

Australia: Sunshine-Fraser Coast Region

REGIONAL CO-ORDINATOR

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1. A Brief Description of Regional Characteristics (in terms of population, the specialisation in economic sectors etc)

The Sunshine-Fraser Coast encompasses six local authorities – Caloundra City Council, Maroochy Shire Council and Noosa Council, Cooloola Shire Council, Maryborough City Council, Hervey Bay City Council, and is one of Australia's fastest growing regions. Situated in the south-east corner of Queensland, just north of the State capital, Brisbane, the region stretches from Caloundra in the South to Hervey Bay in the north. It includes 219 kilometres of Pacific Ocean beaches, magnificent mountain scenery and approximately 21 national and conservation parks, including World Heritage Listed Fraser Island.

A significant contributor to the growth of the region is inward migration – the 'seachange' phenomenon – perhaps reflecting the attractiveness of its property values and the perception that the region provides a healthy lifestyle and environment.

Population and projections

As at 30 June 2004, the estimated resident population of the Sunshine-Fraser Coast was 385,733 persons (9.9% of the State's population in 0.6% of the State's area). The annual average rate of change in population in the Sunshine-Fraser Coast Region between 30 June 1999 and 30 June 2004 was 3.0%, compared with 2.1% for the State.

Population projections indicate that the population will increase to 644,290 in 2026. The annual average growth rate between 2001 and 2026 is projected to be 2.5%, compared with 1.5% for the State. As a result, the region's share of Queensland's population is projected to be 12.2% in 2026 (from 9.6% in 2001).

Economy

The Sunshine-Fraser Coast economy is characterised by a declining agricultural sector, a low manufacturing base, a significant service sector, a heavy reliance on the construction sector, the dominance of the tourism industry, a higher than average unemployment level and a higher proportion of small and micro businesses (with 75% of businesses having less than five employees and 90% having less than 10

The largest numbers of businesses in the Fraser Coast region are in retail, agriculture, forestry, and fishing. The 2001 census revealed that the retail trade was the largest employer in the Fraser Coast region with 17.6% of the region's employed labour force. Tourism is becoming of great importance as it is becoming one of the fastest growing industries in the region. The importance of tourism is likely to increase as

direct flights from Sydney and Melbourne to Hervey Bay commenced in July 2005. The Fraser Coast region has a larger aging population (60 – 69 years) and young adults (20 -34 years) are under represented in the region. There is also a high unemployment rate of persons aged 15 – 24 years, 17% in 1991 to 18.5% in 2002 as compared with the current 15.3% Queensland rate.

Labour force

The overall unemployment rate in the Sunshine-Fraser Coast region at the time of the 2001 census was 11.7% (8.2% for the State). The participation rate for the region was 54.2% (63.1% for the State). The Sunshine-Fraser Coast had 8.1% of Queensland's employed persons and 12% of Queensland's unemployed persons.

2. Characteristics of the HEIs in the Region (the number of HEIs; a basic profile of each institution to be involved in the project in terms of student numbers, balance between teaching and research functions, territorial focus etc)

The University of Sunshine Coast (USC) and the University of Southern Queensland (USQ Wide Bay) both maintain a campus in the region.

USC began life as the Sunshine Coast University College, which was founded in 1994 and opened in 1996. In 1999, USC was granted full university status and changed its name to the University of the Sunshine Coast.

Currently there are three Faculties – Arts and Social Sciences, Business and Science – offering 23 undergraduate, 23 postgraduate and 13 external programs. As at 2004, 3862 students attended USC. This included 3061 undergraduate, 473 postgraduate, and 329 non-award students. 3455 students studied on campus and 407 off campus.

Historically, student load has increased rapidly from 437 EFTSL (equivalent full time student load) in 1996 to 2840 EFTSL in 2004. Total load for 2005 is 3315 EFTSL, and it is anticipated that total load will grow to 5000 EFTSL by 2009.

The University's basic operational philosophy and general directions were and continue to be shaped by extensive community consultation. In the early stages of its operations (1994/5), discussions occurred with hundreds of community groups at the same time that demographic analyses and environmental scans were being conducted to determine future directions. Distinctive priorities and directions emerged for academic developments, with flexibility of structure and inclusiveness of community as hallmarks of that planning.

The community was also concerned about the physical environment of the University and its surroundings and had high expectations that the University would set new standards of environmental responsibility.

With an extensive suite of programs and courses in place, the focus over the last few years has been on research and innovation.

As part of its stated Mission as a major catalyst for economic development within the region, the University runs a highly successful small business accelerator – the Innovation Centre Sunshine Coast Pty Ltd – which was voted 2004 Regional Incubator of the Year. It has also created two research institutes – the Institute for Sustainability, Health & Regional Engagement (iSHaRE) and the Sunshine Coast Regional Institute for Business Enterprise (SCRIBE) – and three research centres – the Centre for Healthy Activities, Sport & Exercise (CHASE), the Centre for Multicultural & Community Development and the National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre.

The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) as a whole has three campuses: the main Toowoomba Campus, Wide Bay Campus and Springfield Campus. The USQ Wide Bay Campus was constructed in Hervey Bay in 1996/1997 after an earlier presence from 1988 within the Hervey Bay TAFE College. The Hervey Bay City Precinct, developed in conjunction with the Hervey Bay City Council, co-located the USQ campus with a library, art gallery and cultural centre to be shared by USQ students and the general community.

