

# BALONNE SHIRE TOURISM AND EVENTS STRATEGY 2025



Queensland  
AUSTRALIA

For the People  
**Balonne**  
Shire Council

ST GEORGE

DIRRANBANDI

BOLLON

THALLON

MUNGINDI

HEBEL

NINDIGULLY





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# PURPOSE

The purpose of this strategy is to collectively share the long-term vision and strategic direction for tourism and events in the Balonne Shire. It provides the framework to collaboratively maximise the economic benefits of tourism and events, whilst managing the environmental and social impacts, including benefits for the local community.



## **THE VISITOR ECONOMY** *Tourism is everybody's business*

The term 'visitor economy' is used to reflect a more contemporary definition of tourism, that includes people travelling not just for leisure, but for business, work, education, events and visiting friends and relatives. It brings together those industries that directly service visitors, for example accommodation, transport providers, tour companies and attractions, as well as indirectly, such as retail, medical and food production. The visitor economy is crucial for the Balonne Shire. It does not occur in isolation, but contributes to investment and jobs throughout a range of industry sectors regionally across the Shire.





# BACKGROUND

## OASIS

***noun***

a fertile spot in a desert,  
where water is found

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## BALONNE

***name***

derived from the Aboriginal  
word meaning pelican

# SETTING THE SCENE



Perched on the banks of the mighty Balonne River, the shire's main service centre, St George provides an oasis in the outback.

The shire consists of seven communities uniquely located on rivers and known for their rich history, inland fishing, birdlife, vast open spaces and relaxed country lifestyle. The communities include Bollon, Dirranbandi, Hebel, Mungindi, Nindigully, St George and Thallon.

With a population of 4,500, the shire is nestled 500km south west of Brisbane straddling the New South Wales border, spanning 31,000km<sup>2</sup>.

Famous as the inland fishing capital of Queensland, birdwatching and prolific agriculture, including cotton and grain, sheep and cattle grazing and horticulture (grapes, garlic, onions and blueberries – just to name a few).

Iconic attractions include the famous silo art of Thallon and the legendary Nindigully Pub.


The region stages over 20 major events annually, including Easter in the Vines, the Yellowbelly Country Music Festival, Paul Kelly and Friends Music Festival, Grazing at the Watering Hole, the River Dragon Festival, Nindigully Pig Races and more.

Strategically located on the intersections of five highways (Moonie, Carnarvon, Castlereagh, Barwon and Balonne Highways), including the major touring routes of the Adventure Way (Brisbane to Adelaide) and the Great Inland Way (Sydney to Cairns).



-  2 hrs ex Roma
- 2 hrs 30 mins ex Lightning Ridge
- 4 hrs ex Toowoomba
- 5 hrs 40 mins ex Brisbane
- 6 hrs 10 mins ex Gold Coast
- 10 hrs 30 mins ex Sydney
- 17 hrs 30 mins ex Adelaide

-  *Bus Queensland*
- 8 hrs 25 mins daily ex Brisbane

-  2 hrs REX twice weekly ex Brisbane
- 1 hr REX twice weekly ex Toowoomba
- 55 mins REX twice weekly ex Cunnamulla
- 1 hr 55 mins twice weekly ex Thargomindah



# STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The Balonne Shire Tourism and Events Strategy has been developed to align with local, regional and state strategies to ensure a coordinated approach.

*Australia – Tourism 2020*

*Qld – Advancing Tourism 2020*

*TEQ Marketing Strategy 2025*

*TEQ Events Strategy 2025*

*Southern Queensland Country Destination Plan*

***Balonne Shire Council:***

*Corporate Plan*

*Economic Development Plan*

*Tourism Strategy*

*Recreational Vehicle &  
Freedom Camping Strategy*

*Marketing Plan*



# PARTNERSHIPS

Creating a culture of collaboration within the Balonne Shire and the tourism and events industry, community organisations across all towns, with strategic partners and all levels of government will be instrumental in achieving long-term outcomes for the shire.





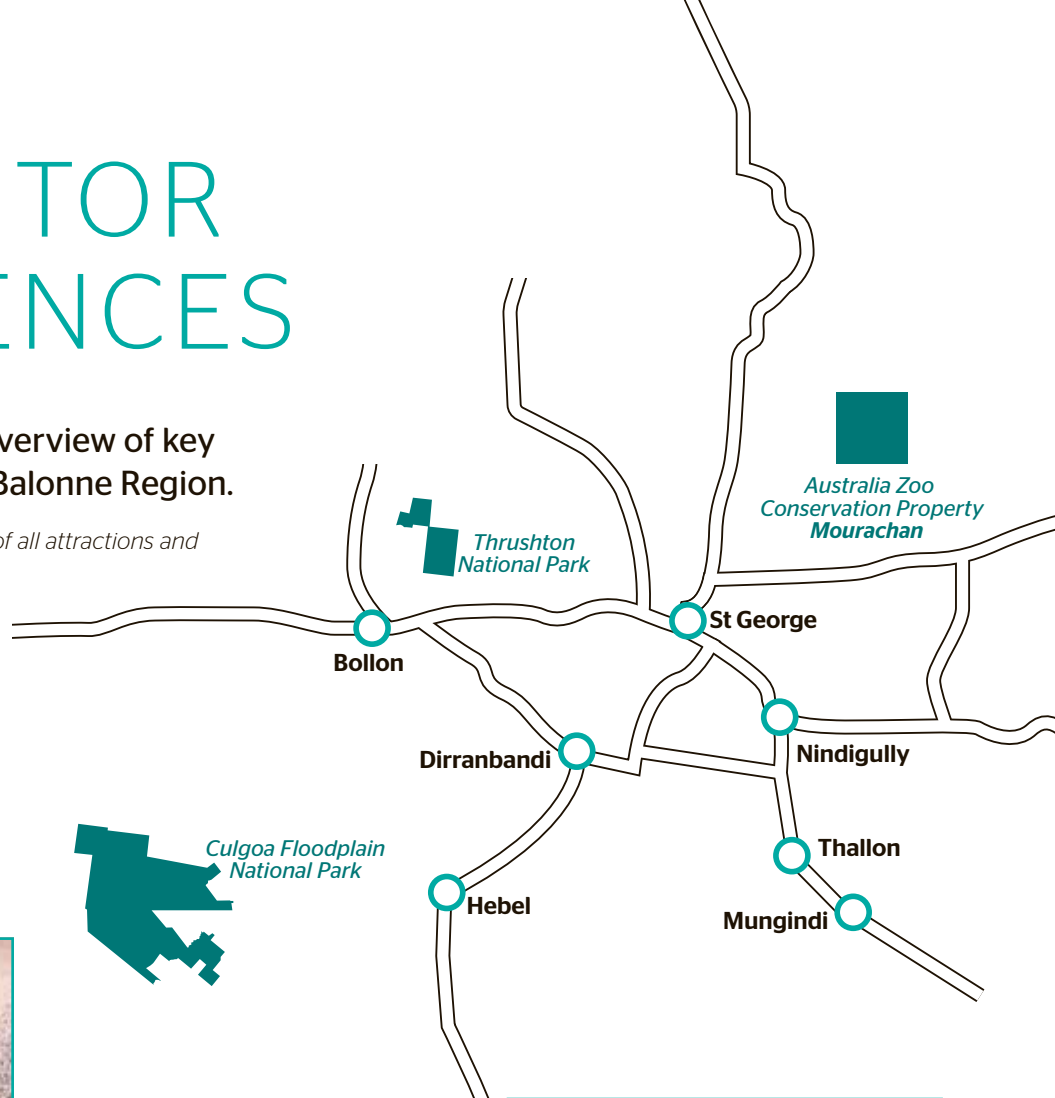
# SITUATION ANALYSIS



# KEY VISITOR EXPERIENCES

The following provides an overview of key tourism experiences in the Balonne Region.

Please note, this is not an exhaustive list of all attractions and experiences in the region.



## DIRRANBANDI

Population: 640

- Cubbie Station Cotton Tours
- Dirranbandi Bakery featuring Russian baked treats
- Rail Precinct with heritage trail and picnic facilities
- River Precinct
- Mosaic walkway
- Rural Transaction Centre



Hotel, Motel, Caravan Park



Cafes, Hotel, Bakery



## BOLLON

Population: 334

- Wallam Creek & Aboriginal Dreamtime artwork along walkway
- Bollon Heritage Centre
- Native koala habitat
- Walter Austin Memorial Park
- Deb's Café
- Bollon Hotel
- Thrushton National Park



Hotel/Motel, Caravan Park/Cabins



Cafe, Hotel



## HEBEL

Population: 149

- Historic Hebel Hotel
- Hebel General Store (est. 1890s)
- Culgoa Floodplain National Park
- Bokhara River



Hotel, Caravan Park



Cafe, Hotel

## SELF-DRIVE TRAILS

Cotton Self-Drive Trail, including the St George irrigation area.





## ST GEORGE

**Population:** 2,395

- Balonne River + riverbank walkway
- Sandytown River Cruises
- Riversands Winery
- Cotton, Vineyard, Heritage & Birdwatching Tours
- The Unique Egg
- Mani Tribes Art Gallery
- St George Heritage Centre
- St George Bakery
- Cacti & Succulent Garden
- Beardmore Dam



Motels, Caravan Parks/Cabins, B&B, Backpackers



Restaurants, Cafes, Hotels, Bakery



## NINDIGULLY

**Population:** 9

- Nindigully Pub (est 1864, longest continually licensed pub in Qld)
- Nindigully Tourist & Visitor Area
- Moonie River Fishing and Camping Area



Hotel/Backpackers



Hotel



## MUNGINDI

**Population:** 700

- One Ton Post
- Mungindi Hot Artesian Pool
- Two Mile Hotel
- Barwon River Parkland
- Rural Transaction Centre



Hotel, Motel, Caravan Park



Cafes, Hotel, Bakery



## THALLON

**Population:** 257

- Thallon Silo Art (Watering Hole Mural)
- Thallon Town Park
- McGeever Recreational Ground
- Francis Hotel (Thallon Pub)
- Giant Northern Hairy-Nosed Wombat statue
- ANZAC Memorial
- History Trails



Hotel/Motel



Hotel

## FISHING

Renowned as inland Queensland's fishing capital, catch a:

- Golden Perch (Yellowbelly)
- Fresh Water Catfish
- Murray Cod
- Silver Perch (Black Bream)
- Spangled Perch
- Blue Claw Yabby

## BIRDWATCHING & WILDLIFE

The Balonne Shire's name is derived from an Aboriginal word meaning Pelican.

Over 240 bird species recorded, including Major Mitchell's Cockatoo and the Glossy Black-Cockatoo.

Other native wildlife includes the endangered northern hairy-nosed wombat, koalas, echidnas, wallaroos, black faced wallabies and commonly sighted emus and western grey kangaroos.

