



Australian Government



Regional
Development
Australia

NORTHERN RIVERS

2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT ON OUTCOMES

2024 - 2025



Signature: 

Certified by (print name and position): Dr Susan Vinnicombe

Date: 19th September 2025

1. **Annual Report on Outcomes must be signed and dated**

2. Chair's foreword or executive summary

The past year has been one of both challenge and renewal for Regional Development Australia Northern Rivers. It was marked by significant change, resilience, and progress in advancing the priorities of our region.

During the year, I had the privilege of stepping into the role of Chair, following a leadership transition. We also welcomed four new Board members through a successful recruitment process, strengthening the breadth of experience and insight guiding our organisation. Their contributions are already proving invaluable as we navigate a dynamic regional landscape.

The Northern Rivers continued to experience the impacts of extreme weather, including ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred, which tested the resilience of our communities and highlighted the importance of collaborative recovery and planning efforts. At the same time, we have been fortunate to benefit from the first full year of leadership from our Director, whose focus and energy helped consolidate our strategic direction.

A major highlight was our success in securing funding through the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to deliver The Welcome Experience. This initiative is already making a positive impact by supporting the attraction and retention of essential workers in the region.

This year also saw transitions within our staff team. We farewelled a long-serving member of staff, while welcoming two new colleagues who bring fresh skills and perspectives to the organisation.

Housing availability and affordability remain critical challenges across the Northern Rivers, continuing to affect workforce attraction, community stability, and economic growth. These issues were further shaped by changes in government at both state and federal levels, with the NSW local government elections and the Australian Federal election influencing the policy and funding landscape for our region.

We also navigated the conclusion of the Jobs Northern Rivers platform, while ensuring the continuation and growth of Live Northern Rivers, which continues to provide a vital tool for promoting our region and its opportunities.

Our work is strengthened by the partnerships we maintain and grow. This year, we have continued to collaborate closely with:

- NSW Reconstruction Authority
- Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- All local governments in the Northern Rivers, as well as the Northern Rivers Joint Organisation
- Business NSW
- Destination North Coast

Together, these partnerships allow us to drive forward regional development initiatives, support recovery and resilience, and ensure that the Northern Rivers remains a vibrant, connected, and prosperous place to live, work, and invest.

3. Strategic context and regional

Over the past year, RDA Northern Rivers has built on a strong foundation of priorities that align with both the Commonwealth Government's objectives and the Regional Development Australia Charter. Guided by the Regional Investment Framework (RIF), the 2024–25 Annual Business Plan was shaped with close consideration of the Australian Government's national focus on housing reform, climate adaptation, Future Made in Australia, and job creation.

In response to the specific needs of our region, RDA Northern Rivers has pursued a strategic program of work across four priority areas: housing, skills attraction and development, recovery and rebuild, and industry development.

- **Housing:** With the establishment of Housing NSW at the state level, RDA Northern Rivers has actively engaged with government agencies and private developers to support increased supply, including affordable housing where possible.
- **Skills Attraction and Development:** Strong partnerships have been developed with Education NSW, TAFE NSW, the NSW Reconstruction Authority, and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, as well as the Northern Rivers Joint Organisation. These efforts, supported by the Live Northern Rivers platform and insights from Jobs Northern Rivers, have focused on identifying and addressing workforce gaps while promoting the region to skilled workers.
- **Recovery and Rebuild:** In the aftermath of natural disasters, RDA Northern Rivers has continued to play a vital role in advocacy and collaboration with agencies such as the NSW Reconstruction Authority, ensuring that regional priorities are embedded in recovery planning and delivery.
- **Industry Development:** Engagement with chambers of commerce, Business NSW, AusIndustry, Destination North Coast, and sector specialists has supported opportunities for economic diversification, industry resilience, and investment attraction across the region.

It is recognised that delivery of these priorities is influenced by external factors, including election cycles, machinery of government changes, and evolving regional priorities such as those of the Northern Rivers Joint Organisation. RDA Northern Rivers remains committed to a flexible and responsive approach, ensuring continuity of outcomes while adapting to changing circumstances.

Through this work, RDA Northern Rivers has demonstrated its role as a connector, advocate, and enabler—linking regional priorities with state and federal objectives while delivering tangible benefits to the Northern Rivers community.

