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THE LOWER CLARENCE VALLEY

A Commercial Perspective

First Edition

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About Helix Planning

Helix Planning is a commercial strategy and advisory practice helping businesses, organisations and regional leaders make better decisions.

Working across business strategy, commercial finance, leadership, facilitation and regional development, Helix Planning specialises in identifying the commercial relationships that influence long-term success. Rather than viewing challenges in isolation, the practice examines how investment, infrastructure, workforce, confidence and capital interact to shape business performance and economic outcomes. This publication reflects that philosophy.

About the Author

Sarah Eifermann is the Founder of Helix Planning and SFE Loans.

Over more than twenty years she has advised businesses, facilitated strategic planning, structured commercial finance and worked alongside organisations navigating growth, investment and change. Her work has developed a reputation for challenging assumptions, connecting seemingly unrelated issues and bringing commercial clarity to complex decisions.

Based in the Lower Clarence Valley, Sarah continues to work with businesses, investors and community leaders throughout regional Australia.

Introduction

Every regional economy tells a story, where some are defined by mining, others by manufacturing, agriculture or tourism.

Conventional economic analysis tends to separate issues into neat categories. Infrastructure is discussed independently from healthcare. Housing becomes a planning issue. Tourism belongs to economic development. Businesses experience something very different. A deteriorating road network influences freight costs, workforce mobility, healthcare access and visitor expenditure simultaneously. A major private health investment reshapes employment, housing demand, education and business confidence. Regional economies operate through relationships, not categories.

Understanding those relationships changes the quality of decision making.
This publication examines the Lower Clarence Valley through a commercial lens, drawing on business experience, investment analysis and regional observation to explore how the local economy actually functions. It does not attempt to catalogue every statistic or describe every industry. Those resources already exist. Instead, it asks a different set of questions. Why do some investments create momentum while others struggle to generate lasting value? Which existing assets remain underutilised? Where is private capital already signalling the region's future?

The Lower Clarence Valley is approaching a defining period. Population change, private investment, infrastructure, workforce availability and shifting industry composition are beginning to reshape the region in ways that are not yet widely recognised. The decisions made over the coming decade will determine whether those changes strengthen the regional economy or simply respond to it.

Seeing the Lower Clarence differently

Looking at the Wrong Map

Every regional economy has two maps
The first is the one everyone recognises. It shows local government boundaries, roads, rivers, towns and postcodes. It determines who collects rates, where planning controls begin and end, and which organisation is responsible for maintaining a particular piece of infrastructure.

The second map is rarely drawn.
It follows where people travel to work, where they shop, where businesses source suppliers, where patients seek healthcare and where investment naturally concentrates. It ignores administrative boundaries because commercial activity has never respected them.

The Lower Clarence is better understood through this second map.
Although forming part of the broader Clarence Valley Local Government Area, the Lower Clarence functions as a distinct commercial catchment centred on Maclean, extending across Yamba, Iluka, Townsend, Gulmarrad, Lawrence, Woombah and the surrounding villages. Businesses operate across this catchment every day, responding to customer demand, workforce availability and commercial opportunity rather than administrative boundaries; and understanding that distinction changes almost every conversation about regional development.

Population statistics explain where people live, however they do not explain where economic activity occurs. A town with a relatively modest resident population may support businesses servicing a catchment several times its size. Planning infrastructure around resident population alone can therefore underestimate the demands placed upon a regional commercial centre.

Maclean illustrates this particularly well.
Its resident population suggests a small country town. Its commercial role tells a very different story. Healthcare, professional services, financial institutions, retail, hospitality, essential services and community organisations collectively serve a much broader population than the township itself.[2] The town functions as the commercial heart of the Lower Clarence despite often being perceived, and planned, according to its resident population rather than its regional function.

Investment however follows function, not perception.
Businesses considering expansion examine customer catchments, accessibility, workforce and supporting services. Investors assess confidence, connectivity and long-term demand. Neither bases a decision solely on the number of people living within a town boundary. The Lower Clarence has long been described according to geography, but its future competitiveness will depend on understanding its commercial geography.

Helix Insight

Regional economies don't grow around populations. They grow around places that solve problems.

People travel to commercial centres because they need something they can't access elsewhere. Healthcare, finance, education, employment, professional advice and specialised services all expand a town's economic influence well beyond its population. The most important places in a regional economy are rarely the largest. They are the places that become indispensable

Footnotes

[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census of Population and Housing; Clarence Valley Council, Community Strategic Plan 2025–2035; NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, regional settlement data.

[2] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census; business and service observations informed by Helix Planning's commercial work across the Lower Clarence (2021–2026), including analysis of healthcare, professional services, retail and finance catchments.

Geography Doesn't Create Prosperity

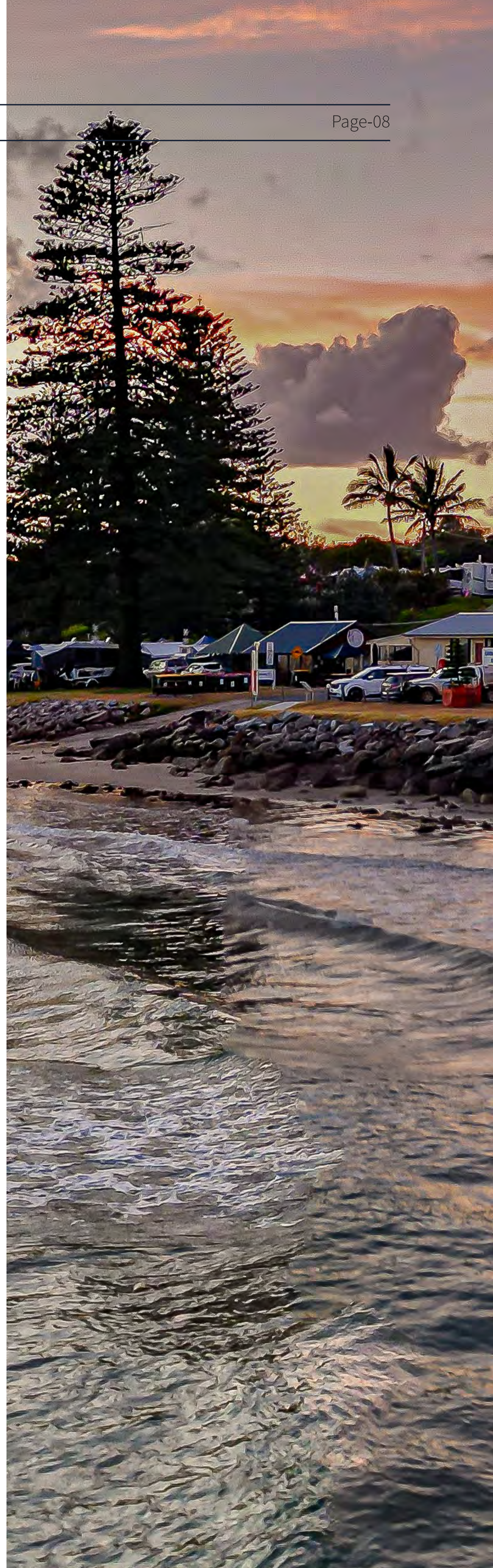
Regions often attribute their success to geography and the Lower Clarence Valley has no shortage of natural advantages.

A major river system, productive floodplains, a spectacular coastline, a temperate climate and a strategic position between Sydney and Brisbane have shaped the region's identity for generations. Collectively, they have supported agriculture, fishing, tourism and settlement, while creating an enviable lifestyle that continues to attract new residents. [1]

Yet geography has never guaranteed prosperity and if natural assets alone determined economic success, every coastal river town in Australia would be thriving. Many are not. The difference lies in how effectively those assets are transformed into productive economic activity.

