

## **What will the workforce of the future look like on the Tablelands?**

### **The Region**

The Tablelands is a diverse region, covering an area of 64,768 km<sup>2</sup> - larger than the main island of the State of Tasmania - and home to 46,937 people (estimated resident population at 30 June 2010, ABS 2011). The main population centres of the Tablelands in Mareeba, Atherton, Malanda, Kuranda, and Yungaburra are located within an hour and a half drive of Cairns, Far North Queensland's key economic centre. Cairns and the Far North are currently facing a number of challenges. The region has been hit hard by the global financial crisis and other factors, with impacts on all parts of the community, particularly the tourism and construction industries. A significant factor in the region's exposure to the global financial crisis and other recent events is its dependence on only a few major industry sectors (Tablelands Community Plan 2021).

The Far North Queensland Regional Plan 2009 - 2031 seeks to strengthen Cairns as a destination and a gateway to the world, focuses on diversifying the Cairns economy and making it more resilient to future financial shocks. This means building on Cairns' existing industry strengths as well as expanding into new areas of opportunity such as its potential as a major regional hub for Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Rim. Cairns and the Far North are uniquely placed as one of the few developed economies in the tropical world. Businesses have designed and adapted their practices and products to the tropical environment. This gives the Far North a competitive edge in selling its expertise to the world. Tropical expertise cuts across many sectors including tropical health, environmental management, tropical agribusiness and tropical infrastructure and design.

Water, soils and diverse growing conditions have sustained development of a wide range of agricultural and horticultural cropping operations on the Tablelands. Agricultural industries realised a gross value of production (GVP) of over \$404 million to the Tablelands economy for the 2010/11 financial year (DAFF Tablelands Agricultural Profile 2010/2011). However, the value of Agriculture in the catchment of the Tableland's main commercial centres, such as the Cape and Gulf, is in the order of \$710M.

The main crops are bananas, mangoes, avocados, papaya, potatoes, sugar, maize, grass legume seed, peanuts, citrus, lychees, pumpkins, tea and coffee. Water for the Mareeba-Dimbulah Irrigation Area (MDIA) is supplied from Tinaroo Dam through an extensive network of channels and streams. Farming enterprises in other parts of the Tablelands (including intensive agricultural areas around Atherton, Malanda and Ravenshoe) draw water from natural watercourses, bores and small dams. This enables a tremendous range of fruit and vegetables to be grown to supply both the domestic and overseas markets. The cattle industry also plays a significant role in the region's economy. The value of animals produced in the region has been approximately \$35 million per annum. To the south, around the Malanda/Millaa Millaa area, the dairy industry is significant and the Tablelands dairy industry is the only tropical dairy industry in Australia and one of the few globally. Other agriculture based industries include poultry, fruit wineries, aquaculture and timber.

With its remarkable scenic qualities, the Tablelands Region is a popular tourist destination. With its location within a World Heritage Area, adjacent to an international airport and within a region that is already a destination for some 2.2 million visitors per annum, it has unrealised tourism potential. Kuranda alone, with the Kuranda Scenic Railway and Skyrail cableway, has up to a million visitors each year. Tinaroo Dam is a further drawcard, with an estimated 500,000 visitors per annum to utilise

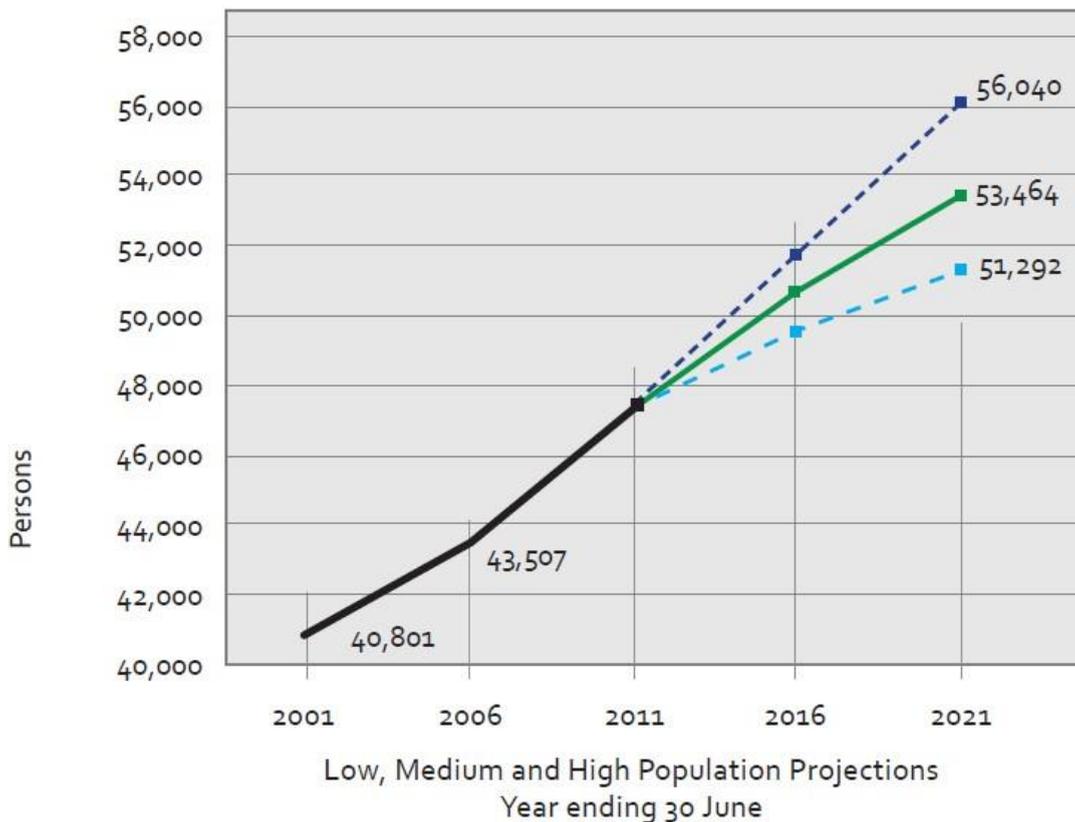
the Dam for water skiing, boating, fishing and camping.

