

# COOLAH

## Community Action Plan



January 2021

# Foreword

## What a difference a year makes!

Though the Town Makeover initiative was conceived in the drought 2018/2019, the seasonal turnaround during 2020/2021 is phenomenal, tempered as it is by the global pandemic and trade disruptions.

As we embark on our journey with Rural Aid with Peter Kenyon at the helm, Coolah is looking forward - not looking back. Though we acknowledge our proud history of being at the edge of early settlement when it was proclaimed that no one was to go "Beyond the Black Stump" - Coolah - in 1829, we can look forward to many things.

Coolah - Valley of the Winds - is at the forefront of renewable energy generation with two windfarms well into development phase. Coolah's people bring persistence, heart, courage, love for our fellow man and a love for our community. The people of Coolah will build in times of prosperity and undoubtedly face more times of challenge when the community connects and once again finds courage together to change and to progress.

It is through these times of challenge that as people we come together, to look at what we can do to assure our community of a brighter future. With Peter Kenyon's expertise, our community eagerly collaborated to reactivate some old ideas and bring many new ideas to the fore, ideas to see Coolah move towards a brighter future. Together we created this Community Action Plan.

This will provide our active community with a map for the short term, goals to pursue and ideas to nurture and grow.

The Coolah community will continue to work side-by-side implementing plans for today and creating new plans for tomorrow's generation, plans that sustain our vision of a welcoming, resilient and thriving community, caring for our people and our environment.

# Acknowledgements



PROUDLY BROUGHT TO YOU BY



The creation of this Community Action Plan was funded by Rural Aid as part of their 'Our Towns' Initiative, of which Coolah was a recipient. Facilitation of the community engagement process and preparation of the plan was undertaken by Peter Kenyon, Bank of I.D.E.A.S and assisted by Tracy Alder and Jen Curnow-Trotter from Rural Aid and the Coolah District Development Group Inc.

Special thanks to all the Coolah Community Members and Warrumbungle Shire Council Staff who gave of their time, knowledge and skills.

The Coolah Action Plan acknowledges the traditional custodians of country for the Coolah district - the Gomeroi and Wiradjuri people, pays respect to the elders both past and present and to the people of the Gomeroi and Wiradjuri Nations and extends that respect to other Aboriginal people.

# Our Story



Coolah is situated on the picturesque Coolaburragundy River and nestled in a valley of the Liverpool Range. It is located 376 km north-west of Sydney and is part of the Warrumbungle Shire. The district population numbers 1300 people.

Prior to European settlement, the land was home to the Gomeroi and Wiradjuri Peoples. The area just north of the present day townsite was known by the Gomeroi People as 'Weetalibah-Wallangan' which means 'place where the fire went out and left a black stump'. Coolah today is the official home of the Black Stump.

In 1826, NSW Governor Darling proclaimed a boundary to the limits of settlement in New South Wales declaring "land beyond the black stump run was neither sold nor let, nor settlers allowed." This was nine km north of Coolah.

Coolah today is a service centre for the surrounding rich agricultural farmland which is noted for its broad acre cereal production, beef cattle and sheep for wool and meat. Coolah is the eastern gateway from Newcastle to the Warrumbungle region with

the main tourist attraction being the Coolah Tops National Park, declared a National Park in 1996. This Park is an impressive destination for bushwalkers, cyclists and campers; noted for its panoramic views, waterfalls, its 120 plus species of birds, its wallabies and its nocturnal Greater Glider. It is one of only two subalpine national parks in NSW.

Coolah has a national reputation as a 'can do', self-help community. Responding to weather challenges, changing population dynamics, Coolah has always realised that it needed to take control of its own destiny. 2021 celebrates 26 years of its community development organisation; namely the Coolah District Development Group with its mission statement 'to foster safe, healthy, cultural and heritage environment for our community; preserve our town services, character and continue to encourage growth and development of the district with productive and sustainable industries'.

Coolah's proactive responses to job and industry losses and community reinvention earned it the 'NSW Community of the Year' award in 2007.



# Our Vision

A welcoming, resilient and thriving community, caring for our people and our environment.