The Pacific Highway illustrates this well. For decades, remoteness was considered one of the Lower Clarence's greatest disadvantages. The completion of the highway upgrade fundamentally changed that equation, reducing travel times, improving freight reliability and strengthening connections to major markets. [2] Accessibility to the region is no longer the primary constraint it once was.
Now, a different challenge is beginning to emerge: the Lower Clarence has become easier to reach than it is to move around.

As external accessibility has improved, local accessibility has become increasingly important. Businesses now absorb the cost



of ageing local roads, constrained parking, increasing freight movements and travel inefficiencies that rarely appear in traditional measures of economic performance. Productivity is influenced just as much by the final five kilometres as it is by the first five hundred. Lowering the speed limit from Yamba to Maclean add minutes to a trip that previously was convenient. If the convenience disappears so does the desire for inter town economic impact.

The same pattern appears elsewhere across the region.
The Clarence River remains one of Australia's defining waterways, yet much of its economic value continues to be measured through recreation and amenity rather than commercial activity, especially due to the bio security control zone for white spot it currently is experiencing. Agricultural land continues to produce high-quality commodities, although the greatest long-term value increasingly lies beyond production through processing, branding, agritourism and premium food experiences. The coastline attracts visitors, although visitor expenditure alone will never generate the same economic impact as visitor investment.

The Lower Clarence does not need more natural advantages but it certainly needs to extract greater economic value from the advantages it already possesses.

Helix Insight

Assets create potential. Productivity creates prosperity.

The Lower Clarence's competitive advantage has never been its river, its beaches or its location. Those assets simply establish the starting point. Regional prosperity is created when existing assets generate increasing economic value over time. The regions that outperform are rarely those with the greatest natural resources. They are the ones that consistently find new commercial uses for the assets they already have.

Emerging Trend

The next decade will reward regions that improve productivity before expanding infrastructure.

Large infrastructure projects will always remain important, but the Lower Clarence's next competitive gains are likely to come from making existing assets work harder. Better utilisation of the Clarence River, a commercially diversified airport precinct, stronger healthcare capability, improved local connectivity and higher-value tourism all represent opportunities to increase economic output without fundamentally changing the region's footprint.

Footnotes

[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census of Population and Housing; NSW Department of Primary Industries, regional agriculture profiles; Tourism Research Australia, regional visitation data.

[2] Transport for NSW, Pacific Highway Upgrade Program; Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics (BITRE), freight and regional transport data.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Confidence is the region's most valuable currency

Every investment begins long before money changes hands, and it always begins with confidence.

Not confidence in financial markets or interest rates, but confidence that a region has a future worth investing in. Investors look for signals and business owners do the same. They watch where capital is flowing, how quickly approvals are granted, whether infrastructure is improving, how local leadership responds to change and whether other investors are willing to commit alongside them. Individually these signals appear insignificant. Collectively they shape investment decisions worth millions of dollars.

Confidence is contagious, yet so is uncertainty, and the Lower Clarence has experienced both.
Private investment across the region has continued despite economic headwinds, suggesting many investors see opportunities that extend well beyond current market conditions. The Maclean Health Centre is perhaps the clearest recent example. More than a new medical facility, it represents one of the largest private commercial investments the Lower Clarence has seen in decades.[1] It reflects confidence in the region's long-term population, workforce, demand for specialist healthcare and broader economic future.

That investment reaches far beyond healthcare.
Construction businesses secure work, professional services expand and new employment opportunities emerge. Patients increasingly remain within the region rather than travelling elsewhere. Additional businesses begin considering whether this is a market worth entering and then capital has a habit of attracting more capital.

The opposite is equally true.
Uncertainty rarely appears in economic statistics until much later. Delayed planning decisions, the cost of holding investments due to delayed planning decisions, inconsistent policy, deteriorating infrastructure or prolonged uncertainty around major projects does alter investor behaviour. Businesses become more cautious, expansion is deferred and capital finds somewhere else to go. The opportunity is not lost in a single decision, it disappears incrementally.

Regional economies often focus on attracting investment while overlooking the conditions that encourage it, or discourage it; and confidence cannot be legislated. It is earned through consistent decision-making, strategic leadership and a demonstrated willingness to support productive private enterprise. Being agile as a governing organisation and changing direction quickly are evidence of this. Regions that understand this create an environment where investment becomes self-reinforcing. Those that don't often find themselves competing for the same capital with increasingly fewer advantages. The Lower Clarence's future will depend as much on the confidence it projects as the infrastructure it builds.

Helix Insight

Private investment is often the earliest indicator of a region's future.

Investors commit their own capital long before economic statistics confirm a trend. A significant private development is more than a construction project. It is a commercial judgement about future demand, workforce, population, consumer confidence and regional stability. Conversely, where they don't commit or change position is also very telling. Understanding where private capital is choosing to invest often reveals more about a region's future than historical economic data.

Footnotes

[1] Publicly available development approvals and investment associated with the Maclean Health Centre redevelopment, including Maclean Medical, Maclean Radiology and AveNuPlus; Clarence Valley Council planning records; Helix Planning commercial observations.

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING

If private investors are demonstrating confidence in the Lower Clarence, what signals are public decision-makers sending in return?

How the economy really works

Economic performance is rarely determined by a single industry.

Regional economies are shaped by the interaction between infrastructure, labour, capital, services and private enterprise. Decisions made in one sector almost always produce consequences somewhere else. A road project influences healthcare, housing influences manufacturing. Tourism affects retail investment and an airport changes freight options. Looking at each independently makes those relationships difficult to recognise.

Understanding how they connect is where commercial advantage begins.

Mobility Drives Productivity

Most infrastructure conversations begin with roads, as regional economies prosper with movement.

Every day across the Lower Clarence, people travel to work, businesses move freight, patients attend appointments, students reach classrooms and visitors explore the region. Each journey represents individual economic activity. When movement becomes slower, less reliable or more expensive, productivity declines. The cost rarely appears in government budgets first, but it certainly appears on business balance sheets.

Mobility is one of the few factors influencing almost every sector of the regional economy.
The completion of the Pacific Highway fundamentally changed the Lower Clarence's relationship with the rest of Australia's eastern seaboard. Freight became more efficient as travel times reduced. Access to Brisbane, Sydney and major regional centres improved considerably.[1] The region became easier to reach than at any other point in its history.

That investment solved one problem, but it exposed another.
The Lower Clarence is now well connected to the outside world, yet moving efficiently within the region remains an increasing challenge.For many businesses, productivity is determined by the last few kilometres rather than the first few hundred. Deliveries entering Maclean, trades travelling between jobs, patients attending medical appointments, tourists navigating unfamiliar roads and freight moving between industrial areas all experience the cumulative effect of local infrastructure every day. Small delays, repeated thousands of times, become significant economic costs.

Mobility extends well beyond roads.
A visitor can arrive in Grafton by rail but has limited options for continuing efficiently through the Lower Clarence without a private vehicle. Residents without access to a car face similar challenges when travelling between townships for employment, education, shopping or healthcare. Public transport exists, although its structure often reflects administrative boundaries and historical service patterns rather than the way people and businesses actually move throughout the regional economy.

The implications reach further than convenience.
Healthcare investment becomes more valuable when patients can reach appointments easily. Businesses gain access to larger labour markets when workers can travel efficiently between communities. Tourism benefits when visitors can move beyond a single destination without relying entirely on private vehicles. Older residents retain independence for longer when mobility options remain

available. Every improvement increases participation in the regional economy.