## AGRICULTURE

Cotton & Grain Crops

Beef, Sheep, Lamb, Wool & Goats

Horticulture — onions, garlic, broccoli, blueberries, table grapes (just to name a few)



# VISITOR ECONOMY SNAPSHOT

## VALUE OF TOURISM

Total Spend<sup>1</sup>

**\$23.5m** (2017)

Total Domestic Spend<sup>2</sup>  
**\$21m** (2018)



## GENERATING

Total Visitor Nights<sup>1</sup>

**251,591** (2017)

Domestic Visitor Nights<sup>2</sup>  
**\$191,000** (2018)



## LENGTH OF STAY<sup>2</sup>

**3 nights**

(2018)



## VISITOR INFORMATION SERVICES<sup>3</sup>

**12,034**

Visitors (2019)

## SPEND<sup>2</sup>

**\$292** average spend per trip (2018)

**\$112** average spend per night (2018)

## PEAK VISITOR SEASON

**winter**

Shoulder seasons: *Autumn & Spring*  
Low season: *Summer*



## TOP 5 GEOGRAPHIC SOURCE MARKETS

### 1. seqld

Gold Coast, Logan, Ipswich, Lockyer Valley, Moreton Bay, Redlands, Sunshine Coast, Noosa, Scenic Rim, Somerset

### 2. greater melbourne

### 3. brisbane metro

### 4. sydney metro

### 5. wide bay burnett

Banana, Bundaberg, Cherbourg, Fraser Coast, Gympie, North Burnett, South Burnett

1 Source: Economy ID, Balonne Shire Tourism & Hospitality Value, 2020

2 Source: Local Government Area Profiles 2018, Balonne, Tourism Research Australia (excluding international visitors due to small sample size)

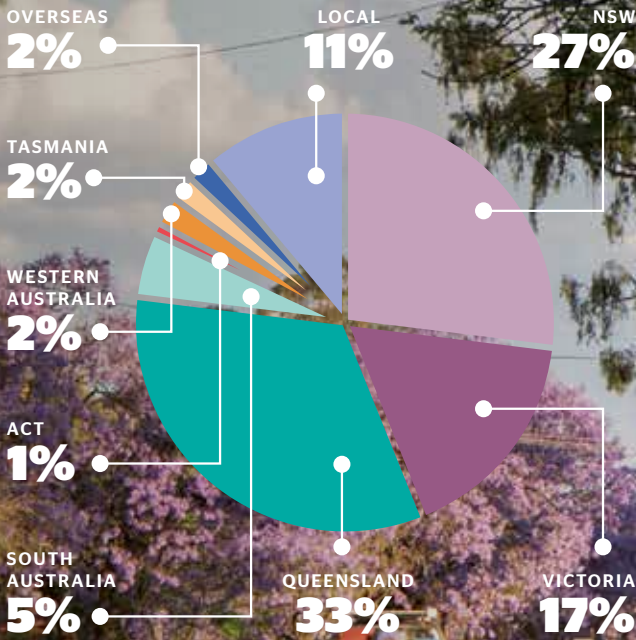
3 Source: Balonne Shire VIC Visitor Report, 2019



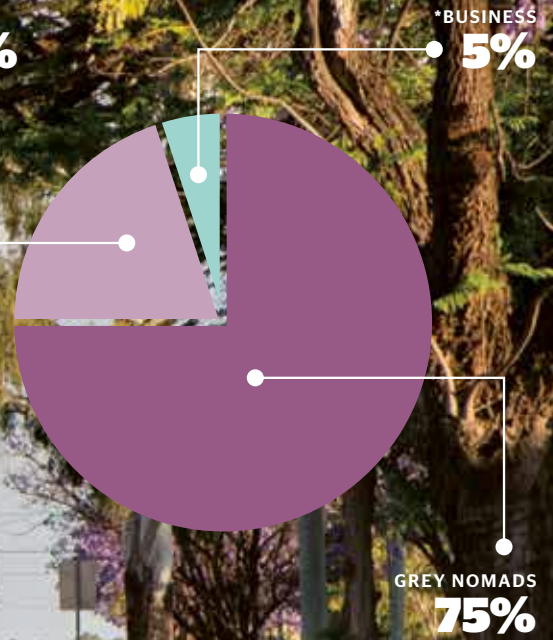
The charts below illustrate the origin of visitor enquiries at the St George Visitor Information Centre.

*\*It should be noted, motel accommodation and hotels estimate business travel much higher at upwards from 35%.*

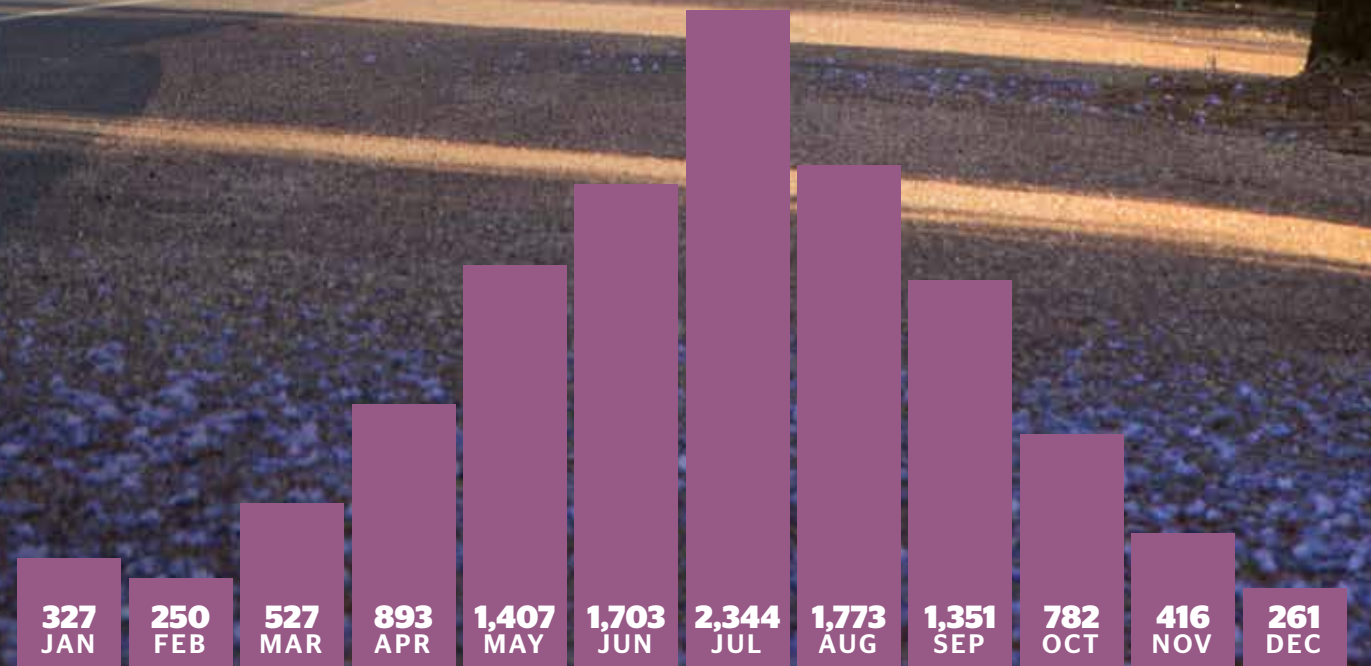
### VISITOR ORIGIN



### VISITOR TYPE



### VISITOR SEASONALITY



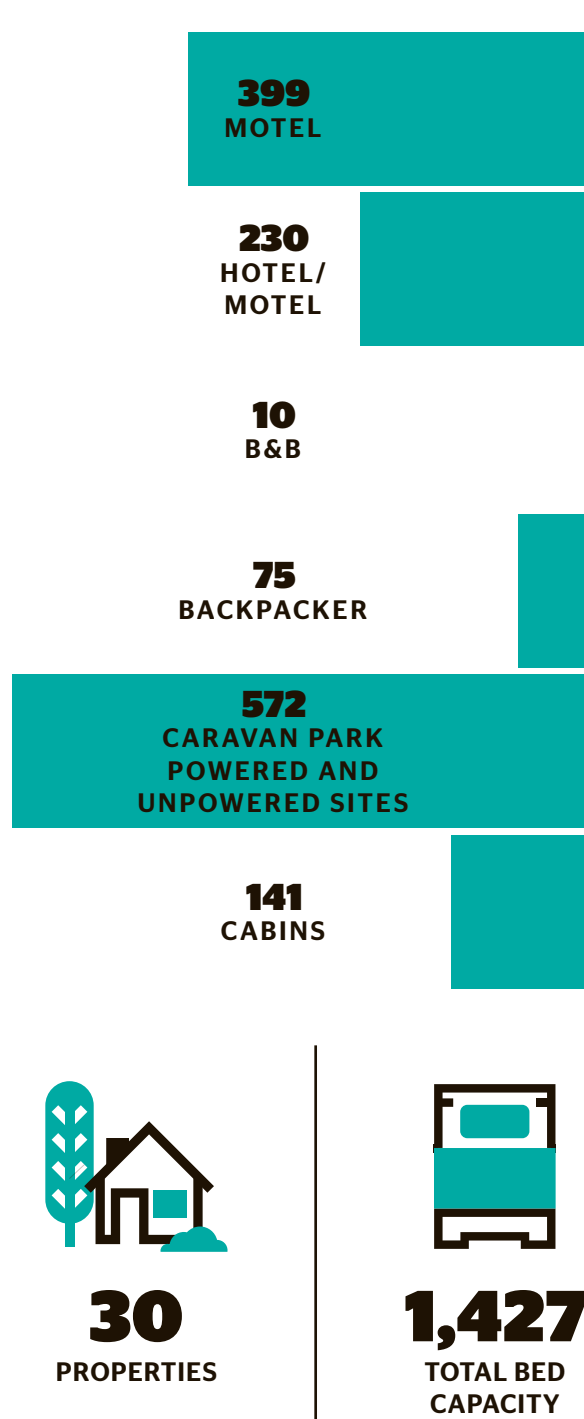
Source: St George Visitor Information Centre, 2019

# ACCOMMODATION SNAPSHOT

## ACCOMMODATION CAPACITY BY TOWN<sup>4</sup>

TOWN	TYPE	TOTAL CAPACITY	TOTAL ROOMS
BOLLON	Hotel/Motel	16	9
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>9</b>
DIRRANBANDI	Hotel/Motel	126	42
	<b>Caravan Parks</b>		
	▪ Cabins	15	9
	▪ On Site Vans	12	3
	▪ Unpowered Sites	10	5
	▪ Powered Sites	44	22
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>81</b>	
HEBEL	Hotel	8	4
	<b>Caravan Parks</b>		
	▪ Cabins	7	3
	▪ Budget Rooms	12	6
	▪ Unpowered Sites	6	3
	▪ Powered Sites	10	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>21</b>	
MUNGINDI	Hotels/Motels	42	26
	<b>Caravan Parks</b>		
	▪ Cabins	12	5
	▪ Unpowered Sites	28	14
	▪ Powered Sites	36	18
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>63</b>	
NINDIGULLY	Hotel	4	2
	Backpacker	10	3
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>
ST GEORGE	Hotels/Motels	425	131
	<b>Caravan Parks</b>		
	▪ Cabins	95	34
	▪ Unpowered Sites	118	59
	▪ Powered Sites	296	148
	B & B	10	5
	Backpackers	65	27
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,009</b>	<b>404</b>	
THALLON	Hotel	8	4
	Cabins	12	8
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>12</b>

