



2024

State of the Richmond Valley Report

Richmond
Valley
Council



Richmond Valley Council recognises the people of the Bundjalung nation as custodians and traditional owners of this land. We value and appreciate the continuing cultural connection to lands, their living culture and their unique role in the life of this region.

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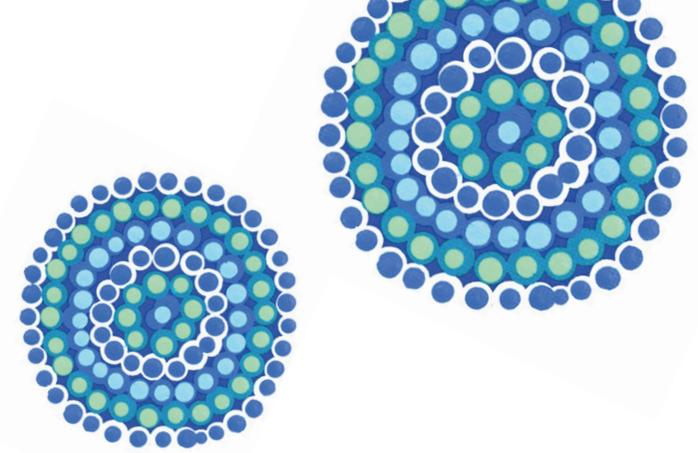
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Welcome to the State of the Valley report

This report is a new requirement for local councils in NSW, to reflect on progress in delivering their long-term plans and focus on key directions for the next council term. Our Community Strategic Plan – Richmond Valley 2040 – was endorsed by Council in June 2023. It outlines a long-term vision for growth and prosperity which relies on many delivery partners, including Richmond Valley Council, State and Federal Governments, private investors, community organisations and local groups. This report revisits the four themes of the Community Strategic Plan and explores progress in delivering its objectives in the first year. The State of the Valley report also provides a snapshot of our community, at the start of the new council term. It looks at some of the strategic challenges we are facing, such as housing, health services, and climate change, as well as considering local priorities, such as jobs, growth and essential infrastructure. The report will help to guide further community consultation as we review the Community Strategic Plan for the 2024-2028 council term.



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DELIVERING OUR VISION OF GROWTH AND PROSPERITY

A message from the Mayor and General Manager

The 2021-24 Council term has been one of the shortest on record in NSW and one of the most challenging for the Richmond Valley, with a global pandemic and catastrophic flooding across our region. Over the past two years, we have been working hard to rebuild our lives, reconnect our communities and reclaim our future following the worst natural disaster in more than 50 years. Council has made great progress in flood recovery, successfully completing the first two years of its Rebuilding the Richmond Valley Recovery Plan and securing funding approvals that will take us through the final three years of road reconstruction and repair. There is still much to be done, but we continue to move forward and advocate strongly for our community.

We've also continued with our long-term plans, laying the foundations for the Richmond Valley's future growth and prosperity and providing the infrastructure and services our community needs. In the 2024-28 Council term, we will start to see this vision unfold, as we take on a stronger role in the Northern Rivers region,

with much-needed homes for local families, more jobs for young people, more services and facilities for our towns and villages and a greater focus on infrastructure investment.

Our top priority will be completing the \$100m repair program for our flood-damaged roads and bridges, as we continue to receive government funding for essential works. We will also take the first steps in activating the Richmond Valley Regional Jobs Precinct, with plans to create 1900 new jobs for our community and support the development of more than 1600 new homes on flood-safe lands. Council will also progress its plans to secure our long-term water supplies, investing up to \$200m in essential water and sewerage infrastructure over the next 25 years and providing improved environmental outcomes. Continued development of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail, Three Villages Cycleway and the upgraded Casino Showground and Racecourse will also bring a major tourism boost for the Valley as we strengthen our reputation as the rural heart of the Northern Rivers and explore the regional



Richmond Valley Mayor Robert Mustow and General Manager Vaughan Macdonald

benefits in the lead-up to the Brisbane Olympics in 2032. These are exciting times, and Council will shortly begin the process of revisiting our long-term plans and community priorities and preparing the new Delivery Program for the 2024-28 Council term.

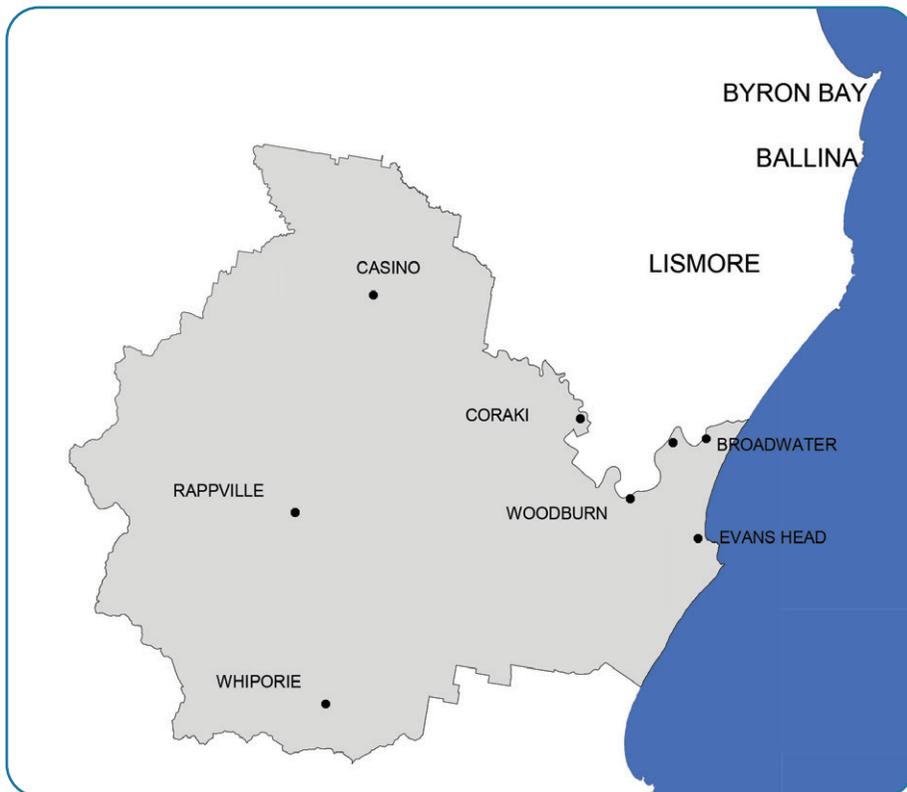
To prepare for this important conversation with our community, our State of the Valley report looks at progress so far in delivering the Community Strategic Plan – Richmond Valley 2040, and highlights some of the key issues our community is currently facing. It also outlines the next steps in the journey as we continue to deliver our long-term vision for growth, recovery, adaptation and renewal. We look forward to sharing this vision with you as we re-commence Our Big Conversation over the coming months. Together, we can deliver positive change and opportunities for the Richmond Valley, while preserving the things that we value the most – our unique identity, relaxed lifestyle and beautiful environment.

ABOUT THE RICHMOND VALLEY

The Richmond Valley local government area covers 3,050 km² and extends from the coastline at Evans Head to the foothills of the Great Dividing Range to the west. The Bundjalung People are the traditional custodians of this land.

Most of the Valley's rolling hills and fertile river plains are devoted to agriculture, interspersed with State forests, national parks and nature reserves.