Parking also belongs in this conversation.
It is frequently treated as a town planning issue when it is fundamentally an accessibility issue. Every unavailable parking space represents additional time, reduced convenience and, in many cases, lost economic activity. Businesses located within regional commercial centres depend upon people being able to access them simply and efficiently. As Maclean's role continues to expand, the ability to move people through the town becomes increasingly important to the productivity of the broader Lower Clarence economy. If there is no land to facilitate extended parking, what other solutions have been considered?

Mobility should also be considered strategically rather than mode by mode.
Roads, rail, buses, active transport, airports and freight networks are often planned independently despite serving the same purpose. An integrated approach could strengthen the value of each asset. Timed bus services connecting arriving trains, airport transfers, hospital shuttles, seasonal tourism services and improved links between Maclean, Yamba and Grafton would not simply improve transport. They would expand the functional labour market, improve healthcare accessibility and strengthen the visitor economy.

The Lower Clarence has already invested heavily in becoming accessible. Its next competitive advantage may come from becoming connected.

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING

If someone arrived at Grafton Railway Station today without a car, how easily could they participate in the Lower Clarence economy?

If someone arrived at Maclean via car, and couldn't find a park, but had difficulty walking longer distances, how easily could they access the commercial precinct? Or, would they leave?

Helix Insight

Transport infrastructure moves vehicles. Mobility infrastructure moves economies.

Roads, rail, buses, airports and footpaths are often planned as separate assets. Businesses don't experience them that way. They experience a single journey. The easier it is for people, goods and services to move through a region, the greater the economic capacity of every industry relying on that movement.

Emerging Trend

The next productivity gains are likely to come from integration, not expansion.

Major infrastructure projects will continue to shape the region, but some of the greatest economic returns may come from connecting existing assets more effectively. Coordinated public transport, better first and last kilometre connections, integrated freight planning and improved access between the Lower Clarence's commercial centres have the potential to increase productivity without requiring entirely new infrastructure.

Footnotes

[1] Transport for NSW, Pacific Highway Upgrade Program; Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics (BITRE), regional freight and transport data.

[2] Transport for NSW regional bus and rail network information; NSW TrainLink service schedules; Clarence Valley Council transport planning documents.

Healthcare is becoming the Lower Clarence's anchor industry

Healthcare is no longer following economic growth only, it is becoming one of the industries creating it.

For decades, hospitals, medical centres and aged care facilities were largely viewed as community infrastructure. They existed to service a growing population and economic development occurred elsewhere. Manufacturing created jobs, agriculture generated exports and tourism attracted visitors. Healthcare supported the people working within those industries.

The Lower Clarence is now telling a different story.
One of the strongest signals in any regional economy is where private capital chooses to invest. Investors commit millions of dollars only after assessing long-term demand, demographic change, workforce availability and commercial viability. Those decisions are rarely speculative. They reflect confidence in where the economy is heading, not simply where it has been.

The Maclean Health Centre is one of the clearest examples the Lower Clarence has seen.
Representing the largest private commercial investment undertaken in the region to date, the development fundamentally changes the scale and capability of healthcare available within the Lower Clarence.[1] General practice, nurse led access clinic, diagnostic imaging, allied health and specialist services have been brought together in a way that would have been difficult to imagine only a decade ago. More importantly, the investment sends a message extending well beyond healthcare itself.

Capital believes the Lower Clarence has a future worth investing in; and that confidence creates consequences.
Medical specialists become more willing to establish local practices because supporting services already exist. Diagnostic capability attracts additional clinicians. Allied health providers benefit from proximity to complementary services. Employers gain greater confidence that staff and their families can access quality healthcare locally. Residents increasingly choose to remain in the region rather than travelling elsewhere for treatment. New residents begin viewing the Lower Clarence as somewhere they can build a long-term future rather than somewhere they may eventually have to leave. Healthcare begins influencing population, not simply responding to it. This is how anchor industries develop. An anchor industry creates economic activity beyond its own sector and the economic impact extends well beyond
the consultation room.

Perhaps the most significant change to recognise though is philosophical.
Public investment has traditionally shaped the direction of regional healthcare. Increasingly, private investment is taking that role. The Maclean Health Centre demonstrates what can occur when private enterprise identifies unmet demand and commits substantial

capital to solving it. The public sector remains critical to healthcare delivery, but private investment is now helping determine where regional capability develops and how quickly it evolves. That shift deserves greater attention: healthcare should no longer be viewed solely as a social service. Within the Lower Clarence, it is becoming one of the region's most significant economic assets.

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING

If private healthcare investment is now leading one of the Lower Clarence's largest periods of commercial growth, what other industries are likely to follow?

Helix Insight

The largest healthcare investment in the Lower Clarence wasn't responding to the economy.
It was voting on its future.

Private investors rarely commit millions of dollars because of today's demand. They invest because they believe tomorrow's demand will justify today's risk. Large healthcare developments therefore represent more than new buildings or additional services. They are one of the strongest commercial endorsements a regional economy can receive.

Emerging Trend

Healthcare precincts will increasingly determine where future private investment occurs.

Modern healthcare precincts attract far more than doctors. Allied health, imaging, pharmacy, aged care, education, technology, accommodation and professional services naturally cluster around them. Over time, healthcare precincts become economic precincts, influencing employment, investment and population growth across the broader region.

Footnotes

[1] Clarence Valley Council development records; publicly available information relating to the Maclean Health Centre development, including Maclean Medical, Maclean Radiology and AveNuPlus; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW); Healthy North Coast regional planning.

Tourism is an investment strategy

Tourism is often measured by the number of people who visit a region and that is one of the least useful measures of its long-term economic value.

Visitors buy lunch, fill their cars, stay overnight and eventually return home. Their spending supports local businesses, but the greatest economic contribution tourism can make is not what visitors spend during their stay, it's what they decide to invest after they leave. Every regional economy competes for three forms of capital:

Financial capital | Human capital | Social capital.

Tourism has the potential to influence all three.
The Lower Clarence has traditionally promoted its natural assets. The Clarence River, Yamba's coastline, heritage streetscapes, national parks and productive agricultural landscape have attracted visitors for generations.[1] These assets remain enormously valuable, yet they represent only the beginning of the visitor economy. People rarely relocate to a place they have never experienced and many businesses are established only after their owners first visit as tourists.

Retirement decisions often begin with a weekend away, and future investors frequently arrive first as holidaymakers. Tourism therefore performs a role extending well beyond accommodation and hospitality. It introduces future residents, business owners, investors and skilled workers to the region long before they make permanent decisions.
Viewed through that lens, tourism becomes one of the Lower Clarence's most effective investment attraction strategies.

The opportunity now lies in increasing the value created by each visitor rather than simply increasing visitor numbers. Heritage tourism offers one pathway. The Scottish identity of Maclean, the maritime history of the Clarence River, the Indigenous storytelling opportunities and the region's agricultural story provide experiences that cannot be replicated elsewhere. Agritourism presents another and a prime example of this are the Clarence Harvest Festival's Cane Fire Tours. Visitors increasingly seek authentic experiences, from food production, farm experiences and opportunities to connect with local producers rather than simply purchasing agricultural products from supermarket shelves.

Conference tourism may represent the largest untapped opportunity, specifically with the pending opening of the Biirinba Regional Arts Centre in Maclean. Unlike seasonal leisure visitors, conferences deliver guests during traditional off-peak periods, generate higher average expenditure and introduce business leaders, investors and professionals who may never otherwise experience the region. The Lower Clarence possesses the lifestyle and accessibility to compete for this market, yet suitable conference facilities and supporting accommodation remain limited.

Tourism succeeds when it changes the way people think about a place.

The Lower Clarence has spent decades attracting visitors, but its next opportunity is converting visitors into investors.

