Tablelands Industry Workforce Group

helping to make the Tablelands a region of choice by creating a skilled and sustainable workforce

Image and Perceptions of the Tablelands

– Positive steps to move forward to become a "Region of Choice" – a Background Paper

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The Tablelands Region, west of Cairns, has a notable 'leakage' of resident workers - who travel to their places of employment outside the Tablelands. As the region's population continues to grow, an increasingly critical issue facing the Tablelands will be its capacity to provide sufficient jobs across industry sectors to support a sustainable economic future. Good infrastructure to meet the requirements of local residents, a skilled workforce, local industry and economic growth without losing our rural identity or lifestyle is required. More accommodation for seasonal workers, accommodation for growing Indigenous families, a public transport system, upgrades to road infrastructure – Kuranda Range Road and Hann Highway and upgrade to Mareeba airport to take larger planes and airfreight. In turn, this would bring more local investment in social and lifestyle infrastructure. This paper discusses what we term "Image and Perception" issues which present hurdles to the Tablelands becoming "a region of choice" for a skilled and sustainable workforce. Whilst there is no silver bullet this paper provides some suggestions and possible projects to overcome these issues. There is a necessity for industry and community to take ownership of such issues. Ultimately we want to create a positive image for the region for attraction and retention of a skilled workforce.

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Introduction

Tablelands Industry Workforce Group (TIWG) is a not-for-profit industry and community group who come together to identify, improve and expand a sustainable workforce within the Tablelands region, west of Cairns. The group is made up of Industry Champions from across a range of sectors on the Tablelands and includes local government chambers of commerce, industry and community not-for-profit representatives. The organisation's mission is to *make the Tablelands a region of choice by creating a skilled and sustainable workforce.*

Amongst TIWG's 4 goals are:-
- To make the region a "Region of Choice" for Employment and Industry Development; and
- To attract skilled workers to the region to support current and new Industry Development

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. An educated and skilled workforce assists in building social capital and facilitates 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 challenges, engaging socially disadvantaged people in education and employment. People who wish to undertake tertiary studies are most often obliged to move away to larger centres. For the Tablelands to be successful in meeting its economic and social development objectives a number of issues will need to be addressed.

One of the greatest challenges facing the Tablelands Region is the provision of sustainable employment across a diversity of industries. 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. In 2006 - 13.5% of employed residents of the Tablelands region worked in Cairns, Port Douglas, Mossman or elsewhere (ABS 2006 Census). As the region's population continues to grow, an increasingly critical issue facing the Tablelands will be its capacity to provide sufficient jobs across industry sectors to support a sustainable economic future.

Good infrastructure to meet the requirements of local residents, a skilled workforce, local industry and economic growth without losing our rural identity or lifestyle is required. More accommodation for seasonal workers, accommodation for growing Indigenous families, a public transport system, upgrades to road infrastructure – Kuranda Range Road and Hann Highway and upgrade to Mareeba airport to take larger planes and airfreight. In turn, this would bring more local investment in social and lifestyle infrastructure such as Restaurants, cafes and cinemas.
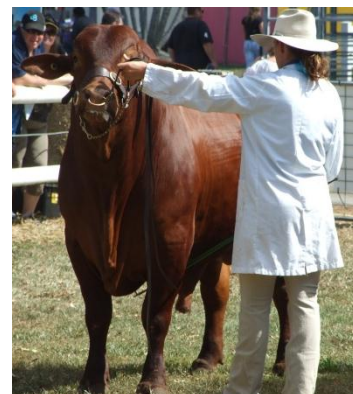
This paper discusses what we at TIWG term "Image and Perception" issues which present hurdles to the Tablelands becoming "a region of choice" for a skilled and sustainable workforce. Whilst there is no silver bullet this paper provides some suggestions and possible projects to overcome these issues. There is a necessity for industry and community to take ownership of such issues. Ultimately we want to create a positive image for the region for attraction and retention of a skilled workforce.

The Region

The Tablelands region is in a time of change. Whilst it has always been recognised for its beauty, the environment, climate and abundant natural resources, such as water, good soils and minerals, the Tablelands has been 'discovered'. Whilst property prices are stagnant and currently there is little demand for land based on current statistics, property prices have risen since 2001. Mining industry resurgence in and adjacent to the region is another factor. The region's key assets are being combined with new ideas into businesses, industries, products, services and projects.

The Tablelands region is an area covering 64,768 square kilometres (slightly larger than Tasmania), extending west of Port Douglas, Cairns and Innisfail. The Tablelands is a blend of the best attractions of the wet tropics and the dry outback charm; a combination of nature and lifestyle at its finest. It is a region of diverse landscapes amongst some of Australia's richest farming and grazing lands.

The rural landscape is green throughout most of the year with an elevation, some 500-1100 metres above sea level, providing a naturally cooler and less humid climate than the neighbouring coastal and inland Shires. Temperatures rarely exceed 30 degrees C. The region is very beautiful, with rich varied soils and huge diversity in terms of both natural flora and fauna and in growing conditions for agriculture.

The Tablelands, only a one hour drive from Cairns, offers the following:
•   Winding roads lead to spectacular lookouts and waterfalls, and highlights include Australia's widest waterfall - Millstream Falls - and many others flowing all year round, the deep blue waters of extinct volcano crater lakes, Lake Barrine and Lake Eacham, the ancient Bromfield Swamp near Malanda and the Mt. Hypipamee Crater National Park near Herberton.
•   Within an hour you can reach the magnificent Outback landscapes with dry creek beds, wandering cattle, Savannah woodlands and wetlands that provide the beautiful ochre colours of the Outback.
•   Opportunities for bush walking, bird watching, limestone cave tours, a wildlife cruise, wildlife spotting, hot air ballooning and water sports as diverse as fishing, water skiing and white water rafting.
•   A Wildlife Paradise - abundant birds, rare and endangered mammals such as the shy Lumholtz tree kangaroo, wallabies, possums, gliders and cassowaries can be found on the Atherton Tablelands. The Tablelands is the best place in Australia to see the reclusive platypus.
•   The region is home to almost double the varieties of native plants than found anywhere else in Australia.
•   Classic old hotels, motels, guest houses, backpackers, farm stays, boutique style cottages and caravan and camping parks provide the ideal base for exploring. There are excellent restaurants and cafes to enjoy, weekend markets, and many World War 2 troop staging sites. The special attractions of the Atherton Tablelands postcard-like towns and villages.

Rural Industry – Agriculture & Horticulture

The region has bounced back from the loss of the tobacco industry and dairy deregulation. The region's main sector is agriculture generating 3.3% of Queensland's gross value of agriculture production. Agriculture also accounts for 42.5% of businesses and 17% of employment by industry

within the region. Agriculture is worth an estimated $385M at farm gate to the local economy, however there are greater opportunities within this sector. Food producers are under severe cost - price pressures. This sector has the potential to be a major employer and generator for a prosperous regional economy. For the value of regional Agriculture to increase further value adding needs to occur to produce before it leaves the region. There are further opportunities in organic and biodynamic milk, cheese, yogurt etc. Opportunities in value adding Macadamias, peanuts. We are too small a player to change the supermarket power but many locals can see value adding as maybe an angle for some industries. There is also a trend towards more tree horticultural crops and some seed production as you drive from Rocky Creek through to Mareeba along the Kennedy Highway (i.e. area around Rocky Creek-Walkamin-Wylandra) as the traditional maize and peanut industries have been screwed down in the cost-price squeeze. Table 1 shows the major crops grown on the Tablelands in mid-2008.