4. Annual Work Plan

Summary of strategic priorities for the 2024/25 financial year

- Industry and workforce development
- Digital connectivity
- Infrastructure development
- Housing and Accommodation development
- Identification of critical investments needed to drive economic development in the region

Summary of top key business activities for the 2024/25

- Engage LGAs to implement local content policy for Northern Rivers
- Support infrastructure development through commonwealth and state government initiatives
- Deliver a skills audit for the region
- Continue the work of the Employment Land Audit to support outcomes in land development
- Complete a local consumption import/export analysis

Strategic objective 1 – Industry and workforce development			
What will we do?	Role	Expected outcomes	Timeframe
Investigate a Northern Rivers domestic import/export analysis	Lead Partners: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• NSW Reconstruction Authority• Individual business chambers• Business NSW• AusIndustry• NSW Department of Primary Industry and	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A report detailing the analysis and understanding of domestic consumption which will include, identification and documentation of what the region produces/manufactures and exports domestically and provide business attraction data to increase opportunities within the region	June 2025

	Regional Development		
Establish a local content policy for the Northern Rivers	<p>Lead</p> <p>Partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northern Rivers Joint Organisation of Councils Individual LGAs Individual business chambers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased spending from local government to local contractors and suppliers, attainable from LGAs capital works completion. 	October 2024
Support and implement an education program for industry in effective tendering	<p>Lead</p> <p>Partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NSW Reconstruction Authority Southern Cross University Industry Individual business chambers AusIndustry Business NSW Private industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivery on at least two (2) education programs for tendering, which will influence the awarding of additional tenders to local companies by improved tender documentation submissions providing increased successful tender outcomes for local business. 	June 2025
Commence a Northern Rivers Skills audit	<p>Lead</p> <p>Partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northern Rivers Workforce Steering Committee Business NSW 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A report documenting the current skills in the Northern Rivers and identification of where gaps exist by industry task and location. 	June 2025

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW Reconstruction Authority • Healthy North Coast • NSW Health • NSW Education Department • NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development • Private industry 		
Chair the Northern Rivers Workforce Steering Committee	<p>Lead</p> <p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TAFE NSW • NSW Department of Education • Workforce Australia • Healthy North Coast • NSW Reconstruction Authority • DEWR • Southern Cross University 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair and coordinate quarterly meetings so as to coordinate, guide and inform respective stakeholders in creating effective training and employment pathways for employers to attract, retain and retrain for a job ready workforce across all industry sectors, leveraging appropriate initiatives to benefit all sectors. 	Ongoing
Support and advise on supply chain opportunities for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic Games	<p>Contributor</p> <p>Partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW Office of Sport • NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending quarterly meetings with all LGAs and NSW Office of Sport, providing advice on economic opportunities for suppliers within the region and identification of potential supply chain opportunities. 	Ongoing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual Local Government Areas 		
Strategic objective 2 – Digital Connectivity			
What will we do?	Role	Expected outcomes	Timeframe
Work with industry network and service providers	Lead/Contributor Partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Telecommunication providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leverage funding opportunities when available to support and promote expansion, service development and network improvements which will aid in a reduction in the region's blackspots and improved network capability to respond to disaster through installation of resilient infrastructure 	Ongoing
Information and intelligence gathering	Lead Partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development Telecommunication providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide intelligence to government on telecommunication gaps, performances and investment opportunities where possible 	Ongoing
Strategic Objective 3 – Infrastructure Development			
What will we do?	Role	Expected outcomes	Timeframe
Collaborate with LGAs	Contributor Partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarence Valley Council Tweed Shire Council Byron Shire Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend Northern Rivers Joint Organisation meetings and inform councils of potential and relevant funding programs and support their endeavours to access funding. 	Ongoing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lismore City Council • Ballina Shire Council • Kyogle Shire Council • Richmond Valley Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend General Managers Advisory Committee meetings, advocating for region wide approaches where possible 	
Information dissemination	Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute monthly e-newsletters and utilise RDA-NR website and social media to promote policies and grant opportunities • Undertake monthly reviews of the RDA-NR website to ensure up to date and relevant information. • Enable stakeholders to leverage “Live Northern Rivers” platform showcasing the liveability of the region 	Ongoing
Collaboration with government agencies	Contributor Partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development • Service NSW • AusIndustry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet monthly to join with other agencies to jointly promote government opportunities in grants and assistance to regional communities 	Ongoing
Promotion of and support of Commonwealth Government programs for regional Australia	Contributor Partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote Commonwealth Government programs for regional Australia through monthly e-newsletters, website and social media, and through attendance at all stakeholders meetings throughout the year 	Ongoing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• AusIndustry• Service NSW		
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Strategic Objective 4 - Housing and Accommodation development			
What will we do?	Role	Expected outcomes	Timeframe
Advocacy and information dissemination	Contributor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collate a list of 'shovel ready' residential projects throughout the region, per LGA identifying the required infrastructure needs of each project. Support improved land use options and advocate for wholesale planning reform to improve the process of development approval through attendance at NRJO and GMAC meetings 	Ongoing
Leverage employment land audit	Contributor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage LGAs to leverage completed employment land audit to promote and encourage growth through attendance at both quarterly NRJO and GMAC meetings Encourage LGAs to consider mixed use housing developments in conjunction with or adjacent to employment lands through attendance at both quarterly NRJO and GMAC meetings 	Ongoing
Strategic Objective 5 - Identification of critical investments and relationships needed to drive economic development in the region			