The largest town is Casino, with a population of more than 12,000. Other communities include Evans Head, Broadwater, Rileys Hill, Woodburn, Coraki, New Italy and Rappville, as well as rural areas.



AREA SNAPSHOT

- Total area 3,050 km²
- 38 km of coastline
- 140km Richmond River
- 490 km² State Forest
- 173 km² National Park
- 1260 km² floodplain

LOCAL SERVICES

SCHOOLS

- 12 primary schools
- 2 high schools
- 2 K-12 schools
- 1 TAFE college

HEALTH SERVICES

- 1 District Hospital
- 4 Community health centres
- 2 Ambulance stations
- 24 local GPs

LAW & ORDER

- 1 District Court House – Casino
- 4 Police stations – Casino, Coraki, Woodburn, Evans Head



Who are we?

- Population – 23,705
- Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander – 7.9%
- Born overseas – 6%
- People requiring help in their daily lives due to disability – 7.9%
- Under 18 yrs – 21.9%
- Over 60 yrs – 32.3%
- Median age – 46 yrs



Where do we work?

- Annual production - \$1.2 billion
- Top employment sectors – manufacturing, health care/assistance, education
- Local jobs - 8,663
- Unemployment rate – 5.7%
- Live & work in the Valley – 58.4%
- Average weekly income – Men: \$808; Women: \$770



Where do we live?

- Number of dwellings – 10,970
- Rental properties – 25.5%
- Owner-occupied – 70.3%



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

CHALLENGES

Continued flood recovery

The 2022 flood left us with a \$150m damage bill for community facilities and infrastructure, including \$100m in damaged roads and bridges. It will take another three years to complete the road repairs. Our Mid-Richmond communities will also need continued support to focus on renewal and disaster adaptation for the future, as we continue to work with the NSW Reconstruction Authority.

Adapting to a changing climate

Our climate is changing and we need to adapt to a less predictable future. We know that temperatures will rise and there will be longer droughts and more bushfire events, along with more frequent storms and flooding. This means we need to plan, build and respond differently in the future to ensure our community is safe and sustainable.

Solving our housing crisis

The Northern Rivers was in the grip of a housing crisis before the floods destroyed hundreds of homes in the region. In the years before the COVID pandemic, housing construction had slowed and rentals were already hard to find. Then came the post-covid exodus from the cities, pushing prices up, followed by the flood, displacing thousands of people. The Northern Rivers is now facing one of its highest rates of homelessness, with vulnerable members of our community suffering the most

Aging infrastructure

Like most regional communities, our major infrastructure is aging faster than our population is growing. This means we now face a huge investment to replace these outdated assets and will need help from State and Federal governments to fund this reconstruction. This includes \$100m in essential water/sewer infrastructure over the next five years to replace the Casino STP, expand Evans Head STP, secure Casino's water supply and cater for growth.

Looking ahead...

There are a number of challenges that our community will face in a rapidly changing world. But there will also be benefits and opportunities that will help to create a brighter future for our Valley. Through careful planning and progressive leadership, we can build on our key strengths, effectively manage risks and harness the new possibilities presented to us.



OPPORTUNITIES

More jobs for our community

Council has been working with the NSW Government to develop the Richmond Valley Regional Jobs Precinct. This will create 1900 new jobs, through direct employment and associated service industries. More tourism jobs are also on the way, with key attractions such as the Northern Rivers Rail Trail, the Casino Showground upgrade completed and plans underway for the Three Villages Cycleway.

More housing on the way

Government initiatives, such as the Regional Housing Fund and the Reconstruction Authority's Resilient Lands program have the Richmond Valley in their sights as a key growth area, with flood-safe lands around Casino. Council is working with the government to help secure funds for essential infrastructure to activate this land, providing up to 1600 new homes in Stage 1.

Plans to secure more services

With a growing population, we'll need more health services, shops, schools and public transport. Council has completed the Richmond Valley Growth Management Strategy to identify where new development can be located. The strategy identifies a new Health Precinct, centred on Casino Hospital, and plans major upgrades for our CBD areas. Council will be advocating strongly for more government-led services to be established in the Richmond Valley.

Strategic location

Located some two hours from Brisbane and the growing communities of South-East Queensland, the Richmond Valley is in easy reach of emerging tourism and investment markets and opportunities from the Brisbane Olympics. We also have direct access to the Pacific Motorway, key inland freight routes along the Summerland Way and Bruxner Highway and a direct link to the North Coast rail line, providing great opportunities for our expanding industrial precincts.

Where are we now?



PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

When each new council is elected to office, one of its first tasks is to work with the community to prepare the Community Strategic Plan (CSP). This plan identifies the community's long-term goals and priorities over at least the next 10 years. Every community is different, so every Community Strategic Plan is unique, and many people, agencies and authorities will be involved in delivering the outcomes. The Community Strategic Plan helps to inform the Council's Delivery Program and Operational Plans (as shown in the diagram). These plans set out how Council's activities and resources will be directed towards delivering the community's priorities. Council reports on progress on the Delivery Program every six months. At the end of the Council term the State of the Valley report is prepared to reflect on progress in achieving the CSP goals.

Our current CSP – Richmond Valley 2040 – includes four Key Directions:

Strengthening our role in the region

This direction focuses on building back better after the floods, identifying opportunities for our community to grow, strengthening our economy and providing more housing, jobs and services.

Creating great places to live

This direction focuses on creating vibrant, liveable and safe communities, enhancing our town centres and ensuring that public spaces, sports fields and community facilities are well maintained. It also looks at strategies to help our community adapt to a changing climate and build resilience against future natural disasters.

Protecting our unique environment

This direction focuses on preserving our native bushland and biodiversity, maintaining healthy rivers, beaches and waterways, and helping our Valley transition to a circular economy.

Delivering for our community

This direction focuses on the role Council plays in delivering the CSP. It includes Council's civic leadership in engaging with and advocating for our community, as well as our responsibilities for managing community resources and providing great service.



REBUILDING THE RICHMOND VALLEY

COUNTING THE COST OF THE 2022 FLOODS



Damage to homes

3000 properties impacted by flooding
450+ homes uninhabitable
1000+ people displaced



Damage to community facilities

\$3m, including halls, sports facilities
and emergency services buildings



Damage to infrastructure

\$150m – including roads, bridges, water
supply, sewerage and drains



Clean-up costs

\$6m – including removal of over
80,000 tonnes of flood waste



Local Economy

\$250m loss predicted in local
production over two years



Government buy-backs

55 home buy-backs offered, 39
accepted so far

The catastrophic floods of 2022 changed the face of the Richmond Valley, leaving devastation on a scale that we had never seen before, and the task to clear the debris and slowly rebuild our communities seemed almost insurmountable.



Two years onwards, the Valley is a different place from those first dark days. Although there is still much to be done, we have worked together to rebuild and reconnect local communities and secure much-needed government funding. The majority of damaged homes are now habitable once more and Council has supported 35 local homeowners to fast-track their flood repair development applications, including a number of house-raising projects. Latest figures would also suggest that the \$250m impact on the local economy - predicted in the Flooding Economic Impacts Statement commissioned by Council in 2022 - has been turned around through strategic government investment in major industries, agriculture and construction. Gross regional product has increased in the past two years.

