

Millmerran
Community Growth Action Plan
Economic Development Strategy
Final Report

September 2015



Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 3

1 OUR TOWN 4

1.1 Our People 4

1.2 Our Workforce 4

1.3 Our Key Industries..... 4

1.4 Our Services and Facilities 5

2 OUR STRENGTHS, OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES..... 6

2.1 Strengths 6

2.1.1 Local Community 6

2.1.2 Industry and Employment..... 6

2.2 Opportunities 6

2.2.1 Tourism 6

2.2.2 Infrastructure and Investment..... 7

2.2.3 Local Community and Lifestyle 7

2.3 Challenges 7

2.3.1 Environmental..... 7

2.3.2 Local Community and Lifestyle 8

2.3.3 Local Governance and Costs 8

2.3.4 Senior Schooling Provisions 8

3 OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE 9

3.1 Our Action Plan 9

3.2 Identifying Our Key Priorities 9

3.3 Our Key Priority Strategies..... 10

3.4 Other Priorities Considered 14

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Toowoomba region is made up of a patchwork of rural townships. Each is unique, shaped by its own history, subject to different issues, challenges and opportunities. They are, however, similar in many respects to a large proportion of smaller rural townships across inland Australia that are changing in the face of the global urbanisation trend and evolving agricultural practices. Whilst these factors are changing the shape and feel of towns like Millmerran there are still opportunities for the community to shape its destiny to ensure that Millmerran remains a place where they, and their children, would chose to live.

Success for Millmerran is best determined by the residents themselves, based on their aspirations, ideals and value systems. In order to better understand what these are, Council facilitated a number of meetings with community members to draw out what issues the town is facing, identify what the potential solutions and opportunities might be and to determine which ones should be focussed on as a priority. These have been documented in this Community Growth Action Plan.

The Plan identifies the five actions that the Millmerran community agreed should be the priority for collective effort. They are:

1. Investigate and lobby with Education Queensland for opportunities of non-traditional methods for Year 11 and 12 schooling.
2. Investigate potential opportunities that may develop from the proposed Inland Rail project.
3. Develop a unique tourist attraction.
4. Investigate additional water sources to support agricultural growth.
5. Investigate potential opportunities that may develop from the proposed solar farm project.

These actions will be best achieved through the involvement and commitment of the broader Millmerran community who, as residents, have the greatest interest in their success. Council will partner with the community, assist directly where possible, and endeavour to involve other regional stakeholders when required.

The Community Growth Action Plan is a living document, and will be reviewed annually. These reviews will be an opportunity for the Millmerran community to come together to celebrate successes, review what has been done and determine priority actions for the coming year. Council will play a supporting role in this process but maximum community involvement will ensure its relevance and increase the potential for success.

1 OUR TOWN

Located on the western fringe of the Darling Downs, Millmerran is a country town located approximately 82 kilometres southwest of Toowoomba along the Gore Highway. Millmerran acts as a centre for surrounding districts, including Bringalily, Cecil Plains, Koorangarra, Lavelle, Lemontree, Pampas, Tummaville, Turallin and Yandilla comprising an area of 4,716 square kilometres.

Millmerran is a prosperous town within the rich agricultural area of the Condamine and Macintyre catchments of the Darling Downs making it an idyllic location for broadacre farming and grazing. Millmerran's location on the Gore Highway along the Brisbane to Melbourne transport route naturally lends itself to the agriculture and transport routes. Millmerran is one of the nation's largest egg producing regions and has the Millmerran Power Station which provide jobs for locals.

Millmerran is well known for its biennial Australian Camp Oven Festival celebrating Australia's heritage and outback traditions. The festival attracts thousands of visitors enjoying a range of camp oven cooking competitions and demonstrations, music and markets.

Millmerran is a tight knit community that prides itself on strengthening the town's economic growth and development whilst maintaining the town's social well-being. Millmerran offers rural living in a town that instils a sense of community wellbeing and pride.