What will we do?	Role	Expected outcomes	Timeframe
Promotion of Southern Cross University Masterplan	Contributor Partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Southern Cross University NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend quarterly meetings with key representatives from Southern Cross University, where we will assist with seeking opportunities for funding for the delivery of the masterplan and approval for the commencement of the masterplan 	Ongoing
Advocate and promote regional significant projects	Contributor Partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development Northern Rivers Joint Organisation of Councils Destination North Coast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend Northern Rivers Rail Trail meetings to assist with promotion and extension of the trail Promote and support for business case of the Great North Coast Trail at all stakeholder meetings Attend quarterly meetings as part of the membership and contribute to the Southern Cross University ReCirculator project 	Ongoing
Northern Rivers Brand	Contributor Partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend Northern Rivers Brand meetings as convened by Business NSW to advocate and promote use of the Northern Rivers Brand across the region 	Ongoing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Destination North Coast• Business NSW• Northern Rivers Joint Organisation of Councils		
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Objective 1 – Industry and workforce development			
What will we do?	Role	What we did do	Timeframe

Investigate a Northern Rivers domestic import/export analysis	Lead	<p>RDA Northern Rivers presented the proposed study to both the General Managers Advisory Committee and the Northern Rivers Joint Organisation, outlining the opportunity to partner with us and providing a detailed report on the methodology, anticipated economic benefits, and potential opportunities. Despite these efforts, both organisations declined to participate in the project.</p> <p>Following this, RDA Northern Rivers issued a Request for Quote (RFQ) to the open market, both locally and nationally, with the intention of fully funding the study if required. However, no responses were received from suitably qualified consultants to undertake the work.</p> <p>Although the project was unable to proceed at this time, RDA Northern Rivers continues to recognise the importance of this research and remains committed to pursuing future funding and partnership opportunities to progress the study.</p>	Ongoing
Establish a local content policy for the Northern Rivers	Lead	<p>A proposal was prepared and presented to several members of the General Managers Advisory Committee. Feedback indicated some uncertainty about RDA Northern Rivers' role in this space, with the view expressed that Local Content policies already exist within individual LGAs, and therefore a region-wide approach may offer limited value.</p> <p>RDA Northern Rivers encouraged Economic Development Managers within councils to consider the benefits of a collective approach; however, many noted that economic development functions at the local level are often viewed primarily through a tourism lens, which reduced the perceived relevance of a broader local content policy.</p> <p>Despite these challenges, RDA Northern Rivers remains committed to progressing discussions on the creation and implementation of a regional local content policy and will continue to advocate for the benefits of a coordinated approach.</p>	Ongoing
Support and implement an education program for industry in effective tendering	Lead	<p>RDA Northern Rivers established an agreement with Business NSW to work in partnership with the NSW Reconstruction Authority to enhance their planned training sessions, with a particular focus on supporting the formation of consortiums.</p> <p>However, the NSW Reconstruction Authority subsequently shifted its priorities and removed tender education sessions from its program of activities for the year. As a result, RDA Northern Rivers was unable to secure their support for delivery of the initiative.</p> <p>In response, RDA Northern Rivers worked directly with 5 identified businesses, providing guidance and advice on tender submissions to strengthen their competitiveness for contracts, to date these tenders are yet to be awarded.</p>	Ongoing
Commence a Northern Rivers Skills audit	Lead	<p>RDA Northern Rivers developed and presented a proposal to the General Managers Advisory Committee (GMAC), requesting that funding be shared across all seven LGAs. The initial request was declined, with advice that the proposal could be reconsidered if RDA Northern Rivers was able to secure additional funding.</p> <p>In response, RDA Northern Rivers released a formal Request for Quote (RFQ) to the open market, supported by a detailed project outline. From the submissions received, a preferred</p>	Ongoing