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING

What would change if every tourism decision was assessed by the businesses, residents and investors it attracted rather than the visitors it counted?

Helix Insight

The most valuable tourist may be the one who never goes home.

Many regional businesses begin with a holiday. A family visits for a long weekend, discovers an opportunity, returns several times and eventually relocates. Tourism is often treated as consumption. In reality, it can be the first stage of long-term capital attraction.

Emerging Trend

Heritage and agriculture will become the Lower Clarence's next tourism advantage.

Coastal holidays are increasingly available across Australia. Authentic regional experiences are not. The regions creating the greatest long-term value will be those combining natural assets with history, food production, local enterprise and immersive experiences that cannot be replicated elsewhere.

Footnotes

[1] Tourism Research Australia, National Visitor Survey; Destination North Coast regional visitor economy data; Clarence Valley tourism statistics and visitor profiles.

Housing determines economic capacity

Housing is usually discussed as a population issue but for the Lower Clarence, it has become an serious economic one.

A region's ability to grow is no longer determined solely by the number of people who want to live there. Increasingly, it is determined by whether the people a region needs can actually find somewhere to live.

The distinction is significant.

Businesses across the Lower Clarence consistently report difficulty attracting skilled staff. Healthcare providers compete for clinicians. Construction firms compete for trades. Hospitality businesses struggle to recruit. Professional services face the same challenge. While wages and lifestyle remain important considerations, housing has become one of the most influential factors in whether a position is accepted or declined.[1]

This changes the role of housing entirely as every new dwelling adds to supply, but not every new dwelling adds to economic capacity. The Lower Clarence has experienced considerable investment in housing over recent years, particularly within lifestyle and retirement developments. These projects respond to genuine market demand and make an important contribution to the regional economy. Construction activity increases, local spending grows and many new residents become active participants in community life.
Yet they also raise an important strategic question: Which forms of housing generate the greatest long-term economic return?
A family home occupied by teachers, nurses, tradespeople or business owners contributes differently to the regional economy than housing designed primarily for retirees. Neither is inherently better and both have value. The difference lies in the economic activity each supports over time.

Housing therefore becomes a workforce strategy.

Regions seeking to attract younger families, professionals and entrepreneurs must provide affordable housing capable of supporting those ambitions. Without it, labour shortages persist regardless of employment opportunities. Businesses delay expansion, investment decisions become more cautious, and economic growth slows- demand has not disappeared- but because capacity has reached its limit.

The Lower Clarence is approaching that point.

Future housing decisions will influence far more than population statistics. They will determine which industries can realistically expand, where investment occurs and how competitive the region remains over the coming decades.
Housing is no longer simply accommodating growth, it is determining its direction.

Helix Insight

Every housing approval shapes the future economy.

Housing policy is often measured by the number of dwellings delivered. The more important question is who those dwellings allow the region to attract and retain. Different housing outcomes create different economic futures. Regions that recognise this gain a significant strategic advantage.

Emerging Trend

Workforce housing will become one of the Lower Clarence's most important forms of economic infrastructure.

Coastal holidays are increasingly available across Australia. Authentic regional experiences are not. The regions creating the greatest long-term value will be those combining natural assets with history, food production, local enterprise and immersive experiences that cannot be replicated elsewhere.

Footnotes

[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census of Population and Housing; National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (now Housing Australia) housing reports; Regional Australia Institute workforce research; Healthy North Coast workforce publications; Clarence Valley Council housing strategy documents.

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING

If housing determines who can live in the Lower Clarence, does it also determine which industries can exist here?

The economic ripple effect

One investment. Multiple economies.

When most projects are assessed, the question is simple. What will this cost? A more useful question is rarely asked. What else changes because this exists? The Maclean Health Centre demonstrates why regional economies should be assessed as interconnected systems of commercial activity rather than individual developments.

Direct Outcome	First Order Effect	Second Order Effect	Long-Term Economic Outcome
Construction of a major health precinct	Employment for local builders, consultants and suppliers	Greater capability within the regional construction industry	Increased confidence to deliver larger commercial projects
Expanded medical services	More GPs, specialists and allied health providers	Higher demand for administration, nursing and support staff	Growth in skilled employment and household income
Maclean Radiology established	Advanced diagnostics available locally	Reduced patient travel and improved referral pathways	Greater regional healthcare capability
Increased healthcare capability	More patients remain within the Lower Clarence	Greater local spending before and after appointments	Reduced economic leakage to larger centres
Larger healthcare workforce	Increased demand for housing, retail and local services	Business expansion across multiple sectors	Broader economic diversification
Improved health infrastructure	Greater confidence among families and professionals considering relocation	Attraction of skilled workers across industries	Stronger labour market and population retention
Significant private capital invested	Market signal that the region has long-term potential	Increased investor confidence	Additional private investment follows

The commercial lesson

The Maclean Health Centre is not simply a healthcare project but a catalyst. Its economic contribution cannot be measured by patient numbers alone. The true value lies in the businesses it supports, the professionals it attracts, the confidence it creates and the investment it encourages across the wider Lower Clarence economy; as this is how regional economies grow. The re-opening of the Argyle Hotel in Nov 2024 also reflects this commercial lesson, and the follow on impact to town, and investment.

The Clarence River is the region's most under utilised commercial asset

The Clarence River has shaped the Lower Clarence for thousands of years.

It determined where communities settled, how industries developed and why towns such as Maclean exist at all. Today it remains central to the region's identity, yet much of its economic contribution is still viewed through the lenses of recreation, scenery and environmental management.

Those are important, obviously, but they are not the whole story. Few regional economies possess an asset capable of supporting so many industries simultaneously. The Clarence River already underpins commercial fishing, tourism, hospitality, marine services, boating, events, property development and recreation. It contributes to lifestyle, attracts visitors and strengthens the region's identity. Yet much of that value occurs organically rather than strategically.

The opportunity is no longer to simply preserve the river and ensure it's health, it is to better utilise it.
Regional economies increasingly compete on experiences that cannot be replicated elsewhere. The Lower Clarence possesses one of Australia's great river systems, yet relatively little economic activity is intentionally built around it. Waterfront dining remains limited and marine tourism remains modest. Events continue to be concentrated around existing formats. Water transport is largely absent from everyday movement- certainly a lost opportunity on multiple fronts- thus demonstrating that opportunities for commercial activation remain significant without compromising the environmental values that make the river so important.

So the conversation regarding the Clarence River – Biirinba- should therefore shift.
Environmental stewardship and economic productivity are often presented as competing priorities. The Clarence demonstrates they can be complementary. A healthy river attracts visitors. Visitors in turn support businesses. Successful businesses generate investment and investment creates greater capacity to protect and enhance the natural environment. Long-term environmental outcomes become more achievable when the river also supports a resilient regional economy. Victoria's River Towns of Yarrawonga, and Echuca are perfect examples of this.

The Lower Clarence already possesses the asset, and so the next challenge is increasing the value created around it.
The regions that prosper over coming decades will not necessarily be those with the greatest natural resources. They will be those that create the greatest economic value from the resources they already have while ensuring those assets remain healthy for future generations. The Clarence River is capable of becoming one of the Lower Clarence's defining competitive advantages.
Its greatest contribution may still lie ahead.

Helix Insight

Economic value & environmental value are not mutually exclusive.

The most successful regional assets create incentives for both. When a river supports tourism, hospitality, marine enterprise, events and recreation, its long-term environmental health becomes an economic priority as well as an ecological one. The strongest regional economies understand that productive assets are often the ones communities value most highly.

Emerging Trend

The next stage of river economies will focus on value, not volume.