# Our Goals

- Valuing citizenship and fostering high levels of volunteerism and participation
- Cultivating a sense of pride in Coolah – “Why I live where I live”
- Creating an environment where our young people feel involved, supported and empowered and will consider returning to our community for work, enterprise, family and lifestyle opportunities
- Providing a wide range of passive and active recreation and sporting activities, events, clubs, facilities and celebrations
- Strengthening the capacity, viability and profitability of our local businesses
- Actively pursuing new economic and entrepreneurial opportunities that strengthen and diversify our local economy and job options
- Promoting enjoyment of the natural environment by maintaining, enhancing and extending the walking and cycling trail network and developing opportunities in the Coolah Tops National Park
- Enhancing our community capacity by fostering civic engagement, leadership, collaboration, innovation and entrepreneurship
- Promoting our community as a lifestyle, work, business, investment and tourist destination A welcoming, resilient and thriving community, caring for our people and our environment.



# Our Guiding Values

- Respect
- Inclusion & Diversity
- Collaboration
- Caring
- Safety
- Positivity
- Innovation
- Mindfulness

# Our Challenges

- Ageing population demographic – poor youth retention due to lack of social networks for youth
- Insurance costs and compliance regulations for community groups. Volunteers are keen to join in and help, but not wanting to take on leadership roles with such high compliance obligations
- Economic leakage from town is a challenge. Solutions are needed to promote local loyalty. Out-of-town or online shopping is inevitable
- Specialist medical services are not locally available, ongoing shortage of GP services and allied health support where telehealth introduction has a poor take up response. This is another example of economic leakage
- Affordable labour with the right skills mix and ethos - in competition with mining opportunities
- Residual debt and stress from 2017 bushfire compounded by drought and in 2020, the Covid lockdown and commodity uncertainty in overseas trade
- Lack of early childhood services and childcare
- Tourism opportunities are lost as there is no coach capacity accommodation in Coolah. Coolah Tops National Park is not accessible by coach.
- Overall town appeal - entrance and general appeal of town in need of “makeover” in order to instil a sense of pride in business and home owners. Some front-line staff would benefit from customer service workshops





*The area just north of the present day townsite was known by the Gomeroi People as 'Weetalibah -Wallangan' which means 'place where the fire went out and left a black stump'. Coolah today is the official Home of the Black Stump.*



# Our Assets

## People

- Strong pro-active, can-do, self-help tradition
- 1300 people in district, 900 in Coolah town
- Young people- school population of 280
- Significant and active Seniors population
- Strong sporting tradition
- Recognised national horse competitors
- Significant number of state and national sporting champions
- Nationally recognised agricultural achievers
- High volunteer contribution
- Low crime rate
- High perceived quality of life by residents

## Institutions

- Warrumbungle Shire Council - local staff, offices, library and depot
- Coolah Multi-Purpose Service Hospital with Aged Care
- Education- Coolah Central School, Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, Coolah Preschool Kindergarten Inc.
- National Parks Wildlife Service extension
- Emergency services - 3 x Ambulances/paramedics, 1 Police Officer, Coolah Volunteer Rescue Assoc'n, Rural Fire Service (volunteers), Fire and Rescue NSW (town brigade), NRMA
- Home and Community Care. Meals on Wheels. Coolah Cottages. Self-Care Units. Low Income Units

## Physical

- Location - halfway between Melbourne and Brisbane; Coffs Harbour and Canberra
- Central location to major centres - Dubbo and Tamworth
- Tourism gateway to the Warrumbungles - 3 hours from Newcastle; 4.5 hours from Sydney
- Scenic rural land and farming landscapes
- Productive soils, reliable and accessible water
- Coolah Tops National Park - panoramic views, unique flora including; towering, ancient Grass trees, Norfolk Falls, bushwalking and camping
- Pandora Pass and Allan Cunningham Memorial
- Black Stump Way, Golden Highway, Warrumbungle Way
- Coolaburragundy and Talbragar Rivers
- Wind - the "Liverpool Range Wind Farm" project and "Valley of the Winds Wind Farm" project
- Dark Skies and stargazing opportunities
- Key Facilities - Recreation/showgrounds with infrastructure to hold major events, swimming pool, river walk, Black Stump rest area, Coolah Airstrip
- Parks and Reserves - Swanston, McMaster, Jorrocks, Queensborough, Coolah Common
- Sporting Facilities - Bowen Oval, Coolah Sporting Club - golf course/ bowling greens, tennis courts, netball courts, Three Rivers Recreation Grounds (renowned horse sports complex with recent upgrades to multipurpose uses)
- Numerous heritage buildings
- Disused railway line/potential rail trail
- Wildlife, bird life



