

Destination Management and Visitor Economy Action Plan

2025 – 2035



The Wreck, Byron Bay



Jingi Walla – Welcome

Acknowledgment of Country

Byron Shire Council acknowledges the Traditional Aboriginal Custodians and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and country.

We recognise and respect the Bundjalung of Byron Bay – Arakwal and the Widjabul Wia-bal Peoples native title rights and interests within the Shire.

Byron Shire Council also acknowledges the Tweed Byron, Jali and Ngulingah Local Aboriginal Land Councils under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act NSW 1983.

Contents

Acknowledgment	2
Contents	3
Executive Summary	3
Context	4
Economic Snapshot	5
SWOT	6
Our Response	7
Council’s Economic Development Roles	7
Funding	8
Priorities	9
Implementation	10
Monitoring and Review	13
Sources and Endnotes	14
Document Tracking	14

Executive Summary

The Destination Management and Visitor Economy Action Plan supports Byron Shire’s Economic Strategy 2025–2035 by outlining actions to manage visitation in a way that benefits local communities, protects the environment and reflects shared values.

Byron’s visitor economy is diverse and dynamic, spanning accommodation, food, wellness, retail, events and cultural experiences. In 2024, 1.79 million visitors¹ contributed \$1.11 billion in expenditure² and supported over 2,100 local jobs³.

This plan shifts the focus from tourism growth to destination management – prioritising local benefit, visitor dispersal and regenerative practices. Actions will evolve across three Delivery Horizons (2028, 2032, 2035), with input by an Economic Activation Group. Progress will be tracked through key indicators.

The plan aims to support a sustainable, inclusive and values-aligned visitor economy that enhances Byron’s unique character and community wellbeing.

Context

Byron Shire's visitor economy is a dynamic system of local businesses, cultural experiences and community interactions that generate both economic and social value. It extends beyond traditional tourism to include accommodation, food, retail, wellness, creative industries and events that contribute to the Shire's identity, vibrancy and economic prosperity.

The 1980s and 1990s saw Byron Shire's reputation grow steadily, attracting a mix of domestic and international visitors drawn to its surf culture, music scene and emerging wellness retreats. This period also marked the rise of boutique accommodation, festivals and creative industries, which helped shape Byron's identity as a lifestyle destination rather than a traditional tourist town.

Byron Shire has long been a meeting place known as Cavanbah, and over time has become globally recognised for its natural beauty, creative culture and lifestyle appeal. This reputation continues to attract a diverse mix of visitors, including international travellers, digital creatives and wellness seekers, contributing to Byron's position as one of Australia's most iconic regional destinations.

While the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted visitation patterns across the globe, it was a time that saw accelerated business evolution that supported economic diversity in Byron Shire as many pivoted operations to be able to continue to deliver services.

In 2024, Byron welcomed 1.79 million visitors¹ who contributed \$1.11 billion in expenditure² and directly supported 2,122 jobs². This includes tourists and regional residents who regularly visit Byron for work, leisure and cultural experiences. Visitation adds to the vibrancy of the Shire – supporting local businesses, activating public spaces and enriching community life.

Though Byron Bay remains the focal destination, other towns in the Shire including Brunswick Heads, Mullumbimby and Bangalow have developed distinct visitor offerings rooted in heritage, nature and community character. These areas have seen gradual growth in visitation, contributing to a more diverse and regionally distributed visitor economy.

Byron Shire benefits from a strategic location along the Pacific Motorway (M1), providing access to major population centres in South East Queensland. The Shire is located approximately 45 minutes' drive south of the Gold Coast with a population of around 680,000⁴, and two hours drive south from Brisbane with a population almost 2.8 million⁵. This proximity places Byron within easy reach of a combined catchment of just under 3.5 million residents. The accessibility of Byron Shire via the M1 enables strong domestic visitation and short-break tourism including day-trip and weekend travel. The region's accessibility is also supported by two key airports – Ballina Byron Gateway Airport and Gold Coast Airport – which connect Byron Shire to domestic and international markets. These transport hubs play a critical role in enabling visitor access and supporting the spread of tourism across the broader Northern Rivers region.

Byron Shire's popularity brings vibrancy and real pressures – on infrastructure, housing, the environment and community wellbeing. Though local towns and villages have grown in popularity, visitation is unevenly distributed with Byron Bay receiving the majority share of visitation activity. As a result, the town is often described as “over-loved”, reflecting both its appeal and the strain it experiences. However, the visitor economy remains a vital support for Byron Shire's livelihoods, services and the broader community.

This economic focus area for action shifts the focus from tourism growth to destination management – prioritising local benefit, visitor dispersal and alignment with community values. It aims for a regenerative and inclusive approach and enhances Byron's unique character while addressing the benefits and challenges of being a globally recognised destination.