## BED CAPACITY BY TYPE



<sup>4</sup> Source: Balonne Shire Accommodation Capacity, 2019



# EVENT SNAPSHOT

Based on the 2020 Balonne Shire Council Calendar of Events



**20+**

MAJOR FESTIVALS & EVENTS STAGED ANNUALLY



**8,640**

TOTAL EVENT VENUE CAPACITY



PEAK EVENT SEASON

**winter**

SPECIFICALLY JULY / APRIL / SEPTEMBER

## EVENT VENUE CAPACITY

<b>EVENT SPACES</b> 6 2,640 CAPACITY	<b>SHOWGROUNDS</b> 3 5,500+ CAPACITY
<b>CULTURAL/ CIVIC CENTRE</b> 1 CULTURAL CENTRE 1 CIVIC CENTRE 500+ CAPACITY	<b>GREEN SPACES</b> 10+
	<b>SPORTING VENUES</b> 14 SPORTING FACILITIES

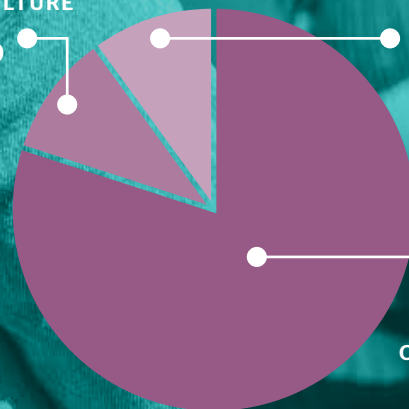
## EVENT TYPE

ARTS & CULTURE

**10%**

SPORTS

**10%**



COMMUNITY

**80%**

Source: Balonne Shire Council Assets Register, 2019

# MAJOR EVENTS CALENDAR

**A vibrant and balanced event portfolio can provide a definite, time-based reason to book now, stimulating tourism for the region and creating awareness as a destination.**

*The table below does not include all events staged in the Shire, but is provided as a snapshot of Major Events from the Balonne Shire 2020 Major Events Calendar.*

(SG) St George // (D) Dirranbandi // (N) Nindigully // (M) Mungindi // (T) Thallon

## JANUARY

26 Taste of Balonne Long Table (SG)

## MARCH

28/29 Battle on the Balonne (SG)

## APRIL

3/5 St George Off-Road Championships 399 (SG)

11/12 Easter in the Vines (SG)

18 Dirranbandi Show (D)

## MAY

3 St George Show (SG)

30/31 St George Golf Open (SG)

## JUNE

29 Yellowbelly Country Music Festival (SG)

## JULY

1-5 Yellowbelly Country Music Festival (SG)

4 Mungindi Races (M)

11 Paul Kelly & Friends Music Festival (D)

18 St George Cup Races (SG)

## AUGUST

8/9 Mungindi Show (M)

19/20 Balonne Cutting Horse Futurity (SG)

## SEPTEMBER

5 Grazing at the Watering Hole (T)

28 Sep - 4 Oct Mourachan, Australia Zoo's conservation property (SG)

2021 River Dragon Festival (SG) 2021

## NOVEMBER

28 Nindigully Pig Races (N)





# BENCHMARKING

Councils with similar inland geographic location on a river system or population size were selected to benchmark their structure, objectives, resourcing and processes in tourism and events. The audit included; **Longreach Regional Council**, **Narrabri Shire Council** and **Winton Shire Council**.

## OBJECTIVE OF EVENTS

The key objectives of tourism and events for all the councils were similar and include:

- Increase visitation in the region
- Increase the length of stay
- Increase economic benefit for the region
- Community health and wellbeing benefits
- Supporting local event organisers
- Attracting events to the region

## TOURISM & EVENT FRIENDLY DESTINATION PROFILING

To be known as a tourism and event friendly destination, local government areas are:

- Implementing a one-stop-shop with exceptional customer service to streamline the approval process for event organisers to assist in growing the event destination brand
- Streamlining procedures to minimise red tape

## ATTRACTING VISITORS

- Events are used as an impetus to stimulate tourism
- Established attractions with admission fees centred around the unique history and culture of the region are a drawcard to attract visitors

### KEY LEARNINGS

**A Significant Built Tourism Attractions and Hallmark Event/s** built around a destination's key selling point are a catalyst for attracting visitation, media profiling and private and public investment

**Economic Benefit:** demonstrated tourism and events economic benefits are often the **catalyst to attract funding** to build and invest in infrastructure

**Event Delivery:** delivery of council owned events is **outsourced** to industry experts when resources and skills are limited

**Event Attraction:** dedicated staff to attract events evaluated against council strategic objectives, fit for the region and the benefit they will provide for the community

**Sponsorship:** is assessed against criteria aligned to council objectives and require post-event acquittals to receive ongoing funding

**Branding:** Council branding can appear to be too 'corporate' when marketing tourism and events

**Training:** assists in event **sustainability, reinvigoration** and networking, providing opportunities for operators to **collaborate** and **package** products and experiences to ultimately **enhance** visitor experiences

**Natural Assets:** can be used to develop **unique tourism opportunities** and **tell the story** of the people, culture, environment and history

### RECOMMENDATIONS

**Significant visitor attraction** and hallmark event/s are required in the long-term to provide the impetus to increase length-of-stay

**Outsourcing Events:** using contractors for elements of destination events can **stimulate event growth** and potentially the overall economic benefit for the region

To be competitive in **event attraction**, a dedicated human resourcing to attract events, and an **event attraction budget** needs to be established

**Tourism and Event sponsorship:** and grants should **focus** on events that will provide significant **reputational** and **economic impact** to increase the **destination profile** and overnight visitor expenditure (OVE)

Provide **networking** and **training** opportunities for the **event** and **tourism industries** to unite, collaborate and develop product and experience packages

**Develop a Tourism and Event Toolkit** to provide Event Organisers with information about the region, suppliers and processes

**Ensure the existing infrastructure**, roads, transport and accommodation will support tourism and event growth and increased visitation with minimal impact to residents

**Develop branding** to use in tourism and event marketing

**Develop experiences** on the river that tell the story of the indigenous people, the river system, the night skies, the irrigation systems, the fish and wildlife found along the river systems

**Encourage the community:** to become involved in the delivery of tourism and events in the region

**Tourism and Event Friendly Reputation:** build council's reputation as a tourism and event friendly destination to encourage more visitors and attract public and private investment

# TRAVEL TRENDS

As competition rises for the tourism dollar and new destinations are being developed and explored, the travelling consumer is spoilt for choice. The need to be kept abreast of consumer travel trends to meet market needs is paramount.



## RECREATIONAL FISHING

One of Australia's most popular leisure activities. According to the Australian Department of Agriculture 3.4 million fishers participate in recreational fishing per year, with NSW, Victorians and Queenslanders accounting for the largest markets in this sector.

### *Opportunities for Balonne Region*

Located on major rivers and waterways, the shire could firmly cement its position as the inland fishing capital of Queensland with the development of an innovative inland fishing experience and major fishing event.



## CARAVAN + CAMPING

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has revealed there was a 4.6% increase in the number of campervans registered between 2017 and 2018.

According to Tourism Research Australia in 2016 there was a 20% rise in the number of nights spent in commercial caravan parks and a 47% increase in the number of nights spent in free camping in 2016, with one third of total caravan nights and half of motorhome nights spent free camping.

In terms of activities undertaken by domestic campers whilst on their trip, eating out was the most popular activity, followed by outdoor sightseeing and bush-walking, all being involved in more than 4 million caravan/camping trips.

### *Opportunities for Balonne Region*

Geographically located on the intersections of five highways and touring routes (Great Inland Way and Adventure Way), the development of iconic experiences, events and infrastructure to develop all towns as RV Friendly Towns (e.g. designated long-vehicle day use parking within walking distance of shops), signage, dump points and water fill stations will help to further harness this market.

## YOLDS

The new 'young olds' in the 65+ age bracket are one of the fastest growing travel markets. They are well travelled, are wealthier than their parents were at retirement and seeking significantly more active experiences.

### *Opportunities for Balonne Shire*

Active experiences such as walking and cycling tracks being developed around the river systems.





## FAMILY DYNAMICS

Changing family dynamics, including single and same sex parents and extended families and friends, traditional holiday packages and travel times are changing.

With the increase of freelance employment and home schooling, many families are not necessarily travelling in school holiday periods, opting for 'edventure', family gap years and getting 'off the grid' (even for just a few days without screen time).

The family market has seen an increase in many Outback Queensland locations, with some events, such as the Big Red Bash, actively developing experiences to suit families.

### *Opportunities for Balonne Shire*

Developing experiences with families in mind from passes for festival, event and attractions to water park experiences on the river.



## EMERGING + 'ONE-OF-A-KIND' EXPERIENCES

According to booking.com, almost two thirds of travellers (60 per cent) value experiences higher than material possessions, seeking authentic experiences. Emerging, undiscovered destination travel is also on the rise.

### *Opportunities for Balonne Shire*

Developing unconventional and 'one-of-a-kind' moments that can't be experienced anywhere else, from tours, accommodation to events, streetscapes and public infrastructure and art.

This could include the painting of water towers in every town with significant art works and evening light installations.

Being acutely aware of similar experiences available on the highway touring routes north/south/east/west.

## CONSCIOUS TRAVEL

Reflecting a growing concern among today's travellers for ethical and sustainable tourism options, seeking holidays that are purposeful and destinations that are open minded. A staggering 86 per cent of global travellers reportedly told booking.com they would be willing to spend some time on activities that offset the environmental impact of their stay.

### *Opportunities for Balonne Region*

Promote the wildlife and natural experiences, including rare and endangered species, such as the northern hairy-nosed wombat, national parks and expeditions and volunteering opportunities at Australia Zoo's conservation property - Mourachan. Highlight sustainable farming practices used in the region, engaging in conservation work or working on a host farm.





## LIVE LIKE A LOCAL

Visitors wanting to engage with and participate in the local culture.

### *Opportunities for Balonne Shire*

Sharing where the locals hang out, the country pubs, local insider tips, local jargon and featuring local legends/ personalities in content.



## WELLNESS TRAVEL

Health is high on the consumer agenda, with wellness travel becoming more active, such as growth in cycling and walking tours.

### *Opportunities for Balonne Shire*

Further development and promotion of walking and cycling tracks in each town along the river systems. Enhance with entrepreneurial opportunities, such as local bike hire, SUP, kayak and sunrise and sunset experiences e.g. walking tours, pilates, yoga classes to ensure overnight visitation.

## MICRO TRIPS

Growth of short-break and micro trips is still on the rise.