The campus provides a focus for on campus and distance education students enrolled for the local region. Currently there are four Faculties at the Wide Bay campus – Arts, Business, Education and Science – offering a total of 50 programs. Over the last 8 years, all faculties have grown in the amount of programs offered and student enrolments. Strengths include Education (Early Childhood, Primary, Middle and Senior Schooling levels), Accounting, General Commerce, Marketing, Mass Communication, Tourism Management, Nursing, Tertiary Preparation and Community Welfare and Development programs. As at 2005, approximately 700 students attend USQ, with approximately an extra 300 studying externally.

The University of Southern Queensland is a learner-focused and community-oriented university, which is committed to flexible distance and on-campus education. USQ Wide Bay's vision is to be seen as a major contributor to our status as Australia's leading transnational educator, including a rapidly developing international profile for the campus. USQ Wide Bay should be seen as providing an unrivalled degree of support to students and as giving participants the most impressive educational experience imaginable. Our work should be characterised by innovation, care and lasting relationships.

USQ's goal is to contribute to the community by developing a University City built on community partnerships, service and engagement. As a relatively small regional campus, USQ Wide Bay offers students and staff from diverse backgrounds the opportunity to become members of a supportive, friendly community which fosters equitable opportunities. Equity demands that all members of our communities are treated with dignity and respect. Regional engagement will prove integral in providing USQ with opportunities to continue involvement with research projects, community events and celebrations embracing the multicultural nature of the region. USQ Wide Bay initiatives include: developing strong educational communities, contributing to the building of social and cultural capital development of our communities and contributing to the environmental and economic development of Fraser Coast.

Two other universities operate in the Sunshine-Fraser Coast. The University of Central Queensland has a small teaching node in the centre of the region, and the Queensland University of Technology has a small campus on the border of the region to the south west.

3. A Brief History of HEIs' Engagement in the Regional Development;

USC's stated Mission is 'to be the major catalyst for the innovative and sustainable economic, cultural and educational advancement of the region, through the pursuit of international standards in teaching and research.' Accordingly, engagement is a key element of the University's strategic framework.

Established as a result of over 20 years of community activism, the University is distinctive in the way that community and regional needs have shaped its teaching and learning, research and engagement initiatives.

First as Planning President and then as Inaugural Vice Chancellor, Professor Paul Thomas has high visibility within the region. His approach has always been based on engagement through productive partnerships to further the region's interests. USC has strong and direct links with regional Councils, State and Commonwealth government agencies, other education and training service providers, the business community, and a range of community groups.

This engagement philosophy is strongly reflected in the teaching and research activities of the academic staff, many of whom have external non-academic experiences prior to entering academia. The two research institutes and three research centres at USC are extremely regionally engaged, and virtually all research projects generated by these entities involving community, business and or government stakeholders and participants. The Research and Research Training Management Plan and the Teaching and Learning Management Plan are solidly grounded in regional engagement, and staff are formally recognised and rewarded for engagement activity.

USQ Wide Bay, from its inception approximately 8 years ago, has always strived for open engagement and meaningful partnerships with the community. The USQ campus hosts a library, art gallery and cultural centre, which are shared by USQ students and the general community. Our premises are also made available for public organisations to host events

Over time, the University has been involved in regional activity in the areas of placement of students in local schools businesses and hospitals, educational planning with the local TAFE institute, delivery of public lectures seminars and presentations, schools outreach programs and active membership in the Maryborough and Hervey Bay Chambers of Commerce, health forums, sponsoring our local Whale Festival, providing regional participation in our campus Open Days, working with Education Hervey Bay and the ETRF (Education and Training Reforms for the Future).

University staff are also serving on State and Commonwealth Committees eg: Ministerial Regional Community Forum, Wide Bay Burnett Area Consultative Committee, ICT Infrastructure Steering Committee, Fraser Coast South Burnett

Regional Tourism Board, Business Advisory Boards and the boards of educational institutions. Students are also involved in SIFE – students in free enterprise, which encourages students to form networks with community, business and educational organisations through the development of projects which passes on students' knowledge of free enterprise to others.

The USQ Wide Bay's Strategic Plan has a committed vision to provide high quality and relevant opportunities for people in the region to engage in continuing higher education studies and to strive to achieve an unparalleled level of engagement with its community. Regional engagement will prove integral in providing USQ with opportunities to continue involvement with research projects, community events and celebrations embracing the multicultural nature of the region.

4. The Scope and Level of Involvement of Regional Stakeholders in the Project

Regional stakeholders are heavily involved in the project. The regional steering committee consists of local, state and federal government representatives, regional businesses and business councils, and education representatives. The project is largely funded from non-HEI sources.

5. Resources for Further Information on the Region (i.e. web-site, published report etc)

About the Universities and the education and training industry:

USC website: <http://www.usc.edu.au>

USQ website: <http://www.usq.edu.au>

Sunshine Coast Education Cluster Website: <http://www.studysunshinecoast.com>

Typical Governance:

Sunshine Coast Regional Organisation of Councils (SunROC) website:

<http://www.sunroc.com/>

Wide Bay Burnett Regional Organisation of Councils (WBBROC) website:

<http://www.wbbroc.org.au>

About the Sunshine-Fraser Coast:

Tourism Sunshine Coast website: <http://www.sunshinecoast.org/>

Tourism Fraser Coast website: <http://www.frasercoastholidays.info>