



THE PROJECT

The Central Queensland Workforce Development Initiatives Regional Engagement Project (the project) is the first step in the development of a proposed Central Queensland Workforce Development Strategy.

The purpose of the project was to undertake comprehensive research into workforce requirements in Central Queensland, focusing on local government areas within Central Queensland's Resources Catchment area, in order to provide a clear picture on current and future workforce requirements across the government's four pillars of Agriculture, Construction, Resources and Tourism.

In doing so, it sought to provide the foundation from which a workforce development strategy could be developed, which would help to address identified skill

shortages over time and harness the potential of a range of industries in order to build and maintain a sustainable workforce in Central Queensland. This in turn will help to create a more balance and sustainable regional economy primed to meet future challenges.

The project was undertaken by Regional Development Australia Mackay Isaac Whitsunday and Regional Development Australia Fitzroy and Central West, with funding from the Queensland Government.

The purpose of this document is to provide a detailed overview of the workforce development engagement project, its findings and recommendations, and the next steps towards the development of a Central Queensland Workforce Development Strategy.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The project has the following four key objectives:

- To ensure that regional stakeholders have a mechanism for input into a Central Queensland Workforce Development Strategy (CQWDS);
- To catalogue current and proposed workforce development initiatives in the region across all industry sectors;
- To develop the regional story on future workforce requirements across all industry sectors by reviewing major projects, and current and projected skills shortages; and
- Ensure the regional story is reflected in the CQWDS.

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PROJECT SCOPE

The area of study included the following local government areas and industry sectors across Central Queensland:

Local Government Area	Sectors
Banana Shire Council Barcaldine Regional Council Central Highlands Regional Council Gladstone Regional Council Isaac Regional Council Mackay Regional Council Rockhampton Regional Council Whitsunday Regional Council Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire Council	Agriculture Construction Resources Tourism

CONSULTATION

Project consultation was undertaken in the following two stages:

1. Desktop research and analysis of workforce initiatives across Central Queensland including current and future proposed projects including:
 - Queensland Government Major Projects;
 - Queensland Resources Council;
 - Construction Skills Queensland;
 - Regional development registers or equivalent documents;
 - Previous research undertaken and relevant outcomes; and
 - Central Queensland Coal Projects.
2. Stakeholder engagement involving face-to-face meetings, email correspondence and telephone consultation to validate research and further discuss workforce development issues and initiatives, included the following organisations:
 - Regional Organisation of Councils in Mackay Isaac Whitsunday, Central Queensland and Central West;
 - Regional Economic Development Corporations in Mackay-Isaac-Whitsunday, Central Highlands, Rockhampton, Gladstone and Central West;
 - Agricultural grower groups – e.g. Canegrowers, Bowen District Growers Association;
 - Training Queensland;
 - North Queensland Bulk Ports;
 - State and national industry skills bodies;
 - Queensland Government; and
 - Industry clusters – e.g. Mackay Area Industry Network, Gladstone Engineering Alliance.

Detailed appendixes including a complete list of participant organisations, persons interviewed and research outcomes are provided as part of the project's final report.

WHO WE ARE

The role of Regional Development Australia Committees is to work across all three levels of government, local industry and their regional communities to enhance the growth and development of regions across Australia. This includes the identification and advocacy of agreed regional priorities; and working in collaboration with regional partners to strengthen each region's long term sustainability for the benefit of future generations.



FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding	Recommendations
<p>Competition for skilled labour is evident throughout the entire Central Queensland region, which is set to become further impacted by the commencement of major projects.</p>	<p>Develop a detailed workforce development strategy that is resilient to fluctuations in demand across industries by targeting skill sets required across multiple industry sectors within the region. Over time this will help to build and maintain a more sustainable workforce in Central Queensland, which readily adapts to change.</p>
<p>Concern regarding the actual impact workforce development initiatives have in Central Queensland – many of which are state and federally funded.</p>	<p>Develop an evaluation process to determine effectiveness, potential gaps and program collaborations for more efficient use of resources.</p>
<p>Workforce development initiatives are currently implemented in isolation across the Central Queensland region.</p>	<p>Establish a regional Workforce Development Coordinators Network between delivery organisations, focused on enhanced communication and collaboration where possible. This will make better use of resources, reduce duplication and enable agencies to work together for maximum impact and delivery across the region.</p>
<p>Disconnect between school level certificate training and industry needs, which is affecting workforce retention in the region in the 15-24 age bracket. Workforce initiatives need to refocus and deliver outcomes to industries where there is most need.</p>	<p>Assess school to industry training pathways and other employment initiatives to identify impediments to achieving desired outcomes and improve program offering so they better align with industry needs.</p>
<p>Significant support for a dual sector university which would see a merger between Central Queensland University and Qld Institute of TAFE.</p>	<p>Government support and movement on this opportunity to streamline the transition between vocational and tertiary study and career development.</p>

REGIONAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COORDINATORS FORUM

Mackay Isaac Whitsunday Regional Development Australia held a forum on Monday 26 June 2012 to further explore workplace development issues in the Mackay-Isaac-Whitsunday region. The forum was attended by 24 people representing private, community (not-for-profit) and government workforce development organisations from across the region.

In addition to supporting the project's findings and recommendations, the following statements were identified by participants as key issues to be addressed by the proposed Central Queensland Resource Catchment Regional Workforce Development Strategy.

There is disconnect between some certificate level training in schools and industry needs: This has resulted in some higher level qualifications obtained at secondary school, particularly in the construction and engineering sectors, not meeting industry recruitment requirements.

Lack of transportation in parts of the region limits access to employment opportunities in other parts of the region: This is most evident between regional communities where there is little to no public transport to larger regional centres, which particularly affects workforce participation by disadvantaged groups.

Lack of suitable accommodation options in some regional centres: Unaffordable housing and limited rental accommodation is a big issue for resource communities, particularly in regional centres (e.g. Mackay). The provision of housing and essential services necessary to attract and support skilled employees must be carefully considered.

Different service boundaries between workforce development organisations: This was identified as a barrier to collaborative action, which needs to be addressed if the potential benefits of a workforce development strategy are to be fully realised for maximum regional benefit.

WHERE TO FROM HERE

There is strong support from key regional stakeholders for the development of a Central Queensland workforce development strategy, with particular focus on mechanisms that will improve communication and collaboration between workforce practitioners.

This requires a champion agency to lead the project in partnership with key stakeholders as follows:

Workforce Development Coordinators Network

- fund a part-time coordinator to establish the Network;
- develop a website to disseminate information; and
- host further Workforce Development Coordinator Forums.

Central Queensland Workforce Development Strategy

- utilise the Network to develop a Central Queensland Workforce Development Strategy that will address identified issues and opportunities;

- establish mechanisms for its implementation and ongoing management via the Network;
- Mapping of state and federal Workforce Development Initiatives, including roles, responsibilities and outcomes.

The outcomes of the workforce development project and the forum held in the Mackay-Isaac-Whitsunday region provide a good starting point for information sharing and future collaboration.

Once the Workforce Development Network is established and Central Queensland Workforce Development Strategy finalised, it is envisaged that regional groups may be in a position to maintain the network and strategy implementation with limited additional funding past the initial twelve months. However, this will be largely dependent on the future direction of the relevant state and federal government agencies and internal capability of workforce development organisations in the region.

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