Delivering our Plan

Council adopted the Rebuilding the Richmond Valley Recovery Plan in June 2022 and has made substantial progress in completing this plan, with most of the community projects finalised and funding secured for the majority of repairs to damaged roads and bridges. Major works, such as the Naughton's Gap landslip restoration, are nearing completion. Council has used the Plan to highlight our community's needs to State and Federal government funding partners, securing more than \$61m in grants for recovery and resilience projects.

Working together

We have also worked to build positive relationships with the NSW Reconstruction Authority, to secure support for our community. This resulted in funding for combined place/adaptation planning for the Mid Richmond communities, feasibility funding for new residential development on flood-safe lands and an agreed pathway to redevelop the Broadwater school. Council continues to work with the RA to agree on the future use of buy-back lands and help secure funds to build essential infrastructure for new housing.

PROGRESS

- \$61m of Government funding secured for community flood recovery/ resilience projects
- Strong advocacy for government business grants, with \$26m+ for agriculture and manufacturing, as well as small/medium business grants
- \$3m flood repairs to community facilities
- \$38.4m of road repairs completed so far
- Broadwater School redevelopment progressed in partnership with NSW RA
- New Richmond Valley flood study completed
- Mid Richmond Place Plans and adaptation planning completed in consultation with the community

WHAT'S NEXT?

- Finalising flood repairs to local roads and infrastructure – three-year program.
- Delivering the Mid Richmond Place Plan projects and disaster adaptation strategies
- Completing the new Floodplain Risk Management Plan and exploring flood mitigation options

FIXING OUR FLOOD-DAMAGED ROADS



\$100m roadworks program underway

The 2022 floods had a devastating impact, with 75% of our road network affected and a \$100m repair bill for Council. The Federal Government provides Disaster Relief Funding to help local communities restore their infrastructure, with these funds being administered by Transport for NSW. The scheme provides emergency funding for immediate repairs after a disaster, and additional funding to undertake longer term restoration and repair work.

To claim the restoration and repair funding, councils must first assess and record all the damage to their infrastructure, provide evidence of the pre-flood condition of the assets, estimate the cost of the repairs, then lodge a funding application for each package of works. This process can take more than a year, with Richmond Valley Council lodging 90 funding applications under the scheme. So far, 88 applications, valued at \$49.7m have been approved, with the remaining applications under review. Council has also received funds through other programs, such as the Northern Rivers Recovery & Resilience Program and the NSW Infrastructure Betterment Fund.

A key focus of the road repair program will be to build back better, so our infrastructure is more resilient in future. We are also focussing on fixing low-lying areas of road that keep communities isolated during flooding. This includes \$23.5m in resilience funding to fix the drainage at Dairy Flat and Thearles Canal on the Woodburn-Coraki Rd (both projects now completed) and replace and raise the twin Tatham Bridges (currently underway), as well as the works already completed improving resilience at Willox and Jacky Bulbin bridges.

While the flood restoration works continue, Council will also be focussing on its other key infrastructure projects, such as much-needed repairs to the Broadwater Bridge.

*Left: Stage 1 works on the Bentley Rd rockslide
Right: Council has secured \$18m to replace the Tatham bridges*



75% Richmond Valley road network impacted by floods

\$100m road repair program

\$38.4m of works completed so far

90 Funding applications for Disaster Relief

\$49.7m Disaster Relief Funding secured

\$33m Secured through other grant programs

2027 Target completion date for all works

Naughtons Gap Road set to reopen

The \$15.8m Naughtons Gap landslip remediation is one of Council's most ambitious and challenging flood repair projects. The road has been closed to traffic since March 2021, after two major landslips occurred – the second during the 2022 floods. The landslip had to be carefully monitored to determine if there was any further movement over time and detailed geotechnical studies were completed. Then came the challenge of designing a long-term solution to the problem and securing the necessary funding. The works are being completed through a combination of Disaster Relief and Infrastructure Betterment funding. The project includes:

- 152 bored piers, up to 15m deep.
- 2,460 cubic metres of concrete in the piers and connecting ridge beam
- 12,000 tonnes of debris removed and repurposed
- 800m of sub-surface drainage to a depth of 3m
- 1km of surface drainage

Contract firm CMC Civil has been undertaking the work, with the project now nearing completion. The official opening is scheduled for December 2024.



Before and after: Naughtons Gap Road (above) following the second landslip in 2022 and (right) following \$15.8m in remediation works





MAJOR WORKS COMPLETED

- Naughton's Gap restoration
- Upper Cherry Tree Rd
- Casino-Woodburn Rd - various restoration and resilience works
- Jacky Bulbin bridge replacement
- Busby's Flat Rd
- Springrove Rd
- Manifold Rd
- Rappville Rd
- Woodburn-Evans Head Rd

WHAT'S NEXT?

- Tatham twin bridges
- Bentley Rd rockslide
- Reconstruction works at Coraki, Woodburn, Evans Head
- Rural reconstruction works - Sextonville Rd, Mongogarrie Rd, Old Tenterfield Rd, Wyan Rd, Bungawalbyn Whiporie Rd
- Resealing works at Rileys Hill, Woodburn, Coraki, Evans Head, Casino and Backmede

REVITALISING THE MID-RICHMOND



The Mid-Richmond villages of Coraki, Woodburn and Broadwater/Rileys Hill were severely impacted by the 2022 flood and the work of rebuilding and reconnecting these communities continues. With the expectation that climate change will bring more frequent and severe events in the future, we need to think differently about the way our lower river communities can grow and prosper. More than one-third of our local government area is floodplain, so disaster adaptation is set to be a stronger focus for the future.

Earlier this year, Council, supported by the NSW Reconstruction Authority and specialist consultants, worked with the Mid Richmond communities to plan a new way forward that recognises the unique identity of each village and places disaster adaptation at the centre of future opportunities for growth and renewal. The five Mid-Richmond Place Plans identify a wide range of projects and opportunities, to improve community facilities, boost the local economy and improve disaster readiness, response and recovery.

This includes initiatives such as creating a stronger village centre for Broadwater, with walkways and bike paths to a new river access site, completing the CBD upgrade and improved facilities for Woodburn, and creating a new riverbank walk

to Windsor Park, at Coraki with more recreation and sports activities. The plans also recognise the important role that Evans Head will play in the future of the Mid-Richmond, with the greatest potential for growth and improved services. The Evans Head plan identified seven precincts within the town for further planning and development, including a CBD revitalisation project and opportunities to enhance and connect popular tourist areas, such as the beach, aerodrome, harbour and lookout.