### *Challenge for Balonne Region*

The challenge for Balonne Region is to increase access with flight times to suit a weekend/short break/ event market with affordable fly-drive packages out of SEQId.

Potential opportunity could be to trial with small charters for major events to create demand.



## MAKE IT EASY FOR ME!

With 'I'm so busy' on many people's lips, the need for 'seamless' travel, where visitors can easily book on their smart phone is imperative.

### *Opportunities for Balonne Shire*

Increase the number of accommodation houses, events and tours online to 'make it easy' to purchase and travel. Package experiences to purchase with one ticket, and add ons online to increase visitor spend e.g. add on breakfasts, tours, lunch, dinner.



## SUPERFOODS, ORGANIC + WHOLESOME FOOD

A major Australian and international visitor trend includes food and wine, paddock to plate, coffee culture and foods relating to health.

### *Opportunities for Balonne Shire*

Develop authentic country food experiences to increase visitor satisfaction. The promotion and access to local produce e.g 100% Australian grown garlic and local blueberries, including the promotion of 'what's in season' and development of picking/tasting experiences.





# PEOPLE TRAVEL ON THEIR STOMACHS

Food is an important component in the tourism experience, with visitors often 'travelling on their stomachs'.

Tourism Australia's Consumer Demand Project revealed visitors' rational reasons for travel including safety and value for money, while their emotional reasons include:

- World class nature & wildlife experiences
- Food & wine

Tourism Australia consumer research reveals 'great food, wine and local cuisine' are a major factor influencing holiday decision making, ranking third ahead of world class beauty and natural environments.



**36%**

**GOOD FOOD AND WINE RANKS AS THE TOP EMOTIONAL FACTOR FOR SELECTING A DESTINATION FOR 36% OF TRAVELLERS**



**50%**

**OF TRAVELLERS ARE HUNGRY FOR FOOD AND WINE EVENTS, RATING A FOOD AND WINE FESTIVAL AS THE MOST APPEALING EVENT WHEN TRAVELLING**

The Balonne Shire offers visitors a range of food and drink experiences from historic country pubs to cafes and restaurants. Over 21 establishments are available, with the majority located in the St George region.

As a major agricultural region with significant horticultural production and livestock, the area has the opportunity to harness this major tourism trend.

The challenge is to differentiate the food experience offered from other

destinations, staging food markets or food and wine events will not suffice, it requires something the region and each town could become famous for.

Maximising the evening sky, sunsets and magnificent backdrops (e.g. rivers, historic pubs, Thallon silos, open farm field) could be prime locations for pop-up food events, ideally staged regularly to promote to visitors e.g. breakfast with the birds on the river or red dirt dinner under the stars, every Wednesday night.



Source: Tourism Australia







# STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES + OPPORTUNITIES

The audit of tourism and events in the Balonne Shire identified the following strengths, gaps and opportunities.

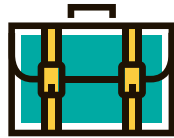
STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES + GAPS	OPPORTUNITIES
Nindigully home to Queensland's oldest, continuously run, renowned friendly pub, the Nindigully Pub	An estimated 77% of visitors are driving through the shire	Develop iconic visitor attractions, experiences and hallmark event/s building on the unique selling points/ competitive advantages of the shire to stop visitors passing through and increase overnight visitor expenditure
Thallon features award winning silo art that attract significant visitation and national media profiling	Limited attractions with supporting infrastructure to promote growth. Innovative attractions and experiences need to be developed to motivate visitors and existing experiences (such as the Thallon Silos) enhanced to increase length-of-stay and visitor spend	Develop water-based activities on the river to stimulate increased tourism opportunities, particularly in shoulder and low season
Each town in the Balonne Shire is situated on a river with fishing and birdwatching opportunities	Seasonality: most visitation occurs during winter	Take advantage of the Balonne Shire's location as the hub of connecting highways
Easily accessible with five highways and the Great Inland Way and the Adventure Way, two popular tourist highways passing through the Balonne Shire	A limited number of hospitality operators are open after 5pm weekdays and 12pm on weekends	Harness attendees of events in other regions passing through the Balonne Shire en-route to the destination. Opportunities exist to develop an event prior or post to convert passing traffic into overnight visitation
The Balonne Shire has a rich indigenous history and culture and features in the Southern Queensland Indigenous Trail	Compared to other regions with a similar population, the Balonne Shire has a limited number of events that attract outside visitation or could be called hallmark events	Collaboration between tourism and event operators to develop packages that will increase overnight visitor expenditure
Space and abundance of wildlife for nature-based activities	The shire has limited event capacity and infrastructure to support event growth	Creation of tourism and event brand for the shire, leveraging wider regional and state tourism brands
Potential for agritourism experiences. The largest cotton farm in the southern hemisphere and significant beef, sheep and horticulture (producing onions, table grapes, garlic, citrus, blueberries etc)	A database with event venues, capacity and contact details for supporting operators is not readily available	Develop an online toolkit for tourism and event operators to assist operators and increase the reputation of the Balonne Shire as an event friendly destination
	Limited digital promotion and destination profiling	Develop a balanced event portfolio with a program of events to provide visitors with a reason to visit during shoulder and low season
	Limited indigenous tourism: the local indigenous heritage and culture has not been showcased to its full potential	Develop indigenous experiences incorporating the river, wildlife, history and culture
		Develop training workshops to increase tourism and event operator capacity, encourage networking opportunities

# TARGET MARKETS

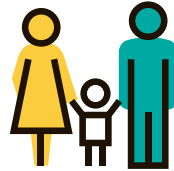
Most visitors to the St George Visitor Information Centre travel for the purpose of:



**75%**  
HOLIDAY



**5%**  
BUSINESS



**20%**  
VISITING FRIENDS  
+ FAMILY (VFR)

Commercial accommodation in St George estimate business travel much higher at upwards of 35%. It should be noted that business travel to the shire would account for a higher percentage, as these figures only measure those who use the Visitor Information Centre.

## HIGH VALUE TRAVELLERS (HVT)

To increase the economic impact, it is recommended to further develop visitor experiences to appeal to travellers who will generate a greater overnight visitor expenditure

Tourism and Events Queensland and Tourism Australia have identified such visitors as High Value Travellers (HVTs) who spend more than the average traveller on travel and are aligned to experiences offered in Queensland and Australia.

The domestic intrastate and interstate markets could offer good potential for the Region, including 18-49 travelling with children and 50+ market travelling without children.

## PRIMARY MARKETS



**CARAVAN / CAMPING**  
/ RV / 4WD



**FISHING / BOATING**



**BUSINESS TOURISM**

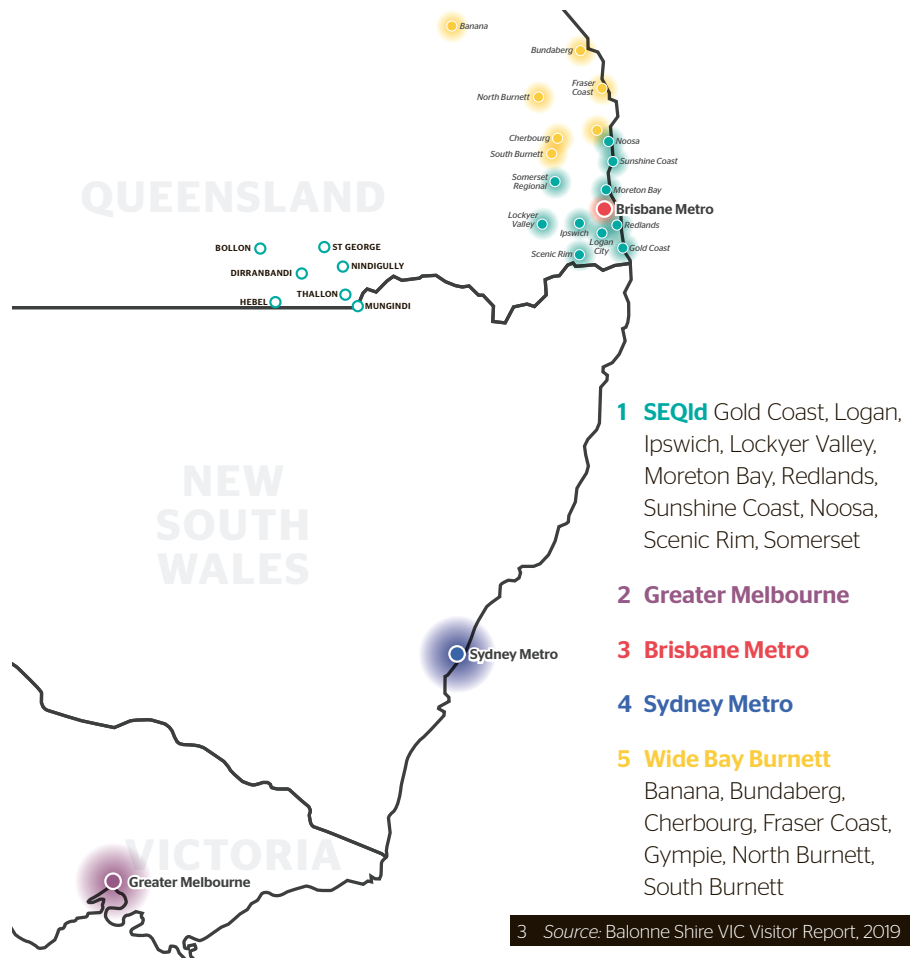


**EVENTS:** Major Events,  
Sporting Meets



**SPECIAL INTEREST / EMERGING MARKETS:**  
Hunting, Pilgrimages

## TOP 5 GEOGRAPHIC SOURCE MARKETS<sup>3</sup>











# COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES

## The Balonne Shire provides an authentic Australian rural country experience west of the Great Divide.

What sets the shire apart are its rivers and waterways, providing an oasis along the highways, giving way to major agricultural production, birdlife and native wildlife.

For the region's major target markets, this 'oasis' concept is very appealing as they are travelling hundreds, sometimes thousands of kilometres, on dry, outback highways.

To remain competitive and increase overnight visitor expenditure, Balonne Shire needs to develop innovative and iconic visitor experiences and events like nowhere else, based on the shire's unique selling points and competitive advantages.

## HERO EXPERIENCES + PILLARS

The Balonne Shire's visitor experiences link to Tourism and Events Queensland's key Experience Pillars of Outback & Adventure, Natural Encounters, Events and Queensland Lifestyle. It specifically delivers on Southern Queensland Country's themes of:

**HISTORY AND HERITAGE**

**AUTHENTIC COUNTRY LIFE**

**NATURAL BEAUTY**



## POTENTIAL ICON EXPERIENCES

### RIVERS AND WATERWAYS



St George and towns of the Balonne Shire are set on inland rivers and waterways, providing an oasis along the highways. Further activation of the waterways with participatory experiences around sunrise, sunset and evening will help to increase overnight visitor expenditure.