Table 1: Major Crops Grown on Tablelands, mid-2008

Mango			
Total Revenue of the current industry	$ 53,200,970.3	16%	<= % of total farm gate revenue
Total Area (ha)	2,492.43	3%	<= % of total area under production
Approx. Agricultural Business Entities	450	25%	<= % of total business entities
Total yield (Tonnes)	26,170.54		
Avocado			
Total Revenue of the current industry	$ 22,929,600.00	7%	<= % of total farm gate revenue
Total Area (ha)	749.33	1%	<= % of total area under production
Approx. Agricultural Business Entities	80	5%	<= % of total business entities
Total yield (Tonnes)	6,744.00		
Lychee			
Total Revenue of the current industry	$ 9,437,493.51	2.8%	<= % of total farm gate revenue
Total Area (ha)	322.65	0.4%	<= % of total area under production
Approx. Agricultural Business Entities	45	2.5%	<= % of total business entities
Total yield (Tonnes)	1,887.50		
Longan			
Total Revenue of the current industry	$ 5,211,456.25	1.6%	<= % of total farm gate revenue
Total Area (ha)	134.75	0.16%	<= % of total area under production
Approx. Agricultural Business Entities	20	1.13%	<= % of total business entities
Total yield (Tonnes)	1,042.29		
Citrus (oranges, mandarins, lemons, limes, grapefruit)			
Total Revenue of the current industry	$ 7,388,335.20	2.2%	<= % of total farm gate revenue
Total Area (ha)	310	0.4%	<= % of total area under production
Approx. Agricultural Business Entities	120	7%	<= % of total business entities
Total yield (Tonnes)	5,649.44		

Banana Industry			
Total Revenue for the current industry	$ 33,195,461.5	10%	<= % of total farm gate revenue
Total Area (ha)	735.00	1%	<= % of total area under production
Approx. Agricultural Business Entities	20	1%	<= % of total business entities
Total yield (Tonnes)	19,767.00		

Papaya Industry			
Total Revenue for the current industry	$ 22,307,400.0	6.7%	<= % of total farm gate revenue
Total Area (ha)	162.00	0.20%	<= % of total area under production
Approx. Agricultural Business Entities	9	0.49%	<= % of total business entities
Total yield (Tonnes)	17,058.60		

Sugar Industry			
Total Revenue for the current industry	$ 19,086,228.0	5.7%	<= % of total farm gate revenue
Total Area (ha)	7,400.00	9.0%	<= % of total area under production
No. of Businesses	65	3.6%	<= % of total business entities
Total yield (Tonnes)	666,000.00		

Potato Industry			
Total Revenue for the current industry	$ 50,746,150.0	15%	<= % of total farm gate revenue
Total Area (ha)	2,348.00	3%	<= % of total area under production
No. of Businesses	70	4%	<= % of total business entities
Total yield (Tonnes)	82,180.00		

Grass and legume seed Industry			
Total Revenue for the current industry	$ 12,959,650.0	3.9%	<= % of total farm gate revenue
Total Area (ha)	3,916.56	5%	<= % of total area under production
No. of Businesses	50	3%	<= % of total business entities

Maize Industry			
Total Revenue for the current industry	$ 9,398,550.00	2.8%	<= % of total farm gate revenue
Total Area (ha)	5,000	6.1%	<= % of total area under production
No. of Businesses	45		
Total yield (Tonnes)	35,000.00		

Peanut Industry			
Total Revenue for the current industry	$ 5,781,000.00	1.7%	<= % of total farm gate revenue
Total Area (ha)	1,500.00	1.8%	<= % of total area under production
No. of Businesses	34	1.9%	<= % of total business entities
Total yield (Tonnes)	7,050.00		

Pumpkins Industry			
Total Revenue for the current industry	$ 4,050,000	1.2%	<= % of total farm gate revenue
Total Area (ha)	180.00	0.2%	<= % of total area under production
Approx. Agricultural Business Entities	50	2.7%	<= % of total business entities
Total yield (tonnes)	5,400.00		

Tea Industry			
Total Revenue for the current industry	$ 2,625,000	0.8%	<= % of total farm gate revenue
Total Area (ha)	750	0.9%	<= % of total area under production
Approx. Agricultural Business Entities	4		<= % of total business entities
Total yield (Tonnes)	2,625.00		
Watermelon Industry			
Total Revenue for the current industry	$ 2,400,000	0.7%	<= % of total farm gate revenue
Total Area (ha)	80.00	0.1%	<= % of total area under production
Approx. Agricultural Business Entities	15	0.8%	<= % of total business entities
Total yield (Tonnes)	3,000.00		
Coffee Industry			
Total Revenue for the current industry	$ 1,815,000	0.5%	<= % of total farm gate revenue
Total Area (ha)	180.00	0.22%	<= % of total area under production
Approx. Agricultural Business Entities	50	2.7%	<= % of total business entities
Total yield (Tonnes)	5,400.00		

Courtesy of Queensland Department of Primary Industries, Unpublished data 2008.

Other field crops include sweet potatoes, navy beans, dolichos, cow pea, sorghum, and hay. Other minor horticultural tree crops include macadamia, cashews, custard apples, passionfruit, native trees and other tropical fruits. Other crops include pineapples, ti-tree, lettuce, mixed vegetables, tomatoes, flowers, fresh herbs and turf. Other agriculture based industries include poultry, pork, fruit wineries, aquaculture and timber.

The cattle industry also plays a significant role in the region's economy and in recent years 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.

The region can rightfully claim it is Australia's tropical food-bowl. Overall, with its natural beauty, economic diversity, abundance of water, proximity to Cairns and potential for significant expansion in terms of agriculture, tourism and mining, the Tablelands region has a secure future.

Workforce and Skill levels

- There were 23,244 persons (15yrs+) in the Tablelands labour force in the June quarter 2011.
- 90.2% were employed and 9.8% unemployed (DEEWR, 2011).
- 38.6% of Tablelands adults have completed Year 11 or 12 schooling compared with 49.5% of Queensland adults (15yrs+ (ABS, 2006 Census).
- 47.9% of Tablelanders (15yrs+) have a qualification, compared with 50.4% of Queenslanders (15Yrs +).
- 37.7% of Tablelands people with a qualification have a certificate (I, II, III, and IV), 10.8% an advanced diploma or diploma and 17.7% a bachelor degree or higher, compared with

35.5%, 13.1% and 26.0% of Queenslanders (ABS, 2006 Census).In 2009 TRC area had 3,574 VET students (OESR, 2011).

Tourism – the "shopwindow" to the region

Tourism on the Atherton Tablelands is under developed. When its natural assets and position is considered the potential is clear. There have been and continue to be, a series of incremental developments addressing issues that led to the Atherton Tablelands under performing as a tourism destination. The TTNQ 2003 Tablelands Tourism Investment Strategy made some comparisons between the overall region and the Atherton Tablelands. However, the 2003 Tablelands Tourism Investment Strategy may not reflect the current situation of the industry in this region as it is almost 10 years old and needs updating. Furthermore, considering the Tablelands unsurpassed scenery, Rural Industry and Environment, it is an area that could be well-positioned to cater for the small to medium Conference/Congress market (i.e. up to say 400 people). However, the Tablelands lack a large enough facility to host a conference (i.e. larger cultural centre or auditorium) and larger accommodation venues (200+ beds).

Tropical Tablelands Tourism (TTT) has done a significant amount of work regarding its identity, branding and awareness of the region. In the International market, the Tablelands region is very well known as the Cairns Highlands and the fabulous Millaa Millaa Falls 'hero shot' well recognised as the destination of the Atherton Tablelands. For the domestic and local market, the region is marketed as Atherton Tablelands and marketed as a destination in its own right (TTT, 2012). There is also a push for development of TNQ & Tablelands as leading destination in the Asia-Pacific for Trails and touring, including mountain-biking.

One of the key points that TTT's marketing plans address is the need for a concise brand message to actively and positively promote the region of the Cairns Highlands and Atherton Tablelands. The core experiences have been defined and tools have been developed to support these experiences (TTT, 2012).

From the TTNQ 2003 Tablelands Tourism Investment Strategy the following:
- The Tablelands currently receives only 520,000 visitors each year of the 2.16M visitors to the TNQ region.
- Of these, 255,000 (49%) are day visitors only, most of whom are already staying in Cairns, Port Douglas or other coastal areas.
- There are currently 265,000 visitors (51% of all visitors to the Tablelands) who spend at least one night on the Tablelands. But more significant is the average stay of overnight visitors to the Tablelands is 2.3 days compared to an average stay in the TNQ region of 6.45 days. This is driven by the significant day visitor numbers.
- 78% of visitors to the Tablelands are domestic and the majority are from country Queensland. These Tablelands visitor numbers exclude Kuranda 'The Village in the Rainforest', which reportedly now attracts approaching one million visitors per annum, despite being in the Tablelands Regional Council.

The former Mareeba Shire (excluding Kuranda) attracted 3% of the international market, former Herberton LGA less than 1% and Atherton and Eacham LGAs had visitation levels too small to factor. More importantly, the Tablelands only achieves a 3% share of total value to the FNQ region from tourism from a sub-region accounting for 17% of the regional population and 24% of the regional area with most of that area having an ideal climate and spectacular scenery. In all the key

performance indicators of arrivals, penetration and yield the Tablelands is underperforming (Source: TTNQ 2003 Tablelands Tourism Investment Strategy).

