



An Australian Government Initiative



Regional
Development
Australia

NORFOLK ISLAND

Regional Plan

2024 – 2026

February 2024

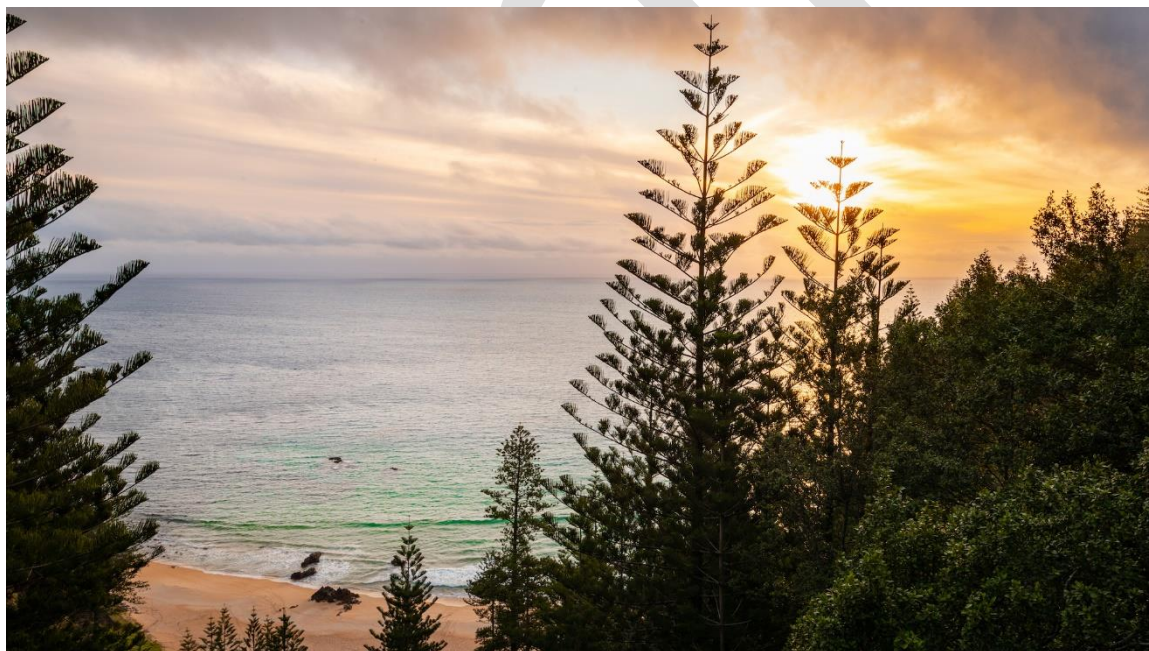


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Draft

From the Chair

Regional Development Australia Mid North Coast (RDAMNC) is a Commonwealth-funded, independent body advocating for, and promoting the development of, the regions of the Mid North Coast, Lord Howe Island and Norfolk Island.

RDAMNC has been working with the community of Norfolk Island since 2018. We have helped to address the many challenges to doing business on the island, including freight and logistics; we have incubated small businesses; and we have supported the development of the tourism industry.

Our role is to provide the links to opportunities for regional growth – between all levels of government, businesses, not-for-profits, and within the general community. As well, we are advocates and facilitators of change on key issues affecting the island. These issues include access to key services, workforce support, circular economy development, and many more crucial issues impacting the people and prosperity of the region. Our work on Norfolk Island has shown us the deep complexities of island life – spanning everything from culture to logistics. In the process, we have been privileged to learn a great deal about Norfolk Island's history and challenges.

With this document, we proudly present the first Regional Development Australia Regional Plan for Norfolk Island, in which the pressing needs and priorities of Norfolk Island are outlined and our role in assisting the community is documented.

Introduction

During the 2021–2022 period, under the previous government, Regional Development Australia (RDA) committees were required to produce a regional plan for the areas they support. As RDAMNC is responsible for both Norfolk Island and the Mid North Coast (MNC) regions, the original intention was to include both areas within the overarching regional plan. In 2023, however, we concluded that a separate regional plan for Norfolk Island is both timely and important as a tool for advocacy and planning. It is also a tool to ensure that the community members of Norfolk Island have visibility over the plans and the activities that are being undertaken for the island, and the outcomes.

Part of the reason for a distinct and separate regional plan for the island was triggered when the present government launched the Regional Investment Framework (RIF) as part of the 2023–2024 federal budget. This framework is now the guiding logic for federal investment in regional priorities. The RIF is integrated into the newly amended Regional Development Australia Committee Charter, which is presented in this document. The RDA for Norfolk Island, like all RDAs in Australia, is funded by the federal government. RDAs ensure the federal government's priorities for regional development are represented in all regions, and that place-based development is occurring, led by the communities who are set to benefit from any initiatives.

We decided that the regional planning process would give us the opportunity to consult with the Norfolk Island community about their needs and the challenges they are facing, and how their strengths may be leveraged and enhanced, while better understanding how the RIF applies in the context of Norfolk Island. We know that the challenges faced by local communities are multifaceted. Many of the structural issues that the nation is experiencing (for example, housing and workforce shortages, cost-of-living crisis, increasing complexity in waste management) are reflected on Norfolk Island.

It is critical to note that Norfolk Island cannot be bundled in with the other regions of Australia, such as the MNC, for many reasons. There are special challenges that the residents of Norfolk Island face by virtue of the island's history, governance and isolation, which need to be tackled with very specific tools and methods that are appropriate to place and circumstance. However, the desire of the federal government to work directly with communities, and especially to work proactively with Norfolk Island, is clear, as illustrated by the federal government establishing the Norfolk Island Governance Committee (NIGC). The Committee has recently commenced work on the task of re-designing the mode of governance and administration for the unique context of Norfolk Island (Joint Standing Committee Report, 2023). Therefore, this regional plan has been authored during a unique period of history for Norfolk Island.

In general, the federal government is wanting to work with regional Australia in two ways:

- via place-based initiatives, and
- coordinated and joined up efforts.

The RDA for Norfolk Island, run by the RDAMNC, will partner with key players in the island's administrative landscape, including:

1. Department of Transport, Infrastructure, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (Cth) (DITRDCA)
2. Norfolk Island Regional Council (NIRC)
3. Norfolk Island National Park (Cth)
4. Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (Cth)
5. Department of the Premier and Cabinet (Queensland)
6. Other specific departments within the Queensland (QLD) state government architecture, as appropriate.

We are also committed to working with and alongside community organisations and businesses to ensure that Norfolk Island thrives and prospers.

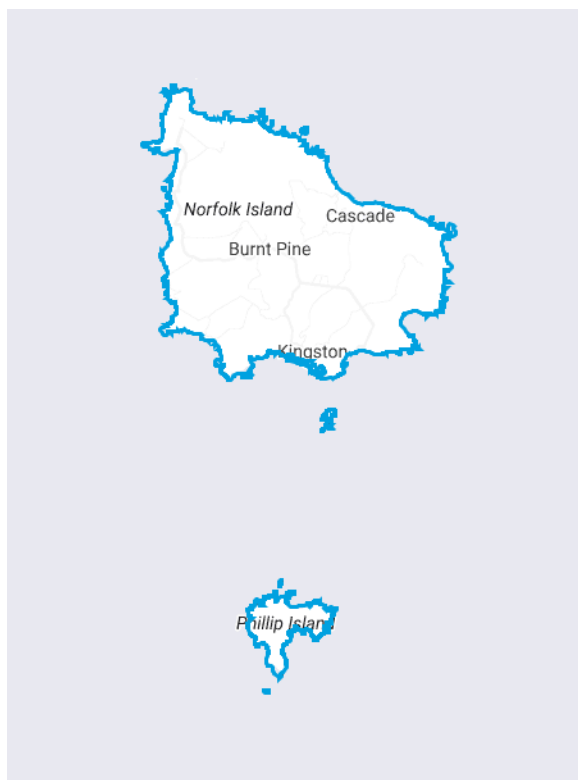


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Overview of Norfolk Island

The RDA network has been issued a new Charter to operate within the RIF. The focus of the RIF is the four key priority areas to support regional development: services, people, places and industry. RDAMNC has collated some key data for Norfolk Island in these areas.