\$12m investment in growth

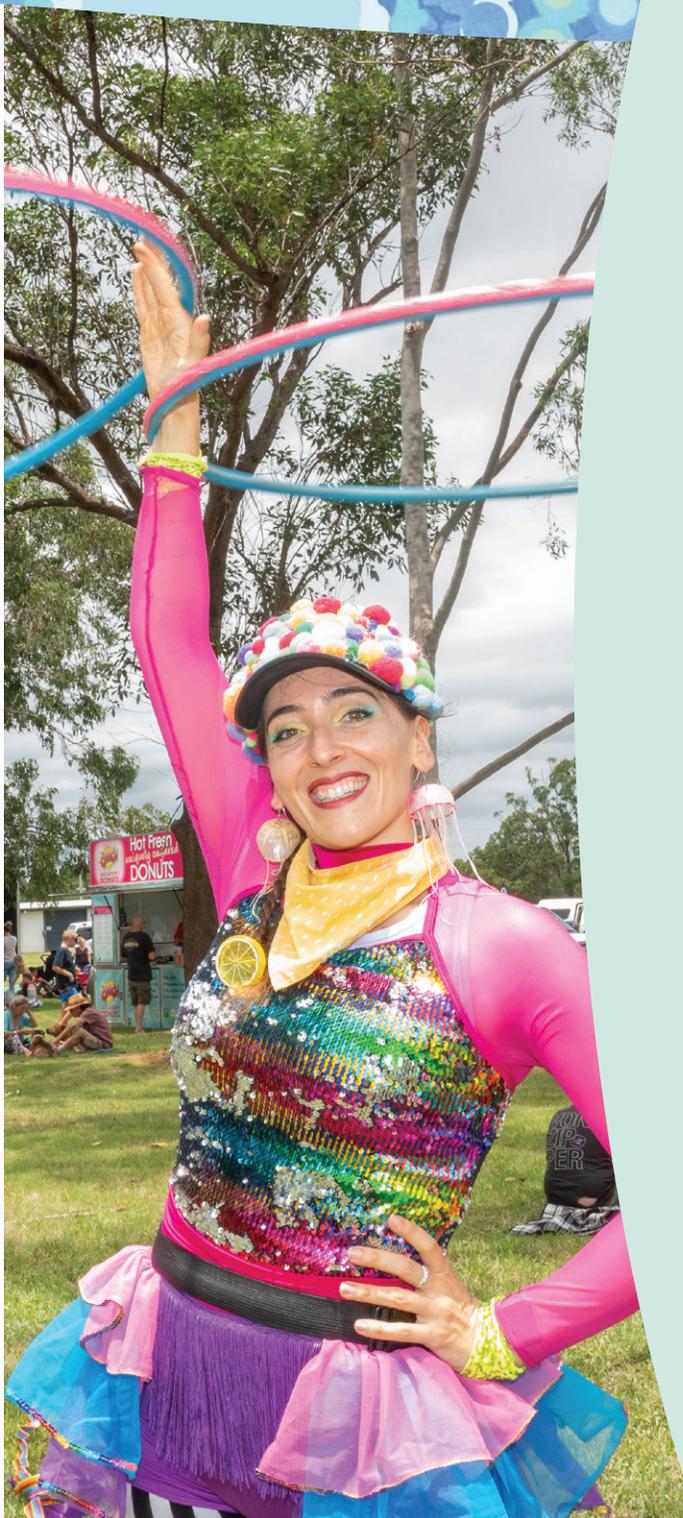
One of Council's signature projects for the Mid-Richmond in 2025 is completing Stage 2 of the Evans Head Sewage Treatment Plant. This \$12m upgrade will double the capacity of the plant to 11,000 EP and improve its environmental performance. The work will ensure there is sufficient capacity to cater for growth and peak tourist populations to at least 2050. Council has received 50% funding for this project from the NSW Safe and Secure water program.

\$3m CBD upgrade project

In 2017, Council started working with the Woodburn community on plans to upgrade the riverside park and CBD precinct after the village was bypassed by the new highway. The park upgrade, including a new visitor information centre was completed, but the 2022 flood delayed progress on the CBD streetscape design. In 2023, Council reopened consultation on the plan, with a number of community workshops to discuss ideas. A new design for the streetscape has been prepared and Council is now actively seeking the \$3m required to complete the work.

Cycleway a top priority

One of the signature projects from the Mid-Richmond Place Plans is to complete the Three Villages Cycleway project, connecting Evans Head, Woodburn and Broadwater. The cycleway will be a great boon for tourists and locals alike. Some sections have already been constructed and designs for the remaining sections are being finalised. Council continues to advocate for the \$20m+ required to complete the project.



PROGRESS

- Combined Place/Adaptation Plans completed for Coraki, Broadwater/Rileys Hill, Woodburn, Evans Head
- Woodburn CBD upgrade plans developed - currently seeking funding
- Three Villages Cycleway - 9km constructed so far
- Long-term restoration designed for Richmond Terrace, Coraki - currently seeking funding
- Repairs and improved flood resilience for Woodburn-Coraki Rd
- Improved security for Mid-Richmond water supply underway (Rous Water)
- Stage 2 Evans Head STP designed and funded

WHAT'S NEXT?

- Seek funding and implement Place Plan projects and adaptation strategies
- Resolve future options for Coraki Pod Village
- Complete Evans Head CBD masterplan and Woodburn CBD upgrade
- Increase tourism options and investment in the Mid-Richmond

DELIVERING OUR VISION FOR GROWTH



Richmond Valley Council General Manager Vaughan Macdonald (right) and Director of Projects & Business Development Ben Zeller planning Council's industrial development at Casino.

New investment in the Valley

Council began planning for accelerated growth in the Richmond Valley from 2021, with the announcement of the Regional Jobs Precinct initiative. Since then, we have carefully laid the foundations for long-term sustainable growth and investment with a series of strategic plans and studies.

Now these plans are being delivered, with more investment and major projects planned for the 2024-28 council term, as we continue to activate the Regional Jobs Precinct, build on our investment in the Casino showground and racecourse upgrade, and develop new masterplans to revitalise the Casino and Evans Head CBD precincts.

Over the past two years, we've seen a significant increase in both government-led and private investment in the Richmond Valley and the pace is picking up, with more than \$55m of new developments approved in the first three months of the current financial year.

Council has led the way with its \$4.3m industrial development in Precinct 3 of the Regional Jobs Precinct, with a second \$13.8m development underway for Precinct 1. We've also seen approvals for major private investment, including \$23.8m in commercial and industrial projects in Casino, and in Evans Head, a new \$4.9m commercial development and continued delivery of two seniors housing projects providing 200 new homes.

\$150m+
new development
approved since 2022,
including
\$56.4m
in commercial &
industrial investment





Housing Fast Facts

Current housing stock: 10,970

Housing demand by 2041: 13,550

Median house prices:

Richmond Valley — \$482,500

Casino — \$460,000

Evans Head — \$1.19m

Median weekly rent (3-bed house):

Casino — \$450-\$530

Evans Head — \$536-\$606



Securing more housing

One of the principles of our Community Strategic Plan is that everyone in our community should have a home. We all deserve a safe place to live. Sadly, for many families this is still not a reality. The Northern Rivers was suffering a housing crisis before the flood and the situation is now worse, with hundreds of homes rendered uninhabitable. In the decade prior to the flood the number of new dwellings provided each year continued to decrease, for example Casino's average rate of dwelling stock additions fell from 34 to 22 dwellings a year between 2011 and 2021, despite an increase in population. Post-flood, new home completions continue to be low.

To help address these challenges Council has prepared a growth management strategy to identify future areas for development in the Valley. Our long-term vision for more housing focuses on three areas:

- Providing greater diversity and choice in housing options
- Increasing development density in appropriate areas, such as townhouses, apartments and shop-top housing
- Supporting greenfield residential development on flood-safe lands throughout the Valley

The NSW Reconstruction Authority's Resilient Lands Strategy for the Northern Rivers identified seven future flood-safe development sites for priority investigation, the largest site being at Fairy Hill near Casino. This could provide at least 1600 new homes in Stage One and Council has received funding from the Authority to complete feasibility analysis and investigations into essential infrastructure to service the estate. We will use these studies to actively lobby all levels of Government for additional funding, including the \$36m required to provide water and sewerage to the site and connect to the new Casino STP.