In recent years there has been a rapid expansion of high quality Bed and Breakfast properties which allow visitors to experience the unique attractions of the Tablelands first hand. The area is also a popular destination for “Grey Nomads” (Tablelands Community Plan 2021).

The Tablelands region is also rich in mineral resources including gold, lead, zinc and other base metals, tungsten, copper sulphate, tin, perlite, limestone, marble and slate, and there are a number of major mining operations within the region.

### Population Growth

The Tablelands population has grown from 40,801 residents in 2001 to 46,937 in 2010 (estimated resident population at 30 June, ABS catalogue 3218.0, 2011). Annual growth over this period has been variable, with a low of 0.8% in the 2003-04 year to a high of 2.4% in 2007-08, slowing to 1.2% in the 2009-10 year. The average annual growth rate over the period June 2001 to June 2010 was 1.6%.

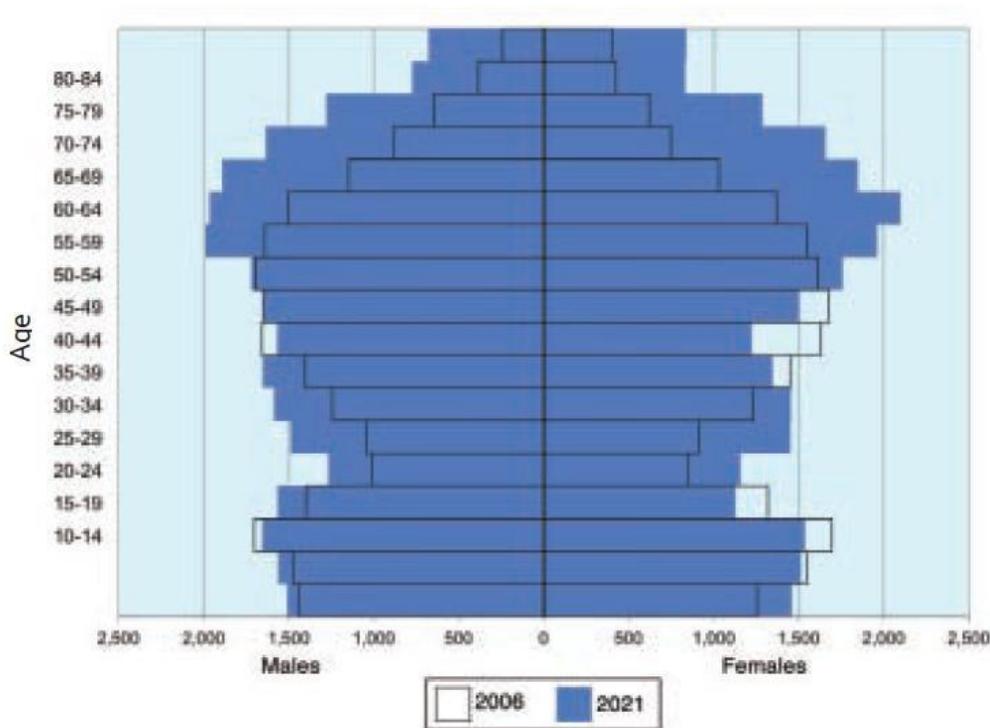


*Based on: ABS Cat 3218.0 (for 2001 ERP) and Queensland Government population projections to 2031: local government areas, 2011 edition, Office of Economic and Statistical Research, Queensland Treasury 2011*

There will be demand for around 300 new dwellings per year and this demand is likely to be for smaller dwellings to accommodate the growth in the number of people living on their own.

