



# Somerset Tourism Strategy 2021-2025

*Providing the Foundations for a  
Vibrant Visitor Economy*





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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Tourism Strategy Purpose and Objectives

The *Somerset Tourism Strategy, 2021-2025: Providing the Foundations for a Vibrant Visitor Economy* is Somerset Regional Council's five-year plan to support the vibrancy, diversity, resilience and sustainability of the region's visitor economy.

The strategy is designed to provide Somerset Regional Council with the direction it needs to help it play its role in growing the local visitor economy and to attract new businesses and opportunities from both within and outside the region. Informed by research, consultation and analysis, it presents a visionary yet practical plan of action to help promote and support the region's visitor economy now and into the future.

Somerset Regional Council is committed to playing its part in supporting economic development. Tourism promotion and development is a key area of focus under the *Prosperous Somerset* theme in Council's Corporate Plan, which seeks to nurture and support a region celebrated for its prosperous rural lifestyle, its agricultural strengths, its natural assets and its potential as a premier regional visitor destination.

The Somerset Tourism Strategy is designed to realise this important objective, for the benefit of the community of the Somerset Region.

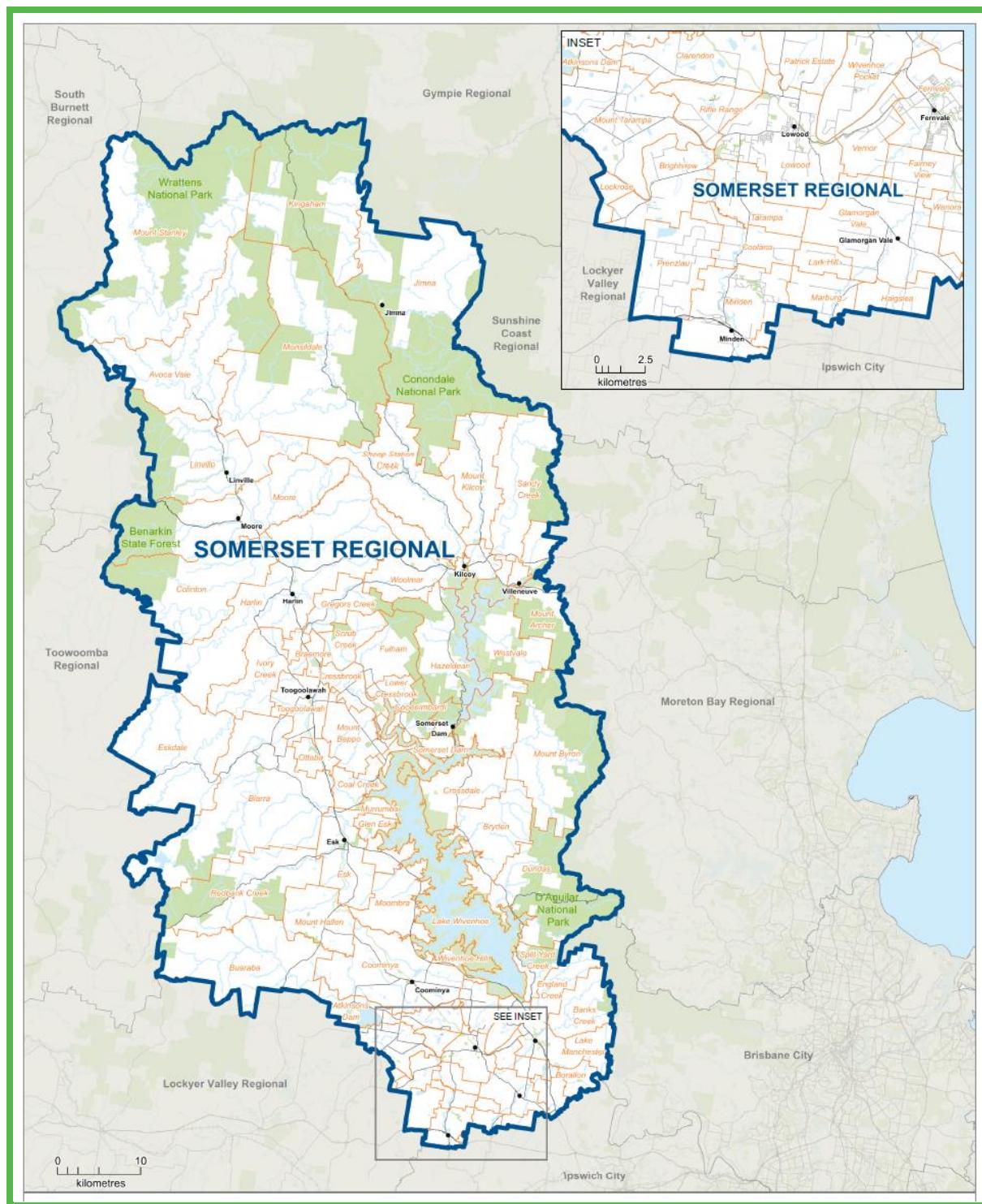
### 1.2 A Consultative Approach to Informing Strategy Development