		<p>consultant was identified. The proposal was then presented again to GMAC, with a revised request for 50% of the original funding. RDA Northern Rivers also offered a substantial cash contribution, in-kind project management support, and the establishment of a Project Control Group with representatives from participating LGAs.</p> <p>The proposal was subsequently referred to the Northern Rivers Joint Organisation, where RDA Northern Rivers outlined the project's benefits and opportunities. While the project received some support from members, overall funding commitments were insufficient to progress. To further pursue opportunities, RDA Northern Rivers held a formal meeting with the NSW Minister for Skills and has since submitted a grant application to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. Notification is expected before December 17 2025.</p>	
Chair the Northern Rivers Workforce Steering Committee	Lead	<p>RDA Northern Rivers recommenced the Northern Rivers Workforce Steering Committee in its role as Chair, with the intent of providing regional coordination and oversight of workforce issues. During the early stages of consultation with members, it became clear that several elements of the Committee's work risked duplicating efforts already being led by other regional groups. To avoid fragmentation and ensure the most effective use of resources, the decision was made to disband the Steering Committee and redirect energy toward strengthening existing structures.</p> <p>As a result, RDA Northern Rivers has focused its efforts on actively supporting the Local Jobs Taskforce, where it now plays an integral role as a member. Through this Taskforce, RDA Northern Rivers contributes to the identification of regional workforce gaps, the development of collaborative initiatives, and the implementation of solutions that support both employers and job seekers.</p>	Ongoing
Support and advise on supply chain opportunities for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic Games	Contributor	<p>RDA Northern Rivers has continued to participate in quarterly meetings with the NSW Office of Sport and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD). We have also engaged with Destination North Coast to explore potential tourism outcomes for the region. A strong connection has been established with the Industry Capability Network (ICN), with quarterly meetings now taking place with the local representative to identify new opportunities. In addition, RDA Northern Rivers has supported the Northern Rivers Joint Organisation in developing a Prospectus for future training facilities.</p> <p>Conversations have also commenced with Northern Rivers Food to explore early opportunities for expanding market share and strengthening the region's food sector.</p>	Ongoing

Objective 2 – Digital Connectivity

What will we do?	Role	What we did do	Timeframe
Work with industry network and service providers	Lead/Contributor	RDA Northern Rivers played a key role in supporting NBN and other telecommunications providers following the impacts of ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred. By facilitating timely	Ongoing

		<p>information sharing between providers, local government, and community stakeholders, RDA Northern Rivers helped ensure that critical service disruptions were identified and addressed as quickly as possible. This collaborative approach not only assisted in the immediate recovery effort but also strengthened relationships between infrastructure providers and the region.</p> <p>As a direct outcome of this engagement, NBN has committed to delivering a regional connectivity roadshow in partnership with Essential Energy during the 2025–26 financial year. This initiative will provide communities across the Northern Rivers with improved access to information on digital connectivity, raise awareness of available services, and build local resilience through better preparedness for future disruptions. The roadshow will also create an opportunity for residents, businesses, and councils to engage directly with providers, ensuring regional challenges and priorities are clearly understood at a national level.</p>	
Information and intelligence gathering	Contributor	<p>RDA Northern Rivers has undertaken sustained advocacy with major telecommunications providers, meeting with them on four separate occasions over the past year. These engagements have focused on highlighting the persistent mobile connectivity challenges faced across the Northern Rivers, particularly in rural and disaster-affected communities where reliable communication is critical for safety, business continuity, and community resilience.</p> <p>Through these discussions, RDA Northern Rivers has reinforced the economic and social impacts of poor mobile coverage, including barriers to remote work, digital inclusion, emergency response, and regional business growth. By presenting clear case studies and evidence from local stakeholders, we have ensured that the voices of the Northern Rivers are heard at both state and national levels.</p> <p>This consistent advocacy has strengthened relationships with providers and positioned the region as a priority for future investment in mobile infrastructure. RDA Northern Rivers will continue to work with industry partners and government to secure long-term improvements in connectivity that support the needs of residents, businesses, and communities across the region.</p>	Ongoing