# Our Assets

## Social Networks

- Service groups – Lions, Coolah Men’s Shed, Coolah Hospital Auxiliary, Coolah MPS Committee, Caring for Coolah (C4C), Vinnies and Anglican Op Shops, Dunedoo/Coolah Landcare Group, Coolah District Development Group, Playgroup, Connect 5
- Sporting groups/clubs - Coolah Sporting Club, Coolah Junior Sports Club, Little Athletics, karate, bowls, swimming, golf, rugby league, rugby union, touch football, cricket, netball, Coolah horse sports: pony club , team penning, rodeo, campdraft, barrel racing and polocross, working dogs, yoga and gym
- Churches- Catholic Parish of St Michael’s, Presbyterian Church, Coolah/Dunedoo Anglican Church
- Cultural and craft groups- Coolah & District Historical Society, Coolah Historical Arts Tourism Subcommittee (CHATS), upholstery, quilters, bridge, Octagon Players, Coolah Craft Shop
- Central School P&C and Catholic School P&F groups, Cattle Club at the Central School
- Landcare. NSW Farmers. Political groups
- Coolah Senior Citizens, Wednesday Activity Group for Seniors
- Coolah Youth and Community Centre Committee, Bowen Oval Steering Committee, Rec Grounds Users Group, Rec Grounds Trust, Jump the Stump Committee
- 95.3 FM Three Rivers Radio
- Events- RockN at the Racecourse festival, Rodeo, Campdraft, Polocross, Team Penning, Veterans Touch, Golf Tournaments, Swimming Carnivals, Regional Schools Cross-Country

## Economic

- Key local groups - Coolah District Development Group, Warrumbungle Shire Community Development Coordinator Program, Coolah Chamber of Commerce, WSC Economic Development and Tourism subcommittee of Council
- Coolah District Diary and Outback Press – local newspaper and print business
- Key agricultural industries- beef, sheep, grain, Studstock breeding enterprises
- Significant number of businesses operating for over 10 years
- Retail sector- supermarket, bakery, opportunity shops, butchery, hardware, agricultural produce supplies, patchwork, fabric and dress store, giftware, pharmacy
- Service sector- real estate (x2) and stock and station agent, post office, builders, electrical, plumbing, carpet cleaning, painting, fuel outlets x3, smash and mechanical, auto and tyre centre, hair and beauty. Agricultural produce supplies, welding, repairs and parts. Truck and bus contractors, rural contractors, NRMA, veterinary services, Council Waste Transfer Station
- Manufacturing sector- steel fabrication, upholsterers, fibreglass fabrication
- Tourism sector- bakery, hotels X 2, motel, caravan park with cabins, Air BnB operators, service stations for fast food and fuel, Driver Reviver, Pandora Visitor Information Centre and Gallery, Craft Shop, Patchwork
- Coolah Tops National Park- 3 designated camping areas and 2 historic huts
- Wind farms x2 (proposed)
- Professional services including medical, legal services, rural services (eg shearing), pharmacy, accountancy, photography, real estate, printing, community gym, veterinary, earth moving, dance studio
- Council - School Based Traineeships
- Facilities- airstrip, Council office and depot
- “Why Leave Town” Coolah Card (Lions Club and Chamber) Shop local.
- RV friendly town – free parking for self-contained visitors, dump site

# Our Assets

## **Cultural ... Stories & Sources of Pride**

- Local legends and Australia folklore - 'Beyond the Black Stump'
- Black Stump Rest Area
- Pandora Visitor Information Centre and Gallery
- Historic churches, hospital buildings and school
- Long Tan Memorial - first in Australia
- Coolah School of Arts and War Memorial
- Indigenous heritage and culture of Gomeroi and Wiradjuri people
- King Togee Headstone and interpretive sign
- Connection to Allan Cunningham - famous botanist and explorer, Pandora Pass Bi-Centenary 2023
- Octagon Theatre and Octagon Players, United Dance Academy
- Coolah Library - part of the Macquarie Regional Library
- Roy Cameron's extensive historical collection and writings, Border police history
- Horse/Equine heritage and culture - several Coolah raised horses have won important national races
- Rail heritage - End of the Line - Centenary book 2020
- Sawmill and logging heritage in Coolah Tops
- Villages- Leadville, Weetaliba, Uarbry and Cassilis scenic drives



# Our Strategies & Actions

## Theme One

### Enhance Lifestyle & Population Attraction

#### ACTIONS

# 1

##### 1. River Walk Project

- Develop an overall plan
- Create shade areas, native flower beds, fitness stations and imaginative play areas- meeting points for all ages, including access for seniors with walkers/gophers
- Develop signage, seating and picnic tables
- Recognise and display indigenous and local culture and heritage
- Link the bike track to the Recreation Grounds with roadside sculptures as Stage 1
- Stage 2, Coolah - Dunedoo Rail Trail

