

Northern Rivers Rail Trail Product & Experience Development Project

Audit Report

Prepared for Destination North Coast
24 November 2021



Destination
North Coast NSW



Disclaimer

The information contained in this Report is intended only to inform and should not be relied upon for future business investment or other decisions. It is expected any specific recommended actions should be analysed and appropriate due diligence undertaken prior to making any investment decisions.

Recommendations contained in this report have been made on the basis of assumptions, methodology and information provided from many sources. The authors, and Destination North Coast accept no responsibility or liability for any errors, omissions or resultant consequences including any loss or damage arising from reliance on the information contained in this Report.

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Acronyms used in this report

ATDW	Australian Tourism Data Warehouse
DCP	Development Control Plan
DMP	Destination Management Plan
DNC	Destination North Coast
LEP	Local Environment Plan
LGA	Local Government Area
NP	National Park
NPWS	National Parks & Wildlife Service
NR	Nature Reserve
NRF	Northern Rivers Food
NRRT	Northern Rivers Rail Trail
NSW	New South Wales
SCA	State Conservation Area
STRA	Short Term Rental Accommodation
WMW	Wollumbin Mount Warning

Executive Summary

The Northern Rivers Rail Trail (NRRT) Product & Experience Development Program is one of the high-profile tourism projects being implemented by Destination North Coast as part of the Federal Government's Recovery for Regional Tourism Fund across the North Coast region until May 2022.

A Product and Experience Audit was undertaken as the first Stage of the Project to:

- Identify areas of potential development and new opportunities for products and experiences in and around the Rail Trail
- Identify potential hubs and precincts of products and experiences in and around the Rail Trail
- Inform recommendations for developing products and experience that will help to enhance and position the Northern Rivers Rail Trail as a Hero Experience
- Review five relevant trail case studies in Australia and New Zealand to identify best practice tourism product and experience development.

Overall, findings showed an opportunity to establish more paid experiences along the Rail Trail and at start, endpoints and stopovers to generate benefits for local visitor economies and to create viable business opportunities.

The following diagram presents a Northern Rivers Rail Trail Product and Experience Development Opportunities Framework that consolidates findings presented in Audit and Case Study Reports into four main areas that can be used as an initial guide to inform tourism product and experience development along and around the rail trail by interested businesses.



Other key audit findings that may be useful to inform product and experience development along and around the Rail Trail include consideration of:

Main Tourism Generating Regions

- Coastal and inland destinations in the Northern Rivers have an important role in the Northern Rivers Rail Trail system as places where people will stay overnight, access tours and transport services to and from the rail trail, and connect to bike hire and repair services.
- The Gold Coast also an important region where visitors may stay and also access the rail trail.

Important precincts and experience hubs (north to south):

- **Start/end points** – Murwillumbah and Casino Railway station precincts
- **Stopover points** – Mullumbimby, Byron Bay, Bangalow, Lismore railway station precinct, Bentley Road area, Naughton's Gap, Primex site (near Casino)
- **Village stop-overs** – Burringbar, Mooball, Stokers Siding, Bexhill/Federal, Eltham
- **Arts & Creative Industries hubs** – Murwillumbah, Byron Industrial Estate, Lismore, Casino.

Main product development opportunities:

- **Cycling and walking tours** along and around the rail trail
- **Retail and local food, drink and agri-tourism operations** in villages along the rail trail and inland towns (Casino, Lismore, Kyogle)
- **Nature and water based tours** that link to the rail trail including Aboriginal and wildlife experiences (NB: *this has the potential to differentiate the Northern Rivers Rail Trail from other trails*)
- **Small-scale accommodation development** in inland towns (Casino, Murwillumbah, Kyogle) and villages along the rail trail
- **Events (ticketed/paid)** connecting to the rail trail.

Trail development opportunities:

In addition to product development opportunities, findings identified the potential to package and bundle products along and around the rail trail that link local products/businesses including creation of:

- **Cycling and walking trails** along the rail trail and connecting/looping to other significant trails in the area
- **An arts and creative industries trail** that connects the rail trail to the region's art galleries and creative industries hubs
- **A food trail along the rail trail** in collaboration with Destination Tweed and Northern Rivers Food
- **A rail heritage trail experience** that provides interesting interpretation of rail infrastructure and facilities along the rail trail
- **A family trail** for parents and children 5 to 10 years of age along the rail trail that links family experiences (e.g. Casino min-rail, Bat tunnel, playgrounds etc.)
- **An inclusive tourism trail** that connects accommodation and inclusive experiences.

Further consultation

Further consultation with NRRT Inc. and the four LGAs (Tweed, Byron, Lismore and Richmond Valley) is required to determine the main rail trail access points (for parking/drop offs), surface materials, planning permissions and licensing requirements for business development opportunities along and around the rail trail (NB: preliminary discussions with Tweed Shire Council suggest that these arrangements are still to be determined). It should also be noted that the NRRT Inc. are currently determining governance arrangements for the management of the whole of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail.

In addition, further engagement is required with NPWS and NSW Forests to determine permissible commercial tour and business opportunities in natural areas adjacent to the rail trail

1.0 Introduction

The Northern Rivers Rail Trail Product & Experience Development Program is one of the high-profile tourism projects being implemented by Destination North Coast as part of the Federal Government's Recovery for Regional Tourism Fund across the North Coast region until May 2022.

This Product and Experience Audit Report presents findings of Stage One of the Project that sought to identify:

- Areas of potential development and new opportunities for products and experiences in and around the Rail Trail
- Potential hubs and precincts of products and experiences in and around the Rail Trail.

The audit is an important initial stage of the Rail Trail Project as it helps to inform recommendations for developing products and experience that will help to enhance and position the Northern Rivers Rail Trail as a Hero Experience.

The audit process involved two parts:

Part One

- Review of related rail trail business case reports, LGA place-making and tourism plans relevant to understand the three development stages of the rail trail, identify potential precincts/hubs, and identify potential product and experience development opportunities that had been proposed in these documents
- Review of 2020 Audit findings and an audit of current ATDW and web product listings to identify and categorise the main attractions and experiences along and around the rail trail and highlight potential development opportunities and challenges.

Part Two

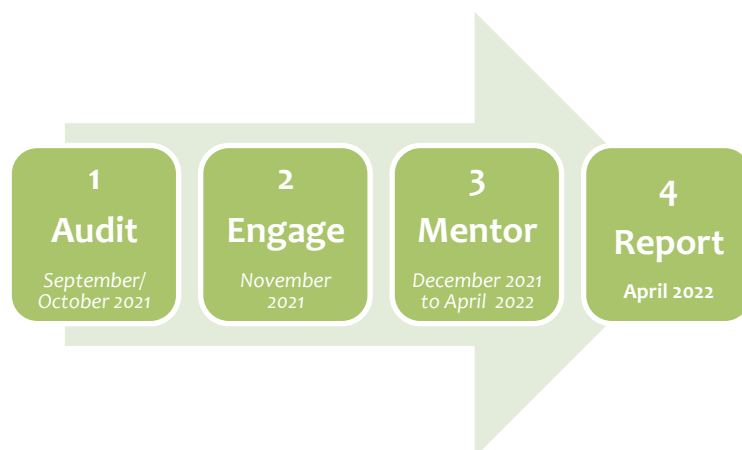
- Review and analysis of relevant rail trail case studies in Australia and New Zealand to identify best practice tourism product and experience development (*see - separate document*).

Audit findings will be used to inform Stage Two of the Project, Northern Rivers Rail Trail Product and Experience Development Program that involves engagement in November 2021 with local businesses, LGAs, local tourism and business organisations, NRRRT Inc., National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) and NSW Forest representatives with an interest in the rail trail to hear their ideas about product and experience opportunities.

From this, a Business Mentoring Support Program (Stage Three) will be offered from December 2021 to April 2022 to businesses that have expressed a genuine interest in developing products and experiences for the rail trail.

A final Report will be prepared using findings of Stages 1, 2 and 3 and to report on outcomes of the business mentoring support program and to identify a minimum of five rail trail focuses product concepts and how these can be activated in the short and longer term including ideas for single and multi-day trail experiences and cooperative marketing initiatives.

Figure 1: Northern Rivers Rail Trail Program Stages



2.0 About the Northern Rivers Rail Trail

The Northern Rivers Rail Trail (NRRT) is 130 kilometres of proposed recreational trail that follows the disused Casino to Murwillumbah railway corridor through four local government areas (LGAs) – Richmond Valley, Lismore, Byron Shire and Tweed Shire. The trail is a significant nature-based tourism and recreational infrastructure project that will secure NSW position in the growing Rail Trail market¹.

In 2012, preliminary work on the viability of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail was commissioned by the NSW Government with subsequent reports and analysis undertaken by the NRRT Inc., a group of dedicated and skilled professionals advocating for the Rail Trail development. With an estimated construction cost of \$33.3 million, substantial research and planning has been undertaken since this time to ensure the Rail Trail is investment-ready including analysis of economic, environmental, heritage and construction elements¹.

When completed, the Northern Rivers Rail Trail will be an iconic world-class tourism and recreational asset driving significant economic, environmental and social benefits to the Northern Rivers Region. The Trail will enhance the North Coast's tourism offering to national and international markets and meet the growing demand for accessible recreational tourism products whilst catering for the strong growth trends in cycling and walking¹. It will also provide an alternative transport corridor for residents in the region¹.

The complete Northern Rivers Rail Trail is being undertaken in three stages:

- **Stage 1: Tweed Stage** - 24 kilometres extending from Murwillumbah to Crabbes Creek, is currently in construction stage and forms the Trail Head to the north. Construction is due for completion by the end of 2022
- **Stage 2: Casino to Eltham** - 45 kilometres linking the towns and villages of Casino, Bexhill, Woodlawn, Eltham, and the City of Lismore. The section from Casino to Bentley that forms the Southern Trail Head is in the preparatory stages of development and due for completion in 2023
- **Stage 3: Eltham to Crabbes Creek** – the 60 kilometer middle section will utilise the rail line between Eltham, through Bangalow, Byron Bay, Mullumbimby, Billinudgel and connect with Crabbes Creek¹. Byron Council is currently investigating the feasibility of a multi use rail transport corridor.

Legislation to formally close the Murwillumbah to Crabbes Creek and Bentley to Casino passed the NSW Lower House on 23 September 2020 and Upper House on 15 October 2020. Both sections of rail corridor remain in public ownership with Transport for NSW².

See map of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail on the next page.

Figure 2: Map Northern Rivers Rail Trail ¹



3.0 Audit Process

The Audit process involved review and synthesis of relevant desktop research, strategies and reports to understand the development stages of the rail trail and to identify opportunities for product and experience development along and around the rail trail.

The Destination North Coast Tourism Research Project Report (July 2020) involved a comprehensive audit of 1,276 tourism attraction and experiences across the North Coast and was useful as a starting point to understand the product and experience strengths and gaps across the 6 LGAs comprising the Northern Rivers. The 2020 audit was also undertaken during a time when lockdown restrictions associated with the Covid-19 health pandemic were not as impactful as those in August and September 2021 meaning more tourism operations had active product listings.

Table 1 outlines the methods used for the phases of the Audit process.

Table 1: Northern Rivers Rail Trail Audit Process

Phase	Description	Methods
1	Review Rail Trail Development Initiatives	Review of related rail trail business case reports, LGA place-making and tourism plans relevant to understand the three development stages of the rail trail, identify potential precincts/hubs, and identify potential product and experience development opportunities that had been proposed in these documents.
2	Product & Experience Audit	<p>The Audit sought to identify and categorise the main attractions and experiences along and around the rail trail and highlight potential development opportunities (gaps) and challenges. This phase involved a review of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant findings of the 2020 Destination North Coast Tourism Research and Accommodation Investment reports • Review of the top 10 attractions and experiences across the Northern Rivers as determined by Trip Advisor (September 2020) • Audit of current ATDW and web product listings (September 2021) related to Tour Transport Operations, Food and Drink along and around the rail trail • Analysis of accommodation along and around the rail trail including short term holiday rental availability • Audit of all National Parks, Nature Reserves and State Conservation Areas within a 50km radius of the rail trail.
3	Rail Trail Case Study Analysis	Review of relevant Australian and New Zealand rail trail case studies to help understand: visitation/economic value; rail trail website elements; tour, transport and hire, food and drink, and accommodation operations connected to the rail trails; and to identify useful operator studies that could be used for Stage 3 – Business Mentoring Support Program.
4	Implications	<p>This phase involved drawing on the key findings of the 3 sections above to highlight the main opportunities for product and experience development along and around the rail trail.</p> <p>A Northern Rivers Rail Trail Product and Experience Development Opportunities Framework is proposed to inform business development planning and decision making.</p> <p>These findings will used as a basis to inform engagement activities with industry and LGA representatives and other interested stakeholder organisations across the Northern Rivers in December 2021.</p>

4.0 Northern Rivers Rail Trail Development Initiatives

This section presents findings of a review of related rail trail business case reports, LGA place-making and tourism plans relevant to understanding potential product and experience development opportunities and potential precincts/hubs across the three stages of the rail trail.

4.1 Stage One: Murwillumbah To Crabbes Creek

The Tweed stage of Northern Rivers Rail Trail involves the re-development of 24 kilometres of disused rail corridor from Murwillumbah to Crabbes Creek creating a shared use Rail Trail.

The heritage listed Murwillumbah Railway Station will be utilised as the Rail Trail base where cyclists and hikers can plan out their day trip to the surrounding attractions including the Tweed Regional Gallery and National Parks, which take in panoramic hinterland views. This section of the Rail Trail then passes through a number of smaller villages including Stokers Siding, Burringbar, Mooball and Crabbes Creek, linking these smaller rural communities and providing residents with a greater sense of connectedness and pride in their region. It incorporates 2 tunnels (one approximately 500 metres long), 27 bridges and provides beautiful vistas of the Tweed Caldera landscape².

Tweed Shire Council conducted and commissioned extensive planning, investigations, design and community consultation activities to advance the establishment of the trail including detailed costings and estimates which provided a realistic estimate of the schedule, milestones and costs involved to convert the disused rail line into a functioning Rail Trail².

