



Australian Government

REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT PLAN

Mid-North Coast Priority Employment Area

Local Employment Coordinator
Renee Hawkins



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The document must be attributed as the Regional Employment Plan – Mid-North Coast Priority Employment Area.

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A plan to help drive local solutions to labour market issues

The Local Employment Coordinator for the Mid-North Coast priority employment area is Renee Hawkins

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Renee is supported by an Advisory Committee comprised of key local stakeholders

REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT PLAN

Local Employment Coordinators have been appointed to 21 priority employment areas through the Priority Employment Area initiative. They will work closely with employers, employment services providers, local communities and all levels of government to help drive local solutions to labour market issues. This involves identifying opportunities, issues and helping to coordinate responses from businesses, government and other organisations to put in place strategies to help address them.

Local Employment Coordinators also develop and implement a Regional Employment Plan that sets out their key goals and strategies to address unemployment, skills and labour issues for their priority employment area.

The Local Employment Coordinator for the Mid-North Coast priority employment area is Ms Renee Hawkins. Ms Hawkins has developed this Regional Employment Plan with support from an Employment Project Officer and an Advisory Committee made up of key local stakeholders who will work with her to implement the strategies set out in the Plan.

The committee comprises key local stakeholders and includes:

- Ms Lyn Bourke, Department of Employment, Hunter and Northern New South Wales
- Mr Grant Burtenshaw, Edmund Barton Centre - StartUp Business
- Ms Jenny Fraser, Mid Coast Connect
- Ms Jan Johnson, Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council
- Mr Ken Johnson, The Gloucester Project
- Ms Marianne Johnson, The Gloucester Project
- Mr Don Mackenzie, The Department of Employment
- Ms Val March, Booroongen Djugun College
- Ms Louise McMeeking, New South Wales Trade and Investment
- Mr Chris Taylor, New South Wales Department of Education and Communities - State Training Services
- Ms Ruth Thompson, Mid Coast Communities
- Mr Peter Tregilgas, Regional Development Australia - Mid North Coast
- Ms Wendy Yarnold, Pathways to the Pilbara Pty Ltd
- Mr Mark Almond, Department of Employment
- Mr Steve Attkins, Manning Valley Business Chamber
- Mr Kellon Beard, NSW Business Chamber
- Mr Rod Barnaby, Future Ambition Pty Ltd
- Ms Sandra Barnett, New South Wales DEC- State Training Services
- Ms Kerrie Bowtell, North Coast Technical and Further Education – Nambucca
- Mr John Butler, Nambucca Valley Care
- Ms Liesa Davies, Port Macquarie Hastings Council
- Ms Sue Donnelly, Youth Connections Inc
- Ms Jill Follington, Industry MidNorth Coast Inc.
- Ms Kerry Grace, Evolve Network
- Ms Renee Hawkins, Local Employment Coordinator
- Ms Marina Hynes, St Joseph's Family Services
- Ms Jacqui Jones, Regional Development Australia
- Ms Karen Roods, Holiday Coast Credit Union
- Ms Rhonda Ebeling, North Coast Technical and Further Education – Taree
- Ms Jennie Rosser, New Careers for Aboriginal People (NCAP) ETC Limited
- Ms Helga Smit, Catholic Care Social Services Hunter-Manning

- Ms Susannah Smith, Kempsey Shire Council
- Ms Jo-Anne Stavely, North Coast Technical and Further Education - Port Macquarie
- Mr Peter Taylor, Department of Employment
- Mr Peter Vibe, New South Wales Department of Education and Communities - State Training Services

The Department of Employment acknowledges the traditional owners of the Mid-North Coast priority employment area and their elders past and present recognising their continuing connection to country. This Regional Employment Plan strives to build and harness mutually respectful relationships and reflect community priorities in employment, skills and jobs development for the region.

SUMMARY

This Regional Employment Plan for the Mid-North Coast priority employment area aims to maximise employment opportunities in the region.

