



SMALL TOWNS ... BIG ADVENTURES

Richmond Valley
Tourism
Development Plan

Richmond
Valley
Council



Richmond Valley Tourism Plan

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The beautiful Richmond River links our communities of Casino, Coraki, Woodburn and Broadwater.

Executive Summary

Tourism is one of the most important contributors to the growth and character of the Richmond Valley. The annual economic contribution of tourism to the region is valued at around \$76 million. Over a period of four years, the Richmond Valley region attracted an average of 119,000 overnight domestic visitors, 180,000 domestic day visitors, and 3000 overnight international visitors per year. Around 292 people are directly employed in the tourism sector.

Given the significance of tourism to the Richmond Valley economy, and the competitiveness of tourism in regional Australia, it is important tourism is not only maintained and strengthened as an economic driver, but also planned and managed in a sustainable way to enhance and conserve the natural environment, protect the wellbeing of residents and attract visitors with shared values.

From a destination management perspective, Richmond Valley Council provides an important leadership and coordination role for tourism through its communications, economic development and events teams, which are responsible for the coordination of destination marketing activities and visitor information services.

The need to develop a Richmond Valley Tourism Development Plan was identified as an important priority by RVC following the establishment of a renewed strategic focus on the management of tourism for towns and villages across the Richmond Valley region.

The Plan identifies important approaches to move forward, such as:

- The establishment of working groups to assist with industry development and engagement, accommodation development, and development of a new agri-based tourism strategy.
- Development of strategies for product development, the Pacific Highway bypass, visitor road signage, Richmond Valley events, Richmond Valley Visitor Information Services, as well as annual marketing plans.
- Continuing to work with Richmond Valley Council's Assets team to determine the feasibility of new infrastructure, such as Casino Riverside Amphitheatre and Drill Hall Project and the Woodburn Riverside Rejuvenation Project, as well as the enhancement of existing infrastructure, like the Casino Civic Hall.
- Supporting operators to develop new products which focus on distinctive experiences related to leisure, nature-based, regional food, and arts and culture.
- Establishing a Richmond Valley Destination Research Program to regularly monitor visitor markets, profiles and satisfaction.

It is also important that tourism stakeholders are mindful that although the Richmond Valley region has many attractions and significant natural attributes, they are not particular to the region and many other destinations can make similar claims. There is also fierce competition for tourism market share across regional Australia. Thus the immediate need to engage industry operators, and to review the Richmond Valley brand to articulate and promote the region's real points of difference.

In this environment, it is particularly important Richmond Valley Council adopts a strategic approach to marketing and promotion, which focuses on its key domestic visitor markets - regional NSW, Brisbane and the Gold Coast, and South-East Queensland, as well as potential visitor markets from Sydney and surrounding areas. It is also vital that key industry stakeholders encourage and support the development of some exciting, market-led signature experiences which reflect the region's distinctive cultural identity and 'sense of place', and which will differentiate the Richmond Valley from other competing destinations.

Richmond Valley Tourism Development Plan is a living document, which provides an integrated framework and clear strategic directions to build a resilient visitor economy for the Richmond Valley region over the next four years. The successful implementation of this Plan will require participation and cooperation of tourism and business operators as part of a ‘whole-of-destination’ approach. The Plan can also be used as a resource to apply for relevant funding opportunities.

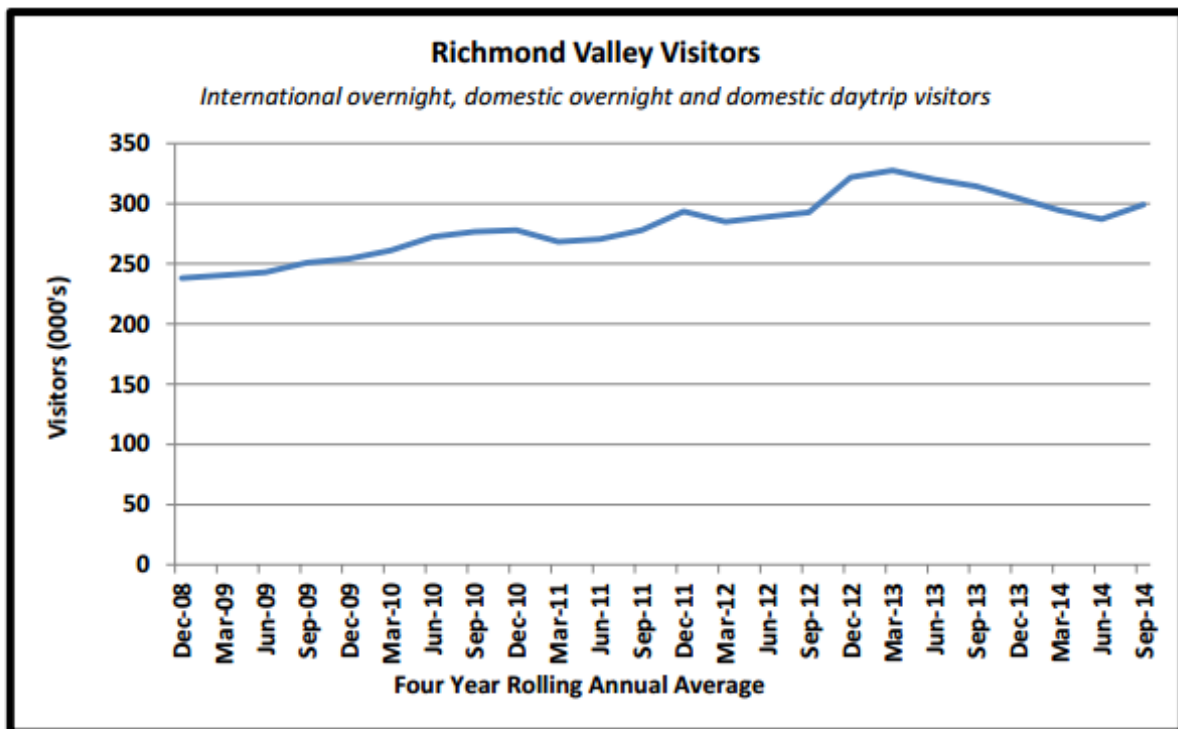
1. Setting the Scene

The Richmond Valley Visitor Economy

Over a period of four years, the Richmond Valley region attracted an average of 119,000 overnight domestic visitors, 180,000 domestic day visitors, and 3,000 overnight international visitors per year. These visitors spend an estimated \$76 million per annum in the region with 292 people directly employed in the tourism sector (Destination NSW).