Summary Statistics

Table 1: Key area statistics

Description	Data
Population	2,188
Annualised population growth (2016–2021)	4.5%
Median age	50 years
Median weekly income	\$728
Labour force participation	63.43%

Source: Remplan / ABS Census 2021.

RIF Statistics

Table 2 highlights some key data for Norfolk Island that are relevant to RDAMNC's work on the RIF.

Table 2: People, places, and industry statistics

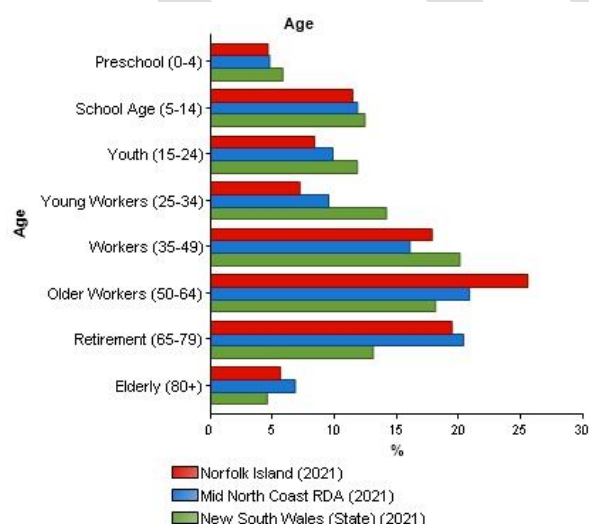
Description	Data
People	Per cent
Population between 50–79 years	44.97%
Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander	<1%
Households with two people	45.61%
Families not in the labour force	8.86%
Disengaged youth (15–24 years)	5%
Population requiring assistance with core activities	4.62%
Population living with one or more long-term health conditions	24.68%
Places	Per cent
Dwellings owned outright	33.5%
Dwellings with a spare bedrooms	75.87%
Index of disadvantage	Score
SEIFA Index of Disadvantage Score	1,006
SEIFA Index of Disadvantage SA2 ranking	1,117 / 2353
Industry	
Industry with largest output contribution	Construction
Industry with largest value-add contribution	Rental, hiring and real estate services
Industry with largest employment contribution	Accommodation and food services
Highest-ranking field of study	Engineering and related technologies

Source: Remplan / ABS Census 2021.

Norfolk Island Comparisons

Population by life stage

Norfolk Island has 44.97% of the population as older workers or retirees. In comparison, the MNC has 41.17% and New South Wales (NSW) has 31.14%.

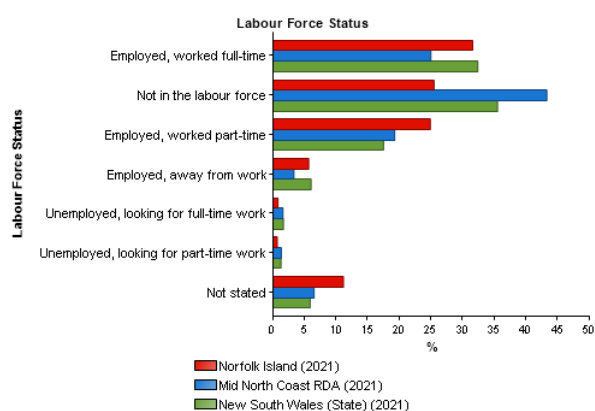


REMPPLAN

Figure 2 – Population by life stage

Population by Labour Force

Norfolk Island has 25.44% of the population not in the labour force. This statistic is in stark contrast to the MNC, which has a much higher percentage of the population not in the workforce at 43.26% and NSW has 35.46%. This statistic shows greater labour participation rates on Norfolk Island than that of the MNC and NSW overall.

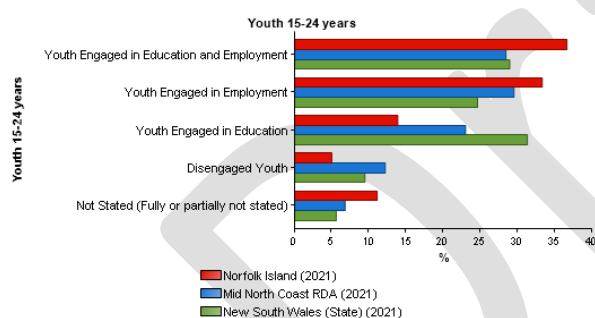


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Figure 3 – Population by labour force status

Youth Engagement (15–24 years)

5% of Norfolk Island's youth are disengaged, meaning not engaged in employment or education. However, Norfolk Island's youth engagement is significantly better than the MNC, which has 12.19% youth disengagement and NSW, which has 9.46%.

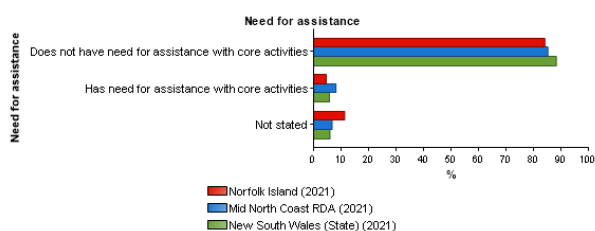


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Figure 4 – Youth Engagement 15-24 years

Need for Assistance

Norfolk Island has 4.62% of its population requiring assistance to undertake core activities. The MNC overall has 8.09% of the population requiring assistance, and NSW has 5.76%

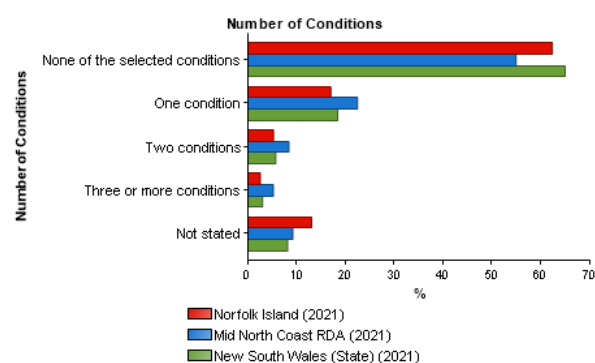


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Figure 5 – Need for Assistance

Long-term Health Conditions

There are 24.689% of Norfolk Island's population living with one or more long-term health conditions. In comparison, the MNC's overall population has 35.95% of the population living with long-term health conditions, while NSW overall has 26.97%.