There is one school of thought that Kuranda is part of a closed loop that has contributed to lack of dispersal of visitors further across the Tablelands. The loop is created by Kuranda at the top of the Range and Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park at the bottom, linked by Skyrail Rainforest Cableway and the Kuranda Scenic Railway. Prior to the opening of the Skyrail a greater number of day and extended tours operated from the terminus of the Kuranda Railway to other parts of the Tablelands. Dispersal beyond Kuranda and around the area is seen by some as a major issue. It was a definite problem for a very long time but may be improving. Tourism Kuranda and TTT are working together to ensure this issue of perception continues to be addressed and are working together towards the region's goal (TTT, 2012).

There is a need for better and more accommodation and memorable experiences which will attract more tourism. A lack of commissionable product across the Tablelands has reduced the region's ability to attract the attention of the tourism industry marketing and distribution systems and so gain recognition and penetration in potential target markets.

The 2003 Strategy also saw as a gap in infrastructure: "The development and facilitation of an iconic walking experience (vis. Milford Track, Cradle Mountain, or Bay of Fires)". Since then, the

Queensland State Government has spent $1.84 million on development of all-weather walking tracks in the mega diverse rainforests of the southern 'Misty Mountains' area of the Tablelands. However, without development of at least modest accommodation nodes placed strategically, these tracks are not likely to attract significant volumes of visitors, as the destinations mentioned above do. There may be the opportunity for development of a 'Cradle Mountain Lodge' style development. The Wooroonooran National Park is a key focus for another major project under development, only some 5 kilometres from the Walkway through the Park at Mungalli Falls. This proposed 220 room 'Misty Mountains Wilderness Lodge', adjacent to the Park, is already approved by the Local Government (Source: TTNQ 2003 Tablelands Tourism Investment Strategy).

In recent years there has been steady development of boutique accommodation, often of a very high standard in the form of 'bed and breakfast', or secluded 'mountain retreat cabins', especially across the southern Tablelands. These have a strong international market presence and a large market share of Bird and Wildlife visitors. The Self-Drive market is a huge target market for this region and these visitors are both international and domestic.

Whilst the southern Tablelands have a number of high standard boutique accommodation, there is insufficient suitable and flexible accommodation across the whole of the Tablelands to attract or cater for all international or interstate visitors. The February 2003 report on the Tablelands identified "*that except for the small number of B&B establishments which catered primarily for the local market, there was insufficient suitable and flexible accommodation on the Tablelands to cater for the domestic and international markets, in particular groups. As such the Tableland's ability to increase*

overnight visitation from these sectors was limited". Unfortunately this is still the case and whilst there are plans to build a 200 bed facility it has not yet commenced. The majority of accommodation is centered on Cairns, Port Douglas, and the Northern Beach area, in line with visitation trends and demand. Accommodation available on the Tablelands has been largely confined to country hotel and motel style units and some high standard boutique accommodation, particularly on the southern Tablelands. The majority of the estimated 4,900 beds are below 3 star rating and/or are considered too small for coach or other affinity groups.

The term "bed & breakfast" has almost become a generic descriptor of small boutique properties which offer intimate personalised service, in unique locations. This is often a misnomer for the style and quality of the experience and can in some circumstances undersell the style and nature of the experience. There is a need to look at better clustering of this unique accommodation sector, and reinforce better present the unique experience they can deliver. Able to attract a higher yield, and particularly attractive to couples it is a segment which should benefit from the trends we note and the direction in which the Tablelands region, in particular, should be heading. There is an opportunity to reposition and better present this experience, and develop a cluster to coordinate their marketing and product offers. Also included in this Unique Indulgence Experiences cluster should be the various upmarket and award winning spa facilities (TNQ Repositioning Study 2009).

There has not been sufficient awareness of what the region has to offer outside a domestic, local market. The word 'Tablelands' especially does not have a clear meaning, especially for international visitors.

Sub regional tourism branding

There is a perception that there is insufficient awareness of what the region has to offer. For example, the "*Tasmanian experience*", where each region is allocated a set number of pages to promote in the Weekend Australian's colour magazine, heightens not only the regions but the whole area of Tasmania (Lewiston, 2012). The Region's peak Economic Development body, Advance Cairns, is moving on 'Regional branding' and the Tablelands needs to be involved (Lewiston, 2012).

Tropical Tablelands Tourism – the region's local tourism organisation has their Discover magazine – a free 54 page regional guide for the Atherton Tablelands, Cairns Highlands and Gulf Savannah. The TTT sub region branding – '*Uplifting by Nature'* has been released, and sits under the broader TNQ branding of '*Adventurous by Nature'*. Their official website – www.athertontablelands.com.au - has everything you need to know about touring on the Atherton Tablelands or the Cairns Highlands and includes a selection of accommodation, tours, attractions, restaurants, events, markets and things to see and do. Tourists can research, plan and book your Atherton Tablelands and Cairns Highlands holiday and tours from this site (Tropical Tablelands Tourism – www.athertontablelands.com.au).

If people ask '*what is the best thing about the region*?' Well, there's more than one! Firstly, the gourmet food and wine trails that criss-cross our 'food bowl of the tropics'. Secondly, our wildlife with a particular emphasis on bird watching and unique marsupials like the tree kangaroo. Thirdly,

the waterfall circuits with their stunning rainforest backdrops and hidden gems. Finally, there's the region's natural wonders such as the Curtain Fig Tree, Lake Tinaroo, Mt Hypipamee Crater, Undara Lava Tubes, Broomfield Swamp, Paronella Park and the twin crater lakes of Barrine and Eacham just to name a few! Venture out, and discover how wonderful it is to stay at cosy B&Bs, timber tree-houses, inviting inns, holiday parks and eco-lodges (Tropical Tablelands Tourism – www.athertontablelands.com.au)

The Tablelands region does not have clarity in its value proposition to consumers and there is a need to focus on a core message to ensure consumers better understand what experiences/benefits the Tablelands region would deliver which are ideal for them. The aspirational value and global awareness of the Great Barrier Reef is considerable, however, the association between the region and the Reef does not appear to be as strong as in the past. There is a need for TTNQ, TTT and Tourism operators to reinforce the other supporting experiences (e.g. World heritage rainforest, nature, outback, indulgence, indigenous) and to ensure their communication is consumer-focused rather than product-focused. The product is not as important as the experience in exciting the consumer. The product is only a vehicle to deliver the experience (TNQ Repositioning Study 2009).

Tourism operators are happy to work with Employers to attract backpackers as they have dollars' to spend. Research out of Mildura in 2009 has shown one backpacker will spend on average $3,600 in the area during a 6 week stay. One local employment agency had 1800 backpackers go through their books on the Tableland in 2009.

There are several quality restaurants/eating places around the Mareeba-Dimbulah area. Canzian's restaurant and bar at Dimbulah; the Anthill Hotel is a good pub in Mareeba, and Mareeba Motor-Inn has a restaurant. In Mareeba the International Club and some sporting clubs (i.e. Soccer club) has good for Pasta on Friday nights. There appears to be more (and better promoted restaurants/eating places on the Southern Tableland, particularly in Yungaburra (i.e. Nick's, Eden House, and Flynn's). Atherton has the Barron Valley Hotel, Atherton Hotel and Pagoda Restaurant. However, Tableland tourism businesses have identified a need for improved customer service skills to enable them to maximise business opportunities generated by industry growth. The hospitality industry is experiencing skills shortages despite rising apprenticeship numbers. This is due to high turnover of staff in the first three months of employment.

Retail

Retail is also strong in the region since the towns of Atherton, Malanda and Mareeba act as service hubs for smaller farming communities. With a population of 46,937 in 2010 (estimated resident population at 30 June, ABS) the Tablelands is experiencing strong investment in shopping centres and retail development. The major urban centre localities in the Tablelands Regional Council area include: Mareeba (8,994), Kuranda (2,505) and Dimbulah (1,525), Atherton and Tolga (9,389), Malanda (1,928), Yungaburra (931) Herberton (974), Mount Garnet (879), Ravenshoe/Millstream (2,198), Chillagoe (377) and Millaa Millaa (289) (ABS 2006 Census information).

Ageing Population

The well-documented and often discussed aging population in Australia and western developed countries has turned the provision of retirement infrastructure and services into big business. The 'retirees', 'grey nomads', 'tree changers' etc., equate to tourism, health and aged care… investment and business opportunities. The Atherton Tablelands is well placed to deliver Lewiston 2012). The

climate and quiet, friendly country environment are core reasons for retirees to select the Atherton Tablelands. The generally cooler, milder conditions, with less humidity than the coastal strip have considerable appeal, evidenced by the history of settlement on the Sunshine Coast and Gold Coast hinterlands. For those who would like to enjoy a cool, green rural environment for their retirement, available locations are running short in Australia. In some cases, cool favourable hinterland locations are at risk of being 'loved to death'. The Atherton Tablelands is one of the few places left with ample space and the 'room to breathe' new settlers typically seek. Retirees can choose the warmer drier northern Tablelands areas, or the higher southern areas with crisp winters, more rain and consequently green rolling hills. There is a long history of retirees choosing the Atherton Tablelands, evidenced in part by population demographics shown in Figure 1.