FIG. 1

Key Measures	Richmond Valley	NSW
Total Visitors (overnight and domestic daytrip) (000's)	299	80,316
Total Overnight Visitors (000's)	119	28,105
Total Nights (000's)	430	154,563
Total Spend (overnight and domestic daytrip) (\$ Million)	76	26,503
Total Overnight Visitor Spend (\$ Million)	56	20,955



SOURCE: International Visitor Survey and National Visitor Survey, Tourism Research Australia (TRA)

Why does the Richmond Valley need a Tourism Development Plan?

Richmond Valley Council has identified the potential for tourism development in the Richmond Valley region. As a dynamic and growing industry, tourism can make a positive contribution to economic growth and development by building on the estimated 300,000 tourists who visited the Richmond Valley in 2014 - proof the Richmond Valley can become a sustainable tourist destination.

It was determined that a number of key issues and challenges need addressing in order to move forward with tourism development in the Valley. This Tourism Plan will assist with implementing strategies to overcome various issues and challenges which are outlined in this document.

Due to the nature of the tourism industry it is recommended that this plan should be seen as a flexible and evolving document which is subject to change.

What is the Richmond Valley Experience?

The Richmond Valley currently has a multifaceted tourism industry. From heritage and culture to agricultural and coastal experiences, the Richmond Valley has plenty to offer visitors of all ages.

Natural Experiences

The Richmond Valley boasts a number of natural experiences and attractions throughout the region. The diversity is a major drawcard for overnight and daytrip visitors. In under an hour you can go from coast to hinterland and farmlands in between. The Richmond River flows through four Richmond Valley villages providing beautiful picnic areas and an abundance of opportunities for water activities. The Richmond Valley is also home to 3 National Parks; Bundjalung National Park, the Broadwater National park and the Bungawalbin National Park. The pristine river estuaries provide a magnificent backdrop for those who enjoy the great outdoors. As well as providing agricultural pastures and river activities, the Richmond Valley is also home to some of the North Coast's most beautiful and healthiest beaches.

Heritage and Cultural Experiences

The Richmond Valley has significant indigenous cultural heritage and embraces this connection with the original custodians of the land. Non-indigenous heritage is also highly appreciated in the Valley by residents and visitors alike, with support for sites such as the Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome, listed as a State Heritage item. The Casino & District Family History Group cooperatively with the Casino & District Historical Society's Folk Museum, provides local residents and visitors with multitudes of historical information. There are also landscapes of great cultural and spiritual significance, such as the Goanna Headland at Evans Head which is associated with a number of traditional dreamtime stories and legends. Additionally, a number of sites and places important in indigenous history since 'European' settlement, such as massacre sites, camping places and former mission stations, are also significant elements of local indigenous cultural heritage. A number of sites, items and places within Richmond Valley Council possess heritage significance based on their historical, social or cultural associations. Places of well-documented significance include the Coraki conservation area, the myriad of civic buildings, churches and hotels throughout the Valley, such as the Rappville Pub circa 1905, and a number of homesteads throughout the rural areas.



One aim of this plan is to make the Richmond Valley a 'regional flavour destination', capitalising on our reputation as the Beef Capital

Coastal and On-water Experiences

The Richmond Valley offers a variety of coastal and on-water experiences. The coastal village of Evans Head boasts 7km of pristine coastline and is central to the mouth of the Evans River. The Evans River provides excellent fishing, boating and rowing facilities with two boat ramps and a boat harbour. The Evans Head beaches are known for their cleanliness and safety along with a well-known surf break. Airforce Beach has 4WD access and is dog friendly. The Richmond River which runs throughout Casino, Coraki, Woodburn, and Broadwater is ideal for on-water activities such as fishing, boating, water skiing and rowing. Coraki and Woodburn host annual water skiing events that attract visitors far and wide.

Casino is home to the platypus pools and if you're lucky enough, in the early morning or late afternoon from both the eastern and the western side of the bridge, you may view the platypus swimming or feeding in their natural environment.

Agricultural Experiences

The Richmond Valley is a leader in primary industries and food manufacturing enterprises, with the NSW Sugar Mill located at Broadwater, the Richmond Dairies and the Northern Rivers Meat Cooperative in Casino. This is supported by a number of agricultural businesses located across the Richmond Valley specialising in grain, dairy, beef, fruits, vegetables, timber and tea-tree.

For a true 'country' experience, the Casino saleyards are open to visitors in their full splendour on sale days. Some of our agri-tourism operators include Aranyani Adventure Tourist Park and the Mongongarie Lodge Olives. The Aranyani Bison Adventure Tourist Park is set on 1180 acres in the

beautiful Bungawalbin catchment at Myrtle Creek, NSW. Aranyani is a working American Bison ranch offering visitors one of Australia’s most unique experiences. Mongogarie Lodge Olives is located south of Casino at Mongogarie producing Table Olives, Virgin Olive Oil and other Olive products. Mongogarie Lodge is a family run business, offering grove tours and lunches as well as farm stay accommodation (Mongogarie Lodge Olives).

2. About the Destination

Destination Profile

The Richmond Valley Council area extends from the coastline at Evans Head to the foothills of the Great Dividing Range to the west interspersed with State forests, national parks and nature reserves. The largest town is Casino and our smaller communities include Broadwater, Coraki, Evans Head, New Italy, Woodburn and Rappville with a combined population of 23,181 in 2015 (*Economic Profile 2016*).



The Richmond Valley is accessible by rail, coach and car from a variety of major cities and centres. With airports located at Lismore, Ballina, Coolangatta and Brisbane and airport transfers available from Brisbane and Coolangatta, Casino is readily accessible.

