

Statement of Strategic Regional Priorities 2025



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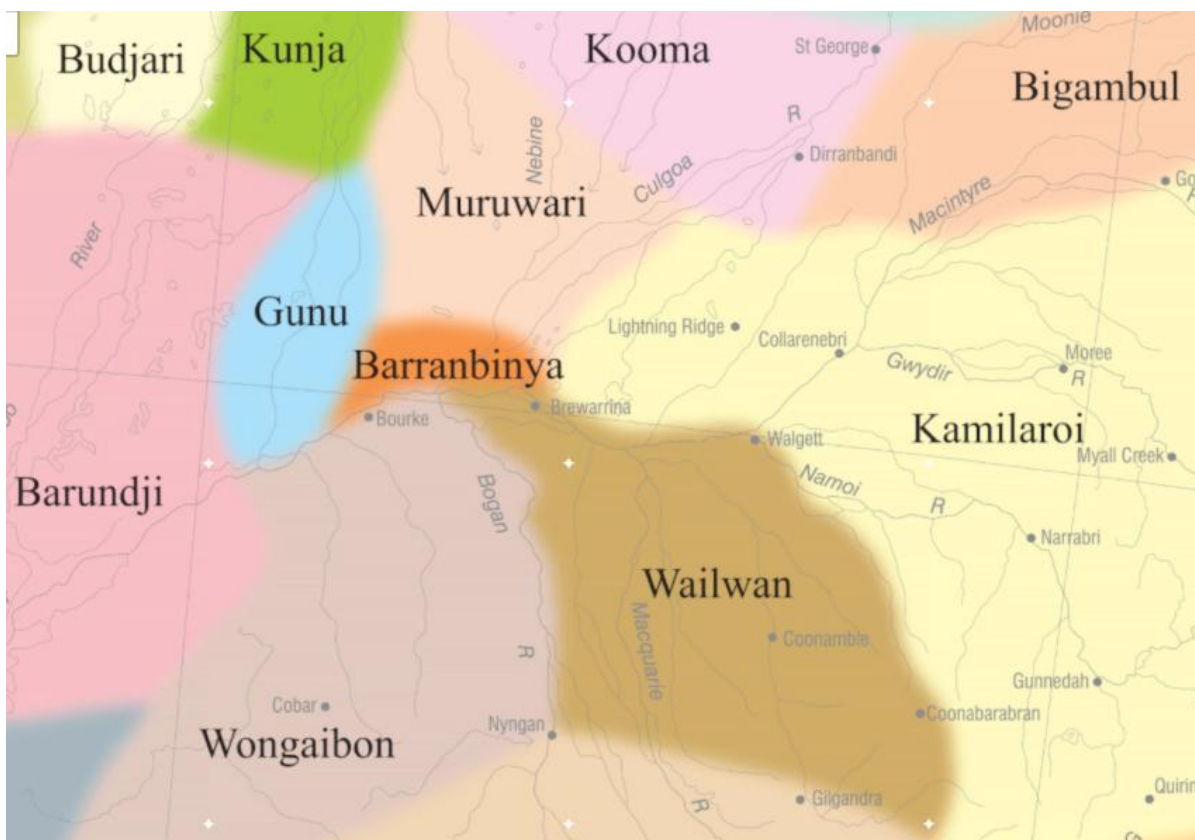
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Acknowledgement

The Far North West Joint Organisation acknowledges the Traditional Owners and custodians of the lands on which we live and work. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present.



(Map reproduced from: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia>)

Where to go for more information

For further information about the Far North West Joint Organisation, please visit our website: <https://www.farnorthwestjo.nsw.gov.au> or contact us by email: eo@farnorthwestjo.nsw.gov.au

About the Far North West Joint Organisation

The Far North West Joint Organisation (FNWJO) was established by the NSW Government in 2018 as part of a network of Joint Organisations across regional NSW. The FNWJO is comprised of member Councils Bourke, Cobar and Walgett Shire Councils. Coonamble Shire Council has formally requested to join the FNWJO and is awaiting approval from the Minister for Local Government. In addition, Central Darling Shire Council has accepted the invitation to join the FNWJO. Coonamble and Central Darling Shire Councils will be considered as associate members until such time as the Minister formalises arrangements for the change in structure and memberships of joint organisations.

