

**Local Jobs Plan**

**Far West Orana Employment Region**

**New South Wales**

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The Department of Education, Skills and Employment acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of country throughout Australia and acknowledges their ongoing connection to land, water, and community in Far West Orana – Kamilaroi, Wailwan, Wongaibon, Wiradjuri, and Wiljali. We pay our respects to the people, the cultures and the Elders past, present and emerging, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Far West Orana region.

# The Local Jobs Program

As part of supporting Australia’s economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Government’s Local Jobs Program (LJP) brings together expertise, resources and access to funding at the local level to accelerate reskilling, upskilling and employment pathways in 51 Employment Regions.

Recognising the importance of local knowledge in getting people back into jobs quickly, the LJP includes the following key elements in each region:

* a local Employment Facilitator
* a Local Jobs and Skills Taskforce
* a Local Jobs Plan
* a Local Recovery Fund to support small scale activities
* access to the National Priority Funding Pool.

The Taskforces, each chaired by the respective region’s Employment Facilitator, develop and update a Local Jobs Plan for their region that identifies key employment and training priorities and provides a framework for driving employment outcomes in the context of the local labour market.

This Local Jobs Plan for the Far West Orana Employment Region identifies the key LJP priorities with a focus on creating employment opportunities, actively upskilling or reskilling local job seekers and meeting local employer demands.

# Key employment and training priorities

1. **Infrastructure Projects** - Develop industry-led and employer focused training and employment initiatives for regional infrastructure projects.
2. **Indigenous Job Seekers** - Create training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations to reskill, upskill and be supported to achieve equitable access to the local labour market.
3. **Health Care and Social Assistance** - Promote the Health Care and Social Assistance sector via facilitating education, training and job opportunities for local job seekers.
4. **Agriculture** - Broker industry and employment opportunities within the Agriculture sector by connecting local projects to job seekers.
5. **Youth** - Develop local strategies to engage and support youth into local jobs and career pathways.

A full description of these key priorities, the strategies to address these and a list of key stakeholders can be found at **Attachment A**.

# Employment Region overview

The Far West Orana Employment Region (ER) includes the major centres of Dubbo in the east and Broken Hill a further 7.5 hours by car to the west. Dubbo is positioned as a central connection’s hub for a larger number of geographically dispersed rural communities. The region is comprised of nine Local Government Areas (LGAs) including Dubbo Regional, Warrumbungle, Coonamble, Gilgandra, Narromine, Warren, Broken Hill, Walgett and Bogan.

The Far West Orana ER includes the districts of Dubbo that has about half of the population of the region with (45,118) residents, Wellington (9,413), Coonabarabran (7,850), Narromine (6,533), Walgett-Lightning Ridge (6,145), Nyngan-Warren (4,778), Gilgandra (4,390), Coonamble (4,069) and to the far west of the state, Broken Hill (17,269).[[1]](#footnote-2) Dubbo (inclusive of Dubbo East, South, West and Region) was the only area in Far West Orana that grew between June 2019 and June 2020 with an increase of 0.9 per cent. In contrast, estimated resident populations fell in all other Far West Orana areas. The largest percentage decline was in Walgett-Lighting Ridge and Nyngan-Warren with a decline of 2.1 per cent and 2.0 percent respectively.



The strongest labour market in the region is Dubbo that has a range of vocational and non-vocational support agencies which are not as readily available in the smaller areas. The Far West Orana region is still recovering from nearly five years of severe drought, with COVID-19 also having a significant impact on the region.

Agriculture is very important with Dubbo home to Fletcher International Exports, a lamb processing production company (abattoir), which is the largest employer in the city. Other industries in the area include construction, retail, health and education; including the following notable large employers: MAAS Construction, Bunnings, Tobins Transport, Rod Pilon Transport, JR Richards Waste and Recycling Services, Woolworths, Big W, Kmart, Coles and Ben Furney Flour Mills.

Lightning Ridge is a world-renowned centre for opal mining and has the largest known deposits of black opals in the world. The town of Broken Hill has always been a mining stronghold with the world’s largest ore seam of silver, lead and zinc, being the place where BHP Billiton began. It still supports a large mining industry but has sought to diversify its industry base by encouraging tourism and the arts. Tourism has risen in the region with unique architecture, mining history and arts drawing 665,016 domestic visitors in 2019/20.[[2]](#footnote-3) Wellington, south-east of Dubbo has a growing tourism industry driven from key attractions such as the Wellington Caves, Lake Burrendong, Mt Arthur Reserve, several wineries and boutique galleries.