One of the key goals of this Regional Employment Plan is to address issues impacting on local Indigenous people. The unemployment rate for Indigenous people in the priority employment area is significantly higher than the comparable national rate and Indigenous workers fill only 2 per cent of all occupations in the area. This Plan has four strategies specifically aimed at creating training and employment opportunities for local Indigenous job seekers and supporting Indigenous businesses to grow.

The Local Employment Coordinator and Advisory Committee also identified a need to address skills gaps and ensure that local job seekers have access to suitable vocational and skills training in order to take advantage of employment opportunities in existing and emerging industries.

The five (5) key goals of this Regional Employment Plan are:

- Close the Gap for Indigenous Australians through maximising Government investments and developing key partnerships;
- Support employment, workforce participation and skills development including through maximising government investments;
- Help retrenched workers transition into new employment and/or training;
- Facilitate employment and training opportunities for job seekers, with a focus on industries experiencing skills shortages; and
- Support the development of Social Enterprise initiatives with the assistance of local business support networks and by maximising government investment.

This plan identifies activities for the 2013-2014 Financial Year.

MID-NORTH COAST PRIORITY EMPLOYMENT AREA

The Mid-North Coast priority employment area spans approximately 16 831 square kilometres and includes the six Local Government Areas of Bellingen, Gloucester, Greater Taree, Hastings (including Port Macquarie), Kempsey and Nambucca.

The Federal Electorates of Lyne and Cowper fall within this priority employment area.

The Mid-North Coast priority employment area covers the Bellingen, Gloucester, Greater Taree, Hastings (including Port Macquarie), Kempsey and Nambucca Local Government Areas

The Federal Electorates of Lyne and Cowper fall within this priority employment area