Overview of the Region

Casino

Set in the heart of the Richmond Valley region, on the banks of the Richmond River and at the junction of the Bruxner Highway and Summerland Way, Casino is the largest populated town in the Richmond Valley. Casino is located 717km north of Sydney and 228km south of Brisbane. Casino is central to many amazing World Heritage listed national parks known collectively as the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia and is home to the people of the Bundjalung nation. A wide range of sporting venues and facilities are available in and around Casino. There is also a skate park, BMX track and a new Indoor Sports Stadium.

Coraki

Situated at the junction of the Richmond and Wilsons Rivers, hence the Aboriginal name for “meeting of the waters”, Coraki lies west of the Pacific Highway and South West of Ballina. Coraki is the tea tree capital of the region and is centrally located to inland centres, National Parks and beaches. Boating and water sports abound and there is even a nine-hole golf course which would stand the test of the most demanding of golfers. The Coraki Riverside Caravan Park, centrally located in the village right beside the river, makes for a perfect and peaceful home base when visiting the region.

Broadwater

Broadwater is situated on the Pacific Highway just north of Evans Head and a 25-minute drive south of Ballina and is adjacent to the Broadwater National Park. It is central to several coastal beaches and the beautiful hinterland, making it a quiet oasis where visitors can stop and rest by the Richmond River or continue onto the Broadwater National Park, which is home to a variety of birdlife and unique wilderness. Broadwater’s history has largely revolved around the NSW Sugar Milling Cooperative, which dominates the skyline.

Evans Head

Located six meters above sea level at the mouth of the Evans River, Evans Head is 720km north east of Sydney, 12km south east of Woodburn, and just minutes from the Pacific Highway. With average temperatures ranging from 28 degrees in summer and 20.2 degrees in winter and an average rainfall of 134.2mm per month in summer and 110.4mm per month in winter, it’s no wonder Evans Head is known as the “jewel in the crown” of the Richmond Valley. Evans Head boasts long unspoilt beaches, sandy river flats, fantastic fishing and a highly-recommended surf break. It offers a variety of options for eating out, activities for children and adults, and a range of accommodation catering for all tastes and budgets. Being only two hours north of Coffs Harbour, 2.5 hours south of Brisbane and an hour’s drive south of Byron Bay, Evans Head is the perfect base from which to explore the rest of the Northern Rivers region.

Woodburn

A delightful and peaceful town situated next to the Richmond River on the Pacific Highway, 11km west of Evans Head. Woodburn is well known to regular travellers of the Pacific Highway as a junction town, with roads leading from Woodburn to Evans Head, Broadwater and Ballina to the east, Coraki and Casino to the west, and Lismore and Alstonville to the north. The river has always been an important part of life in Woodburn. It is an excellent focal point for recreational water sport activities including rowing, sailing, waterskiing, and fishing. The riverside beach, park and picnic facilities provide the perfect spot to relax for an hour or a day while the nearby Bundjalung and Broadwater National Parks are just a short drive away.

3. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Through a range of observations and engagements, a variety of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were identified within the boundaries of the Richmond Valley region. To move forward with a Tourism Plan and achieve tourism goals, it is important to address issues within our area as well as strengthen and drive the potential opportunities to the shire.

The table below highlights the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that could potentially impact upon tourism in the Richmond Valley.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Richmond Valley</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity to Byron Bay and the Gold Coast. • Transport from major cities, rail/buses from Brisbane and Sydney. Transfers from Gold Coast and Brisbane airports. • River runs through four Richmond Valley towns • Richmond Valley Council offering free wifi in some towns • Diversity of existing/potential tourism activities (coastal, river and agricultural) • Historic Aboriginal significance- Coraki and Evans Head • Number of significant events - Beef Week, PRIMEX, Evans Head Fishing Classic, Woodburn Riverside Festival, Malibu Classic, Great Eastern Fly in, Craig Shepherd Memorial Ski Race, Carnivale Italiano, Carp Muster • Strong heritage. Museums located within Evans Head, Casino, Coraki and New Italy. <p>Casino</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central location within the Northern Rivers - easy to day trip to other locations • Gateway Lifestyle Village - well established • Strong events focus • Presence of historical knowledge - Family History Group and Historical Society • Established attractions - mini rail, Folk Museum, Jambama Art Gallery • New Indoor Sports Stadium • Three caravan parks <p>Coraki</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water Skiing • Historical Museum • Aboriginal History • Caravan Park is riverside • Tea Tree Capital NSW <p>Evans Head</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coastal activities and beach access • Evans Head Touring Guide • Established tourist destination • Active Chamber of Commerce • Variety of events • Aboriginal history • Established social media accounts • Aviation and Living museums 	<p>Richmond Valley</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No RV wide touring guide to promote the Richmond Valley outside of the shire • Lack of branding and imagery for marketing and promotional purposes • Lack of public transport options to link Richmond Valley towns, regional centres and airports • Destination signage • Lack of funding allocated for tourism in the Valley • Lack of communication between events and tourism • Lack of uniformity amongst Visitor Information Centres in the Valley • No promotion of cultural, arts and heritage activities • No social media strategy <p>Casino</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of marketing material available outside of Casino for tourists. i.e. touring guide • Lack of tourism based activities/ no tourism focus • Lack of communication between tourism operators • Lack of tourism officer to promote Casino • Casino Visitor Information Centre not meeting accreditation standards • Underutilisation of current assets - Drill Hall, Civic Hall, boat ramp area • Geneebeinga Wetlands area needs attention. <p>Coraki</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flooding • Lack of developed tourism products/experiences • No Business and/or Community Chamber <p>Evans Head</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main Beach sand contamination post dredging of bar • Gumma Garra Bridge removed- located Bundjalung National Park • VIC location <p>Woodburn/New Italy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of tourism related activities • Lack of adequate parking for caravans and trucks • Woodburn VIC needs overhaul <p>Broadwater/Rileys Hill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sugar Mill tours not open to general public • Limited tourism opportunities