The Tablelands has an ageing population. When examining the change in age structure of the population of the Southern Tablelands, compared to the Far North SD, the Southern Tablelands has notably higher proportions of people in the older age group. As shown in the figure below, there are fewer young to middle aged adults aged between 20 and 49, suggesting that young people in this age bracket tend to move out of the region to seek educational and employment opportunities elsewhere. The median age of the Tablelands population at the 2011 census was 43 and is expected to be 46.0 years by the year 2021. Over the next ten years, the Tablelands population is likely to increase by 12.6% to around 53,500 people. Almost a quarter of our population will be over the age of 65 years in 2021.

**Age Distribution, Tablelands Regional Council  
 2006 and projected 2021**



*Source: Queensland Government population projections to 2031: local government areas, 2011 edition, Office of Economic and Statistical Research, Queensland Treasury 2011*

The challenge of an ageing population, with the associated loss of young people from the region, raises the question of how can we attract and retain skilled and professional people in the younger age groups to the Tablelands?

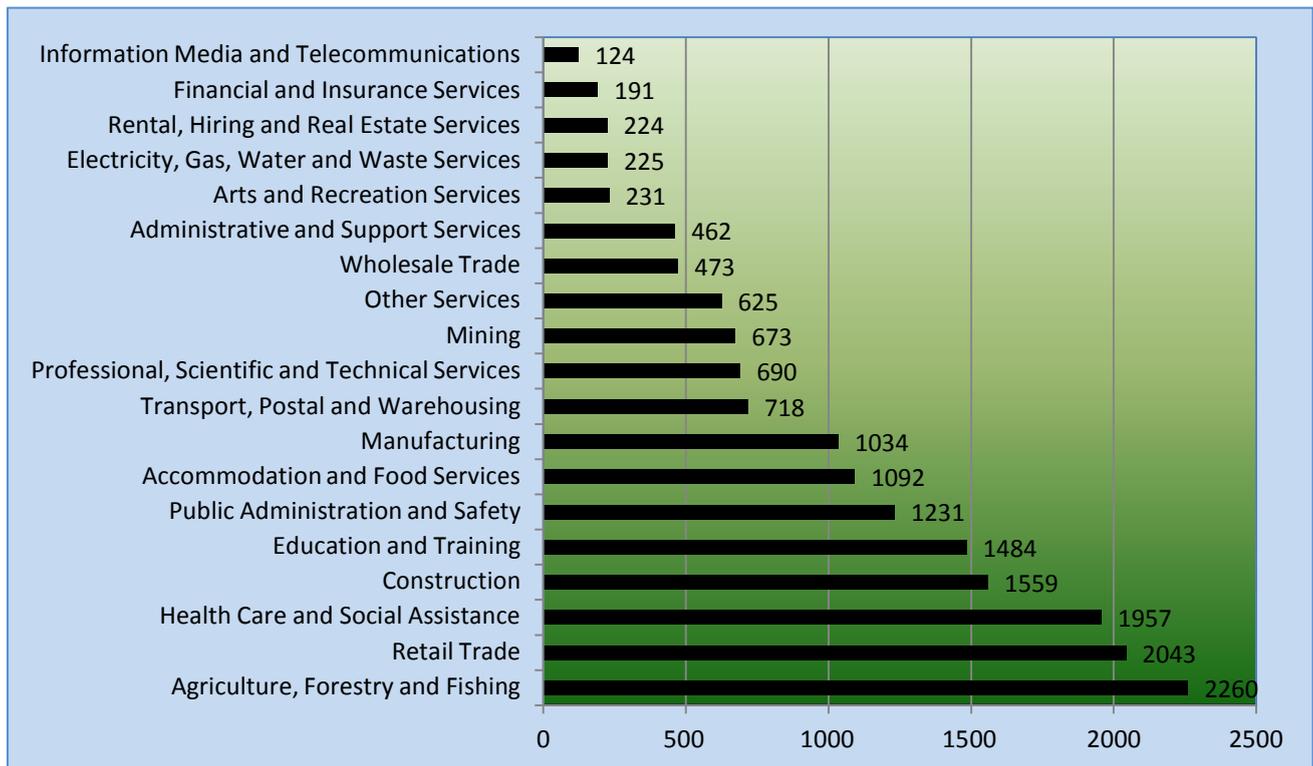
**Current Workforce**

There were 23,244 persons (15yrs+) in the Tablelands labour force in the June qtr. 2011. 90.2% were employed and 9.8% unemployed (DEEWR, 2011). Based on the available information from the 2011 Census, the labour force participation rate for the Tablelands region was lower at 54.7% when compared to

Queensland at 62.8%. Qualitative data obtained from stakeholder consultation suggests that many of the townships in the region are socially and economically disadvantaged due to their geographical location, limiting residents' access to employment. Moreover, according to a local job training provider, many residents lack skills in numeracy, literacy and communication required to engage in meaningful employment. Indigenous people and people who are disadvantaged by their location are most likely to be assisted by local job training services on the Tablelands. What the labour force participation rate does not show is underemployment and consultation data indicate that many of the resident workers are underemployed.