To inform the preparation of this strategy, Somerset Regional Council consulted with a diversity of government, industry and community stakeholders via a series of meetings and forums. Strategy consultation included:

- A 'Scene-Setting' Workshop with Councillors and the Executive.
- Presentation to and discussion with the Economic Development and Tourism Committee.
- One-on-one meetings with 27 external stakeholders including government agencies, tourism bodies, community organisations and local businesses.
- A Tourism Volunteers Workshop (21 participants).
- A series of Somerset Regional Council Tourism Team focus group meetings.

The consultations have been instrumental in helping to establish a vision for the visitor economy of the future and to guide Somerset Regional Council's efforts in tourism promotion and destination management. The consultations highlighted the Somerset Region's many strengths and attributes as well as pertinent challenges and opportunities for developing the region's visitor economy in a sustainable manner consistent with Council's Corporate Planning objectives.

## The Somerset Region



Source: Queensland Government

## 2. A Vision for a Vibrant Visitor Economy

Defined by its warm and inviting local villages, its breath-taking mountain scenery, native forests, placid waterways and picturesque patchwork landscape, the Somerset Regional Council area covers 5,379 square kilometres. With a population of approximately 26,200, the Somerset Region is home to almost 2,100 businesses and around 6,100 jobs. The Somerset Region's key industries include agriculture, food product manufacturing, retail, health, education and construction services as well as a developing visitor economy.

Located just one hour and fifteen minutes' drive from central Brisbane, the Somerset Region, with its authentic country lifestyle, feels a world away. The region's five main townships include Esk, Kilcoy, Fernvale, Lowood and Toogoolawah, which are hubs for a diversity of communities dispersed throughout the region. The region's smaller villages including Linville, Jimna, Harlin, Moore and Coominya also play important roles in the social and economic lives of the region's residents.

Situated in the south-east corner of Queensland and part of Australia's fastest-growing region, the Somerset Region takes in the Brisbane and Stanley river catchments with meandering waterways and great lakes surrounded by a beautiful natural environment. This provides a diverse playground for residents and visitors alike, including anglers, birdwatchers and water sports enthusiasts. The region's expansive wilderness is ideal for camping and four wheel driving, and with a diversity of walking trails and the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail, the Somerset Region is a drawcard for walkers, trail runners, horse-riders and cyclists.

Somerset Regional Council is pro-active in its commitment to the design and delivery of initiatives which serve to support the local visitor economy and the Somerset Region's prosperity more generally. It proactively works in collaboration with regional tourism agencies and the tourism industry to enhance the 'Experience Somerset' brand and to deliver associated marketing, product development, visitor servicing and support infrastructure programs.

The aim is to promote the Somerset Region as a premier regional visitor destination defined by a diversity of authentic experiences built on its natural features, iconic attractions and its recreational, heritage and cultural assets. In order to grow the tourism sector in the Somerset Region, Council has a key role to play in addressing the 'enablers' of a vibrant visitor economy. These enablers include:

- A conducive natural, built and social/cultural environment.
- Quality infrastructure and services (including transport and communications, hospitality services, accommodation, entertainment and events and cultural attractions).
- Effective information management (including research, marketing, visitor information and wayfinding).
- Business support (e.g. customer service training, digital learning, marketing and branding).