Regional planning in Far West Orana is focused on five key components for the future, including: Transport and logistics; Agribusiness; Tourism; Mining and Renewables; and growing the Services Sector.[[3]](#footnote-4) Agribusiness, manufacturing, mineral and renewable energy resources create a large proportion of job opportunities to the region. An increase in government infrastructure projects will focus on expanding transportation, freight and logistics routes and promote the region as a renewable energy hub. See **Attachment C** for more information.

# Key challenges in the Far West Orana Employment Region

Key challenges within the region include:

* + Limited public transport in most towns across the region, with very few reliable and/or frequent public transport options available for job seekers residing outside of the major centres of Dubbo and Broken Hill. The limitation of minimal public transport options is a key challenge that is exacerbated by a high percentage of job seekers who do not hold drivers’ licences. Other major towns of Wellington, Narromine and Gilgandra are within a 30-50-minute drive from Dubbo with Coonamble and Walgett a further 1 hour 45 minutes and 3 hours respectively.
	+ There is an issue in the region around limited access to local tertiary education and vocational training opportunities, which results in job seekers unable to acquire the appropriate skills as easily as their metropolitan counterparts. Some sectors including construction, meat processing, IT, aged care and disability services report difficulties in finding suitably skilled staff who hold the appropriate training and/or qualifications for the roles.
		- Further to this challenge, reports from employers indicate there is a discrepancy between industry standards and operational requirements. Training delivery is not always available in some regional localities and access to trainers who can qualify other trainers is low.
	+ Educational attainment rates are relatively low within the region with only 31.9 per cent completing year 12 or equivalent.[[4]](#footnote-5) This lends itself to a trend of mismatched qualifications and employment opportunities, with local employers requiring a Bachelor degree or higher in 39.7 per cent of online job advertisements in 2021.[[5]](#footnote-6)
	+ The region has a disproportionately high Indigenous job seeker cohort. Census 2016 data indicated the Far West Orana region had a population of 116,775, with an Indigenous representation of 20.5 per cent.[[6]](#footnote-7) The region also has high Indigenous Youth unemployment, which represents 68.3 per cent of the Transition to Work caseload as of 30 September 2021. [[7]](#footnote-8)
	+ A large part of the workforce is reliant on seasonal work due to the predominance of agricultural businesses in the region. When industries affected by drought are not employing seasonally as usual, the traditional workforce finds it difficult to transition to other industries.
	+ Underemployment, in which the underutilisation of workers within the employed population has been anecdotally cited as a concern within the region. Underemployment is not reflected in the region’s current employment and unemployment figures.

# Local stakeholders and opportunities

Key stakeholders within the area include local government, Local Aboriginal Lands Councils, NSW Health, other NSW Government departments (particularly Department of Regional NSW, Training Services NSW and Transport for NSW), RDA Orana, NSW Business Chamber, the Australian Rail Track Corporation, AusIndustry and other Australian Government entities and major employers (see above for examples).

As implied by the above list, the span of operations of some major stakeholders is not limited to the ER. Other stakeholders include Charles Sturt University, registered training organisations (RTOs), with NSW TAFE being the provider for the department’s Skills for Education and Employment program and the Foundation Skills for your Future program in the region.

There are eight DESE **employment programs** delivered by nine employment service providers in the region including three jobactive providers (BEST Employment Limited, Sureway Employment and Training and Joblink Plus). Apart from jobactive, employment services in the region include ParentsNext, Transition to Work, New Enterprise Incentive Scheme, Career Transition Assistance, Harvest Trail Services and Employability Skills Training. In addition, the department’s Online Employment Service assists many job ready job seekers.

**Other Australian Government programs** include Disability Employment Services (both the Disability Management Service and the Employment Support Service), the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network and AusIndustry services.

