one that is supported by stakeholders, enables transparency and collaboration and is agile enough to refine in response to changing demands and circumstances.

Essentially there are three models to consider:

• Industry Model

• Outsource Model

• Council Internal Model

INDUSTRY MODEL

This model is often a combination of being Council funded, membership funded and grant funded. The combination of funding varies but the Council tends to be the majority funder. Additional support from industry is sought for individual activity such as international programs or marketing, and grant funding through a range of different programs and schemes such as State Tourism Organisation Cooperative Marketing Fund, Drought Relief Fund and more recently, the Federal Government Tourism Business Resilience Fund.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Industry facing	Subject to Council annual funding
Highly engaged industry	Membership sales and relationships require significant resources
Strong industry investment for marketing programs	The caliber of the board may change
Allows RTO to be more autonomous day-to-day	Ability to attract staff due to funding volatility

OUTSOURCE MODEL

In the Outsource Model, the Council appoints an independent tourism marketing and industry development agency to act as the RTO with the primary charter to drive destination marketing and industry development/servicing. This model tends to be funded predominantly by Council with a membership program, and additional financial support sought for participation in marketing cooperative programs.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Can be focused on priority areas	Limited scope to only undertake what is included in the contract and gaps in services may appear (e.g. famils, business events)
Expertise can be imported	Loss of control by Council or industry
Increased emphasis on KPIs and reporting as part of contract	Ability to react outside of contract scope with additional costs for variations or additional services
Increased autonomy day to day	

INTERNAL MODEL

This model sees all tourism functions undertaken within Council.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Ability to attract staff given perceived employment 'security'	Perceived by industry as 'public servants' and don't really 'get the real world'
Able to engage with other Council units and lean on the additional resource	Industry often won't support Council led initiatives, including gaining funding for marketing programs
Stronger voice in Council plans	Not seen as impartial
Ability to reprioritise if required	Competing internal priorities or politics
Stability in budget allocation	Breakaway tourism representative groups may form

WHY IS GOVERNANCE IMPORTANT?

Paramount to any model is good governance that is regularly reviewed and refined. It is essential to achieving objectives, driving improvements, as well as maintaining legal and ethical standings in the eyes of stakeholders. It is important that a solid governance foundation is in place that is agreed upon by all parties and is regularly reviewed to ensure transparency and accountability.

APPROACHES TO TOURISM GOVERNANCE

It has become increasingly common for local governments to support a pro-economic development approach to local tourism policy, focusing on the marketing and promotion of tourism, and often on the creation of public-private partnerships (PPPs). Within the tourism landscape, effective local governance arrangements work to empower local advocacy and ownership of policy initiatives, and provide a forum for information sharing, learning, collaboration and empowerment.

Paramount in the success of a governance structure, is one which is truly owned by the region it represents, is funded as a true partnership between the industry and key stakeholders, and is a structure which is truly linked to regional and state-wide tourism organisations. The effectiveness of regional tourism governance is based on a holistic and balanced approach to sustainable tourism and in achieving the goals of its stakeholders, dependent upon the effectiveness of structures and processes, as well as the resources and skills sets available.

The dimensions and features of local tourism governance success include:[16]

• Positive cultures, constructive communication and engaged communities

• Transparency and accountability

• Clear vision and leadership

• Acceptance of diversity and the pursuit of equity and inclusiveness

• Developing knowledge, learning and sharing expertise

• Role clarity and determination of responsibilities of participants

• Clear operational structures and process of the network

• Clear business focus and strategic thinking

• Revenue improvement mechanisms that encourage investment from existing and new operators

• Industry and community involvement to facilitate tourism growth

• Regional ownership

• A representative voice on tourism issues and advocacy to levels of government

• Excellent communications between all stakeholders and involved parties

• A mix of long-term and new members.

If a board is to be appointed, and for it to truly add value to their organisation and their stakeholders, members should be prepared to go the 'extra mile'. This means going beyond a traditional 'board meeting' in which they listen to management reports and staff presentations, look at finances, and provide input on reporting and decision making. To add value, the board member can add strategic insight in a collaborative manner for future growth and planning, be aware of trends and shifts in the sector as well as potential issues to note, hold other members to accountability and open doors for regular engagement with industry and community.

[16] Institute of Directors New Zealand, What makes a good board?, https://www.iod.org.nz/resources-and-insights/starting-a-board/what-makes-a-good-board/# ,
Lightfoot Marketing 2014, Final Report - Review And Recommendation Of Governance Model For Tourism In Far West NSW, http://rdafarwestnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Final-Report-Review-and-Recommendation-of-Governance-for-Tourism-in-Far-West-NSW.pdf.
Holly G 2017, Let's talk governance for tourism, http://www.hollyg.com.au/tourismupgrade/governance-tourism/
Beaumont N & Dredge D, Local tourism governance: A comparison of three network approaches, https://eprints.usq.edu.au/6940/1/Beaumont_Dredge_JST_v18n1_AV.pdf.