The development of a strong and sustainable visitor economy also requires the Somerset Region to embrace its connections with the wider region. This means leveraging the marketing and promotional power of the region's location within South East Queensland and its proximity to major attractions and events. This is particularly important in light of Brisbane's status as the preferred candidate city / bidder to host the 2032 Olympic Games.

## 2.1 Council's Commitment to Supporting a Vibrant Visitor Economy

Focussed on its role in influencing the enablers of a vibrant visitor economy, Somerset Regional Council is committed to:

- **Understanding our markets** by continually working with the region's tourism industry stakeholders to understand current and emerging markets and what they're looking for / what they want and expect.
- **Understanding and articulating our offer** by working in collaboration with the region's key stakeholders to identify and communicate our 'personality brand' and to build a positive narrative about the Somerset Region's tourism offer.
- **Being strategic** with an informed and targeted plan of action to address priorities for implementation.
- **Being organised** by defining, appropriately resourcing and communicating Council's tourism services support roles and functions, integrating these activities across the organisation and building partnerships with industry and key agencies to build collective capacity.
- **Being informed** by continually monitoring our markets and our offer as well as strategy implementation progress and Council's return on investment using a combination of output and outcome measures.

These considerations inform strategy action planning and implementation and represent what are Somerset Regional Council's tourism planning, promotion and destination management planning principles. They also underpin the vision and charter for tourism in the Somerset Region.

Council's commitment to supporting the region's visitor economy, and its particular areas of focus reflect stakeholder views regarding the Somerset's tourism issues, challenges and opportunities for growth, which combined, inform the vision for a vibrant visitor economy. The vision is supported by the tourism charter, which describes Somerset Regional Council's commitment to promoting, facilitating and co-ordinating tourism promotion and support activities in the Somerset Region.

### *Vision for a Vibrant Visitor Economy in the Somerset Region*

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*Connecting country and the coast, the Somerset Region, in the heart of South East Queensland, is a premier visitor destination, defined by a diversity of authentic experiences which capitalise on the region's natural features and iconic attractions, as well as its recreational, heritage and cultural assets, driving sustainable tourism.*

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### *Somerset Regional Council's Tourism Charter*

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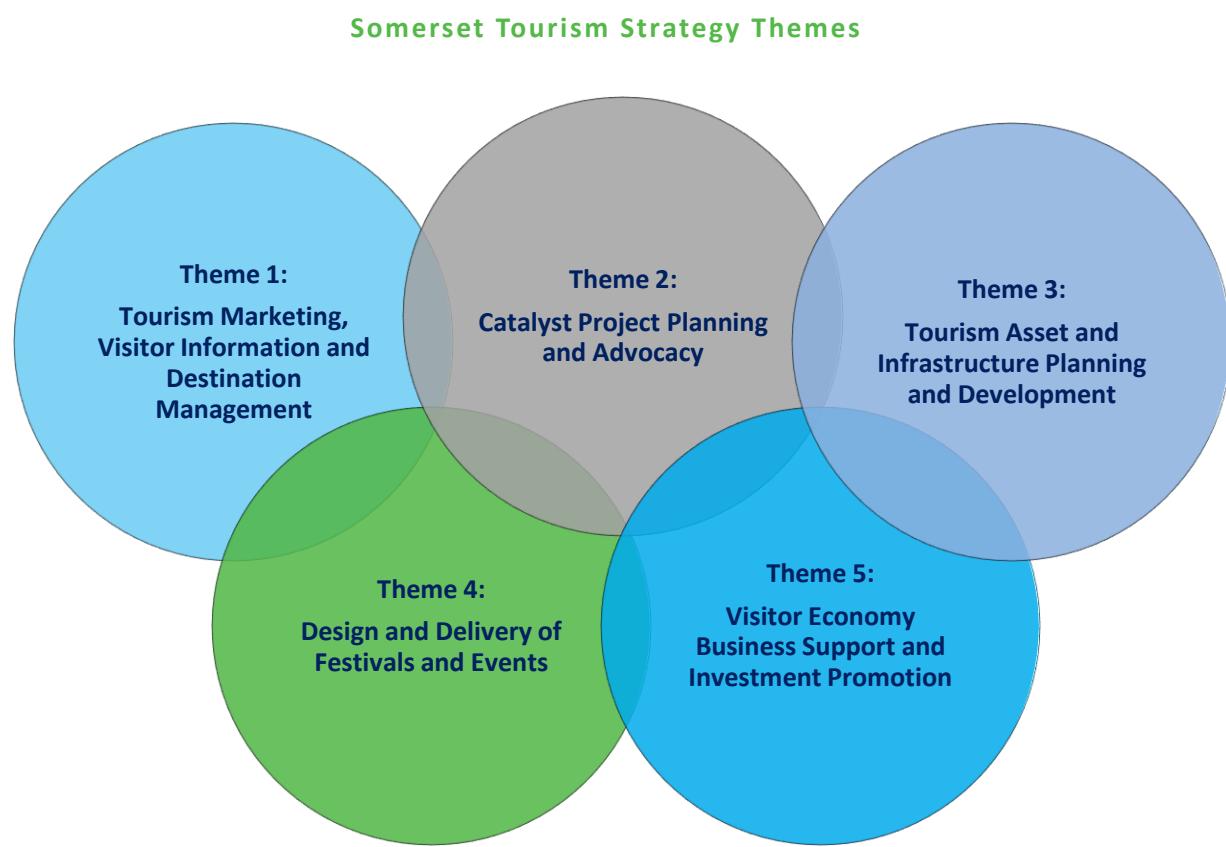
*Somerset Regional Council supports and promotes tourism in the region through sound strategic planning, infrastructure delivery and asset management. It takes a partnership approach to tourism promotion and development, working in collaboration with tourism agencies and operators to enhance the 'Experience Somerset' brand, through collaborative marketing, product development, visitor servicing and industry engagement.*

