



**Local Jobs
Program**

Local Jobs Plan
Mid North Coast
New South Wales
October 2021

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The Department of Education, Skills and Employment acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of the lands known as the 'Mid North Coast Region' - The Gumbaynggirr, Dunghutti, Biripi/Birpai and Worimi lands where we work and travel through. We pay our respects to their people, cultures, and their Elders past, present and emerging, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Mid North Coast Region.

The Local Jobs Program

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

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

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

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

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

Key employment and training priorities

1. Create job opportunities for displaced workers
2. Support disengaged youth
3. Support mature age job seekers
4. Create employment and training pathways for Indigenous job seekers
5. Support migrant and refugee (CALD) communities to be work ready
6. Support small and micro business to employ.

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

Employment Region overview

The Mid North Coast Employment Region (ER) stretches 300 kms along the New South Wales coast, and inland to include Gloucester and Dorrigo from around Bulahdelah in the south to Woolgoolga in the north. With the inland part of the region bounded by the Great Dividing Range, Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour, the two largest centres, are 153 kilometres apart.

Figure 1 Mid North Coast Employment Region



Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie and the Forster Tuncurry regions are the main tourism centres and easily accessible to visitors from Sydney via the Pacific Highway. Between the airports at Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie, they also cater for direct flights from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Canberra.

The coastal area is home to a large population of retirees and there are many aged care facilities and hospitals throughout the region.

Many areas have seen significant growth. Between June 2018 and June 2019, Korora - Emerald Beach has seen a 3.4 per cent increase in the number of residents, Wauchope (2.7 per cent), Old Bar - Manning Point - Red Head (2.2 per cent), Laurieton - Bonny Hills (1.8 per cent), Port Macquarie (1.7 per cent) and Woolgoolga - Arrawarra (1.7 per cent). All other areas had rises of less than the 1.4 per cent recorded for total NSW, with small declines (Dorrigo, Bulahdelah - Stroud and Nambucca Heads).

Key challenges in the Mid North Coast Employment Region

Key challenges in the Mid North Coast Employment Region include:

- Securing adequately skilled workers in growth and demand sectors with accessible entry-level work (for example aged care, disability, tourism, construction, and manufacturing). Many businesses and organisations in these industries relied on the availability of migrant and backpacker labour, meaning they have been impacted by lockdowns and workforce shortages.

- Significant medium-term impacts of COVID-related lockdowns on the Mid North Coast, affecting business and employment. Tourism industries such as hospitality, accommodation and retail are particularly sensitive to lockdowns, with businesses experiencing significant effects when Greater Sydney was locked down in July, compounded by the state-wide lockdown in August and September.
- Significant impact from natural disasters since 2019, including drought, bushfires, and flooding. Recovery from these events are still ongoing.
- Pre-existing long term employment challenges for young people in the Mid North Coast Employment Region along with significantly high levels of disengagement by the youth cohort.
- Employer concerns regarding soft and employability skills amongst young people, as well as a general unpreparedness for the world of work.
- An ageing population that is characterised by jobactive caseload numbers of mature age job seekers that are 28 per cent higher than the NSW state average. This is reflective of the broader regional population demographics, with over 51.6 per cent of the total Mid North Coast population aged 55 or over.
- Structurally high unemployment amongst specific groups such as Indigenous Australians. For example, pre-COVID (February 2020) analysis of job seeker caseload data suggests an Indigenous person of working age in the Mid North Coast is nearly three times as likely to be a registered job seeker compared to the general population.
- Structurally high unemployment in specific locations including Nambucca, Kempsey, and Taree (SALM data August 2021) that are also limited by poor or no available transport options, affecting access to areas where the employment opportunities are clustered.
- With the vast majority of the employers being small and micro businesses on the Mid North Coast, capacity building to increase employment opportunities within their business model.
- Many professional organisations and businesses are utilising the option to work from home during lockdowns, with many deciding against a fulltime return to the office. Some of the challenges associated with this trend is a tree/sea change move from the cities to the regions, resulting in housing shortages; increased burden placed upon internet capabilities, exacerbated by the closure of schools in Term 3, highlighting the weaknesses and gaps in regional digital supply; dampening effect on town and city centres.
- According to the ABS 2016 Census of Population and Housing, the education profile for the Mid North Coast shows a significantly lower level of educational attainment than the NSW average with just 9.23 per cent of the population having a degree or post-degree qualification compared to 23.4 per cent for NSW. There is also a significantly larger proportion of the population who have a certificate level qualification on the Mid North Coast compared to NSW – 20.3 per cent compared to 14.8 per cent.