3.2 DECISION MAKING TOOLS

Advocacy and Governance
Build a united Visitor Economy through strong frameworks and structure.
Use research and engagement to guide decisions making and to advocate for the region.

Clear Destination Management Structure	Decision making tools	Leveraging grant opportunities

Destination management has several elements that are required to be able to make informed decisions about the present and future of a destination. Research is a key element in being able to understand important information about the destination. This research for the visitor economy traditionally is available from sources such as Tourism Research Australia, Destination NSW and Economic id. However whilst these sources provide relevant data there is often a lag in the data collection and publication date. This was particularly evident during the recent pandemic closures when reopening was happening and getting data and patterns of visitation in most areas has been difficult especially in smaller LGA's.

Subscribing to economic research such as Spendmapp as a source for economic data gives real time data which show trends of visitors spending in the region based on credit card data mapping. This data can then be used for planning and mapping strategies in a more responsive manner.

This research should then be collated and shared across the tourism industry to help other businesses make more informed decisions.

Whilst sharing data to the tourism operators is useful for them, the other flow of information from them to the Council would prove just as useful. Encouraging operators to share their trend data (occupancy, increase in sales) without compromising confidentiality would help not only Council planning but the broader industry to understand the overall regions trends. This could also capture anecdotal feedback that is collected from industry.

This type of industry data is also helpful when advocating for the region for funding and support.

3.3 LEVERAGING GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

Advocacy and Governance
Build a united Visitor Economy through strong frameworks and structure.
Use research and engagement to guide decisions making and to advocate for the region.

Clear Destination Management Structure	Decision making tools	Leveraging grant opportunities

Recently Hawkesbury City Council has been the recipient of a number of grants which have been able to fund a broad range of projects across the LGA. With the development of the $5 billion WestInvest Fund into Western Sydney and the Hawkesbury from 2022 being grouped as part of the Western Sydney region for the visitor economy, there are potential funding opportunities ahead.

There is a need for development of business cases that match the Visitor Economy needs (both visitor and business) in readiness for grant programs as they arise. Linked to the Community Strategic Plan these grant business cases should be 'shovel ready' projects that are able to be applied for easily. This will enable resourcing requirements to be at a minimum to submit. For example business cases could be developed for projects around Heritage Trail Signage and Tourism Signage and approved as priority projects for available grants.

An online information grant opportunity board needs to be developed and propagated on a regular basis to ensure grant opportunities are not missed. These grant opportunities also need to be accessible to the community via the Council website, to be able to make sure that grant opportunities are not missed by local community groups.

ACTION PLAN – ADVOCACY AND GOVERNANCE

Strategic Pillar	Strategic Action	Action 1	Action 2	Action 3
Advocacy and Governance	**Clear Destination Management Structure**	Develop a staggered approach working towards a Destination Management structure for the region	Review and work towards an internal Tourism Council structure	Develop formalised links with industry to work towards a collaborative approach to Destination Management
Advocacy and Governance	**Decision making tools**	Investigate economic research data and share with industry to better inform decisions moving forward	Develop formal mechanism to share data with industry	Develop mechanisms for industry to share relevant data with Council to improve Destination Management research and knowledge
Advocacy and Governance	**Leveraging grant opportunities**	Shovel ready and approved priority projects proposals should be developed ready for grant opportunities.	Work with industry to partner with projects to develop a more collaborative approach	Develop a Grant database accessible to Council and industry to understand available grants and projects being submitted and links to long term plans for the region

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – SITUATION ANALYSIS

NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030

The NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030 sets the roadmap for the vision for the NSW Economy to 2030. The major outcome is for NSW to be the premier visitor economy in the Asia Pacific contributing $65 billion in total visitor expenditure by 2030, with $25 billion in regional expenditure.[17]

The phases outlined to achieve these outcomes includes the immediate phase of recovery for NSW (now to 2024) post major disruptive events for the State. Bushfires, floods and COVID-19 affected the momentum of the Visitor Economy for the State and for Regional NSW including the Hawkesbury. The recovery Phase is followed by the Momentum phase (to 2026) and the Accelerator phase (to 2030).[18]

The projected increase in visitor expenditure and in particular in regional visitor expenditure is tied to this phased approach enabling a steady and structured approach to recovery and growth of the Visitor Economy Stare wide. The acknowledgment of the rebuilding phase and the significant time this will require, is reflected in the guiding principles of the strategy. These are the key to the action plan and should be reflected in the Hawkesbury Visitor Economic Action Plan.

The Guiding Principles[19] and the Strategic Pillars[20] combine to create the action plan for the NSW State.

Guiding principles:

• Put the visitor first

• Accelerate digital innovation

• Lead with our strengths

• Move fast, be responsive and agile, while taking a longer-term view

• Collaboration between the industry and government

Strategic Pillars:

• Road to recovery

• Build the brand

• Showcase our strengths

• Invest in world-class events

• Facilitate growth

[17] NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030
[18] NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030 pg.12
[19] NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030 pg.28
[20] NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030 pg 30

These principles and pillars are used to develop key areas and associated actions leading to a detailed action plan to create a leading Visitor Economy.