Within the Far North Queensland region the Tablelands has a strong representation in the industries of agriculture & forestry, manufacturing, education and training, Administrative and support services, transport & warehousing and health care and social assistance. By far the service sector dominates employment on the Southern Tablelands, notably retail, health and social services, and accommodation and food services. Despite the deregulation of the dairy industry, the agricultural sector is still a major wealth generator for the region (Southern Tablelands Regional Economic Development Strategy, 2008). As the Tablelands region moves forward from its traditionally based industries to service-based industries, there is a threat of casualization of jobs, leading to job instability and further trends in underemployment.

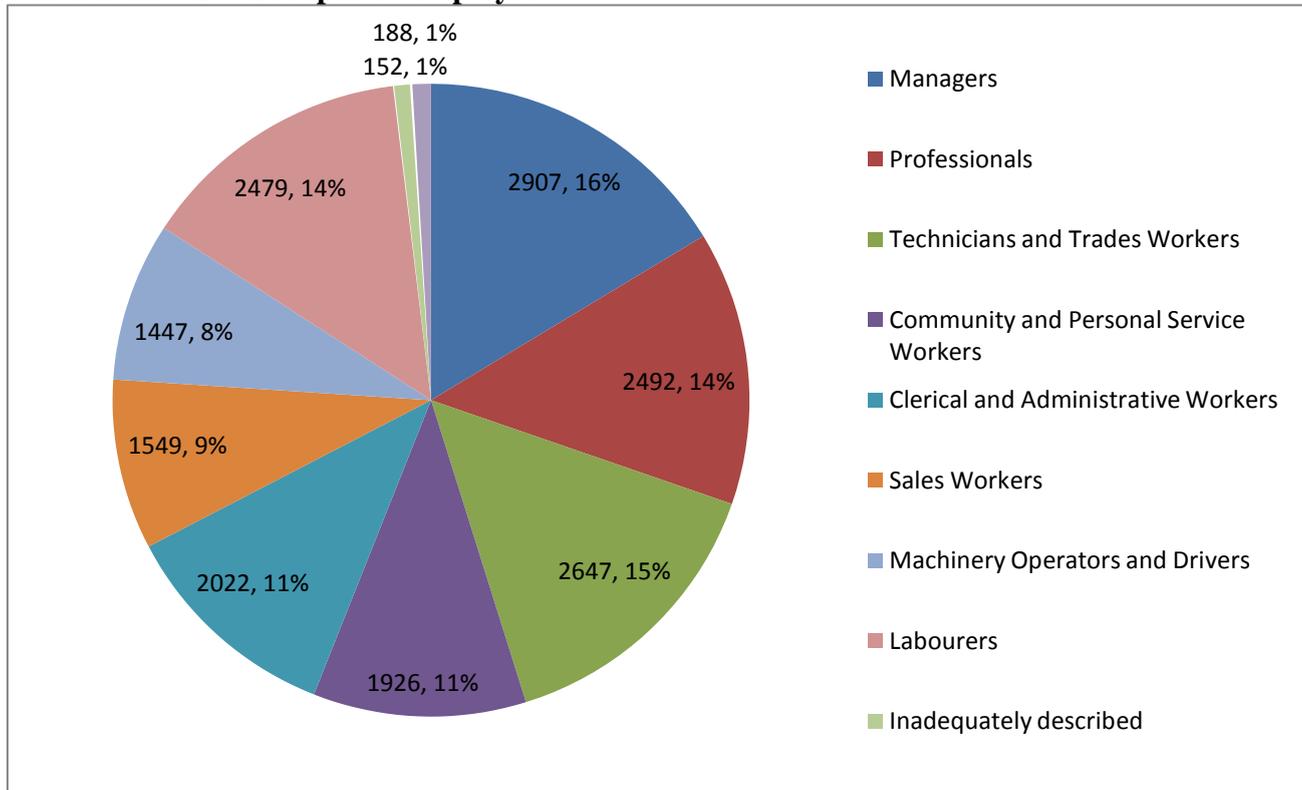
### Tablelands Employment by Industry Sector, 2011



ABS 2011 Census

Of the 4,745 businesses in the Tablelands region, 94.3% were small businesses (employing less than 20 people) in 2008-09 (From OESR 2011, Source: ABS cat no. 8165.0 from Tablelands Community Plan 2021).