1.1 Our People

Millmerran District's population is estimated to be 3,218. As of 2014 the estimated resident population of Millmerran township was 1,695 people. The population generally declined between 2001 and 2007, before increasing through to 2014. As at 2001, the estimated resident population of Millmerran was 1,693 persons decreasing to 1,446 person by 2006. By 2014, the estimated resident population of Millmerran was 1,695 persons.

Millmerran is characterised by an older demographic with a higher proportion of persons aged 65 years and older (20.1%) at the time of the 2011 Census compared to the Toowoomba Regional Council benchmark (15.5%). Nonetheless, Millmerran maintains a strong family connection with a higher proportion of families with children as at the time of the 2011 Census.

The average age of Millmerran residents as at 2011 was 40.8 years.

Millmerran is a family oriented community that prides itself on embracing its community values to provide a warm and welcoming town for its residents. At the time of the 2011 Census, Millmerran was characterised by couple families with children accounting for 38.5% of households.

1.2 Our Workforce

Millmerran has typically recorded higher labour force participation rates and lower unemployment levels in comparison to other rural towns throughout the Toowoomba region. As at 2013, Millmerran recorded a labour force participation rate of 76.9% and an unemployment rate of 4.8%.

Agriculture, forestry and fishing (22.4%), construction (10.9%) and health care and social assistance (10.6%) industries were the main employers of Millmerran residents as at 2011, reflective of the town's connectivity to the Darling Downs.

1.3 Our Key Industries

Millmerran's location in the rich agricultural area of the Darling Downs and connectivity with the Gore Highway provides a natural affiliation with the agriculture and transport industries.

An analysis of industry specialisation shows that Millmerran has high levels of specialisation in agriculture, mining and energy, and road transport reflective of Millmerran's connectivity to the Gore Highway. Egg production is a significant industry in the Millmerran area.

Millmerran also hosts the Millmerran power station and Commodore Coal Mine, which are major employers at the local and regional level.

1.4 Our Services and Facilities

Millmerran is only an hour's drive to Toowoomba and offers a range of quality localised services and facilities including a post office, bank, newsagent, hospital, police and ambulance. Millmerran has numerous community facilities, sporting clubs, a modern medical Centre, pharmacy and a quality retirement home.

Millmerran provides a range of educational facilities for young families offering early childcare education facilities, a primary school and a secondary school. However, it is noted that the secondary school only caters for senior students to Year 10, resulting in Year 11 and 12 students having to travel further afield to complete their schooling. This issue has been raised by the community who are concerned that this may discourage families to locate to Millmerran and may also force existing families in the community to relocate. Millmerran has early education and long day care facilities to enable increased employment in the community.

Millmerran also provides a range of community facilities including a museum, library and community and cultural centre as well as a range of sporting and recreation facilities such as a golf club, bowls club, tennis club, sporting shooters club, auto club, indoor sports centre, aquatic centre, sporting ovals and a showground allowing residents to enjoy a range of recreational activities close to home.

2 OUR STRENGTHS, OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Millmerran’s connectivity with the Gore Highway and location within the Darling Downs, represents a number of strategic opportunities to develop the social and economic growth of the town and the local community.

2.1 Strengths

2.1.1 Local Community

- **Camp Oven Festival:** is a successful biennial event held in Millmerran that has operated since 1999. The festival is well received by the community, with the business community achieving strong sales during this period; and
- **Local buy program:** was recently introduced to encourage residents to buy locally and appears to be working well so far.
- **Affordability:** Millmerran has lower real estate costs than many other regions

2.1.2 Industry and Employment

- **Employment:** the community has indicated that Millmerran has a number of employment opportunities available. As at December Quarter 2013, Millmerran recorded an unemployment rate of 4.8% compared to 5.4% for the Toowoomba Regional Council Area;
- **Industrial growth servicing the heavy transport sector:** Millmerran’s location on the Gore Highway naturally lends itself to the transport industry with more than 1600 vehicles travelling through Millmerran each day;
- **Millmerran Power Station and Commodore Coal Mine:** located south of the township are key assets to the local community employing a large number of local residents and has provided access to a local community fund that assisted in nurturing the Millmerran community. The power station and associated mine has an expected life of 30 years; and
- **Agriculture:** is the largest provider of employment in the Millmerran District. Millmerran’s location also provides ease of transporting produce towards Melbourne or Brisbane.