<p>Woodburn/New Italy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Italy Museum • Water Skiing Club • Riverside Festival <p>Broadwater/Rileys Hill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rileys Hill Dry Dock • River History • National park/Beach • Sugar Milling Industry 	
<p>Opportunities</p>	<p>Threats</p>
<p>Richmond Valley</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity of existing/potential tourism activities (coastal, river and agricultural) • Create more events and increase scope of current events • Rail Trail • Partnerships • Direct flights from China to the Gold Coast • Proximity to Byron Bay • Commonwealth Games 2018 <p>Casino</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of more events and increasing the scope of current events • Free camping, encourage spending in the town • Amphitheatre project • Drill Hall utilisation • 'Technical Visits' e.g. saleyards, NCMC, Richmond Dairies, New World Foods • Attract large sporting events • 'RV Friendly' status • No moteliers pet friendly • Art Deco Buildings <p>Coraki</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • River utilisation - river paddles • Offer free camping in caravan park <p>Evans Head</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evans Head Coastal Walk • Reinstating Gumma Garra bridge • Relocating VIC to Library/Council office <p>Woodburn/New Italy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • River Utilisation - river paddles • Post Pacific Highway bypass- overnight caravan camping • Upgrade of Riverside Park in planning stages <p>Broadwater/Rileys Hill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • River utilisation • Restoration and promotion of the Dry Dock • Opening Sugar Mill tours to general public 	<p>Richmond Valley</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of digital presence through social media and website • Pacific Highway upgrade: Pre, during, and post construction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of year round traffic and visitors post bypass - Highway workers taking up much of the available tourist accommodation (tourists begin to go elsewhere) - Business closures post bypass - Traffic congestion during construction - Adequate signage post bypass • Online marketing/social media trends • Richmond River health currently poor <p>Casino</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future rail station plans • Vandalism <p>Evans Head</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seasonality of visitation <p>Woodburn/New Italy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pacific Highway upgrade: Pre, during, and post construction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of year round traffic and visitors post bypass - Highway workers taking up much of the available tourist accommodation (tourists begin to go elsewhere) - Business closures post bypass - Traffic congestion during construction - Adequate signage post bypass • Flooding <p>Broadwater/Rileys Hill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flooding • Pacific Highway upgrade: Pre, during, and post construction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of year round traffic and visitors post bypass - Highway workers taking up much of the available tourist accommodation (tourists begin to go elsewhere) - Business closures post bypass - Traffic congestion during construction - Adequate signage post bypass <p>Coraki</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flooding • Vandalism

4. Objectives and Strategies

Product Development

Objective 1: Review possible tourism products that will increase visitation to the Richmond Valley.

Strategies:

- 1.1 Research/investigate creation of tourism experiences.
- 1.2 Allocate funding to produce a Richmond Valley Wide Touring Guide.
- 1.3 Creation of day trip/multiple day touring opportunities.
- 1.4 Consider prospective free camping closer to or within our towns (Coraki Caravan Park, Woodburn post bypass, Casino saleyards, and/or the Casino Showground).
- 1.5 Consultation for development of partnerships.

It is important for the Richmond Valley to consider the creation of a range of tourism-related activities and opportunities to acquire greater visitation and length of stay.

Because of the diverse nature of the Richmond Valley, and the fact it encompasses agricultural, river and coastal characteristics, there are a variety of possible new activities and opportunities. With the introduction of more diverse tourism-related activities, it is expected that an increase in visitation would occur as well as an increase in the length of stay to the area.

Although greater consultation within the community is required, some possible new activities and opportunities are listed below:

Activity/Opportunity	Details
Agri-tourism	Investigate potential technical visits - NRLX, NCMC, Broadwater Sugar Mill, Richmond Dairies, New World Foods.
Free camping opportunities	Offering free camping at the Coraki Caravan Park (limit stay), Casino saleyards (incorporate sale day tours), and/or the Casino Showgrounds.
Heritage and cultural trail	This would incorporate a trail based on the fact that Casino, Coraki, New Italy and Evans Head all have museums. Possibility to also include the Rileys Hill Dry Dock.
Arts trail	With the introduction of a public arts program for the Richmond Valley, this creates an opportunity (longer term) to introduce a Richmond Valley Arts Trail.
Drill Hall utilisation	Options include: museum displays; cultural and indigenous art displays; market facilities; visitor information facilities; botanical gardens; artist workshops and display spaces; outdoor performance spaces.
Evans Head coastal walk	A coastal walk which begins at Razorback Lookout and leads towards the tip of Goanna Headland. There is currently a steering committee in place working with local Aboriginal groups to direct this project (stage 1)
Richmond River guided river paddles	Promotion of kayaking and canoeing between Coraki/Woodburn/Broadwater. New tourism business- guided paddles.
Aboriginal cultural significance	Coraki and Evans Head holds considerable Aboriginal cultural significance. Could Bundjalung people give tours/talks on the cultural significance?
Development of Local Farm Operator Partnerships	Consultation/networking for operators. Operators working together to offer multiple experiences over multiple days. Offering package deals. Aranyani working together with Mongogarie Olives, each offering very different experiences.
Development of Region Wide Operator Partnerships	Coastal and Agriculture operators working together to highlight diversity within our region, offering package deals. E.g. Aranyani working with North Coast Holiday Parks

Marketing and Promotion

Objective 2: To raise the profile of the Richmond Valley as an events and tourism destination.

Strategies:

- 2.1 Undertake market research.
- 2.2 Learn more about digital marketing strategies.
- 2.3 Develop a marketing plan

Destination first, product second

It is important to remember destination is king. While tourism product is a key element in the destination story, it is the destination itself that speaks first and foremost to the consumer. Just as many travellers choose a destination followed by the airline on which to travel, so too do they choose a tourism product or operator. Promotional methods may include:

- website
- social media
- blogging
- e-newsletters
- networking
- brochures and flyers
- TV, radio or print advertising
- word of mouth
- mail-outs and letter drops
- sponsorship
- PR activities such as media releases and events

Participate in trade events, missions and roadshows

A calendar of trade events will be compiled on up-coming trade events and road shows. RVC will piggyback off other tourism promotions and leverage off their advertising. RVC will offer packages to local business and other interested parties to share exhibition space and displays at trade events.

Sustainable Tourism

Objective 3: Provide tourism and event activities which are not only beneficial to the area but ensure they are sustainable for the Richmond Valley and its communities.