The Hawkesbury Destination Management Plan should draw on these principles and pillars to guide the development of the plan and align to actions to create the most benefit to the region by being able to leverage opportunities created by the State plan. It should also look at its alignment with the State's existing and emerging strengths.

Strength	Examples	Primary	Secondary	Emerging
Icons and Hidden Gems	Hawkesbury River	✓		
Small-Town Charm	Kurrajong Village, Windsor	✓		
Vibrant Contemporary Culture	Street Art in Windsor, Hawkesbury Regional Museum			✓
Reconnect in Nature	Agritourism, National Parks	✓		
World-Class Food and Drink	Hillbilly Cider, Bilpin Cider, Karu Distillery			✓
Strength	Examples	Primary	Secondary	Emerging
New Icons				
Eco-Wellbeing	Yanda, Lithgow Eco Park		✓	✓
Everyone's Invited (accessibility and liveability)	Crowne Plaza, Wildcat		✓	✓

DESTINATION SYDNEY SURROUNDS NORTH DMP 2018–2020

This is the current, however expired Destination Management Plan (DMP) for the destination network that Hawkesbury belongs to, Destination Sydney Surrounds North (DSSN).

The DMP was the initial document for the destination network and acknowledges the hero experiences, key infrastructure and opportunities for each of the 11 LGA's it includes. For Hawkesbury it acknowledged the experiences of arts, culture, food, wine and nature as being strengths. The key infrastructure of houseboats, seaplanes, Australiana Pioneer Village, orchards and wineries. For weaknesses it mapped the limited public transport, engagement to Hawkesbury Riverfronts, limited restaurant options and limited group accommodation. When this plan was developed in 2018 these were the key strengths and opportunities. There has been significant work in the region in the areas of product and experience development which while acknowledging the above has changed these outcomes.

In 2019 the DSSN identified that there was a lack of a coordinated strategic approach for the region to capitalise on the international market. Including the number of export ready bookable products. In 2019 there were identified 2 international export ready products in the Hawkesbury Region, both accommodation providers. The strategy was developed pre-COVID and looked into current, emerging and potential market sources. Moving forward developing international export ready, bookable products should be a focus for Hawkesbury.

The updated version of the DSSN DMP is currently on hold due to the reworking of Destination Management Plans across the whole of the Destination Networks.

WESTERN CITY DISTRICT PLAN

The Western City District Plan sets out planning the priorities and actions for improving quality of life for residents as the district grows and changes.[21] The plan covers the eight councils as part of the Western Sydney City Deals which sets the investment foundation for the Western City Parkland City. Signed in 2018 the City Deals is a collaborative approach to building and coordinating investment to create world-class jobs and a great quality of life[22] for Western Sydney residents. It includes planning priorities for leveraging opportunities for local councils from the Western Sydney Airport and Badgerys Creek Aerotropolis.[23]

As part of the Western Parkland Liveability program and funded under the City Deals program, Hawkesbury City Council has created liveability projects to revitalise the town centres of Richmond, South Windsor and Windsor through public domain upgrades, place-making and activation initiatives, stakeholder partnerships and commercial opportunities.[24]

The Western City District Plan also acknowledges the creative and cultural hub of the Hawkesbury with key local artist networks like at the Hawkesbury Regional Art Gallery and local centres that attract tourists and are focal points of neighbourhoods.[25]

The plan also highlights the key colonial heritage role that the Hawkesbury plays in the district with its early colonial buildings and townships with the convict trail and four of the five Macquarie Towns. As well as the role of the Western Sydney University campuses at Hawkesbury, the RAAF base and the natural assets of the World Heritage Area and the Hawkesbury River.

[21] Western Sydney District Plan pg. 3
[22] https://www.wscd.sydney/city-deal
[23] Western Sydney District Plan pg. 19
[24] https://www.yourhawkesbury-yoursay.com.au/lptc
[25] Western City District Plan Pg 35 & pg 51

HAWKESBURY CITY COUNCIL STRATEGIES AND PLANS

The actions outlined in the Hawkesbury City Council Community Strategic Plan (CSP) and the Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS) clearly articulate the vision of tourism for the region. Action 5.7 of the CSP of 'Promote our community as the place to visit, work and invest'[26] broadly captures the vision for tourism for the region. By enhancing and strengthening opportunities within the tourism sector and working in partnerships to actively market the city[27] the developing collaborative and unified approach for tourism for the Hawkesbury region.