Local stakeholders and opportunities

Large employers

Major employers in the Mid North Coast include: the Mid North Coast Local Health District (throughout region), North Coast TAFE (throughout region), Southern Cross University (Port Macquarie), Expressway Spares (Port Macquarie), Wingham Beef (Taree) and aged-care employers,

such as Nambucca Valley Care and Royal Benevolent Freemason Society (Coffs Harbour and Bellingen). Jim Pearson Transport is also a major transport and logistics operation based in Port Macquarie.

Manufacturing is prevalent in many regional locations including a vibrant vehicle-building cluster in the Macksville region, Akubra Hats are manufactured in Kempsey. Additionally, there is a strong shipbuilding presence in the region with Stebercraft based in Taree and Birdon Marine operating in Port Macquarie. Major hospitality venues in the ER including the CEX club in Coffs Harbour.

Selected Major Projects

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the NSW Government has fast tracked approvals of some projects including a \$58 million project to create employment land at [Port Macquarie Airport in the form of a Business Park](#), the [Coffs Harbour Airport Enterprise Park](#) began construction in 2020, with sites becoming available in late 2020, and sites will become available in the [Valla Urban Growth Area](#) from late 2021

Other Major Projects include:

- The Australian and NSW governments are funding the 14-kilometre Coffs Harbour bypass project. Minor works on the project commenced in December 2020. This includes property noise treatments, utility relocation, fencing and demolition and relocation of a Rural Fire Services building. Major construction is expected to commence in mid-2022 and take five years to complete. It will require substantial employment and boost the local economy.
- Construction of the new \$194 million Coffs Harbour Hospital is underway with the new Clinical Services Building facility projected to open late 2021. This will be followed by refurbishment of parts of the existing hospital in 2022. The new \$73 million Macksville Hospital opened on 26 May 2020.
- [Construction of a new \\$6.5 million memory support village](#) for St Agnes Parish in Port Macquarie, funded by the Building Better Regions Fund. Construction is due to start in January 2022 and will be completed by June 2023.
- [Construction of Yarrila Place](#), Coffs Harbour's \$76.52 million Cultural and Civic Space commenced in 2021, due for completion in mid-2022.

Local Stakeholders, Services, Strategies and Synergies

While the boundaries for the Mid North Coast Employment Region extend from Bulahdelah to Woolgoolga, Mid North Coast and Northern Rivers, stakeholders engage in close collaboration, which is evidenced by the joint North and the Mid North Coast NSW Employment Strategy and Action Plan. The NSW Government, Regional Development Australia (RDA) Committees and local councils established a number of industry working sub-groups developing targeted economic development strategies under the RDA North Coast Employment Strategy.

It is important to recognise the artificial nature of the employment region boundaries and to approach engagement with the North and the Mid North Coast stakeholders as a joint group. The Mid and North Coast Employment Facilitators meet regularly to share ideas and initiatives, as well as identifying opportunities to work together.

There are six local councils in the Mid North Coast: Coffs Harbour, Bellingen, Nambucca, Kempsey, Port Macquarie – Hastings and the former Greater Taree and Gloucester Shire – now an amalgamated part of MidCoast Council. In the North Coast, the Northern Rivers RDA and the Joint Organisation (NRJO) are active representatives of the Ballina, Byron, Kyogle, Lismore, Richmond

Valley and Tweed NSW local government areas. RDA Mid North (RDAMNC) is also an active member of the Mid North Coast economic development network. Given the existing local partnerships, leveraging their networks will be a priority.

There are eight Australian Government employment programs delivered by eight Employment Service Providers in the region. Three providers deliver Enhanced Services as part of the New Employment Services Trial (NEST) arrangements on the Mid North Coast: TURSA, NORTEC and ETC. Job ready NEST participants are being assisted by the department through the Digital Services Contact Centre. Other employment services in the region include ParentsNext, Transition to Work, , Career Transition Assistance, Employment Preparation Activity, Employability Skills Training, Harvest Trail Services and the Entrepreneurship Facilitator.