Strategies:

- 3.1 Undergo community consultation before new tourism products developed and put in place.
- 3.2 Utilise existing facilities where possible to ensure costs and impacts are minimal.
- 3.3 Protect natural assets from environmental impacts of tourism

Sustainable tourism can be defined as “tourism that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Weaver and Lawton 2010). It’s important to examine any impacts that new tourism products might have on the environmental, social, cultural and economic capacities of the destination (Weaver and Lawton 2010). This means that any new and existing tourism activity within the Richmond Valley must

ensure maximised benefits while those environmental, social, cultural and economic costs are kept low.

To address this, the use of existing facilities and enhancing some of the current activities will ensure minimal negative implications. For example, offering free camping at the Casino Showgrounds would not have any negative financial impacts as amenities and facilities are already present. The development of a heritage and cultural trail is creating awareness to visitors while using already existing facilities and new partnerships between operators wouldn't have any monetary expenditure to the RVC or its residents except if the Council were to host networking evenings.

Other activities that have a higher likelihood to impact upon community groups and residents should include information and consultation meetings. For example, consultation with agri-tourism operators about potential partnerships, consultation with Bundjalung people about tours based on the Aboriginal cultural significance of Coraki and Evans Head, and further consultation on the utilisation of the Casino Drill Hall. Consultation processes will examine what people want, whether or not activities are going to negatively affect residents and whether or not such activities will be financially beneficial for all parties.



Agri-Tourism

Objective 4: Make the Richmond Valley a 'regional flavour destination'.

Strategies:

4.1 Catalogue of assets to help see what we need to do to fit agri-tourism.

4.2 Target suitable and relevant properties/farms in the Richmond Valley to arrange B&B premises and farmstays.

4.3 Investigate opportunities for transport services to bring overseas visitors from the Gold Coast and Ballina airports directly to the Richmond Valley.

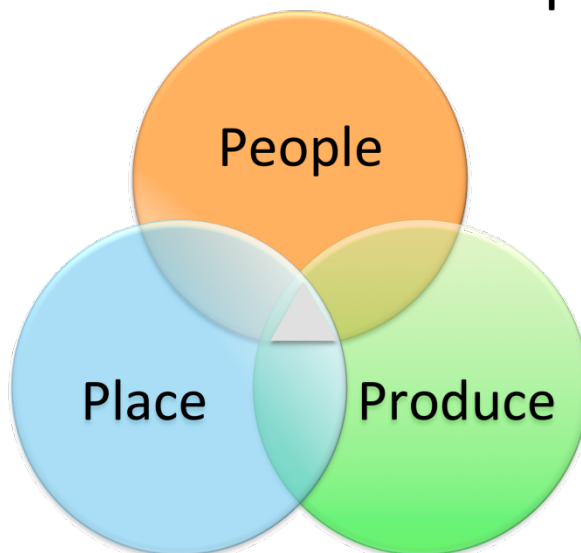
Agri-tourism is an important part of both the tourism and agricultural industries. Agri-tourism offers a unique country holiday experience which invites visitors to stay on farms and in rural communities to enjoy an agricultural experience.

Asian visitors in particular want to immerse themselves into the landscape, the environment and lifestyle and experience something new. They want to learn, they want to know how and why, they want to taste, touch, smell and feel the experience. They want to connect with and experience our lifestyle and culture. They want to find the source and taste fresh, seasonal regional produce. They want to discover special places and experiences.

We should be aiming to make the Richmond Valley a 'regional flavour destination', capitalising on our reputation as the Beef Capital. A travel-tasting experience where tourists have a range of food producers to visit, including those who grow, process and sell their products.

Consider both self-driving and organised tours and include sale days at the NRLX, picnic opportunities at Chinamans Beach, and on-farm experiences.

Three elements to creating an authentic food tourism experience



Improve capacity of tourism operators

Objective 5: Work with local tourism operators to improve skills and develop capacity

Strategy:

5.1 Undertake a comprehensive and regular audit of all visitor accommodation to determine the scale and characteristics of current offerings and to identify gaps/opportunities to help plan for appropriate levels of visitor accommodation.

5.2 Encourage the refurbishment of existing properties to provide a diverse range of quality and affordable accommodation options for visitors to the Richmond Valley.

5.3 Investigate and promote opportunities to establish viable commercial local transport services to connect coastal and hinterland towns and villages and enhance visitor dispersal around the Richmond Valley.

5.4 Source and share information on current and emerging technologies which impact on the tourism organisation process.

5.5 Identify and use a range of opportunities to update knowledge of the tourism industry.

5.6 Monitor current issues of concern to the industry.

Recent research on the global tourism visitor market has uncovered new insights into traditional visitor motivations. What persuades a potential visitor to holiday in a particular destination is that destination's ability to engage in unforgettable and truly inspiring experiences that touch visitors in an emotional way and connect them with special places, people and cultures. In an era where high quality tourism offerings are expected and global travel is readily available to more and more people, destinations can no longer compete on a simple product versus price basis. To be on top, operators need to move from selling tourism 'products' to providing engaging and memorable 'experiences'.

All businesses across the tourism spectrum have a role to play in delivering the visitor 'experience', from:

- Tour operators
- Accommodation or hospitality establishments
- Retail businesses
- Tourism attractions
- Local councils
- State and Federal government agencies
- Visitor Information Centres
- Environmental groups or protected area managers.

Also, maximise the number of Richmond Valley tourism operators who have online booking and payment facilities, to increase their ability to service customers both domestically and overseas. RVC should consider working closely with the industry to ensure more tourism enterprises are able to take advantage of online opportunities.

Branding and Signage Program

Objective 6: Create a recognisable Richmond Valley-wide tourism brand and image which highlights our diversity and individuality.

Strategies:

6.1 Undertake a brand review process to ensure an authentic, consistent and competitive brand and positioning for the Richmond Valley which reflects coastal and hinterland visitor experiences.

6.2 Facilitate engagement with tourism stakeholders to effectively promote and apply the Richmond Valley brand.

6.3 Provide Richmond Valley branded souvenirs for visitors to purchase in the Visitor Information Centres.

6.4 Develop a visitor road signage plan in partnership with RMS to strategically plan for wayfinding signage, tourism attraction and business signage, and visitor information during construction and completion phases of the Pacific Highway upgrades across the region.