The LSPS outlines the key endowments of the region for leveraging including colonial history, rural character, agriculture and environmental assets including the Hawkesbury River. It also speaks of the opportunity of the Hawkesbury's Arts and Culture and the opportunity of this sector to stimulate the night-time economy.[28] It speaks of the unique character of each of the towns and villages and the unique experience that each has to offer to a visitor and the opportunity that this can be used as a visitor destination. However it acknowledges the balance between the positive effect of tourism on the economy and the protection of the renowned natural and heritage qualities.[29]

The Hawkesbury City Council Events Strategy outlines the links between events and the visitor economy and the huge range of events that the Hawkesbury currently has. It outlines the way events will contribute into the future of promoting the City and how events will increasingly become an important component of the Hawkesbury brand and destination marketing.[30]

The flow of strategy and plans through the Council core documents allows for a strong targeted action plan to be developed using this best practice Destination Management Framework and these strategies.

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN 2017–2021 (EXPIRED)

Commissioned by Destination NSW the Destination Management Plan (DMP) and Action Plan for the Hawkesbury State Electoral District was developed in 2017.[31] This plan was part of secured funding to develop and implement the plan and various projects in developing the Hawkesbury Visitor Economy.

The primary objectives of this plan were to:

• Grow the Hawkesbury's region's share of greater Sydney's overnight visitation and expenditure

• Help NSW achieve its tourism goal of doubling overnight visitor expenditure by 2020

• Focusing on tourism product which generates a solid commercial return to grow the sustainability of the region's visitor economy[32]

[26] HCC Community Strategic Plan pg.32
[27] HCC CSP pg.32
[28] LSPS pg 25 & pg 48
[29] LSPS pg.65
[30] Hawkesbury City Council Events Strategy pg.17
[31] Hawkesbury DMP pg.6
[32] Hawkesbury DMP 2017-2020 pg.6

Many of the outcomes and actions outlined in the DMP have been achieved over the document's lifespan.

Actions outlined in the DMP 2015 which have been achieved include:

Destination Management Plan Action	Status
Product and Experience Audit	Completed and maintained by the Visitor Information Centres
Content and Media Asset Audit	Completed
Product Gap Analysis	Completed
Content Development	Undertaken internally and in conjunction with DNSW
Product and Experience Development	New experiences and existing experiences have been updated and developed due to funding availability
Event Audit	Undertaken internally
Update and development of Event Calendar	Event Strategy developed
Brand Development and Identity	Developed in conjunction with DNSW
Marketing Campaigns	Undertaken with funding from DNSW and State Government. The last campaign is running 21st November - 20th December 2021

THE VISITOR ECONOMY STRATEGIES AND PLANS

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                    │  NSW Visitor Economy Strategy │
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                    │ Destination Sydney Surrounds │  ◄── │ Business Recovery │
                    │      North DMP 2018–2020     │      │       Plan        │
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   │ Business Recovery │ ──►  ┌─────────────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
   │       Plan        │      │    Hawkesbury City Council   │  ◄── │  Events Strategy  │
   └──────────────────┘      │   Community Strategic Plan    │      └──────────────────┘
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                    │        DESTINATION           │
                    │     MANAGEMENT PLAN          │
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GOVERNANCE

Significant state funds have been injected into destination management for the Hawkesbury, above and beyond the standard investment made across regional NSW by DNSW.

As such, to build on the momentum to drive demand to the Hawkesbury region, nurture partner and stakeholder relationships and build the supply side through capacity building and broader capital projects, dedicated, qualified resourcing needs to be considered.

Whilst there has been progress by Council in building relationships and programs to support the tourism industry, for the large part, they still remain faceless to the industry, yet play an important role in the tourism development in particular planning. The Hawkesbury region is still relatively new to destination management.

Stakeholder engagement has been a cumulative of the work undertaken in the region under various projects since 2017 by the Sparrowly Group. These have been formal as well as ongoing informal consultations and relationships with operators throughout the region through continuous work with Business Mentoring programs. Through these channels there has been commentary around the industry and council communication and understanding the structure and 'who to go to' within Council.

The recommendation would be that the structure include a Program Leader/Team Leader that works with the Visitor Information Centres to bring the industry and the strategy together. Being located part of the week at the Visitor Centre would help the team to work together, provide insights into the visitors in the region and help to identify training opportunities for the visitor centre staff as needed.

Considering the above, and, whilst there are typically three management/governance structures for tourism bodies - industry, outsource and council, it is recommended that the region focus on building out a solid council internal model structure. An internal Council led framework would be able to assist the industry in establishing and building particularly during the recovery process. Through this Council would be able to establish an independent body to lead and govern the Visitor Economy recovery and work on a collaborative approach to the destination management of the region.

GLOBAL TRENDS

There is little doubt the global pandemic has changed travel globally. It has changed the way people travel and the way people think about travel going forward. The tourism sector amounts to 10% of the worldwide GDP and provides work for millions around the globe.[33] Looking at global trends and the recovery in overseas markets we can be guided about likely outcomes for the Visitor Economy in Australia and be ahead of the curve.