### RURAL LIFESTYLE



Over 50% of businesses in the shire are based around agriculture, with the southern hemisphere's largest cotton farm, Cubbie Station in Dirranbandi. In addition to cotton and grain crops, the region is a major beef, sheep, wool and horticulture producer. It is one of the largest producers of table grapes, onions and garlic. Other horticultural crops include carrots, broccoli, blueberries, pomegranate, citrus and more.

### INLAND FISHING



St George and the region has the opportunity to further position its place as the 'Inland Fishing Capital of Queensland' due to its fishing 'catch', including Golden Perch (Yellowbelly), Fresh Water Catfish, Murray Cod, Silver Perch (Black Bream), Spangled Perch and Blue Claw Yabby. The development of an iconic attraction/s based around fishing and the river systems could be a major impetus to spur visitation and private and public investment.

### INDIGENOUS CULTURE



From the Mani Tribes Art Gallery in the main street of St George, Aboriginal Dreamtime Artwork along the Bollon walkway and culture history in the Bollon Heritage Centre to the boomerang statue at Nindigully. Potential lies in further developing indigenous content within existing visitor experiences and events, including packaging and the development of indigenous visitor enterprises.

### AUSTRALIAN NATIVE WILDLIFE



The shire has prolific birdlife, including Major Mitchell's cockatoos, glossy black-cockatoos, endangered northern hairy-nosed wombats, koalas, echidnas, wallaroos, black faced wallabies and commonly sighted pelicans, emus and western grey kangaroos. Development of content, from professional imagery to stories of the native wildlife (even if you can't readily see them) could provide depth of the Balonne story for visitors.

### HISTORY AND HERITAGE



Heritage buildings, centres and walking trails and the historic country pubs of the shire provide authentic visitor experiences. Opportunities could include the painting and lighting for evening heritage walks of historic building facades. In each of the towns in the Balonne Shire, the pubs provide a central meeting place and authentic visitor experience.

## ICON ATTRACTIONS

### THALLON SILO ART



### NINDIGULLY PUB





# INTO THE FUTURE

To grow overnight visitor expenditure for the Balonne Shire into the future, the shire will need to develop experiences that not only stop passing traffic, but ensure overnight visitation.

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To solidify its position as Queensland's Inland Fishing Capital and increase overnight visitor expenditure, attractions, events and experiences – like nowhere else – will need to be enhanced and developed.

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To help ensure a sustainable tourism and events industry, developing events and visitor experiences in shoulder and low seasons will help to counteract the effects of seasonality.





# THE 5 YEAR VISION

In five years time, the Balonne Shire is known as an essential overnight stay destination as an 'oasis' in Queensland's Southern Outback.

It capitalises on its strategic location on major inland highway routes and is firmly positioned as Queensland's Inland Fishing Capital.

It is home to iconic art installations and major attractions that build on the shire's competitive advantages with hallmark and destination events.

The result is a region famous for iconic attractions and events, a positive media profile and resilient tourism and events industry with year round employment.

# GOALS + OBJECTIVES



— ATTRACT EXTERNAL VISITATION —



## OVERNIGHT VISITOR EXPENDITURE

To increase year round employment and a resilient and sustainable tourism and event industry



## POSITIVE DESTINATION PROFILE

Grow a positive destination profile for the shire to attract external visitation and encourage overnight visitation



## REGIONAL DISPERSAL

Encourage regional dispersal throughout the towns of the shire to increase visitor length-of-stay and expenditure



## COMMUNITY BENEFIT

Improve community connectivity, civic pride and liveability through the development of tourism and events

# CRITICAL SUCCESS STRATEGIES

[1]

**GAME  
CHANGERS +  
ONE-OF-A KIND  
EXPERIENCES**

[2]

**HALLMARK +  
DESTINATION  
EVENTS**

[3]

**DESTINATION  
BRAND +  
PROFILE**

[4]

**INDUSTRY  
CAPABILITY +  
CAPACITY**

*Please note, projects and infrastructure identified in the strategy are not deemed a Balonne Shire Council financial commitment. They have been identified from the consultation process and are items for future prioritisation and may be subject to collaboration with strategic partners and multi-partner funding.*

# GAME CHANGERS + ONE-OF-A-KIND EXPERIENCES

Major projects and experiences that can't easily be replicated anywhere else were identified throughout consultation as 'game changers' for the shire. These projects and experiences build on Balonne Shire's competitive advantages and potential growth in key target markets.

With growing competition for the travel dollar, the need for accommodation, attractions, events, visitor services and the wider visitor economy including transport and infrastructure to elevate their visitor experience is required.

As the competition has grown, the quality of attractions and experiences along the major highways leading to the Balonne Shire has also improved, with many small regional and remote towns offering significant visitor experiences.

The need to differentiate and elevate the experience throughout the shire is paramount to remain competitive into the future, and to reduce visitors 'just passing through'.

Investment in private and public infrastructure and experience development will be an integral component to growing overnight visitor expenditure.

Investment by all levels of government in high quality and innovative tourism and event infrastructure and experiences will not only attract external visitation, it will help spur private sector investment and sustainability to grow employment.

Improvements in tourism infrastructure and visitor experiences at key locations throughout the shire will help deliver a better experience for both visitors and local residents and assist in regional dispersal.



## ICONIC INLAND FISHING ATTRACTION

The shire needs to solidify its position and deliver on its promise as the Inland Fishing Capital of Queensland. Located on major inland waterways, it is ideally positioned to do this.

The development of the attraction/ experience would need to be highly interactive and state-of-the-art as one of Queensland's iconic attractions.

The experience could include an immersive underwater with walk through, touch and dine by the river/ billabong experiences.

Such an experience could be a base point with satellite experiences throughout the shire, including a major fishing event.

It would need to build and innovate on the success of recent marine life based attractions, such as the

Cairns Aquarium and the Barramundi Discovery Centre, both opened in the past two years.

The **Barramundi Discovery Centre** in Karumba (pictured above) is an example of a state-of-the-art building including visitor services, experiences and conferencing facilities.

South of Balonne Shire in Narrandera is the **John Lake Tourist Centre** which features an aquarium of inland fish species of the Murray Darling, a 60 seat theatre and extensive picnic area.

Please refer to case studies on p 44.

The development of a pre-feasibility and concept plan to source funding and commercial partners is recommended to commence the project in the short term.



## THE OASIS EXPERIENCE

To capitalise on the shire's location on major inland highways and waterways, the activation of river precincts is highly recommended.

Developing 'oasis' experiences across the shire will help to stop more pass through traffic. It will differentiate the shire from other towns on the highways and something the shire could become famous for, building on its unique selling points.

It will be essential to elevate the river and waterway experiences throughout the shire, delivering on the promise of an 'oasis' experience focusing on the linking of the rivers and waterways with the main streets in each town.

This could include further enhancement of riverwalks and biketrails, evening lighting and artwork installations (e.g. on the Gully Walk, Nindigully; the Dreamtime Walk, Bollon and The Watering Hole, Thallon), shade cloth/cooling areas and water-based activities.

The Balonne River in St George provides the opportunity to develop a major riverwalk experience to attract higher visitation during shoulder and low seasons.

The river walk experience could be developed with floating boardwalks, beach front, water sports, ski jump and family friendly water parks.

Such a development could be enhanced by calling for expressions of interest for private enterprise to operate experiences such as kayak, canoe, paddle boat and stand up paddle board hire and potentially pop-up dining/ coffee opportunities.

### **Pop-Up Water Park**

A major pop-up water park could create a significant attraction during summer to attract the family market. The **Coolum Aqua Park** on Queensland's Sunshine Coast is an ideal example.

### **Great Escape Spa**

A wellness trail linked with the **Dirranbandi River & Rail Precinct** with an artesian waterfall and spa could become an iconic experience delivering on the oasis theme and wellness travel trend.

### **Streetscape Masterplanning**

To further build on the 'oasis' theme to stop drive through traffic the landscaping with water wise gardens and public art is highly recommended.

Landscaping and art installations to guide visitor traffic to increase the linking of main streets with riverbank and water experiences is highly recommended.

Where possible develop water infrastructure to further enable treescapes and gardens.



### **When in Drought**

When in drought and water shortage periods, streetscaping should include art installations, murals and painting of street poles and building facades to reflect an oasis theme.



Carmichael Lynch Water Tower projections x Minneapolis College of Art

## AFTER DARK

Partnerships with communities in each town of the shire to create iconic after dark experiences will help to significantly grow overnight visitor expenditure into the future.

After dark experiences staged in shoulder and low seasons contribute to alleviating the pressures of seasonality, particularly during late spring and summer, and early autumn.

After dark experiences identified include:

- Solar lighting of riverwalks and heritage trails with uplights on trees
- Lighting of murals and artwork, such as 'light up the Thallon Silos'
- **Dirranbandi's Glow by Night** water towers with glow in the dark artwork and linking the flow of glow in the dark artwork to the main street for building facades on the main highway.

The use of water towers could further the oasis and inland fishing theme. Where possible activate the artwork with moving installations on alternate evenings to create an overnight attraction and regional dispersal.

Further development of after dark events is outlined on p 45.



Mani Tribes Art Gallery

## INDIGENOUS CULTURE

Balonne Shire has a living indigenous culture and was home to the only known Aboriginal Fighter Pilot to serve in World War II, Warrant Officer, Leonard Waters.

The active involvement of first nations in experience development is recommended with the Queensland Government launching 2020 as the Year of Indigenous Tourism with a new Indigenous Tourism Development Service to support new and existing indigenous tourism operators.

The Balonne Shire is featured in the South West Queensland Indigenous Cultural Trail.

Indigenous history, legends and stories, including current attractions, such as the Mani Tribes Art Gallery, the Aboriginal Dreamtime Artwork along the walkway in Bollon and the giant

boomerang at Nindigully should be further featured in tourism and event marketing content and packaging.

The Mani Tribes Art Gallery provides packaging opportunities.

Where appropriate theatrically orchestrated Welcome to Country at events could be staged.

The input and development of the indigenous story and significance of locations should be developed with tour operators.

The employment of first nations people within the tourism industry should be encouraged.

Case Studies from Dolphin Dreaming and Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours are included in the Tourism + Events Audit Document attached.

## EXPERIENCE PASS

The packaging of experiences with each other to create an experience pass, such as those available for theme parks, the 3 Park Super Pass or Longreach Legends Pass and the Big 3 Pass should be developed to increase length-of-stay and spend.

Packaging could be further developed with experience passes and accommodation options from camping, caravan, cabin, pub and motel accommodation.



## TOURISM EXPERIENCE FUND

To encourage local businesses to innovate and develop 'one-of-a-kind' experiences, it is recommended to develop a Tourism Experience Fund.

The fund could be developed along the lines of the event funding program, with clear objectives, criteria and outcomes.

The funding program could also act as a conduit for other state and federal funding programs.

## AIR ACCESS

Increased air access is crucial for Balonne Shire to realise growth in business tourism and grow higher yield leisure travellers for events and special interest (e.g. hunting).