Objective 3 – Infrastructure Development

What will we do?	Role	What we did do	Timeframe
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Collaborate with LGAs	Contributor	RDA Northern Rivers attended and presented at all four Northern Rivers Joint Organisation meetings and all four General Managers Advisory Committee meetings during the 2024/25 year.	Ongoing
Information dissemination	Lead	Distributed over 34 e-campaigns, including Newsletter to an average 1776 subscribers and actively utilised the RDA Northern Rivers website to promote policies, programs, and grant opportunities. Regular reviews of the website were undertaken to ensure information remained accurate and relevant. The Live Northern Rivers platform was further expanded to highlight the region's liveability and opportunities, supporting workforce attraction and regional promotion.	Ongoing
Collaboration with government agencies	Contributor	RDA Northern Rivers maintained strong engagement with key partners through a structured program of meetings throughout the year. This included monthly (12) meetings with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), ensuring alignment on regional priorities and collaboration on key initiatives. Regular meetings were also held with AusIndustry on an as needed basis, providing opportunities to connect local businesses with national programs and support mechanisms. In addition, RDA Northern Rivers attended monthly (12) meetings with Council Economic Development Managers from across the region. These forums enabled consistent information sharing, coordination of economic development initiatives, and the identification of opportunities for collective impact across all seven local government areas.	Ongoing
Promotion of and support of Commonwealth Government programs for regional Australia	Contributor	Promoted Commonwealth Government programs for regional Australia through monthly (12) E newsletters, regular updates on the RDA Northern Rivers website and social media channels, and by sharing information at stakeholder meetings throughout the year.	Ongoing

Objective 4 - Housing and Accommodation development

What will we do?	Role	What we did do	Timeframe
Advocacy and information dissemination	Contributor	Collaborated with individual councils to compile a list of shovel-ready projects for potential investment. Leveraged meetings with state government Ministers to highlight specific regional opportunities and priorities. Advocated for planning reform through 6 bi-monthly meetings with	Ongoing

		the NSW Premier's Department. Provided direct advocacy on behalf of individual businesses and applicants to relevant councils to support project delivery and regional growth.	
Leverage employment land audit	Contributor	Collaborated closely with individual Local Government Areas (LGAs) to discuss and refine the findings of the Employment Land Audit, ensuring that local priorities and opportunities were clearly identified. Presented these opportunities to the Northern Rivers Joint Organisation, highlighting how the audit outcomes can inform strategic planning, investment attraction, and future land use to support business growth and job creation across the region.	Ongoing

Objective 5 - Identification of critical investments and relationships needed to drive economic development in the region

What will we do?	Role	What we did do	Timeframe
Promotion of Southern Cross University Masterplan	Contributor	Attended and actively contributed to four (4) strategic meetings focused on advancing the Southern Cross University Masterplan. Provided input on regional priorities, opportunities for collaboration, and the potential economic and community benefits of the Masterplan. Supported discussions on how the University's future development can align with broader regional growth strategies, strengthen industry partnerships, and enhance educational and employment pathways for the Northern Rivers.	Ongoing
Advocate and promote regional significant projects	Contributor	Engaged directly with seven (7) NSW State Government Ministers to advocate for and progress key priorities for the Northern Rivers. This included personal meetings with two (2) Ministers to discuss and further advance significant regional projects, such as the Ballina Marina development and the Byron Bay Wildlife Hospital. These discussions provided an opportunity to highlight the economic, social, and environmental benefits of the projects, secure stronger government awareness and support, and position the initiatives within broader state priorities for regional growth and resilience.	Ongoing
Northern Rivers Brand	Contributor	Collaborated with Business NSW to actively support the advancement and wider adoption of the Northern Rivers Brand. This included promoting the brand as an identity for the region with businesses and encouraged adoption of The Brand with local government, encouraging uptake among local businesses, and community organisations, and demonstrating its value as a tool to strengthen regional recognition, attract investment, and boost tourism.	Ongoing