The pandemic has meant:

• People have been disconnected socially from friends and relatives. This will mean more people are seeking out these connections into the future. This may see a rise in intergenerational travel for example.

• People working from home and home-schooling has meant there has been little time for a break from children. There has been a development of 'quarantine fatigue'. Short breaks (with or without children) will become more important to find space to have fun and relax.

• Connection to nature, and health and wellness tourism will increase. An increase in interest in 'being in nature', sustainability, luxury retreats and people looking for the pursuit of physical, intellectual or spiritual wellness post pandemic.

• The increase of ecotourism focused holiday destinations and experiences as people become more aware of the environment and the intrinsic link globally that we have.

• The desire to give back to communities through volunteerism or to make an ethical destination choice for the next holiday destination.

• Increase in domestic tourism as people grapple with the increased risk of booking overseas travel and the worries about safety, domestic tourism will continue to increase and be an important sector.

Two important sectors for the Hawkesbury area are Ecotourism and the Food and Beverage sector when reviewing Visitor Economy global trends.

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[33] https://www.tourism-review.com/post-pandemic-tourism-will-set-off-new-trends-news12009

ECO TOURISM GLOBAL TRENDS

Situated adjacent to a World Heritage National Park, near the newly announced $50 million Garden of Stone and the Lost City Adventure Experience situated in Lithgow[34], as well as the soon to be accredited EcoTourism Destination of the Blue Mountains, the Hawkesbury is well placed to leverage and collaborate with these ventures. Understanding the trends places the Hawkesbury in the best position to be able to benefit.

According to the UNTWO ecotourism encompases 'all nature-based tourism in which the main motivation is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas'. Ecotourism is driven by sustainability, ensuring tourism does not negatively impact a destination's natural environment or local economy. Ecotourism is important because it can leverage emerging trends to create successful visitor economies, whilst delivering on its mission to create sustainable, considerate, experiential and educational tourism.

Around the world, tourism organisations and governments are establishing ecotourism certification bodies and processes for businesses to apply for. Some good examples include Slovenia Green, Ecotourism Japan and Slow Tourism Italia. Some other forms of instilling ecotourism include leveraging volunteer tourism and having visitor pledges. Volunteer tourism allows the tourist to volunteer and provide value to the communities and landscapes which they visit. Visitor pledges are ceremonious pledges taken by visitors upon entry to a country which forces them to consider things like environmental sustainability and carbon footprint.

In Australia, Ecotourism Australia provides accreditation for tourism businesses who are environmentally sustainable and align with the values of ecotourism. Due to the large volume and variety of nature and wildlife tourism experiences in Australia, ecotourism is a critical emerging trend, as tourists learn to appreciate and contribute to the sustainability of natural environments such as the Great Barrier Reef, The Blue Mountains and the various coastal towns and beaches.

FOOD AND BEVERAGE TOURISM GLOBAL TRENDS

Food and Beverage tourism is considered a vital part of the Visitor Experience for both regions as well as the visitor. Visitors are seeking an authentic experience when visiting a location and an experience they can engage with - food and beverage fulfil these desires. Gastronomy and beverage tourism contribute to promoting and branding destinations, maintaining and preserving local traditions and diversities, and harnessing and rewarding authenticity.[35]

Worldwide we see destinations leaning into their gastronomy tourism and really developing and enhancing this experience pillar. With many seeking the UNESCO city of Gastronomy title as a way to identify this identity. This title is more than just about food it's about how people connect to, with and through food. It's also about climate change and how we protect the agricultural and urban food landscapes.

Most recently Launceston in Tasmania has been awarded this title, only the second city in Australia to win this title. Launceston worked on their 'soil to stomach' approach and the way that food interacted with the city's people, creativity and culture.

The beverage sector is a fast growing trend that is no longer niche - it's about creating a unique point of difference and a visitor experience where they can connect directly to the maker and the product used to create. With unique examples like the distillery in

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[34] https://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/gardens-of-stone-and-lost-city-adventures-0
[35] https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.unwto.org/gastronomy-wine-tourism&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1637797736401000&usg=AOvVaw3nOECduhyR5pldC9kJWNle

Cape Town which uses indigenous medicinal herbs and allows their visitors to pick and mix their own gin. Or the distillery in the Adelaide Hills that uses an Australia Green Ant to produce their Gin and uses other native ingredients regularly in their brews. Producers' tours and engagement directly in the process continue to be a popular trend both overseas and in Australia.

The connection to the environment also extends to the beverage sector. Like the Puhoi Organic Distillery in New Zealand who promote their 100% solar powered distilleries with zero emissions.

Food and beverage tourism is a sector that as part of cultural tourism can impact the length of stay and the visitation statistics of regions. Agriculture, food and beverage producers and unique experiences come together to be food and beverage tourism pillar.

IMAGE: Destination NSW

REGIONAL CONTEXT

The Hawkesbury Local Government area sits with the Greater Sydney Region of NSW between Penrith, Blue Mountains and the Hills Local Government areas.