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

The Mid North Coast of NSW is home to [Charles Sturt University](#), [Southern Cross University](#) and [TAFE NSW](#).

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

1. Create opportunities for displaced workers

Create opportunities for displaced workers and other job seekers with transferable skills to transition into areas of employment growth or self-employment, leveraging Australian and NSW government programs and the Local Recovery Fund.

Mid North Coast Employment Region is characterised by strong labour market demand in Health Care and Social Assistance, Construction, Retail Trade and Education and Training.

With the impact of COVID-19 also driving higher levels of domestic tourism and visitation to regional locations, the Mid North Coast is well placed to take advantage of the impending surge in accommodation, hospitality and tourism growth.

New opportunities are also being created through government investment in programs like the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). With the region's share of the adult population aged 55 and over at 51.6 per cent, and the highest in the state, the region continues to see increasing demand in aged and healthcare services, both in-home and through residential facilities.

Strategies

- Coordinate the range of training options (full qualification, short course, micro-credential) directly linked to current labour demand in the region to provide recently displaced job seekers with a single, streamlined pathway to upskilling and reskilling information.
- Develop and implement overarching industry-specific recruitment models in areas of regional skills shortages (e.g. Health Care and Social Assistance, hospitality, etc.) that expedite employer and job seeker connections in a way that can be both tailored to individual employer needs and enable employer collaboration across the industry.
- Support local job seekers and businesses to build entrepreneurial capability and innovate in response to new and emerging opportunities in the region.

Stakeholders

- Relevant Australian Government agencies
- Relevant NSW Government agencies
- Local Government
- Local SME businesses
- Education providers and Registered Training Organisations
- Employment Services Providers
- Businesses, industry organisations and sector representatives.

2. Support disengaged youth

Develop and implement local strategies to support disengaged youth to connect with education and training pathways linked to available jobs.

The Mid North Coast Employment Region is characterised by significant youth unemployment reflected in the high number of young people on job seeker caseloads, and comparatively higher levels of youth disengagement.

Strategies

- Develop a consolidated picture of locally available youth services, programs and initiatives to effectively inform the streamlined design of potential education, training and employment pathways that will address local needs.
- Design and deliver industry-specific preparatory programs to support young people to engage with and develop required capability to take up apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities in growth areas.
- Identify and promote regional business examples and practices that have utilised positive strategies and practices in maximising the benefits of young employees.
- Identify opportunities and create skills development pathways aligned with growth economies to support youth entrepreneurship.

Stakeholders

- Relevant Australian Government agencies
- Relevant NSW Government agencies
- Local Government
- Youth Services and Youth Organisations
- Education providers and Registered Training Organisations
- Employment Services Providers
- Businesses, industry organisations and sector representatives.

3. Support mature age job seekers

Develop and implement local strategies to identify the impediments to mature age job seekers securing meaningful employment opportunities and developing employment, education and training pathways linked to available jobs.

The Mid North Coast ER has an ageing population that is characterised by jobactive caseload numbers of the mature aged job seeker cohort 28 per cent higher than the NSW average. This is reflective of the broader regional population demographics.

Whilst many employers are looking for younger candidates to recruit for roles within their organisation, they are limiting their capacity to access an available labour pool that could readily meet many of their existing and future needs.

Strategies

- Engage and explore with local businesses to identify the issues and impediments to hiring older workers – perceived and real.

- Identify and collate data on the skills and qualifications of the current registered caseload of job seekers to inform and develop targeted marketing strategies directed at businesses and industries within the region seeking/requiring these skills.
- Link strategies identified under Priority One where supplementary skills and supports are required.
- Identify and promote regional business examples and practices that have utilised positive strategies and practices in maximising the benefits of older workers.
- Identify opportunities and create skills development pathways aligned with growth economies to support entrepreneurship.

Stakeholders

- Relevant Government agencies (all levels)
- Businesses, industry organisations and sector representatives
- Community organisations and not-for-profits
- Education providers and Registered Training Organisations
- Employment Services Providers.