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## 3. Opportunities to Support a Vibrant Visitor Economy

### 3.1 Tourism Strategy Themes

Opportunities for action are informed by the findings of the research, consultation and analysis undertaken to inform the preparation of the Somerset Tourism Strategy, together with the tourism vision and charter. The opportunities for action are presented under five themes as follows.



From a long-list of opportunities identified through the strategy research, consultation and analysis, and following further consultation with and direction from Somerset Regional Council's senior staff and Councillors, 13 opportunities for action have been adopted as those initiatives to be progressed as priorities over the life of this strategy and include an annual review of implementation priorities.

Some of these priorities, as determined by Council, are focused on catalyst project planning and development initiatives which require action combined with a well-planned course of project implementation for the desired outcomes to be realised over time. Others are focussed on strategic program implementation and are initiatives that can be addressed as part of Somerset Regional Council's day-to-day strategic planning and facilitation functions.

The priority opportunities for action are as follows.

### **Theme 1: Tourism Marketing, Visitor Information and Destination Management**

- ❖ **Prepare a Somerset Region Tourism Marketing Plan** - Scope the preparation of a *Somerset Region Tourism Marketing Plan*, beginning with a review and assessment of current marketing activities including social media marketing and tourism website content and structure. A marketing plan would identify appropriate approaches to developing, amongst other things, a targeted multi-platform tourism advertising campaign. Ensure branding clearly articulates the Somerset Region's point of difference while connecting and promoting the local tourism offer's place in the wider South East Queensland branding and destination management framework.
- ❖ **Develop a Single Online Entry Point / Website Landing Page** - As part of the proposed marketing plan, review the Experience Somerset website in conjunction with an audit of other tourism promotional web sites with a view to enhancing the region's digital presence with an easy-to-find (search engine-optimised), well-designed and branded, easy-to-navigate and regularly updated landing page.
- ❖ **Investigate Opportunities to Tap Into the Large Tour Group Market** - Explore opportunities to work with the Somerset Region's tourism operators to improve the offering for large group tours including international visitor tours, caravan and camping clubs, car clubs and the motorcycle club drive market.
- ❖ **Create a Compelling Vision and Identity for Agriculture in the Somerset Region** – Engage with the region's key industry stakeholders to empower local innovation and identify and exploit synergies between agriculture and tourism.
- ❖ **Prepare a Town Centre Entry Enhancement and Wayfinding Strategy** - Prepare a strategy which identifies streetscaping and place-making initiatives to enhance the entrance to the Somerset Region's towns and villages and support with consistent branded town entry statement signage and clear and simple directional signage at strategic junctures throughout the region.