Economic Snapshot

Data supports an economic baseline for Financial Year 2024.

- **1.79m** Visitors Annually¹
- **160,745** International Visitors¹
- **848,363** Domestic Overnight¹
- **785,127** Domestic Day Trips¹

- **\$1.11b** Visitor Expenditure²
- **2,112** VE Jobs (direct)²
- **7 days** International average length of stay¹
- **2.8 days** Domestic average length of stay¹



Visitor Spend Dispersal – Locations³



Visitor Spend Dispersal – Seasons³



SWOT

Based on the research and engagement conducted for this project, the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) have been identified.

Strengths

- Pristine and diverse natural environment
- Relaxed and laid-back feel
- Well-known and popular beaches and surfing
- Community markets
- Diverse towns and villages
- A well-established visitor destination
- Food and beverage offering
- Health and wellbeing offering
- Events and festivals

Weaknesses

- Lack of transportation network within the region
- Congestion and too many people
- Staff shortages
- Lack of housing for staff
- Seasonality of tourism
- Lack of a clear brand and destination identity
- Lack of commercial accommodation
- Parking limitations in many areas
- Too much red tape
- Reliance on events and festivals

Opportunities

- Health and wellbeing tourism
- Indigenous cultural tourism
- Rail trail development
- More food experiences
- More events and festivals that celebrate Byron's identity
- Branded, commercial visitor accommodation
- Regenerative, ecotourism and travel for good
- Family friendly experiences
- Nature-based experiences
- Business events
- Maximising visitor yield
- Greater dispersal of visitors throughout the region
- Inclusive and accessible tourism
- Destination is accessible

Threats

- Falling behind other destinations and losing market share
- Becoming too expensive/luxury market focused
- Over tourism (too many visitors that lead to congestion, crowding and activities that do not align with community values)
- Climate change and natural disasters
- In the absence of clear destination identity, the market will dictate future visitation which may not align with community values



For example lists, see the Byron Shire Economic Strategy 2025-2035.

Our Response

This Action Plan reflects the Economic Strategy's commitment to a targeted, integrated and collaborative approach. It identifies priority actions for the Visitor Economy in Byron Shire, guided by the strategy's overarching economic Vision, Objectives and Principles. These actions are designed to align with and complement, not duplicate, existing initiatives across Council and beyond.

Council's action will evolve across three Delivery Horizons: from strengthening to scaling and ultimately enabling long-term transformation of Council's enabling role and as outcomes for the local economy.

Implementation will be staged and adaptive, with actions delivered through a suite of evolving activities. These will be designed to be ready to benefit from funding opportunities, collaboration and a variety of roles of Council.

Action Plans for each economic focus area complement and overlap. This integrated approach means that the Byron Shire Economic Strategy 2025-2035 should be read alongside its supporting Action Plans for a full picture of activity.

Council's Economic Development Roles



Advocate: Champion local needs to attract funding and policy support.



Promote: Share Byron's story and celebrate local success.



Support: Back local initiatives with funding, advice or resources.



Collaborate: Work with partners to deliver shared outcomes.



Facilitate: Bring people together and support collaboration.



Model: Demonstrate and pilot best practice as a local business.



Deliver: Provide services, infrastructure and programs.



Plan: Provide a clear, enabling planning and regulatory framework.

Funding

Sustainable funding is essential to support destination management, infrastructure resilience and community wellbeing. While voluntary visitor contributions – as through Council-run holiday parks – are currently in place, broader levy mechanisms remain limited by current legislation. Involuntary levies, such as a bed tax or visitor charge, are not currently permitted under NSW law.

Byron Shire experiences a significant surge in demand on services and infrastructure during peak visitation. While peak visitation before the COVID-19 pandemic reached equivalent to a near 45% increase in population⁶, demand remains high. In 2024, Byron Shire recorded 3.51 million visitor nights¹ – equivalent to an additional 9,616 (25%) residents when divided across a year like resident population nights⁷. This influx places considerable strain on infrastructure and services, beyond what the local ratepayer base can sustain. These pressures highlight the need for more equitable and sustainable funding solutions.

Council will continue to investigate both voluntary and regulatory mechanisms that invite visitors to contribute to the regeneration of the places they enjoy. This approach supports a more balanced, values-aligned visitor economy – one that shares responsibility for protecting and enhancing the Shire's unique character and community assets.



Brunswick River

Priorities

The following provides examples of what strategic actions looks like. They were informed by the Economic Activation Group and will be refined through their ongoing input.

Sustainable Tourism: Support low-impact and community-aligned tourism with policy, for a clear and sustainable approach. A series of initiatives aim to reduce pressure on popular areas, spread benefits across the Shire and seasons and ensure tourism contributes positively to local wellbeing.