The three member councils of the Far North West region cover an area of approximately 110,000 square kilometres, or more than 13.7% of the area of NSW. With the inclusion of the associate member councils of Coonamble and Central Darling this increases to approximately 172,900 square kilometres or 22% of the land area of NSW.

The primary purpose of the Joint Organisation is to facilitate State and local government collaboration, planning, priority setting and delivery of important projects on a regional scale. The FNWJO has also identified support for the operations of its member Councils, aimed at strengthening local government in the region, as a role for the Joint Organisation.

The principal functions of all Joint Organisations are:

- **Strategic regional planning**
- **Regional leadership and advocacy**
- **Intergovernmental collaboration.**



The Great Cobar Museum

Our Vision for the Far North West

A connected region of diversity and opportunity that cares for its people and environment.

We acknowledge the challenges that face us but we are committed to working in collaboration to address these.

The Principles we are committed to

- ✓ We will make decisions and support initiatives, programs and projects based on the evidence and what is best for the entire region
- ✓ We will focus on the strategic vision for our region and our communities
- ✓ We will be respectful of our member Councils' representatives, work cooperatively, communicate often and ensure good governance
- ✓ We will work collaboratively across all levels of government and with other key partners and stakeholders in the region
- ✓ We will make informed decisions that consider the risks and benefits
- ✓ We will deliver projects, initiatives and programs, applying sound project management methodologies and financial rigour
- ✓ We will support other projects that deliver benefits for our region and that align with our strategic vision
- ✓ We will support and celebrate the success of our member Councils, and identify strategies and actions where we can share and work together for service delivery
- ✓ We will embrace technologies to address our priorities.



Jandra Paddle Vessel on the Darling (Baaka) River, North Bourke

Far North West region: Fast facts

This snapshot includes collated information about the Far North West region member councils including Bourke, Cobar and Walgett Shire Councils. Data for Coonamble and Central Darling Shire Councils will be added once the Minister formalises membership arrangements.

Fast facts		As at (date)
Total land area	109,482 km ²	2023-24 ¹
Population	11,722	2021 ²
Median age	39.3 years	2021 ²
% of population of working age (15-64 years)	61.4%	2021 ²
% of population who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	20.9%	2021 ²
Number of households	4,757	2016
% of adults who have completed Year 12 or equivalent	24.6%	2021 ²
% of 15-19 year olds fully engaged in education and/or employment	48.0%	2021 ²
Top self-reported health conditions	Asthma Arthritis Mental health condition Diabetes	2021 ²
% of local councillors who are women	38.7%	2024 ³
Total length of roads (local and regional)	7,160 km	2022-23 ⁴
Total number of registered vehicles	15,853	2025 ⁵
Total number of active businesses	1,387	2023 ¹
(number of businesses with one or more employees)	(482)	2021 ⁶
Industries with the most businesses	Agriculture/forestry/fishing Construction Transport Real Estate/hire	2021 ²
Annual tourist visitor numbers	425,000	2019 ⁷
Median house sale price	\$259,300	2025 ⁸

1. NSW Office of Local Government – Your Council Report 2023-24: <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/OLG-Time-Series-2023-24-Update-.xlsx>
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Census data – General Community Profile for each Council <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/community-profiles/2021/AUS>
3. 2024 Election results from each Council's website.
4. NSW Office of Local Government - Your Council snapshot for 2022/23 from <https://www.yourcouncil.nsw.gov.au/your-council/>
5. Transport for NSW Registration Snapshot Report for each Local Government Area from at 30 June 2025: <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/data-and-research/drives-reporting-portal/registration-snapshot-report>
6. Services NSW - NSW and Local Government Area Business Profiles 2021: <https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/system/files/2023-03/nsw-and-local-government-area-business-profiles.pdf>
7. Local Government Area Profiles 2019: website accessed August 2025: <https://www.tra.gov.au/en/regional/local-government-area-profiles>
8. REA Group website – average of median prices for previous 12 months across the three council areas -accessed August 2025: <https://www.realestate.com.au/australia/>

About this Statement of Strategic Regional Priorities

Following each local government election (generally every four years), the Joint Organisation prepares a Statement of Strategic Regional Priorities to identify the key priorities and actions for that term. The Statement provides direction for the programs, projects and other initiatives that will be the focus of delivery during the term to support achievement of those regional priorities.