Lobbying for more flights with two night stopovers would help to cater for the needs of these markets and meet travel trends for micro and short-break trips.





## TOURISM + EVENT FRIENDLY DESTINATION

Developing the Balonne Shire's reputation as a tourism and event friendly destination will be essential in enabling existing tourism businesses and events to develop and attract new tourism investment and events.

To achieve this reputation, a can do with a corporate culture that tourism and event centric with a whole of Council and regional approach with strategic partners.

Where possible the council could offer a 'one stop shop' approach to facilitate and assist tourism businesses and event organisers to deliver visitor experiences that will provide greater return-on-investment, based on the strategic goals to attract outside visitation to achieve:

- Overnight visitor expenditure
- Positive destination profile
- Regional dispersal, and
- Community benefit

## WILDLIFE ENCOUNTERS

Balonne Shire provides abundant bird watching opportunities and other Australian wildlife opportunities. Emus, kangaroos and wallaroos are readily sighted from the highways and waterways. Although not easily sighted, koala colonies exist and the region is home to the endangered giant northern hairy-nosed wombat.

The Mourachan Conservation Property purchased by Steve and Terry Irwin of Australia Zoo, located north east of St George is testament to the value of the natural environment and wildlife to be experienced in the region.

Building on this natural asset and the conscious travel trend to 'give back', native Australian wildlife experiences, such as nocturnal spot lighting, viewing platforms and interpretative signage could be further promoted and developed.

A series of bird hides to observe wildlife and birds at close quarters could be developed and link to river walks and above water ways. Architecturally designed bird hides could be developed, similar to carefully crafted small shelters that were designed by Biotope to help establish the Arctic town of Varanger to become established as one of the best birding destinations in Northern Europe.



Steelines bird hide by night

## RV FRIENDLY TOWNS

The development of RV Friendly towns throughout the shire.

This could include the prominent signing of 'RV Friendly Town' with major 'welcome' signage and pull-off areas with visitor maps in strategic locations.

To grow the market, recommendations include long-vehicle parking (RVs, boat trailers) in key locations within walking distances, a regional signage strategy and leveraging highway committee and caravan and camping networks.

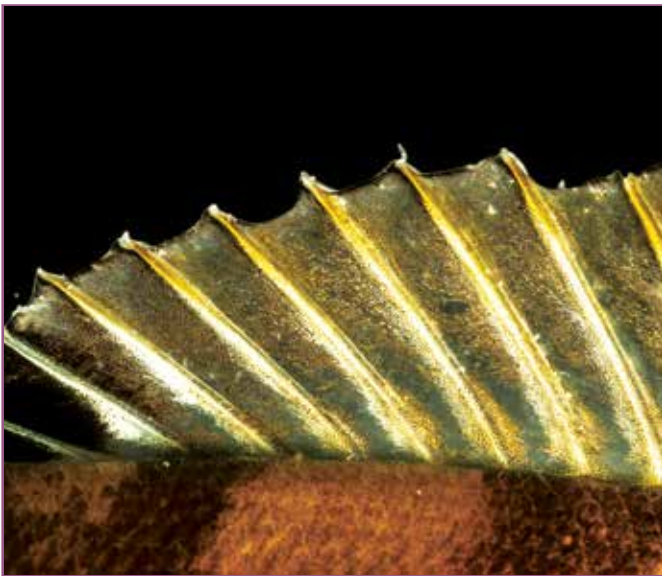


# HALLMARK + DESTINATION EVENTS

In recent years, Balonne Shire's share of voice in the media has often been associated with negative stories relating to drought and water consumption on catchment areas.

This can affect visitor perceptions of the region, hence events, particularly hallmark and destination events can play a pivotal role in amplifying a positive destination image for the Balonne Shire, its towns and communities.

Events encourage visitors to 'book now' and also have the propensity to attract visitors in shoulder and low seasons.



## HALLMARK + DESTINATION EVENTS

It is highly recommended to look at new and existing events with hallmark and destination potential that build on the shire's competitive advantages.

Fishing and water sports, such as water skiing championships were identified throughout consultation.

### *The Million Dollar Yellowbelly*

To secure the shire's position as the Inland Fishing Capital of Queensland, a major fishing competition could be an ideal opportunity. It would need to be a major event, the likes of events

such as *Million Dollar Fish* in the Northern Territory and the *Boyne Tannum Hookup* near Gladstone.

With September to November the best time to catch a Yellowbelly, a major fishing competition at this time could provide a good shoulder season event.

The event could be held across the shire to create visitor dispersal.

The event would be ideal to activate the development of the proposed Inland Fishing attraction.

Such an event could also link to the *Yellowbelly Country Music Festival*.

## REINVIGORATE EXISTING EVENTS

Some existing events have potential to develop into hallmark and destination events, through reinvigoration and innovation of their event experience, staging and programming, professional support to increase media profile and external visitation.

Emerging events with strong destination potential include the *River Dragon Festival*. The event strongly builds on the oasis and river theme and the name of the town St George. The event could return to its roots around the legend of Saint George and the dragon and its linking to St George being discovered on Saint George day.

It could be further developed along the Balonne River precinct with development of the dragon boat regatta, skiing and interactive water sports. In the long term, the festival could become a major event on Australian and international Dragon Boat Championships calendars. A good example of water sport programming is featured in the case study on p 45 of the *Longreach Paddle Regatta*.

The staging of existing events in iconic locations, such as the Balonne River is encouraged to further grow their destination appeal. The Balonne River is an ideal event space that builds on the oasis theme, has natural viewing opportunities and is within walking distance of accommodation, pubs and retail to maximise the potential visitor spend.





## SPECIAL INTEREST EVENTS

Events could help to activate higher yield special interest markets to show market demand to warrant development investment for private enterprise. Events to attract special interest markets identified during consultation included:

- Wildlife expeditions, e.g. Australia Zoo's Mourachan Conservation Property
- Art & Photography
- Hunting, particularly for niche international markets
- Military & pilgrimage style events to celebrate significant historic dates
- Off road motorsports e.g. St George 399 by the SEQld Off Road Racing Association

## PRE + POST EVENTS

The leveraging of major events that occur outside the region, where visitors pass through the Balonne Shire Council, such as those travelling to the **Birdsville Big Red Bash**, **Birdsville Races** and **Lightning Ridge Opal Festival** provide opportunity to develop pre and post events.

The Windorah **International Yabby Races** were developed by locals who sat in the pub, watching cars driving through the town without stopping, to attend the **Birdsville Races**. The yabby races are staged the Wednesday afternoon

before the **Birdsville Races** to increase overnight visitation in the region.

The **Charleville Half Way There Shindig** is an event developed for visitors on their way to the **Big Red Bash**. It includes a street party with food stalls and local artists and musicians. This event works particularly well as the halfway travel point from Brisbane to Birdsville.

A similar lead time is St George to Longreach at 8.5 hours and from Sydney 9.5 hours.



## AFTER DARK EVENTS

Further development of After Dark events, such as the **Taste Balonne Long Table** in January is an ideal example of staging evening events in summer during the low season and building on the competitive advantage of the Balonne Shire.

Lighting events, such as **Christmas in the Country** lights was a relatively low cost evening event highlighted.

### **The Big Sleepout**

A major event suggestion raised during consultation to capitalise on the conscious travel trend to 'give back' and the shire's native wildlife was called '**The Big Sleepout**' under the stars to raise funds for endangered species such as the great northern hairy-nosed wombat. Development of this event with high profile celebrities could help to increase profile and also raise funds to contribute to the development of visitor experiences that have long-term fundraising opportunities for the host town and the species.

### **The Great Aussie Pub Crawl/Tour**

The shire is home to some iconic and heritage pubs including the Nindigully and Hebel pubs which are over 100 years old, the Thallon pub and the art deco Australian Hotel in St George. An event with evening experiences and stays at the pubs throughout the shire could be developed and promoted as the Hottest Great Aussie Pub Crawl during summer months.

## DESTINATION BRAND + PROFILE

We need to recognise the marketing budget for many regional destinations is often smaller than the annual budget of a major chain hotel or attraction. With limited budgets it is imperative the shire continues to embrace and participate in the greater Southern Queensland Country and Outback Queensland destination brands and campaigns and link with Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ) and Tourism Australia (TA) initiatives.







## BRAND DEVELOPMENT

The development of a contemporary tourism and events brand for Balonne Shire, that leverages the regional, state and national tourism brands is required.

Local applications to the parent brand needs to be developed for local town/village application, as visitors do not know where Balonne Shire is.

## HIGHWAY LINKS

The brand and marketing for Balonne Shire should continue to link with highway touring routes, such as the Great Inland Way and Adventure Way.

## TOURISM & EVENT BRAND TOOLKIT

To ensure the amplification of the region, a digital tourism and events brand toolkit that can be accessed by the wider tourism and events industry through the Balonne Shire is essential.

This will help to reinforce consistent messaging and could include brand templates, media releases and professional images and digital footage.

## CONTENT CREATION

The development of professional event and destination images and footage is essential. This includes images and footage to reflect the key competitive advantages, including rivers, fishing, Australian wildlife, indigenous culture, rural lifestyle and heritage.

Where possible, partner with SQCT, TEQ and TA to ensure this content is included in the regional, state and national image and footage tourism libraries.

***83 percent of respondents responded 'No' when asked whether or not their business is listed with the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse.***

## DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION + MEDIA PR

Balonne Region tourism operators and events need to increase their digital distribution on tourism booking engines and websites such as TripAdvisor and the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW).

Increasing content and compelling images and footage through social media platforms and Media PR units with Southern Queensland Country, Tourism and Events Queensland and Tourism Australia is essential.

Tourism and events need to amplify their content, messaging and digital distribution to create cut-through in a competitive market place and gain greater share of media voice.

Strategies to amplify destination profiling include:

- Integrating Balonne Shire destination images into event marketing, linking the regional visitor website and social media channels to event/festival websites.
- Subject to privacy laws, developing a database of visitors from tourism and event online ticketing systems to provide targeted visitor insights.
- Encouraging tourism and event organisers to participate in tourism marketing with strategic partners (e.g. SQCT, OQTA, TEQ, TA and applicable industry associations e.g. Caravanning Queensland).
- Maximising the Balonne Shire's exposure at events and with tourism operators, e.g. with signage placement, provision of destination images and footage to tourism event organisers for social media and television broadcasts.
- Encouraging established tourism and events to enter business, tourism and event awards could further profile the Balonne Shire's tourism and events on a regional, state and national stage.

To grow Balonne Shire's visitor economy and further develop its reputation as a tourism and event friendly destination will require building capacity of the tourism and event industry, the wider visitor economy, council, strategic partners and local community.

### TOURISM + EVENT TRAINING PROGRAM

To identify the training needs, tourism and event industry representatives were surveyed as part of the consultation process to indicate what areas of training they would attend. Increasing tourism industry capacity through a three to five year training and mentoring program is recommended.