# Attachment A – Key employment and training priorities: strategies and stakeholders

## PRIORITY 1: Infrastructure Projects

**Identify workforce needs across key infrastructure projects to develop targeted, industry led and employer focused requirements for training, and develop skills and employment initiatives for job seekers.**

**Strategies:**

* Build stronger pathways to employment in the region through the identification of intervention points. Develop a regional register of current, pending, and potential infrastructure and development projects to identify recruitment needs, required skills and timelines to guide local job seekers into jobs.
* Map existing federal, state and local governments resources to ensure training and employment opportunities are fully leveraged locally.
* Develop innovative and agile training, reskilling, upskilling and work experience projects including where appropriate, the facilitation of micro-credential courses, graduate certificates and employer focused traineeships, apprenticeships and internships.
* Hold bi-annual planning sessions with key stakeholders to identify where job creation and pre-employment/training courses can be delivered to ensure localised job creation.
* Liaise with employers to identify the range of entry levels to jobs and promote the consideration of hiring job seekers with partial qualifications who can then learn practical experience and develop their qualifications while employed.
* Encourage collaboration between employers and potential mentors who can assist employers with strategies and develop employment solutions through a longer-term lens.

**Stakeholders:**

* Job seekers, federal, state and local governments, RTOs, employers, construction and infrastructure services, peak construction and infrastructure industry bodies.

## PRIORITY 2: Indigenous Job Seekers

**Support equitable access to the local labour market for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job seekers by building clearer pathways to employment and training opportunities.**

**Strategies:**

* Work with Aboriginal Assemblies, Local Aboriginal Lands Councils and Elders in the community including but not limited to, Three Rivers Regional Assembly, Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, Murdi Paaki Young Leaders Assembly, and REDI.E. to create meaningful employment opportunities in areas that have significance for Indigenous Australians.
* Ensure educational resources and cultural guidance is provided to assist businesses and employers in their recruitment and onboarding processes.
* Create a register of potential projects, including projects that have identified workforce diversity goals.
* Promote training, upskilling, workforce diversity and the range of government resources available to support recruitment and job seeker retention.
* Create a local register of government, education, health and youth services that can be used as employment supports.
* Identify projects that target Indigenous job seekers for training and employment.
* Promote education, training and employment programs and leverage local partnerships with Charles Sturt University, TAFE NSW and RTOs to provide formal education and training opportunities to geographically dispersed towns in the region, coupled with cultural awareness programs for maximum efficacy. This includes working with Indigenous training organisations to provide services in the community.
* Work with Aboriginal education and training organisations to create sustainable, ongoing employment models and opportunities in the region.

**Stakeholders:**

* Job seekers, Aboriginal Assemblies, Local Aboriginal Land Councils, Elders, RTOs and employers.

## PRIORITY 3: Health Care and Social Assistance

**Promote Australian Government initiatives and leverage key partnerships to facilitate reskilling and upskilling of job seekers into Health Care and Social Assistance sectors to build a job-ready skilled workforce.**

**Strategies:**

* Work with government programs, NSW Skills Brokers and local employers to increase visibility of employment options within the sector and provide training pathways and employment opportunities for job seekers.
* Work with education and training organisations to ensure there are suitable and attractive options for job seekers to upskill or reskill to meet industry needs. This includes, where appropriate, the facilitation of micro-credential courses, graduate certificates and industry-led traineeships, apprenticeships, and internships.
* Generate awareness for job seekers to explore multiple career pathways in this sector, as it is not limited to only hygiene or personal care. There are a number of jobs with administrative, operational or preparatory duties.
* Generate awareness for youth in the career pathways available in the sector, linking employment with traineeships, apprenticeships and internship opportunities to showcase the variety of jobs and careers on offer.
* Hold government and industry-led education sessions for sole traders and start-ups to develop business and local employment options within the care, health and community services space.

**Stakeholders:**

* Job seekers, federal, state and local governments, Skills Brokers, registered training organisations, employers, schools, health care and social assistance services and peak health care industry bodes.

## PRIORITY 4: Agriculture

**Facilitate job opportunities within the Agriculture sector by connecting local projects, training and employment pipelines to job seekers.**

**Strategies:**

* Explore opportunities to integrate Agribusinesses with localised infrastructure projects, such as transportation and logistics chains, to boost employment options locally.
* Identify potential projects and create a workforce map of seasonal labour market needs.
* Identify government funding opportunities, including grant options for local businesses.
* Facilitate partnerships with local RTOs, educational institutions and other training organisations to upskill and train the local labour force; and investigate and identify transferrable skill sets that can be brought from other sectors into Agriculture.
* Hold government and industry-led education sessions to inform local job seekers of the various types of work and career pathways offered in the Agriculture industry.

**Stakeholders:**

* Job seekers, federal, state and local governments, RTOs, agribusiness services, peak agriculture industry bodies and employers.