Significant work has been undertaken by TFC, TRC, Advance Cairns and retirement groups (known as Tablelands Retirement and Aged Care Facilities Action Group) over the last 2 years. Detailed surveys, supply and demand analysis and liaison with developers has seen an increase in applications to council for aged care, with feedback from surveys being taken into account. While there have been a variety of sources two retiree groups have predominated. One has been country northern Queensland, from Townsville in the south to Mount Isa in the west, in an arc of some 600 km radius. The second has been Cairns and near coastal strip residents. Anecdotal reports suggest that this is changing, with the mix including more retirees from further afield in Australia and from overseas.

Figure 1. Age Sex Structure, Southern Tablelands and Far North SD, 2006
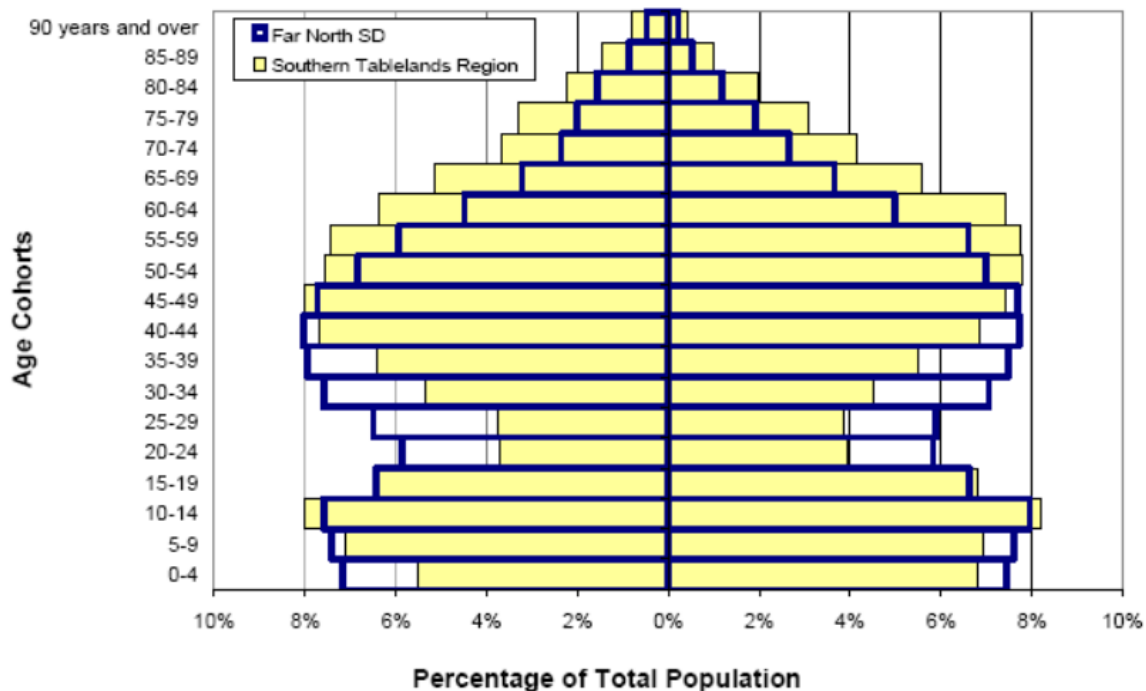
Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2006. Courtesy of the Southern Tablelands Regional Economic Development Strategy Report.

There are seven trends and factors that support this change and the view that Tablelands infrastructure and services oriented to retirement will experience strong and increasing demand over an extended time frame. These are:

• National & Global Demographics
• Tourism Discovery – the "shopwindow to the region"
• Technology Advances
• Hinterland Settlement Patterns
• Property prices
• Mining Boom
• Cairns Growth Rates

The trend is to older populations in developed nations across the world, with increasing numbers of retirees as a proportion of population levels. This is the result of a combination of lower birth rates and longer life expectancy. There are wide global implications flowing from this trend, which could not be reversed in the medium term even in the unlikely event that fertility rates increased almost immediately. In Australia those aged 65 and over represented 8.4% of the population in 1955. In 2005 it was estimated at 13.1% and by 2025, projected to be 20.3% (Source: ABS Australian Social Trends 2006).

The median age of the Tablelands population in 2006 was 41.2 years. In 2021 it is expected to be 46.0 years. While the size of the younger age groups (0-19 yrs.) will remain fairly steady over the next ten years, the size of the older age groups (55+ yrs.) will become significantly larger. In the middle years, the 25 - 39 years age group is expected to become larger than it was in 2006, but the 40-49 years age group is expected to become smaller. A very significant change will be in the number of people aged over 85 years. There were 643 people aged 85 years and over in 2006; on current trends there will be around 1,500 people 85 years and over in the Tablelands in 2021, an increase of 133%.

Although the numbers of young people may not change very much, the proportion of young people (0-19 yrs.) in the Tablelands population is projected to fall from 27.2% in 2006 to 22.3% in 2021. The proportion of older people (65+ yrs.) is projected to rise from 15.0% in 2006 to 23.8% in 2021 (Source: Queensland Government population projections to 2031: local government areas, 2011 edition, Office of Economic and Statistical Research, Queensland Treasury 2011). 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.

It was recognised by regional organisations that the apparent gap between the supply and demand for retirement oriented accommodation on the Tablelands represented a potential economic development opportunity for the region as well as a challenge to fulfil the changing accommodation needs of the growing numbers of people in the senior years on the Tablelands. As well as fulfilling local demand, there is also the potential to satisfy a wider demand from outside the region. The Tablelands already attracts migrants in the 50-65 years age group, drawn by the tropical highland climate and rural and relaxed lifestyle (TRC, 2009). Feedback from the community indicates that any development of retirement specific accommodation must go hand-in-hand with provision of an adequate level of residential aged care facilities. While there are four excellent residential aged care facilities already on the Tablelands, forecasts of the growth in numbers of those potentially requiring aged care over the next five to ten years show that a substantial investment in more aged care beds is required (Tablelands Retirement and Aged care Facilities Action Group, 2010).

Broad evidence of supply not meeting local demand has been shown in the Tablelands Regional Council document "*Aged Care in the Tablelands Region: Aged Accommodation and Support Services Survey Report and Discussion Paper, April 2009*". This showed that 616 households (35%) of the 1,785 respondent households (50% of all households with a person aged over 65yrs in the Tablelands region) would consider living in a retirement village style unit within the next 5 years. Nationally the average is 5%, so the response in the survey may exaggerate the true intentions of the Tablelands population, however it is clear there is an unmet need given that there is not one accredited retirement village on the Tablelands (Tablelands Retirement and Aged care Facilities Action Group, 2010).

Infrastructure & Community Aspirations

In facilitating discussions around "Infrastructure and Services" seen as limiting workforce, those present felt that there was a fair amount of public infrastructure on Tablelands based on a per capita basis and that it was sometimes 'undersold'. For example, there are two major hospitals for almost 47,000 people. There are good public and private schools and good sporting facilities and clubs. However, there may be a lack of 'specialist services', 'social' activity and 'a café latte set or Nightlife. A summary of priority community aspirations in 20 Towns or Districts from the Tablelands Community Plan are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Priority Community Aspirations

Priority Community Aspirations	No. times out of 20
Road Infrastructure	16/20
Economic Development, Employment, Education and Training	14/20
Sport and Recreational Facilities	13/20
Health Services and Facilities	13/20
Town Infrastructure	8/20
Land Use Planning	8/20
Youth venues and activities	8/20
Culture, Arts and Heritage	7/20
Appropriate Housing	7/20
Telecommunications	7/20
Aged Care / Accommodation	7/20
Water Quality and Infrastructure	6/20
Natural Environment	5/20
Public Transport	5/20
Community Centre Facilities	3/20

Source: *Tablelands Community Plan 2021 - Unique communities working together.*

Access to reliable and consistent high speed internet and mobile phone services has been identified as a constraint to business, attracting knowledge workers, global economy workers and tele-working from home. We need to ensure that the Tablelands has the internet and telecommunications infrastructure available to support business needs and investigate creative ways to connect the communities of the Tablelands through Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

From some community responses within the Tablelands Community Plan 2021 with regard to specialist services with health there is a need for the Queensland Government to:

- Re-instate outpatient services at Tableland hospitals.
- Staff hospitals with appropriately qualified staff to deliver clinical and other hospital services including emergency response.
- Extend allied health services to wider community including self-funded retirees.
- Extend and upgrade Patient Transfer Scheme to be more disabled and elderly friendly.