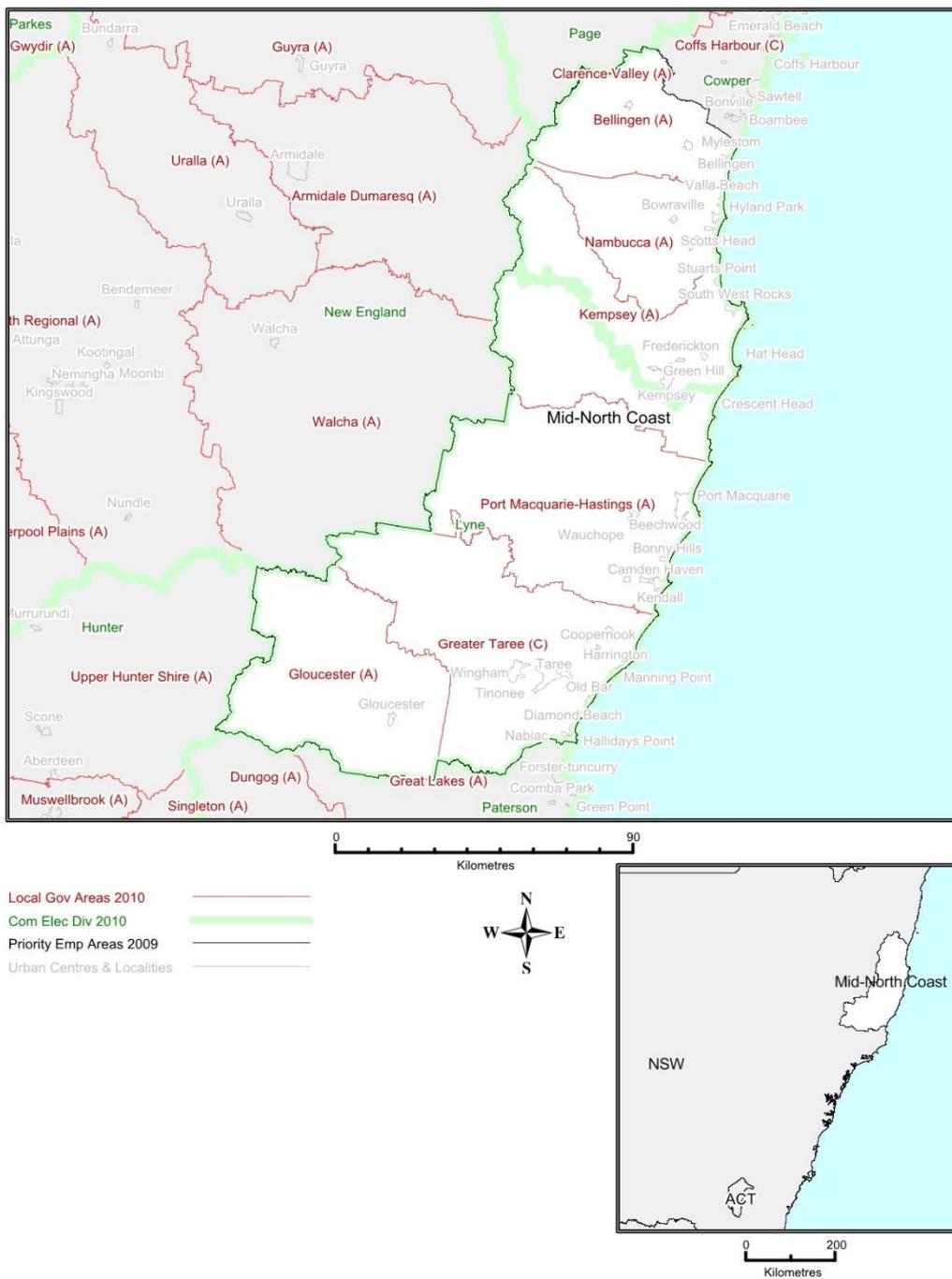


Figure 1: Mid-North Coast priority employment area.

The region is mainly coastal, with a number of inland Local Government Areas containing hinterland, rivers, valleys and floodplains.

Around 190,700 people live in the Mid-North Coast priority employment area

While the region is mainly coastal, a number of Local Government Areas are situated inland and contain large areas of hinterland, rivers, valleys and floodplains. The region is rich in environmental assets including waterways, national parks and state forests.

Urban centres in the priority employment area rely heavily on retail trade, health and education sectors, and tourism-related activities and services. The hinterland and valleys are home to a number of agriculture industries.

Population

The population of the Mid-North Coast priority employment area stood at around 190 700 in June 2012.¹ Around 23 per cent of the population in the region were aged 65 years and over in June 2012 (compared with 14 per cent for Australia), while only around 14 per cent were aged 15-29 (compared with 21 per cent for Australia). This reflects the movement of teenagers and young adults away from the region and, in part, the migration of people, either approaching or of retirement age, to the region.

According to New South Wales Department of Planning², population growth will be driven by net migration and will exceed growth rates in New South Wales as a whole until 2013.

Employment and labour market participation

The unemployment rate in the priority employment area stood at 6.2 per cent in September 2013, up from the 5.9 per cent recorded a year earlier and above the national average (of 5.6 per cent). While the region's participation rate rose by 0.8 percentage points over the period, to 54.3 per cent in September 2013, it remains well below the national average of 64.9 per cent. The youth unemployment rate stood at 14.9 per cent, compared with 12.7 per cent for Australia.

In August 2011, the Indigenous unemployment rate in the region was 24.0 per cent, well above the comparable rate for Australia (17.1 per cent).

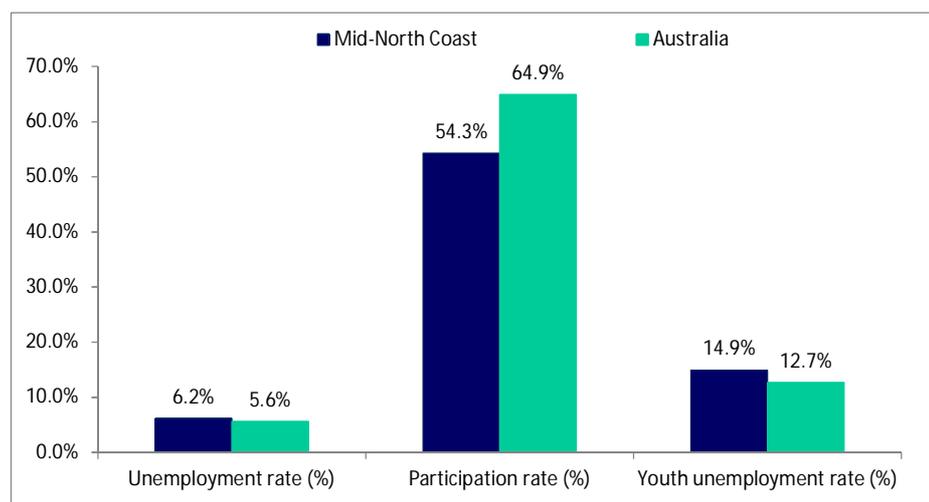


Figure 2: Unemployment rates and participation rates in the Mid-North Coast priority employment area.