4. Facilitate pathways for Indigenous job seekers

Facilitate pathways for Indigenous job seekers to build required skills and move into available employment opportunities. The Mid North Coast Employment Region is characterised by significantly high levels of Indigenous job seekers, reflecting the broader population of the region. Whilst Indigenous people make up 7 per cent of the Mid North Coast regional population, pre-COVID (February 2020) analysis suggests an Indigenous person of working age in the Mid North Coast is nearly three times more likely to be a registered job seeker compared to the general population.

Strategies

- Collate a list of stakeholders who work with and understand the needs of the Indigenous communities across the Region.
- Collate a consolidated register of potential collaboration opportunities with employers and industry in high growth areas in the context of workforce diversity goals, including those targeted in Priorities One (displaced workers) and Five (migrant and refugee communities).
- Design and deliver a promotional campaign targeting local employers to highlight the benefits of workforce diversity and the range of available resources (government, community) to support the recruitment and retention of Indigenous job seekers.
- Facilitate the development and delivery of employer bespoke training and recruitment pathways that draw on the full range of available programs and services supporting Indigenous job seekers.
- Ensure that all projects submitted to the Recovery Fund or otherwise auspiced through the taskforce consider issues of access and prioritisation for Indigenous Australians.
- Promote all project participation opportunities across the network of stakeholders who are directly engaged with Indigenous groups.

Stakeholders

- Relevant Australian Government agencies
- Relevant NSW Government agencies
- Local Government
- Indigenous services providers, community organisations and representatives
- Education providers and Registered Training Organisations
- Employment Services Providers
- Employers.

5. Support migrant and refugee communities to be work ready

Coffs Harbour became a refugee welcome zone in 2008 and as such has a substantial newly arrived Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Community.

Refugees come to Coffs Harbour from a variety of countries: currently the majority of refugee families come from the Middle East (Ezidi), some African nations and Myanmar. The refugee community is a cohort which contributes significantly to the culture and community of Coffs Harbour. Generally, employment options available to the new arrivals are education, childcare, interpreting, retail, hospitality, horticulture and community services.

However, this cohort is also vulnerable, needing support and assistance to learn English, get their driver's licence, access training and education, as well as day to day help to navigate their new home. Many refugees have experience and qualifications in industries which are not recognised in Australia, and there is potential to unlock access to better quality jobs. This cohort is reliant on public transport to access employment, which can be a barrier to employment.

Strategies

- Facilitate the development and delivery of employer bespoke training and recruitment pathways that draw on the full range of available programs and services supporting CALD job seekers.
- Collate a list of stakeholders who work with and understand the needs of the CALD communities across the Region (mostly in Coffs Harbour).
- Collate a consolidated register of potential collaboration opportunities with employers and industry in high growth areas in the context of workforce diversity goals, including those targeted in Priorities One (displaced workers) and Four (Indigenous Australians).
- Design and deliver a promotional campaign targeting local employers to highlight the benefits of workforce diversity and the range of available resources (government, community) to support the recruitment and retention of CALD job seekers.
- Facilitate the development and delivery of employer bespoke training and recruitment pathways that draw on the full range of available programs and services supporting CALD job seekers.
- Support English language programs development and delivery by third party partners, including local government.
- Transport shuttle services especially for afterhours cleaners and hospitality workers.

Stakeholders

- Relevant Australian Government agencies
- Relevant NSW Government agencies

- Local Government
- Registered Training Organisations
- Employment Services Providers
- Humanitarian organisations.

6. Support small and microbusinesses to employ

Assist and support small business to develop better recruitment and retention practices to support their operations, with the right fit staff and skills.

According to ABS data as at 30 June 2019, of the 27,941 businesses operating on the Mid North Coast and Coffs Grafton regions combined, 60 per cent are sole traders employing no staff, 28 per cent employ 1 to 4 staff, 10 per cent employ 5 to 19 staff and only 2 per cent employ 20 staff or more.

With this significant number of small and micro businesses operating in the Mid North Coast region of NSW, one of the key challenges in hiring staff is having the capacity and skill sets within the organisation to recruit effectively and for the long-term benefit of their business sustainability.