2.2 Opportunities

2.2.1 Tourism

- **Promotion of tourist attractions:** Millmerran offers a number of attractions and things to do in town that could be better promoted to encourage visitors to spend more time in town;
- **Promotion of town events:** Millmerran is a proud community that runs a number of community events for local residents and visitors. The promotion of the town’s events provides an opportunity to strengthen the local community whilst embracing visitors to town; and
- **Develop a unique tourism attraction:** the community has identified the potential to develop a unique tourism attraction for Millmerran that would provide residents with an additional recreational activity as well as potentially attract visitors from nearby towns and the broader areas.

2.2.2 Infrastructure and Investment

- **Downtown beautification:** the enhancement of Millmerran will assist in the beautification of the town's centre whilst instilling a sense of community pride and increasing the aesthetic appearance of Millmerran to visitors;
- **Opportunity for hard stand for trucks:** Millmerran has a strong association with the transport industry. An opportunity exists to create hard stand areas to allow trucks to decouple/recouple trailers as required;
- **New rail opportunities:** Millmerran's affiliation with the transport industry is bolstered by the town's location on the Gore Highway. The development of the inland rail network provides an opportunity for Millmerran to further enhance the town's transport industry through rail;
- **Retain, attract and develop new industry:** the community has identified that the town requires more industry given Millmerran's strong transport industry and limited availability of appropriately zoned industrial land;
- **Develop a backup plan for local and regional water supply storage:** the Darling Down's rich agricultural land makes it an ideal area for pastoral activities which naturally places heavy reliance on water supply. Millmerran's reliance on rainfall and limited agricultural water storage represents an opportunity to appropriately develop a backup plan for environmental events;
- **Investigate agricultural opportunities outside of airport:** Millmerran's location within the Darling Downs naturally lends itself to the agriculture industry. There is potential to utilise land outside the Millmerran airport for agricultural purposes; and
- **Opportunity to develop underutilised land near rail line:** land located behind the main street was previously used for rail purposes and is no longer active posing a potential opportunity to allow access for larger vehicles to encourage better utilisation of Millmerran's services and facilities by visitors.

2.2.3 Local Community and Lifestyle

- **Work with grant providers:** the community has identified an opportunity for local community groups to work with grant providers to better understand how to complete the application and the selection process; and
- **Training opportunities through aged care facility:** existing aged care facilities within town represents a training opportunity for local residents to attain a new qualification or up skill existing qualifications.

2.3 Challenges

2.3.1 Environmental

- **Increasing dingo and rabbit population:** it is understood that there has become an increasing presence of dingo and rabbits in Millmerran posing potential threats to the environment and community and a need to maintain existing fencing;
- **Drought:** the location of Millmerran and a lack of agricultural water storage makes it more susceptible to drought conditions, which can have implications for the local community as well as the region's underlying agricultural industry; and
- **Shortage in water supply:** limited water supply provided by a bore has resulted in reduced water allocations in town impeding the town's water use on a daily basis for both personal and business use.

2.3.2 Local Community and Lifestyle

- **Drive in/drive out population:** Millmerran is utilised by a significant drive in/drive out population with Millmerran workers living in other communities and only driving in/ out for work. There is a need to provide more opportunities and incentives to encourage industry to base workers in Millmerran;
- **Retention of younger residents:** is a challenging task in rural communities such as Millmerran as younger residents tend to seek opportunities beyond their rural communities; and
- **Population over 75 is increasing:** concerns were raised as to the increase in the aging population of residents particularly 75 years and older, which can have implications for aged care and health care services provided to cater to older Millmerran residents.

2.3.3 Local Governance and Costs

- **Diminished access to decision makers:** the amalgamation of councils has increased the overall jurisdiction of Toowoomba Regional Council. The community has identified concerns with the accessibility to decision makers; and
- **Infrastructure costs and other Council costs are high:** higher infrastructure charges and development costs are seen as an impediment to development and investment in Millmerran.