We trust that funding partners and delivery collaborators will refer to this Statement when identifying how they can best support the Far North West region to achieve its objectives. We look forward to working collaboratively with our intergovernmental partners and other key organisations across the Far North West to support our communities to reach their potential.

This Statement was developed by the FNWJO Board in consultation with various State Government representatives and takes into account the Community Strategic Plans of each of our member councils, as well as key State and regional plans and priorities identified by others for our region. Once Coonamble and Central Darling Shire Councils have been formally admitted as full member councils, the Statement of Regional Priorities will be fully reviewed to include the context and additional area of the new member councils.

This Statement of Priorities reflects five key themes that are shared across all our region's communities:

Liveable communities

Sustainable environment

Prosperous economy

Leadership and governance

Community infrastructure

This Statement makes clear the role of our Joint Organisation in leading particular initiatives that support regional outcomes, but also identifies some of the local issues our member Councils are pursuing on behalf of their own communities which will be supported and advocated for by the FNWJO. We look forward to using this Statement to drive delivery of results for our regional communities across the Far North West.



Walgett water tower mural of Jimmy Little
Photo by: Andi Methner - Zest Events International

Where are we in 2025

Since its establishment, the Far North West Joint Organisation (FNWJO) has focused on three regional priorities, based on a foundation of a strong, capable and resourced organisation:

- **Resilient and functioning communities**
- **A strong regional economy**
- **A sustainable natural environment.**

In response to these priorities, the FNWJO has undertaken a number of activities. These include:

- Managing the contract for the continued operation of the Western Air Services and advocated for further funding
- Promoting regional tourism by gaining funding for tourism facilities and undertaking projects on a collaborative and regional basis, to enhance opportunities for the development of a regional tourism strategy.
- Enabling member Councils to meet best practice for urban water supply through involvement with the Western Councils Water Alliance
- Working with member and associate member Councils to improve resourcing through staff attraction and retention
- Advocating for improved telecommunications, particularly to reduce black spots across the region and improved connectivity where services are at best marginal
- Coordinating regional projects including the Contaminated Lands Project, Drought Planning, Historic Pub Tours and the Joint Organisation Net Zero Acceleration (JONZA) program on behalf of member and associate member Councils.

As we move forward, it is time to review our priorities in light of the current regional landscape. Across our region a number of challenges and opportunities exist that will help to shape the FNWJO's activities over the coming years.

There are significant on-going regional issues that our Councils face, including:

- Impacts of droughts, floods and other adverse weather related events
- Lagging impacts of the Global COVID pandemic
- Lagging digital connectivity and capability to participate in the digital economy, coupled with the tyranny of distance
- Housing availability
- A continued decline in the region's population
- Lack of or reduced access to secure and sustainable energy and water supply and the impacts that this has had on business and industry investment and expansion
- Movement of young people out of the region as they pursue education and employment opportunities, resulting in an ageing of the remaining population in some areas
- Ageing local business owners and operators, with a lack of certainty about who will take up these businesses in the future
- Cost of upgrades to significant regional infrastructure (for example key water pipelines, electricity transmission and substation infrastructure)
- Difficulty attracting and retaining skilled labour to the region
- Meeting net zero targets

The FNWJO is significantly reliant on external funding for the achievement of our service delivery commitments. The on-going financial viability of the FNWJO is challenged by the ability of Councils

to provide additional funding, given they have low populations and thus low rate bases. It is critical for the FNWJO to be successful in achieving grants and project funding to undertake regional projects that benefit the member and associate member Councils.