- 'Digital & Social Media' (67%)
- 'Increasing Visitor Length-of-Stay & Spend' (50%)
- 'Branding & Marketing' (50%)
- 'Grant + Tourism Submission Writing' (50%)
- 'Strategic Business Planning' (50%)
- 'Networking' (42%).

### EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT + PACKAGING PROGRAM

To realise the region's 5 year vision to stop pass through traffic with 'one-of-a-kind' experiences and increase overnight visitor expenditure, an experience development and packaging program is recommended to be rolled out over a three to five year period as part of the tourism and event training program.

### INDUSTRY NETWORKING

During consultation a strong desire for networking between the tourism industry and event organisers was cited. To facilitate this process it is recommended the tourism committee is expanded to include events, with meetings held in tourism venues around the shire. These meetings could be held the updating of progress on the strategy and sub action plans, information exchanges, market sector updates and tourism trends, case studies and training included.

### WELCOME PROGRAM

To further create a tourism and event friendly destination, a welcome program across the shire could be developed.

This could include the involvement of local police and wider community being encouraged to welcome visitors and be educated on the attractions within the shire.

A customer service program for the wider visitor economy, such as the Welcome to Noosa program is an easy to use, online professional development program aimed at delivering memorable experiences for visitors and local customers alike.

A concept could be modelled around the Brisbane Greeters Program where local volunteers, passionate about their hometown, take visitors on complimentary walking/cycling tours of their favourite places to introduce visitors to the city.

The program could include an *Explore Your Own Backyard* media campaign in local and regional media, including social media.

### BEST OF QUEENSLAND

Where possible all tourism and event operators should be encouraged to be part of the *Best of Queensland* program.

The program is an innovative program that guides industry to deliver exceptional customer experiences, create positive word of mouth, help attract more visitors, grow expenditure and increase market share.

The program is a partnership with Southern Queensland Country Tourism, the Queensland Tourism Industry Council and the Department of Innovation, Tourism Industry Development and the Commonwealth Games. It identifies and recognises experiences that best bring the Queensland story to life and consistently deliver a high-quality visitor experience.

The program is based on an independent set of criteria that incorporates online customer reviews, responds to consumer expectations and reflects industry best practice.

All operators in the program receive a personalised bench-marking report, allowing them to celebrate their successes and continually deliver exceptional experiences.





LOCAL &  
FRESH!  
Picked this  
morning!

**MONITORING +  
ACTION PLANS**



# ACTION PLAN

The following Action Plan outlines the implementation of the strategic priorities for the Balonne Shire Tourism and Event Strategy 2025. It is intended as a working document that is reviewed and updated regularly and will rely on the collaboration of strategic partnerships across the public and private sector.

## CRITICAL SUCCESS STRATEGIES

### [1] GAME CHANGERS + ONE-OF-A-KIND EXPERIENCES

- Iconic Inland Fishing Attraction
- The Oasis Experience
- After Dark
- RV Friendly Towns
- Indigenous Culture
- Experience Pass
- Air Access
- Tourism + Events Friendly Destination
- Tourism Experience Fund

### [2] HALLMARK + DESTINATION EVENTS

- Fishing + Water Sports
- Million Dollar Yellowbelly
- Reinvigorate Existing Events
- After Dark Events
- The Big Sleepout
- The Great Aussie Pub Crawl
- Pre + Post Events
- Special Interest Events

### [3] DESTINATION BRAND + PROFILE

- Leveraging regional, state and national tourism brands
- Brand Development
- Highway Links
- Tourism + Events Brand Toolkit
- Content Creation
- Digital Distribution

### [4] INDUSTRY CAPABILITY AND CAPACITY

- Tourism + Event Training Program
- Experience Packaging Program
- Industry Networking
- Welcome Program
- Best of Queensland

## ABBREVIATIONS

BDC	Bollon and District Community Group	NSC	Nindigully Sports Community Inc
BSC	Balonne Shire Council	OQTA	Outback Queensland Tourism Association
COC	St George & District Chamber of Commerce Inc	QTIC	Queensland Tourism Industry Corporation
CMCA	Caravan & Motorhome Club of Australia	SQCT	Southern Queensland Country Tourism
CQ	Caravanning Queensland	TMR	Qld Department of Transport & Main Roads
DAF	Qld Department of Agriculture & Fisheries	TPA	Thallon Progress Association
DPA	Dirranbandi Progress Association		

Bolded organisations identified in the stakeholder column of the Action Plan is indicated as the lead agency with key stakeholders identified as potential partners to help facilitate the action. Please note more community associations and strategic partners may be applicable to specific projects may be involved as potential partners for implementation.





# GAME CHANGERS + ONE-OF-A-KIND EXPERIENCES

ACTION	LEAD	2020 -22	2022 -24	2024 -25
<b>1.1 Iconic Inland Fishing Attraction:</b> Develop pre-feasibility and concept plan, including funding models	BSC DAF SQCT			
<b>1.2 The Oasis Experience:</b> Work with local communities and private enterprise to create action plans to develop oasis experiences across the shire, investigating funding opportunities for projects such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ St George Riverwalk &amp; pop-up waterpark</li> <li>■ River and Rail Precinct, Dirranbandi</li> <li>■ Great Escape Spa, Dirranbandi</li> <li>■ The Watering Hole and heritage trail, Thallon</li> <li>■ The Gully Walk, Nindigully</li> <li>■ Dreamtime Walk, Wallam Creek, Bollon</li> <li>■ Streetscape masterplanning for town entrances as a welcome oasis on the highways, with particular focus on Hebel as entry to Qld/shire from Lightning Ridge</li> </ul>	BSC DPA TPA Industry Operators			
<b>1.3 After Dark:</b> Develop after dark experiences, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Lighting of riverwalks and heritage walks</li> <li>■ Light up the Silos</li> <li>■ Dirranbandi's Glow by Night Watertower</li> <li>■ After Dark Events</li> </ul>	BSC DPA TPA Industry Operators			
<b>1.4 RV Friendly Towns:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Develop each town in Balonne Shire as an RV Friendly town, including day parking for long vehicles within easy walk of main streets, dump points and water</li> <li>■ Erect RV Friendly signage</li> </ul>				
<b>1.5 Indigenous Culture:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Incorporate and facilitate indigenous experiences, attractions, legends and content in tourism and event marketing, tours, experiences and packaging</li> <li>■ Facilitate indigenous content in event programming e.g. Welcome to Country</li> <li>■ Leverage Year of Indigenous Tourism funding for existing and new Aboriginal tourism enterprises</li> <li>■ Work with tourism and events industry to incorporate indigenous content and experiences in their properties, tours and events</li> </ul>	BSC Indigenous Enterprises			
<b>1.6 Australian Wildlife Encounters:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Investigate Australian wildlife encounters and develop content (professional images, footage) to incorporate into tourism marketing and tour operator guides</li> <li>■ Work with industry to incorporate Australian Wildlife Encounters content and experiences in their properties, tours and events</li> <li>■ Where possible, with Australia Zoo approval, incorporate quotes and images from Steve Irwin/Australia Zoo</li> </ul>	BSC Industry Operators			



ACTION	LEAD	2020 -22	2022 -24	2024 -25
<b>1.7 Experience Pass</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Identify experiences to be packaged and trial for sale through VIC and local industry operators (e.g. accommodation, pubs and tour operators)</li> <li>■ Engage professional packaging expert over a two to three year period to encourage distribution of Balonne Shire packages for sale through tourism channels</li> </ul>	<b>BSC</b> <b>Industry Operators</b>			
<b>1.8 Air Access:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Advocate for more convenient air access to fly in and out e.g. a mid-week with two night stopover for business tourism</li> <li>■ Investigate tourism packaging opportunities with REX</li> <li>■ Trial of charter flights for major events, conferences and holiday deals to package flights, events and visitor experiences e.g. fly in Friday, fly out Sunday</li> </ul>	<b>BSC</b> SQCT Airline Partners			
<b>1.9 Tourism + Event Friendly Destination:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Further develop tourism and event friendly culture across all council departments</li> <li>■ Develop “one-stop-shop” approach for tourism and event enquiries</li> <li>■ Develop Tourism Experience Fund program to encourage/enable innovative entrepreneurship and “one-of-a-kind” experiences</li> </ul>	<b>BSC</b>			



# HALLMARK + DESTINATION EVENTS

ACTION	LEAD	2020 -22	2022 -24	2024 -25
<b>2.1 Hallmark + Destination Events:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Identify new and existing events will hallmark potential</li> <li>■ Develop concept plan for the Million Dollar Yellowbelly</li> <li>■ Investigate</li> </ul>	BSC DAF Local Fish Clubs			
<b>2.2 Reinvigorate Existing Events:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Work with event organisers with hallmark and destination potential to reinvigorate event programs, staging and branding</li> <li>■ Encourage event organisers to stage events in iconic and outdoor locations</li> </ul>	BSC Event Operators			
<b>2.3 After Dark Events:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Encourage the development of After Dark events to increase overnight visitor expenditure and shoulder and low season visitation</li> <li>■ Develop concept with a strategic partner for "The Big Sleepout"</li> <li>■ Encourage publicans to develop "The Great Aussie Pub Crawl"</li> <li>■ Investigate concept for pre and post events, and identify potential existing events that could be tweaked or staged at a different time to leverage this traffic</li> </ul>	BSC Event & Industry Operators Publicans			
<b>2.4 Special Interest Events:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Encourage and support special interest groups and industry operators to bid and develop events to attract special interest markets</li> </ul>				





# DESTINATION BRAND + PROFILE

ACTION	LEAD	2020 -22	2022 -24	2024 -25
<b>3.1 Brand Development:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop tourism and event brand that leverages the regional, state and national tourism brands with local application</li> </ul>	BSC DAF Local Fish Clubs			
<b>3.2 Highway Links:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to participating in highway touring route marketing</li> </ul>	BSC Tourism & Event Operators			
<b>3.3 Tourism + Event Brand Toolkit:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a digital tourism and events brand toolkit making it easy for tourism and event operators to use content</li> </ul>	BSC Tourism & Event Operators			
<b>3.4 Content Creation:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop online library of event and destination imagery and footage</li> <li>Distribution of content to local industry and regional/state/national image libraries</li> </ul>	BSC SQCT TEQ TA			
<b>3.5 Digital Distribution:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integration of destination images in tourism and event operators marketing</li> <li>Increased distribution of Balonne Shire tourism and event destination content and operators on ATDW, TripAdvisor and 3rd party distribution channels, e.g. Create TripAdvisor Destination Profile <a href="https://www.tripadvisor.com.au/Profile/AusOutbackNT">tripadvisor.com.au/Profile/AusOutbackNT</a></li> <li>Increased number of Balonne Shire tourism and event operators featured in business, event and tourism awards</li> </ul>	BSC Tourism & Event Operators SQCT			