2.3.4 Senior Schooling Provisions

- **No Year 11 or 12 provided by secondary school:** Millmerran offers a quality schooling from prep. To Year 10 only, which may result in the local families relocating to allow children to complete their schooling. An opportunity exists to investigate ways to deliver Year 11 and 12 schooling to assist local families with senior students.

3 OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

3.1 Our Action Plan

Vision: To build and develop Millmerran to achieve sustainable economic and lifestyle benefits for the district. To promote the district as an exceptional place to live, work, invest and visit.

Working towards our vision for the future requires the Millmerran community and Toowoomba Regional Council (TRC) to work together as one to nurture the economic and social development of Millmerran as an exceptional place to live, work, invest and visit by identifying the actions required and committing to them. These include:

- **Local Governance and Planning:** identifying those key actions that can be implemented by Council that will assist in fostering the economic and social growth and development of Millmerran;
- **Community:** identifying those key actions that can be undertaken by the local resident and business community with Council support to foster the economic and social well-being of Millmerran;
- **Infrastructure:** identifying those key actions required to improve and introduce new infrastructure within Millmerran to enhance the economic and social development of Millmerran;
- **Business and Investment:** identifying those key actions required to attract and retain key business and development opportunities to foster the economic growth and development of Millmerran; and
- **Tourism:** identifying those key actions that could assist in increasing the number and frequency of tourists to Millmerran.

3.2 Identifying Our Key Priorities

At a community workshop held in May 2015, the local Millmerran community identified the key priorities to initiate Millmerran's economic development strategy. These key priorities were selected from a list of 26. The five key priorities receiving the most votes, in order, include:

- Investigate and lobby with Education Queensland for opportunities for non-traditional methods for Year 11 and 12 schooling;
- Investigate potential development opportunities that may develop from the proposed Inland Rail project;
- Develop a unique tourism attraction;
- Investigate additional water sources to support growth; and
- Investigate potential development opportunities that may develop from the proposed solar farm project.

These key priorities serve to cultivate the implementation of Millmerran's economic development strategy over the next 12 months through the active commitment of the local community with support from Toowoomba Regional Council as appropriate.

3.3 Our Key Priority Strategies

Millmerran Action 1

Investigate and lobby with Education Queensland for opportunities of non-traditional methods for Year 11 and 12 schooling.

The provision of Year 11 and 12 in Millmerran would encourage families to live in the community and may reduce relocations. Anecdotal evidence suggests some families move away from Millmerran as their children approach high school age to reduce the inconvenience of having to attend a high school away from the town. Currently, many children take a bus to Pittsworth for secondary school.

HOW

Select a few members of the community passionate about this cause and develop a task force dedicated to working towards the goal.

Meet with education providers to discuss the issue from their standpoint and source enrolment figures and catchment information.

Seek latest population projection data from TRC that will assist in building a case.

Request meeting with appropriate Department of Education Queensland representatives to discuss potential for Year 11 and 12 in Millmerran or possible alternative methods of delivery.

Request letter of support from TRC.

Lobby Councillors and appropriate local members of Parliament to extend the local high school to include Year 11 and 12.

Millmerran Action 2

Investigate potential opportunities that may develop from the proposed Inland Rail project.

The Inland Rail is a proposed rail connection between Melbourne and Brisbane via central-west NSW and Toowoomba that will assist to efficiently address the rapidly growing national freight task. There are currently two different proponents with differing delivery and route proposals. Millmerran is on the route identified by both proponents. Whilst trains travelling between Brisbane and Melbourne are unlikely to stop in Millmerran there may be opportunities associated with new rail services that could be enabled by the increased rail capacity that the project delivers. There may also be opportunities during the construction phase of the project.

HOW

Follow-up with the representatives from the Inland Rail Implementation Group that attended a meeting in Millmerran in June 2015.

Host a representative from the two proponents, Australia Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) and National Trunk Rail (NTR) to discuss the proposed Inland Rail project as a guest speaker to a breakfast or dinner event.

Monitor news outlets to be alerted of any updates.

Benefits of the project are most likely short-term and revolve around the construction of the line. Develop strong partnerships with key industry sectors to support opportunities for growth.

Investigate the possibility of recommencing rail freight between Millmerran and Toowoomba, Brisbane and new freight options to Melbourne.