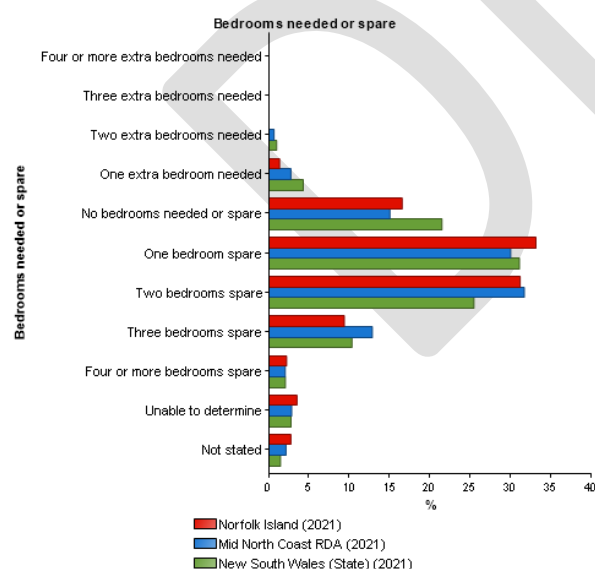


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Figure 6 – Health Conditions

Housing Suitability

Of the dwelling structures on Norfolk Island, 75.87% of them have spare bedrooms. MNC has 76.52% and NSW has 68.86%. Looking at the reverse, 1.3% of dwellings need additional bedrooms on Norfolk Island, compared to 3.55% in the MNC and 5.52% across NSW. 16.52% of dwellings on Norfolk Island have no spare bedrooms OR need additional rooms. Comparatively, the MNC is less at 15.02% and NSW is 21.48%.



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Figure 7 – Housing suitability

SEIFA Index of Disadvantage

The SEIFA scores range from 143 (min) to 1,207 (max) with 143 having the highest level of disadvantage and 1,207 being the least disadvantaged. Norfolk Island's SEIFA score is 1006 and is higher than any of the local government areas (LGAs) on the MNC, meaning they are classified as being more advantaged than those areas.

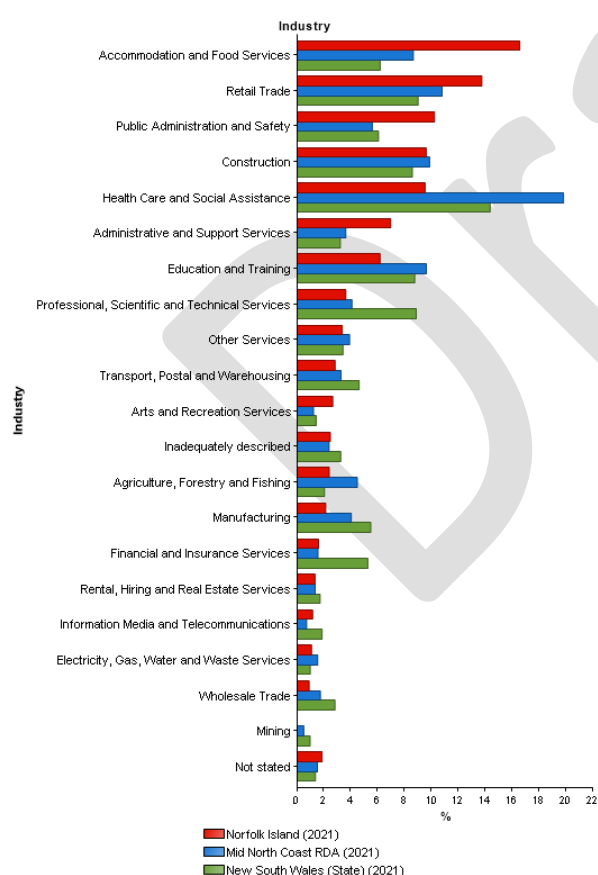
Table 3: SEIFA rankings by MNC LGA

Region	Score
Norfolk Island	1,006
Port Macquarie – Hastings	985
Bellingen	981
Coffs Harbour	972
Mid Coast	943
Nambucca Valley	920
Kempsey	903

Source: Remplan / ABS Census 2021

Industries of Employment

The top three industries of employment on Norfolk Island are accommodation and food services, retail trade, and public administration and safety. The top three for the MNC overall are health care and social assistance, retail trade and construction. NSW also has health care and social assistance as its top industry of employment; however, retail trade and professional, scientific, and technical services are the state's other top two industries.



REMPLAN

Figure 8 – Employment by Industry



Key Insights

Below is a summary of the key statistical data for Norfolk Island:

- The annualised population figure of 4.5% is three times that of the MNC and of NSW, overall.
- According to the SEIFA Index of Disadvantage, Norfolk Island is a more advantaged region than anywhere on the MNC, or in NSW, overall.
- A higher population of older workers and retirees, combined with family composition and dwelling suitability aligns with a current crisis in the areas of housing and the availability of key workers.
- The number of available bedrooms highlights the need for an urgent review of current living arrangements to increase more flexible and viable options to enable greater use of existing structures, in addition to the development of new housing.
- While the percentage of the population living with long-term health conditions is significantly lower than that of the MNC or NSW, there are still enough people who will require more specialised care in future, which will put an increased strain on the island's only medical facility.
- Norfolk Island's labour force participation rates are significantly greater than the MNC and NSW. While the data suggests that the island will continue to meet demand in the future, however it is known that resourcing is a continual challenge for Norfolk Island.
- Norfolk Island's youth is significantly more engaged than their MNC and NSW counterparts.

Source: Remplan / ABS Census 2021

Norfolk Island's Current Political Context

In November 2023, the Joint Standing Committee (JSC) released its report on the inquiry into local governance on Norfolk Island. The inquiry covered issues of critical importance to the island, including the current lack of democracy, revenue sources, proposed models for the provision of local government services, and the ongoing relationship with the federal government.

The report provided an insight into the history of Norfolk Island and the challenges it has faced from a governance perspective since its establishment as a British penal colony in 1788. There have been various models adopted over the course of this history, including since the arrival of the Pitcairn settlers in 1856. The most recent model, established in 2015, resulted in the dismissal of the NIRC's councillors in November 2021. The elected councillors were replaced by a government-appointed administrator for a period of three years, ending in December 2024. This has compounded the already fragile and fractured relationship between Norfolk Island and the Australian Government. Decisions must now be made about the ongoing model of governance for the island. The JSC has made a series of recommendations that are designed to contribute to the process of determining this new governance structure. These are outlined in more detail, below.

It should be noted that, while the JSC inquiry was underway, and at the instigation of the Hon. Minister Kristy McBain MP (Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories), the NIGC was established to provide community input into the provision of services and governance, and to provide a mechanism for collaboration between the Norfolk Island community and the federal government. The NIGC, which is similar to the proposal within the JSC's report, is comprised of six members, including three democratically elected local members, the Norfolk Island Administrator, a representative from DITRDCA and a representative from the Queensland Government's Department of Premier and Cabinet. This NIGC is in place until a locally elected governance body is re-instated on Norfolk Island. It is hoped that the NIGC can use some of the recommendations from within the report to facilitate discussions with the local community on the future governance model for Norfolk Island.

Additional Issues

As part of the inquiry, other issues and challenges raised by local community that have or are still impacting them significantly, include (but are not limited to):

- Covid 19 pandemic
- increases in interest rates
- annualised inflation rates exceeding 11%
- increases in cost-of-living expenses, such as electricity, land, and waste rates
- increases in wages and superannuation expenses due to adopting Australian workplace legislation
- immigration and population management strategy
- competition with international tourism markets
- telecommunication services
- biosecurity
- food security
- education, training, and skill development (in particular, capacity building of Norfolk Island to support future governance arrangements).

JSC Report and the role of RDAMNC

RDAMNC plays no role in the process of determining a new governance structure on Norfolk Island; however, the inclusion of a summary of the report in the regional plan is an acknowledgement and recognition of the significant pressures the current state of flux has on the Norfolk Island community. We support seeing a governance structure developed for Norfolk Island that is mutually beneficial for both Norfolk Island and the Australian Government.

While we are not directly involved in the process of setting a new governance structure, where we *are* able to work with the Norfolk Island community is in some of the areas that were raised during our scoping period (discussed, below) that are in addition to the core governance structure. These are listed and addressed throughout this regional plan for Norfolk Island.