Communications Strategy

The key channels used over the year were:

- Regional Development Australia – Northern Rivers (RDANR) website.
- RDA NR Facebook (FB)
- RDA NR Instagram (IG)
- RDA NR LinkedIn (LI)
- RDA NR Google Business
- Jobs Northern Rivers (JNR) website – *retired on 6/5/2025*
- Jobs Northern Rivers (JNR) Facebook/Live Northern Rivers (LNR) Facebook*
- Live Northern Rivers (LNR) website
- Live Northern Rivers (LNR) Instagram

**Note: Jobs Northern Rivers (JNR) Facebook became Live Northern Rivers (LNR Facebook) on 22/04/2025*

Over the reporting period Government funded projects were promoted through the announcement of successful local government and grant applicants as part of the local council news updates and Funding and Opportunities section of the RDA Northern Rivers eNews, and through twice yearly funding updates.

Data

Social Media statistics			
Social Media – All Results			
Channel	Posts	Average Reach	Engagement
Facebook	142	279	558
LinkedIn	116	131	1102
Instagram	30	151	36
Social Media - Government programs performance			
Channel	Posts	Average Reach	Engagement
Facebook*	35	9888	257
LinkedIn	51	1035	210
Instagram	12	137	8
eNews statistics			
Over the year 34 email campaigns were sent to RDA NR subscribers			
Average # subscribers	1776		
Monthly eNews campaigns sent	12		
eNews Alert sent	15		

ENews Updates sent	5
Funding Update sent	2
Government stories	87
Government consultations	30
Government Grants	107

Website traffic - www.rdanorthernrivers.org.au

Total users	Total event count	Event count per active user	Page view	User engagement
6437	47243	7.35	15205	11499

Government Grants and Awards featured on www.rdanorthernrivers.org.au

189 Government Grants and 13 Government Awards were featured on RDA Northern Rivers website.

Case Studies

Case Study 1: The Welcome Experience (TWE)

About the Program

The Welcome Experience (TWE) is a free service designed to support essential workers—and their families—who are considering applying for, or have already accepted, roles in regional NSW. The program connects new arrivals with *Local Connectors*, who provide practical and personal support to make the transition easier. This includes help with housing, childcare, job opportunities for partners, social and cultural connections, and other aspects of settling into a new community.

Eligible participants include government employees from agencies such as Corrective Services NSW, NSW Health, the Department of Education, NSW Police Force, Fire & Rescue NSW, NSW Ambulance, NSW Rural Fire Service, TAFE NSW, and the Department of Communities & Justice. Workers in key non-government industries such as aged care, disability support, early childhood education, health, education, and veterinary services are also supported.

Coverage in the Northern Rivers

Within the Northern Rivers, TWE supports relocations across the LGAs of Tweed, Byron, Ballina, Lismore, and Richmond Valley.

Partnerships and Collaboration

TWE's strength lies in the partnerships formed across government, community, and industry. Alongside direct engagement with state agencies and eligible industries, TWE works closely with councils, community organisations, Healthy North Coast, and local real estate agents to deliver outcomes.

- In partnership with **TAFE NSW**, TWE hosted a social event in Lismore to connect essential workers and their families.
- Collaboration with property managers has resulted in early access to rental listings, off-market opportunities, and even free advertising in local media to encourage landlords to prioritise essential workers.
- Northern NSW Local Health District now includes TWE in every job advertisement, while the Diocese of Lismore features the service in its recruitment materials.
- Referrals and word-of-mouth, particularly through facilitators at Lismore Base Hospital and Tweed Valley Hospital, have become one of the strongest drivers of participation.
- A local working group, made up of council representatives, community organisations, and other stakeholders, provides ongoing guidance and support for delivery.

Impact to Date

Since its introduction, TWE has successfully supported the relocation of 108 essential workers and 107 family members, a total of 215 to the Northern Rivers. The majority of these relocations have been to Tweed and Lismore LGAs to support staffing needs at Tweed Valley Hospital and Lismore Base Hospital, with additional relocations to Ballina, Richmond Valley, and Byron LGAs.