### Tablelands LGA Occupation employed



*Courtesy of Economic and Structural Policy, Queensland Treasury and Trade 2011  
 ABS Labour Force, Australia, 2011.*

### Tablelands of the Future

A higher skills level is needed for the future and a well-educated and skilled workforce is essential to the region's economic growth and social wellbeing. Educated and skilled workforces assist in building social capital and facilitate productive engagement with government and community organisations. The Tablelands region is experiencing skills shortages and staff retention issues, an ageing workforce, reduced youth labour supply, low workforce participation, a looming mining boom and problems engaging Aboriginal people in education and employment.

As a region we need to develop a distinct regional identity and regional brand to promote the region not only to attract tourists and economic activity, but also to attract "knowledge workers" who would come to the Tablelands for its unique lifestyle, climate and friendly community while being able to work.

The Postcard Survey, conducted during the Tablelands Community Planning process found that the most highly valued aspects of the Tablelands are:

- The tropical highland climate
- The rural, relaxed lifestyle

- The rural, farm landscape
- The natural environment, especially the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area
- The farming economy and way of life
- The small country town atmosphere
- The sense of community
- That it is a good place to raise children (Tablelands Community Plan 2021).

Climate change, “peak resources”, global financial crises, global population pressure on land, food and water security and threats to our biodiversity from overdevelopment are factors that could influence the Tablelands to become much more self-sufficient in food and energy, to localise our economy and to change our way of life to make it sustainable, with less negative impact on the environment. The challenges of feeding more people in the world, reducing carbon emissions and finding new ways to harness and utilise energy from renewable sources offer great opportunities for the Tablelands, with its well-developed expertise in tropical agriculture, its land area and its potential for harnessing solar, wind and geothermal energy. Opportunities for the development of diverse bio- based industries on the Tablelands have been identified as having great potential for sustainable economic growth (Tablelands Community Plan 2021).

It is reasonable to assume that these aspects will determine the look of the Tablelands future workforce around Rural & Ecotourism, Agriculture and Horticulture, a “Knowledge” economy, tropical expertise, health & community services and service industries to these sectors (including light manufacturing).

### **Future Workforce**

The region continues to develop and promote itself as a tropical lifestyle destination of choice to attract knowledge workers, global economy workers, Fly In-Fly Out (FIFO) workers and home- based businesses in the professional services industries. The Tablelands, with its ready access to an international airport, affordable cost of living, rural lifestyle with good educational, sporting, recreational services and other community services and facilities, bountiful natural assets, great climate and clean green environment, is a “Region of Choice”. These lifestyle attributes can be used to attract ‘knowledge workers’, which will in turn contribute to the development of the Tablelands as a centre for excellence and innovation in tropical science, knowledge and research.

There is a push for Cairns to become a supply and service gateway to the South Pacific and Asia in mining and resources sector workforce, agricultural products and tropical expertise. This will have flow-on effects to the Tablelands, a food-production area and for those who may base themselves here seeking a ‘hinterland’ lifestyle. As well, a focus on establishing Mareeba as the industrial hub of Far North Queensland and the further development of the Mareeba airport, which has the potential to become a major regional centre in North Queensland’s fast growing general aviation industry, will provide strategic infrastructure which will help fuel sustained economic growth into the future. This includes the establishment of a flight training school and aeroplane maintenance.

The Tablelands will continue to be a lifestyle destination of choice for many “tree changers” leaving the cities in search of a quieter lifestyle or for those people who are simply attracted to the natural beauty of the region, its mild tropical climate and its relative proximity to Cairns. However, there is an exodus of young people who leave the Tablelands in search of educational and employment opportunities in larger regional centres and capital cities. This ‘brain drain’ of young people has been

cited as being a key constraint to the development of the region's economy (Tablelands Futures Corporation 2007).

The employment challenge for the Tablelands is to create an estimated 10,000 additional jobs<sup>1</sup> by the year 2026. Of these new jobs, an estimated 500 jobs will need to be in construction and approximately 5,000 jobs will occur naturally and proportionately with population growth (e.g. be demand-driven with little intervention required such as growth in the retail and personal services sectors as a direct result of increased population growth). The employment challenge will be for the Tablelands to create an additional estimated 4,500 'driver sector' jobs between now and 2026.