Millmerran Action 3

Develop a unique tourist attraction.

Millmerran's location on the Gore Highway ensures that a large volume of traffic travels through the town. In May 2015 the average daily figure was approximately 1,600 vehicles, with around 25% of that being heavy vehicles. A percentage of those vehicles will stop in Millmerran for various reasons, which will generally generate an economic outcome through purchases, accommodation etc. Increasing the percentage of vehicles that stop in town will in turn increase potential economic outcomes. One suggested way of stopping more travellers is the creation of a unique tourist attraction in Domville Place on Campbell Street.

HOW

Develop a Task Force with representation from multiple groups within the community to lead this initiative.

Contact Department of State Development to obtain case studies of tourist attractions and successful public art initiatives from other regional communities across Australia and internationally.

Organize a workshop to discuss the community vision for tourism development and the type of attraction desired.

Engage with relevant TRC departments to discuss possible place making initiatives.

Request footpath from VIC to Domville Place, guiding people to the main street.

Request a Streetscape Design plan for Domville Place and Campbell Street with the inclusion of an identified location for a tourist attraction.

Seek relevant funding programs that will help the community accomplish the desired project. Consider organizing a crowd funding campaign to help raise money.

Grow the community's web presence and make sure information available online is accurate and interesting.

Millmerran Action 4

Investigate additional water sources to support agricultural growth.

Water supply is crucial to Millmerran given its location and connectivity with the agricultural sector. Monitoring all sources of ground water, local and state resources, may help determine the capacity for growth and development in Millmerran.

HOW

Toowoomba Regional Council Department of Water & Waste Services conduct a study to identify projections for future water demand to support agricultural growth in the area.

Review projections and provide recommendations as appropriate for a bulk water storage facility.

Contact Toowoomba Regional Council to understand the current state of Millmerran's water supply and discuss any local concerns.

Millmerran Action 5

Investigate potential opportunities that may develop from the proposed solar farm project.

The 2GW Bulli Creek Solar Farm project, located just to the West of Millmerran, is expected to be one of the largest solar farms in the world once completed. The initial proponent, Solar Choice, has announced US solar giant SunEdison as co-developer for the project. SunEdison is one of the biggest developers of large-scale solar plants in the world and utilise innovative funding mechanisms that reduce their cost to finance projects. The project received planning approval from TRC in February 2015 and is expected to be delivered in stages over 8 years. During the construction and operations/maintenance stages of the project there may be opportunities for local businesses.

HOW

Host a representative from the project as a guest speaker to a breakfast or dinner event to inform local residents and businesses of the project, its expected timelines and potential local content opportunities. Contact Angus Gemmell, Managing Director with Solar Choice to discuss.

Maintain regular contact with project proponents to understand how the project is progressing.

If there are solid indications that the project will achieve financial investment work with the proponent, TRC and State Development to seek greatest local content outcomes available.

3.4 Other Priorities Considered

LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND PLANNING	
Action	Rationale
Acknowledge the differential in urban and regional development price points by implementing lower TRC development related fees and charges for Millmerran.	Regional communities are losing potential development to Toowoomba and surrounding local governments as TRC development fees and charges are not reflective of the regional location and market conditions. The disparity of fees has been identified as a weakness of Millmerran.

COMMUNITY	
Action	Rationale
Improve the level of detailed information currently available about Millmerran on the TRC website by including a profile of the community and identify key events, attractions, facilities as well as history of Millmerran.	Information currently available on the TRC website specific to Millmerran is too sparse. Additional details are warranted to better communicate the history of Millmerran, articulate what makes Millmerran unique and welcome readers to visit the town. Information available on the TRC website will complement information available on the Millmerran Commerce and Progress website.
Investigate opportunities to support place making initiatives and beautification projects in Millmerran to enhance the appearance of town.	Supporting local advocates and community groups wishing to enhance the appearance of the town will help foster community pride. The aesthetic appeal of a town has a lasting impression with visitors.
Promote greater awareness and knowledge in the community of the available funding streams provided by TRC as well as other external grant schemes that can be sought to support local initiatives requiring funding.	Ensuring the community is aware of the different funding streams available will encourage the completion of projects that benefit the community. Communicating this information to special interest groups empowers them to apply for funding while encouraging private and public partnerships.
Identify two individuals in the community responsible for finding grants and applying to relevant funding schemes.	Having one or two people identified to find and identify relevant grant funding programs will help the community accomplish desired projects.