Future growth is unlikely to come from increasing activity indiscriminately. It will come from higher-value experiences, better waterfront activation, premium tourism, marine enterprise, cultural interpretation and investment that strengthens both the economy and the river itself.

Footnote

[1] NSW Department of Primary Industries, fisheries and estuary data; Tourism Research Australia, regional visitor data; Clarence Valley Council strategic planning and waterfront studies.

[2] Clarence River has long supported commercial fishing, agriculture, transport, tourism and recreation. See Clarence Valley Council historical publications, NSW State Archives and regional historical records.

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING

If the Clarence River disappeared tomorrow, which industries would survive unchanged? If the answer is very few, should it still be treated primarily as a scenic asset?

Why Maclean matters

Maclean is often described as a small country town however, commercially it performs a much larger role.

Measured by population alone, it appears unremarkable. Yet, measured by the services it provides, the businesses it supports and the catchment it serves, Maclean functions as the economic heart of the Lower Clarence. Healthcare, financial services, legal practices, accounting firms, retail, hospitality, essential and government services, and education all concentrate within a town that serves far more people than those who reside within its boundaries.[1]

This distinction changes how the town should be viewed.
Successful regional economies are rarely built around their largest population centre. They are built around their principal commercial centre. That is where decisions are made, businesses interact, investment concentrates and supporting industries naturally cluster. Maclean has those characteristics as it was once the governing centre of the Lower Clarence.

The growth of healthcare has strengthened its role as a regional service centre. Professional services have continued to expand and retail remains resilient despite increasing competition from larger centres and online commerce. Vacancy is very low compared to other regional locations and cafés, hospitality venues and independent businesses benefit from the steady movement of workers, patients, contractors and visitors throughout the week.

The town's greatest strength is not any individual business, it's concentration.
Businesses benefit from being located near complementary businesses. Medical practices generate demand for pharmacies, cafés and professional services. Financial institutions support business investment. Hospitality benefits from weekday commercial activity as much as weekend tourism. Each strengthens the viability of the next.

This concentration however also exposes Maclean's greatest constraint.
Infrastructure has not always evolved at the same pace as its commercial role.

Parking is the most visible example. Most people experience parking as an inconvenience. Businesses experience it as accessibility. Every unavailable parking space represents a customer who may choose to shop elsewhere, an appointment delayed, a delivery complicated or a worker spending valuable time searching for access rather than creating value.[2]
The issue is therefore larger than parking itself, but productivity.

As Maclean continues to grow as the Lower Clarence's commercial centre, investment in accessibility, walkability, public spaces and local movement becomes investment in the broader regional economy. These improvements benefit far more than the businesses immediately surrounding them. They strengthen the efficiency of the commercial centre serving much of the Lower Clarence.

Maclean's future importance will not be determined by how many people live there, but by how effectively it performs the role the regional economy already expects of it.

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING

If Maclean already functions as the Lower Clarence's commercial centre, are planning decisions reinforcing that role or constraining it?

Helix Insight

Commercial centres should be planned for the economy they serve, not the population they contain.

Regional service centres naturally attract people from surrounding communities. Their infrastructure should reflect the size of that functional catchment rather than the number of residents recorded on Census night. Failing to recognise that difference eventually limits productivity, investment and business confidence.

Footnotes

[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census of Population and Housing; business distribution and service observations informed by Helix Planning analysis of the Lower Clarence economy.

[2] Clarence Valley Council parking and transport studies; Maclean CBD business observations; Helix Planning commercial analysis.

The airport isn't about aeroplanes

Clarence Valley has its own airport, and most discussions about regional airports begin with airlines. However they should begin with business models.

For decades, the success or failure of regional airports has largely been measured by passenger numbers. Routes commence, routes are withdrawn and communities debate which airline might eventually return. The airport becomes dependent upon a decision made in a corporate boardroom hundreds or thousands of kilometres away and this is an inherently fragile position.

Clarence Regional Airport must be viewed differently as its greatest value does not lie in the aircraft using the runway today. It lies in the economic activity capable of developing around it over the next thirty years and the impact of this to the Lower Clarence as well.
A runway is only one asset. The surrounding land, aviation infrastructure, strategic location and commercial potential collectively create something far more valuable: an opportunity to build an aviation and logistics precinct capable of generating its own economic momentum and this changes the conversation entirely.

Instead of asking whether passenger services are commercially viable, a more useful question emerges.
How does the airport become commercially successful regardless of who is operating scheduled flights?
Successful regional airports increasingly derive a substantial proportion of their revenue from activities occurring beyond the terminal. Commercial leases, privately funded hangars, aircraft maintenance, pilot training, aviation engineering, aerial agriculture, emergency services, freight operators, fuel sales, logistics businesses, vehicle hire and industrial development all contribute to diversified revenue streams. Passenger services become one customer of the airport rather than the airport's entire reason for existing.[1]

The Lower Clarence is well positioned to adopt that philosophy, as its proximity to the Pacific Highway provides efficient road freight connections. Productive agricultural industries continue to generate freight demand. Healthcare increasingly requires timely movement of medical equipment and pathology. Manufacturers depend upon reliable logistics. Emergency services already utilise aviation capability across the region. Collectively, these activities create a stronger commercial foundation than passenger services alone and make the lower Clarence a gateway to the region.

Freight deserves particular attention.
Regional aviation has traditionally treated freight as supplementary to passenger operations. There is an opportunity to reverse that thinking. An aircraft generating consistent freight revenue before passengers board is fundamentally different from one relying almost entirely on ticket sales. Freight creates resilience. Passenger services improve utilisation. Together they strengthen route viability in ways neither achieves independently.

The airport also presents a significant property opportunity.

Businesses locating within aviation precincts commonly fund the construction of their own hangars, workshops and operational facilities on long-term leased land. The airport benefits from recurring lease revenue without bearing the full cost of development. Businesses secure purpose-built facilities tailored to their operational requirements. Capital is invested by those directly benefiting from the infrastructure rather than solely by the public sector.

This model has transformed numerous regional airports across Australia and it also changes the role of council.

Rather than acting primarily as an airport operator, it becomes the steward of a commercially productive industrial precinct capable of generating recurring income, supporting private enterprise and strengthening the regional economy of the entire Clarence Valley.

Passenger services do remain important as they reconnect businesses with major markets, improve tourism, support healthcare access and strengthen investment attraction. They should remain an objective, but they should not be the only objective.

Clarence Regional Airport has the potential to become one of the Lower Clarence’s most productive commercial assets.

Achieving that outcome begins by recognising that the runway is only the beginning of the business.

Helix Insight

A successful airport is not supported by airlines. It is supported by the businesses that choose to build around it.

When an airport generates income from commercial leases, hangars, freight, maintenance, training, logistics and aviation services, passenger routes become easier to attract because the underlying asset is already commercially viable. Airlines reduce risk. The airport reduces dependence. Both benefit.

Emerging Trend

Regional airports are becoming business precincts first and transport assets second.

The most resilient regional airports increasingly diversify their income through aviation-related industries and commercial development. Passenger services remain important, but they are becoming one component of a broader economic ecosystem rather than the sole measure of success.

Footnotes

[1] Clarence Regional Airport Master Plan; Australian Airports Association, regional airport guidance; BITRE regional aviation data; Airservices Australia; CASA; examples of diversified regional airport business models in Australia.

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING

What would Clarence Regional Airport look like if every business capable of operating there already did?

The economy we already have

Regional economies often become preoccupied with attracting the next major employer and in doing so, they sometimes overlook the businesses already creating wealth.