RDAMNC has noted the requests throughout the JSC report for local engagement and we intend to continue to build our communication, consultation, and collaboration with all stakeholders on Norfolk Island, including local community members and businesses, local and federal government representatives, and any other relevant parties.

The Role of Regional Development Australia

The following section explains the role of Regional Development Australia committees, which are non-profit organisations funded by the federal government to support effort and investment in regional Australia. The committees are key in providing regional intelligence to assist the federal government in their planning and delivery for the regions.

The RDA committees are bodies that are funded to connect, facilitate and support their communities to make progress on opportunities and challenges. They are not service delivery organisations funded to provide direct services. The organisation exists to assist communities by linking resources, support and advocacy on key issues. The RDA Charter was redeveloped by the government and launched on 27 July 2023.

RDA Charter

The government's vision for regional Australia is of strong, connected regions that shape our economic growth and wellbeing. These regions are resilient and responsive to economic and environmental shocks, and are inclusive, vibrant, and diverse. They are regions that our First Nations people have every opportunity to engage in and shape, and where people, businesses and investments thrive.

Regional Development Australia Committees (RDAs) are critical to the delivery of this vision, including supporting the successful implementation of the Australian Government's RIF, which will guide a more coordinated approach to regional development, underpinned by local engagement.

RDAs play a role in helping to drive economic growth, innovation, and entrepreneurship in regions by facilitating investment in community, industry, and the environment. RDAs help to bridge the regional development gaps by working with a broad range of stakeholders across sectors and supporting the delivery of identified Australian Government strategic priorities.

As representatives of their local communities, RDAs will:

- focus their activities and strategy on delivery of the RIF in their region, including by investment in people, places, services, and industries and local economies
- support regional stakeholders, including local government and the not-for-profit-sector, to seek grant opportunities that advance strategic regional priorities

- support decarbonisation efforts and the transformation to a net zero economy and enable regional linkages between sectors to achieve these aims
- build the evidence for economic development, including innovation and diversification strategies
- facilitate meaningful engagement across the all levels of government to ensure investments deliver better outcomes for regions
- contribute relevant data and local intelligence to support the evidence base to inform regional development strategies, program design and policy responses.

RDAs use their local, cross-sector expertise and regional voice to:

- collaborate with integrity, transparency, respect, and accountability
- engage with diverse communities, especially First Nations people
- support the government's ambition of 'no one held back, and no one left behind'
- support gender equality opportunities in their regions.

The Charter demonstrates the facilitative nature of the RDA remit and reflects the organisational and funding structure. RDAs are small entities; each RDA looks different in each region and many RDAs run multiple programs in addition to their RDA responsibilities.

Regional Investment Framework Overview

In May 2023, the federal government issued their overarching framework that will guide their investment in regional Australia. Their focus is to invest in people, services, places and local industries and economies. Below is a description of the program priorities within the RIF.

Investing in People

People are the bedrock of vibrant, safe, and inclusive communities. The RIF aims to ensure regional communities are safe, supported, and have the ability to take up opportunities and to participate at their full potential by:

- improving outcomes for First Nations people in all domains by advancing the Closing the Gap agenda
- enabling First Nations community owned and controlled services
- improving access to domestic and family violence services
- supporting veterans and their families
- supporting funding education options
- supporting vocational education and investing in trainees and apprentices within the National Skills Agreement
- addressing labour shortages across the region.

Investing in Services

Quality services and amenities underpin the sustainability and success of communities and regions. The RIF sets out to improve the accessibility, connectivity, and equity of services in regional Australia. The focus areas include:

- accessing core utilities, such as power and water
- accessing health and community services
- reducing cost-of-living pressures
- improving the regional health workforce
- accessing regional mental health services
- improving the workforce shortages in early childcare and workforce availability in regional and remote areas
- improving telecommunications and internet services
- supporting infrastructure and freight logistics.

Investing in Places

The federal government prioritises places by supporting the regions through a range of investments that help communities to thrive, harness local competitive advantages, improve infrastructure and enhance liveability. The types of investments are:

- community-led initiatives, such as the 'Stronger Places, Stronger People' initiative

- whole-of-government framework to address community disadvantage
- supporting economic diversification of mining dependent communities
- 'Housing Australia Future Fund' and other housing-related initiatives
- a significant infrastructure program to ensure communities are connected, liveable and safe
- 'Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program'
- National Park support
- 'Disaster Ready Fund'
- arts, cultural and inclusivity support for communities.

Investing in Industries and Local Economies

The government is seeking to make future-focused investments in the regions to secure a productive and sustainable future for the nation. A significant focus of this is the transition to net zero. The types of investments that are being supported are as follows:

- preparing relevant regions to be clean energy exporters
- 'Hydrogen Headstart Program'
- 'Net Zero Economy Agency'
- 'National Reconstruction Fund'
- critical minerals sector support
- 'Australian Strategic Capabilities Accelerator' and Australian Defence Force support
- agricultural sustainability fund
- expansion and improvement on the Pacific Australia Labour Migration (PALM) scheme

Regional Investment Framework and Norfolk Island

Following the release of the RIF, the RDAMNC team determined that an in-depth scoping and consultation process was necessary to identify how it applied to Norfolk Island. The RDAMNC Board approved an extended visit to Norfolk Island by the CEO to undertake the scoping exercise and engage thoroughly with the Norfolk Island community.

Consultation Process

The visit commenced in September 2023 and closed at the end of November 2023. During the two-month visit, the CEO conducted three industry consultation sessions, which enabled industry representatives to provide detailed input into how the RIF applies to the Norfolk Island local context.

The three public stakeholder conversations were:

1. agri-business sector
2. tourism and hospitality sector
3. social, health and community care sector.

These sessions were complemented by numerous one-on-one conversations and consultations with community members, organisational representatives, and businesses. The distribution of consultations and conversations from the visit are presented below.

Table 4: Activity summary by sector

Sector	Code	Visit totals	Visit totals %
Local government	LG	13	14%
State government	SG	1	1%
Federal government	FG	20	22%
VIP/ministerial	VIP	4	4%
Commercial	COM	4	4%
Small business	SB	9	10%
Community	CY	20	22%
Totals		90	100%

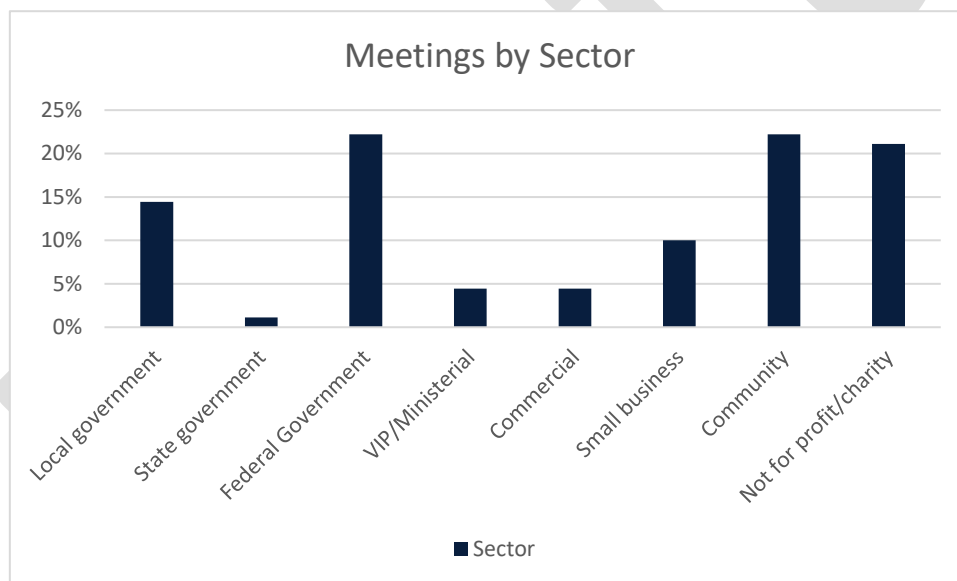


Figure 9 – Consultation Meetings by Sector

The discussion below highlights pressing areas for address within the RIF's quadrant of investing in people, Investing in Services, Investing in Places and Investing in Industry and Local Economies.