Construction of the Tweed section (Stage 1) of the rail trail is jointly funded by the NSW Government (\$7.8 million) and the Australian Government (\$6.5 million). An additional \$600,000 has been secured from the NSW Government to cover the cost of operating and maintaining the Tweed section of rail trail for the first 3 years. In June 2021, Tweed Councillors resolved to support the recommendation of Council's Tender Evaluation Panel and award the contract to Hazell Bros (Qld) Pty Ltd following a rigorous tendering process. Construction is due for completion in December 2022².

Product and Experience Development Opportunities

The Tweed Stage will link many of the region's natural features and nature-based tourist attractions such as Mooball, Mt Jerusalem and Wollumbin National Parks, whilst also connecting the Region's art galleries and creative industries, such as the Tweed Regional Gallery and the Margaret Olley Art Centre².

The Tweed Stage Business Case (2016) notes that the Trail will provide opportunities for package development with other tourism operators in the Region. Partnerships with arts and culture, food & wine, adventure and other nature based operators will assist in lengthening visitor stay and expenditure in the Region. The Trail will also act as a major artery through the rural areas of the Tweed and assist in circulating visitors around the Region. The Business Case report also acknowledges the potential for development of new and existing businesses to support users of the rail trail, such as: cafés and restaurants, accommodation providers (B&B's, campsites, hostels, hotels, farmstays, lodgings), cycle provision, hire and repair companies, stables and saddleries and gift shops³. See Appendix 1 for further experiences that could be aligned to the Tweed section of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail identified in this report.

The Tweed Destination Management Plan 2019 to 2030 acknowledges the Tweed Valley Rail Trail as perhaps the most important tourism asset to be considered for the Tweed Valley since the development of the Tweed Regional Gallery aiding dispersal, encouraging business development and investment and give high yield visitors a reason to leave the coast and spend time and money in the Valley. The situational analysis undertaken to inform the DMP determined the following opportunities and challenges to development relevant to the rail trail:

- Focus effort on clusters that connect to existing offerings and tourism routes and trails that link villages to enhance awareness and dispersal beyond the coast
- Wollumbin Mt Warning (WMW) is our most identifiable and iconic natural landform and arguably our "Uluru or Opera House". However, WMW has had limited investment in infrastructure and is sometimes used without the respect and care it deserves
- We must facilitate collaboration between the Tweed's traditional owners, NPWS, rural land holders and Tweed Shire Council to identify and prioritise areas where public infrastructure can be created allowing for the development of a range of suitable tourism products and

experiences that will help sustainably manage visitation to key natural and cultural assets

- Development of the Nightcap Track and the creation of an integrated trails route that connects to the rail trail and WMW is an opportunity to disperse visitors and to lessen the impact on popular sites such as WMW (currently being developed as the Tweed Byron Hinterland Trail)
- Whilst the Tweed is a magnificent natural environment and many visitors want to explore away from the coast, there are very few tracks and trails that allow visitors to explore and learn about this magnificent environment
- NPWS has expressed its desire to partner with the region to support operators of the Tweed Byron Hinterland Trail, appealing to the international visitor as packaged and bundled products with premium accommodation and culinary options
- Although the Tweed has a magnificent natural environment and many visitors want to explore away from the coast, there are very few tracks and trails that allow visitors to explore and learn about this magnificent environment⁴.

Strategic Action 9a of the DMP identifies a number of actions relevant to nature based tourism Mount Warning/Wollumbin, Tweed Byron Hinterland Walking Trail and the Northern Rivers Rail Trail that includes:

- Support the Northern Rivers Rail Trail infrastructure
- Explore the option to connect to Coast Walk/Cycle Trail through Wooyong Road
- Work with NPWS to connect the rail trail to Nightcap Track at Upper Burringbar
- Explore the potential of connecting the rail trail north of Murwillumbah via a River Trail system that connects all the small jetties along each of the villages (Fingal, Chinderah, Tumbulgum, Condong and Murwillumbah).

Other key product and experience themes identified in the DMP that are relevant to product and experience development along and around the Tweed section of the rail trail include:

- Agri based and culinary tourism
- Accessible tourism
- Group tourism
- Cultural Tourism
- Outdoor lifestyle and wellness⁴.

4.2 Stage Two: Casino to Eltham

The Casino to Eltham section is located within the Lismore City and Richmond Valley Local Government Areas. The 45-kilometre length of rail trail commences in Casino, extends to the City of Lismore and finishes in Eltham¹.

The Casino to Eltham Stage will deliver an integral part of the rail trail capitalising on Stage 1 Tweed Stage by forming the southern Trail Head from Casino. The rail trail will commence at Old Casino Railway Station (referred to as the 'Railway Museum') and traverse through the picturesque countryside to the City of Lismore, then through the smaller communities of Woodlawn, Bexhill, and Eltham. Users will also be able to access the Rail Trail at many access points along the route¹. (See Appendix 2 for Stage 2 map).

The Rail Trail will provide a key non-motorised link for businesses and residents with the town centres and suburbs of Casino, Lismore and Eltham. The Trail will become a strategic link in the Lismore City and Richmond Valley strategic pathways and transport networks.

The Northern Rivers Rail Trail Historic Heritage Considerations: Casino to Bangalow (2018) Report identifies several opportunities associated with heritage assets located on the Casino to Eltham Stage and noted 'the Northern Rivers Rail Trail is likely to have a number of high heritage positive outcomes that are likely to ameliorate development impacts'. The report further identifies the opportunities for heritage integration into the Rail Trail, including:

- Sympathetic, adaptive reuse of a disused, historic thoroughfare
- Conservation of significant historic features enroute, notably the metal truss bridges, which will be scenic and historic highlights for users
- Opportunities to interpret the historic rail line and its history in promotional material at strategic nodes along the route, and at significant historic items and resting places
- Reconnection, revitalisation and promotion of once prominent heritage localities along the Rail Trail route such as Old Casino and Eltham.

The Casino to Eltham Stage of the rail trail will assist in the urban renewal of declining areas within Lismore and Casino as well as assist in activating the retail centres, driving economic and social outcomes³.

An overview of each section of the Casino to Eltham Stage is now provided relevant to the Richmond Valley and Lismore LGAs.

4.2.1 Richmond Valley Council - Casino to Bentley

The Casino to Bentley trail represents 13.5km of the full potential of the 130km Northern Rivers Rail Trail and is described as a '13.5km eco recreational experience through natural farming regions of the Northern Rivers of NSW'.

Richmond Valley Council is in the preparatory stages of the construction of the Casino to Bentley section of the Rail Trail. In December 2020, Richmond Valley Council adopted the final master plan for the Northern Rivers Rail Trail – Casino to Bentley. In December 2020, the Australian Government committed \$7.5 million for the construction of this section that is due for completion in 2023¹. \$430,000 has also been approved for the development of the Old Casino Railway Station.

Casino is the beginning of the trail and is located at the southern end. For an average leisure ride with the family, this leg of the trail would take approximately 60 minutes depending on the pace of all family members. The longest length between destinations (rest points with shade, seating and some with water and amenities) is from the Primex site to the 'Bat' tunnel at Naughton's Gap. This section is approximately 7.8km⁵.

The town of Casino is set to be one of the greatest beneficiaries of the rail trail. The town acts as the 'Rail Trail Head' and marks the southern end of the wider rail trail network. To capitalise on the expected influx of tourists to the region following the development of the rail trail, the Old Casino Station precinct has been designed to cater to visitors needs, with amenities, storage areas, tourist bus drop-off and ample parking. Alongside this, the trail's end will direct and guide visitors to the restored Old Casino Railway Station⁵.

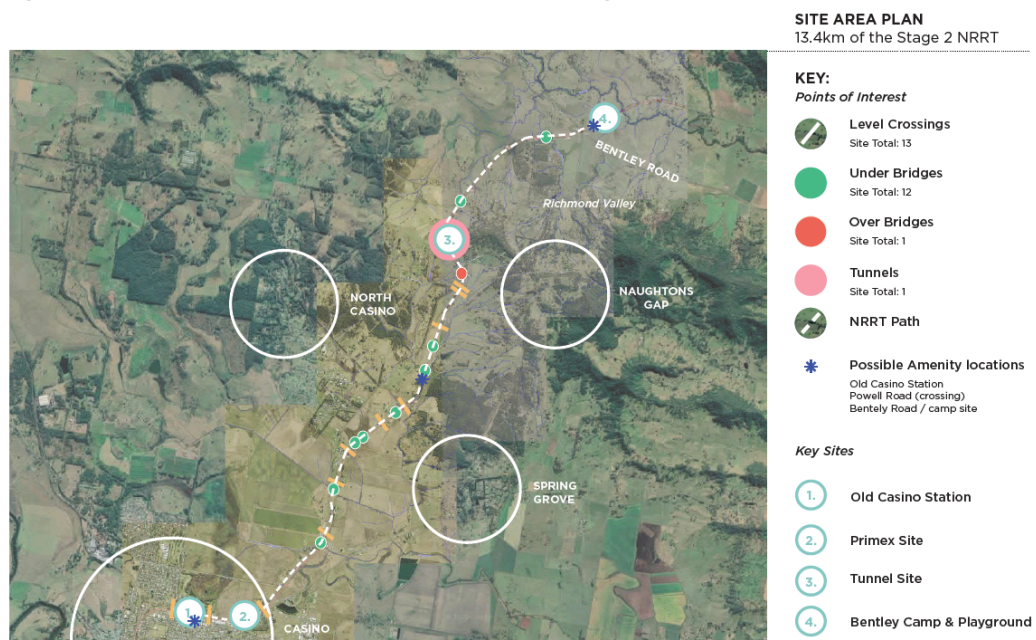
The Casino to Bentley Masterplan describes the trail as boasting a number of significant heritage structures and infrastructure with the dis-used rail-line serving as a tangible connection to the regions agricultural and industrious past and its conservation will serve as an education tool. The rail trail will

also serve to protect the cultural heritage of the rail line and enable improved interpretation and understanding of its significance to future generations.

Four key destination points are proposed in the Masterplan:

1. **The state heritage listed Old Casino Station** acts as an important landmark at the starting point to this stage of the rail trail. Conservation of the building and adaptive re-use of the site is proposed, this could include an information centre, kiosk, amenities, parking and meeting areas
2. **The Primex site** that provides another parking / drop off node
3. **The ‘Bat’ tunnel** is a point of interest with many opportunities to explore; potential for tunnel access, views from on top, quiet nature sounds from below, and mini train cycle experience. Further bat studies are currently being undertaken to help inform a management plan for the tunnel
4. **Bentley Road area** is an easily accessible, open rail corridor expanse with some existing service infrastructure providing opportunity for potential amenities, a camping ground, playground and bridge experience over Back Creek Bridge. This northern end of the Richmond Valley Council area terminates this stage of the rail trail and serves as the future link to the Lismore Council area of the Trail⁵.

Figure 3: Site Area Plan Northern Rivers Rail Trail Stage 2



Product and Experience Development Opportunities

The Plan further outlines opportunities to:

- **Conserve the Old Casino Station building**, which would improve the existing interpretive elements provided by the Museum and Mini Railway. Adaptive re-use of area around the Station would enhance its potential as a central hub and principle entrance to the southern end of the rail trail and could feature an information and interpretation centre with visitor amenities and kiosk. To accommodate public use, parking and a bus pick up/drop off area will be constructed, allowing for the opportunity for larger tour groups
- **Connect with the existing Mini Rail line**; a potential link from Old Casino Station. The integration of both this new network into the existing shared path and cycle network within Casino will allow for the seamless direction of visitors to the trail into the heart of the town, supporting local businesses
- Allow new exciting business opportunities with the potential for guided tours, heritage/educational groups and self-guided exploration
- **Establish an Art and Historic Trail**: ongoing consultation will occur with the local Aboriginal Community and Council are looking at options of how to represent the Aboriginal Community on the rail trail as well as strategies to incorporate the local Galibal dialogue; how the local stories can be told and logical locations for local Aboriginal art to be integrated/displayed

- **The connection of the trail into the newly established hub for the southern end of the trail at Old Casino Station will guide visitors into the towns centre**, guiding them to the town's accommodation, eateries and boutique shopping⁵.

The Richmond Valley Destination Management Plan 2021 to 2025 identifies the Casino to Bentley Rail section of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail as a critical catalyst project for Casino and surrounds, which will help to attract new visitor markets and stimulating new business investment to the area. To take full advantage of this opportunity the Plan proposes the need:

- **For a whole-of-destination approach** to strategically plan for the whole of Casino CBD as a significant start/end point of the rail trail, not just the upgrade of the Old Casino Railway Station and development of the rail trail. This will help to provide opportunities for visitors to spend locally rather than just using the rail trail
- **For a coordinated approach to consider the supporting infrastructure and facilities needed to present Casino as a bike/walking-friendly town**, to identify new tourism product opportunities, to attract and support interested investors, as well as working with industry to adopt an open-for-business attitude
- **To advocate for the development of the project with other LGAs** with an interest in the rail trail is also important to fast track its development
- **To Integrate with other destination development initiatives** – such as such as Recreation Vehicle (RV) friendly town and Drill Hall Precinct
- **Work with local tourism and hospitality operators to create Casino as an appealing, visitor-friendly town** in preparation for the completion of the Casino to Bentley section of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail.

The Plan further highlights the following main opportunities and challenges to grow the Richmond Valley visitor economy relevant to the Rail Trail:

Opportunities:

- Developing and positioning the Richmond Valley as a distinct walking, cycling and mountain bike tourism destination on the North Coast
- Increasing awareness and further activating nature-based tourism experiences provided by national parks, State forests, reserves, rivers and waterways
- Encouraging and supporting private sector investors to enhance existing and develop new tourism products is essential to attract visitors and to drive economic growth
- Attracting visitors year round is important to achieve sustained growth and viable Businesses
- Creating and promoting agri and cultural tourism experience trails to encourage visitor dispersal
- Establishing clear brand identity and positioning stories for Evans Head (coastal) and Casino (inland)
- Cooperation between Council and industry stakeholders is important to drive sustainable visitor economy growth and development.