¹ ABS 2012 Estimated Resident Population data

² NSW Department of Planning Projections, 2008

In September 2013, the unemployment rate for the priority employment area stood at 6.2 per cent.

The youth unemployment rate stood at 14.9 per cent.

Source: ABS Labour Force, Australia, September 2013 (Cat No. 6202.0) and ABS Labour Force, Australia, Detailed – Electronic Delivery September 2013 (Cat No. 6291.0.55.001). Data for Australia are in seasonally adjusted terms, while data for the region are three-month averages of original estimates, with the exception of youth data which are 12-month averages of original data. The priority employment area of Mid-North Coast is approximated by the ABS Labour Force Region of Richmond-Tweed and Mid-North Coast.

Education

Data from the ABS Census of Population and Housing 2011 indicates that just 37.8 per cent of people aged 15-64 in the priority employment area had completed year 12 (compared with 59.0 per cent nationally) and only 13.5 per cent had a bachelor degree or above qualification (compared with 24.4 per cent nationally).

Lower levels of educational attainment may mean that workers will have difficulties adjusting to any industry restructuring or job losses that may occur as a result of an economic downturn.

However, those people in the Mid-North Coast priority employment area with relatively high levels of education generally perform better in the labour market, with higher labour force participation rates and lower unemployment rates, compared with those with lower education levels.

The Local Employment Coordinator has identified a need for accessible career advisory knowledge and suitably qualified personnel, clear pathways for education and improved local options for school leavers. As a result, there is also a strong need to link high school students with employment and further education opportunities, including trade training.

Improved knowledge regarding existing programmes, courses and flexible training options is required in the priority employment area, as well as better recognition of prior learning, particularly as a means of encouraging older workers to retrain.

Industry composition

The largest employing industries in the Mid-North Coast priority employment area in 2011 were health care and social assistance (employing 10 500 workers or 16.2 per cent of total employment in Mid-North Coast), retail trade (8 800 or 13.5 per cent), Construction (5800 or 8.9 per cent) and education and training (5 800 or 8.9 per cent), and accommodation and food services (5 600 or 8.6 per cent).

The region has higher proportions of workers in the tourism-related industries of retail trade and accommodation and food services compared with Australia as a whole (10.8 per cent and 6.6 per cent respectively). Mid-North Coast also has a much higher employment share in health care and social assistance (16.2 per cent) and agriculture, forestry and fishing (4.6 per cent) compared with Australia (11.9 per cent and 2.5 per cent each, respectively).

Between 2006 and 2011, the largest declines in share of employment in Mid-North Coast were in retail trade (decreasing from 14.7 per cent in 2006 to 13.5 per cent in 2011) and manufacturing (decreasing from 8.3 per cent to 7.1 per cent over the same period). By contrast, the share of employment in the area in health care and social assistance increased from 13.7 per cent in 2006 to 16.2 per cent in 2011. This increase in share was larger than nationally (from 10.8 per cent in 2006 to 11.9 per cent in 2011).

Only 37.8 per cent of people aged 15-64 in the priority employment area had completed Year 12.

People in the priority employment area with relatively high levels of education generally perform better in the labour market.

The occupational profile of Mid-North Coast reflects its service industry base, with a comparatively high proportion of community and personal service workers (12.3 per cent of employment in Mid-North Coast compared with 9.8 per cent nationally). The area's profile also suggests a lower skilled workforce than nationally, with a lower proportion of workers employed professionals (17.3 per cent compared with 21.7 per cent) and a higher proportion employed as labourers (12.3 per cent compared with 9.6 per cent) and sales workers (11.0 per cent compared with 9.5 per cent).