People

Labour market

Norfolk Islanders have an impressive labour participation rate, with 63.7% of people over 15 years of age in the labour force. This is significantly higher than the other Territories, which have 58.2% participation, and slightly higher than the Australian rate of 61.1% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census All person QuickStats).

However, Norfolk Island also has the challenge of underemployment, with people working multiple part-time jobs – a notable feature of the labour market dynamics. Partly, this reflects the nature of the tourism economy, which is the island's clear driving industry, but it also reflects the historically low wage roles across Norfolk Island prior to the introduction of the Australian Award structure. This structure now provides mandatory minimum wages across all industries. For many years prior to the introduction of the Australian Award structure, people would work multiple part-time roles to get by.

The median annual wage for the island is a low \$37,097. In order to purchase a house the household must be able to purchase a property outright (purchase prices range from \$600,000 for a modest family home to over \$1 million for a modern renovated house). It is no longer possible for someone to take out a mortgage, or any other form of business loans on Norfolk Island. Therefore, to relocate requires substantial capital. Should an individual be seeking to rent, the influx of comparatively affluent people to the island has seen an increase in rental costs of 73.9% between the years 2016 and 2021 (Norfolk Island – Annual Economic Update, Strategy and Outlook, Delta Pearl Partners 2023, p. 15), with the trend continuing through to 2024. A significant proportion of the renters on Norfolk Island are feeling the effects of the increased rental costs – which is contributing to an increased sense of economic vulnerability.

Income distribution

In the 5 years between Census collections 37.18% of Norfolk Island's population was living either in Australia or elsewhere overseas. The migration of people to Norfolk Island has included people who were living abroad and that have returned to Norfolk Island in combination with Australia and New Zealand migrants.

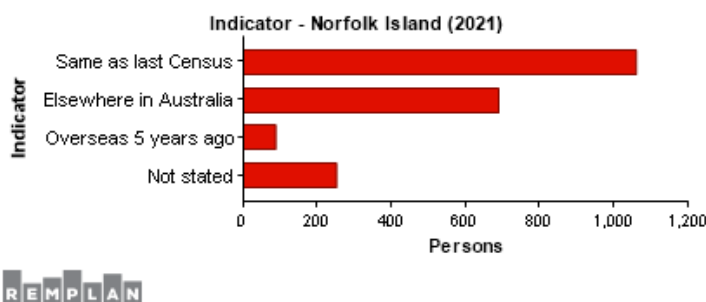


Figure 10 – Usual address 5 years ago

With a median weekly income of \$728 and a sizeable cost-of-living differential compared to mainland Australia, there are economic pressures on the community of Norfolk Island which are derived from their isolation and remoteness (ABS Census 2021, Remplan). Yet, when Norfolk Island is viewed from the lens of the SEIFA index (4), it shows as a medium socioeconomic status (SES) region. The data contained in the snapshot above demonstrates that Norfolk Island, when compared against the RDAMNC regions, is the highest-ranking SES status region out of the seven local government areas.

The Census data collected in the last Norfolk Island run Census of 2011 demonstrates the weekly median income of the Norfolk Island “ordinarily resident population” was \$555 per week (Norfolk Island Government, 2011 p. 24). The median weekly income for NSW excluding Sydney was \$561 per week (2011 Census All Persons

QuickStats Rest of NSW). In Coffs Harbour, for a regional comparison, this was \$469 (2011 Census All Persons QuickStats Coffs Harbour). This is now \$728 per week for Norfolk Island, \$612 for Coffs Harbour (Census 2021, Remplan) and for regional NSW excluding Sydney, this is \$722 (2021 Census All Persons QuickStats Rest of NSW). This indicates a consistent pattern in income has held across the pre-Commonwealth administration to the present day which maintains Norfolk Island as a medium socioeconomic status community. However, it needs to be reiterated that the cost-of-living differences, the necessity of an international flight to leave the Island, the additional market challenges around freight and lack of competition surrounding supply of basic products adds additional layers of cost and complexity to the lives of Norfolk Islanders.

Education

Between the 2016 to 2021 census data sets, there has been an alarming reduction in higher education enrolments. This is not a reflection of peoples' aptitude or desires, but rather of the practical barriers to education for Norfolk Islanders. Globally the cost of all basic goods has increased with the inflationary economic climate. On Norfolk Island, this is compounded by freight charges. This has impacted the cost of living, which is still increasing.

The current census data is skewed with respect to educational attainment. The immigration pattern of well-qualified retirees are inflating the proportion of the community with higher educational attainment. The current participation in higher education of about 1% demonstrates an urgent need to widen access. The Norfolk Island Census of 2011 indicated 14% of the resident population held degrees at Bachelor level or higher (Norfolk Island Government, 2011 p. 20). The present Higher Education Dashboard for 2023 (Deloitte) indicates 21% of the population hold degree-level qualifications. The Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of 2016, though under subscribed, indicates 11% of the counted population have Bachelor-level qualifications, or higher.

There are a number of areas where Norfolk Island's situation of being without the governance and resources of a state-level government creates a stark inequality. This will be discussed more fully in Investing in Services, but one of these areas is in access to education. Norfolk Island has provided universal education to children to Year 10 via the NSW curriculum for decades. The Norfolk Island community have progressively mandated universal education for children since their arrival on the island in 1856. This was extended to provide the full curriculum to Year 12 many years ago. The Norfolk Island Central School performs well, with a 93.4% of students retained to Year 10, which is very high by Australian standards. However, it is the post-secondary education options that are significantly challenging.

The federal government has recognised the challenges presented by the lack of state government with its program supporting vocational education students to access the TAFE and vocational education and training (VET) system. The Commonwealth supports people accessing VET with travel subsidies in much the same way that state governments support their remote students with travel and accommodation funding to enable them to access the VET. This has been a real change for Norfolk Islanders, which has seen a significant increase in the enrolments in VET; 55 people were enrolled in the latter part of 2023.

The challenges around successfully undertaking further education are still present. There are no facilities that assist in removing the barriers to education in the community: for example, IT, internet access, learning support, peer support, or even a conducive environment for study. This has a significant impact on people's confidence and on their ability to complete studies. It must be noted that with the improvement of telecommunications options on the island, such as Sky Muster and Starlink, access to online education has never been more possible for Norfolk Islanders. What this does not provide is the educational supports required for people to succeed in education, particularly those who are attempting tertiary education as a first-in-family student.

This are genuine implications for Norfolk Islanders in terms of their ability to remain competitive in a changing labour market. Norfolk Islanders are competing for employment opportunities with Australians who have not faced the same barriers to post-secondary education. Additionally, experience and qualifications obtained on Norfolk Island are not easy to translate for the purposes of recognising prior learning. For residents of Norfolk Island, there are also significant barriers to furthering their professional development, or even for maintaining current qualifications.

This challenge in educational access and experience is not only felt at an individual level. Organisations such as the Norfolk Island Hospital and Residential Aged Care Service (NIHRACS), the NIRC, the Commonwealth and other organisations (professional services, the service industry, and the care industry) all struggle with accessing staff with suitable skill sets. “There is a need to build the local workforce through work experience, accreditation and university placements” (PHN Health Needs Assessment 2023, p. 10).