Richmond Valley projected
population increase by 2041



27,650

PROGRESS

- Regional Jobs Precinct (RJP) Masterplan endorsed by Council. LEP/DCP amendments being prepared
- \$18m in Council-led industrial development in precinct 1 and 3 of the RJP
- \$56.4m private investment in commercial/ industrial
- Priority investigation for flood-safe housing near Casino (Summerland Estate)
- 190 new seniors lifestyle homes approved for Evans Head
- 46 new housing lots - South Casino and Broadwater
- 25-lot rural residential estate approved for Swan Bay

WHAT'S NEXT?

- Completing Council's \$13.5m Precinct 3 Industry Activation project
- Actively supporting investment in the RJP and emerging industries
- Working with NSW Reconstruction Authority to unlock housing development on flood-safe land
- Completing CBD masterplans for Casino and Evans Head, with more options for apartments and shop-top housing

DIVERSIFYING OUR ECONOMY



Richmond Valley economy

\$1.2 billion annual productivity

Top value-add industries

- Agriculture — 15.2%
- Manufacture — 14.8%
- Health care/assistance — 9.9%

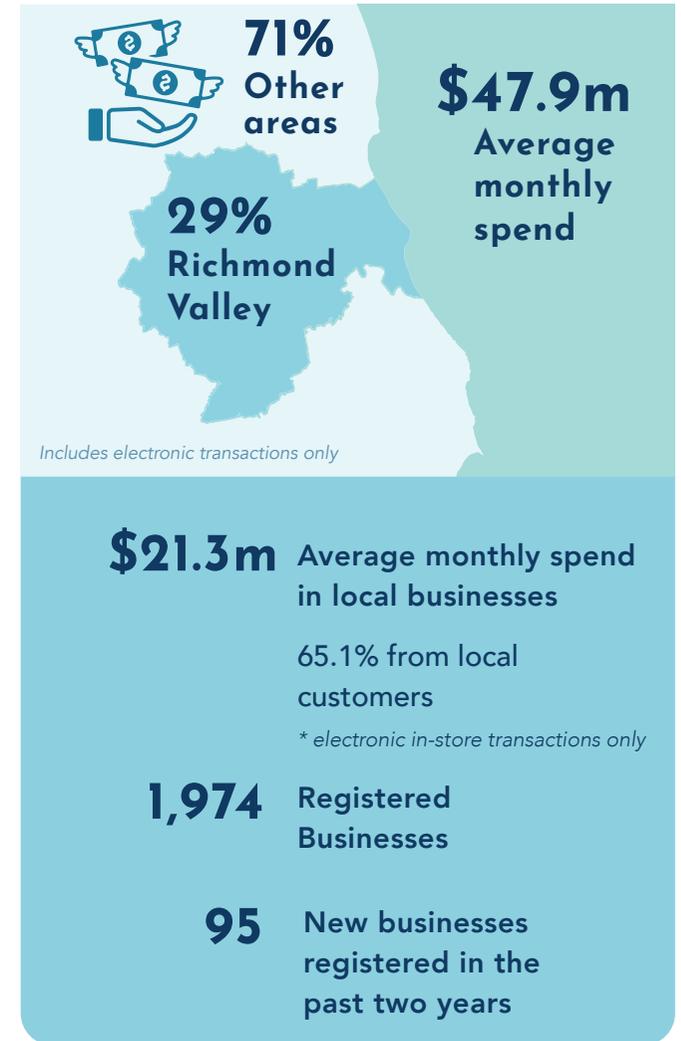
Local jobs — 8663

Top employment industries:

- Manufacture — 14%
- Health care/assistance — 13%
- Education — 10%

Where do residents spend their money?

The Richmond Valley has a thriving and increasingly diverse economy, which is set to grow even stronger in the next 20 years. With a healthy \$1.2 billion in annual local production, our traditional 'engine industries' of manufacturing and agriculture provide a sound economic base and are branching into new areas of production. Alongside the traditional beef industry, the Valley has seen emerging production in more plant-based foods such as soya beans and microalgae. Service industries are also growing, with increasing employment in health care, education, retail and hospitality. Tourism continues to be a strong income source for the Valley, with increasing numbers in our popular coastal areas, and key attractions, such as the Northern Rivers Rail Trail and Casino Truck Show boosting visitor numbers inland.





Supporting agricultural enterprise

The Richmond Valley is the rural heart of the Northern Rivers and agricultural production still underpins our local economy. Over the past 10 years, Council has invested heavily in essential infrastructure to support rural enterprise, including the \$15m upgrade of the Northern Rivers Livestock Exchange and the recent \$14.4m redevelopment of the Casino Showground and Racecourse facility. This has strengthened our local industries and ensures we are well positioned to take advantage of new opportunities as they emerge. The showground redevelopment, with its new 40m x 80m covered arena, seating 2500, is proving a real drawcard for new rural events, such as the NSW Championships Dog Trial, hosted earlier this year. Council will continue to actively market the facility to ensure it can be maintained to a high standard and provides economic stimulus for the local community.

PROGRESS

- New Invest and Live RV team established to promote economic growth
- \$14.4m Casino showground and racecourse upgrade completed
- Casino-Bentley section of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail completed – Bentley-Lismore section opening in December 2024
- NRLX leasing arrangements finalised, with continued high throughput
- Record 2024 Casino Truck Show attendance – 30,000+ with 600 entrants and a \$3.9m boost to the local economy
- New medical centre approved for Woodburn

WHAT'S NEXT?

- Encouraging emerging industries, such as recycling and ag-tech to establish in the Regional Jobs Precinct
- Continuing to grow and diversify our local tourism industries
- Supporting continued growth in service industries – including development of the Casino Health Precinct
- Revitalising CBD precincts to attract more retail, accommodation and housing options
- Continuing to support and deliver signature events, such as the Truck Show, Primex and Beef Week.
- Actively promoting the Casino Showground and Racecourse facility.

CELEBRATING OUR UNIQUE IDENTITY



Bringing our community together

Supporting sport

The Richmond Valley is home to a wide range of sporting activities and organisations, with Council providing facilities for 23 sporting clubs. Since 2022, Council's advocacy has successfully attracted more than \$5.9m in government grants to improve sporting facilities, including upgrades to Stan Payne and Woodburn Ovals, new clubhouses for Woodburn Pony and Tennis Clubs, Casino Netball, Casino Cobras, Junior Rugby League and Swimming Clubs. This is on top of the \$6.7m to complete stage one of the Casino Memorial Swimming Pool upgrade, which opened in September 2023.

Local events

Council has also continued to sponsor and deliver a variety of events to bring local communities together and attract more visitors to our region. This includes signature events such as Beef Week, Primex and Casino Truck Show, as well as popular gatherings such as Flavour Fest and our Christmas Street Parties. Council also secured \$400,000 in funding for local events to reconnect flood-affected communities and stimulate the local economy. This included Festival of the Waters events at Coraki and Woodburn, as well as the Casino Family Fun Day.

Thriving libraries

Our regional library service has continued to grow in popularity, with up to 1000 new members joining each year. Total membership is currently 16,407. The libraries' huge collection includes everything from e-resources to cake tins, knitting needles and exercise equipment. During the last council term, the library service provided more than 2000 programs for adults and children throughout the region, with all four branch libraries continuing to be well patronised, as well as the popular mobile library for remote communities.