Source: ABS 2006 and 2011 Census of Population and Housing. The Mid-North Coast Priority Employment Area consists of the Bellingen, Gloucester, Greater Taree, Hastings, Kempsey and Nambucca Local Government Areas (LGA), 2006.

Skills and Jobs in Demand

The Department of Employment's regular employer surveys provide an opportunity to assess the impact of labour market fluctuations on employer recruiting experiences. This provides useful information to help target or adjust activities.

The occupations most commonly reported by employers in the Mid-North Coast priority employment area as difficult to fill during the 12 months to September 2012 were:

Bachelor Degree or Higher Vocational Education and Training Qualifications	
Chefs*	Registered Nurses*
Structural Steel and Welding Trades Workers*	
Other Vocation Education and Training qualifications and lower skilled occupations	
General Clerks	Kitchenhands*
Pharmacy Sales Assistants	Truck Drivers*

*Occupations marked with an asterisk were also reported as difficult to fill in the region in June 2010, which suggests that employers have experienced persistent difficulty filling these vacancies.

Transport

A high proportion of workers in the region use private transport. This could reflect a lack of other modes of available transport or the relative convenience of car travel and easy parking. There are irregular transport services and a need for better coordination between existing transport modes.

Poor drivers' license levels within Indigenous communities in the region also present challenges to gaining employment.

Road freight is set to increase as the Pacific Highway's dual carriageway upgrade for the Mid North Coast draws towards completion in 2016. Details can be found at: http://www.rms.nsw.gov.au/roadprojects/projects/pac_hwy/construction_employment/

Housing

The high number of individuals and families on the public housing waiting list suggests a need for more social housing in the region. Population growth estimates will drive the need for more housing and opportunities exist for promotion of greener construction and affordable housing. The Social Housing Initiative is estimated to provide an \$85 million investment to improve housing options in the region.

A high proportion of workers in the region use private transport

Population growth estimates will drive the need for more housing

Opportunities

The region has a private sector of largely small, service-based businesses and only few large-scale industries with industry innovation limited throughout the priority employment area. There are opportunities to make existing businesses more sustainable through initiatives such as small biz connect, Regional Industries Investment Fund, the rollout of the National Broadband Network (NBN); and social enterprise development.

In terms of tourism, there are opportunities to develop family oriented tourism and fine dining experiences and the need to better market the region as a means of attracting people to the region in the off tourist seasons.

The upgrading of infrastructure and facilities at Port Macquarie, Kempsey and Taree airports will provide opportunities, along with significant employment and training opportunities for business and job seekers in the region.

In addition, the redevelopment of the Kempsey Hospital, with construction of the Port Macquarie Base Hospital Expansion project due for completion in mid-2014, offers significant construction, employment and training opportunities for local business and job seekers in the area.

Other Community Development projects recently announced in December 2013 funded under the Regional Development Australia Fund will also provide future opportunities for local employment including:

- The Northern Gateway Regional Transport Hub in Taree -The project will provide road network upgrades, eased connections to air and rail transport and a road freight interchange terminal at the northern entrance of Taree to entry from the Pacific Highway.
- The South Kempsey Recreational Parklands Project – an upgrade of 5.2 hectares of recreational parkland.
- The Surf Life Saving Operations and Training Centre in Port Macquarie– providing education and integrated rescue services for the whole of the Mid North Coast.

There are opportunities to develop family oriented tourism and fine dining experiences.