Regional Context

● Village	Railway	South West Growth Area	Water body
● Strategic Centre	Motorway	Outer Sydney Orbital	National Park
Proposed Airport	Major Road	North West Growth Area	State Forest
Western Sydney Freight Line	Hawkesbury LGA		Urban Footprint
Road Visionary			

0 2.5 5 10 km N

36
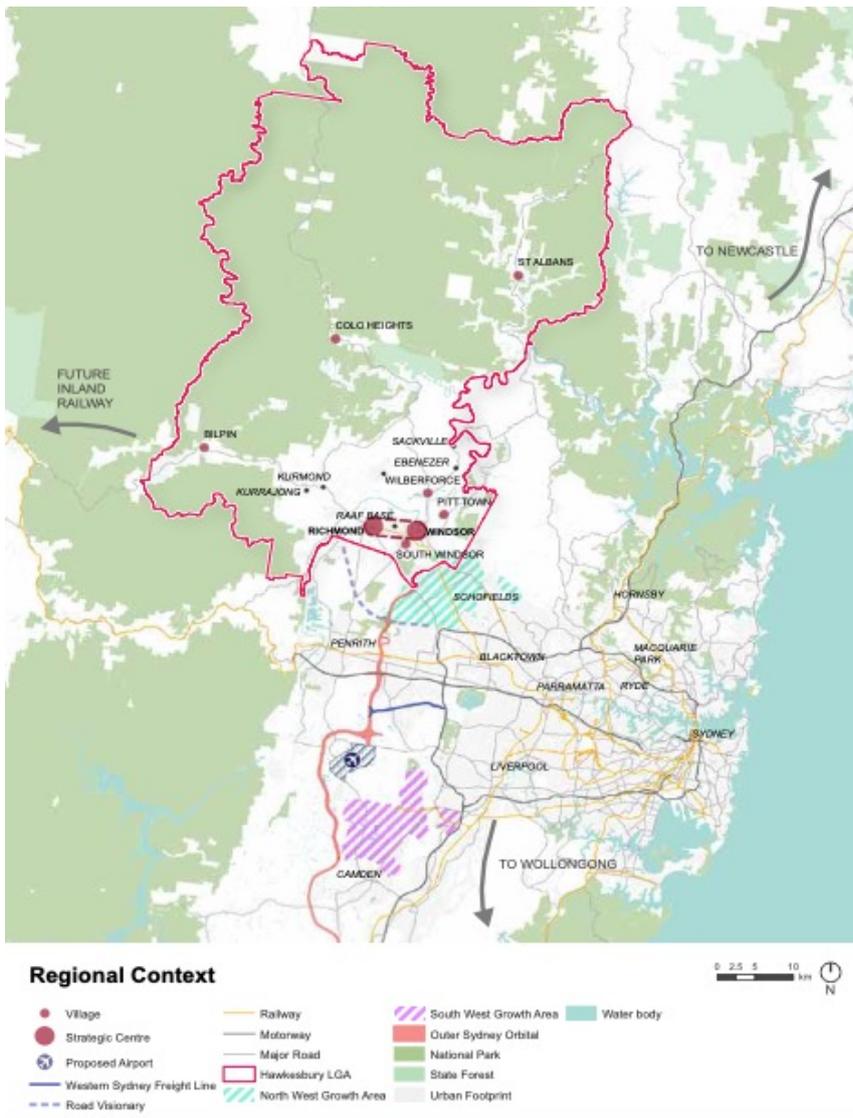
It is part of the Western Parkland Councils Alliance with the eight local government areas of Blue Mountains, Camden, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Penrith and Wollondilly.
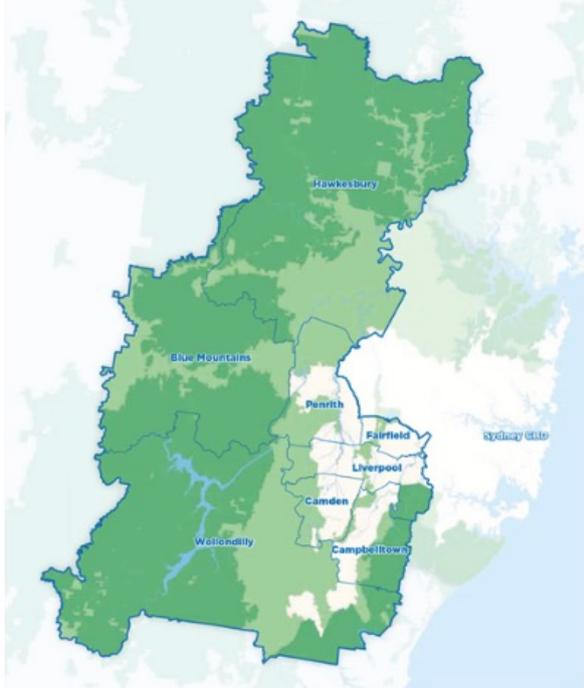
37 Western Parklands Alliance Councils

The Hawkesbury until July 2022 formed part of the Destinations Sydney Surrounds North with the Upper Hunter, Muswellbrook, Dungog, Maitland, Cessnock, Port Stephens, Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Central Coast, Singleton, Blue Mountains and Penrith and sits outside of the Greater Sydney Region for this classification.