Challenges:

- Richmond Valley shows relatively low visitation levels as compared to other North Coast destinations, ranked behind Lismore in terms of domestic overnight visitation
- There is currently little tourism product creating a real point of difference in the Richmond Valley
- Improving visitor accommodation quality and capacity is necessary to attract new and high yield visitors to stay longer and explore the local area. There have been challenges in the past to attracting accommodation investors
- The area has abundant nature-based assets, the challenge is how to activate these in a sustainable way to attract new nature based visitors
- Although agriculture is a main industry for the Richmond Valley, agri-tourism experiences are still mainly underdeveloped
- Attracting visitors year round is needed to achieve sustained growth and viable businesses⁶.

4.2.2 Lismore City Council – Bentley to Eltham

Lismore City Council recognise the Northern Rivers Rail Trail as a priority project and \$9.9 million has recently been secured from the Australian Government (Building Better Regions Fund) to construct the 16.3km section between Bentley and the Lismore Railway Station. It should also be noted NSW Government legislation will also be needed to initiate this section of the Rail Trail.

The Rail Trail will link from Bentley and traverse through the main town of Lismore connecting recreational and retail areas and providing opportunities to drive tourism expenditure into the heart of the City. The Project aligns with and will assist on delivering the Lismore Growth Project, Lismore City Council's economic development strategy for reactivation of key areas within the City. The Growth Project identifies four key precincts that will assist drive economic growth and activate the urban centre:

1. The Riverside Precinct
2. City Centre Precinct
3. Sport and Recreation Precinct
4. Health Precinct.

The Northern Rivers Rail Trail – Casino to Eltham Stage is expected to drive visitation directly into the Precinct areas, assisting with the urban renewal of Lismore by providing opportunities for vibrant public spaces, new community facilities, events, and transport links, and employment generations.

Figure 4: Lismore Activation Precinct



The Rail Trail directly links to the Riverside Precinct, which is strongly connected to the other precincts as a key recreational open space in Lismore. A key destination for Rail Trail users will be Lismore Railway Station, located in South Lismore. The Lismore City Council Bridge to Bridge Strategy identifies South Lismore as an area for rejuvenation.

The South Lismore Train Station is situated in a highly visible location on the riverside, however it is currently in a state of disrepair. The community vision for the South Lismore Train Station is identified as 'core to civic life, the station is bustling once again with new community-focused and leisure uses that acknowledge and celebrate the creative and industrial nature of South Lismore'. As a result of the Project, the current railway infrastructure liabilities will be converted into valuable working heritage assets with the preservation of historic bridges, tunnels and station buildings resulting in new heritage tourism products for visitors to experience. The location of the Rail Trail will be of particular interest to the cycling market that has a preference for riverside rides

The Rail Trail will also link directly with the Lismore Parklands Project, a \$24 million revitalisation project located in the heart of the Lismore CBD, adjacent to the main shopping precinct, in the Sport and Recreation Precinct. The objective of the Lismore Parklands Project is to strengthen and grow Lismore's community assets, by transforming the existing under-utilised but strategically located open space of Lismore Park into modern, vibrant community parklands. The Parklands area will accommodate major special events, community and sporting events as well as regular community activities. The Rail Trail will assist visitation to the events by providing a direct walking/cycling access route to the area.

Objective 13 of The Lismore Regional City Action Plan 2036 is 'to enhance tourism, events and visitor services and includes four actions:

- Plan for events tourism, including infrastructure and supporting uses and mitigate land use conflict
- Promote culturally appropriate Aboriginal tourism opportunities
- Investigate opportunities arising from the subregion's track and Rail Trail links
- Facilitate boutique commercial, tourist and recreation activities in rural landscape areas where they do not conflict with primary production⁷.

It will be important that a destination management plan (tourism strategy) be undertaken soon to best prepare for opportunities associated with the Northern Rivers Rail Trail.

4.3 Stage Three: Eltham to Crabbes Creek

The Eltham to Crabbes Creeks section of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail is located within Lismore City Council and Byron Shire Council LGAs and is being investigated in several sections: Eltham to Booyong, Booyong to Bangalow, Bangalow – Yelgun, Yelgun to Crabbes Creek. Progress on each section is reviewed below.

4.3.1 Eltham to Booyong – no plans are yet developed for this stage.

4.3.2 Byron Shire Council – Bangalow to Yelgun

Following a Mayoral Minute in late 2016, Byron Shire Council has been investigating the feasibility of reactivating the rail corridor from Bangalow to Yelgun for multi-use rail transport applications.

A feasibility study was prepared for Council in June 2019 reported that the engineering assessment highlighted that the corridor is in ‘reasonable’ condition and has the capacity to support very light rail vehicles (less than 10 tonne axles or less, at speeds equal to or less than 60 kilometres per hour)⁸.

Since this time, Council has reported that it is continuing to work on the re-activation of the Rail Corridor, initially for the link between Byron Bay and Mullumbimby (Stage 1). Funding opportunities are being sought via both State and Federal Governments. Councillors and Staff have also attended workshops facilitated by Transport for NSW in November and March to identify potential infrastructure options for both the rail and road corridors to ensure that the movement and place solutions support the future growth of the Byron Shire region⁸ (see Appendix 3 for Stage 3 map).

Byron Shire Council has also been working with local village communities on place-making initiatives that are also relevant to the development of products and experiences along and around the Rail Trail.

The Byron Bay Town Centre Masterplan presents a vision and strategy to guide the future of Byron's town centre over the next 20 years. The first two projects to be implemented from the Plan are specifically related to the Byron Bay Railway corridor precinct:

1. **The refurbishment of Railway Park** on Jonson Street Byron Bay, is the first project delivered from the Byron Bay Town Centre Masterplan in November 2019
2. **Restoration of the rail corridor** in the centre of Byron Bay is underway and expected to be completed in September 2021. This project will open up the area between Lawson Street and the new bus interchange, create a pedestrian and cycling link across the town centre and improve accessibility of this unused area. Plans also include a boardwalk and pathways from Butler Street and the western side of the rail corridor, into the town centre and Railway Park, restoration of the heritage features of the area⁹.

Transport for NSW has also recently built a new bus interchange in the rail corridor adjacent to Butler Street in Byron Bay. This interchange will replace the existing bus stop on Jonson Street and was completed in April 2021¹⁰. As such this area is an important transport hub for visitors to and from Byron Bay.

The Bangalow Village Plan sets out residents’ aspirations for their village and is intended to guide its improvements and development over the next 15 years. The Plan acknowledges that a significant opportunity exists in using the rail corridor to provide pedestrian and cycle pathways linking the northern and western residential areas to the village centre, primary school and sports fields including renewing the old station building as part of the wider rail corridor activation. Cycling and walking is also cited as an appealing mode of transport, supported by end-of-trip facilities that are in accessible, prominent and safe locations in village centre streets and public-spaces. Bike racks, water stations, toilets with change rooms and lockers for use by walkers and cyclists are available in Bangalow. Bike racks are provided along busy sections of Byron Street, A&I Hall, school, bus stops and the sports fields. Of particular relevance to the rail trail are plans for Precinct 2 – Station Street, The Triangle, Rail Corridor and Memorial Park. Implementation of this initiative has been included in Byron Shire Council’s operational plans¹¹.

Our Mullumbimby Masterplan sets out a vision and principles to guide sustainable growth and change in Mullum over the next ten years. Its aim is to enhance the things that people love about Mullumbimby - the sense of community, inclusivity, great walkability, services and facilities for locals and the natural environment. Of relevance to the rail trail, Precinct 1 – Town Centre proposes the need to Liaise with Transport for NSW to ensure that any future use of the rail corridor lands are consistent with

community needs and values. These include the following considerations:

- Medium density housing for key workers and compatible commercial/live work uses, along with peripheral parking and open space
- Though the land is owned by the State Government, and they will have the final say, ensure that the views of Council and the community are heard when further community consultation occurs
- Look for opportunities for well connected peripheral parking on the edge of the town centre
- Integrate the village with the multiuse rail corridor and the Story Trail that encompasses the town's history and integrates with a sculpture walk¹².

The New Federal Village Masterplan will provide a roadmap for sustainable development in and around Federal village and is currently being created through a community-led planning process. Although not directly on the Rail Corridor, the village of Federal is located 9 kilometres from Binna Burra and 18km from Eltham (on the Rail Trail). Federal has experienced increases in visitation and also in development application activity due to its hinterland location, park and popular cafés. Its 700-person-village supports a growing population in surrounding areas and current infrastructure faces challenges in dealing with increases in population, traffic, tourism and developments. The Masterplan will establish a shared vision to ensure a future that addresses the needs and issues of its residents and the environment, for the next 20 years¹³.

Product and Experience Development Opportunities

The Byron Shire Draft Sustainable Visitation Strategy 2020 to 2030 identifies that a Council led strategy for Byron Shire would endeavor to change the visitor mix, manage visitor behavior and attract visitors who respect the community and environment, stay longer and are local impact and want to explore various towns and villages within the Shire, 'these are the visitors we want to attract, those who share our community values'. A key action of the Strategy is to 'collaborate with industry to encourage tourism product and visitor experiences that complement the brand, values and image of Byron Shire'. Community engagement undertaken to inform the following industries as a focus for product development and visitor attraction that also reflect the community's values and attract the right type of visitors:

- Arts and creative industries
- Indigenous culture
- Wellbeing and health retreats
- Nature-based tourism
- Business events and conferencing,
- Food experiences
- Agritourism
- Volunteer tourism.

Byron Bay Solar Train

It is also important to acknowledge the existing use of the rail line by the Byron Bay Railroad Company operates a Solar Train on three kilometres on the rail corridor linking the Byron Town Centre with the North Beach precinct and Byron Arts Estate. The journey takes ten minutes one way or 25 return from North Beach Station. The journey passes through littoral rainforest, endangered coastal wetlands and over the stunning tea tree Belongil Creek, part of Cape Byron Marine Park. The train has capacity for 92 seated passengers, additional standing passengers and luggage room for bikes, prams and surfboards, carried free of charge.

In terms of potential rail trail development the Railroad Company explains that the rail corridor is typically 40 metres wide throughout and there is ample room to provide a Rail Trail within the rail corridor and clear of the operating rail line. The Company has a non-exclusive licence to use the rail corridor and operate trains. Transport for NSW can licence other parties including a Rail Trail or other rail operators to also use the rail corridor.

The refurbishment of the Belongil Creek rail bridge has accommodated the option to simply attach a pedestrian or cycleway gantry to the existing structure in the future. The company continues to work with the Northern Rivers Rail Trail organisation in accommodating their objective of delivering a cycle way within the same corridor. They also support Byron Shire Council's intent to establish a dedicated park and ride facility west of Bayshore Drive (toward the highway) or on any number of other appropriate sites along the rail corridor. Such a facility could provide enormous social, economic and environmental benefits to the Byron Shire¹⁴.

5.0 Northern Rivers Rail Trail Tourism Product & Experience Development Opportunities

This section presents findings of a review of the Destination North Coast Tourism Research Report audit findings (July 2020) and an audit of current ATDW and web product listings (September 2021) that sought to identify and categorise the main attractions and experiences along and around the rail trail.

5.1 Key Findings 2020 Audit

5.1.1 Northern Rivers Product and Experience Strengths and Weaknesses

The 2020 Audit is useful to understand the tourism product and experience strengths across the 14 North Coast LGAs. The 2020 Audit identified 1,276 tourism attraction and experiences across the region. It also highlighted that ATDW listed 834 attractions in the region and determined 37% of attractions were not listed on ATDW at the time¹⁵.

For the Northern Rivers the audit found:

- **Tweed, Ballina and Byron have a strong cluster of ‘food tours and product’** with food based experiences in these three LGAs comprising more than half of all food-based experienced identified in the North Coast
- **Byron is a health and wellness hub**, comprising 34% of all health and wellness product
- **Byron and Ballina together represent 36% of all scenic cruises, drives and flights** identified in the audit
- The audit noted that **Kyogle and Richmond Valley, in particular, are not as strongly developed as other North Coast destinations**¹⁵.

The Table in Appendix 4 shows the summary of attractions by product category for the 6 Northern Rivers LGAs. Grey highlighting has been used to show the dominate experience strengths:

- Natural attractions
- Walking and biking tracks
- Arts and cultural
- Watersports and fishing
- Food tours (Tweed, Byron, Ballina)
- Wellness (Byron).

The 2020 Audit also found that other North Coast LGAs have strengths associated with adventure, art and culture, family based product, indigenous experiences, and wildlife tours. This highlights an opportunity rail trail to increase product and experiences associated with these experience themes:

- **Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour appear to be the adventure hubs** for the region, comprising 23% and 26% of adventure attractions identified
- **‘Art and Cultural’ product is a strength of the Clarence Valley**, comprising 18% of the product of this type identified in the North Coast region
- **Port Macquarie-Hastings has the largest proportion of family-based product** (including fun parks), totaling 35% of all family experiences identified.
- **Coffs Harbour has the greatest number of indigenous products and experiences**, totaling 4 experiences and equating to 27% of this type of product throughout the region
- **Clarence Valley is a hub for ‘watersports and fishing’** with 19 experiences mainly situated near Yamba
- **Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie-Hastings have the largest number of ‘wildlife tours and viewing’** accounting for 25% and 17% respectively of wildlife product identified¹⁵.

5.1. Paid vs Free Attractions and Experiences

The 2020 Audit also examined paid versus free product across the North Coast. Overall the audit found that the North Coast region offers a myriad of free experiences (70% of those assessed are free experiences) and attractions that makes it a challenge to derive higher visitor yield with limited commissionable tourism product.

Findings for each LGA show:

- **Byron, Ballina and Lord Howe Island are the only destinations where paid product exceeds free product**
- **Tweed has an even distribution between free and paid product**
- **For destinations such as Kyogle and Lismore, free product makes up more than 80% of the product on offer** and while this is influenced (in some cases) but the number of free trails and tracks, there is a need to investigate opportunities to grow the level of commissionable product¹⁵.