The Lower Clarence is not waiting for an industry to arrive because its economy is already remarkably diverse.
Agriculture continues to underpin the region's identity, while commercial fishing, manufacturing, construction, healthcare, professional services, retail, education, tourism and logistics collectively support thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in economic activity each year.[1] Most have developed steadily rather than dramatically, making their contribution easy to underestimate.
This is particularly true of small and medium-sized businesses.

Regional economies are rarely dominated by multinational corporations. They are built by business owners employing five, ten or twenty people at a time. Individually they appear modest. Collectively they become the largest employers, the greatest investors and the strongest contributors to community prosperity.

The Lower Clarence demonstrates this exceptionally well.
A manufacturer supplying products nationally, a local engineering workshop, a medical practice, a commercial fishing business, a transport operator and a family-owned construction company may appear unrelated. Commercially, they are deeply connected. Each purchases goods and services from the others. Each employs local people. Each contributes to demand for housing, professional services, retail and hospitality. Remove enough of them and the regional economy weakens surprisingly quickly.
The greatest economic leakage often occurs when local capability is overlooked.

Every time a consumer is forced to source a product outside the region that could have been obtained locally, economic value leaves the Lower Clarence. Every patient travelling elsewhere for healthcare, every contractor engaged from outside the region where local capability exists and every purchase unnecessarily made elsewhere reduces the multiplier effect generated by local enterprise.
This does not suggest every dollar should remain within the region.

Healthy economies depend upon external trade.
The objective is to maximise the value retained before wealth naturally flows elsewhere.
That requires recognising existing capability.
The Lower Clarence already possesses businesses capable of competing nationally and internationally. It has manufacturers exporting beyond the region, primary producers supplying domestic and overseas markets, professional service firms supporting complex commercial transactions and healthcare providers delivering increasingly specialised care. These businesses rarely define the public narrative of the regional economy, yet they underpin much of its resilience, but how do we promote them?

Economic development should therefore begin with a simple question: What already exists that deserves greater recognition, stronger connections and increased opportunity?

Growing the Lower Clarence economy will require new investment in that and it will also require greater confidence in the businesses that have been building it for decades.

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING

If every existing Lower Clarence business grew by just ten per cent over the next decade, how would that compare with attracting one major employer?

Helix Insight

The strongest economic development strategy often begins with the businesses already paying rates.

Regions frequently invest significant effort attracting new enterprise while overlooking opportunities to help existing businesses expand. Supporting one established business to double in size can create greater long-term value than attracting a business with little connection to the local economy.

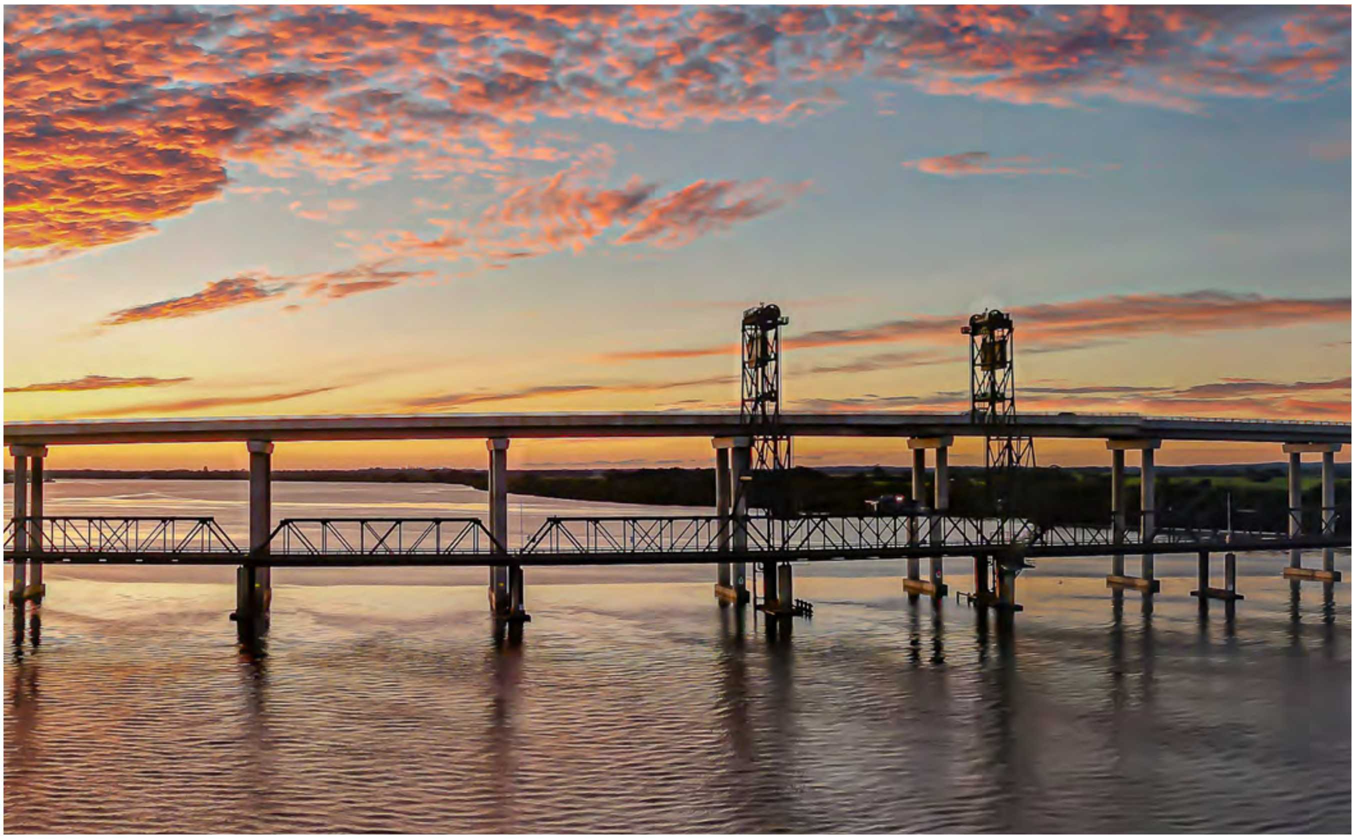
Emerging Trend

Regional competitive advantage will increasingly come from depth, not breadth.

The Lower Clarence does not need to compete in every industry. Greater economic resilience is more likely to come from strengthening the industries where capability already exists, encouraging collaboration between them and helping local businesses move further up the value chain.

Footnote

[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census of Population and Housing; Australian Business Register; ABARES regional agriculture data; NSW Department of Primary Industries; Clarence Valley business profile data.



The price of delay

Regional economies are rarely held back by a lack of opportunity. More often, they are held back by the time taken to act on it.

Delay carries a cost that rarely appears in financial statements. A business postpones an expansion because uncertainty remains around infrastructure. An investor chooses another region because planning timeframes are unpredictable. A skilled worker accepts a position elsewhere because suitable housing is unavailable. None of these decisions attracts headlines, yet collectively they shape the economic trajectory of a region.

Opportunity has a shelf life and the Lower Clarence has experienced this repeatedly.
Armidale Road provides one example. Long before substantial funding was committed, businesses were already paying the price through longer travel times, higher operating costs, unreliable freight movements and reduced tourism confidence. The economic cost began years before construction commenced. Infrastructure investment eventually addressed part of the problem, but it could not recover the productivity already lost.[1]

The same principle applies well beyond roads. Planning uncertainty increases development costs. Delayed housing constrains workforce growth. Deferred infrastructure reduces business confidence. Slow decision-making rarely prevents investment entirely, although it often changes where that investment occurs.