New Destination Networks

KEY
- RIVERINA MURRAY NSW
- SOUTHERN NSW
- NORTH COAST NSW
- COUNTRY AND OUTBACK NSW
- SYDNEY SURROUNDS NORTH
- SYDNEY SURROUNDS SOUTH

37 https://wpcouncils.nsw.gov.au
38 https://www.destinationnsw.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Destination-Networks-29-June-2017.pdf
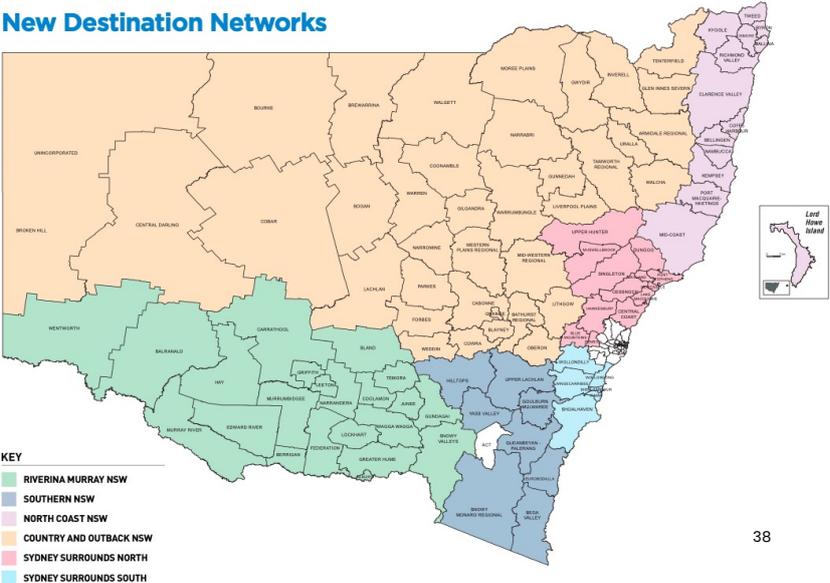
The announcement however in November 2021 to make changes to the Destination Networks that were established in 2016, announced a new Destination Network for the Central West NSW and the alignment of the Sydney Surrounds North and Destination Sydney Surrounds South Boundaries with Western Parklands City.[39] This is effective July 1, 2022 and sees Hawkesbury out of the regional Destination Networks.
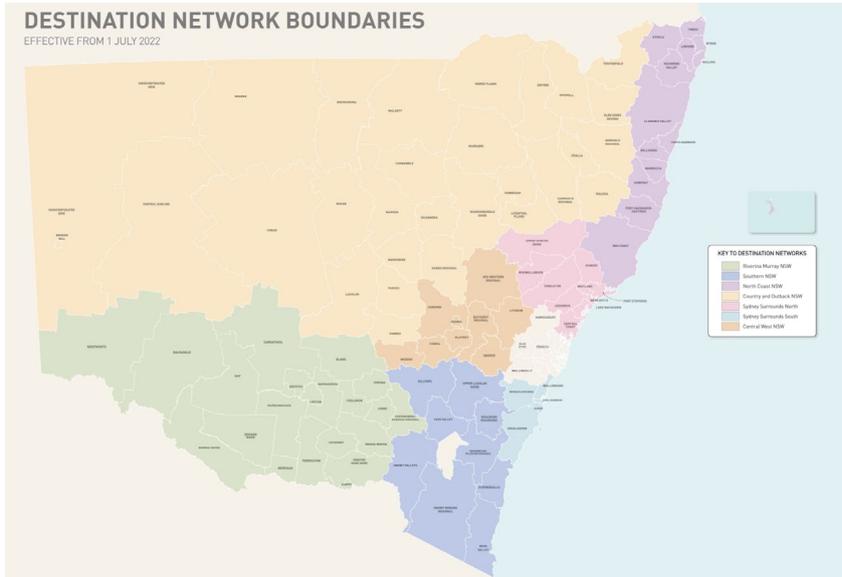
However the Hawkesbury region sits inside of Greater Sydney for the NSW State Regional Boundaries.
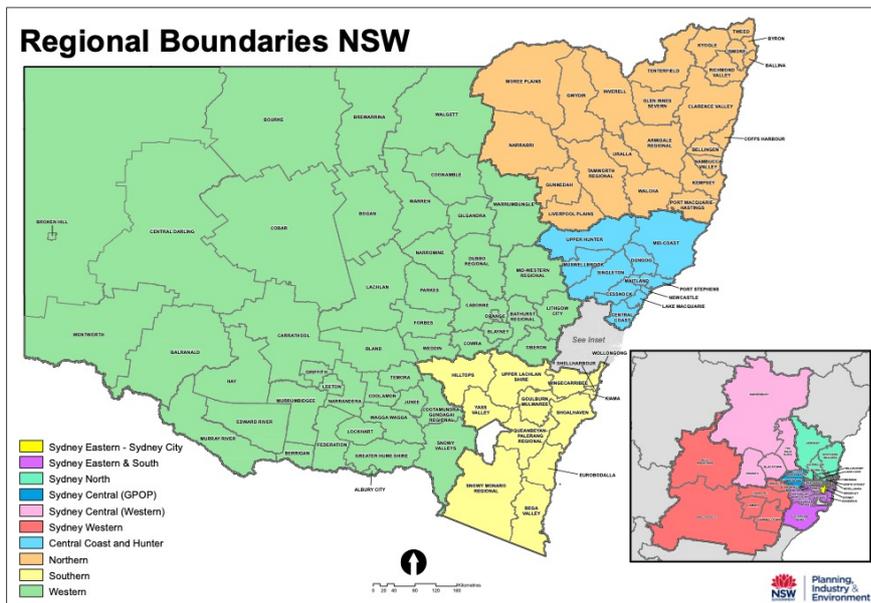
The confusion between boundaries extends to the eligibility of the Hawkesbury for funding and grants as they are released.