Housing Affordability

The price range for a "standard" urban house in Mareeba or Atherton is in the range of $285,000 to $420,000 for a 3 or 4 bedroom house on an Urban allotment. Similarly, it is hard to find a rental for under $300 per week. The FNQ2031 plan has developed a legislated footprint that will restrict urban and industrial growth and continue to push prices upwards. There is also a lack of short-term accommodation for seasonal workers. It is felt that local and Fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) mine workers living on the Tablelands will further push up house prices, exacerbating the problem of attracting skilled workers to the Region.

The growth of FIFO as a strong opportunity for the Tablelands, mainly due to the lifestyle that can be offered with a range of property sizes and climates on the Tablelands while still maintaining proximity to air transport. It could potentially address several issues such as ageing population, attracting residents and bringing financial resources into the region.

Transport Issues

Tablelands Industry Workforce Group Inc. is part of a Transport Infrastructure Group and, together with the Mareeba Chamber of Commerce, was instrumental in the formation of this group in early 2012. The lack of suitable transport links is seen as an impediment to economic growth. Poor road infrastructure limits expansion, access to markets, employment and job creation. Better road infrastructure would result in larger Industry in Mareeba and Atherton. The FNQ Regional Plan 2031 does not include any provision for upgrades to the Kuranda Range Road.

The Kuranda Range Road, the main access route from Cairns to the Tablelands, is not currently suitable for B-Doubles (ref. Figure 2). Trailers must be unhitched before travelling across the range. This significantly increases freight cost. The Tablelands is a smaller freight destination than Cairns and 'out of way' - so we need to 'connect' ourselves to the main route from Cairns via Mareeba back down south either via the Coast (Bruce Hwy) or an inland access route via Mt Garnet, Greenvale, Charters Towers. Only the Kuranda Range Road does this without doubling back on itself. Many transport companies choose to leave Cairns empty travelling south and pick up a load on the way to southern markets and Ports. Currently crossing the Kuranda Range to pick up produce is an estimated 7 additional hours when taking into account the hitching and unhitching of trailers. If operators were able to access the Tablelands via Kuranda Range Road - this would reduce transport costs. Negotiations are continuing in regards to an unhitching pad at Koah which will potentially reduce this timeframe, however the Mareeba and District Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association

have indicated that this will not reduce the turnaround time sufficiently enough to entice transport companies to travel up the Kuranda Range Road.

There is a belief that the Palmerston Highway offers a suitable B- Double alternative to upgrading the Kuranda Range. It is unrealistic to expect transport companies to make the 5 hour trip from Cairns to Mareeba via this route. Anecdotal evidence suggests that transport companies prefer to leave Cairns empty. Bill Cummings (Cummings Research) addressed a Mining Expo in Cairns in 2011 and stated "For hinterland mining development, lack of road development and quick short linkage with the ports of Cairns and Mourilyan for both output and input is a development constraint. The Kuranda Range Road needs to be taken to a level where it can safely take B-Double size vehicles as soon as possible." Cummings' research has also demonstrated that heavy vehicle movements along the Kuranda Range have increased from 407 Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) volumes in 1999 up to 701 AADT's in 2009. This statistic indicates that there is the demand to use the Kuranda Range as a major link to Cairns, now the challenge is to address the efficiency of the route. Previous plans for upgrading the Kuranda Range Road proved to be cost prohibitive, in part due to environmental considerations.

The regional Resources sector has concerns that any exporting of resources that could be done from Far North has little access to port Facilities. Consequently, bulk materials for export, e.g. mineral sands, Magnetite, ore concentrates, are transported to Brisbane by road first (e.g., Vital Metals-Tungsten, Magnetite - Ingham). Regionally, there is interest in a sea, road and rail hub at Mourilyan. However, if Innisfail becomes the transport hub for Far North Queensland then this will reduce the number of trucks to the Tablelands and increase freight costs up here and return.

Figure 2. Map of Major Tablelands Routes
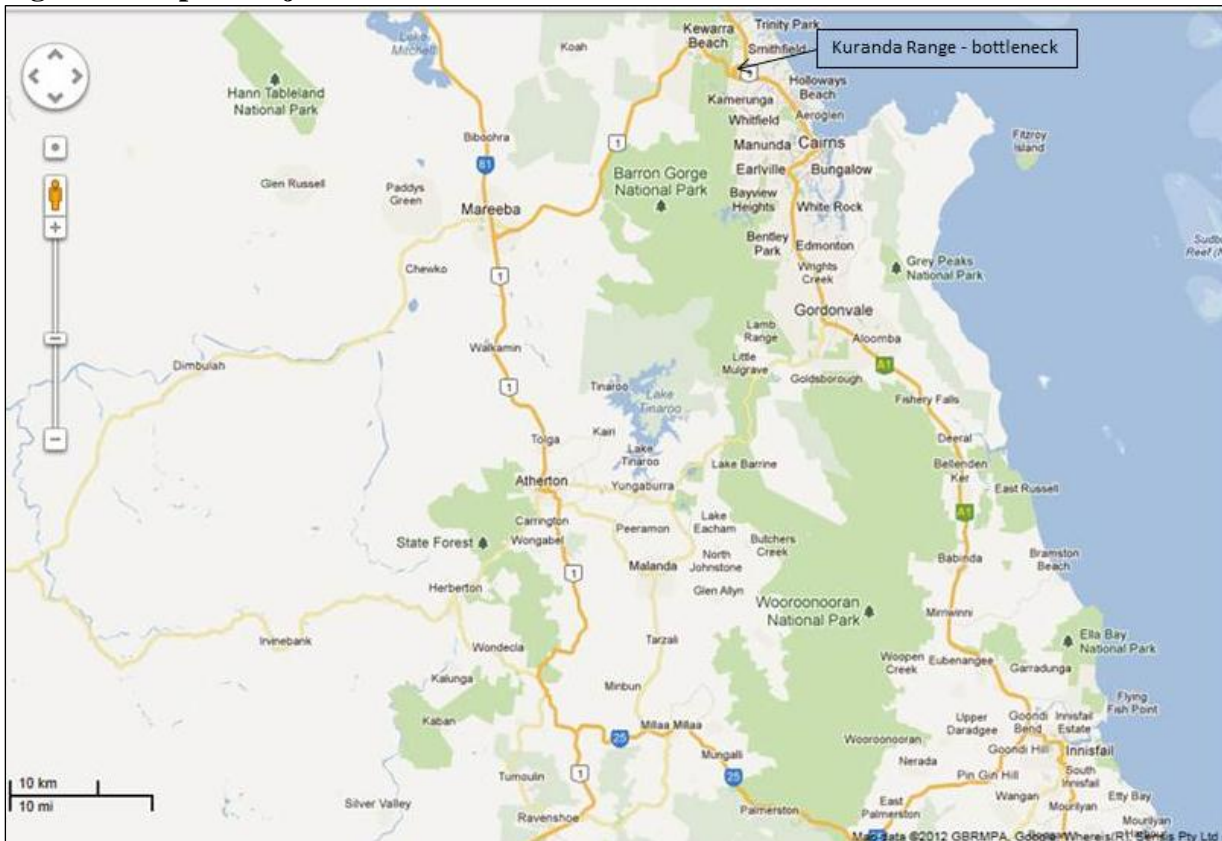
Courtesy of Google Maps

In this Kuranda Range Road Upgrade argument - we propose the establishing a 'loop' whereby trucks that arrive into Cairns loaded, proceed to the Tablelands and return south via Mourilyan or Mt Garnet loaded with Tableland produce. Tablelands freight could be exported out of Mourilyan reducing time, food kilometres and carbon emissions.

There is also an urgent need to examine the B double routes throughout the region. As greater significance is placed on food miles and carbon emissions it is important to maximise B-Double transport as it is more efficient in time and cost and ultimately reduces the number of trucks on the roads. The increased cost of hitching and unhitching at Mareeba and Smithfield is prohibitive for most producers and transport companies. From the Mareeba District Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association point of view, "*improved infrastructure to move our product out of the area is a high priority and one of the problems we have with the Mareeba – Cairns connection. We are not able to move our product efficiently from Mareeba to Cairns and we are unable to receive vehicles from the Cairns area. It would be much more efficient if this was able to occur*".