Retaining specialist skills and staff numbers across our member Councils is an ongoing challenge, as it is for many regional councils.

NSW Government regulations impose requirements that come with significant cost burden for our local councils and communities, including those related to the Biodiversity legislation that appear not to take into account the Far North West region's characteristics. Such regulations are providing additional hurdles that impact on local economic development opportunities. The FNWJO will continue to advocate for policy that takes into account our regional context, and push for changes to reflect this.

Regional councils face policy challenges that are not evident in metropolitan areas. These often carry significant cost burdens for local councils and communities. In response, our region has demonstrated continued resilience and capacity to adapt. Over recent years our communities and our member Councils have collaborated to address shared needs and have taken steps to improve our digital connectivity, driven in part by the impacts of the COVID pandemic.



Where do we want our region to be in the future?

The Statement of Strategic Regional Priorities primarily provides direction for the Joint Organisation during the current local government term (to 2029) and identifies our objectives and shapes our direction beyond that. The priorities and goals have been identified through inputs from each of our member Councils and their communities (as described in each Shire's Community Strategic Plan). In addition, State Government planning has also identified priorities and objectives for the Far North West which have been considered in this planning process.

The goals for our region include:

Liveable communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Connected communities (digital, transport, social connection)✓ Enhanced access to health services✓ Communities that people want to live in✓ Things for our residents and visitors to do✓ Housing development✓ Education opportunities✓ Safe communities✓ Sustainable employment opportunities
Sustainable environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Healthy river systems✓ Protection of natural landscapes✓ Energy efficiency and emissions reduction✓ Minimising waste to landfill✓ Promoting the circular economy✓ Resilience to climate change impacts
Prosperous economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ A vibrant, flourishing regional tourism industry, including cultural tourism experiences and products...a tourism destination✓ Business development✓ Provision of self-sufficient air services✓ Increased investment in the region
Leadership and governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ A sustainable Joint Organisation✓ Combined efforts to get best value for investment✓ Share resources to maximise outcomes (procurement practice, technical and specialist skills, Audit Risk & Improvement committee)✓ Technology is embraced
Community infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Water security for sustainable and secure supply for our towns and villages✓ Energy security and sustainable power supply✓ Improved transport routes, including enhanced north/south freight corridor

We invite our State and Federal Government colleagues, as well as industry and other regional stakeholders, to join us in delivering projects that will see our region's goals realised.

Through collaboration, investment, leadership and commitment we can build a strong and sustainable Far North West region.

What will we do to progress our region's priorities?

Our Joint Organisation will progress our regional priorities in two key ways:

- Attracting funding to support the delivery of targeted projects that address specific priorities
- Advocating for our region and in support of our member Councils to other levels of government and industry stakeholders to ensure our region's voice is heard.

The activities we will pursue are grouped under the five goals of our region. The activities we will undertake to progress our goals include:

1. Liveable communities	1.1	Advocating for the NSW Government and housing industry stakeholders to develop a Regional Housing Strategy, in collaboration with FNWJO councils, that supports access to affordable housing across the region and promotes liveability
	1.2	Advocating to NSW Health and other health service providers to ensure access to health services for Far North West communities is maintained
	1.3	Encouraging our member Councils and their communities to promote opportunities for volunteering and social connection
	1.4	Advocating for digital connectivity enhancements across the region, including enhanced mobile telephone reception and access to high speed internet
2. Sustainable environment	2.1	Advocating for water security and sustainable supply across the region, including achievement of the Western Weir initiative and implementation of a Regional Water Strategy
	2.2	Continuing to deliver projects on behalf of our member Councils, including those related to drought, disaster ready, tourism, waste, energy and water
	2.3	Working with member Councils to pursue sustainable energy options (for Council power supply and the broader community and industry), including virtual power plants
	2.4	Continuing to contribute to the delivery of the NetWaste initiative
	2.5	Identifying opportunities for regional collaboration in managing waste, diverting waste from landfill, recycling and resource recovery for reuse or repurposing or other circular economy initiatives
	2.6	Advocating for a healthy river system across the Barwon Darling and tributaries
	2.7	Advocating for the protection of natural landscapes
	2.8	Advocating for better management NSW National Parks including mitigation and eradication of feral animals
3. Prosperous economy	3.1	Identifying key actions from the NSW Government Regional Economic Development Strategy for JO action and advocacy
	3.2	Preparing and promoting a Regional Investment Prospectus that builds upon local economic development strategies and identifies possibilities for growth and investment across the region and opportunities to grow our region's employment base