**Timeframe: 2020-2024 Stage 1 completion, 2024-2030 Stage 2**

##### 2. Community Garden

- Establish committee
- Community identify potential locations and decide on most appropriate location
- Plan necessary infrastructure for garden eg. Water/Garden Beds etc

**Timeframe: 2020-2024**

#### LEAD GROUPS

**Coolah District Development Group Inc,  
Dunedoo/Coolah Landcare**

#### OTHER PARTNERS

**Warrumbungle Shire Council, Coolah Central School,  
Sacred Heart Catholic School, Coolah Men's Shed,  
Coolah Preschool, Coolah Youth and Community Centre Inc**

## Theme Two

### Build Community Connections

#### ACTIONS

# 2

##### 1. Cassilis Road View Spot

- Establish sub-committee
- Work with Council traffic committee
- Plan signage, seating, potential view finder/photo frame, location diagram

**Timeframe: 2020-2025**

##### 2. Youth Engagement, Retention and Attraction

- Build Jump the Stump skate park - funding approved
- Develop a youth retention and attraction strategy including a mechanism to regularly keep in touch with former Coolah youth residents, reminding them of Coolah lifestyle and work opportunities
- Fund and implement a Youth Development Officer position
- Create a local initiative to encourage children and youth participation and citizenship
- Introduce more sports and cultural clinics
- Establish a mixed twilight netball tournament
- Physically refresh the Youth Centre and introduce an after school youth program and school holiday programs like laser tag. Introduce relevant youth games
- Create more opportunities to hear youth voices

**Timeframe: 2020-2025**

## Theme Two

# Build Community Connections

## ACTIONS



### 3. Community Building Initiatives

- Develop a 'Skill and Passion Audit' of the community
- Promote volunteering and community engagement
- CYCC Hall Community ownership
- Establish a Community Garden and edible garden beds
- Establish a Farmer's Market that provides an opportunity for young people to test agricultural and entrepreneurial ideas
- Establish a TOMRA reverse vending machine for bottle and can recycling
- Install air conditioning in Catholic hall to create a better community space
- Create a new event- an annual combined Gymkhana/Bikehana
- Encourage greater resident pride in their houses
- Introduce a local renewable energy scheme
- Develop a strategy to encourage retirement in Coolah
- Establish a Community Bank
- Lobby for improvement of mobile phone coverage

**TIMEFRAME: 2020-2025**

### 4. Community Hub Project

- Create a facilitator role
- Develop an entrepreneurial development eco-system to support local idea/enterprise creation and business mentoring
- Create a drop in coffee/meet facilities
- Coordinate youth clinics - drama, arts and crafts, tennis, cricket, visual arts...
- Create workspace facilities for new enterprises
- Coordinate school holiday activities
- Foster mutual learning, sharing and mentoring opportunities
- Create an archives storage area for Roy Cameron's historical files and maps
- Establish a choir

**TIMEFRAME: 2020-2025**

### 5. Educational Opportunities

- Improve the Catholic Church Hall as a venue for community events and child care services- kitchen enhancement, air conditioning
- Develop more sporting and cultural youth clinics
- Improve facilities and grounds at both Central and Catholic Schools
- Establish a fenced agricultural plot at Catholic School
- Regain TAFE activities
- Develop learning centre activities

**TIMEFRAME: 2020-2025**

## LEAD GROUPS

**Coolah District Development Group Inc, Jump the Stump Committee, Coolah Youth and Community Centre Inc**

## OTHER PARTNERS

**Warrumbungle Shire Council, Coolah Central School, Sacred Heart Catholic School, UPC Renewables, Tilt CCC (Liverpool Range Windfarm)**

## Theme Three

# Community Spaces Appeal & Development

## ACTIONS

### 1. Revitalise Binnia Street

- Refresh all three town entrances and reset Coolah rocks with mulch bed and focus spotlights
- Revitalise town gardens and trees
- Undertake a signage audit and install and refurbish business/historical/tourism signage
- Utilise empty shops for pop up retail and enterprises
- Protect and promote heritage buildings and heritage street appeal

**Timeframe: 2020-2024**

### 2. Three Rivers Recreation Grounds

- Construct amenity area fencing.
- Install horse day yard (Goal-300)
- Landscaping around community areas (eg Multi-Purpose shed and kitchen etc)

