



# Byron Shire Council Agriculture

## Action Plan 2020-2025

### Introduction

Byron Shire Council identified that the value of primary production sales in the Shire had declined by \$9.6 million dollars over the five year period from 2010/11 to 2015/16. With this decline, there was a loss of about 50 jobs in the agricultural sector and it was calculated that Byron Shire had 3% fewer agricultural workers than its neighbouring Northern Rivers Councils. The Shire lost more agricultural businesses than any other industry, yet industries such as construction, healthcare and social assistance added 130 businesses within that timeframe (Regionality 2018). This trend is likely to have continued on the decline to present time.

A number of factors were thought to contribute to this decline which include the increase in agricultural land values, change in the demographic of the rural landholders, changing agricultural markets, a lack of agronomic support to the farming community and a lack of coordinated marketing, infrastructure and resource sharing.

Farmers own most of the land in the Shire. Not only is agriculture an important industry in the Shire, it is also recognised as being vital to the landscape and the culture of the Shire, which are some of the many attractions highly valued by its residents and visitors.

In recognition of the issues faced by agriculture, Council engaged *Regionality* to consult with local farmers to find out what their needs and challenges were and what opportunities are available for them. A number of engagement activities were conducted to connect with as many farmers and stakeholders as possible including an open forum, industry survey, focus group sessions and one to one discussions. The outcomes of the consultation are summarised as the goals, objectives and their accompanying actions and deliverables in this Agricultural Action Plan. A number of the actions contribute to the implantation of the Byron Shire Rural Landuse Strategy (2017).

As a demonstration of support to the agricultural industries of the Shire, Council has already implemented a number of key actions identified in the process including the engagement of an Agricultural Project Officer and for on-going consultation, the establishment an Agriculture Cluster Group of local farmers who are identified locally in high regard, representing a variety of farming types.

Council's management of the Agricultural sector has been integrated with its Biodiversity team in recognition of the important role our farmers play in protecting and improving our Biodiversity as natural resource managers. Council sees great opportunities to not only engage with farmers to discuss both farming issues and biodiversity, but also to develop projects which achieve both farm sustainability and productivity outcomes along with positive biodiversity and NRM outcomes at the same time.

This Acton Plan will inform Council's annual Operational Plan which will enable consideration of funding for the implementation of its actions in Councils future budget allocations. The plan will be reviewed in 2025.

## Aim

*To improve the economic and environmental outcomes and ensure the long term sustainability of farming/agriculture in Byron Shire.*

In addition, Council resolved (Res 21-149) for the Aim of the plan to include:

1. To arrest the trending decline in the economic performance of the agriculture sector by the end of 2023.
2. To increase the annual value of primary production in the shire by \$20 mil by the end of 2025
3. To have a database of 300 landowners aware of and practicing some form of conservation land management by 2025

## Goals

1. Improve productivity and sustainable land use practices on rural lands in Byron Shire
2. Improve communication, engagement and trust with all rural landholders
3. Ensure agriculture remains a major economic contributor to Byron Shire's Gross Regional Product (GRP).



## Goal 1 – Improve productivity and sustainable land use practices on rural lands in Byron Shire.

**Objective: Develop and deliver tools to address the challenges and support opportunities for farmers to improve productivity and sustainable land use practices in Byron Shire.**

ACTIONS	DELIVERABLES	Timeframe
1.1 Appoint an Agricultural Extension Officer <i>(This position is funded for 18mths by Federal Govt Drought Pest &amp; Weed Grant)</i>	1 to1 on site and virtual farming extension for the purpose of increasing productivity, biodiversity and minimizing the effects of drought pests and weeds.	2020
1.2 Establish and support an agricultural mentoring program to support new and existing farmers in starting up, expanding their enterprise or changing their land management practices.	20 farmers seeking guidance and support are connected with experienced, respected farmers as mentors	2021-2022
1.3 Develop and maintain a database of farmers and primary production stakeholders to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- identify farmers issues and opportunities</li> <li>- enable easy forwarding of relevant information and activities to specific farmers and stakeholders.</li> </ul>	A database to capture all enquiries, sorted into specific issues, farming types, interests and opportunities raised by farmers, stakeholders and the broader community. The database is vital in the efficient devolvement of information and resources and will assist in informing future extension activities.	2020-2025
1.4 Develop and deliver (or refer landholders to) workshops and field days on best practice farming, innovation, productivity, sustainable land use and biodiversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where information gaps are identified, workshops and field days are developed and held to assist landholders learn and apply best practice farming.</li> <li>• Planned 'SmartFarm' workshops include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Property Planning - Understand your land</li> <li>• Native Vegetation</li> <li>• Water</li> <li>• Integrated pest management</li> <li>• Making a living from your farm</li> <li>• Soil</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Via the farmer databases and through media, social media and web pages, farmers are informed of relevant</li> </ul>	2021-2025

	workshops and field days held by other organisations within the region or online on an ongoing basis	
1.5 Establish and maintain links to relevant organisations for the benefit of information sourcing, project collaboration, resource sharing and support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A data base is developed for collaborating individuals, organisations and agencies to facilitate two way information and resource sharing.</li> <li>• A strong connection and engagement is developed and maintained with agencies and organisations such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ North Coast Local Land Services</li> <li>○ Neighboring Councils</li> <li>○ Department of Primary Industries</li> <li>○ Northern Rivers Foods</li> <li>○ Southern Cross University</li> <li>○ Sustainable Food</li> <li>○ Regional Development Australia</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	2021-2025
1.6 Source and provide current best practice farming information and techniques to assist farmers to improve productivity and sustainability by practice change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best practice farming information sourced from agencies, organisations and the internet</li> <li>• Best practice farming information is disseminated via site inspections, meetings, Webinars, YouTube, other social media and web based information sources.</li> </ul>	2021-2025