PROGRESS

- Continued support for NAIDOC week and local Aboriginal employment programs
- Completion and implementation of Council's new Disability Inclusion Action Plan
- \$5.9m in government funding to improve local sports facilities
- 2000 programs delivered through the regional library service
- More than \$186,000 in Council community grants for local clubs and events.
- Continued sponsorship of signature events – Primex, Beef Week and ongoing support for local events

WHAT'S NEXT?

- Ongoing advocacy for improved educational opportunities
- Continuing to seek funding for improvements to local sports facilities, including Casino pool upgrade stages 2 & 3 and Stan Payne Oval Masterplan priorities
- Ongoing support for community events and library programs
- Further rounds of Council's Community Grants Program
- Improvements to local parks and playgrounds.

Working together for positive change

One of the principles of our Community Strategic Plan is that no-one should be left behind when it comes to receiving an education, getting a job and finding a safe, affordable place to live. The Richmond Valley community has traditionally experienced a high level of socio-economic disadvantage, but analysis over 10 years has shown gradual improvement. The 2026 census results will be critical in determining if this trend is continuing. Addressing inequity and disadvantage within our community is a shared responsibility between all levels of government, supported by social enterprise, community groups and individuals. Council plays a role by helping to create more housing and employment within the community, sponsoring our youth employment scheme, implementing our Disability Inclusion Action Plan, creating access to learning and resources through our libraries and supporting local agencies. Working together for positive change will be a strong priority for our community over the next 20 years as we continue to grow.



The SEIFA indexes

The relative advantage or disadvantage of an area, compared to others, is generally measured by the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). Governments often refer to these indexes when allocating funding to communities. SEIFA combines Census data such as income, education, employment, occupation, housing and family structure to summarise the socio-economic characteristics of an area. Each area receives a SEIFA score indicating how relatively advantaged or disadvantaged that area is compared with other areas. The lower the score, the greater the level of disadvantage. SEIFA uses four different indicators to measure different aspects of the community. The most recent census data, 2021, showed that while the level of socio-economic disadvantage within our community was improving, overall, the Richmond Valley was still one of the more disadvantaged communities both within the Northern Rivers and NSW.



Index of Relative Social Disadvantage- IRSD

This shows that the relative socio-economic disadvantage within the Valley is improving compared to other communities in the State. In 2011, the Richmond Valley was ranked No.8 in NSW for disadvantage. This has improved to No.14 in 2021.



Index of Relative Social Advantage & Disadvantage - IRSDAD

When levels of both advantage and disadvantage are considered, the Valley slides down the rankings in NSW, because other LGAs have more advantaged areas to offset disadvantage. From 2011 to 2021, the Valley went from ranking No.7 to No.6 in NSW.



Access to economic resources

This has improved from 2011-2021, suggesting an increase in income or home ownership in the community. In 2011, the RV ranked No.18 in NSW, improving to No. 30 in 2021.



Education and occupation

The Valley continues to record some of the lowest scores in NSW on this index. This indicates that there are comparatively more people without qualifications, undertaking low-skilled work in the Valley than in other communities.

LIVING SUSTAINABLY IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

Adapting to natural disasters

The Richmond Valley has experienced nine natural disasters in the past five years, with devastating consequences for our community. The 2019 bushfires saw 48.6% of the local government area impacted by fire. A series of major storm and flood events followed in 2020 and 2021 – and then the devastation of the catastrophic 2022 floods. These disasters have shown us that we must change the way we prepare for, respond to, and recover from these events in the future.

Disaster adaptation will become a stronger focus for the Richmond Valley in the future, as the NSW Government rolls out its State Disaster Mitigation Plan and regional Disaster Adaptation Strategies. Richmond Valley Council has led the way with exploring local disaster adaptation options through the Mid Richmond Place Plan Project.

Like many regional settlements, the Mid-Richmond communities are located in areas of natural hazard risk and high environmental value, so decisions about future growth and development can be challenging and require careful planning.

The Place Plans use a version of the CSIRO's Maintain-Modify-Transform model to explore resilience and adaptation pathways and encourage community conversations about future directions. Council will consider ways to apply this model more broadly across the Richmond Valley in the future.

Building climate resilience

1. **Social** – Connecting communities and helping people prepare for future events.
2. **Economic** – Diversifying the economy and supporting local businesses to be better prepared.
3. **Settlement** – Taking a risk-based approach to land-use planning, identifying the safest places for new development.
4. **Infrastructure** – designing disaster resilience into buildings, assets and essential infrastructure.
5. **Natural environment** – nature based measures such as ecosystem restoration can help provide natural defences.



Creating cool, green spaces

With temperatures expected to rise over the next 20 years, providing more shaded areas and cool green spaces will become more important for our community. The Richmond Valley currently experiences an average of 16 days each year where the temperature climbs above 35 degrees. This is expected to increase by three more days by 2030. In a recent community survey 91% of respondents said they wanted more shade in the Richmond Valley and 80% wanted more trees in parks and playgrounds. Council has committed to an ambitious community greening program, aiming to plant 15,000 additional shade trees in streets and community spaces by 2040 and is already well on the way to achieving this target through our habitat restoration and public planting programs.

Providing more EV charging stations

Our community has embraced the change to environmentally friendly vehicle options, with more hybrids and e-vehicles on the road. However, as with most regional communities, distance and lack of charging stations is impacting on up-take rates. Council has supported the installation of an e-charging station at Casino and is currently trialling another two stations, one at Evans Head and a second in Casino.



PROGRESS

- Richmond Valley Growth Management Strategy and place plans finalised - identifying areas for future safe development
- Local disaster adaptation planning developed for the Mid-Richmond
- Updated RV Flood Study completed and funding secured for a new Floodplain Risk Management Plan
- 327 mature street trees planted
- Solar installations on key community buildings – 50% energy reduction
- Electric vehicle charging stations installed at Casino and Evans Head

WHAT'S NEXT

- Continuing to develop regional disaster preparedness, response and adaptation plans
- Supporting Community Resilience Teams and disaster preparedness education programs
- Exploring further options to apply the “Maintain-Modify-Transform” model to council assets
- Rolling out more tree planting projects
- Installing more solar panels on community buildings to reduce energy consumption

REDUCING OUR IMPACTS ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Preserving biodiversity and habitat

Preserving the Richmond Valley's beautiful landscapes is a key focus of the Community Strategic plan, but our bushland, native plants and animals are feeling the impacts of climate change and increasing human activity. The Valley's strong agricultural heritage means that much of the land has been cleared and we have lost up to 70% of our local tree canopy. Our riparian zones along the riverbank are also feeling the pressure of land clearing and farming and it's important that we protect these areas to keep the river healthy.

Over the past council term, we've been working to raise community awareness of the importance of habitat protection and responsible land management and provided opportunities for people to get involved in enhancing critical habitat areas for koalas, native fish and flying foxes.

So far 11,713 trees and shrubs have been planted as part of Council's Flying Fox habitat program in Queen Elizabeth Park Casino, 795 trees and 1167 native grasses have been planted to stabilise the riverbank and protect fish habitat at McDonald Park Casino, 2,367 native species have been planted for riverbank restoration and enhanced koala habitat at Coraki and 3ha of native bushland have been rehabilitated with koala food trees under the Caring for Catchments initiative.