There is a need for maintenance and upgrade of state controlled and council roads. The lack of all-weather access into the region during the wet-season is cited as an impediment to economic development. For example, flood proofing the inland route via the Kennedy Highway and Greenvale to Charters Towers, the Kennedy Development Road at Nettle Creek Bridge at Innot Hot Springs. This is a very old, low lying, one lane timber structure that is a constant source of problems for the trucking industry during the wet season. During peak times road trains and trucks travel this bridge approximately every 20 minutes and consequently it is part of a very busy road network and tourist route. This route is a vitally important alternative route when the Bruce Highway is cut by flooding during the wet season. In the 2011 wet season operators experienced months of delays and restrictions through a permit system which in turn impacted on local businesses waiting for delivery of food, freight, equipment and getting cattle to markets.

Mareeba Airport

The Tablelands Regional Council (TRC) welcomed in late 2010 a commitment from the State Government for a $13 million upgrade of the Mareeba Airport. The funding would see the Airport become Queensland's second major aviation service centre after Cairns and was an important investment in the future of Far North Queensland. The redevelopment of the airport has the capacity to bring benefits to the whole region - both in the construction phase and once the works were completed. The project has the potential to be a job incubator for whole region with the hope that local companies will tender for works associated with the construction and be cost competitive in that process. Once the redevelopment has been completed, there will be jobs created in aviation-related activities.

The $13.3 million upgrade was set to position Mareeba Airport as a training hub for the Asia-Pacific region, providing world-class facilities and attracting a larger share of the $322 million local aviation sector. However, the State Government has decided to withdraw the funding. Retention of funding is being pursued by TRC, Tablelands Futures Corporation (TFC) and other regional

stakeholders as this is a key pillar in the Mareeba Airport Development Plan which aims to attract more business by developing the facility as a high technology maintenance and specialist flight training centre. Mareeba is perfectly placed to leverage off a world-wide aviation industry skills shortage by providing vital training services to the Asia Pacific region.

The $13.3 million upgrade will enable the Airport to capitalise on the high demand for aviation training as well as attract significant industry investment to Mareeba, boosting the economy and creating local jobs and will also transform an Airport that began as a refueling and rearmament base for Australian and American bombers in World War II into a first-rate training and aviation service centre (Tablelands Regional Council 2010 http://www.trc.qld.gov.au/news).

A staged plan and timeline for construction has been formally adopted by Tablelands Regional Council. The first step is to deliver a useful and useable airstrip for up to 45,000 kg aircraft and all the necessary facilities for the development of an aviation industrial estate. TRC has opted to strengthen the existing runway, main taxiway and apron to accept aircraft up to 45,000kg in weight which will allow for the landing of heavy aircraft such as the Dash 8-100, the C130 Hercules and some jet aircraft under certain conditions (Tablelands Regional Council 2012 http://www.trc.qld.gov.au/news).

A report tabled at a TRC meeting outlined potential business opportunities that would flow from the redevelopment such as:
- Heavy maintenance of up to Code 3C aircraft, predominately Dash 8-100 aircraft
- Spray painting for up to BAe146-300 aircraft
- Helicopter maintenance and flying training
- There is interest from an International Flying School to set up at Mareeba which conservatively would generate 20 well paid permanent jobs, but much more indirectly
- General Aviation maintenance, workshops and storage hangers
- Aviation support facilities and services e.g. avionics and aircraft sales
- Freight consolidation and distribution
- Additional refueling facilities; and
- Other aviation related activities.

Stage 1 of the redevelopment involves:
- Undertaking stormwater drainage works
- Strengthening the sub-grade of the existing runway and re-sheet with sprayed bitumen seal
- Construction of additional taxiways on the western, southern and northern sides of the runway
- Construction of the helicopter apron
- Construction of the Aviation Industrial Precinct, utilities, taxiways, aprons, fuel facilities, and access road at the western end of the airport
- Construction of an engine run-up bay at the western end of the airport including a hydrant style water outlet for agricultural aerial spraying and fire-bombing operations; and
- Construction of a portion of the flight training school apron sufficient to accommodate up to 20 aircraft (Tablelands Regional Council 2012 http://www.trc.qld.gov.au/news).

The upgrade at the Mareeba Airport was the only State Government project, as at March 2012, that created enabling infrastructure in Far North Queensland. That is, it will create economic activity, rather than just be catch up infrastructure. There are operators at Cairns Airport that could move to Mareeba creating space for higher value businesses in Cairns whilst creating

expanded opportunities in Mareeba. The Aviation and Marine sectors are the only two local sectors in Far North Queensland that are expanding and creating new jobs.

Regional leadership and Collaborative Governance in Tablelands Workforce

The Tablelands is characterised by a multitude of Government agencies, business associations, community associations and other groups with interests in regional development (both economic and social), especially in relation to Workforce Development and Skills Formation. Without being exhaustive, these interests are 'governed' or may be represented by the following organisations:

- Tablelands Regional Council (TRC)
- Regional Development Australia – Far North Queensland and Torres Strait
- Tablelands Industry Workforce Group (TIWG)
- Quality Industry Training and Employment (Q.I.T.E.)
- Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE
- Regional Development Australia – Far North Queensland and Torres Strait
- Tableland Futures Corporation (TFC)
- Advance Cairns
- Local Chambers of Commerce – Mareeba, Malanda and Atherton etc.
- Queensland Government Department of Employment, Economic development & Innovation (incl. Australian Agricultural College Corporation)
- Queensland Government Department of Education and Training (and Skills Queensland)
- Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations
- James Cook University
- Tableland Secondary Educator's Consortium/Cluster (Tablelands Schools VET Network)
- Gulf Savannah Development (GSD) covers areas in the Western part of the Tablelands LG area.
- Various Industry Associations – Agforce, Mareeba Fruit and Vegetable Growers Assn., Growcom, Queensland Dairyfarmers Organisation, Malanda Beefplan Group, Canegrowers etc.

The general absence of institutionalised levels of regional government in Australia makes it incumbent on Local Government to adopt a broader view on economic development matters. Local communities that form natural economic regions will benefit from a higher level of cooperation and coordination of resources and activities. It is important to note however, that facilitating economic development is not the sole responsibility of Local Government. All levels of Government, as well as industry and community stakeholders play a vital role in shaping the economic landscape of areas such as the Tablelands. Collaboration between these stakeholders not only contributes to achieving good economic outcomes, but also develops a strong foundation for good governance. As such, governance and leadership are just as important as having a strategy in place to deal with Workforce development and employment challenges.

Collaboration and Cooperation within Region

It was only in March 2008 that the four former Shires were merged. The Region is very parochial along Town and former Shire lines. Many within the region feel disenfranchised by both State and Federal Government following Dairy deregulation, the closure of the Tobacco industry, Shire amalgamation etc. There is a tendency, by some in Community leadership positions to be more reactive, than proactive. There is a divide between the former Mareeba Shire and the three former Southern Shires with local aspirations for de-amalgamation. Some of this is cultural, historical and possibly industry based. The former Mareeba Shire was partly established on Tobacco and has a large Mediterranean Population (Italian, Croatian, Albanian, Sicilian), whilst the southern Tablelands

was established on the back of Timber, Dairy and Cropping (maize, peanut, potatoes etc.). According to the 2006 Census, 16.7% of the former Mareeba LGA population was born overseas and 6.1% still speak Italian at home.

To date, there has been more competition in the training and employment sector rather than collaboration. However, previous collaboration has occurred between TAFE and Q.I.T.E. (Quality Innovation Training and Employment), a community-non-for-profit and largest Job Network and non-Government training provider in training delivery along with TIWG.

The Far North is establishing itself as a Centre of Enterprise for Tropical Expertise. There is much opportunity for further collaboration in the delivery of Agricultural and Horticultural Training and in their delivery of training and recruitment to the Resources sector. The Tablelands Region is well-positioned to become an Education and Training 'hub' or 'precinct' in the disciplines of Agriculture, Horticulture, sustainability and Environment capitalising on the region's diversity of Horticultural and Agricultural industries and Climate.

Urban encroachment onto Good Quality Agricultural Land

A lot of western grazing families like to retire to the Tableland and this is certainly a growth area. With the addition of a fly-in, fly-out mining workers seeking a Hinterland lifestyle we will experience continued growth of the Tablelands. There needs to be a sensible approach to urban development with new houses not covering productive good quality agricultural land (GQAL), particularly the Atherton basalts, which is amongst the highest value and sought-after in the country. There is ample poorer, rockier ground surrounding Mareeba and Atherton (to the west near Golf course and Carrington - expansion needs to be mainly up along Herberton road. Yungaburra has plenty of poor land (she-oak forest country, stonier grey soils) towards the dam and the Malanda surrounds is lower value grazing land.