Capital is patient, but Investors are not.
Private capital constantly compares opportunities as do the city based credit teams that primarily fund it. Regions are not competing only with neighbouring councils. They compete with every location offering confidence, clarity and commercial opportunity. When decisions take longer than necessary, uncertainty increases. As uncertainty increases, risk increases. Higher risk demands higher returns. Projects become harder to justify.

The consequence is subtle.
Investment does not always leave because another region is dramatically better. Sometimes it leaves because another region is simply ready. This presents one of the Lower Clarence's greatest opportunities. Many of the region's strategic assets already exist. The Pacific Highway is complete. The Clarence River remains one of Australia's defining waterways. Private healthcare investment is accelerating. Clarence Regional Airport possesses considerable untapped commercial potential. Strong agricultural, manufacturing and professional service sectors already underpin the economy.

The challenge is no longer identifying opportunity.
It is recognising when the time to act has arrived. Economic leadership therefore requires a different measure of success.
Projects delivered matter. Projects delivered before opportunities are lost matter considerably more. The regions that outperform over the coming decades are unlikely to be those making the largest investments. They will be the ones making the right investments while the opportunity still exists.

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING

What opportunities already exist in the Lower Clarence that will become significantly harder, or more expensive, to realise in ten years' time?

Helix Insight

The cost of delay is usually paid by someone else first.

Governments experience delayed expenditure. Businesses experience delayed income. Communities experience delayed opportunity. By the time public investment finally occurs, private enterprise has often spent years carrying the economic cost through reduced productivity, constrained growth and
forgone investment.

Emerging Trend

Speed is becoming a regional competitive advantage.

Regions able to make timely, commercially informed decisions will increasingly outperform those with similar natural assets but slower decision-making. Investors rarely expect perfection. They do expect confidence, clarity and momentum.

Footnote

[1] NRMA, Funding Local Roads; Transport for NSW, Armidale Road upgrade program; Infrastructure Australia, Infrastructure Market Capacity; BITRE regional freight and productivity publications.

The Hidden Cost of Natural Disasters

Natural disasters are usually measured by what they destroy and regional economies experience them very differently.

Floodwaters recede, roads reopen. businesses clean up, insurance claims are lodged, infrastructure is repaired and communities begin the long process of recovery. Public discussion naturally focuses on the visible damage and the cost of rebuilding. These are important measures, but they tell only part of the story.

The greatest economic cost often emerges after recovery has officially begun.
The Lower Clarence understands this reality better than most. Floods are not unusual events. They are an accepted part of living, working and investing in the region. Businesses plan for them and communities respond to them. Yet every major disaster influences the decisions that follow.[1]

Capital has a long memory. Insurance premiums increase and excesses become more difficult to absorb- that's if you can stay insured. Supply chains remain disrupted. Business owners delay expansion until greater certainty returns. Investors reassess projects. Cashflow is significantly impacted and so lenders become more cautious. Some developments proceed with higher costs and others are postponed indefinitely. A flood may last days, but its influence on commercial confidence can persist for years.

Those decisions rarely appear in disaster recovery statistics.
No report measures the business that was never established, the investment that shifted elsewhere or the entrepreneur who decided another region presented less uncertainty. Yet these are often the losses that shape a regional economy most profoundly. Lost of business confidence and opportunity forgone is considerably harder to recognise than infrastructure damaged.
Recovery funding presents a similar challenge.

Governments quite rightly focus on restoring essential infrastructure and public services as quickly as possible. Roads are repaired, bridges reopen and public assets are rebuilt. Communities depend upon these investments and without them economic recovery cannot begin. Restoration, however, should not be mistaken for resilience.

Replacing yesterday's infrastructure with tomorrow's infrastructure are two very different outcomes. Every recovery project presents an opportunity to improve freight efficiency, strengthen flood resilience, reduce future maintenance costs or increase economic productivity. Too often, success is measured by how quickly assets are replaced rather than whether they perform better than they did before the disaster.

Private enterprise rarely approaches rebuilding this way.
Businesses rebuilding after a flood seldom replace ageing equipment with identical equipment if a more productive alternative exists.

They redesign workshops, modernise operations, improve layouts and invest in greater resilience because rebuilding provides a rare opportunity to strengthen the business rather than simply restore it.

Regional economies must adopt the same philosophy.
The Lower Clarence will continue to experience natural disasters. That reality is unlikely to change. The economic outcome, however, is not predetermined. Recovery can become an investment in future productivity rather than a return to previous conditions. Infrastructure can be rebuilt with stronger commercial outcomes in mind. Planning decisions can reduce future disruption and strategic investment can improve the region's ability to attract capital even within a disaster-prone environment.

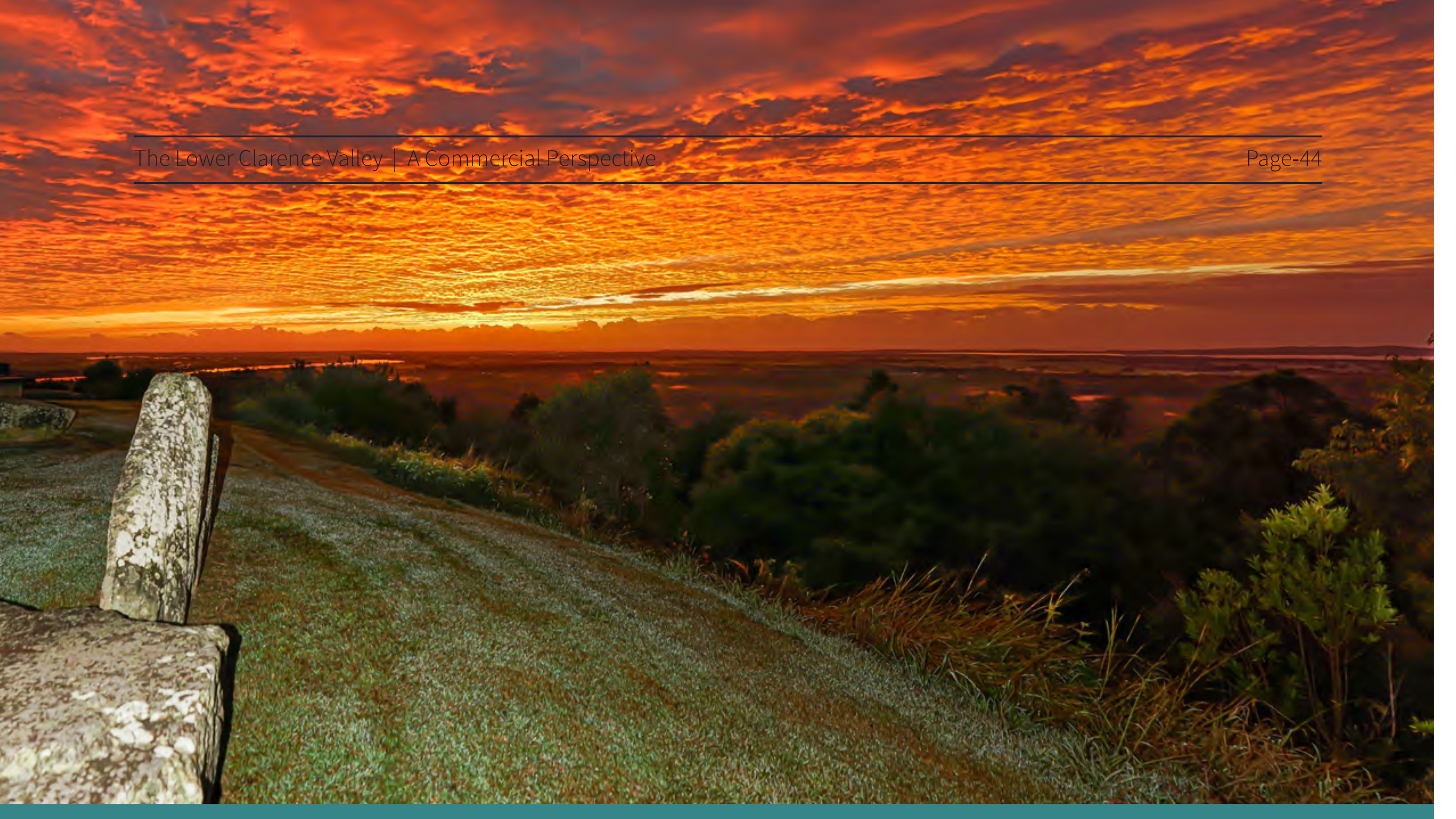
Perhaps the greatest challenge lies in the way risk itself is assessed.
Commercial lending policies are generally designed to provide consistency across national portfolios. Regional economies do not always fit comfortably within those frameworks. A business operating successfully in the Lower Clarence may have demonstrated its ability to prepare for, withstand and recover from multiple flood events while maintaining profitability and meeting every financial commitment. However that last event that was out of cycle, can literally be the straw that breaks the camel's back. Those strengths to weather the conditions- pun intended- are rarely recognised as commercial advantages especially when cashflow has dried up. More commonly, the business is assessed primarily through the lens of its location, and there is an important distinction between exposure and capability.