## PRIORITY 5: Youth

**Develop and implement local strategies to support youth to connect with education and training linked to local employment opportunities.**

**Strategies:**

* Create a register of locally available youth services, programs and initiatives to inform and design potential education, training and employment pathways.
* Build stronger partnerships between schools, employers and training organisations to ensure regional specific employment and training opportunities are communicated to students in a timely manner. This includes the facilitation of work placement opportunities within identified local industries.
* Utilise youth support services and Indigenous organisations to assist in mentorship programs to help steer youth into sustainable employment pathways.
* Hold industry-led career/education sessions for youth to highlight industry specific career options and link available jobs to young job seekers.

**Stakeholders:**

* Job seekers, federal, state and local governments, RTOs, employers, schools, extracurricular clubs and organisations for youth.

# This Labour Market Data Dashboard was published in April 2022 and provides a summary of the key indicators for the Far West Orana labour market.   The dashboard combines a range of data for each of the 51 Employment Regions, to provide an overview of local labour market conditions. Dashboards are also available for each state and territory, and at the national level. The data used include the Labour Force Survey, Employment Services Caseload, Internet Vacancy Index and Small Area Labour Markets.  For any enquiries related to this dashboard, please contact EmploymentPathwaysAnalysis@skillscommission.gov.au”Attachment B – Labour Market Data Dashboard (April 2022)

# Attachment C – General Information

## Selected Major Projects

The region has several major projects underway or in prospect.

### *Construction*

* Construction is underway on Dubbo’s $35 million Western Cancer Centre. This follows demolition of the old Dialysis Unit and Operating Theatres, both of which have moved into new and expanded facilities as part of the $150 million Dubbo Hospital Redevelopment Stages 3 and 4. The Western Cancer Centre project will be delivered in parallel with the Dubbo Hospital Redevelopment Stages 3 and 4. Construction is scheduled for completion in 2021.[[8]](#footnote-9)
* The 1700km Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail project is the largest rail infrastructure project in Australia. The Parkes (Central West Employment Region) to Narromine (Far West Orana ER) (P2N) will comprise of approximately 300km of new track and is one of 13 projects with construction well advanced. Upgrading of 98.4km of existing rail track is currently underway, which includes a full rebuild of the rail tracks, rail formation and supporting structures in the existing rail corridor. Almost 1,600 people have worked on the project since December 2018.
* The NSW Government has awarded a contract to deliver the Regional Rail Fleet Project to Momentum Trains. Momentum Trains is an international consortium comprising of CAF, UGL Rail Services, Pacific Partnerships, CAF Investment Projects and DIF Infrastructure V Coöperatief. The project will work with the NSW Government to replace the ageing NSW regional fleet of XPT, XPLORER and Endeavour trains.
	+ CAF will be supplying new passenger intercity and regional trains. The new fleet will consist of 117 carriages which will form 29 new trains, 10 regional intercity trains, 9 short regional trains and 10 long regional trains. The final fit-out will occur at the Mindyarra Maintenance Centre in Dubbo with the first new trains expected to be running from 2023.
	+ CPB Contractors have been engaged to design and construct a new train maintenance facility in Dubbo. Construction includes earthworks, pavements and drainage, steel structures, and roofing and cladding for the main build of the Mindyarra Maintenance Centre which commenced in 2020 and is expected to take 30 months to complete.
	+ UGL will undertake all asset management and maintenance activities for the new regional rail fleet of 117 rail cars, training simulators and the maintenance facility in Dubbo for at least 15 years.
	+ The project has a working group to look at how to promote the project and address pre-employment training opportunities. This is still in its infancy with career pathways and job vacancies yet to be confirmed.
* On 22 May 2020, the Australian Government announced a new $500 million Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program (LRCI Program). This program will support local councils to deliver priority local road and community infrastructure projects across Australia, supporting jobs and the resilience of local economies to help communities bounce back from the COVID-19 pandemic. The program was expanded further in the 2020-21 and 2021-22 budgets for a total commitment of $2.5 billion [[9]](#footnote-10).
* In June 2020, the Australian Government announced funding for 61 access and safety upgrade projects across Regional Australia as part of Round 1 of the Regional Airports Program. These include:
	+ $420,000 for Narromine for lighting upgrade, installation of Secondary Illuminated Wind Indicator and fencing upgrade.
	+ $250,000 for Dubbo for patching, resealing and line marking.
	+ $83,000 for Gilgandra for runway lighting upgrade.