**TIMEFRAME: 2020-2021**

### 3. Swimming Pool Development

- Improve seating, change-rooms and toilets
- Create water park features including an inflatable slide
- Instigate more activities especially in the evening
- Wish List:
  - Construct a diving board
  - Install barbecues
  - Install underwater lights
  - Heat pool
  - Develop a water feature in baby pool
  - Build a therapy pool

**TIMEFRAME: 2020-2025**

### 4. Recreational Facility Developments

- Fund and install defibrillation units in all sporting and event venues
- Expand the gym

#### BOWEN OVAL

- Jump the Stump Skate Park - funded
- Build multi-user storage shed at Bowen Oval
- Resurface the tennis courts
- Replace the soccer nets
- Upgrade Bowen Oval toilets
- Build new toilets at the netball courts
- Improve signage at Bowen Oval

#### REC GROUNDS

- Build multi-user storage shed for all users at Rec Grounds
- Complete the construction of horse day-yards
- Address toilet accessibility
- Upgrade water system at Rec Grounds
- Undertake landscaping around Function Centre at Rec Grounds
- Improve signage at the Rec Grounds
- Upgrade power at Rec Grounds
- Build Pony Club storage shed
- Build Campdraft Secretary's Box and Campdraft Yard shade structures

**TIMEFRAME: 2020-2025**

## LEAD GROUPS

**Coolah District Development Group Inc, Coolah Chamber of Commerce, Coolah Rec Grounds Land Managers, Coolah Rec Grounds User's Group, Bowen Oval User's Group & Steering Committee**

## OTHER PARTNERS

**Warrumbungle Shire Council, Dunedoo/Coolah Landcare, Coolah Men's Shed, Coolah Youth and Community Centre**

## Theme Four

# Preserve Local Heritage & Enhance Environment

## ACTIONS

### 1. Railway Centenary (2020) and Heritage

- Feature a railway mural in celebration of the towns rich rail history
- Potential Rail Trail Coolah – Craboon (45km), pursue funding for Feasibility Study and Development Plan

Timeframe: 2020-2025

## LEAD GROUPS

**Coolah District Development Group Inc, Coolah Historical, Arts & Tourism Subcommittee, Coolah Historical Society**

## OTHER PARTNERS

**Warrumbungle Shire Council**



## Theme Five

# Business & Industry Development & Support

## ACTIONS



### 1. Tourism development

- Formulate a town/shire 'Tourism Strategy'
- Develop a town logo
- Paint/decorate the silos
- Expand accommodation options
- Develop RV area
- Establish a Visitors Centre/interpretative Centre similar to Pilliga Discovery Centre/Baradine Visitor Centre
- Improve interpretation related to the Black Stump folklore in Binnia Street civic space
- Improve the appeal of the Coolah Tops National Park – explore opportunities for glamping, mountain bikes, horse riding, geo trails, bird routes; create garden at lookout; provide more interpretation including signage pointing out different peaks and destinations; seal the access road; re-open the road from Merriwa; provide a NRMA service; create a sculpture with viewing/photographic frame; enhance basic facilities – more rubbish bins, toilets and seating
- Renew interest in the development of the Mountain Bike track
- Establish a viewing spot above Coolah on the Cassilis Rd with interpretation
- Construct view frames at view spot
- Grow Coolah's reputation and infrastructure related to horse events
- Continue to upgrade the Rec Grounds as an event venue
- Lobby for re-sealing Black Stump Way

**Timeframe: 2020-2025**

### 2. Business Retention and Expansion

- Establish feasibility of a Community Bank and Post Office
- Instigation of Buy Local Campaign

**TIMEFRAME: 2020-2025**

### 3. Agricultural Diversity and Support

- Promote local niche products and Paddock to Plate
- Instigate a Farmer's Market
- Creation of an agricultural plot at Catholic School

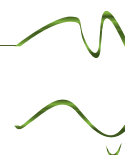
**Timeframe: 2020-2025**


## LEAD GROUPS

**Coolah District Development Group Inc,  
Coolah Chamber of Commerce**

## OTHER PARTNERS

**Warrumbungle Shire Council,  
WSC Economic Development & Tourism Subcommittee,  
Sacred Heart Catholic School  
and P&F Association**





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**Coolah's proactive responses to job and industry losses and community reinvention earned it the 'NSW Community of the Year' award in 2007.**

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**COOLAH**  
NEW SOUTH WALES