The current 'Visit the Richmond Valley' branding and imaging is outdated. Due to the importance of branding for a destination's success, it is priority to develop a branding strategy for the Richmond Valley. RVC has an opportunity to provide and sell branded souvenirs through the Valley's Visitor Information Centres. Postcards, magnets and stickers are just some of the popular items visitors often ask about. This can generate a form of revenue to the business as well as providing visitors with what they want.

RVC should also consider outdoor advertising to attract visitors. Outdoor advertising is the only type of media that has constant exposure. No other type of advertising allows a message to be displayed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Council owns a billboard near the Casino Showground, which it recently reclaimed and will feature a general message of welcome. Opportunities also exist south of Grafton, which could be used to draw travellers off the Pacific Highway during the construction phase. This could be done in conjunction with Kyogle and/or Lismore councils.

Council could also consider the implementation of highly attractive and innovative (and moveable) 24/7 digital touch screens. These touch screens could be placed in high traffic areas and be moved to event areas in order to provide visitors with a range of information, such as accommodation and activities. The potential exists to have the touch screens sponsored - advertisements can be placed on the screen when they are not in use. They can also be used to provide general community information updates.



Highway Billboard Strategy

Richmond Valley Council wants to put the Richmond Valley in the spotlight to ensure it gets a cut of the tourist market. Positive imagery and key phrases will be used for a stunning new billboard campaign on the Summerland Way, and south of Grafton on the Pacific Highway.

The first billboard skin will be installed near the Casino Showground late March to catch the eye of northbound traffic. Larger town names to be included: Casino; Coraki; Woodburn; Evans Head.

Imagery will capture all the Richmond Valley has to offer, from the hinterland to the coast: outdoor sporting and recreational pursuits; and sustainable and natural tourism activities. The billboard will also feature the Richmond Valley Made icon.

The imagery will suggest there is more to the Richmond Valley than meets the eye, and the best way to understand the Richmond Valley is to experience it first hand.

The tagline 'small towns big adventures' will underwrite the fun portrayed by the images. (*Open for discussion)

RVC will liaise with Kyogle and Lismore councils to install a skin south of Grafton to encourage motorists to get off the Pacific Highway during construction of the bypass.

RVC's Manager Communications, Events and Tourism will begin a campaign to promote the different kinds of 'come-out-to-play' activities in the Valley one-at-a-time with depth and specificity. These stories will be shared with city media outlets, as well as local journalists.

To get this underway, RVC is looking for champions who will drive the activities they are passionate about, such as a camping/fishing advocate, a horse riding champion, and a keen surfer.

Festivals and Events

Objective 7: Increase marketing to a wider audience and better utilise marketing between Tourism and Events.

Strategies:

7.1 Expand upon current signature events to 'tap' into other target markets.

7.2 Improve promotion and marketing scope of events.

7.3 Increase communications between Events and Tourism teams.

7.4 Creation of new events for the Richmond Valley region.

7.5 Encourage event and festival visitors to stay longer, spend more and enjoy the diversity of experiences across the Richmond Valley.

7.6 Examine how we can draw new attendees to events, possibly from overseas.

It has been identified that Richmond Valley people are interested in hosting new events, as well as drawing in new markets from our already iconic events, like Beef Week and PRIMEX. People want to know:

- Are there ways that Beef Week could tap into the international market, and can we continue to build on the success of Beef Week and PRIMEX?
- Can we attract larger sporting events to Casino now with the state-of-the-art indoor sports stadium?

Some ideas for new events included:

- Potential international markets to attend a golf/beer/gaming tournament during Beef Week.
- Use of the CIVIC Hall for more live theatre.



Growing our iconic Beef Week Festival will provide a platform for industry leaders, businesses, producers and the community to network, transact business, socialise, and build partnerships.

Visitor Information Services

Importance of Visitor Information Centres

Objective 8: Ensure effective operations of Visitor Information Centres. (VICs)

Strategies:

- 8.1 Deliver a contemporary, efficient and cost effective visitor information services system to engage industry and connect visitors with Richmond Valley experiences
- 8.2 Upgrade Casino and Woodburn VICs
- 8.3 Relocation of Evans Head VIC to Council's upgraded office and library
- 8.4 Provide uniformity, top-quality customer service with accurate, adequate and correct information with a focus on promoting our local area across all three VICs.
- 8.5 Greater interaction between VICs
- 8.6 Improve collection of visitor insights/statistics

Visitor information centres (VICs) are often the first place visitors stop when they arrive in town. They may request information regarding about where they can stay, what they can do while they are here and directions for their continued journey. Due to the importance of a VIC to a destination, it is vital the Richmond Valley has quality centres providing quality information, especially given the challenges some of our towns will face in the future in regards to the Pacific Highway upgrade.

The Richmond Valley has three VICs. A level 2 VIC is located in Casino and Level 3 VICs at both Woodburn and Evans Head. Level 2 VICs are required to be open 363 days of the year (closed Good Friday and Christmas Day) and be open for a minimum of 43 hours per week. Level 3 centres are only required to be open five days a week including on weekends and operate for a minimum of seven hours per day. (Aurora 2014, see Fig 1)

Casino

Casino VIC is located at 86 Centre Street and is currently operating 9am to 3pm Monday to Friday, 10am to 2pm on Saturday and closed on Sunday. This currently does not meet accreditation requirements for opening hours. Casino VIC was meeting accreditation opening hours when it was operating 9am to 4pm Monday to Saturday and 10am to 2pm on Sunday. Casino VIC is located on the junction of the Bruxner Highway and the Summerland Way, offering amenities, local, regional, state and interstate information to visitors. In 2015 Casino VIC had a total of 7629 visitors and in 2014 a total of 8711 visitors including via phone and email.

Woodburn

Woodburn VIC is currently operating 9am to 5pm six days a week (closed Sunday), by a volunteer under the direction of Richmond Valley Council. It is identified that despite the location of the Woodburn VIC on the Pacific Highway, statistical numbers are low and/or are not being collated. It has also been identified that the Woodburn VIC needs upgrading.