	3.3 Working collaboratively with other Councils and Destination NSW to market the Far North West region as a tourism destination and encouraging the expansion of opportunities and activities to celebrate our culture
4. Leadership and governance	4.1 Strengthening collaboration in the region to pursue regional objectives (including inviting other regional Shire Councils to join FNWJO)
	4.2 Actively participating in regional and State forums with other levels of government to ensure the FNWJO is able to engage with and influence any policy or program development affecting the region
	4.3 Identifying, promoting and pursuing opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing across the region
	4.4 Developing and implementing a regional local government Workforce Strategy to support the attraction and retention of Council staff across the region (including finding solutions to recruiting hard-to-fill roles and providing professional development opportunities)
	4.5 Promoting the objectives and activities of the FNWJO and celebrating our achievements with our regional stakeholders
	4.6 Securing the FNWJO's future through targeted funding applications that include allowance for administrative on-costs
5. Community infrastructure	5.1 Continuing to ensure air services are available to communities across the region and pursuing funding to support sustainable air service provision
	5.2 Advocating to the NSW Government for funding to upgrade and maintain key water pipeline infrastructure to ensure security of supply to remote communities
	5.3 Advocating for better-connected communities through accessing funding for road upgrades that enable transport access across the region
	5.4 Advocating for an enhanced freight corridor between Adelaide and Brisbane through upgrades to the Wool Track between Balranald, Central Darling and Cobar
	5.5 Work towards improving connectivity of establish tourist routes
	5.6 Advocating for equitable service provision and government infrastructure investment for our regional communities