Strategies

- Develop a campaign to engage, gain input and collate data from small and micro business operators in the region to identify and quantify what their business needs to sustainably recruit one more staff member to their existing operation.
- Identify regionally accessible tools, collateral, resources, supports and no cost services that can be utilised to assist businesses in developing or accessing effective recruitment practices and processes that are fit for purpose to their business needs.
- Map and identify an ecosystem of business networks, platforms and other stakeholders within the region who can be timely disseminators and facilitators of providing access to this material.

Stakeholders

- Relevant Australian Government agencies
- Relevant NSW Government agencies
- Local Government
- Business Chambers and industry associations
- Small business support providers
- Registered Training Organisations
- Employment Services Providers.

Labour Market Data Dashboard

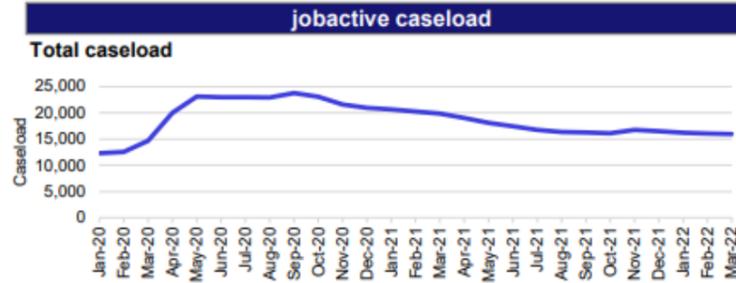
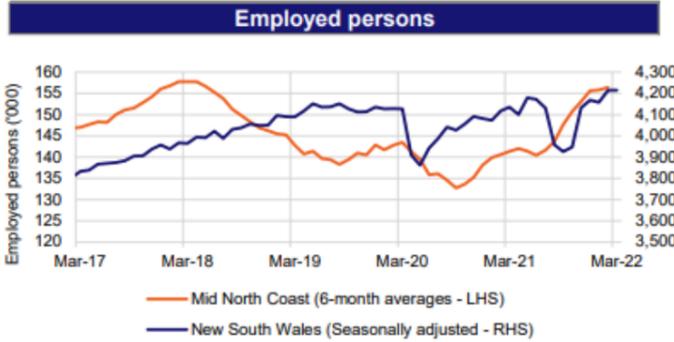
Data current as at 21 April 2022

Refer to source notes for data reference periods

This Labour Market Data Dashboard provides key indicators for the labour market by Employment Region and is updated monthly.

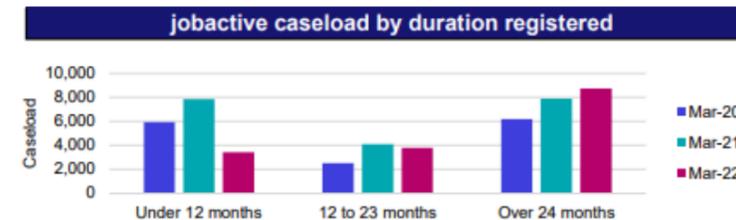
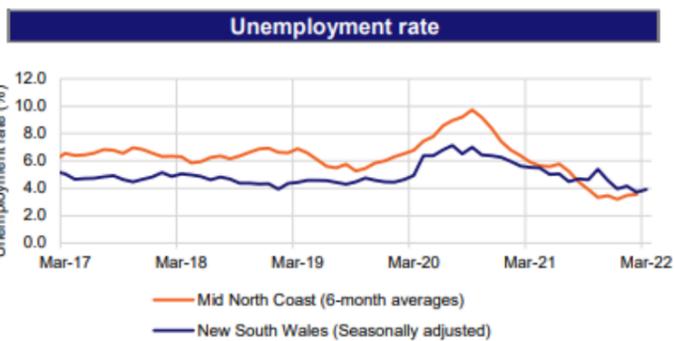
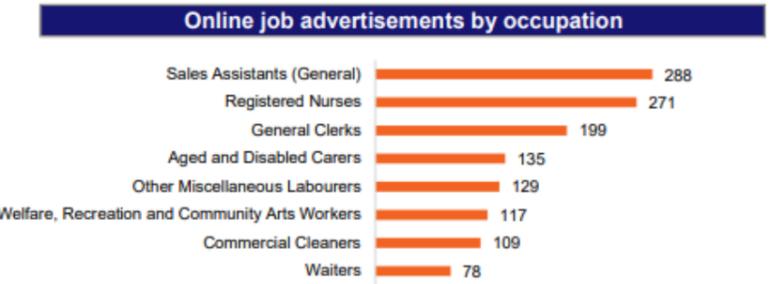
Labour market summary table												
	Employment			Unemployment			Unemployment rate		Participation rate		Youth unemployment rate	
	Mar-22 ('000)	Mar-20 ('000)	Change (%)	Mar-22 ('000)	Mar-20 ('000)	Change (%)	Mar-22 (%)	Mar-20 (%)	Mar-22 (%)	Mar-20 (%)	Mar-22 (%)	Mar-20 (%)
Mid North Coast	156.4*	143.5	9.0*	5.8*	10.4	-44.7*	3.6*	6.8	53.2*	50.7	8.4*	13.8
New South Wales	4,214.9	4,127.5	2.1	172.4	214.9	-19.8	3.9	4.9	65.5	65.4	9.9	10.5
Australia	13,389.9	12,995.5	3.0	551.3	723.2	-23.8	4.0	5.3	66.4	65.9	8.3	11.6