INFRASTRUCTURE	
Action	Rationale
Investigate signage opportunities to provide improved access to the town centre by identifying key locations for new signage, particularly from the Northern entrance.	Signage along the highway is not effective at directing traffic from the highway into the business centre of town. The signs are not at optimum locations to encourage motorists off the highway.
Investigate opportunity to provide improved car parking facilities for RV's.	There is very little parking accommodating to RV's near the town centre.
Improve the gateway entrances into town by installing new signs with the new regional branding.	Conveys a consistent image throughout the TRC boundaries. Provides an appealing gateway into Millmerran welcoming motorists to the community. Millmerran is a gateway into Toowoomba Regional Council boundaries and should be marked accordingly. A region wide signage strategy is nearing completion.

BUSINESS AND INVESTMENT	
Action	Rationale
Identify and discuss potential development options for underutilised land adjacent to the rail line with Queensland Rail. Look at including facilities for large vehicles and parking.	There is a large piece of property located behind the main street that is owned by Queensland Rail. This rail line is currently decommissioned, but not permanently closed. Opportunity to lightly develop the property, perhaps into a park or caravan parking if the land is not contaminated.
Develop an Investment and Liveability Prospectus that can be utilised by TRC, TSBE, DSDIP and the community to promote business and residential growth by highlighting the best of Millmerran.	An investment prospectus summarizes the condition of Millmerran and can be used to highlight desired areas of growth, a valuable tool for investment attraction.
Investigate the potential of establishing a large-scale arts project that could be implemented throughout the region.	Potential for a region wide arts project (ex. silo art).
Work with the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning and the Toowoomba Chamber of Commerce to investigate opportunities to better support the professionalism and sustainability of Millmerran Commerce and Industry.	Accessing available resources will help build the capacity of the Millmerran Commerce and Industry and ultimately enhance the efficiency of the organization. The community would like to improve business confidence, attract investment and improve cohesiveness between local businesses of Millmerran.

TOURISM	
Action	Rationale
Investigate opportunities to better promote Millmerran as part of the Open Plains Drive.	The Open Plains Country Drive is promoted on the TRC website. Greater promotion of the route has the potential of attracting day-trippers to Millmerran from areas such as Brisbane and the Gold Coast as well as from Warwick and Stanthorpe.
Investigate the opportunity to host a festival that takes place in the alternate year of the Camp Oven Festival.	Millmerran is well known for the biennial Camp Oven Festival. There is potential to attract another festival in the alternate years.
Investigate opportunities to promote Millmerran's involvement in Council's Summer Tunes Program.	The Summer Tunes program provides free, live music and is a great way to relax with friends and family on a Sunday afternoon. Increasing awareness and growing attendance of the event may warrant more dates, thus more appealing to locals and visitors alike.
Investigate opportunities to collaborate with the Campervan and Motorhome Club to host a CMCA Rally.	As a RV Friendly town, Millmerran has potential of hosting a CMCA rally. This would bring an influx of visitors to town and help build Millmerran's reputation among key stakeholders within the industry.
Investigate opportunities to better promote Millmerran as an RV Friendly town.	Millmerran is currently the only town within Toowoomba Regional Council that has been declared an RV Friendly Town by the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia. This classification carries weight within the caravan network and should be promoted.
Encourage improved integration of Millmerran community events into Council's calendar of events to better promote these events to a broader audience.	Inclusion of Millmerran events on the TRC Events Register will help boost awareness across the region and increase numbers.
Investigate opportunities for sports tourism in Millmerran	The recent cycle Queensland bicycle tour has highlighted potential opportunities to attract sporting events to communities and Millmerran has a good range of sporting facilities to be utilised. State Rugby League carnival in July as well as Sheep races and rock 'n' rods run by school.