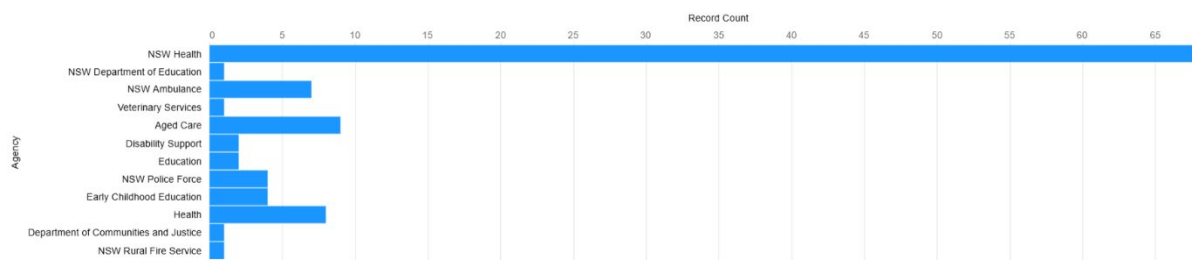
Vision and Opportunities

The Welcome Experience is more than just a relocation service—it is a long-term workforce and community-building strategy. By attracting, preparing, welcoming, and retaining essential workers and their families, TWE aims to:

- Contribute to a sustainable and reliable workforce.

- Improve liveability and life outcomes for people living and working in regional, rural, and remote NSW.
- Strengthen community ties for essential workers, partners, and families.
- Deliver time and cost savings for employers by reducing turnover and recruitment costs, while ensuring new hires feel welcomed and supported.

As a free NSW Government service, TWE provides eligible employers and workers with an invaluable resource that enhances both workforce stability and community resilience.



Case Study 2024–25

RDA Advocacy: Delivering the Ballina Marina Master Plan



Unlocking regional waterfront potential

The Ballina Marina Master Plan represents a transformative opportunity for the Northern Rivers, designed to enhance the Shire's waterfront, expand marine industry capacity, and strengthen Ballina's role as a regional destination.

RDA Northern Rivers has been a consistent advocate for the delivery of this project, recognising its potential to:

- Stimulate the local economy through tourism, recreation, and marine services
- Generate construction and long-term jobs in Ballina and across the Northern Rivers
- Unlock new business opportunities by modernising waterfront facilities
- Position Ballina as a hub for boating, fishing, and waterfront activity

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT



Strategic engagement with NSW Ministers

Throughout the year, RDA NR worked closely with local stakeholders and directly engaged NSW Ministers and senior departmental leaders to keep the Marina project front of mind. Advocacy efforts included:

- Presenting the Marina as a **shovel-ready project** in meetings with Ministers for Regional Development, Transport, and Planning and senior staff
- Briefing the NSW Premier's Department on the economic potential and regional benefits of the development
- Coordinating with Ballina Shire Council to ensure consistent messaging and aligned priorities
- Leveraging RDA's role in regional planning forums to highlight the Marina as a critical enabler of economic diversification

Advancing regional economic delivery

The Marina has been consistently positioned as a priority project within regional growth discussions. RDA NR's advocacy ensured that the project:

- Was profiled as a flagship initiative in conversations about regional tourism and economic infrastructure
- Received strong local and industry support through engagement with chambers of commerce and business networks
- Aligned with state and federal government priorities around regional development, tourism, and jobs



Artist's perspective showing the marina esplanade area looking west

Looking forward

RDA Northern Rivers remains committed to advancing the Ballina Marina project through continued advocacy and collaboration with NSW Ministers, government agencies, and local partners. With the Master Plan adopted and strong regional backing, the focus is now on securing investment and delivery.

The Marina is not just a Ballina project — it is a regional economic opportunity that will create long-term benefits across the Northern Rivers.

7. Third Party Arrangements

Organisation Name	Description of activity being undertaken	Contract start and end dates	Contract value and payment milestones	Activity progress to date	Details of how any surplus funds generated will be used
NSW Reconstruction Authority	Live Northern Rivers Tender Portal Scope Variation - Admin Controls	30/06/2024 – 30/06/2026	\$26,322 Milestone 1 50% Milestone 2 50%	Milestone 1	N/A
Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development	The Welcome Experience	21/10/2024 – 30/06/2026	\$570,000 Milestone 1 10% Milestone 2 30% Milestone 3 10% Milestone 4 10% Milestone 5 10% Milestone 6 15% Milestone 7 15%	Milestone 4	N/A