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Goal 1: Closing the Gap for Indigenous Australians through maximising Government investments and developing key partnerships

Strategies

1. **Assist in the development and delivery of Indigenous employment projects** which aim to provide employment opportunities for Indigenous people; strengthen cultural competence for both employers and employees; and build the skills and resilience of Indigenous students, job seekers and employees to secure training and employment. The Local Employment Coordinator will do this by:
 - engaging with key stakeholders including Indigenous organisations, Job Services Australia providers and Registered Training Organisations to develop Indigenous employment projects to train and employ Indigenous workers to meet the needs of industry;
 - assisting with the development of Indigenous Employment Projects targeted at providing training and employment opportunities for specific cohorts of Indigenous job seekers e.g. young people, elders and women;
 - creating partnerships with Registered Training Organisations, Job Services Australia providers and other relevant stakeholders to develop clear recruitment, training and education pathways for Indigenous stakeholders and job seekers; and
 - working with the Department of Employment's Regional Education, Skills and Jobs Coordinator to maximise engagement with the local Indigenous community on matters relating to early childhood education, school education, skills development, tertiary education and employment.
2. **Work with existing Indigenous organisations to train and employ Indigenous workers** and facilitate partnerships to support their operation as commercially sustainable enterprises by:
 - working with existing Indigenous organisations to develop workforce strategies that facilitate the up-skilling of existing workers and the attraction and recruitment of new employees, by utilising existing and new government programmes;
 - creating partnerships with Registered Training Organisations, Job Services Australia providers and other relevant stakeholders to develop clear recruitment, training and education pathways for Indigenous stakeholders and job seekers;
 - helping existing Indigenous organisations to identify business assistance and support programmes which are tailored to improving their commercial sustainability; and
 - working with existing Indigenous organisations to identify potential new revenue streams and commercial tendering opportunities.

Goal 2: Support employment, workforce participation and skills development including through maximising Government investments

To promote the availability of existing programmes, courses and flexible training options and encourage the take up of work experience and employment places created by employers, the Local Employment Coordinator and her Advisory Committee nominated the following three (3) key strategies:

Strategies

1. **Facilitate and promote Jobs and Skills Expos/Jobs Drives in the priority employment area** to improve stakeholder knowledge and access to training pathways, work experience and employment opportunities by:
 - encouraging the participation of industry, education and training providers and employment services providers to support the development and delivery of Jobs and Skills Expos/Jobs Drives, encourage industry partnerships with the education and training sector and showcase employment and training opportunities within the region to job seekers;
 - reviewing the outcomes from the Jobs and Skills Expos/Jobs Drives to further refine the content to better meet the needs of job seekers and employers.
2. **Raise awareness of the opportunities offered through Australian Government programmes and initiatives** to increase access to training and employment opportunities by:
 - working with the Department of Employment's Regional Education, Skills and Jobs Coordinator to showcase government programmes and services at local community forums, business meetings and conferences.
3. **Increase employment participation** by identifying, developing and coordinating work experience and job opportunities in consultation with local employers by:
 - engaging and collaborating with the Regional Education Skills Forum and their sub committees to create partnerships between education and training providers and employers to facilitate work experience opportunities for students and youth in the priority employment area;
 - working collaboratively with the Department of Employment's Regional Education, Skills and Jobs Coordinator to engage with the local community to develop projects relating to early childhood education, school education, skills development, tertiary education and employment; and
 - continuing to work with key stakeholders to identify work experience opportunities with regional employers to increase employment opportunities for local job seekers.

Goal 3: Help retrenched workers transition into new employment and/or training

A Rapid Response framework has been established through an existing New South Wales State Government model to offer a coordinated, whole of government approach to support affected workers where major redundancies (i.e. more than 100 workers impacted) occur in the priority employment area.

Administered by the New South Wales Department of Premier and Cabinet and New South Wales Trade and Investment, this framework allows all stakeholders in the region, including the Department of Employment, the Local Employment Coordinator and employment services providers, to deliver timely and targeted assistance that will minimise the impact on the affected workers and identify positive opportunities to benefit the region as a whole.

In instances where less than 100 workers are affected, the Local Employment Coordinator and the Department of Employment's Employment Project Officer will take the lead to ensure that targeted and coordinated assistance is delivered by the appropriate stakeholders on the ground.

In both circumstances support can only be provided where affected companies accept an offer of assistance on behalf of their staff. Where these offers are not accepted, the Local Employment Coordinator and the Department of Employment's Employment Project Officer will work with stakeholders to ensure that their activities are coordinated and that affected workers receive the support and assistance they need.