Evans Head

Evans Head Visitor Information Centre is located within the Evans Head Bowling Club and is currently operating seven days a week from 10am to 5pm. The Evans Head Bowling Club is currently meeting the opening hour requirements for accreditation as a level 3 VIC. Considering

the staff members which operate the information centre are also in charge of bookings for the Evans Head Bowlo Cabins, it has been identified that there is a conflict of interest present and accreditation was unlikely to be readmitted should the situation not change.

The objective across all of the VICs is to operate at accreditation standards and opening hours. We also need to provide uniformity, top quality customer service with accurate, adequate and correct information with a focus on promoting our local Richmond Valley area across all three VICs.

FIG. 1

ACCREDITATION LEVELS - OVERVIEW OF ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

Please read through this document in its entirety to ensure you familiarise yourself with every aspect and requirement of achieving and maintaining Accreditation. The following table briefly outlines the differences between the Levels of Accreditation.

Criteria Area	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Opening Hours	Open 363 days per year and for a minimum of 56 hours per week	Open 363 days per year for a minimum of 43 hours per week	Open a minimum of 5 days per week (including weekends) for a minimum of 7 hours per day
Primary Function	An Accredited Visitor Information Centre whose primary function is disseminating visitor information.		A business or information centre where the provision of information may or may not be the primary function, can be a mixed or private business (eg. museum, craft shop)
Scope of Information Provision	Local, regional and Statewide information provision.		Local information provision only.
Staffing	A minimum of one full time permanent staff member with appropriate experience. Ongoing training and professional development for staff. Training program to include staff induction, customer service ongoing staff training and product familiarisation program. Maintenance of personnel records		May be staffed by volunteers. Training program to include staff induction, customer service ongoing staff training and product familiarisation program. Maintenance of personnel records
Management and Planning	Operates in accordance with a Business Plan and Operations Manual.		Operates in accordance with both Business Plan and Operations Manual and with guidelines set up by the endorsing Level 1 or 2 AVIC or local Council.
Application Requirements	Application direct from the Visitor Information Centre to the Accredited Visitor Information Centre Network Secretariat. Requires the submission of a Business/Marketing Plan relevant to Visitor Information Centre component of the business		Application must be endorsed by a local Level 1 or 2 AVIC or local Council Requires the submission of a Business/Marketing Plan relevant to Visitor Information Centre component of the business
Annual Accreditation Fees	\$880.00 inc GST	\$880.00 inc GST	\$385.00 inc GST

Fig. 2

Online Presence

Objective 9: Create social media accounts via Facebook and Instagram along with a new Richmond Valley tourism website.

Strategies:

- 9.1 Increase and improve the RV digital presence through social media.
- 9.2 Utilise digital presence for marketing of tourism and events.
- 9.3 Creation of Richmond Valley tourism website to replace current Visit Richmond Valley site.

It has been identified that the Richmond Valley is not currently utilising and is lacking an online presence. Due to this the Richmond Valley could be currently missing out on reaching a vast array of potential visitors. Facebook and Instagram are great tools in capturing a large audience easily and inexpensively (Australian Tourism Data Warehouse 2011). While the Richmond Valley Council has a Facebook page, a Richmond Valley Tourism page could potentially be highly beneficial for the region in reaching audiences we currently are not. There are plans to delve into social media, as well as introducing some new 'branding.'

The Visit Richmond Valley website is currently populated through Book Easy which is hard to navigate changes and updates. Additionally the website is unattractive. There are several web domains aside for Richmond Valley tourism to undergo a complete website rebuild.

Funding

Objective 10: Increase tourism budget

Strategies:

- 10.1 Request additional funds from Richmond Valley Council to the tourism budget.
- 10.2 Investigate tourism grants.

It's obvious that the need for funding is an important aspect for business operations. To implement this plan an increase of funding will be required to the tourism budget to provide opportunities to increase visitation to the Richmond Valley and to lengthen duration of stay. In recent years there has been a small allocation of money for the development of tourism in the Mid Richmond region. Reallocating funding to the tourism budget could allow for Richmond Valley Visitors Centres to provide a more extensive range of local products and gifts to visitors, the Casino Visitor Centre in particular, once provided a wide variety of locally produced merchandise to its visitors. An increased allocation could also provide support in the development of new tourism products, assist in providing improved marketing materials, such as a Richmond Valley Touring Guide and provide opportunities for membership purchases which could facilitate the creation of more tourism partnerships.

It is expected that further research and consultation would take place in an attempt to apply for and receive funding from tourism grants that may be offered.

Partnerships

Objective 11: Create stronger partnerships with established tourism networks.

Strategies:

11.1 Increase involvement with Destination North Coast.

11.2 Take a lead role with Northern Rivers Tourism Managers Group

11.3 Rebuild relationship with Kyogle Council

“A key reason for the growing interest of partnerships in tourism development is the belief that tourist destination areas and organisations may be able to gain competitive advantage by bringing together the knowledge, expertise, capital and other resources of several stakeholders” (Bramwell & Lane, 2000).

There is an immediate need to consider ways to unite and engage tourism and hospitality operators and provide industry development and networking opportunities.

It is important for the Richmond Valley to consider creating tourism partnerships to increase knowledge base, collaborate on tourism products and provide contemporary experiences. The Kyogle Council has expressed an eagerness to rebuild the previous tourism partnership, working together and supporting each other where possible.

It is proposed that a Destination Richmond Valley working group be established as part of this Plan to lead and drive initiatives. Important stakeholder organisations involved in tourism should be represented to guide and inform planning and decision making.



Jambama Art Gallery provides an opportunity for participants and artists of the Aboriginal communities in the region to showcase their talent and creative skills.