Trades availability

Norfolk Island is a busy place with both minor works and major projects occurring in the private and public sectors. The availability of tradespeople on Norfolk Island is a challenge, with customers waiting inordinate times to have both domestic and commercial work undertaken. This is further compounded by the challenges associated with gaining VET sector qualifications on the island. To undertake subjects and assessments, students must leave Norfolk Island for weeks at a time. The Commonwealth has recognised the challenges associated with access to vocational education as a result of the island’s extreme remoteness and because of the lack of state government architecture for Norfolk Islanders.

Access to immigrant labour

The post COVID-19 return of the working holiday maker (WHM) visa holders has greatly assisted the businesses on Norfolk Island and allowed many to keep trading. These workers are particularly useful for the tourism and hospitality industry sectors. However, this method of providing labour is not without its complications. The 88-day rotation of WHM visa holders means that businesses are constantly training new staff, which is inefficient and expensive. It also leaves the island vulnerable to the structural shocks that have affected the international economy more broadly. Furthermore, the changes being made to the visa system for WHM visa holders from the United Kingdom – which removes the criteria of working for 88 days in a regional area for their second term – may also adversely affect Norfolk Island’s supply of transient workers.

Prior to 2015, Norfolk Island was managing its own immigration policy and was able to draw workers from neighbouring islands and from Australia with a higher degree of control around the conditions and duration. There is a sizeable population of Pacific Islanders who live on Norfolk Island; they have a robust community infrastructure, including their own religious institution. In recent years, many business owners have tried to access workers via the PALM scheme, but the difficulties and costs with this scheme have meant that, to date, this has been unsuccessful.

Despite Norfolk Island having a thriving community of Pacific Islanders, the PALM scheme remains out of reach for businesses on Norfolk Island. Preliminary discussions with labour hire firms around the viability of supplying labour to Norfolk Island have highlighted the following challenges:

1. being able to satisfy the welfare supervision requirements
2. the viability of medical insurance and risk management
3. the cost per hour required to recoup the expenses of supporting a labour pool on Norfolk Island with the scheme’s current requirements.

Despite these barriers, the PALM scheme is a labour solution that could be very useful for Norfolk Island, where workers would be well supported because of the community that already exists on the island. It is an area that needs to be pursued and advocated.

Ageing population

The population of Norfolk Island presents a profile in which the most significant segment is older workers aged 50–64 years. The smallest contingent of the population is young workers, aged 25–34. This is not a surprising distribution, as many young people leave their place of origin in search of educational, employment and experience opportunities. It is, however, a challenge when it comes to providing appropriate services for people on-island and sufficient staff for the local economy. People on Norfolk Island work longer, with 11% of the workforce coming from the 65–74 years cohort compared with 5.9% of the MNC or 4.4% of NSW (ABS Census 2021 accessed via Remplan). A further illustration is that 27.4% of the workforce is comprised of workers aged 55–64 versus 15.4% in NSW.

In consultations, people raised the challenges associated with being an older worker in the labour market and the unsuitability of many roles because of the physical requirements. There is a significant productive burden on the older members of the community. Many of the people who immigrate to Norfolk Island intending to retire find themselves working well into their planned retirement, contributing to the community, filling gaps in the service and business sectors, and sharing their previous work experience.

Services

Servicing an ageing community

Since 2016, the NIHRACS has had a significant transformation to its scope of practice following the changes in the island's governance brought about when the federal government assumed control. This has resulted in alterations to the kinds of procedures and levels of care that are available and accessible by the community. The main driver for this was the introduction of Australian standards applied by NSW and subsequently QLD health systems, which specify the standard requirements for facilities, such as operating theatres and spaces for more complex healthcare delivery.

A key feature of the NIHRACS is the aged-care facility. Recently, the federal government announced that a new purpose-built, residential, aged-care facility will be constructed, with the expectation that it will be completed by 2027. It is anticipated that this facility will also include some other ancillary buildings to support service delivery (DITRDCA, 13 December 2023).

Access to state-level grants

Most Australian communities have the benefit of state government support. As an external territory, some of the state-based services or supports are brokered by the Commonwealth via service delivery agreements. This set of arrangements is complex: 'The instability of these arrangements has been a source of stress for Norfolk Island residents and increased the fragmentation of the health and education system' (Norfolk Island Health Needs Summary 2023, p. 9).

There is, however, another arena in which this lack of support presents – in the domain of small grant availability. Remote communities in QLD, for example, have the benefit of being eligible to apply for grants from the following pools:

- Gambling Community Benefit Fund – up to \$35,000 or up to \$100,000 (super round)
- Community Recovery Grants – various
- Back to Work Regional Program – business support for wages paid
- Business Growth Fund – up to \$75,000
- Drought preparedness grants – up to \$50,000

Norfolk Island has recently become eligible for many of the federal government grants, which have enabled some significant investment in infrastructure. However, the lack of community- and business-scale grants that are usually supported by state governments, mean businesses and not-for-profit organisations are struggling to refresh essential community infrastructure. Moreover, businesses have no avenue for grant-based growth support. An example is the desperate need for the renovation of the Scout and Guides Hall. Something like the Gambling Community Benefit Fund would provide an avenue to upgrade the facility for the youth organisations that use the Hall for their programs. On the island, it is the sole facility dedicated to young people. The Norfolk Island Cadets have been trying to fund much-needed repairs for years. This smaller scale grant range is simply not catered for in the remit of the Commonwealth.

Banking and insurance

Norfolk Island is served by the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, which is the only branch physically located on Norfolk Island. People report challenges with online two-factor authentication processes, which are becoming more stringent, and difficulties with the telecommunications infrastructure because of the local telephone

numbering system and the associated Antarctic-based phone code. Visitors also struggle to access banking services when they are on-island for the same reasons, as well as an inability to connect to network roaming.

The restricted choice for access to direct banking is somewhat overcome by the proliferation of internet banks, however, accessing support when you need it is very difficult to impossible from Norfolk Island.

At present, only one insurer is prepared to insure Norfolk Island as a location. This market monopoly results in poor competition and high pricing structures. These market dynamics add additional costs and stress to businesses that are trying to protect assets.

Perhaps the most significant challenge for businesses and individuals on Norfolk Island, when it comes to banking and insurance services, is the complete inability to obtain a loan. It makes it extremely challenging for businesses to be able to invest in improving and upgrading their offerings and tourism infrastructure. This creates a vicious cycle of underinvestment in product, which, in turn, jeopardises the tourism industry.

Municipal and service infrastructure challenges

In 2015, the transfer of assets from the previous governance arrangements to the local government model saw an enormous balance transfer of ailing infrastructure. This had consequences for the viability of the local government model's operations administered by NIRC. The roads, airport, electricity, telecommunications, waste-processing capabilities, ports, and other infrastructure, were transferred in varying states of condition, but with many of them requiring significant maintenance and investment. The cost of all construction and maintenance has increased over the period of local government operations, but the consequences of COVID-19 on freight and logistics undoubtedly compounded the issues.

There is still a significant program of work ahead to recondition public infrastructure, however, the NIRC, together with Commonwealth support, has seen some impressive strides towards decarbonising NIRC's business activities and the Norfolk Island electricity grid. The NIRC's achievements in sustainability would be the envy of many local government entities in Australia. There is still some way to go before Norfolk Island is free from the regular use of diesel generators, but the changes to the network have already been significant.

Health services

There have been several significant changes to the provision of health services on Norfolk Island in the last decade, with an attendant increase in complexity for Norfolk Island residents.

The reduction in the services accessible through the Multi-Purpose Health Service has meant that procedures that are considered basic, for example simple day procedures that were previously performed on Norfolk Island, can now only be accessed off-island.