Strategies

1. **Support the New South Wales Department of Premier and Cabinet and New South Wales Trade and Investment** in the development and implementation of the Rapid Response framework where 100 or more redundancies are announced by businesses in the priority employment area. The Local Employment Coordinator will also work with the Department of Employment in the delivery of a rapid response to redundancies.
2. **Where redundancies occur with less than 100 workers affected**, the Local Employment Coordinator and the Department of Employment's Employment Project Officer will take the lead to ensure targeted and coordinated assistance is delivered including:
 - working with key stakeholders including the Department of Employment to coordinate information sessions;
 - providing support and assistance to affected workers; and
 - facilitating the provision of information regarding re-training options and job referrals, as well as access to relevant Australian Government services and initiatives.
3. **Assist affected workers to connect with and transition to alternative training or employment opportunities** by:
 - working with stakeholders to identify the skills base of retrenched workers and connecting them with employers within the same industry or employers who require the same skills sets.

4. **Support the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities - State Training Services** in the delivery of their Retrenched Workers Training Program which is funded under the Strategic Skills Program. This programme covers a range of services from information and advice to skills assessment, and gap training to full training qualifications.
5. **Identify new opportunities for retrenched workers** by:
 - working with the Department of Employment's Regional Education, Skills and Jobs Coordinator to identify training for skills in demand in the region; and
 - developing and convening training courses to address skills shortages and transition affected workers into training and employment.
6. **Support New South Wales Trade and Investment** in their development of business assistance programmes tailored toward employers who have been affected by business collapses.

Goal 4: Facilitate employment and training opportunities for job seekers, with a focus on industries experiencing skills shortages

The Local Employment Coordinator, the Department of Employment's Employment Project Officer and the Advisory Committee will work to identify areas of skill shortage across industry sectors within the priority employment area.

The Local Employment Coordinator and the Department of Employment's Regional Education, Skills and Jobs Coordinator will work collaboratively with key stakeholders and employers to ensure that education and employment pathways are developed and job opportunities are maximised in industry sectors with identified skill shortages.

Strategies

1. **Identify areas with skill shortages within the priority employment area and gaps in the provision of education and training to meet industry needs** by engaging and collaborating with the Regional Education Skills Forums and their sub committees.
2. **Identify areas with skill shortages within the priority employment area and gaps in the provision of education and training to meet regional development opportunities** by engaging and collaborating with Regional Development Australia and other government agencies.
3. **Develop workforce planning projects that facilitate the up-skilling of existing workers and the recruitment of new employees** by utilising existing and new government programmes and working with existing employers in the priority employment area with identified skill shortages, including government agencies.
4. **Assist Registered Training Organisations to develop clear education pathways** in the priority employment area for employment positions within the areas with skill shortages.

5. **Work with employers and Job Services Australia providers** to ensure that clear communication channels and effective servicing arrangements are established so successful recruitment strategies are developed and implemented. This aims to address communication issues reported by employers.
6. **Maximise benefits from relevant projects, programmes and services in the education, skills and training sectors** by working collaboratively with the the Department of Employment's Regional Education, Skills and Jobs Coordinator.
7. **Provide assistance to all existing employers with identified skills shortages** in placing trainees (including school-based trainees) and apprentices by ensuring effective servicing arrangements are established with Australian Apprenticeship Centres, Group Training Organisations and the New South Wales Department of Education and Community - State Training Services.
8. **Work with employers involved in workforce planning projects** to maintain linkages with Job Services Australia providers, Registered Training Organisations, Australian government programmes and apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities.

Goal 5: Support the development of Social Enterprise initiatives with the assistance of local business support networks and by maximising government investment

Strategies

1. **Identify and assist in the development of sustainable Social Enterprise projects** targeted at providing training and employment opportunities for job seekers by working with local business support networks, including business chambers. This may include:
 - facilitating workshops in the priority employment area to improve stakeholder knowledge of social enterprise development models and access to training pathways and government services and programmes.
2. **Assist Registered Training Organisations to develop clear training and education pathways** for skills development for social entrepreneurs and their associated workforce development needs.
3. **Provide assistance to support local** social enterprise development and investment applications for funding, where necessary.