16,000+
trees, shrubs and native grasses
planted for habitat protection

Our challenges

150k of river riparian zone to protect

70% of the Valley's native woody vegetation has been cleared

283 threatened species of flora and fauna

2 threatened species of fish

12 threatened ecological communities



Improving recycling rates

Over the past two years, RVC's waste education team has been actively promoting the 'reduce, re-use, recycle' message to help improve recycling rates and reduce the amount of waste that is sent to landfill.

Since 2022, some 11,600 tonnes of waste has been taken to landfill each year. This is an increase on previous years and is partly due to increased construction waste from flood demolitions and renovations. Up to 4,900 tonnes of material is recycled each year. About half of this is food and garden materials, which is processed into compost and the other half is plastics, metals and e-waste. All recycled materials are processed outside the Valley. However, some materials can't be recycled because of contamination rates in our kerbside bins. Putting the wrong waste in the wrong bin can affect our recovery rates and adds extra cost to waste management. If we hope to achieve the NSW Government's target to transition the State to a circular economy in 20 years, our community will need to find better long-term solutions for residual waste and more opportunities for recycling and reusing materials.

Over the past two years, we've taken positive steps in this direction, completing the \$6m expansion of the Nammoona Resource Recovery Centre, with the new Cell 6 commencing operations this year. The new cell will provide waste management security for the community for the next 12-15 years, while council continues to work on longer-term solutions. Opening Cell 6 has also brought environmental benefits by reducing the amount of waste that has to be transported to Queensland – that means 550 fewer truckloads of waste heading north each year – and a \$1m saving in transport and disposal costs.

HOW MUCH WASTE DO WE PRODUCE?

- 11,600 tonnes** taken to landfill each year since 2022
- 4,900 tonnes** recyclable materials recovered per year
- 23%** contamination rate in yellow kerbside bins (including general waste and non-recyclable materials)



PROGRESS

- \$432,000 government funding secured to protect flying fox and fish habitat
- 16,000 native trees, shrubs and grasses planted for habitat restoration
- 3ha of bushland rehabilitated with koala food trees
- \$6m Nammoona Cell 6 completed, providing landfill security for the next 12-15 years
- New waste management fleet, using smart technologies to support efficient waste collection

WHAT'S NEXT

- Continuing to work with community groups, such as Landcare, to help deliver more habitat restoration projects
- Increasing riparian zone restoration work, in partnership with landowners, to help protect river water quality
- Supporting community groups, such as Friends of the Koala, to protect threatened species
- Developing long-term waste management solutions that support transition to a circular economy
- Encouraging more recycling industries to establish in the Richmond Valley

SECURING OUR WATER SUPPLIES

\$200m investment in growth and renewal

Richmond Valley Council manages water and sewerage networks within our community, in partnership with Rous County Council. Rous provides bulk water supply for the Mid-Richmond villages of Coraki, Broadwater, Rileys Hill, Woodburn and Evans Head and Council manages the water supply for the Casino township.

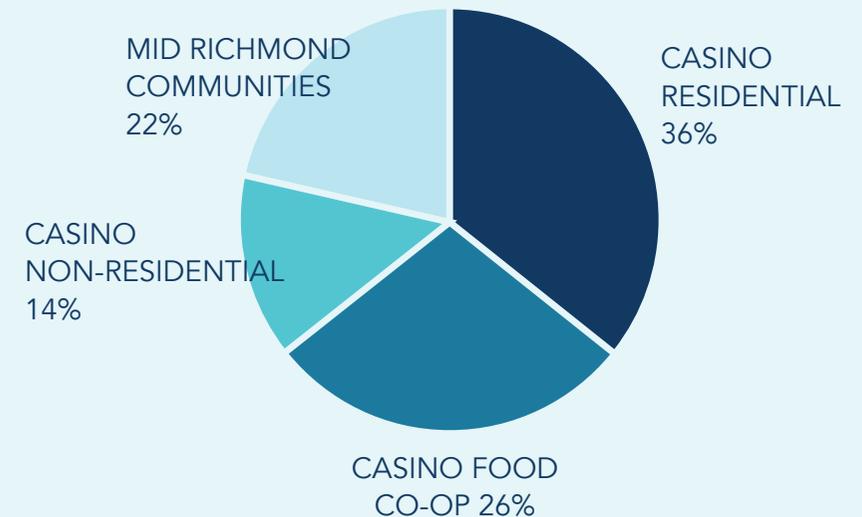
Each year, our community consumes some 2,700 million litres of water, and this is expected to increase with accelerated housing and industrial growth in the future. In the face of an increasingly unpredictable climate, with longer periods of drought and more intense rainfall, we need to find ways to firstly reduce our water consumption and also secure our community's long-term supplies.

Earlier this year, Richmond Valley Council endorsed a \$200m plan to invest in our water and sewerage networks over the next 25 years. This is an ambitious target, as approximately half of this investment will need to occur in the next five years, with the \$65m replacement of the aging Casino STP, \$12m Stage 2 of Evans Head STP, \$10m+ upgrade of the Casino Water Treatment Plant and the first stage of our town water security project for Casino. Council will need to rely heavily on government funding to support this program, as well as income from development charges, water and sewer charges and significant borrowings.

OUR WATER & SEWER NETWORK

- 1 water treatment plant & raw water pump station
- 13 reservoirs
- 4 sewage treatment plants
- 400 km of pipelines
- 42 pump stations
- 7,386 connected properties

AVERAGE ANNUAL WATER USAGE – 2730ML



Replacing our aging infrastructure

Communities throughout NSW are facing increasing challenges as long-term water and sewerage assets come to the end of their service life. Many assets date back to the 1960s-70s, with parts of Casino's sewage treatment plant being more than 90 years old. This demise of these assets is coinciding with accelerated growth in regional areas and escalating prices in the post-pandemic world. Councils now find themselves with higher costs for major asset replacement, more urgent timeframes to deliver these projects and less government funding to help them do it.

Council has identified the \$65m replacement of the Casino STP as a top priority project for the next four years and is actively seeking funds to complete the work. Replacing this plant will allow us to fully activate the regional jobs precinct and open greenfield development sites for new homes, by providing capacity for a future population of up to 20,000. Securing a funding source would allow the new plant to be delivered by 2028.

Meanwhile, funds have been secured to complete Stage 2 of the Evans Head treatment plant, which will increase capacity to 11,000 EP, catering for peak holiday season crowds, as well as steady growth in Evans Head, Woodburn and Broadwater.

The Coraki STP is also due for an upgrade within the next 10 years and Council will deliver the new Rappville Community Sewerage Scheme, funded by Recovery Grants, in 2025.



PROGRESS

- 25-year \$200m water strategy endorsed by Council
- Water demand analysis completed for Casino water supply, with three options for future water security
- Work commenced on Rous County Council's Woodburn Groundwater Scheme, improving water security for the Mid-Richmond
- Funding secured to support the \$10m+ upgrade of Casino Water Treatment Plant
- Funding secured for Stage 2 of Evans Head STP, with detailed design underway
- Concept design and environmental studies underway to ensure the Casino STP project is shovel-ready for funding
- New \$1.6m South Casino sewage transfer system constructed to improve flood resilience

WHAT'S NEXT

- Actively seeking funding to complete the Casino STP upgrade and water/sewer infrastructure for new housing
- Completing the Rappville Sewerage Scheme
- Working with high commercial/industrial water users to improve efficiency
- Reviewing water and sewer pricing to develop more equitable funding models

ADVOCACY AND ENGAGEMENT

Telling our story

One of the key roles Council plays in delivering the Community Strategic Plan is to advocate to other levels of government for essential services, such as education, health care and public transport. The Plan provides a strong foundation to raise key issues and, over the past term, Council has met with the Prime Minister, Premier, NSW Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries to seek support for our community, as well as actively pursuing all available grant funding opportunities. This has resulted in a record \$131.5M in funding for the Richmond Valley since 2022, on top of our regular operational grants, totalling \$18.3M, received from the government. Funded projects have ranged from road and bridge repairs to community events, sports facilities, biodiversity and koala protection, water leak reduction programs, library resources, tactile indicators to help people who are visually impaired and youth week activities. A key focus for the 2024-28 council term will be advocating for more funding to replace our essential water and sewer infrastructure, to support continued growth in the Valley.