The 2020 Audit highlighted the following implications for product and experience development relevant to the rail trail including:

- **There may need to be a focus on introducing more paid experiences along these trails or at the start or endpoints**
- Much effort by councils especially, has gone into creating high quality coastal and hinterland walking and cycling trails, mountain biking circuits and supporting infrastructure. However, **without the corresponding commissionable product (pop up or permanent cafes and retail, guided experiences and other tour operator product), many LGAs will continue to find it hard to generate stronger visitor yield and better economic outcomes, for their visitor economies**
- **For those LGAs with a much higher ratio of free to paid attractions and experiences, the focus would need to shift to encouraging more paid experiences and attractions** if a stronger visitor economy is to be developed **and to support more commercial accommodation development and investment**¹⁵.

5.1.3 LGA Product and Experience Gap Analysis

The 2020 Audit proposed a number of product gaps and investment priorities based on consultation with the LGAs (see Table 2). In terms of tourism product and experience development, overall, the consultants found:

- **Hinterland areas are often seen to offer excellent opportunities for eco attractions, experiences and accommodation of a smaller and more sustainable nature** but planning instruments (LEPs and DCPs) and a rigid interpretation of these by planning staff tend to that many agri-tourism opportunities and associated economic and social benefit
- **Many areas see a need for higher quality accommodation facilities (4-5 star)** to encourage higher spending visitor markets and to broaden area appeal
- **Several LGAs are keen to complete rail trails, coastal walkways and related boardwalks etc.** which are viewed as important public good projects to stimulate greater local and visitor market demand for the area
- **Some LGAs noted that they lacked better quality food and beverage outlets** which impacted on their ability to position themselves as more attractive visitor destinations to a broader and higher spending visitor market, yet many had extensive agricultural production and food and beverage processing to support a retail experience¹⁵.

Table 2: 2020 Audit Gap Analysis Commentary¹⁵

LGA	Product Gap	Public, Private or Combined Investment Priorities
Tweed	Distillery (agri-food link), low impact eco-resort in Hinterland, completion of rail-trail and hinterland trails, headland sustainable coastal development	Rail trail, hinterland trails, glamping experiences, higher quality small-scaled headland area tourism development
Byron	Business and conference facilities, indigenous art and cultural centre	Aboriginal art and cultural centre, volunteer tourism, rail trail to reduce vehicle flows,
Lismore	Built attractions, 4-5-star accommodation options, self-contained accommodation, destination holiday park	4-5-star eco higher-end resort
Richmond Valley	Higher quality 4-5-star accommodation, limited bars, cafes and restaurants, wildlife sanctuary, Aboriginal tourism product	Destination holiday park, 4-star resort, food and beverage outlets
Ballina	Marina development, walking trails (Ballina to Lennox Head), arts and cultural precinct, food hub (agri-tourism)	Indigenous cultural interpretation sites/centre, INXS built attraction centre
Kyogle	Limited accommodation capacity, limited higher-end accommodation, farm-based experiences	Stargazing/dark sky sanctuary

5.2 Key Findings 2021 Audit

5.2.1 Northern Rivers Top Attractions and Experiences (TripAdvisor)

To supplement the 2020 Audit a review of the ‘top things to do’ as listed by TripAdvisor was undertaken by Wray Sustainable Tourism in September 2021 across the main stopover points along the rail trail (Table 3). This review is useful as it indicates what visitors have identified as the main attractions and experiences in each area.

The attractions were colour coded by experience theme (see key at bottom of table) and highlight the main groupings of attractions and experiences in each stopover destination. These clusters and may be useful as a starting point to consider how products and experiences can be packaged/bundled around visitor experience themes.

- Murwillumbah – strong arts & creative industries, Tweed Regional Gallery & Margaret Olley Centre
- Burringbar/Mooball - Tweed Valley Whey Farmhouse
- Mullumbimby – wellness & retail
- Byron Bay – aquatic, nature-based, food & produce
- Bangalow – 2 x markets, arts & cultural, wellness
- Binna Burra/Eltham –Eltham Hotel, nature based
- Lismore – range of experiences
- Casino – arts & antiques, family, wild river tour
- Ballina – beaches, naval heritage
- Kyogle – nature based, Daley’s fruit trees.

Table 3: TripAdvisor 'Top Things to Do' (September 2021)

Rank	Murwillumbah	Burringbar Mooball	Mullumbimby	Byron Bay	Bangalow	Binna Burra/ Eltham/ Bexhill	Lismore	Casino	Ballina	Kyogle
1	Tweed Regional Gallery & Margaret Olley Centre	Tweed Valley Whey Farmhouse	Crystal Castle & Shambhala Gardens	Cape Byron Lighthouse	Minyon Falls	The Eltham Hotel	Rocky Creek Dam	Jambana Arts Gallery	Ballina Naval & Maritime Museum	Daleys Tree Fruit Nursery
2	Tweed Regional Museum Murwillumbah	Heath's Old Wares	Mullumbimby Farmers Markets	Lighthouse Trail	Bangalow Market	Lamington National Park	Lismore Car Boot Market	McKees Antiques	Lighthouse Beach, Ballina	Kyogle VIC
3	Tweed Regional Aquatic Centre	Mooball National Park	Mullumbimby Community Gardens	The Farm	Bangalow Heritage Museum	Bellbird Lookout & Circuit	Lismore VIC	Casino VIC	Big Prawn	Koorelah National Park
4	Murwillumbah VIC		Kiva Spa & Bathhouse	Stone & Wood Brewery	Zakay Glass Gallery	Pegasus Park Equestrian Centre	Lismore Regional Art Gallery	Casino Mini Rail	Ballina VIC	Borders Ranges National Park
5	M-Arts Precinct		Made in Mullum Artisan Collective	Byron Bay Beaches	Bangalow Remedial Massage	Bexhill Open Air Cathedral	Friends of the Koala	Wild River Tours	Ballina Headland Lookout	Horseshoe Park Pony rides
6	Makers & Finders Markets		Mullum Sari Holistic Gym & Medi Spa	Wategos Beach	Herbal Wisdom		Heritage Park Railway		Ballina Historical Walking Trail	
7	Murwillumbah Library		Son of Drum (music shop)	Belongil Beach	Helix Café & Winebar (NB: changed hands)		Lismore Library		Richmond River Lighthouse	
8	Caldera Wildscapes Art Gallery		Sunshine Alley	Tallow Beach	Bangalow Farmers Market		Star Court Arcade		South Ballina Beach	
9	The Grainery		Mullumbimby Chocolate Shop	Cape Byron Distillery	Hammers & Hand Metal & Jewelry Collective		Lismore Workers Club		North Wall	
10	Crystal Creek Miniatures		Mullum Fitness	Cape Byron State Conservation Area	Thomas Frank Jewelry Workshops		Kadina Park		Shelley Beach	
Key	Family	Food & Produce	Wellness	Nature Based	Arts & Culture	Heritage	Markets	Services	Aquatic	Boutique Retail

5.2.2 Tour and Transport Operations (paid)

Given the potential to create tours associated with the rail trail, a review of current paid tour based operations was undertaken in September 2021 to determine the location and scale of tour operations along and around the rail trail organised under the experience themes – land-based, water-based, and tour/transport operations.

Findings show range of existing tour operations mainly located in Tweed and Byron.

Land-based Tour Operations

- Nature-based tour operations are predominantly based in Byron (9)
- There are three Aboriginal tour operators located in Ballina (2) and Byron (1)
- Local food tours are based in Tweed (5) and Byron (9)
- Cycling hire and tour operations are based out of cycle shops in Tweed (2), Byron (4) and Ballina (3)
- There are is only one walking tour operator across the Northern Rivers (in Byron)
- Some air tours (planes, balloons, sky dive etc.) are located in Byron and Lismore
- A few equestrian tours operate out of Byron and Ballina
- Kyogle and Richmond Valley offer no local paid nature based tours (See Table 4).

Table 4: Northern Rivers Land Based Tour Operations (paid)

LGA	Nature Based	Aboriginal	Local Food	Cycling	Walking	Air	Equestrian
Tweed	1	0	5	2	0	0	0
Byron	9	1	9	4	1	8	4
Lismore	1	0	1	0	0	4	0
Richmond Valley	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ballina	1	2	0	3	0	0	1
Kyogle	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	12	3	15	9	0	12	5

Water-based Tour Operations

- Tweed has 11 tours mainly focus on boat hire, river and kayak cruises and whale watching as well as 7 fishing operators and 3 surf schools
- Byron has 6 river and whale watching tours based out of Brunswick Heads and Byron Bay and a number of water sports operators (15)¹
- Ballina has some water sports (5) and fishing (1) operators
- Richmond Valley has 2 river tours (Casino and Evans Head)
- Kyogle has no water based operations (Table 5).

Table 5: Northern Rivers Water Based Tour Operations (paid)

LGA	River/Ocean	Water Sports	Fishing
Tweed	11	3	7
Byron	6	15	0
Lismore	7	0	2
Richmond Valley	2	0	2
Ballina	0	5	1
Kyogle	0	0	0
TOTAL	26	23	12

¹ It should be noted that some Ballina based are listed under Byron

Tourism Transport Operations

- Tweed has 2 local tour and transport operators
- Byron has 13 operators including shuttle buses, limousines, transfer and tour services¹
- Ballina has one motorcycle tour operator
- Richmond Valley and Kyogle have no local operators (Table 6).

Table 6 Northern Rivers Tour and Transport Operations (paid)

LGA	Tour & Transport*
Tweed	2
Byron	13
Lismore	0
Richmond Valley	0
Ballina	1
Kyogle	1
TOTAL	16

* NB: Does not include hire car services

5.2.3 Food and Drink

The 2020 Audit did not analyse 'food and drink' operations. Given, not all local food and drink related business are listed on ATDW, a Google search of food and drink for each of the main destinations and villages along and near the rail trail was undertaken in September 2021 to estimate the scale of hospitality businesses in each location and to identify examples of appealing 'refreshment' stop over points.

Appendix 5 shows findings of this analysis as well as examples of appealing businesses, and pubs/distilleries.

Findings show:

- As expected, Byron Bay has a large number of hospitality operations (est. 160)
- Murwillumbah (est. 90)
- Mullumbimby, Brunswick Heads, Bangalow, Lismore and Casino have a good scale of current offerings (est. 30 to 50)
- Villages along the Murwillumbah to Crabbes Creek section also have some interesting operations that may appeal to Rail Trail visitors
- Pubs, clubs and some distilleries are located in the main destinations along the rail trail providing truly local refreshment stops for visitors
- There are few businesses located between Eltham and Lismore and along the Lismore to Casino sections. This suggests there is a need for 'food and drink product' development in suitable locations along these sections of the rail trail.

Consideration could also be given by the LGAs to:

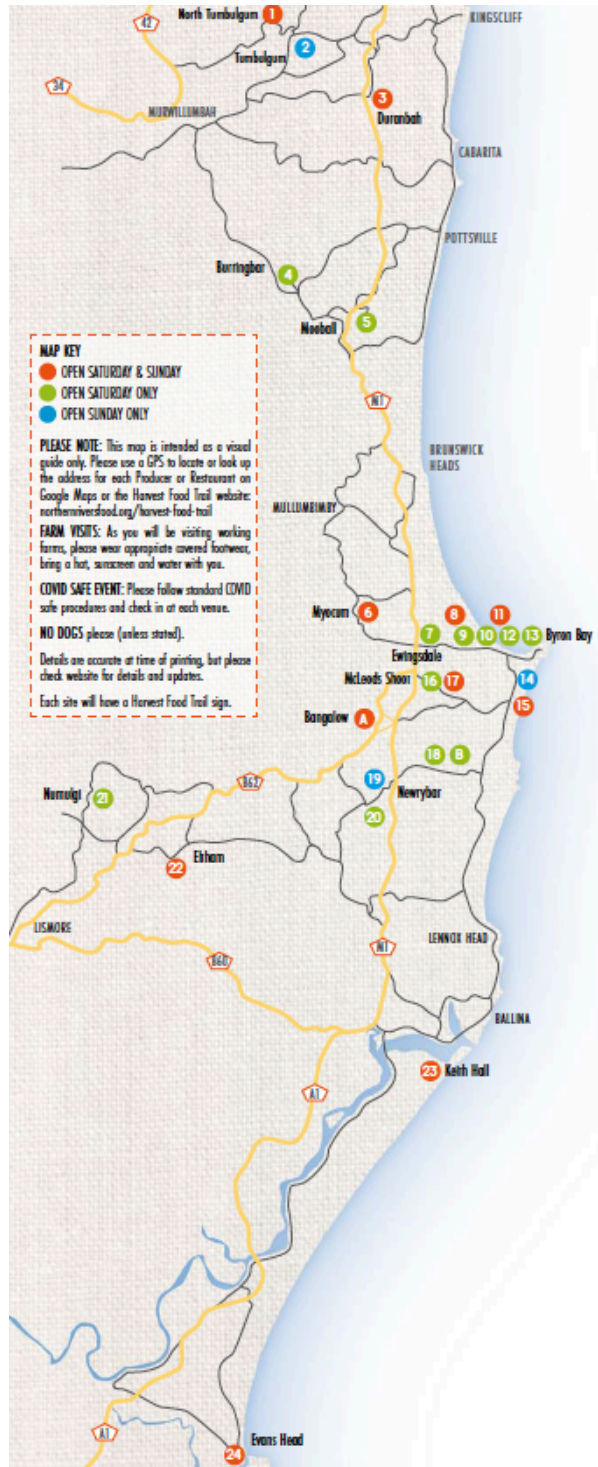
- Allow 'pop-up' coffee carts/food vans at suitable locations along the rail trail. A recent example is the 'Flora Food Van' that has been parked at the front of the old South Lismore train station
- Determine the type of hospitality product/experiences that will be offered in revitalised rail corridor precinct areas (e.g. Murwillumbah, Old Casino, Bangalow, Mullumbimby and Byron Bay Stations and other precincts and hubs (e.g. Naughton's Gap, Bentley, Lismore Riverside Precinct)
- Activate farm gates and farm trail events for interested producers along the rail corridor
- Encourage and support local hospitality businesses to be 'open for business' along the rail trail
- Explore opportunities for events and festivals to be hosted in or near rail trail hubs and precincts.