Regional council, at time of publishing this paper (March-April 2012) need to take a different view to where the urban footprint actually occurs. This can be done - to encourage housing development with keeping charges to a minimum and being cooperative with developers to keep costs down. There may also be an opportunity for Council to discuss with the new State Government the opportunity to review the urban footprint in and around Tableland Towns to allow development of poorer forest country that is currently, 'protected' remnant vegetation, rather than cleared but productive GQAL. Particularly where the remnant vegetation is mapped as 'not-of-concern' under the Vegetation Management Act. Protection of GQAL and food security will become paramount in future years.

Identified constraints impacting on the Workforce in Local Industries

Identified constraints impacting on the Workforce in Local Industries include:-
- An exodus of young people from the region, particularly in 18-25 age bracket. People leave the area in search of educational and employment opportunities in larger regional centres, capital cities or industries offering better wages and conditions. This brain drain of young people has been cited as a key constraint to the development of the Region's economy. With this reduced youth labour supply, over the next 15 years the population group aged under 35 will decrease and the young labour pool will significantly diminish.
- Ageing workforce. In the next 20 years the region will experience a major demographic shift causing industry to rethink employment practices to attract older workers. Population aged

over 65 is predicted to almost triple by 2026. There is already a 'tree change phenomenon and attraction of retirees to region.

- Skills shortages in key sectors including agricultural and horticulture, trade qualified (metal, construction, motor), aged care, childcare, community services, professional and semi-professional jobs.
- Low Workforce Participation - the labour force participation rate for the Tablelands is significantly lower than that of Far North SD (56% in 2008).
- Population growth - Growth anticipated being between 6,000 and 12,000 people by 2025.
- Low education and skills – The Tablelands region has higher proportions of persons aged 15 years and over who have completed schooling to the Year 8, 9 and 10 year level but lower proportions of the population having attained a year 12 level education.
- Mining - There has been unprecedented mining exploration activity in and around the Tablelands. Local mines once they become operational may require between 4,000 – 5,000 workers. This will act as a vacuum for skilled workers further exacerbating skills shortages already being experienced in the Region and drain workers away from the traditional industries.

- Lack of major infrastructure and investment in region i.e. rail, mobile phone coverage, suitable B-double routes for produce and resources from Tablelands to Coast and Southern Markets.
- Lack of accommodation for shorter-term (seasonal) workers:
  o Low cost
  o Short/medium term
  o Itinerant workers
  o No short-term worker/backpacker Hostels in Mareeba-Dimbulah area.
  o Want good standard of backpacker accommodation.
  o Need to meet fire standards. Don't want a "Childers" here on Tablelands otherwise it could destroy us as destination.
- Shortage of aged care facilities and services - required to meet the needs of an ageing population
- High unemployment (particularly high Indigenous unemployment).
- Image of Community – not being seen as 'community of choice' to attract younger people and young families to live, work and play.
- Necessity for industry and community to collaborate and take ownership of workforce issues (need for industry workforce planning).
- Inflexible training system - Block training – Apprentices having to travel to Cairns for 6-7 weeks at a time.
- Commonwealth Funding policy directed towards whole qualifications rather than 'skills sets'.
- Coordination of publicity and services
- Access to information about community/facilities etc.
- Lack of Tablelands brand.
- Lack of self-promotion - better promotion of Tablelands is required; Tourism marketing is critical; Marketing the region; Issue of Tablelands proximity to Cairns – that Tablelands

sometimes 'gets lost' in promotion with larger Regional peak bodies i.e. "Cairns Highlands". The Tablelands is different and needs to differentiate itself from Cairns, but be connected to it. Significant activity is being undertaken in the area of marketing and promotion, including driving "Taste Paradise" further forwards, as well as development of a regional Master Brand for TNQ. Comment was made that the 'A Taste of Paradise' brand is really just a book of photos of Fruit and Veg and is "really cold" and does nothing for Tablelands.

- Need to retain seasonal workers in the region longer
- Image & perception issue with many employers (in Agriculture) themselves. Some Employers not being seen as 'Employers of Choice' and colouring perception of region. Have a 'crack the whip', head down, backside up mentality –. Need to provide workers with water, toilet breaks, smoko's etc.
- Attitudinal Change – may be required within some businesses to become Employers of Choice.
- Training is not seen as an investment by employers.
- Recognition of what are good working conditions.
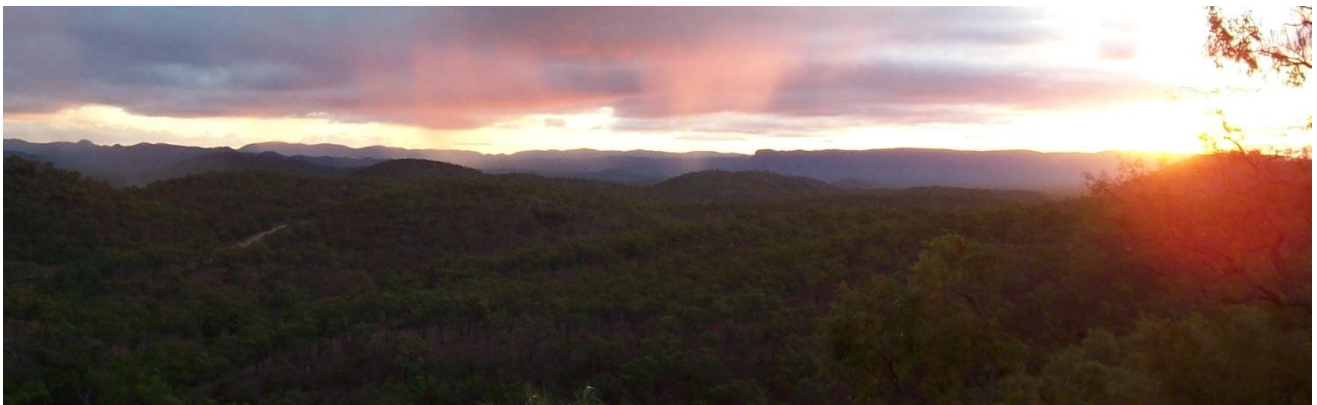
Opportunities

Employment/Workforce & Education
- Possible case studies book on "*Employers of Choice*" which also promotes the region as a "*region of choice*" (as a leading employment destination) to "work, live and play" as well. Profile regional lifestyle for potential residents. Provide information specific to seasonal employment.
- Region being seen as 'retirement village' and need to pitch marketing at younger and middle aged families… adventure, lifestyle. "*An Adventure-seekers paradise*". "*Uplifting by nature*" branding. The Region needs vision and investment. A Tinaroo Lake Water Sports Centre (maybe on the cards). This alone would not be enough, but it's a start, needs a whole package. Parachuting, mustering etc. could also be included.
- TAFE training - there is an opportunity to take students out in the field and see how good businesses promote and excel with improved customer service. This is a much better way of learning that using a text book or PowerPoint.
- Current completion of a Regional (TNQ) Master branding project - estimated completion 09/2012.
- Improve the way job vacancies in the region are communicated to people outside of region - provide detailed information on skills shortages and job vacancies in the region.
- Promote the region and specific job opportunities in the region at Country week or Ekka or similar expos.

- The opportunity to tap into the residential and 'fly in fly out' (FIFO) mining population, which will in turn attract business and infrastructure investment to the Tablelands. The growth of FIFO is a strong opportunity for the Tablelands, mainly due to the lifestyle that can be offered with a range of property sizes and climates on the Tablelands while still maintaining proximity to air transport.
- The potential capacity for the Tablelands region to function as a major service centre to support mining activities. This will further lead to investment attraction in existing centres such as Mareeba, Dimbulah, Chillagoe Herberton and Mount Garnet.
- Develop models for retaining rural workers in the region during periods of instability or between seasons could be investigated and implemented where appropriate (possibly link to mines as drivers etc.)
- Employee training/sharing opportunities between government and private industry.
- Through collaboration, Tablelands Region become an Education and Training 'hub' or 'precinct' in the disciplines of Agriculture, Horticulture, sustainability and Environment capitalising on the region's diversity of Horticultural and Agricultural industries and Climate.
- Utilising the Tablelands' position in the Wet Tropics, explore opportunities for establishing an institution to undertake education and research activities on climate change, particularly focusing on agricultural and pastoral industries.
- Market opportunities for research and development in the region's traditional industry sectors and develop the Tablelands as a leader in agricultural research and innovation (i.e. tropical dairy studies and forestry).
- There are growing opportunities for new biotechnology industries to take advantage of the tropical expertise of the Tablelands. In turn, these industries will generate new 'knowledge' jobs and attract professionals and skilled workforce into the region.
- Opportunities to introduce and expand school-based apprentice and vocational training opportunities for secondary school students through TIWG facilitating Industry links and support.
- Professional assistance to assist farmers to transition to organic/biodynamic farming as 'niche' and to diversify farming activities e.g. farm tourism, Carbon farming and payment for ecosystem services.
- Regional training organisations focus on a 'grow-your-own' technical and professional staff approach as part of workforce planning.