## Goal 2 - Improve communication, engagement and trust with all rural landholders

**Objective: Build a communication and engagement framework and tools to provide and receive up-to-date information.**

ACTIONS	DELIVERABLES	Timeframe
2.1 Support the Bryon Shire Agricultural Cluster Group	<p>Guide and support the ACG to achieve it's objectives which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Act as an advocacy point (external reference point) for agricultural businesses, organisations, and farmers within Byron Shire's agricultural industry.</li> <li>b) Communicate to Council, pertinent issues within the industry that affect development.</li> <li>c) Identify and explore positive projects that Council can support to assist in lifting the profile of the Shire's agricultural industry.</li> <li>d) Work collaboratively within industry, commerce, the wider community and Council on shared interests towards a common goal including the right to farm land responsibly.</li> </ul>	2020-2025
2.2 Develop and implement a Communication plan to establish the best methods of contact, maintain a connection with farmers and for information dissemination to the farming community and within Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication plan that identifies communications targets, opportunities, timeframes and delivery mechanisms for the dissemination of agricultural information and connection to the agricultural community</li> <li>• A landholder/stakeholder database to be utilized for Communication and information dissemination according to landholders interests</li> <li>• Landholder/stakeholder database is utilized for Communication and information dissemination of Council issues of interest e.g. Landuse planning issues, Council policy and Council developed activities.</li> </ul>	2020-2021

<p>2.3 Develop and/or publicise publications and electronic links on topics including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landuse conflict reduction</li> <li>• Locally significant 'how to farm' guides</li> <li>• Best practice farming</li> <li>• New and innovative techniques in farming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Farmers farm and cows DO moo</i> handbook. A guide to purchasing land in rural area in Byron Shire.</li> <li>• Byron Shire specific sustainable land use and <i>Rural Land Management Handbook</i></li> <li>• Links for farmers to multi media and social media information via Council website, Facebook and direct email</li> </ul>	<p>2021-2025</p>
<p>2.4 Promote the role of Council in Agriculture and it's Agriculture Project Officer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The farming community (and Council staff) is aware of and understands the role and responsibilities of Council and its staff with regards to Agriculture.</li> <li>• Traditional owners are made aware and understand the role and responsibilities of Council and its staff with regards to Agriculture and possible management of their lands as traditional owners</li> </ul>	<p>2020-2025</p>
<p>2.5 Develop an awards program category in Council's Sustainability Awards to identify exemplary farmers</p>	<p>An agricultural award program is established and promoted to recognize practice change, productivity improvement, carbon farming and biodiversity improvement within Byron Shire</p>	<p>2022-2025</p>

### Goal 3 – Ensure agriculture remains a major economic contributor to Byron Shire’s Gross Regional Product (GRP).

**Objective: Establish opportunities for agriculture and agribusiness to increase viability and adapt to new practices, product and markets.**

ACTIONS	DELIVERABLES	Timeframe
3.1 Council appoint an Agriculture Project Officer	Council APO is the conduit between Council and farmers dealing with issues such as land use planning, infrastructure, water supply, policy and support.	2020-2025
3.2 Collaborate with agriculture industry support organisations in the development of a Byron provenance brand that reflects the values and image of the Byron Shire	Council provides promotion and negotiated assistance to support local food and farming organisations and their endeavors in the development of a Byron brand (e.g. Northern Rivers Food, Sustain Food, RDA).	2020-2025
3.3 Record and act on enquiries from farmers and stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A database of issues collating specific planning concerns to inform possible planning amendments and considerations is developed.</li> <li>• Planning issues/constraints that effect primary production are identified and minimised where possible (e.g. small lot farming).</li> <li>• Planning instruments are amended where possible to support agriculture and agricultural activities</li> </ul>	2020-2025
3.4 Support new development opportunities associated with primary production, distribution and marketing	Council will provide promotion and negotiated assistance to support primary production, distribution and marketing opportunities.	2020-2025
3.5 Monitor agricultural land use and productivity statistics within Byron Shire	Utilising relevant local, state and national data (ABS, DPI, BSC), monitor changes in landuse and agricultural productivity to inform program evaluation, planning, development and resourcing within Council.	2023-2025
3.6 Investigate, develop and support processes and arrangements that increase opportunities to access and activate underutilised farmland.	Develop and/or support a process/mechanism which connects new and existing farmers to landholders with available land to re-activate underutilised farmland	2021-2022

3.7 Support projects connecting seasonal and temporary farm workers with farms requiring labour.	Investigate local agricultural employment requirements and support opportunities and programs providing seasonal/temporary farm labour.	2020-2025
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**Reference:**

Regionality 2018 – *Investigation into Agriculture in Byron Shire and Action Plan* – Farming industry consultation summary report (BSC- 27 July 2018).