



Sunshine Coast transforms into a thriving high-growth hub

Thousands of new jobs created as region attracts local and foreign investors.

A new era of innovation and investment is strengthening the Sunshine Coast's reputation as one of Australia's most dynamic regional economies.

This year, Infrastructure Australia identified the Sunshine Coast – about 100 kilometres north of Brisbane – as one of five regional areas that should be focal points for national productivity growth and government support.

Business confidence in the region is at a record high, the latest Sunshine Coast Business Confidence survey shows. The Sunshine Coast is also the most confident region on employment and capital expenditure, according to the March 2016 Pulse survey by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland (CCIQ).

'The Sunshine Coast has excellent momentum,' says Mayor Mark Jamieson. 'We are showing the benefits of collaborating with governments and the private sector to secure capital investment and foster the development of higher-growth industries that create jobs.'

Led by the proactive Sunshine Coast Council, the region is being transformed from a coastal tourism location into a thriving hub of innovation and entrepreneurship that is targeting export opportunities in Asia.

Leading demographer and commentator Bernard Salt recently described the Sunshine Coast as Australia's entrepreneurship capital, based on formation rates for new ventures.

Larger companies are also embracing the region. Fast-growing insurer Youi

last year announced plans to build its \$80 million global headquarters on the Sunshine Coast. Contact centre provider Stellar Asia Pacific is doubling its presence in the region, adding 290 jobs.

Major infrastructure projects are creating opportunities for new and established businesses.

The Sunshine Coast University Hospital, Sunshine Coast Airport Expansion Project, and development of the Maroochydore City Centre – a world-class urban space – will create thousands of jobs and boost industry.

Clear benefits for community

The initiatives are delivering tangible results for residents and businesses. The region's economy has grown from \$13 billion to \$16 billion in the last three years, and is projected to reach \$33 billion by 2033.

The Sunshine Coast economy was one of Queensland's fastest-growing in the previous decade, and its average annual economic growth rate surpassed the Australian average by a full one per cent in the period since 2002.

The region's employment rate is now in line with the Queensland average, having consistently been below it in the past.

'We're one of few coastal communities that is actually engineering a decline in unemployment, particularly our youth unemployment,' says Mayor Jamieson.

New jobs are bringing more people to the region. The Sunshine Coast's



Mayor Mark Jamieson

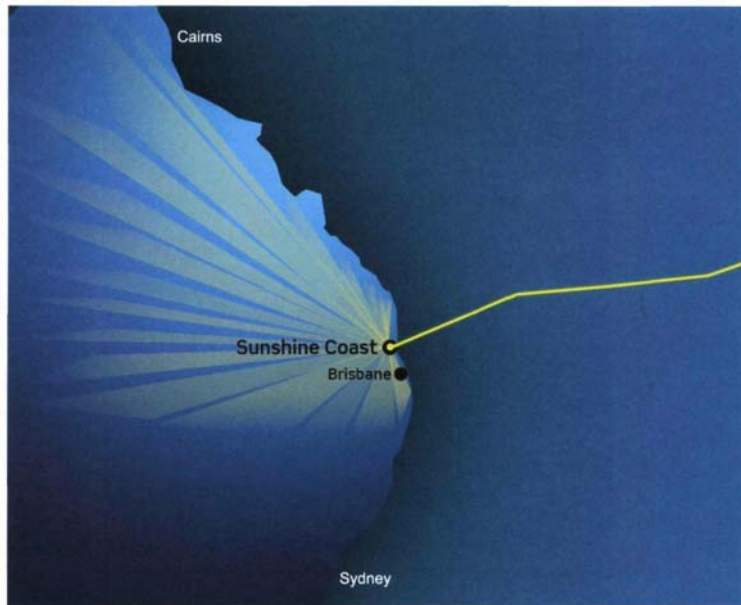
population of more than 290,000 is expected to grow to 450,000 by 2031.

Foreign and domestic investors are attracted to this growth. 'We are receiving considerable interest from investors who see tremendous opportunities on the Sunshine Coast,' says Mayor Jamieson.