Exposure considers where a business operates.
Capability considers how well it manages the risks associated with operating there. Those are not the same thing. A business that has successfully navigated repeated natural disasters has demonstrated operational resilience, financial discipline and management capability that many metropolitan businesses have never been required to prove. Those attributes reduce commercial risk. They should increasingly form part of how lender's credit decisions are assessed.

The Lower Clarence does not need to convince investors or banks that natural disasters will never occur, but it needs to demonstrate that successful businesses continue to thrive despite them. That is a far stronger measure of resilience.

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING

If two businesses have identical financial performance, but one has successfully survived three major flood events, which business has demonstrated greater commercial resilience?



Helix Insight

Resilience should improve credit quality. It rarely does.

Businesses that have successfully traded through repeated natural disasters have demonstrated resilience, adaptability and disciplined financial management under conditions many metropolitan businesses have never experienced. Those capabilities represent commercial strength, yet lending decisions often continue to focus on previous cashflow positions and geographic exposure rather than proven performance. Better credit assessment distinguishes between where a business operates and how well it manages the risks of operating there.

Emerging Trend

Commercial resilience will become a competitive advantage.

As natural disasters become a more frequent consideration for investors, insurers and lenders, regions capable of demonstrating strong business continuity, resilient infrastructure and consistent commercial performance will become increasingly attractive destinations for private capital. Future competitiveness will depend as much on confidence in recovery as confidence in growth.

Footnote

[1] Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection; NSW Reconstruction Authority, Northern Rivers Recovery Program; Insurance Council of Australia, flood impact reports; Productivity Commission, Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements; Reserve Bank of Australia research into natural disasters, insurance and regional economic performance.

The next economy already exists

Regional economies often speak about the future as though it arrives all at once.

Regional economies often speak about the future as though it arrives all at once. However, the next economy cycle begins with zero fanfare. A private investor commits capital where others still see risk. A manufacturer develops a higher-value product. A healthcare precinct expands its capability. A tourism operator creates an experience rather than accommodation. A regional airport diversifies beyond passenger services. None appears transformational in isolation. Together, they signal that the economy is already changing.

The Lower Clarence is further along this path than many realise.
Healthcare is evolving from a community service into an economic anchor. Tourism is shifting towards experience, heritage and investment attraction. Agriculture is increasingly creating value beyond the farm gate. Professional services continue to mature. Local manufacturers compete well beyond the region. The airport has the potential to become a diversified commercial precinct. Existing businesses continue finding new ways to create value from established industries.

None of these trends represents a departure from the Lower Clarence's identity, but they do represent its evolution which is an important distinction. Regional economies do not become successful by abandoning what made them successful in the first place. They grow by extracting greater value from existing strengths while recognising where new opportunities naturally emerge.
That requires confidence, always confidence.

Confidence invests because the evidence suggests they will.
Throughout this publication, one principle has appeared repeatedly. The Lower Clarence's greatest opportunities already exist.
The challenge is not discovering entirely new industries or waiting for a transformational project to arrive. It is recognising the commercial potential already present within the region's people, businesses, infrastructure and natural assets, then connecting those assets more effectively than they have been connected before.

This publication has deliberately avoided presenting a list of recommendations.
Every region has recommendations and every town has different opinions on what these look like. Far fewer develop a framework for making better decisions. The Lower Clarence does not need to become something different, but it needs to become more intentional about what it is becoming.

The regions that prosper over the next generation will not necessarily have the best geography, the largest budgets or the fastest population growth.

They will be the regions that recognise tomorrow's economy while everyone else is still planning for yesterday's.

Collaboration: The Multiplier Effect

No single organisation, business or government can build a thriving region alone. Collaboration is the multiplier that turns individual effort into collective impact.

TOGETHER, WE ACHIEVE MORE THAN WE EVER COULD ALONE.

THE COLLABORATION ADVANTAGE

When the right people work together, the whole system performs better.

SHARED PURPOSE
A common purpose aligns effort and strengthens focus.

COMBINED RESOURCES
Pooling knowledge, funding and capability creates more opportunity.

STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS
Trust and connection improve outcomes and reduce duplication.

BETTER SOLUTIONS
Diverse perspectives lead to smarter, more innovative solutioon.

FASTER PROGRESS
Working together accelerates delivery and reduces time to impact.

GREATER IMPACT
Collective action creates lasting change for the whole region.

THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT

Collaboration multiplies the impact of every input.

COLLABORATION is the multiplier

Partners share ideas and insights

Smarter decisions are made

Projects are delivered more efficiently

Communities benefit and support grows

The region becomes more resilient and attractive

COLLABORATION IN ACTION

Where partnerships create real results.

GOVERNMENT + BUSINESS
Clear policy, less red tape and practical support create a better environment for investment.

EDUCATION + INDUSTRY
Training that matches real needs builds the workforce our region requires.

COMMUNITY + NOT-FOR-PROFIT
Stronger social outcomes and vibrant communities attract and retain population.

PRIVATE SECTOR + INVESTORS
Local knowledge and capital drive innovation, jobs and long-term prosperity.

HEALTH + SERVICES
Integrated approaches improve access, outcomes and quality of life.

REGIONAL NETWORKS
Working across regions strengthens our voice and broadens our opportunities.

THE ENABLERS OF SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

TRUST
Built through transparency, honesty and reliability.

COMMUNICATION
Open, regular and two-way communication keeps everyone aligned.

CLEAR ROLES & ACCOUNTABILITY
Everyone knows their role and takes ownership.

SHARED MEASURES
Common metrics track progress and celebrate success together.

FLEXIBILITY
The ability to adapt and solve problems together keeps momentum strong.

RESPECT
Valuing different perspectives and placing the region first.

ONE REGION. MANY PLAYERS. SHARED FUTURE.

Collaboration connects our towns, industries and people.

- Businesses
- Government
- Community
- Education
- Industry
- Health

Stronger connections.
Stronger outcomes.
Stronger region.

THE HELIX INSIGHT

Collaboration is not a nice to have.

It is a competitive advantage.
It reduces risk, shares the load and multiplies impact.
When we collaborate well, our region doesn't just grow — it thrives.

Together, we can build a Lower Clarence that is resilient, innovative and prosperous for generations to come.

FINAL QUESTION

If the Lower Clarence was being planned today from a blank sheet of paper, knowing everything now understood about its economy, what would be done differently?

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