Destination Tweed and Northern Rivers Food (NRF) have member listings of producers and service providers that could be used to create food/rail trail experiences. For example, NRF hosts the Harvest

Food Trail event in May each year. The 2021 event proposed visits to 24 farms and producers located in destinations that align with the rail trail and has a number of member listings (see Figure 5).

As indicated in the previous section there are also a number of existing food tour operations in the Northern Rivers region that may be interested in working with cycling and walking tour operators to create rail trail/food tours and food events.

Figure 5: Northern Rivers Food – Harvest Trail Participants 2021¹⁶



	NRF Harvest Trail Participants	Location
1	Husk Farm Distillers	Tumbulgum
2	Sunshine Sugar at Twohill Farm	Tumbulgum
3	Tropical Fruitworld	Durrabah
4	Dona Chilata	Burringbar
5	Sunshine Sugar at Cowell Farm	Mooball
6	Forage	Byron Bay
7	The Farm	Ewingsdale
8	Stone & Wood Brewery	Byron Bay
9	Bun Coffee	Byron Bay
10	Lord Byron Distillery	Byron Bay
11	Santos Organics	Byron Bay
12	Karkalla (indigenous)	Byron Bay
13	Beach Restaurant	Byron Bay
14	Bay Grover	Byron Bay
15	Byron at Byron	Byron Bay
16	Brookfarm	McLeods Shoot
17	Cape Byron Distillery	McLeods Shoot
18	Zentfeld's Coffee	Newrybar
19	Harvest	Newrybar
20	Duck Creek Macadamias	Newrybar
21	Wattle Tree Creek	Numulgi
22	Barefoot Farm	Eltham
23	Rock Chic Eggs	Keith Hall
24	Hotel Illawong	Evans Head

6.0 Accommodation Development Opportunities

This section reviews key findings of the 2020 DNC Tourism Research Report and DNC Accommodation Investment Report (2020) to provide an overview of the scale and range of accommodation across the Northern Rivers region. This is supplemented by a review of short-term holiday rental properties along and around the towns of villages of rail trail was sourced from AirDNA in September 2021.

6.1 Accommodation Capacity

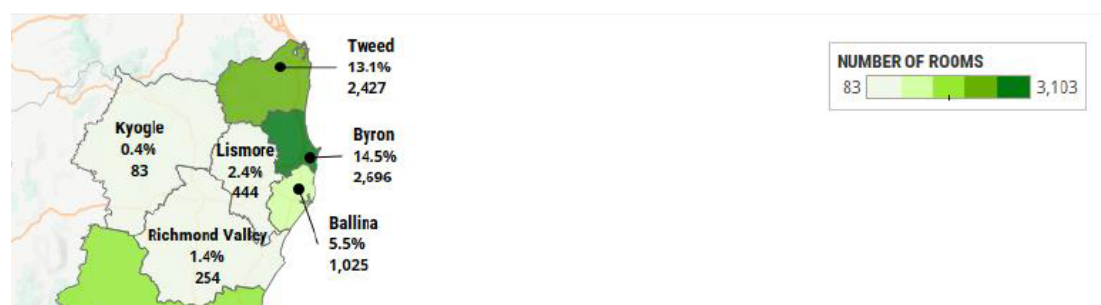
The 2020 DNC audit of accommodation is useful to review as it provides an overview of the accommodation strengths and gaps across the 6 Northern Rivers Rail TRail LGAs and the main areas where visitors stay when they visit the Northern Rivers region.

Overall, the 2020 audit found that nearly three-quarters of the available commercial room stock is held within the five largest North Coast LGAs being Mid-Coast, Byron, Coffs Harbour, Tweed and Port Macquarie. There was also a clear correlation between the number of available commercial properties in an LGA, the higher ratio of paid visitor attractions and experiences on offer, and the corresponding strength of the visitor economy¹⁴.

Analysis of room stock for the 6 rail trail related LGAs shows the importance of Byron and Tweed and also Ballina LGAs as key destinations where visitors can stay overnight and also be drawn from for Rail Trail experiences.

Figure 6 shows the number of rooms per LGA and the percentage of the total North Coast accommodation stock (extracted from the 2020 Audit).

Figure 6: Accommodation Room Capacity – Northern Rivers LGAs (percentage of total North Coast)¹⁴



Other relevant results of the 2020 Audit for the Northern Rivers LGAs reflect accommodation strengths of each area:

- Byron has the largest number of:
 - **Backpacker properties**, comprising 41% of all backpacker properties identified and 69% of all backpacker rooms
 - **Holiday home and apartment properties** as well as rooms, comprising 35% of these properties and 37% of room stock within this category with many of these properties self-listed on home rental websites such as Airbnb and Stayz
 - **Hotel properties** (36% of all hotels), however, hotel room stock is largest in Port Macquarie Hastings (448 rooms compared to Byron with 232 rooms) and Tweed (320 rooms)
 - **Serviced apartment properties and room stock**, encompassing 26% of serviced apartment properties and 22% of room stock
- **Tweed has significant retreat/resort stock** (935 rooms), although some require refurbishment
- **Ballina has a good range of accommodation** across holiday homes & apartments, holiday parks and motels (1025 rooms)
- **Lismore has a good stock of motel accommodation** (307 rooms)
- **Richmond Valley has 254 rooms** (NB: many would be located in Evans Head)
- **Kyogle has only 83 rooms** mainly in holiday parks (36) and pub accommodation (26)¹⁴.

6.1.2 Accommodation Investment Opportunities and Gaps

Key findings of the Destination North Coast Accommodation Investment Project (2020) further indicated that:

- **For most LGAs, accommodation options are abundant within the basic 1-star, mid-range and 3-star categories, there is a limited number of higher-quality properties**, particularly those of a larger scale and/or branded accommodation. There are exceptions to this, primarily in Byron, Tweed and Mid-Coast, where there appears to be sufficient supply of small, medium and larger scale higher-quality properties, including hotels, resorts and more boutique-style accommodation
- **Several LGAs are keen to complete rail trails, coastal walkways and related boardwalks etc.** which are viewed as important public good projects to stimulate greater local and visitor market demand for the area and which should aim to have smaller-scale accommodation opportunities (lodges, eco chalets and glamping pods or tents) along trail routes and at the end of them¹⁷.

The Project Report identified a number of commercial accommodation investment and development opportunities which correlate to local government desires to stimulate economic uplift in a mix of coastal and hinterland areas throughout the region. Figure 1 shows these for the 6 LGAs relevant to the rail trail.

Figure 7: Accommodation Investment Opportunities – Northern Rivers¹⁷



Source: DNC Accommodation Investment Report 2020

In addition, the following gaps and opportunities were identified within the accommodation mix relevant to the 6 LGAs associated with the rail trail:

- **Higher-quality, boutique hotels and/or glamping** which could be operated on a seasonal basis and to supplement existing accommodation sites particularly in areas such as Lismore, Kyogle, and Richmond Valley
- **Higher-quality branded destination holiday parks** to encourage further growth in the family market and higher visitor spend in Lismore
- **Self-contained serviced apartments** in Lismore
- **Completion of significant rail trail and development of hinterland trail experiences** with links to accommodation options in Tweed

- **Agri-tourism product development in Ballina hinterland** with on farm styled accommodation.
- **The introduction of low impact eco focused sustainable options of a smaller scale in hinterland areas and/or in agricultural areas** where eco-tourism, farm stays, etc. can be effective supporters of various other elements of the economy and to support greater use of cycle trails and walking trails etc. was also highlighted
- **Clustering tourism development into nodes, hubs and precincts** along with other forms of tourism development often provides important opportunities to help leverage off other local and visitor demand generators. Clearly, this has far greater application for coastal strips, urban centres etc. than more remote locations but even then, adding incorrectly scaled commercial accommodation with walking and cycling trails start or endpoints, or stunning locations adjacent to national park sites or for agri-tourism ventures in agricultural areas, is important
- **Developing trails and circuits with either permanent or pop up smaller-scale commercial accommodation at the start, at appropriate locations during for overnight stops** and the end of trails is often overlooked so, the economic uplift and benefits desired from important nature based assets are often not realised¹⁷.

6.2 Smaller-Scale Accommodation along the Northern Rivers Rail Trail

Given findings of the previous section highlighted the opportunity for smaller-scale commercial accommodation, it is useful to review the availability of smaller scale accommodation along and around the rail trail.

Review of the 2020 Audit data of the number of rooms for Bed and Breakfasts, Boutique Cabins, Farmstay and Pub Accommodation showed, not surprisingly, the dominance of Byron (45%) and an opportunity for the other Northern Rivers areas to increase their stock of small-scale accommodation.

Table 7: Bed and Breakfasts, Boutique Cabins, Farmstay and Pub Accommodation⁴

LGA	B & Bs		Boutique Cabins		Farm Stay		Pub Accom		Total	
	No.	Rooms	No.	Rooms	No.	Rooms	No.	Rooms	No.	Rooms
Tweed	6	12	9	58	2	16	0	0	17	86
Byron	17	53	32	142	8	19	0	0	57	214
Lismore	8	28	8	19	2	4	0	0	18	51
Richmond Valley	0	0	2	25	0	0	4	39	6	64
Ballina	3	6	4	14	1	3	0	0	8	23
Kyogle	7	9	2	3	2	5	4	26	15	43
Total	41	108	57	261	15	47	8	65	121	475

Source: Extracted from DNC 2020 Tourism Research Project

To supplement this data, a current review of short-term holiday rental properties along and around the towns of villages of rail trail was sourced from AirDNA² in September 2021.

AirBnB/Home Away accommodation listings can be considered as supplementing the traditional accommodation offer by providing additional capacity and more visitor accommodation experiences reflective of the country lifestyle. It is also important to recognise that only one in five visitor nights in regional Australia are spent in hotels, more than have are spent in an owned or rented²¹. Destination NSW also highlights the need for a clear sharing economy plan²².

Use of current AirDNA listings was considered to be useful in capturing more small-scale properties available in the vicinity of the rail trail that may not be listed on ATDW or have their own websites.

² Air DNA provides short-term vacation rental data and analytics for over 10 million listings in 80,000 markets globally including AirBnB and HomeAway to build a comprehensive view of active short term rentals that are geo-located. Data was accessed for this analysis was accessed on 6 September 2021.

It should be noted that there is a likely crossover of listings from the 2020 accommodation audit with active listings identified by AirDNA. In addition, this review was undertaken on 6 September 2021 when NSW was impacted by Covid-19 lockdowns in Sydney and parts of Regional NSW and the QLD border was also closed. It could be anticipated that there may be more listings once restrictions are lifted. The AirDNA data, however, provides insights into the number of small-scale accommodation properties along the rail trail.

Findings show:

- Villages along the Murwillumbah to Crabbes Creek section have some existing small scale properties (43 including Murwillumbah)
- Byron Bay has a large amount of STRA properties (1266)
- There are a number of STRA properties listed in Brunswick Heads (60), Ocean Shores (119) Mullumbimby (106), Suffolk park (218) and Bangalow (114)
- Other village areas along the Yelgun to Bangalow section have small numbers of active listings
- There are no active listings in Eltham and Clunes has 17, and Lismore has 22 listings
- There are only 5 listings in the Casino area
- Lennox Head (around 20km from Bangalow) has 314 active listings and Ballina (around 30kms from Lismore) has 40.

The following tables present findings by town and village along and around the rail trail.

Table 8: STRA Active Rentals - Murwillumbah to Crabbes Creek

Stop Over Points on Rail Trail	Active Rentals	Av. Rental size bedrooms	Av. Rental size guests
Murwillumbah	12	2.3	5.3
South Murwillumbah	1	3	8
Dunible	0	0	0
Stokers Siding	7	2.2	6.8
Upper Burringbar	5	1.6	4.2
Burringbar	7	1.8	4.3
Mooball	1	1	4
Crabbes Creek	10	1.4	4.6
Sub Total	43		

Table 9: STRA Active Rentals - Coastal Destinations within 50 kms Murwillumbah to Crabbes Creek

Coastal destinations <50kms of the Rail Trail	Active Rentals	Av. Rental size bedrooms	Av. Rental size guests
Coolangatta	226	2	4.4
Tweed Heads	61	2.2	4.7
Tweed Heads South	4	2.7	6.3
Fingal Head	19	2.8	6.4
Kingscliff	388	2.7	5.9
Cudgen	7	2.7	8
Casuarina	190	2.8	6
Hastings Point	30	2.7	6
Pottsville	72	2.8	5.9
Sub Total	997		

Table 10: STRA Active Rentals - Yelgun to Booyung

Stop Over Points on/near rail Trail	Active Rentals	Av. Rental size bedrooms	Av. Rental size guests
Yelgun	1	1	2
Billinudgel	4	1.8	4.8
Ocean Shores	119	2.3	4.9
Brunswick Heads	106	2.4	4.9
Mullumbimby	60	1.9	4.1
Myocum	48	2.2	5.3
Ewingsdale	62	2.9	6.8
Tyagarah	9	1.8	4.4
Byron Bay	1266	2.6	5.6
Suffolk Park	218	2.4	5.3
Coopers Shoot	52	2.4	5.5
Skinnners Shoot	28	1.2	2.8
Hayters Hill	4	3	6
Talofa	15	2.2	4.7
Bangalow	114	2.3	4.9
Federal	32	2.7	6
Possum Creek	19	3.3	6.9
Binna Burra	8	2.3	5.7
Nashua	8	4.1	8.5
Booyong	1	1	N/A
Sub Total	2174		

Table 11: STRA Active Rentals – Eltham to Lismore

Stop Over Points on/near rail Trail	Active Rentals	Av. Rental size bedrooms	Av. Rental size guests
Eltham	0	0	0
Clunes	17	2.5	5.5
Bexhill	4	2.5	5.8
Woodlawn	1	2	3
North Lismore	1	3	6
Lismore	22	2	4.1
Sub Total	45		

Table 12: STRA Active Rentals –Lismore to Casino

Stop Over Points on/near rail Trail	Active Rentals	Av. Rental size bedrooms	Av. Rental size guests
Naughton's Gap	0	0	0
Bentley	0	0	0
North Casino	1	1	2
Casino*	4	2	4
Sub Total	5		

* 10 active rentals - Q1 2020

Table 13: STRA Active Rentals – Other Coastal Destinations < 50 kms

Stop Over Points on/near rail Trail	Active Rentals	Av. Rental size bedrooms	Av. Rental size guests
Evans Head (60kms)	119	2.9	6.6
Ballina	40	2.2	4.7
Lennox Head	314	2.5	5.5

7.0 National Parks, Nature Reserves, State Conservation Areas

In addition to examining relevant paid tour operations, a review of all National Parks and Nature Reserves with 50km of Rail Trail was undertaken in September 2021 to understand the type of visitor facilities (bushwalks, day use facilities and camping), current tourism operations and to consider the potential natural areas that could be linked to the rail trail to create outstanding nature based visitor experiences.