5. ACTION PLAN

The following table provides an action framework for implementation of strategies over the next four years. The timeframe for implementation is defined as:

Short-term	< 6 months
Medium-term	1 to 2 years
Long-term	2 to 3+ years

Objective	Strategies	Actions	Time Frame
1.0 Review possible tourism products that will increase visitation to the Richmond Valley.	1.1 Research/investigate creation of tourism experiences.	1.1.1 Survey to Chambers of Commerce, operators, visitors to discover what is and isn't currently working and examine what other ideas people might have.	Short-term
	1.2 Allocate funding to produce a Richmond Valley Wide Touring Guide.	1.2.1 Improve relationships between operators to build foundations of possible new partnerships between operators. Possible creation of new partnerships could lead to the creation of new experiences	Medium-term
	1.3 Creation of day trip/ multiple day touring opportunities.	1.3.1 Explore opportunities to increase day visitation	Long-term
	1.4 Consider prospective free camping closer to or within our towns. E.g. The Coraki Caravan Park, Woodburn post bypass and the Casino Saleyards.	1.4.1 Can Casino provide free camping areas?	Medium-term
	1.5 Consultation for development of Partnerships	1.5.1 Create opportunities for operators to create partnership.	Long-term

2.0 Provide tourism and event activities that are not only beneficial to the area but ensure they are sustainable for the Richmond Valley and its communities	2.1 Undergo community consultation before new tourism products developed and put in place.	2.1.1 Community meetings to inform residents/community and give them the opportunity to express any concerns and provide feedback.	Medium/Long-term
	2.2 Utilise existing facilities where possible to ensure costs and impacts are minimal.	2.2.1 Consider utilising the infrastructure already in place when developing a product and/or experience.	Short-term
	2.3 Protect natural assets from environmental impacts of tourism	2.3.1 Ensure natural assets are maintained properly to minimise the impact of increased tourism to the environment.	Long-term
		2.3.2 Identify where impacts are occurring and develop appropriate ongoing management solutions	Long-term
	3.0 Create a recognisable Richmond Valley wide tourism brand and image which highlights our diversity and individuality.	3.1 Create a consistent and recognisable brand for the Richmond Valley.	3.1.1 Creation of brand i.e. 'Discover the Richmond Valley'
3.1.2 Market the new branding via Social Media on Facebook and Instagram			Short/Medium-term
3.1.3 Create a Richmond Valley Tourism Website that is resourceful and device friendly for visitors.			Medium-term
3.2 Promote the Richmond Valley as a destination that embraces its diversity.		3.2.1 Emphasis to visitors that the Richmond Valley has more than one tourism experience through media, marketing, digital marketing, and Visitor Information Centres.	Short-term
3.3 Provide Richmond Valley branded souvenirs for visitors to purchase in the Visitor Information Centres.		3.3.1 Provide Centres with branded souvenirs, e.g. postcards.	Medium-term

4.0 Ensure effective operations of Visitor Information Centres.	4.1 Upgrade Casino and Woodburn VICs	4.1.1 Inspect sites to address what changes can be made to make VICs more appealing, user friendly and practical.	Short/Medium-term
	4.2 Relocation of Evans Head VIC	4.2.1 Incorporate VIC relocation into EH office upgrade.	Long-term
	4.3 Provide uniformity, top quality customer service with accurate, adequate and correct information with a focus on promoting our local Richmond Valley area across all three VICs.	4.3.1 Ensuring all VICs have adequate supplies of information, access to information and support as required.	Medium-term
	4.4 Greater interaction between VICs	4.4.1 Casino Visitor Centre operator to ensure other VICs well stocked with in house brochures as required, provide any necessary support to other VIC employee's and volunteers.	Short-term
	4.5 Improve Collection of Visitor Insights/Statistics	4.5.1 Woodburn and Evans Head to start recording daily statistics as accurately as possible. Provide an alteration of Casino VICs current statistical collection form to suit the respective towns. Reinforce the importance of such information to highlight the use of our Visitor Information Centres	Short-term
	4.6 Ensure all VICs are meeting Accreditation standards for upcoming 2018 accreditation.	4.6.1 Casino VIC to operate longer hours over the weekends.	Medium-term
5.0 Create social media accounts via Facebook and Instagram along with a new Richmond Valley tourism website.	5.1 Increase and improve the RV digital presence through social media.	5.1.1 Create and utilise Facebook and Instagram accounts	Short-term
	5.2 Utilise digital presence for marketing of tourism and events.	5.2.1 Create a long term Social Media Strategy for marketing tourism and events	Medium/Long-term
	5.3 Creation of Richmond Valley tourism website to replace current Visit Richmond Valley site.	5.3.1 Communications Trainee to take on project.	Medium-term

6.0 Increase marketing to a wider audience and better utilise marketing between Tourism and Events.	6.1 Expand upon current signature events to ‘tap’ into other target markets.	6.1.1 Incorporate a ‘What’s on’ strategy. An example could be having chalk boards in front of our Information Centres with event information for the week/weekends.	Short/Medium-term
		6.1.2 Create a more extensive events database from tourism contacts, increase possible sites to display event information.	Medium-term
	6.2 Improve promotion and marketing scope of events.	6.2.1 Release event information to Visitor Information Centres outside of our own LGA. Drop off flyers to other VICs for display.	Short-term
	6.4 Increase communications between Events and Tourism teams, and key stakeholders in our community.	6.4.1 Proposition of new meetings to occur fortnightly/monthly between Events and Tourism teams	Short-term
		6.4.2 Propose meetings/surveys with local people even visitors to the region about what they might like to see occur in the RV.	Medium-term
	6.5 Creation of new events for the Richmond Valley region.	6.5.1 Further consultation with community and events team to determine future events.	Medium-term
	6.6 Examine how we can draw new attendees to events, possibly from overseas.	6.6.1 Focussed events marketing.	Long-term
	7.0 Increase tourism budget.	7.1 Request additional funds from Richmond Valley Council to the tourism budget.	7.1.1 Richmond Valley Council to approve and increase tourism budget.
7.2 Investigate tourism grants.		7.2.1 Liase with tourism partners regarding funding and grant opportunities.	Medium-term

8.0 Create stronger partnerships with established tourism networks	8.1 Increase involvement with the North Coast Destination Network	8.1.1 Attend seminars and workshops hosted by the North Coast Destination Network.	Short-term
		8.1.2 Participate in North Coast Destination Network marketing campaigns	Long-term
	8.2 Buy into the Northern River Tourism Managers Group	8.2.1 Purchase membership for the Northern Rivers Tourism Managers group	Short-term
		8.2.2 Attend Northern River Tourism Managers Group meetings	Medium-term
	8.3 Redevelop relationship with Kyogle Council	8.3.1 Work with Kyogle Council's Tourism Economic Development Officer to reestablish RVC/Kyogle Council partnership	Medium-term

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