Monitoring our progress

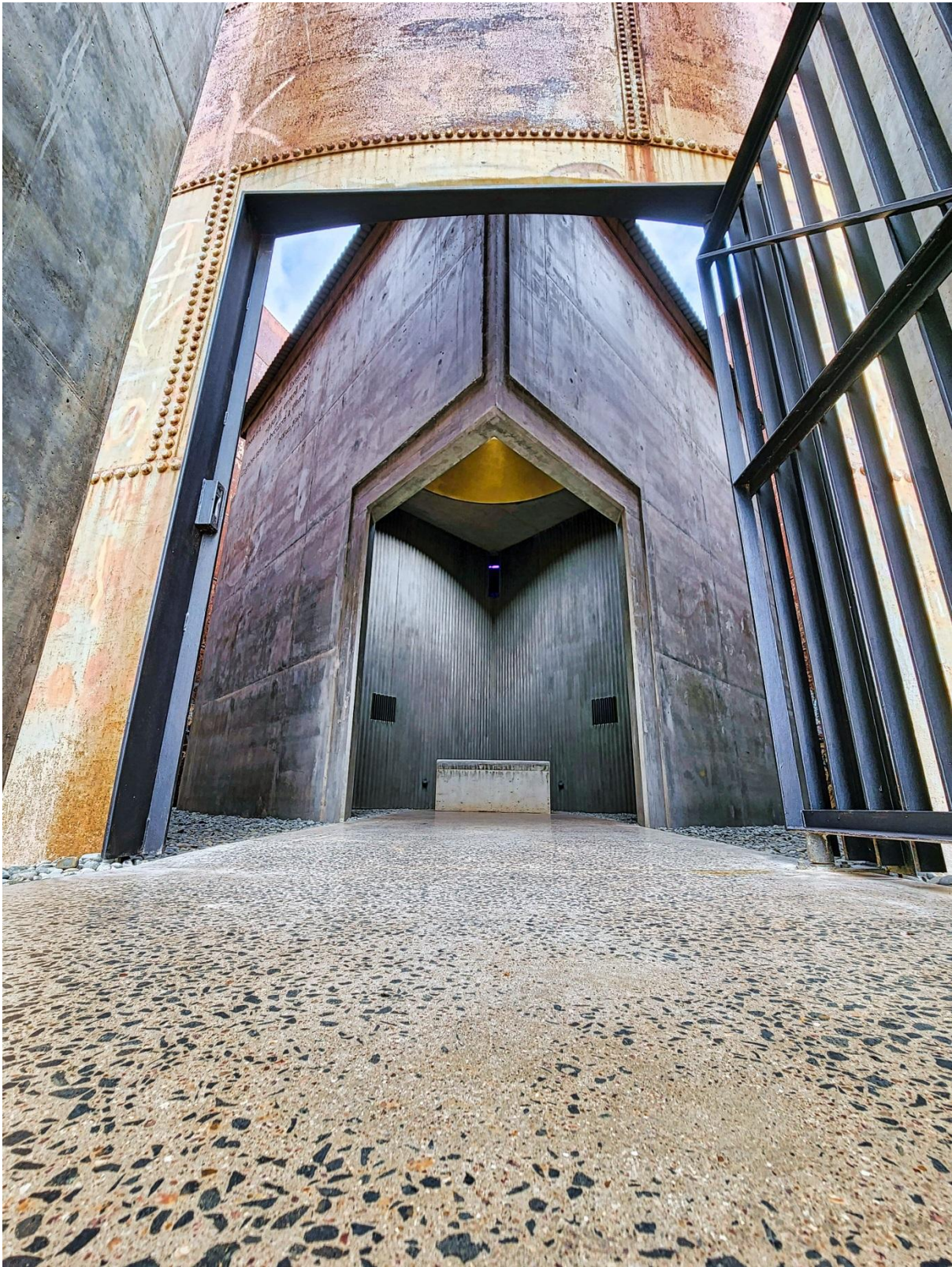
Each year, in our Annual Performance Statement, we will provide our communities and partners with an update on the progress of implementing the activities identified in this Statement of Strategic Regional Priorities in support of achieving our regional goals.

In addition, we will monitor and periodically report on some key regional indicators that will help measure the progress of our region against its goals. This will support us to review and update this Statement of Strategic Regional Priorities in 2029. The key indicators we will monitor in relation to each of our five goals are described below.

Regional objective	Indicator
Liveable communities	Regional population
	% of residents experiencing housing stress
	Homelessness rate
	Residential rental vacancy rate
	% of residents who volunteer for an organisation or group
	% of residents who have access to high speed internet at home
	Number of children enrolled at preschool, primary school and secondary school; and number of people attending a tertiary institution
	Number of domestic violence assaults
	Number of thefts from dwellings
	General crime rate trends
Prosperous economy	Gross Regional Product
	Nett business growth (entries less exits)
	Number of jobs
	Median weekly personal income
	Unemployment rate (15 years and over)
	Number of tourism businesses; number of tourists/visitors; average visitor nights of stay; and average visitor spend
	Number of DAs determined and value of DAs determined
Sustainable environment	Total greenhouse gas emissions (tonnes CO ₂ -e) and emissions (tonnes CO ₂ -e) per capita
	Energy efficiency and emission reduction projects implemented
	NSW State of the Environment Report on health of waterways

Regional objective	Indicator
	Annual domestic waste generated; waste generated per capita, waste diverted from landfill through recycling or recovery centres
Leadership and governance	Amount of funding received by the JO
	Participation in regional collaborations such as workforce and housing strategies
Community infrastructure	Air service passenger numbers
	Amount of funding received in the region as part of Road Maintenance Council Contracts (State roads)
	Nature and value of infrastructure projects delivered





Cobar Sound Chapel

**FAR NORTH WEST JOINT ORGANISATION
STATEMENT OF STRATEGIC REGIONAL PRIORITIES - 2025**