7.1 Natural Area Audit – Northern Rivers

Table 14 on the next page shows all National Parks (NP), Nature Reserves (NR) and State Conservation Areas (SCA) located within a 50km radius of the rail trail.

Findings show:

- There are 10 National Parks, 34 Nature Reserves and 5 State Conservation Areas within the rail trail footprint
- 57% (28) of all natural areas do not have established visitor facilities
- 23 natural areas offer half day walks, 9 offer full day walk itineraries
- 9 natural areas have camping facilities, highlighting an opportunity to consider how these areas could be connected to the rail trail
- Nightcap National Park (near Lismore), Whian Whian SCA (near Minyon), Awarkwal National Park (Byron) and Cape Byron State Conservation Area (Byron) are the only areas with existing tourism operators, highlighting the potential of these areas to connect to a rail trail experience
- It should also be noted that Wollumbin National Park does not allow commercial tour operations.

Green shading highlights natural areas where current tour businesses operate and may have the potential to be linked to rail trail experiences (ranked 1 = shorter term and 2 = longer term).

Further collaboration with National Parks and Wildlife Service is important to:

- Identify natural areas along the rail trail where visitors can rest, explore (e.g. Nature Reserves – Tyagarah, Boatharbour (Bexhill) and what permissions are required
- Identify tour opportunities that link nature based areas and trails to the rail trail
- Work with interested nature based tour operations to develop integrated NPWS and rail trail experiences
- Determine what is feasible, and what approvals are required in the short and longer terms.

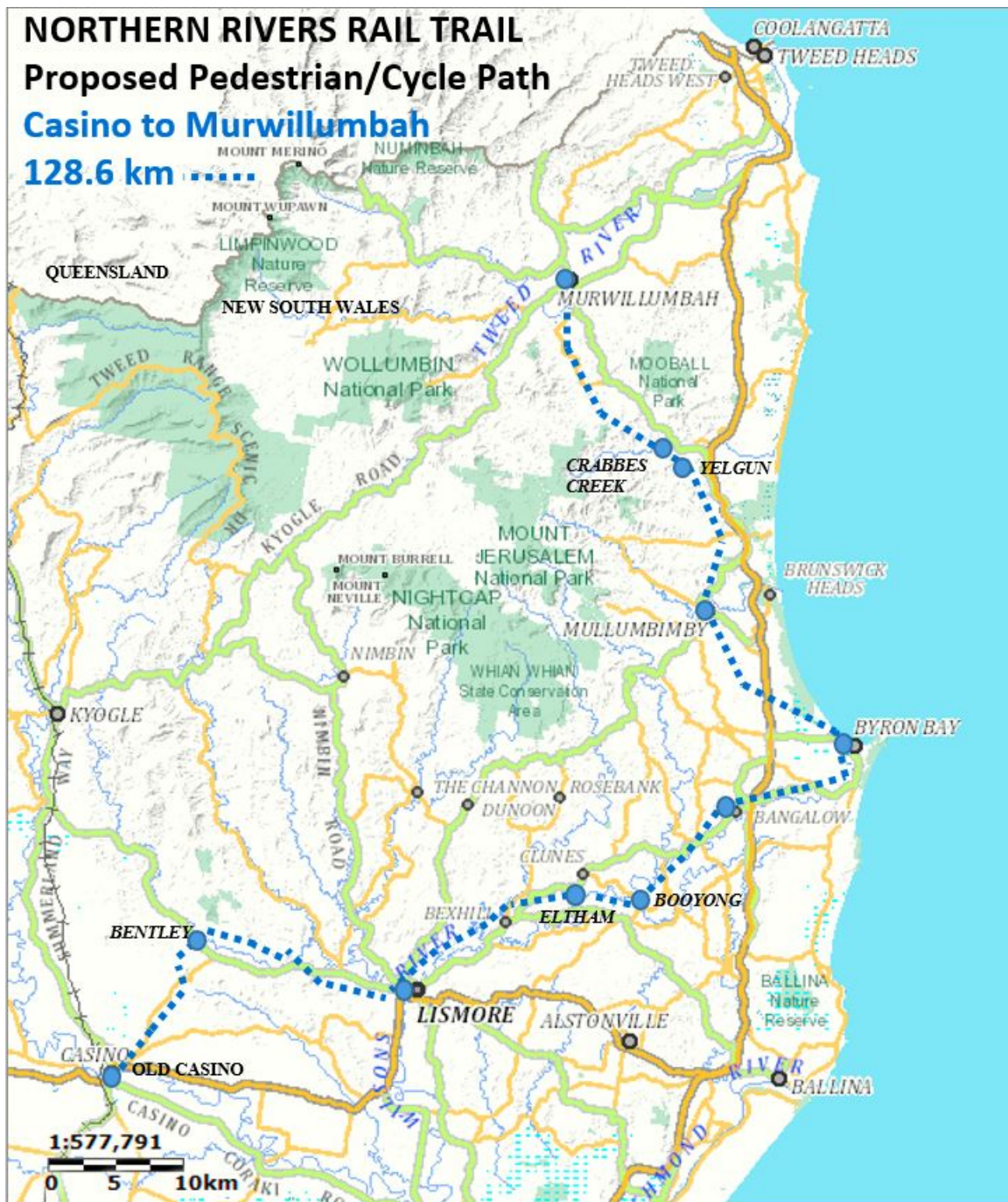
Figure 8 on page 27 shows a map of the main natural areas within 50km of the rail trail.

Appendix 6 presents detailed maps of each section of the rail trail from Crabbes Creek to Casino that further indicates where natural areas are located.

Table 15: National Parks (NP), Nature Reserves (NR) and State Conservation Areas (SCA) in the Northern Rivers

Parks, Reserves and State Conservation Areas	Town	Potential package with RT**	Current tourism operators	Visitor facilities: bushwalks and day use areas		
				No visitor facilities	½ day	Full day
Border Ranges NP	Kyogle	2			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wollumbin NP	Uki	1 (non commercial)			<input type="checkbox"/>	
Wollumbin SCA	Tyalgum		X			
Mebbin NP	Tyalgum	2			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mount Jerusalem NP	Uki/Mullumbimby	1			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> (TBHT)
Numinbah NR	Springbrook, QLD				<input type="checkbox"/>	
Limpinwood NR	Tyalgum		X			
Mount Nullum NR	Uki		X			
Hattons Bluff NR	Uki		X			
Cudgen NR	Cabarita				<input type="checkbox"/>	
Stotts Island NR	Tumbulgum		X		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Moobal NP	Burringbar	2	X			
Cudgera Creek NR	Pottsville		X			
Nightcap NP		1	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> (TBHT)
Whian Whian SCA		1	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Goonengerry NP			X			
Snows Gully NR			X			
Wooyung NR	Wooyung		X			
Inner Pocket NR	Billinudgel		X			
Billinudgel NR	Billinudgel		X			
Brunswick Heads NR	Brunswick Heads				<input type="checkbox"/>	
Tyagarah NR	Tyagarah				<input type="checkbox"/>	
Cumbebin Swamp NR	Byron Bay		X			
Awarkwal NP	Byron Bay	1	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>
Cape Byron SCA	Byron Bay	1	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Haters Hill NR	Byron Bay		X			
Broken Head NR	Suffolk Park				<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Andrew Johnston Big Scrub NR	Eureka		X			
Boatharbour NR	Bexhill	2			<input type="checkbox"/>	
Booyong NR	Booyong	1			<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ballina NR	Lennox Head		X			
Richmond River NR	South Ballina		X			
Uralba NR	Alstonville		X			
Davis Scrub NR	Alstonville		X			
Victoria Park NR	Alstonville	1			<input type="checkbox"/>	
Tuckean NR	Bagotville		X			
Wilson NR	East Lismore		X			
Tucki Tucki NR	Tucki Tucki	2			<input type="checkbox"/>	
Broadwater NP	Broadwater	1			<input type="checkbox"/>	
Bundjalung NP	Evans Head	2			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tabbimobile Swamp NR	Tabbimobile		X			
Bungawalbin NR, SCA, NP (3 Parks)	Bungawalbin		X			
Yarringully NR, SCA (2 parks)	Coraki		X			
Hogarth Range NR	Hogarth Range		X			
Mallanganee NP	Mallanganee		X			
Richmond Range NP	Mallanganee	2			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Toonumbar NP	Toonumbar	2			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bungabbee NR	Bentley		X			
Mucklewee Mt NR	Bentley		X			

Figure 8: Northern Rivers Rail Trail Proposed Pedestrian Cycle Path – Casino to Murwillumbah



7.2 Recent Nature-Based Trail Projects – Northern Rivers

Important project work currently being undertaken to explore and develop nature-based trails in the Northern Rivers include:

Tweed Caldera

NPWS is currently developing the 40km (4 day/3 night) Tweed Byron Hinterland Trail that is currently under-construction and will link Nightcap National Park with Mount Jerusalem National Parks around the southern and eastern edge of the Caldera with extended walking tracks, walk-in campsites and additional day use areas. The primary objective of the TBHT is to ‘disperse the high volume of visitors from Wollumbin and Byron Bay by providing a compelling alternative experience’.

NPWS and the Uki Residents Association are supportive of opportunities to link the TBHT to the rail trail through Mount Jerusalem.

The Visitors for the future. Richmond and Clarence Valley Headwaters (draft)

(Project partners: NPWS, Kyogle Council and Tenterfield Shire Council, State Forest)

This project reviewed the Kyogle and Tenterfield tourism and visitor facilities, as well as NPWS and State forest assets, and proposed several tourism opportunities. Potential links between this projects and the rail trail could be developed around multi-day cycling/serviced cycling routes proposed in the Richmond Range and Toonumbar National Parks. These cycling proposals are aimed at gravel/back road cyclist rather than the designated mountain bike track riders.

7.3 Mountain Biking

Although mountain biking is a different cycling experience to rail trails, it is useful to consider if there are potential opportunities to promote mountain biking as a complementary activity to the rail trail.

For example, the Kyogle Mountain Bike Club Inc. has developed a successful purpose build mountain bike track facility within Boorabee State Forest adjoining Kyogle town. Lismore City Council has also recently opened a Mountain Bike Skills Course at Nesbitt Park.

There are several other such facilities within the Northern Rivers Rail Trail footprint (Table 16).

Table 16: Mountain Bike Trails within 50 km of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail

Trail	Location	No. of Trails	Km of trails
Kyogle Mountain Bike Park	Kyogle	17	15
New Italy Mountain Bike Forest	New Italy	26	28
Mebbin National Park	Uki	2	7
Captain Rous Park Mountain Bike Trails	Goonellabah	3	2
Duck Creek Mountain Bike Park	Alstonville	21	8

Source: www.trailforks.com

8.0 Summary Business Development Opportunities

This section highlights key findings of the product and experience development audit. Overall, the aim should be to establish more paid experiences along the Northern Rivers Rail Trail and at start, endpoints and stopovers to generate benefits for local visitor economies and to create viable business opportunities.

Key tourism generating regions

Coastal destinations including the Tweed Coast, Byron Bay, Brunswick Heads, Lennox Head, Ballina and Evans Head are key visitor generating regions where people can stay and also access the rail trail. The Gold Coast also an important region where visitors may stay and also access the trail.

Inland destinations along the rail trail (Casino and Lismore) may also attract overnight guests but currently have limited accommodation capacity. All, however, have an important role in the Northern Rivers Rail Trail system as places where people will stay overnight, access rail trail tours and transport services to and from the rail trail, and connect to bike hire and repair services.

Important precincts and experience hubs (north to south):

- **Start/end points** – Murwillumbah and Casino Railway station precincts
- **Stopover points** – Mullumbimby, Byron Bay, Bangalow, Lismore railway station precinct, Bentley Road area, Naughton's Gap, Primex site (near Casino)
- **Village stop-overs** – Burringbar, Mooball, Stokers Siding, Bexhill/Federal, Eltham
- **Arts & Creative Industries hubs** – Murwillumbah, Byron Industrial Estate, Lismore, Casino.

Main product development opportunities:

- **Cycling and walking tours** along and around the rail trail
- **Retail and local food, drink and agri-tourism operations** in villages along the rail trail and inland towns (Casino, Lismore, Kyogle)
- **Nature and water based tours** that link to the rail trail including Aboriginal and wildlife experiences (NB: this has the potential to differentiate the rail trail from other rails)
- **Small-scale accommodation development** in inland towns (Casino, Murwillumbah, Kyogle) and villages along the rail trail
- **Events (ticketed/paid)** connecting to the rail trail.

Trail development opportunities

In addition to product development opportunities, findings identified the potential to package and bundle products along and around the rail trail that link local products/businesses including creation of:

- **Cycling and walking trails** along the rail trail and connecting/looping to other significant trails in the area
- **An arts and creative industries trail** that connects the rail trail to the region's art galleries and creative industries hubs
- **A food trail along the rail trail** in collaboration with Destination Tweed and Northern Rivers Food
- **A rail heritage trail experience** that provides interesting interpretation of rail infrastructure and facilities along the rail trail
- **A family trail** for parents and children 5 to 10 years of age along the rail trail that links family experiences (e.g. Casino min-rail, Bat tunnel, playgrounds etc.)
- **An inclusive tourism trail** that connects accommodation and inclusive experiences.