[39] https://www.nswnationals.org.au/growing-the-regional-visitor-economy/
[40] Department of Industry and Planning

DESTINATION COMPARISONS

BENDIGO

Bendigo is a town situated in Central Victoria. It is located approximately 150 km from Melbourne, just under a two-hour drive. It is a rural town that has a focus on producing livestock, fruit, poultry, wheat, dairy products, vegetables and wool. Tourism is also important to the region with attractions like Bendigo Pottery, as well as a strong focus on history with its historic Victorian Buildings and Gold Mining history.

Visitation

Bendigo has a larger population than the Hawkesbury at 123,632 and it struggles as a destination in its own right with its proximity to a major city. Unlike the Hawkesbury, the reason most visitors come to Bendigo is primarily to visit family and friends as opposed to holiday.

Bendigo has embraced their day trip visitors and in the year ending 2019 had 3.2 million domestic day trip visitors to their region as opposed to Hawkesbury regions 800,000.[41] Bendigo have lent into their strengths of food, wine, festivals and culture and have leveraged these to be their point of differences and pillars and have been named a UNESCO City of Gastronomy in 2019.

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[41] https://www.bendigo.vic.gov.au/About/Media-Releases/overnight-visitor-numbers-increase-nearly-20-cent

Shepparton
MANY GREAT THINGS

SHEPPARTON

Shepparton is a regional city in Victoria near the border with New South Wales, 181 km North-East of Melbourne. Like Hawkesbury, Shepparton is not a coastal destination and it shares similar domestic day visits and population as Hawkesbury. Both destinations are also situated on and strongly connected to rivers (Goulburn River and Hawkesbury River).

The reason for Shepparton's visits is primarily to visit family and friends, whilst in the Hawkesbury the main reason for visits is for a holiday. As a destination on the in-land route between Sydney and Melbourne, it's a popular place to stop and rest, whilst on the other hand, Hawkesbury is often bypassed by travelers.

Shepparton shares some tourism strengths with Hawkesbury such as arts and culture attractions, nature destinations and walking tracks. Shepparton's focus on events as a primary strength to attract visitors distinguishes it's product offering from Hawkesbury, which focuses on food products and nature experiences instead.

Visitation

Visits to the Shepparton region are dominated by domestic day trips and overnight stays, but fewer international travelers. In the year ending 2019 there were approximately one million domestic day trip visits and approximately 1.13 million domestic visitor nights.[42]

Product Offering

The region of Greater Shepparton is one of Victoria's premier event destinations. It has a reputation as a leading major event destination in regional Australia with events for sport, arts and culture, equine, business and lifestyle. Beyond the strengths of the city of Shepparton, there are many products and experiences to be had in the surrounding towns including Dookie, Murchison and Tatura. There is a diverse range of products and experiences on offer, in various stages

of maturity, which appeal to both domestic and international travelers.

This also includes connecting to and leveraging other regions and towns in the Hume and Goulburn regions and their offerings, including Mitchelton Wines at Nagambie, Cactus Country, the Murray River and the Victorian Silo Art and Mural Trail, as well as the Murray River to the north.

Shepparton's prime location on the Newell Highway is an attribute that makes it a transport and logistics hub, adding to its tourism strength. In the tourism system, Greater Shepparton is a transit route, not a place where a visitor's main traveling activity occurs but a place where refueling, stretching legs, walking the dog, toilet rest stop, purchasing coffee occurs. 10 Visitors stop because of the location.

[42] https://economy.id.com.au/shepparton/tourism-visitor-summary