Destination Identity: Work with industry and community to define a shared destination identity for Byron Shire. This will guide future promotion with a Byron Shire voice in the visitor market and help shape a more inclusive, sustainable and community-aligned visitor experience.

Conduct a tourism capacity audit: Collaborate with an academic institution to assess Byron Shire's tourism capacity, including infrastructure, environmental and social impacts. The audit will identify gaps and opportunities, providing a foundation for evidence-based planning and destination management models that support destination management. While legislative options remain limited, Council will explore voluntary contributions and community-aligned mechanisms to help manage tourism impacts and destination management.

Define a tourism position aligned with community values: Create a tourism policy that reflects Byron Shire's guiding principles for sustainability, inclusion and clarity. Drawing on best-practice examples, the policy will support regenerative, low or positive impact tourism that is community aligned and provide a clear framework for decision-making.

Advocate for improved public transport and active travel options: Work with regional partners and agencies and transport to improve public and active transport options and wayfinding for visitors and residents. Better connectivity will support visitor dispersal, reduce pressure on Byron Bay and enhance the overall experience for residents and visitors.

Visitor insights and data: Improve access to visitor insights by investigating development of a dashboard that brings together data on visitation, dispersal and experience. This will support evidence based

planning, transparency and better understanding of visitor impacts and opportunities over time.

Empower Aboriginal enterprise and experiences: Support Aboriginal-led tourism initiatives that reflect cultural knowledge, connection to Country and community aspirations. This includes promoting experiences, strengthening relationships and enabling enterprise development.

Diversify visitation through off-peak activation and alternative segments: Work with events, operators, agencies and industry associations to activate off-peak seasons and locations, including mid-week micro business events, workcations, residencies and learning tourism. These approaches attract values-aligned visitors and help spread economic activity.

Advocate for, enable and promote accessible tourism: Support improvements to tourism infrastructure that enhance accessibility for all. This includes promoting inclusive design, facilitating upskilling, enabling accessible experiences and advocating for upgrades to facilities and services.

Regional Catalysts: Develop a framework for a local response to local, regional and global opportunities like the Northern Rivers Rail Trail, major festivals, industry trends and infrastructure projects. Clear planning for signage, business engagement and visitor activation will better support local benefit, community alignment and readiness over time.

Investigate voluntary and legislative funding mechanisms: Continue to advocate for tourism funding and investigate emerging models that support destination management. While legislative options remain limited, Council will explore voluntary contributions and community-aligned mechanisms to help manage tourism impacts and destination management.

Implementation

Implementation of the strategic actions will evolve across the Delivery Horizons, with activities staged over time to reflect available resources, emerging opportunities and community priorities. A new Business as Usual (BAU) will be implemented alongside a suite of identified change making projects. Some activities will overlap across actions and economic focus areas, reflecting the Economic Strategy's integrated approach and the interconnected nature of Byron Shire's economy.

Objective	Action	Ref	Activity	Council Role	Horizon Start	Delivery Horizon			New BAU	Change Making Project
						1	2	3		
A. Identity Driven	1. Define and promote a values-aligned destination identity	1.1	Develop a Byron Shire destination identity.	Plan	1					✓
		1.2	Develop and implement a marketing plan.	Deliver, Collaborate, Promote	2					✓
		1.3	Investigate destination certification and report on findings.	Plan	3					✓
B. Local Opportunity	2. Disperse visitation to reduce pressure and share benefits	2.1	Bolster micro sized business events (less than 200) opportunities with regional collaboration and local benefit.	Support, Collaborate	1				✓	
		2.2	Create a Byron model to showcase best practice sustainable tourism.	Plan, Collaborate, Promote	2					✓
		2.3	Partner with events and operators to activate off-peak seasons and locations.	Facilitate, Support, Promote	2				✓	
	3. Foster local-led visitor experiences	3.1	Support cultural tourism initiatives that reflect local stories, language and values.	Support, Promote	1				✓	
		3.2	Bolster venues and creatives capacity to host visitor activations.	Deliver, Support	2					✓
		3.3	Investigate a village activation program for connections across the Shire.	Collaborate, Promote	3					✓