Further consultation

Further consultation with NRRT Inc. and four LGAs (Tweed, Byron, Lismore and Richmond Valley) is required to determine the main rail trail access points (for parking/drop offs), surface materials, planning permissions and licensing requirements for business development opportunities along and around the rail trail (NB: preliminary discussions with Tweed Shire Council suggest that these arrangements are still to be determined). It should also be noted that the NRRT Inc. are currently determining governance arrangements for the management of the whole of the rail trail.

In addition, further engagement is required with NPWS and NSW Forests to determine permissible commercial tour and business opportunities in natural areas adjacent to the rail trail.

Figure 9 presents a Northern Rivers Rail Trail Product and Experience Development Opportunities Framework that consolidates findings presented in this report and the Case Study Report into four main areas that can be used as an initial guide to inform tourism product and experience development along and around the rail trail by interested businesses.

Figure 9 : Northern Rivers Rail Trail Product and Experience Development Opportunities Framework



Table 17 on the next page presents key actions associated with paid business development opportunities.

Business development opportunities identified throughout this report for the four LGAs along the rail trail are summarised in Appendix 7 and can be used as a resource for the Northern Rivers Rail Trail Product and Experience Development Business Mentoring Program.

Table 17: Product and Experience Development Actions

Opportunity	Actions
Cycle Hire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with local cycle shops and hire services to ensure there are bike rental and repair opportunities at the main destinations or start/end/stopover points along the rail trail
Transport Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with transport operators to provide return rail trail transport services from the main coastal destination hubs – Tweed, Byron, Ballina, Richmond Valley (Evans Head); and inland Lismore and Kyogle (NB: include luggage services)
Tour Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with tour operators to consider new rail trail tours and to include rail trail walking and cycling experiences into existing tour itineraries including half day, single day and multi-day experiences • Work with local operators to explore ways to connect tour itineraries to appealing local experiences along the rail trail including local villages, natural area attractions, arts and creative industries, food and drink, water based tours, and horse-riding experiences • Explore ways for tour operators to connect to other local walking and cycle trails to create rail trail experience ‘loops’ • Work with NPWS and NSW Forests to identify opportunities for commercial tour operations within natural areas that connect with the rail trail
Food & Drink Businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with hospitality operators to create new businesses or enhance existing businesses to deliver welcoming and appealing local food and drink experiences along the rail trail • Support local producers along the rail trail to understand LGA planning requirements to develop food, drink and agri-tourism farm gate experiences along the rail trail • Work with Pubs and Clubs along the rail trail to welcome rail trail visitors • Support food and drink carts/vans to understand LGA planning requirements for suitable pop-up locations and picnic/hamper pickups along the rail trail
Retail Businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with local retailers to enhance existing businesses or to create new retail businesses in precincts and villages along the rail trail – e.g. bike hire and repair shops, gift shops, arts & creative workshops • Link local markets to the rail trail experience
Small-scale Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with existing small scale accommodation providers along the rail trail to connect their properties to the rail trail experience • Support tour operators to identify opportunities and NPWS requirements for glamping and camping in natural areas • Support new and existing accommodation operators to understand LGA planning permissions and regulations for small-scale accommodation in inland towns (Casino, Murwillumbah, Kyogle) and villages along the rail trail including STRA.

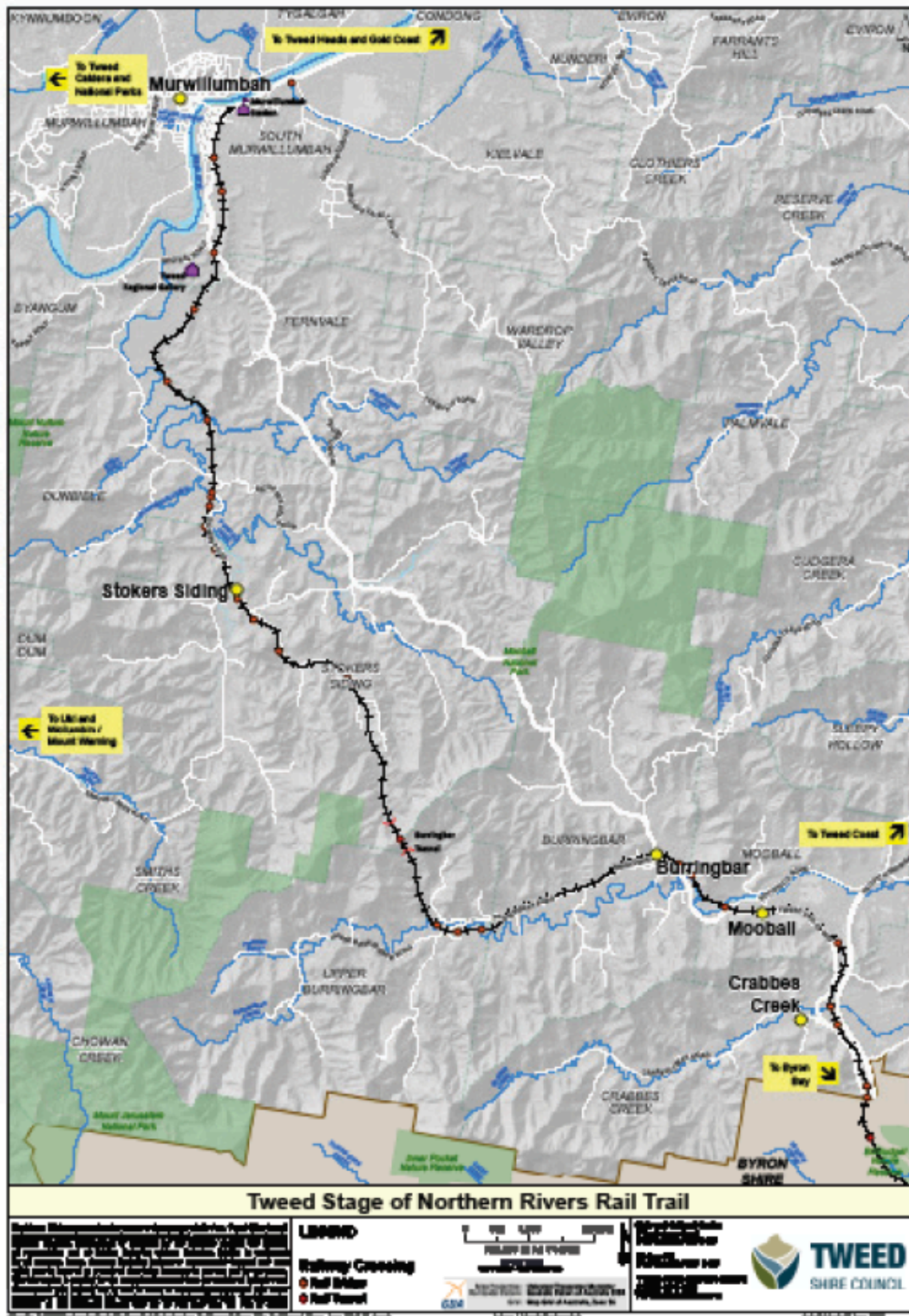
9.0 Appendices

APPENDIX 1: Tourism Product & Experiences identified in Tweed Business Case (2016)

TABLE 2: TWEED STAGE EXPERIENCES & SERVICE ALIGNMENT	
REQUIREMENT	TWEED STAGE OF THE NRRT
Access/proximity to a large population centre	With Murwillumbah as one of the track heads, the trail will be easily accessible to the large population base in SE Queensland, and with the proximity of the Gold Coast Airport, to the region's major domestic markets as well as international visitors.
Existing/easily developed visitor infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposed rail trail would travel through the villages of Stokers Siding, Burringbar and Moolball. A review of current accommodation options suggests that Uki District with 17 choices of accommodation, including accommodation for groups, could be developed as a hub and gateway to a number of the rides and bushwalks. Uki can be accessed via Smiths Creek Road – a quiet country road regularly used by cyclists. Group accommodation is also currently available at Hosanna Farm Stay at Stokers Siding. There are also a range of accommodation options scattered across the valley associated with the many options associated with the trail network that can be linked to the rail trail From Moolball there is also easy access to the range of coastal accommodation via Pottsville road or further along the trail via Wooyung Road. All three villages have some commercial activity and opportunity to expand with suitable vacant premises. Murwillumbah has all the facilities of a regional town with a range of services. The Tweed Regional Art Gallery is in close proximity to the line Basic facilities such as toilets are available at Stokers Siding, Burringbar and Moolball as well as Murwillumbah.
Needs to be scenic	At Murwillumbah there is the picturesque Tweed River with Wollumbin as a backdrop. Through Stokers Siding there are views to Mount Nullum and Moolball NP. The route passes through the Burringbar Range. The many optional add on side trips provide more opportunities to explore the scenic Tweed Valley and World Heritage listed NPs.
Interesting Features	For the railway buffs the Tweed section of the rail trail has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dunkible Creek Railway Bridge – one of the first railway bridges to be built using the American Pratt Truss Design and an excellent example of the work of Henry Deane responsible for many of the design features of the North Coast Railway. The bridge is on the State Heritage List Murwillumbah Station and Yards contain a number of features. These include sections of the 1920's Station, some of the outbuildings and the water tower. The 500 metre long Burringbar Tunnel with glow worms and micro bats would also be a special feature.
Potential for short, medium and long length rides/walks along the trail	Numerous user entry and exit points have been investigated. They include options in the Tweed Valley and opportunities to enter or leave the trail to and from other parts of the Green Cauldron. Trail users will have access to an array of optional tour routes across the hinterland and coast – suitable for cycling, mountain biking and longer distance walking. Some of these are suited to an itinerary of several days. A few examples of options include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> From Stokers Siding via Smiths Creek Road and Uki to Mount Jerusalem NP with waterfalls, swimming holes, viewpoints and the option of cycling or walking through the NP into Byron Shire and vice versa. From Crabbes Creek/Moolball via either Pottsville or Wooyung Roads to and from the coastal villages, resorts and coastal bikeway and vice versa. From Stokers Siding to Mount Jerusalem NP and through to Clarrie Hall Dam. Brunswick Heads to Murwillumbah via Main Arm/Uki/Stokers Siding From Burringbar via Cudgera Creek Road into Moolball NP and potentially on to Murwillumbah or the coast Stokers Siding to Uki and via Cadell Road into Mebbin NP with camping at Cutters Camp on to Tyalgum via Byrill Creek Road and through Chillingham into Murwillumbah There is potential for horse riders to enter at the Crabbes Creek end and exit via Cudgera Creek Road into Moolball NP which permits horse riding. Horse riding is also permitted in both Mount Jerusalem and Moolball NPs
Opportunities to access other regional experiences	There are a wide range of regional experiences potentially available to trail users, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Package tours that could include for example: ride to Murwillumbah and then canoe or kayak down the Tweed River, or cycle through Mount Jerusalem and kayak the highly scenic Clarrie Hall Dam. On the coast, access to surfing, snorkelling on the Cook Island Marine Reserve reef, beaches and whale watching Dining out at the many excellent restaurants and cafes scattered throughout the coastal and hinterland villages featuring fresh local produce Visit the Tweed Regional Gallery and Margaret Olley Art Centre Visit the eclectic, character filled Café/Galleries of the Shire's villages Take a river cruise and sample fresh local seafood, or visit Tropical Fruit World
Promote or build it and they will come	Anecdotal evidence from both Australia and the USA indicates that a large part of demand for trails is supply driven – trail users are attracted to trails that are both known to user groups and/or promoted, and that provide facilities such as signage and interpretation, parking, toilets and water. While Australian research data is limited, several Western Australian Trails are examples with evidence of steadily growing usage once established. For example, walks on the Bibbulmun Track have steadily increased from 10,000 walks in 1998 to 35,000 in 1999-2000, 137,500 in 2003 and 167,206 in 2008 (Transplan 2010 ; Colmar Brunton 2009).