A blueprint for growth

Launched in 2013, the Sunshine Coast Regional Economic Development Strategy was the genesis of the region's transformation. The long-term goal is to turn the Sunshine Coast into a clear node for creativity and collaboration, with strengths in health, education, aviation, tourism, clean technology, agribusiness and knowledge industries.

The 20-year plan was developed as a partnership between the council, the state government, business, industry and the University of the Sunshine Coast to provide the blueprint to transform the region's economy from one based on consumption to one that is responsive to demand from key markets.



commitment and drive to see it implemented,' says Mayor Jamieson. 'I believe we will achieve those targets sooner than expected, and that, in some cases, they will potentially be significantly exceeded.'

Seven industry priorities

Health and wellbeing is a key focus. The \$2 billion Sunshine Coast University Hospital, due to open in April 2017, will transform the region's health service industry.

'Over time, we'll see a cluster of health, medical and allied businesses form around this hospital and at other locations like Nambour and Buderim,' says Mayor Jamieson. 'Health and wellbeing is a natural strength when we are seen as one of Australia's healthiest regions.'

The region has many competitive strengths: proximity to the state capital, competitive business conditions, a beautiful location, an ideal climate, a skilled workforce, and recognition as one of Australia's healthiest communities. But it could be much more.

The economic plan has four key goals: to grow the economy to \$33 billion by 2033;

to lift the number of high-value jobs in the region from 59,000 to 100,000; to grow exports from 12 per cent to 20 per cent of goods and services produced; and to ensure that the region's average household income at least matches the state average.

'It's early days, but we are already seeing the results of having this clear plan in place, along with a strong

Education is another priority. The University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) is one of Australia's fastest-growing universities, and is on the brink of achieving a *Times Higher Education* ranking in the world's top 100 universities aged under 50 years – a remarkable achievement for a university that only celebrated its 20th anniversary this year.



Artist's impression of the Maroochydore City Centre



USC now serves the Sunshine Coast and the Fraser Coast, and last year successfully tendered to develop the new Moreton Bay Region University Precinct in Petrie, north of Brisbane (and in another of Australia's fastest-growing regions).

Aviation is another focus. The planned \$347 million Sunshine Coast Airport expansion will deliver a new, 2450-metre by 45-metre runway, upgraded terminal, new airport control tower and associated infrastructure. The new runway will enable flights from more destinations across Australia and the Asia-Pacific region to land directly in the Sunshine Coast, providing a significant boost to the region's inbound tourism market.

The project is forecast to provide a \$4.1 billion contribution to the region's economy through to 2040, and to generate 2230 jobs over the same period.

The Queensland Coordinator-General provided the approval of the Environmental Impact Statement for this project in May, and it is now full steam ahead.

In the area of clean technology, the Sunshine Coast Council will become Australia's first local government to build a utility-scale, grid-connected solar farm, which will enable the council to offset its entire electricity consumption with energy generated from a renewable source by mid-2017. It will lead the nation in this space.

'Other governments talk about offsetting around 50 per cent of their electricity consumption with energy from renewables within the next 10-20 years. The Sunshine Coast Council will achieve a 100 per cent offset by the end of 2017,' says Mayor Jamieson.

The Sunshine Coast's agricultural sector – for years a backbone of the economy – has the potential to export fresh produce and aquaculture to Asia. 'Our airport expansion opens up so many opportunities to export fresh and value-added produce directly into Asian markets,' says Mayor Jamieson.

Knowledge industries and professional services will also find that the Sunshine Coast is an ideal base, with the council planning to secure Australia's next international broadband submarine cable connection to come ashore in the region.

The international submarine broadband cable will provide the Australian eastern seaboard with a direct fibre link outside of Sydney, connecting to global communication systems in the Asia-Pacific region and the United States.

'The Sunshine Coast will become the natural location for entrepreneurialism, start-ups and digital technology solutions – making us Australia's leading smart region,' says Mayor Jamieson.

'What more could you want [than] a smart, healthy region in a fantastic location and connected to the world?' ●

To learn more about the Sunshine Coast, visit www.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au.