### **Theme 2: Catalyst Project Planning and Advocacy**

- ❖ **Implement a Program of Rail Trail Infrastructure Improvements** - Improve the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail experience with a program to establish more resting facilities, tree plantings and shade structures, water fountains and toilet facilities.
- ❖ **Prepare a Mount Glen Rock Tourism Concept Plan** - Following Somerset Regional Council's purchase of Mount Glen Rock for a multi-use recreational park, explore concepts that would elevate this asset to an attraction of international standard. A concept plan would consider and address opportunities for a diversity of recreational activities including mountain biking, formal walking / riding tracks and visitor information points and other support facilities.
- ❖ **Develop Rail Trail and River Tourism** - Explore opportunities to organise paddling tours on the Brisbane River with booked camping along the way, including integration of school-based adventure and camping tourism. Visitors could be attracted to organised tours which could include cycling the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail, camping and drop-off for river paddle tours. Pick-up and drop-off points located at campsites would be necessary.

### **Theme 3: Tourism Asset and Infrastructure Planning and Development**

- ❖ **Undertake an Updated Visitor Accommodation Investigation** - Explore opportunities to enhance the visitor accommodation offer in the Somerset Region by confirming visitor segment needs and expectations, undertaking market assessments and preparing business cases. Re-visit the need and opportunity for additional caravan park facilities and explore the concept of a business case for an

'eco-lodge' accommodation facility in a location with access to the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail and / or dam lakes.

#### **Theme 4: Design and Delivery of Festivals and Events**

- ❖ **Promote and Leverage the Brisbane Air Show** - Leveraging the profile of the Brisbane Air Show and other activities at the Watts Bridge Airfield, develop and implement a strategy to showcase the Somerset Region as a tourist attraction with national and international appeal.
- ❖ **Explore a More Strategic and Coordinated Approach to Events Planning and Promotion** - Review existing festivals and events (e.g. water events (sailing, fishing, rowing, water-skiing), sporting events (trail runs / rides utilising the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail, race days, rodeos, skydiving events / days, motorsports), food and wine and identify opportunities for existing and emerging events throughout the Somerset Region to become part of a wider, coordinated calendar of events.

#### **Theme 5: Visitor Economy Business Support and Investment Promotion**

- ❖ **Build Local Tourism Partnerships** - Investigate ways to build the region's collective capacity to connect and grow the Somerset visitor economy. Explore collaborative ways to nurture and develop stakeholder partnerships – Council, operators, tourism bodies, government – in a strategic, informed and targeted manner, which articulates a shared vision about the future of the visitor economy and a how to get there.