# INDUSTRY CAPABILITY + CAPACITY

ACTION	LEAD	2020 -22	2022 -24	2024 -25
<b>4.1 Tourism + Event Training Program:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3-5 year tourism and event training and mentoring program</li> </ul>	BSC SQCT QTIC Tourism & Event Operators			
<b>4.2 Experience and Packaging Program:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experience development program run over a three year period, incorporating travel trends, packaging and visiting operators with leading examples and mentoring program developed</li> </ul>	BSC Event Operators			
<b>4.3 Industry Networking:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tourism committee is expanded to include events, with meetings held in tourism venues around the shire</li> <li>Training, experience and packaging programs could be incorporated with industry networking</li> </ul>	BSC Tourism & Event Operators DPA COC TPA			
<b>4.4 Welcome Program:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Long-term development of welcome/greeters program and customer service throughout the region</li> </ul>	BSC Tourism & Event Operators SQCT			
<b>4.5 Best of Queensland:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage industry operators to participate in the Best of Queensland program to increase Balonne Shire's presence in state activities and improve visitor satisfaction levels</li> </ul>	Tourism & Event Operators SQCT TEQ			





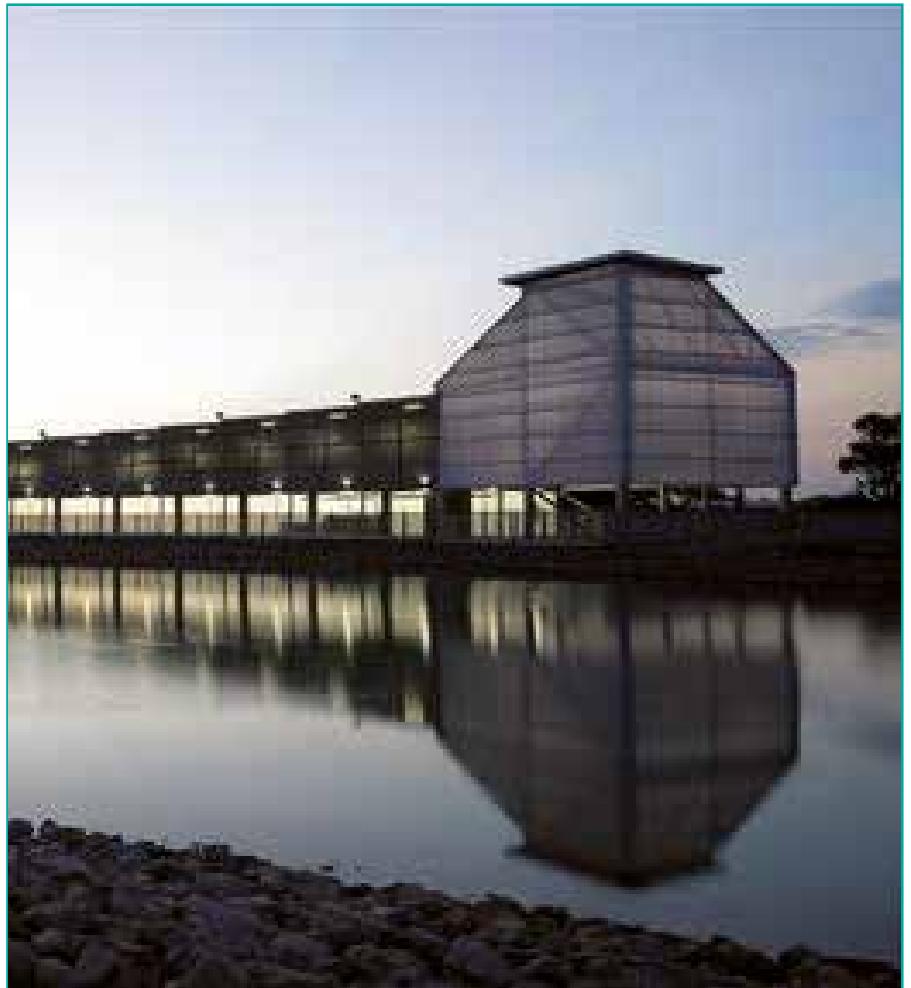
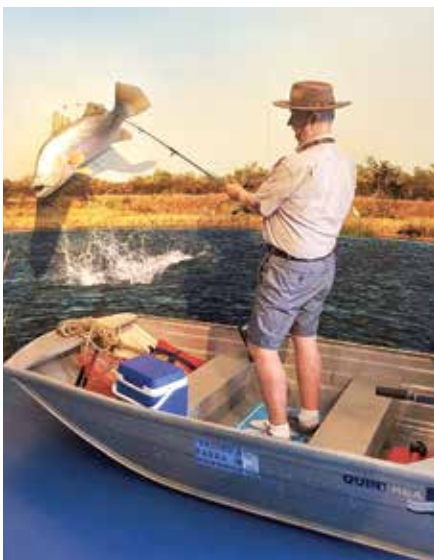
# CASE STUDIES

## JOHN LAKE CENTRE, NARRANDERA

*John Lake Centre* in Narrandera, New South Wales features an aquarium of many fish species of the Murray Darling, a 60 seat theatre and short film with free BBQs and extensive picnic area.

The centre is also the location of inland freshwater fisheries research in New South Wales, and has also developed into a productive hatchery, providing fingerlings of four native fish species (Murray cod, Trout cod, Golden perch and Silver perch) to improve freshwater recreational fisheries and conservation initiatives.

[dpi.nsw.gov.au/about-us/science-and-research/centres/narrandera-fisheries-centre](http://dpi.nsw.gov.au/about-us/science-and-research/centres/narrandera-fisheries-centre)



## BARRAMUNDI DISCOVERY CENTRE, KARUMBA

The *Barramundi Discovery Centre* was the redevelopment and expansion of a visitor centre on a barramundi farm and hatchery in Karumba, a remote town near the Gulf of Carpentaria in Far North Queensland which at the 2016 census had a population of 526.

Predominately funded by the Queensland State Government's Building Our Regions program, with additional funding from other state government departments and council, the project is intended to draw students and tourists to the area, while also providing jobs and a community meeting place for the local population.

The Carpentaria Shire Council estimates the centre currently generates around \$2.6 million in gross regional product per annum. The project is also expected to generate new opportunities for council to partner with the tourism, retail, fishing and education sectors, including James Cook University.

The centre was opened in 2018.

Not only an impressive building with meeting facilities, the visitor experience includes state-of-the-art interactive story of the barramundi, barramundi feeding, tours, even "photos" with a barra.

[barracentre.com.au](http://barracentre.com.au)



## COOLUM AQUA PARK, SUNSHINE COAST

Called 'The World's Largest Aqua Park', *Coolum Aqua Park* is located on the Sunshine Coast.

It is a pop-up, floating park, operated during summer months, 5km inland from the beach on a freshwater lake at Coolum.

The park has an onsite café and is operated by Oz Ski Resorts, who also operate water ski and wake board hire and coaching on the lake.

[aquaparkcoolum.com.au](http://aquaparkcoolum.com.au)  
[ozskiresort.com](http://ozskiresort.com)

## OUTBACK PADDLE REGATTA, LONGREACH

The *Outback Paddle Regatta* was a new event for Longreach in 2019, attracting national publicity and over 2,500 visitors in its first event.

Its objectives were to:

- Build on natural assets and change perception of water
- Generate water-based activities for local residents
- Attract wider publicity and an event to attract outside visitors

The event is staged in school holidays to attract an increasing family market to Outback Queensland and included multiple water activities (dragon boat racing, rubber duck races – big and mini, water skiing, stand up paddle boarding – SUP, kayaking etc).

The multiple events attracting competitors from all over Queensland and interstate, but also events, which general public (visitors and locals) could participate in.

[outbackpaddleregatta.com.au](http://outbackpaddleregatta.com.au)



## MILLION DOLLAR FISH, NT

The *Million Dollar Fish* is a marketing campaign and competition launched by Tourism NT in 2015 to promote the Northern Territory as the best place in the world to stay, play and fish.

Developed to attract visitors over the tropical summer months between October and March, the competition draws attention around the world.

Keen anglers register to enter the Million Dollar Fish competition for their chance of catching one of 126 tagged fish and taking home a cash prize pool.

The eligible fishing areas are across the top of the Northern Territory to create visitor dispersal and tourism operators package deals to make the experience easy to book and memorable.





# CONSULTATION

This Strategy has been prepared through consultation with Balonne Shire's tourism and event industry including face-to-face workshops with industry and internal council staff, councillor meetings and phone consultation.

In addition to in-region workshops and face-to-face meetings, the strategy development process included a desktop audit of reference materials and benchmarking Longreach Regional Council, Narrabri Shire Council and Winton Shire Council.

Following consultation, for those who couldn't attend workshops, event and tourism industry representatives were invited to participate in an online event survey distributed to participants by the council. The survey was sent to tourism and event operators in the Balonne Shire with 16 survey respondents.



# APPLAUSE

A special THANK YOU to the people and community of Balonne Shire who gave time, input and advice into the making of this strategy.

NAME	ORGANISATION
Amber Stewart	Dirranbandi Progress Association
Andrea Killen	Dirranbandi Progress Association
Barb McMillan	Dirranbandi Rural Transaction Centre
Brett Nosse	Betta Home Living
Brett Schweikert	Sandytown River Cruises
Cr Fiona Gaske	<i>Deputy Mayor</i> ; Balonne Shire Council
Cr Ian Todd	Balonne Shire Council
Cr Richard Marsh	<i>Mayor</i> ; Balonne Shire Council
Cr Robyn Fuhrmeister	Balonne Shire Council
Cr Samantha O'Toole	Balonne Shire Council
Dan Gallagher	St George Police
David Blacket	Riversands Wines
Debbie Burns	Nindigully Pub
Digby Whyte	<i>Director</i> ; Community and Environmental Sustainability, Balonne Shire Council
Frank Deshon	DPASSOC
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Janine Wilson	Merino Motor Inn
Julie Anderson	Dirranbandi Motor Inn
Karen Sullivan	Dirranbandi Progress Association
Kim Wildman	<i>Manager</i> ; Tourism, Balonne Shire Council
Kyra Passman	St George Visitor Information Centre
Leanne Brosnan	Thallon Progress Association Limited
Leanne Brummel	Our Fishing Shack
Liz Hill	Connect South West QLD
Marlies May	St George & District Chamber of Commerce
Mary-Ann Crowe	Jacaranda Country Motel
Nikki Pulfer	Dirranbandi Caravan Park
Richard Crook	Thallon Progress Association Limited
Sandra Lee	St George Visitor Information Centre
Shannon Koch	Hebel Rodeo Association
Sheryn Blundstone	Pelican Rest Tourist Park
Steve Burns	Nindigully Pub
Wade Cameron	Kamaroka Tourist Park



# REFERENCES

Advancing Tourism 2016-2020, Queensland Government

Balonne Shire Council 2018-2023 Corporate Plan

Balonne Shire 2019/20 Operational Plan

Southern Queensland Country Destination Tourism Plan 2014-2020  
(DTP Review 2019/20)

Balonne Shire RV Strategy

TEQ Marketing Strategy 2025



## KRISTA HAURITZ

TOURISM + MARKETING + CONSULTING

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