The Tablelands' strategic position can be leveraged to promote export orientation. Important opportunities for the Southern Tablelands lie in its capacity to capitalise on its established and potential economic links with Cairns (and other regional and capital cities) and seek to tap into national and international markets. This could very well involve measures to enhance the capacity of the Tablelands region to further value add to its manufacturing, food processing or agricultural output within the region. It also involves strategies to establish the region as a leader in tropical expertise, to capitalise on existing and emerging industries such as agriculture, tourism and manufacturing. As a region, the Tablelands are exploring options for diversifying the local economy including:

- Lifestyle retirement and Aged care industry
- Industries associated with information and telecommunications technology and lifestyle destination for knowledge workers and global economy workers to base business in district
- Clean green environment, renewable energy options and associated education, health and well-being industries:
  - Organic and biodynamic farming, local production of goods and services, awareness of "food miles" concept and Farmers' markets
  - A co-operative Greenfield milk processing plant
  - Value adding of locally grown food and on-farm diversification including innovative milk products
- Develop ecotourism and history based tourism, Indigenous cultural tourism, wildlife as a tourist attraction and promotion of the tree kangaroo as a cultural and tourism icon, volunteer tourism to promote natural environment.
- Cycling, arts, food trails and sidewalk dining
- Developing and promoting the Tablelands as a leading tropical bio-based industries precinct. This includes:
  - Tropical bio-based research and development in bio-mimicry
  - bio-prospecting, bio-ceuticals
  - Production of bio-mass
  - Construction of a bio-refinery
  - Manufacture of industrial products from bio-mass.
  - Rainforest bio-ceuticals industry in partnership with Traditional Owner groups (Tablelands Community Plan 2021).

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<sup>1</sup> In any given area the local population will drive the provision of the majority of jobs required by the workforce. In a mature economy, about 65% of jobs come from the population driven sectors (e.g. primary and secondary education, retail, household services, personal services etc.) and about 5% from the construction sector. The balance (30% of the jobs) is in the exporting or 'driver' sectors of the economy (Tablelands Futures Corporation 2007).

Two industries within the Agricultural sector which holds much promise are Bananas and Bio-based industries. There is work currently within the banana industry to improve production processes so the industry is more competitive and sustainable (\$1.86 million over three years). The banana industry is now the most valuable agricultural industry on the Tablelands (\$95.2 m). Significant new areas have been planted and banana prices in late 2010/11 were high due to damage from TC Yasi to coastal banana crops. The mango industry, representing the largest area of tree crops on the Tablelands was valued at \$45.0 m. The Tablelands avocado industry has expanded in recent years (DAFF Tablelands Agricultural Profile 2010/2011).

## TROPICAL BIO-BASED INDUSTRIES

The Tablelands is emerging and being promoted as an important tropical biotechnology precinct, carrying out research and development to support the large scale production of biomass tropical crops (both food and non-food) and ultimately the manufacture of bio-based fuels, bio-pharmaceuticals and industrial products within the region from non-food biomass (Tablelands Community Plan 2021).

*One vision espoused through the Tablelands Community Plan 2021 is “In 2021... The Tablelands retains its enviable reputation as a tropical clean green food bowl, and at the same time, develops into a leading producer of tropical biomass for biofuels for transport and machinery, bioenergy (utilising plants for renewable energy generation) and bio-products as petro-chemical replacements with the potential for the future manufacture of these within the Tablelands region. Developing bio-based industries builds on the long history within the region of large scale agricultural production. It could enable the agricultural sector to continue producing food crops on good quality agricultural land, and to diversify into the production of large scale biomass (non-food crops) which is often grown on more marginal land. Farm diversification into biomass may increase the economic viability of many farm businesses but the risk is that food crops and/or existing farmland could be replaced by the large scale production of non-food biomass. Development of sustainability criteria as part of a bio-based zoning strategy will help incentives bio-based industrial investments and maximise bio-based development in the region”.*

According to the Tablelands Futures Corporation’s Cairns Hinterlands Investment Environment report (2007), opportunities for bio-based products and services are expanding on the Southern Tablelands. These products and services include biopharmaceuticals, cosmeceuticals, biofuels and bioenergy. For example, Ecobiotics is an Australian company based in Yungaburra that specialises in the discovery and early development of new pharmaceuticals.

Bio-based industrial products are developed from renewable agricultural and biological resources through environmentally friendly and complex processes that have become available due to technological advances enabling bio-products to be produced in a sustainable way. In a sense, farming has always been a bio-based industry. Basically, research and development using advanced technologies in relation to plants have the ability to move our reliance on carbon-based non-renewable fuels, energy and products to renewable plant based fuels, energy and products and the Tablelands is well placed to be at the forefront of this significant global trend. It is an emerging industry driven by the global demands for sustainable and cost-effective petro-chemical alternatives and other clean green fuels and products (Tablelands Community Plan 2021).

This global demand is driving cutting-edge research and development to explore possible bio-based industries and products. A few publicly well-known local business enterprises are already capitalising on this growing global demand for bio-products and having grasped the potential of bio-based industries, are involved in bio-prospecting for biopharmaceuticals; another is developing the technology to grow plants suitable for biofuels and other bio-products; and there is an emerging local interest by farmers to start growing biomass (non-food crops) for conversion to biofuels and products. These Champions could be promoted to draw substantial attention to the Tablelands as a growing Centre of Excellence in bio-based capabilities (Tablelands Community Plan 2021).