Round 2 projects funded in Far West Orana include:

* $300,000 for Dubbo for a General Aviation apron upgrade (Stage 2) including heavy patching and sealing of apron and upgrading stormwater infrastructure.
* $389,000 for Narromine for construction of a new taxiway, resealing the existing taxiways and apron area, tree removal and water supply upgrade.[[10]](#footnote-11)
* The NSW Government is providing $145 million to seal and upgrade the remaining 209 kilometres of the Cobb and Silver City highways in far western NSW. Transport for NSW is delivering this program. The sealing of the Cobb Highway is scheduled to be completed in December 2022 and to date 57km of the 110km highway has been sealed. Construction of a bridge on Packsaddle Creek is complete.[[11]](#footnote-12)

### *Mining*

* The Nyngan Scandium Resource Project is touted as the world’s first scandium-only mine development. Production is estimated at $87.1 million with a production life estimate of approximately 20 years. The mine has created 60-75 jobs.[[12]](#footnote-13)

### *Health*

* Dubbo Hospital will deliver a $30 million parking project to deliver a new multi-story car park on the western side of the hospital campus and a new car park on the south eastern side. The ground level carpark was completed in October 2021 with the remainder of the carpark construction on track for completion in 2022.[[13]](#footnote-14)
* The NSW Government is currently delivering the $150 million Dubbo Hospital Redevelopment Stages 3 and 4 with construction still underway. The $35 million Western Cancer Centre Dubbo was completed in September 2021.[[14]](#footnote-15)

### *Renewable Energy and Resources*

* The Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) in central-west Orana is planned to commence in 2022 and will unlock 3,000 megawatts of new electricity capacity and will bring in up to $5.2 billion in private investment to the region by 2030. The REZ is expected to support around 3,900 construction jobs in the central-west Orana region at its peak. The Far West Orana areas targeted for this project are Narromine, Dubbo, Gilgandra and Wellington.[[15]](#footnote-16)
* The NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment has approved a new $188 million solar farm at Maryvale, 15km north-west of Wellington. It will provide around 125 megawatts (MW) of clean renewable energy. The project will support up to 150 local construction jobs over the 12-month construction period.[[16]](#footnote-17)
* Uungula Wind Farm is a proposed development of up to 97 wind turbines and associated infrastructure on agricultural land approximately 14km east of Wellington, NSW. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) has been prepared and the development application has been lodged with the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE). Construction is forecast to commence in 2021 with the wind farm to be fully commissioned and operational in 2023.[[17]](#footnote-18)

## Bushfires and Drought

In January 2020, the NSW Government announced $1 billion over the next two years to rebuild bushfire impacted communities across NSW. The priority will be repairing and rebuilding vital infrastructure, such as roads, rail-lines, bridges, schools, health facilities and communications facilities. Far West Orana areas around Coonabarabran and Dubbo were affected by these bushfires.[[18]](#footnote-19)

As at 28 January 2020, 180 councils had access to $301 million in funding under the Drought Communities Programme Extension - applications for this grant closed June 2021. This funding was to help stimulate the local economy, create jobs and support local communities.[[19]](#footnote-20) After nearly five years of severe drought in the Far West Orana region, strong recovery in agricultural conditions has occurred in the area. However, Broken Hill is still classified as “drought affected (intensifying)” with the rest of the region classified as “recovering” or “non‑drought”.[[20]](#footnote-21)

The Department of Regional NSW, Local Land Services and Resilience NSW coordinate the Far West Drought Task Group. The region also holds a Resilience and Recovery Committee to address regional recovery issues.

## Business Impacts of COVID-19

The Far West Orana region has been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic with residual strain felt from years of drought. The region reported below average business confidence levels in March 2021 - this result was significantly lower than other regions in New South Wales.[[21]](#footnote-22)

COVID-19 restrictions have resulted in less movement of people, lost revenue for businesses and loss of or reduction in employment. Domestic and international border restrictions have affected seasonal employers and workforces. This has meant, and will mean going forward, fewer overseas seasonal workers available to meet the needs of the agricultural sector.

Some industries were affected more than others, with accommodation and food services and retail trade impacted in the region. The economic stimulus packages including JobKeeper and JobSeeker, assisted in managing what could have been a much more catastrophic event for rural, regional and remote Australia. As the COVID-19 pandemic evolved, the NSW Government developed various support packages to assist employees, employers and businesses. As of 13 July 2021, the NSW Government in conjunction with the Federal Government increased the COVID-19 disaster payment for workers and businesses.[[22]](#footnote-23) [[23]](#footnote-24) The package aimed to keep businesses operating within the region.

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