Source: ABS, Labour Force Survey, Mar-22. *Feb 22 data has been used, as flooding affected Labour Force Survey data collection in this Region and Mar-22 data are not available. Employment Region data are 6-month averages of original estimates, except for the youth unemployment rate, which is a 12-month average of original estimates. State youth unemployment rates are 12-month averages of original estimates. Remaining data are seasonally adjusted.



Change in jobactive services caseload

	Mid North Coast	New South Wales
Caseload - Feb 2020	12,529	169,325
Caseload - Mar 2022	15,962	251,206
Change from Feb 2020 to Mar 2022	3,433 ↑	81,881 ↑
	27% ↑	48% ↑

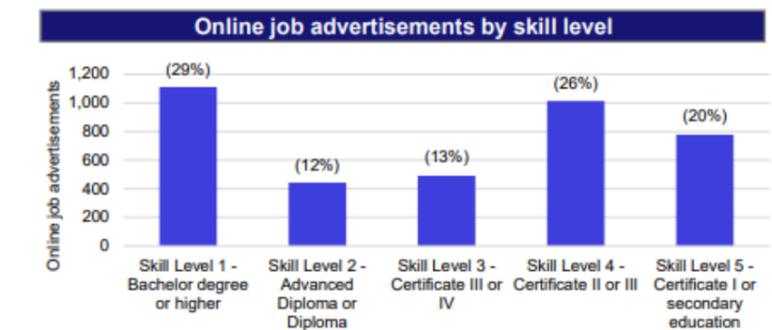


Data include jobactive and New Employment Services Trial participants. Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment, caseload data, Mar-22

LGAs with highest unemployment rates (%)

Local Government Area (LGA)	Dec-21	Dec-20
Nambucca Valley	7.2	10.9
Kempsey	7.1	10.6
Mid-Coast	5.4	8.5
Armidale Regional	4.9	6.3
Port Macquarie-Hastings	3.8	6.1

For more insights, access SALM data via lmp.gov.au. Source: National Skills Commission, Small Area Labour Markets, four quarter averages, Dec-21 quarter



Note: Data are not readily available for all sources by Employment Region. ABS Labour Force Survey data are based on the combined SA4s of Coffs Harbour - Grafton; and Mid North Coast. The Internet Vacancy Index (IVI) uses a unique geographical approach. For this region, the IVI NSW North Coast region has been used. jobactive caseload reports at the Employment Region level and includes participants receiving both digital and provider servicing (it excludes other programs, such as ParentsNext or Transition to Work (TTW)). For caseload data, the Employment Region is based on (1) the location of the provider for jobactive provider serviced participants; (2) where the participant resides for Online Employment Services (OES) participants; (3) the NEST Employment Regions of Adelaide South or Mid North Coast for NEST participants. jobactive caseload by duration registered is based on the participant's time registered in employment services. Caseload data are based on current methodology which has been retrospectively applied to historical jobactive caseload dates. As such, the data may not align with earlier figures. For any enquiries related to the data in this dashboard, please contact EmploymentPathwaysAnalysis@skillscommission.gov.au.