Having a say

Providing opportunities for local people to have a say in creating and delivering our community's long-term vision is one of the most important parts of the process. With each new term of office, Council works with the community to revisit the Community Strategic Plan and identify key directions and priorities. The new council then prepares a four-year Delivery Program. This is the elected Councillors' commitment to the community to deliver the CSP priorities during their term in office. Consultation and engagement continues throughout the council term with plans, projects and proposals regularly exhibited for community feedback and live-broadcasts of Council's monthly meetings. Residents can also contact their seven councillors directly via email or phone or speak to Council's customer experience team for service requests, enquiries, or help with lodging a development application. We also share information with the community via our website, social media sites, e-newsletters, on-line surveys and ideas boards and deliver the community newsletter to each household in the Valley once a month.



\$149.8M
total
government
funding since
2022



PROGRESS

- 84 government grants, totalling \$149.8m since 2022
- Direct advocacy to the Prime Minister, Premier and Government Ministers on community priorities
- New Community Engagement Strategy adopted in 2024
- Consultation on 25+ major plans for future directions, flood recovery and community facilities
- 132,000 community newsletters distributed each year

WHAT'S NEXT

- Continuing to advocate for government funding for essential infrastructure
- Ongoing advocacy to NSW Reconstruction Authority to progress flood recovery programs
- Commencing the next round of Our Big Conversation to inform the CSP
- Completing the next Community Satisfaction Survey

RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT

Managing our finances

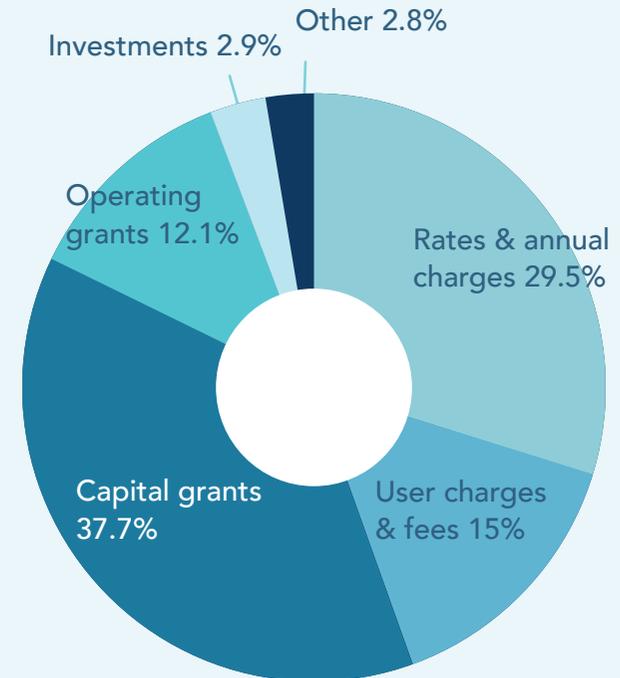
Council has stewardship of community assets worth more than \$1.2 billion and manages an annual budget of \$80 million to provide the services our community needs. Council derives its income for a number of sources, including rates and annual charges, user fees and charges, operational and capital grants and interest on investments. With a significant increase in grants since 2022, the past council term has seen one of our most ambitious capital works programs successfully delivered, and Council will continue to seek further funding over the next four years to replace essential infrastructure. Council will continue to seek further grants over the next four years, to replace essential infrastructure. Our long-term financial plan identifies income and expenditure for the next 10 years. The plan is updated and placed on public exhibition each year, along with proposed charges for rates and fees. Our audited financial statements are also exhibited for community feedback.

Reducing Council's carbon footprint

The NSW Government has committed to cutting greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% by 2030 and reaching net zero by 2050. Council has also committed to reducing its carbon footprint, as part of our Sustainable Communities Strategy. As a starting point, we've examined our main areas of operation to identify which services are generating the greatest emissions, either directly (such as methane generated from landfills) or indirectly (through electricity consumption). The analysis showed that our waste services were the highest source of emissions, followed by sewerage services and fleet.

To help reduce electricity consumption, Council has installed solar systems at the Casino administration centre and our water treatment plant. These systems have reduced consumption by up to 50% and we are now designing further installations for our raw water pump station and the new Casino STP.

SOURCE OF COUNCIL FUNDS



18,381 TCO₂-E

Total emissions in 2023

Landfill – 8,800

Sewerage – 4,082

Fleet vehicles – 2,834

Electricity – 2,665

Supporting local employment

The Community Strategic Plan focuses on responsible management of Council's activities across the quadruple bottom line – providing social, financial and environmental outcomes for our community while ensuring sound leadership and governance. As the second largest employer in the Richmond Valley, with 295 full-time staff, Council is committed to creating a safe, supportive and inclusive workplace, that provides opportunities for people to grow and learn in our organisation. This includes supporting initiatives such as our Women's Try a Trade, Aboriginal employment programs and our Youth Employment Scheme, which helps local school-leavers get a start in the workforce. During the past council term 34 young people have been offered traineeships, apprenticeships or university placements through the YES program.



295 LOCAL JOBS

129 staff are in the operational workforce (roads, parks, waste etc) but only 7% of these are female

77% of council staff live in the Richmond valley

50% of staff are aged under 45 years

51% of staff under 30 years hold a Certificate III or higher qualification

25 current permanent staff started at council as a trainee



Our next Big Conversation

The State of the Valley report reflects on our progress so far in delivering the Richmond Valley 2040 Community Strategic Plan and provides a snapshot of our community at the start of the new council term.

Over the next six months, Council will be reopening Our Big Conversation, to share our long-term plans and identify the community's priorities for the future. This will include in-person and on-line engagement opportunities, as well as our Community Satisfaction Survey, in early 2025. Keep watching our social media sites and the Community Newsletter for dates and details of the program.

The revised Community Strategic Plan and Council's new Delivery Program for 2025-29 will be presented to the June 2024 meeting for adoption, along with the revised Long Term Financial plan and 2025-26 Operational Plan, including rates, fees and charges for the coming year.



WANT TO READ MORE?

Council's long-term plans are all available on our website: www.richmondvalley.nsw.gov.au or via our library service.

These include:

- Richmond Valley 2040 Community Strategic Plan
- Richmond Valley Growth Management Strategy
- Richmond Valley Sustainable Communities Strategy
- Water for Life 2050 strategy
- Individual Place Plans for: Casino, Coraki, Woodburn, Broadwater/Riley's Hill and Evans Head.

References

Council relied on the following external data sources when preparing the State of the Valley report:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics: Census data and SEIFA indexes
- idCommunity demographic resources
- National Institute of Economic & Industry Research (NIEIR) statistics
- CBAiQ data service
- Service NSW – average rental data



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