**Bio-based Industries.** The scope, nature and size of the opportunities for new bio-based products and materials are rapidly expanding, as illustrated below:

Category / sector	Examples of biobased products and markets	Remarks ( <i>information derived from a number of sources</i> )
Biopharmaceuticals	vaccines, antibodies, anti-cancer agents	Global biologics market to reach US\$160 billion by 2015
Nutraceuticals	over the counter health-care products/ pills	World demand will increase 7.2 % p/a to \$23.7 billion in 2015
Cosmeceuticals	personal-care products (skin, hair, anti-ageing)	US demand to increase 5.8 % p/a to \$8.5 billion in 2015
Biofuels	transportation – ethanol and biodiesel	US\$100 billion market for aviation biofuels (2011 projection)
Bioenergy	green electricity and heat	Bioenergy could supply 30% of Australia's electricity by 2050
Biofibres	automobile, housing, textiles, construction	Natural fibre composites >\$530 million by 2016 (11% CAGR)
Bioplastics	automobile, electronics, construction, furniture	Global bioplastics market to grow at 32% over 2010-2014
Biobased chemicals	chemicals, paints, dyes, enzymes, solvents, inks	Succinic acid market to grow 6 fold to \$1.35 billion by 2015

*Source: Updated 2011 Table from this earlier research article. 'Fostering the bio-economic revolution — the new age of agriculture in tropical north Queensland', Peter Holden, Peter Tonello and Natalie Dillon Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, December 2005*

The Tablelands region has many characteristics and assets required to support the strategic development of bio-based industries including:-

- Agricultural Research Precinct at Peters St, Mareeba (with a long history of extensive agricultural research and development)
- Land and water plus demonstrated capacity for large scale agriculture and climate for year-round biomass production
- Proximity to ports including Mareeba regional airport
- Industrial estates plus centralised and modern sugar mill
- Tablelands lifestyle plus proximity to Cairns and Wet Tropics (Tablelands Community Plan 2021).

The prospects for new biotechnology industries are growing and will take advantage of the tropical expertise of the Tablelands. In turn, these industries will generate new 'knowledge' jobs and draw professionals and skilled workforce into the region. There are opportunities to partner with James Cook University and the Mareeba Agricultural Research Precinct to investigate options for expanding research and development in bio-based industries and creating more knowledge-based jobs; along with the promotion of Indigenous expertise in bio-based products is an area that will give the Tablelands a considerable point of difference (Tablelands Community Plan 2021).

Bio-based industries build on the long history within the region of large scale agricultural production. Expanding the region's bio-based research and development capabilities will build on and expand the region's reputation as a "knowledge" region, attracting younger highly skilled knowledge workers which will help to offset the current net loss of younger residents aged 18-49 years (Tablelands Community Plan 2021).

## AGRICULTURE & HORTICULTURE

The region recognises that agricultural production is a key component of the regional economy. One vision could be for the region to develop as a clean green food bowl with increased agricultural diversification and further value adding opportunities for agricultural producers. This vision could include:

- increased agricultural efficiencies and innovative practices to increase profitability including capitalising on economic opportunities in relation to carbon farming and ecosystem services.
- Increased implementation of conservation farming practices and trash blanketing on cultivation. More use of soil conservation banks, grassed waterways and retention ponds to minimise soil erosion and accelerated runoff.
- The community connected with landholders and actively joined producers in campaign for fair and viable pricing for producers on agricultural products and agricultural inputs such as water and electricity.
- Promotion of buy local campaigns for fresh produce and promotion of local businesses that use local produce.
- The region's produce manufactured into value-added products (i.e. cannery, meat processing).
- Innovation, research and development in the primary industries supported by Government and Industry and encouraged.
- The delivery of training programs in agricultural science to enable the region's young people to study without leaving the region.

The rural workforce is well-educated and skilled and the sector is an "Industry of Choice" utilising cutting edge-technology. The Region will be exporting innovative tropical agricultural expertise and genetics.

## MINING & RESOURCES SECTOR

Mining activities in and around the Tablelands is in a renaissance period. Improvements to existing and the development of new resource projects are being considered with gold, zinc, copper sulphate, tungsten trioxide and other base metals such as copper, lead, gold and silver being mined in the Tablelands region. The global and domestic demand for mining resources will see growth in mining activities on the Tablelands. There is capacity for the Tablelands region to function as a major service centre to support mining activities. This will further lead to investment in centres such as Mareeba, Dimbulah, Chillagoe Herberton and Mount Garnet. The Tablelands region holds substantial untapped mineral resources which, if developed in a sustainable manner, would provide significant regional economic and employment benefits (Tablelands Community Plan 2021).