Destination Management and Visitor Economy Action Plan

Objective	Action	Ref	Activity	Council Role	Horizon Start	Delivery Horizon			New BAU	Change Making Project
						1	2	3		
C. Resilience & Adaptability	4. Respond to regional catalysts and emerging opportunities	4.1	Develop a Rail Trail Activation Plan.	Deliver, Support	1					✓
		4.2	Target opportunities arising from the 2032 Brisbane Olympics.	Collaborate, Support	1					✓
		4.3	Develop a framework to respond to emerging opportunities.	Plan	2					✓
D. Regenerative Tourism & Events	5. Embed regenerative and inclusive tourism practices	5.1	Develop a tourism policy with community values and guiding principles for sustainability and transparency.	Plan	1					✓
		5.2	Build operator capacity to embed and promote regenerative and inclusive tourism practices.	Support, Promote	2					✓
	6. Attract and support local-aligned and alternative visitor segments	6.1	Support Aboriginal visitor facing enterprise and experiences.	Support	1				✓	
		6.2	Promote workcations, creative residencies and learning tourism.	Promote, Collaborate	2					✓
		6.3	Investigate opportunities for tourism experiences for youth, by youth.	Support, Facilitate	3					✓
E. Creative Industries & Cultural Enterprise	7. Improve tourism infrastructure and accessibility	7.1	Advocate for, enable and promote accessible and sustainable tourism.	Advocate, Promote	1				✓	
		7.2	Advocate for improved public transport and active travel options in consideration of visitor services and impacts.	Advocate	1				✓	
		7.3	Improve signage and wayfinding.	Deliver, Collaborate	2					✓

Objective	Action	Ref	Activity	Council Role	Horizon Start	Delivery Horizon			New BAU	Change Making Project
						1	2	3		
F. Informed & Impactful	8. Pursue sustainable funding and partnerships	8.1	Advocate for legislative changes for voluntary and involuntary funding mechanisms.	Plan, Advocate	1				✓	
		8.2	Investigate opportunities for partnerships	Deliver, Collaborate	2					✓
		8.3	Explore co-investment and philanthropic opportunities.	Advocate, Collaborate	3					✓
	9. Clarify and monitor tourism impacts and opportunities	9.1	Conduct a tourism capacity audit including an impact assessment and gap analysis, and report on findings.	Plan, Collaborate, Promote	1					✓
		9.2	Investigate development of a dashboard with visitor data, dispersal and satisfaction metrics.	Plan, Deliver	2					✓

Monitoring and Review

Monitoring for this Action Plan will follow the overarching framework set out in the Byron Shire Economic Strategy. Progress will be tracked through quarterly and annual reporting, Economic Activation Group engagement and staged audits aligned with the Strategy's Delivery Horizons:

- **Horizon 1 (2028):** Strengthen: Early wins, system stabilisation, momentum builds.
- **Horizon 2 (2032):** Transition: Scaling, innovation, strategy review.
- **Horizon 3 (2035):** Transform: Long-term change, evaluation, strategy reset.

Outcome indicators will track changes in Byron Shire's Visitor Economy. While Council is not the sole driver of outcomes, it plays a key enabling role.

To support this approach, the following indicators will help to monitor progress and outcomes over time:

Indicator	FY2024 (Baseline)
Visitors ¹	1.79m
Visitor Nights ¹	3.51m
Visitor Expenditure ²	\$1.11m
Jobs (Direct) ²	2,112
Visitor spend while in region – Locations ³	56% Byron Bay 7% Brunswick Heads 7% Mullumbimby 5% Bangalow 25% Other
Visitor spend while in region – Seasons ³	30% Summer 24% Autumn 22% Winter 24% Spring

For full details, refer to the Monitoring & Review section of the Byron Shire Economic Strategy.

Sources and Endnotes

1. Tourism Research Australia (TRA) – Survey data 2024; Economy ID 2025. Available: economy.id.com.au/byron/tourism-visitors-nights
2. National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR) 2025; Economy ID 2025. Available: economy.id.com.au/byron/tourism-value
3. Visitor spend data, 2025.
4. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2024; Economy ID 2025. Available: profile.id.com.au/gold-coast/population-estimate
5. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2024; Economy ID 2025. Available: profile.id.com.au/australia/population-estimate?WebID=280
6. Byron Shire Council 2019. Tourism Scale and Impact Analysis by .id. Attachment to Ordinary Council Meeting Agenda, 23 May 2019. Available: byron.infocouncil.biz/Open/2019/05/OC_23052019_AGN_996_files/OC_23052019_AGN_996_Attachment_6461_4.PDF
7. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2024; Economy ID 2025. Available: economy.id.com.au/byron/population

Document Tracking

Doc No.	Date	Detail
E2025/121717	November 2025	Reported to Council for Adoption
E2026/52092	June 2026	Updated following prioritisation workshops with the EAG, reported to Council for adoption.

Thank You to Photo Contributions

Credit goes to Flawless Imaging for the photography



NAIDOC Week Community Family Day at Denning Park, Byron Bay

For more information

PO Box 219 Mullumbimby NSW 2482
(70 Station Street)

E: council@byron.nsw.gov.au

P: 02 6626 7000 | F: 02 6684 3018

www.byron.nsw.gov.au