Women are unable to give birth on Norfolk Island and must relocate to the Australian mainland from 36 weeks on to have their child. This puts significant strain on families and adds additional complications to the provision of antenatal care.

Additionally, the arrangements for health service system support have moved from NSW to the QLD government. Norfolk Island's support is now coming from the Metro North Health Hospital and Health Service and Brisbane North Primary Health Network. There are knock on consequences for staff and patients with these shifts.

There are also benefits for islanders, who can now access Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, and subsidies for medical transport off Norfolk Island. This greatly assists individuals with the cost of accessing care elsewhere.

There are some gaps in terms of service provision and equity that communities in remote Australia face, and the Norfolk Island community is no exception. For example, along with antenatal and early childhood care and assistance, there is a need for specialists to provide care to young people on-island. There are clear and urgent needs for additional support for children and youth services with 50% of Norfolk Island students currently being on a behavioural or developmental management plan (Brisbane North Primary Health Network 2023, p. 4).

Places

Water security

Norfolk Island relies primarily on water harvesting from rainfall as the source of municipal and private water supply. Some properties have bores, but this is not the norm. Consequently, there is a high degree of vulnerability to drought. There have been high-quality studies commissioned into increasing islanders' resilience to drought by capturing and storing water more effectively; however, these initiatives are another area where the grants that would be required to deliver the projects are sitting in the "missing middle" of grant provision – as in, not needing a capital investment of \$5 or \$15 million (as per the minimum grant thresholds for federal government grant). These sorts of initiatives – improving tank-water management and monitoring, more efficient water capture by, for example, improving guttering and other measures to improve water security – are small capital investments. Grants for these kinds of initiative usually come from state government assistance provided to local governments in their states.

Energy security and affordability have been improved, as mentioned above. There have also been network-scale battery investments and programs to encourage households to invest in battery and solar arrays. Norfolk Island's progress in this respect is one to watch and support.

Another area of civil infrastructure that requires continued investment is telecommunications. Improvements over the past two years have delivered faster and more accessible internet, but there are still challenges for the community and for tourists. As referenced above, the entrance to the Norfolk Island market of multiple low-earth-orbiting satellite internet service providers has made a substantial difference to connectivity for some people. It is also the case that both the Commonwealth and the NIRC are continuing to invest in this aspect of island infrastructure.

Housing

Construction costs on Norfolk Island are expensive – and increasingly so. Because of this, and because of labour constraints, growing the amount of housing stock on-island is a challenge, but is now a priority. Some houses play a role in the tourism market as short-term rentals. A quick search of AirBnB listings shows 40 properties listed as available for short term rental. The total number of stand-alone dwellings counted on Norfolk Island was 1005, with 28 medium density dwellings (Census 2021, REMPLAN). While AirBnB does not show all private dwellings which have a role in the tourism sector, it is a good indication that approx.. 3.5-4% of the housing stock on Norfolk Island has some role to play in the market.

The island has not been sheltered from the increases in housing prices experienced on the Australian mainland, and, likewise, the cost of renting is increasingly unaffordable for people on average Norfolk Island wages. The national challenges around access to trades are also being felt on Norfolk Island. This, along with the cost of freight and the long timeframes associated with the supply of building materials, means maintaining existing housing stock is difficult.

Biosecurity and a special ecosystem

Norfolk Island is located on the Zealandia continent along with New Zealand, the Kermadec Islands, New Caledonia and Lord Howe Island. These locations share a range of species, with each of the islands having their own variations of flora and fauna having evolved on their unique land masses. There is a bounty of natural history on Norfolk Island, an already strong research interest and community, and a supportive local contingent of scientists and citizen-scientists heavily involved in preservation and conservation of the endemic species and other elements of the natural ecology. The community rallies behind National Parks Services, with volunteers supporting weed management and the propagation of native species.

There is a significant opportunity to invest in the conservation of this natural history for both scientific and tourism purposes. The National Parks Service has been improving infrastructure and the visitor experience, and there are plans to improve the nature-based and adventure-based tourism experiences on offer. There are collections on Norfolk Island that will be a strong attraction for tourists and conservationists if investment in

the display of the collection is made. There is also the opportunity to use this platform to better cater to the existing research interest in Norfolk Island's ecology and history.

The creative community

Norfolk Island has a deep relationship with the Pacific Islands, which predates the European history of the island but was cemented with the arrival of the Pitcairn settlers in 1856, who were descendants of the *Bounty* mutineers and their Tahitian wives. This relationship with the Pacific Island communities continues today, with Norfolk Islands continuous representation at the Festival of Pacific Arts since 1980. Norfolk Island has a troupe of acclaimed dancers, has artisans skilled in fibre arts, craft, and jewellery, has produced renowned authors and artists, and has a strong community arts collective, which has kept creative momentum going on Norfolk Island for 50 years.

These traditional arts are complemented by many accomplished photographers, videographers, marketers and designers. Norfolk Island's creative community spans the range of creative endeavours and enterprise, formed in the backdrop of Norfolk Island's deep cultural sense of place and heritage. The island's story continues to inspire and motivate. All of these aspects and activities bring a richness and diversity to Norfolk Island. One of the things that could bring an additional lift to the creative community is the identification of a space for makers and artists in residence to be able to make the creative pursuits more readily visible for visitors and accessible for residents. Such investments have proven successful in small communities and can become a visitor attraction which showcases local talent and creativity.

Industries and Local Economies

Cost of living, business and inflation

At the time of writing, across all Australia, there is a significant cost-of-living crisis that is affecting many people. On Norfolk Island this is felt even more keenly because of the structurally significant difference in the cost of living experienced by Norfolk Islanders.

Because the Australian figures are not representative of the circumstances or situation on Norfolk Island, in 2023, the NIRC reinstated the cost-of-living survey and calculation of inflation for the local economy. The Australian rate of inflation in December 2022 peaked at 7.8%, with a decline to the September 2023 quarter, resulting in a Consumer Price Index (CPI) of 5.4%. The *Norfolk Island – Annual Economic Update, Strategy and Outlook* calculated inflation on Norfolk Island at 11.09% in 2022, with a slight reduction by the first quarter of 2023 to 10.54%. The difference between the two markets is illustrated in the variation in the inflation rates.

The realities of island life mean that Norfolk Islanders depend on freighted goods for the day-to-day necessities, such as basic food supplies, building and construction materials, fuel, and retail stock. All these goods are subject to high freight costs. At present there is only one company providing regular freight services to the island, which clearly is not ideal. Planning is underway to improve the port access and improve the ability of the island to handle containerised freight.

The average small business owner on Norfolk Island faces a raft of barriers to entry and continuation that are not present in Australia. The cost of bringing goods to the island, the logistical challenges, the communication barriers, the delay in postal exchange, and the monopoly supplier situation make doing business a tough proposition.

Tourism

Tourism is Norfolk Island's most significant industry with many related businesses also reliant on the tourism trade for their existence and continuation. A significant proportion of this activity is related to the accommodation and food services sectors; however, the flow-on from these sectors is thought to encompass as much as 40% of the total economic activity (KPMG 2019 in DeltaPearl 2023, p. 11). The tourism economy also supports a significant proportion of the employment activity, with 12.5% of the island's labour pool working in the accommodation and hospitality sectors (ABS Census 2021, in DeltaPearl 2023, p. 11).

The challenge for the tourism industry is its vulnerability to significant global economic trends and structural shifts. The island is in a precarious position. Events, such as the Global Financial Crisis that occurred in 2008 and COVID-19 in 2019–2020 can leave business operators vulnerable. These global events can put a serious brake on the tourism industry, placing Norfolk Island in a challenging position. The recovery of the sector following COVID-19 has been excellent, with the tourism numbers for 2023 breaking back through to the pre-2016 highs of 30,000+ visitors.