#### **Strategy Monitoring and Review**

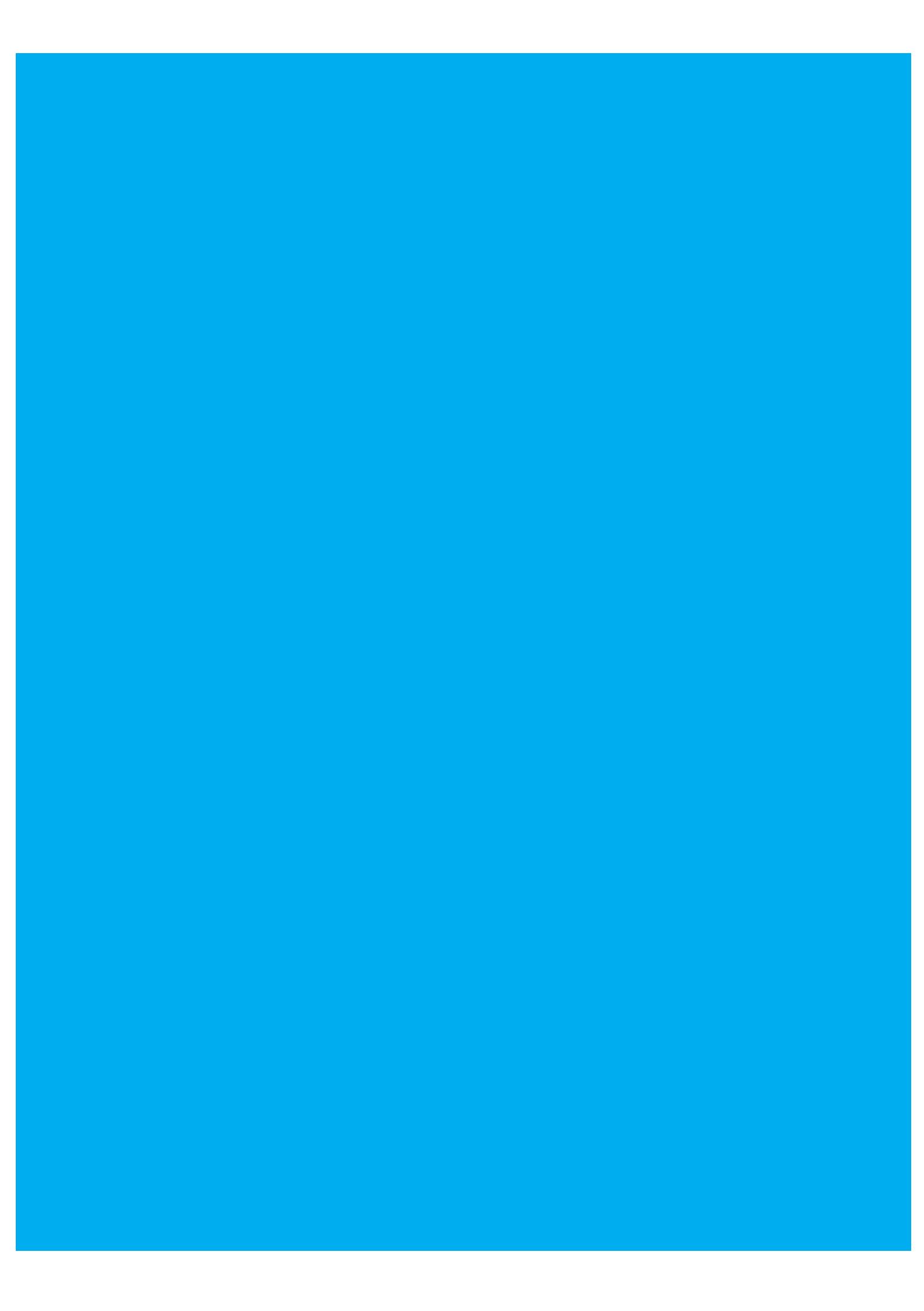
- ❖ **Undertake an Annual Review of Tourism Strategy Implementation Priorities** - To ensure Council's resources are directed to those projects and programs which generate the greatest return on investment, consistent with the vision for tourism in the Somerset Region and Council's Tourism Charter, it is recommended an annual review of strategy implementation priorities be undertaken and that Council: renew its commitment to on-going priority initiatives; and identify and commit to new opportunities - including those which capitalise on the 2032 Olympic Games - as circumstances and resources warrant.

### **3.2 Monitoring Council's Return on Investment**

The Somerset Region currently receives around 458,000 day-trip visitors, 162,000 domestic overnight visitors and just 3,000 international visitors. A (conservative) strategic target is to generate an uplift in visitation to the region by 10%. The initiatives put forward in this report, if implemented by Council, will help realise a desired economic outcome defined by a 10% increase in visitation to the region, which would see visitor expenditure increase from \$66 million per annum to approximately \$73 million.

Economic modelling suggests that the direct addition (uplift) in visitor expenditure of \$7 million in the Somerset Region would lead to a corresponding direct addition of 57 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs in the local economy and a further 27 FTE jobs resulting indirectly through production and consumption multipliers, for a total estimated increase of 84 FTE jobs in the Somerset Region.

These anticipated economic output and employment impacts represent a strong return on investment from Council's commitment to the implementation of the Somerset Tourism Strategy. These desired outcomes, along with progress made on individual actions, will be monitored through regular (annual) Somerset Region tourism operator surveys and customer / visitor satisfaction surveys; subscription to regularly updated data sources such as profile.id and economy.id or REMPLAN; and Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data and Business Register data. Strategy progress and performance will be reported annually. The *Somerset Tourism Strategy* will be reviewed annually and updated in five years.





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