Accommodation

- Address lack of accommodation – through business incubation/investment attraction approach.
    - Low cost
    - Short/medium term
    - Itinerant workers seasonal workers – caravan parks, guest houses & pubs
    - Misty Mountains Eco lodge

- Accommodation - new models of accommodation for seniors
    - Small scale development with community title
    - Seniors lodging hubs/guest houses

Aged Care/Health

- Encourage more volunteering in nursing homes and provide more training for staff and volunteers.
- Lifestyle retirement industry - Investigate new models of accommodation for Seniors including exploring suitable models of retirement village settlements for those wanting to downsize:
  - Range of low - high care services available on site
  - Designed to suit needs of elderly
  - Retrofitting existing houses to extend independent living (ageing in place principles)
  - Shared accommodation
  - Clusters of independent living units with on-site support
  - Planning scheme to support small scale development with community title (6 units with one unit for live in carer or nurse).
- Aged care provision and accommodation as above
- Support services.
- Town infrastructure upgraded to enable elderly to continue living independently in own home longer including upgrade footpaths for multi-use (e.g. wheelchairs, mobility scooters, walking aids) and improved access to shops and public facilities for people using wheelchairs and walking aids.
- Investigate options for increasing support services to elderly residents including Blue Care nurses based at Health Clinics, more outreach/visiting services, local Meals on Wheels service and Respite care.
- Lobby for more aged care packages and better support services.
- Explore feasibility of collaborative approach by government, community and commercial health service providers to deliver improved and expanded health services including Bulk billing and increasing the number of General Practitioners.

Transport
- Explore options for improving public transport to better connect Towns / communities to other towns and Cairns Airport.
- Upgrade Kuranda Range - road needs to be upgraded to ensure efficient movement of B-doubles, however does not need to be 4 lanes which increase the impacts on the environment. Three lane proposal for Range. This would then help create a 'loop' for heavy transport vehicles unloading in Cairns, travel to Mareeba via the Kuranda Range to pick up produce and then head south to either Mourilyan or other southern markets via the Palmerston Highway. This loop would ultimately reduce time to move goods and thereby reduce the cost of transport.
- One solution as alternative to Kuranda range is another access to Cairns. Revisit the possibility of Quaid Road? This would cut the travelling time to Port Douglas, Northern Beaches etc.
- Decoupling pad at Koah or top of Kuranda range.
- Extend the access to the region by increasing the B double routes throughout the region. Maximise the usage of B Doubles to move produce and livestock throughout the region thereby reducing the number of trucks on the road and the associated carbon emissions, and reducing food miles through greater efficiency and timeliness of transport.
- All weather access to the region via an inland access route – Mt Garnet, Greenvale, Charters Towers.

Information and Communication Technologies & High Speed Broadband

- Improved access to reliable and consistent high speed internet and mobile phone services. This may involve campaigning for the early roll-out of NBN on Tablelands to ensure the Tablelands has the internet and telecommunications infrastructure available to support business needs.
- Ensure the Tablelands have the internet and telecommunications infrastructure available to support businesses, attract knowledge workers, global economy workers and tele-working from home.
- Investigate creative ways to connect the communities of the Tablelands through Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

Tourism/Regional Branding
- Build on regional Branding work done by other regional bodies but with Tablelands Regional Brand (distinct sub-region from rest of FNQ). "*We should sell the sizzle, not the sausage*". Like QTIC selling Qld to Asia we could be selling the Tablelands to similar.
- Produce a tourism CD for Tableland
- Establish information/display booth on Esplanade – freestanding panels (much like the 'mangrove' information etc.)
- Large Billboards/signposts for Tablelands in Cairns/Innisfail etc. No signage on road coming up from Townsville (~50% of Tourism are coming up from Townsville) – Ma Mu Walk. Billboards/signposts – after Kuranda there is no signposts – How far to Wetlands, Cairns Wildlife Safari Zoo, Skybury? Establish sign near cable ski in Cairns and a large sign coming up from Townsville – North and South of Gordonvale, Palmerston etc. Paronella Park and the Herberton Historical Village are excellent examples.
- Need to encourage more restaurants/eating places on northern Tableland to open at night.
- Should have a guide to Infrastructure/services/facilities.
    - Promotion & local facility guide.
    - Do Interview of Restaurants and what is on offer.
    - Knowing where to go - good Food/wine/restaurant guide – hand out to tourists. Promote pubs etc.
    - Events calendar.
    - Targeted at newcomers, new employees and seasonal workers.

- Attraction of large events to Tablelands:
    - Could have something like the World's lengthiest Golf course – play a hole in each town – from Mt Molloy to Millaa Millaa as a tourism promotion
    - International Cycling event – has flow on effect – Mountain biking/cycling etc. "Tour-de-Tablelands"
    - Eco Challenge
    - Wheelbarrow race
- Coordinate investment in local infrastructure – putting people of like minds and similar attitude to risk together in local projects to Invest locally in projects like seasonal worker accommodation at a central location.
- Potential for Food & Wine trails and greater promotion of this.
- Farm & Nature based tourism/B&B's etc.

- Create Tourism Loops – "Brand the circuit" – Adventure loop – include Blazing saddles etc., 200 B&B's, 27 Restaurants, Skydiving etc…
- Venues need coordination to get it all together – 'i.e. 'Food & Wine trail'
- Free bus running from Esplanade at 9.00am daily to Tableland attractions and tourism businesses.
- Lack of cultural facilities (i.e. Art Galleries etc.) and where they exist, they are not promoted or supported enough.
- Consideration needs to be given to the preservation and development of caravan parks in the region. Councils could consider the option of establishing Public/Private Partnership programs to take over the management and development of the council owned facilities (TNQ Repositioning Study 2009).
- Development of an eco/indulgence focused property in the Tablelands to accommodate groups. Ranging in size between 100-200 beds would prove viable (TNQ Repositioning Study 2009).
- Big venue for conferences needed also linked to national and international conferences (i.e. Cairns Convention Centre)
- Tourism - Farm Tours
- Country pubs too could look more closely at the opportunities for providing accommodation for seasonal workers.

Business Attraction/Growth/incubation
- Business migration/Business attraction/incubation – campaign into larger centres – suburban Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne etc. - that can do business here. Cheaper land, housing, water, good services, better environment, safe etc. As a Region we should look at places down south that have done this like larger Regional centres in NSW i.e. Tamworth, Armidale, Orange
- Need to get into suburban newspapers and southern media people
- Employ a marketing person – Funding sources?
- Business Incubation - Coordinate investment in local infrastructure – putting people of like minds and similar attitude to risk together in local projects. Creation of 'Syndicates' to invest locally in projects like seasonal worker accommodation at a central location? Larger growers that employ 50+ people may be willing to invest in accommodation and transport (like Howe's and Mackay's bananas in Tully run buses). Plenty of backpackers leave Gilligan's to go to Tableland for work.
- There is a lot of promotional opportunity in science, sustainability, biotech health & agriculture) - Diversification in Agriculture/Horticulture:
  - o Biotech Industries
  - o Opportunities with CSIRO, DPI, Terrain NRM, Cane Growers
  - o organics in 'niche' agricultural industries – farm tours
  - o biofuels
  - o carbon
  - o health - human trials cancer drug (EBC-46) Q-Biotics
  - o aquaculture
- Professional assistance to farmers - transition to organics, biodynamics, carbon trading, ecotourism etc.,
- Training – link to JCU
- Adventure Tourism –links with Mareeba Airport
- With adequate start-up funding, there is an opportunity to establish and support Indigenous businesses (e.g. QiTE with Murri Delights).

- Further expand and promote the Tablelands' thriving export-oriented industries, including the tropical industry sector, to create new 'driver sector' jobs for the region.
- Support the growth of local businesses to create additional jobs, particularly in the knowledge-based sectors.
- Funding or support for small business mentoring and training programs to enable small businesses on the Tablelands to have better access to professional advice and training.
- Investigate opportunities for new business and jobs from long term expansion of Mareeba Airport:
  o Attract new industries to use air transport
  o Establish flight training school and aeroplane maintenance
  o Fly in / fly out transport for mines.

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