There has been a good investment in tourism and destination marketing efforts appealing to different demographics, which will continue to promote the island in a new and fresh way. It is anticipated that this will widen the tourism base, which presently is skewed towards the retiree market. To continue to develop the market, continued investment and redevelopment of the tourism product on-island is required.

Circular economy

Recent changes occurred in Norfolk Island's waste management practices, which led to an urgent need to improve what was being done to manage waste. The island's waste was being flown off the island at an enormous cost to the NIRC, and, consequently, the community. This has seen Norfolk Island Regional Council and community take the lead, pioneering new technological processes for waste management in partnership with Revolve Your World, and in other activities associated with a circular economy. The waste management process improvements have seen 75% of all waste diverted from landfill, with several products being made available to the community as effective substitutes for expensive horticultural and landscaping supplies, among other uses. This responsible approach to environmental management is an exciting and pioneering venture for Norfolk Island, with clear benefits and implications for other communities in remote locations.

Agriculture and the food system

Norfolk Islanders have a long history of resilience, making do, and providing for themselves. There are several productive landholdings that supply the domestic and tourism markets with fresh seasonal produce. However, there are vulnerabilities in this market, with an ageing population of farmers and challenges associated with succession planning for family businesses. While there is an import market for fresh produce, a considerable amount of high-quality fresh produce is currently grown locally. The market gardening economy is an area that requires focus, because the consequences of a dwindling supply of locally produced fresh produce will be severe.

Norfolk Island will always need to import certain food products, particularly those that are highly manufactured. However, the current challenges with freight have resulted in a single company supplying the island with their ocean-based freight needs. The challenge with the infrastructure required to accommodate containerised freight as mentioned above is a genuine difficulty for some businesses and for the overall cost and competitiveness of the freight route. There is work being undertaken on this issue, but any changes to this situation will take time and bring additional complications in other arenas, such as biosecurity and pest management.

There are a number of key components to improve the resilience of the food system for Norfolk Island:

1. support local produce processing and storage options
2. work to remove barriers to entry for people wanting to make their lands more productive for food purposes
3. cooperative use of heavy plant and equipment to support agricultural growth
4. diversify production and species within strong biosecurity controls
5. promote and celebrate Norfolk Island's traditional, seasonal way of consuming and producing.

There are local groups and individuals working to increase the diversity of production on Norfolk Island and to use collective practices to reduce some of the costs associated with agricultural production.

There are massive challenges with the cost of agricultural inputs for Norfolk Island, with the challenges of restricted markets, biosecurity, freight and supply barriers seeing some industries (for example, pigs and poultry) fold due to the cost of feed and other necessary inputs.

Cattle industry

The cattle (and other ruminant) industry on Norfolk Island has suffered a blow in the years since 2016. It is estimated that Norfolk Island cattle producers cover approximately 50% of the local demand for beef. There is also a strong tradition of people raising their own meat for their own consumption. This is a vital component of the food supply chain. At present, it is not possible for Norfolk Islanders to import a live ruminant. The last live importation of fresh genetics for the industry was in 2014. The ordinary practice of producers was to import a small number of new animals to the island every few years in order to maintain the health of the herd. The island has very few of the diseases and pests that are found in Australian mainland cattle, and so the biosecurity regulations are set to maintain this status. A consequence of this is that the health and genetic integrity of local herds are now under threat. Significant local effort and Commonwealth grant support has gone into equipping the islanders so they can handle artificial reproduction. However, the success rate for artificial insemination has been poor for a number of reasons. The extra protocols and requirements make it challenging to supply Norfolk Island with new genetic material. This is a disincentive for the Australian industry to assist and has made sourcing embryos difficult.

Draft

RDA Norfolk Island Focus Areas

It is not possible to capture all the complexity of Norfolk Island in a single plan and it is not the intention of this document to do so. Rather, this Plan is to guide the efforts of RDA Norfolk Island and assist with the organisation's transparency and communications with the Norfolk Island community.

Given the consultation conducted and our continued service to Norfolk Island from 2018, the key focus areas for RDA Norfolk Island to pursue are detailed below.

Table 5: Summary of key focus areas aligned with the Regional Investment Framework

Investing in People	Investing in Services
1.1 Understanding skill needs and labour market dynamics	2.1 Improved access to essential services
1.2 Increasing access to post-secondary education and opportunities	2.2 Investments in service provision for an ageing community
1.3 Improvement in professional development and capacity building opportunities	2.3 Supporting and advocating for grant access
1.4 Improved access to labour	2.4 Better access to suppliers and markets for businesses
1.5 Strengthen research relationships	2.5 Investing in health services
Investing in Places	Investing in Industry and the Local Economy
3.1 Improved infrastructure condition and investment	4.1 Agricultural and food production industry
3.2 Investment in destination marketing and awareness	4.2 Circular economy support
3.3 Water security	4.3 Supporting succession planning
3.4 Telecommunications improvements	4.4 Encouraging investment in existing businesses
3.5 Promote the natural history and biodiversity of Norfolk Island	4.5 Increasing resilience in the food system
3.6 Improve freight access	4.6 Investment in ecotourism, wellness tourism and natural history tourism opportunities
3.7 Support housing investment	4.7 Supporting local artisans, crafts people, artists and producers
3.8 Support and promote the creative community	
3.9 Increased focus on community-level infrastructure improvements	

Business Plan 2023–2024

Table 6: Projects

Project Title	Focus Area Alignment	Description
People		
Country University Centre	1.2, 1.3	Form provisional Board and submit application into the Regional University Study Hub grant from Department of Education and Training
Places		
Renewables opportunity mapping	3.1	High level assessment of the opportunity represented by renewable energy for Norfolk Island
Natural history collection preservation	3.5	Identify key stakeholders for collaboration on the creation of a natural history centre for Norfolk Island
Researcher Centre	3.9, 1.5	Identify and support the development of spaces for researchers on Norfolk Island to have adequate support and resources
Planning		
LGA snapshots	1.1	Providing dataset for population and economic characteristics of Norfolk Island
Regional Plan NI	All	Producing the first regional plan for Norfolk Island
Services		
Regenerative agriculture training	4.1, 4.4, 1.3	Nutritech Solutions training course in February 2024 for all islanders interested in regenerative agriculture and soil health
Food system mapping	4.1, 2.1	Undertake a study of the food system in order to prioritise effort and investment in supporting initiatives
Improving access to PALM	1.4, 4.4	Investigation of opportunities and options for improving access to PALM scheme
Industry and economy		
Herd genetics program	4.1, 4.4	Supporting industry to improve outcomes from assisted reproduction and investigate producing foundational research for ruminant importation
NI local produce brand	3.2, 4.6	Produce a “Made in Norfolk” brand to distinguish local product

Table 7: Advocacy, scoping and grant support

Activity	Focus Area Alignment	Description
Accessing state-level grant funds	3.1, 3.9, 2.3	RDA NI will be working to improve access to small- to medium-sized grants
Water security	3.1, 3.3	Support for projects related to water security, seeking grants and collaborating with partners to improve outcomes
Continuing the circular economy development	4.2	Championing and advocating for continued investment and seeking to publicise the incredible progress
Film industry development on Norfolk Island	3.2	Working with partners to assess the prospect of greater film industry involvement in NI with NIRC
Dark Skies destination leveraging	4.6, 3.2	Working with NIRC to maximise the benefits for the dark skies classification for the island
Local futures potential collaboration	4.1, 4.7	Assessing the potential for a collaboration to support economic localisation and strengthen the resilience of the island's economy

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