Exploration in modern terms has been limited, partly due to the significant and time-consuming process associated with securing of exploration licenses. It is recognised that mineral exploration and extraction has short, medium and long term impacts on environmental and amenic values and accordingly any development plans must be supported by restoration. If managed appropriately the industry has significant economic and employment potential. The opportunities, costs and benefits arising from resources industry expansion within the region should be investigated.

The resurgence of mining will have significant demographic implications. The mining boom is attracting 'fly in fly out' workers to the Tablelands. The region can capitalised on new opportunities in the global marketplace by servicing mining operations in Northern Australia and PNG, for example

with aviation services, food products, and ecosystem restoration services and as a residential location for fly-in-fly-out workers. As mining operations resume, it is likely that the region will experience a large settlement of mining workers and their families.

## TOURISM

The Tablelands region will be known worldwide with the region's high environmental values, including the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. The region will be known for food and agri-tourism including niche markets and unique food products and experiences. There will be further development of recreational and adventure tourism, for example non-motorised off road trails, mountain biking trails, hot-air ballooning and rafting/canoeing. Cultural and historical tourism will be further developed for example art trails and historical trails, Herberton Historic Village, Millstream express Steam Train and Indigenous tourism. There will be the development of more visitor accommodation options to keep visitors on the Tablelands longer (Tablelands Community Plan 2021).

## CREATIVE & TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRIES

Creative and technology industries are key drivers of the Southern Tablelands' future economy. According to the Tablelands Futures Corporation's report on the Cairns Highlands Investment Environment (2007), the lifestyle attributes of the Southern Tablelands region is attracting 'creative industry' workers and the industry's annual turnover in Tropical North Queensland are estimated to be \$286 million. Two fifths of the creative industries in Tropical North Queensland are located on the Tablelands. In support of the above, the findings of the consultation suggest that the Southern Tablelands is home to inventors, IT specialists, cartographers, artists, web designers and artists.

Tablelands businesses will be able to reach all potential markets with high quality, high speed telecommunications services. There will be improved access to reliable and consistent high speed internet and mobile phone services which will support business needs, support and attract knowledge workers, global economy workers and home-based businesses. Internet infrastructure will be in place, across the Tablelands, to enable tele-working from home.

## LIFESTYLE RETIREMENT, HEALTH & AGED CARE

In thinking about our ageing population, a vision that emerges is one of a community in which older people live active, healthy lives contributing to society through volunteering, mentoring and active participation in community events and activities. Access to excellent support services will allow the aged to carry on living in their own homes but if necessary being cared for in residential care facilities (Tablelands Community Plan 2021).

The Tablelands could develop and be promoted as a centre of excellence in tropical health, aged care and wellbeing services and training. Atherton Hospital is the largest referral centre on the Tablelands. The hospital is at the forefront of Rural Generalists training and is the first Hospital in Australia to be accredited to train Rural Generalist interns following the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine Training Pathway. Mareeba Hospital is an Accredited Teaching Hospital of James Cook University (Medical and Registered Nursing students) and the Tropical Medical Training (Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine Provisional Fellows). Mareeba Hospital works with TAFE Queensland in the training of Enrolled Nursing students.

The Tablelands has a high proportion of people in the population groups most at risk of chronic disease:

- aged population: 16% over 65yrs (ABS, ERP 2010)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander: 10.3% (ABS, 2011 Census)
- Socioeconomically disadvantaged: 42% of Tablelands population lives in areas of highest disadvantage (OESR, 2011; ABS 2006 Census).

## **Conclusion**

One of the greatest challenges facing the Tablelands Region is the provision of sustainable employment across a diversity of industries. For the Tablelands to be successful in meeting its economic and social development objectives a number of issues will need to be addressed including population growth, an ageing workforce, reduced youth labour supply, low workforce participation, unemployment and underemployment, a low education and skills base and an upcoming mining boom.

Employment on the Tablelands is dominated by agriculture, followed by retail trade, health care and social services, and education and training. The service sector provides the bulk of the region's jobs, notably retail, health and social services, and accommodation and food services. The region's agricultural sector is a significant wealth generator with the agricultural industry being the highest contributor to the region's total output. The region also has a high number of resident workers who travel to their places of employment outside the Tablelands everyday (predominantly to Cairns). As a result, the Tablelands have a notable leakage of jobs to other parts of the wider region. These factors, together with an increase in FIFO workforces, will shape the Tablelands workforce of the future.

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SGS Economics and Planning Pty Ltd *Southern Tablelands Regional Economic Development Strategy: A Prosperous Region, a Prosperous Future*, prepared for Tablelands Strategic Alliance, January 2008.

Tablelands Community Plan 2021 - Unique communities working together.

[www.trc.qld.gov.au/tablelands-community-plan](http://www.trc.qld.gov.au/tablelands-community-plan)

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