Source: Tweed Section Business Case (2016) page 19

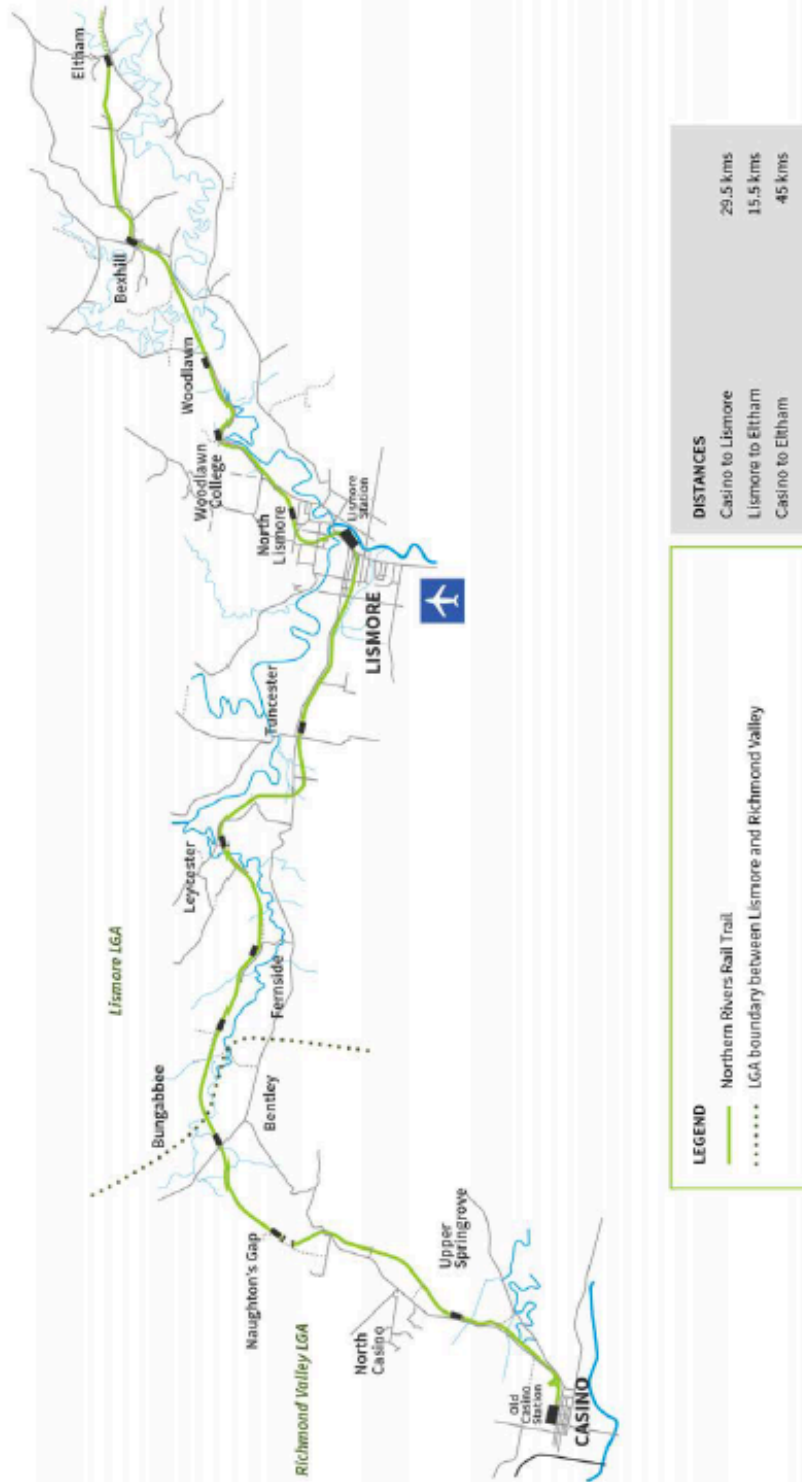
APPENDIX 2: Maps of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail – 3 stages
 Map – Tweed Stage



Map: Northern Rivers Rail Trail, Stage 2 Southern Trail Head – Casino to Eltham

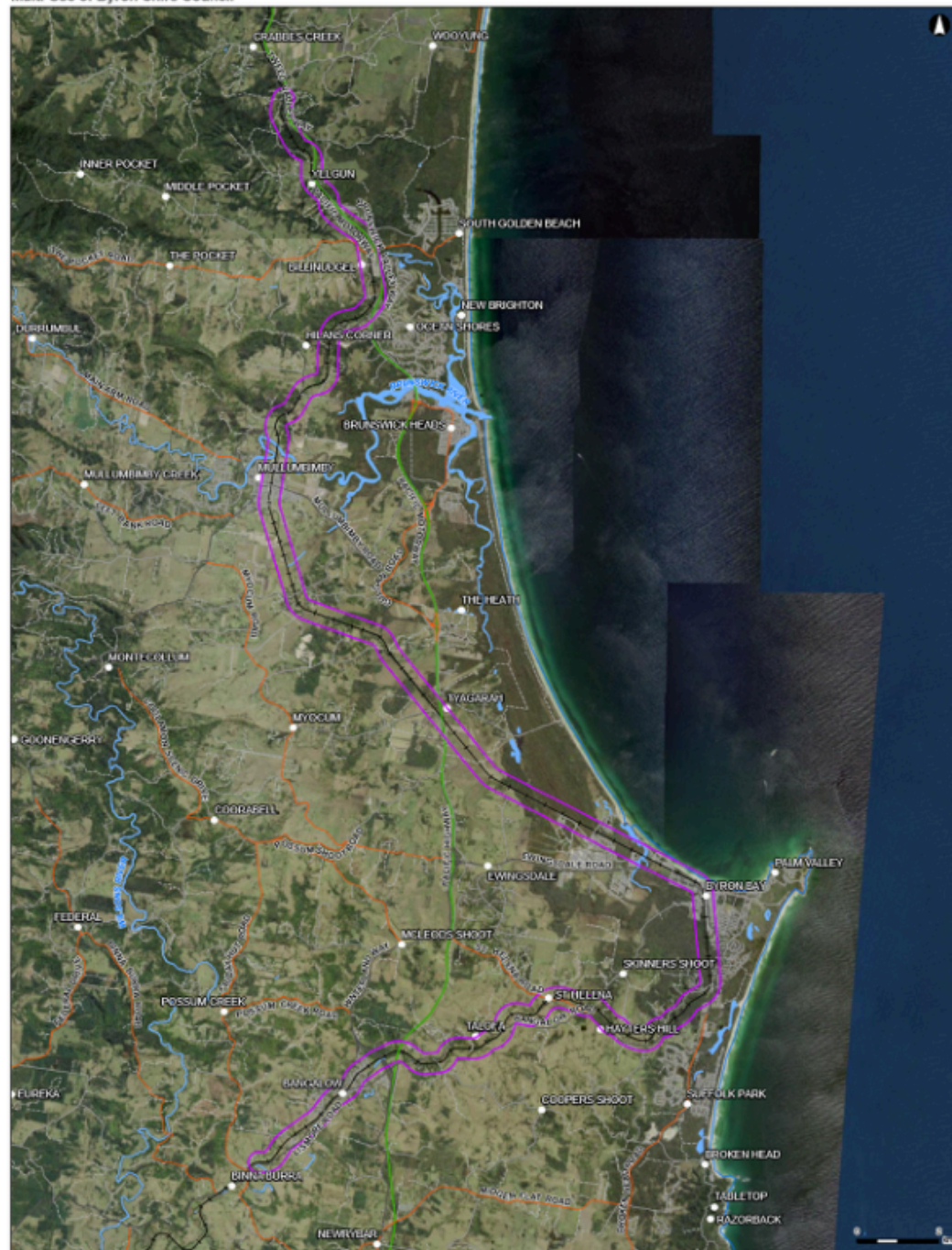
Figure 2.2.2.2 Map of Stage 2 Casino to Eltham

NORTHERN RIVERS RAIL TRAIL Stage 2 – Southern Trail Head, Casino to Eltham



APPENDIX 3:
Map: Stage 3 Northern Rivers Rail Trail – Yelgun to Binna Burra

Multi-Use of Byron Shire Council



Railway 250m corridor	Primary Road
Railway	Arterial Road
River	Sub-Arterial Road
Waterbody	Local Road
	Track/Vehicular

Transport Network

ARCADIS

1:50,000 @ A3

Appendix 4
Attractions Summary by LGA (2020 Audit)

LGA	Adventure	Tours	Arts & Creative Industries	Bike Hire & Tours	Food Tours & Product	Fun Park/Family Activity	Golf
Tweed	1	2	7	2	5	1	5
Byron	4	8	11	4	8	2	3
Lismore	1	0	17			3	
Richmond Valley	1	1	8			1	3
Ballina	1	2	15	3	6	2	2
Kyogle		1	2				1

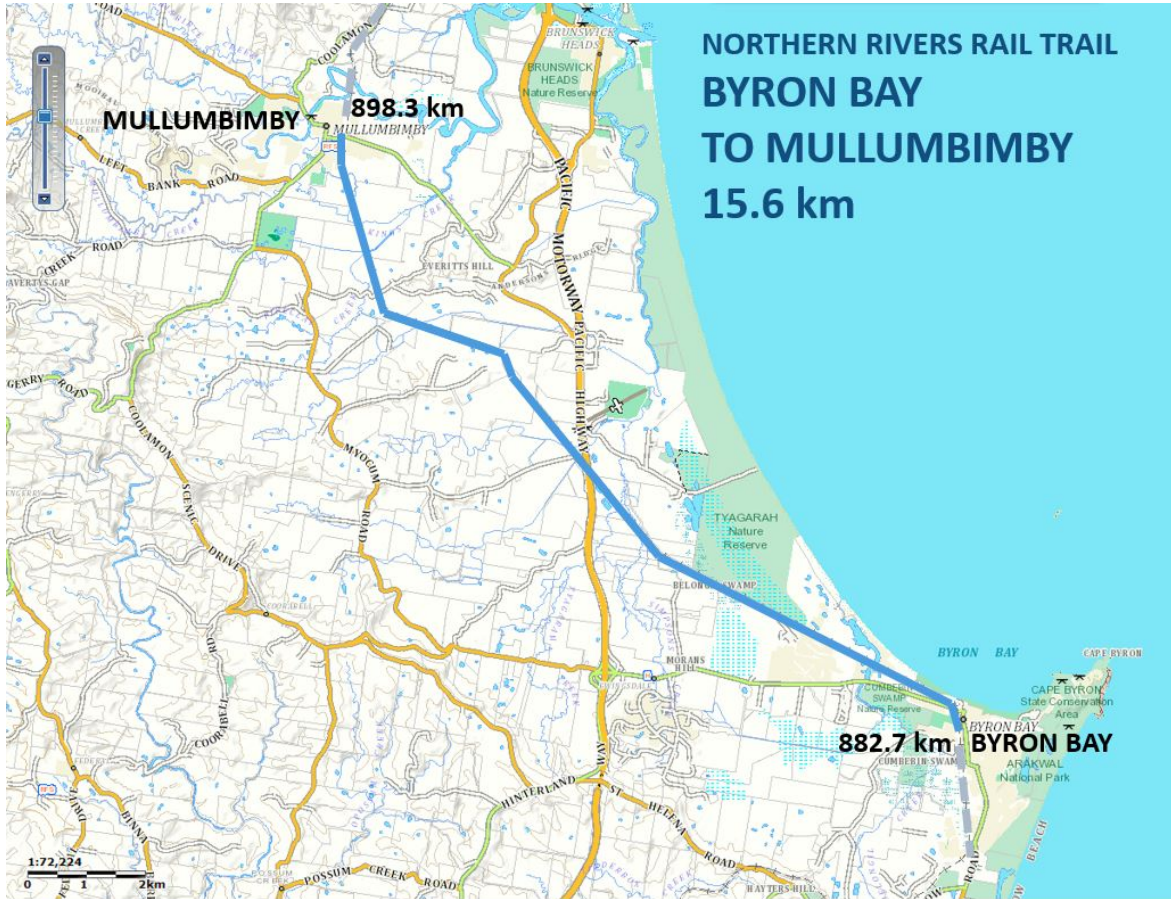
LGA	Health & Wellness	Indigenous Product	Natural Attractions & Gardens	Scenic Cruises, Drives & Flights	Walking & Bike Tracks	Watersports & Fishing	Wildlife Tours & Viewing	TOTAL
Tweed	1	1	12	2	14	10	3	66
Byron	12	1	15	7	35	16	3	129
Lismore	3	1	19	3	20	1	1	69
Richmond Valley	1		8		11	3	2	39
Ballina	3	2	6	7	3	3	1	56
Kyogle	1		14	3	11			33

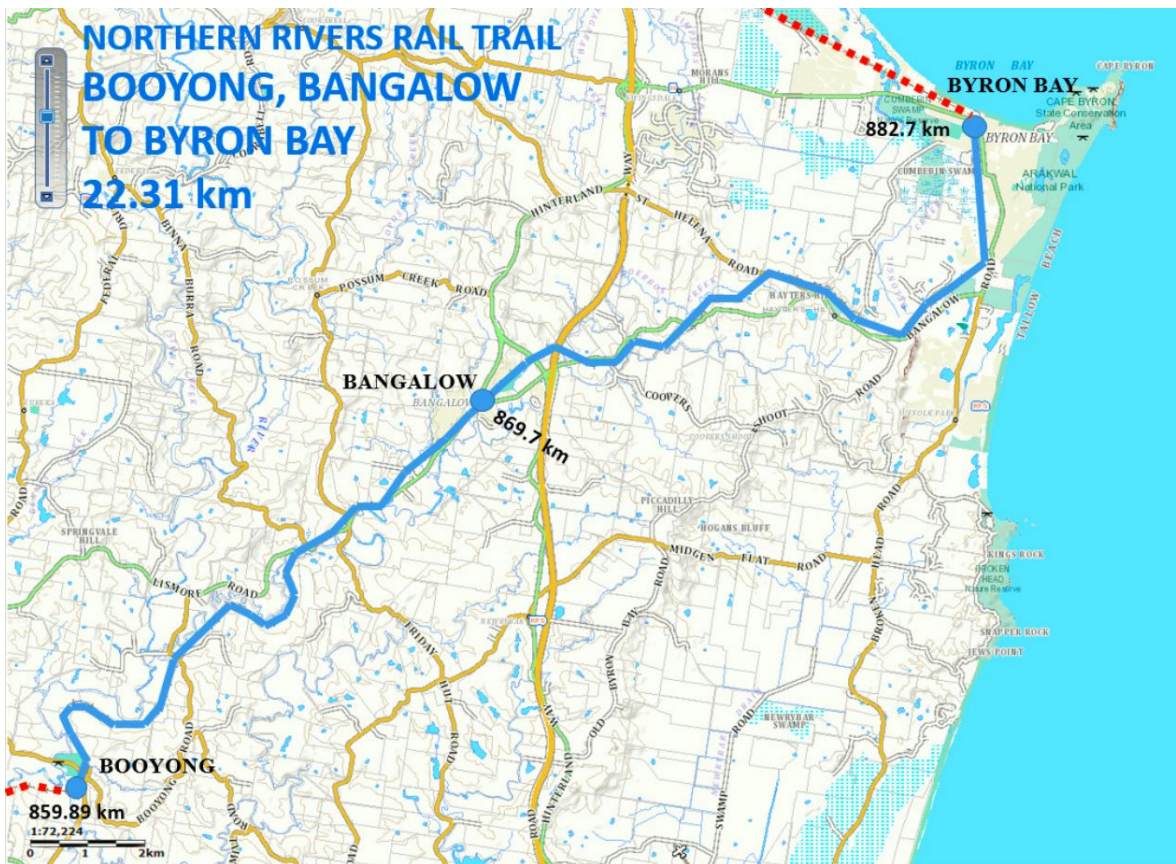
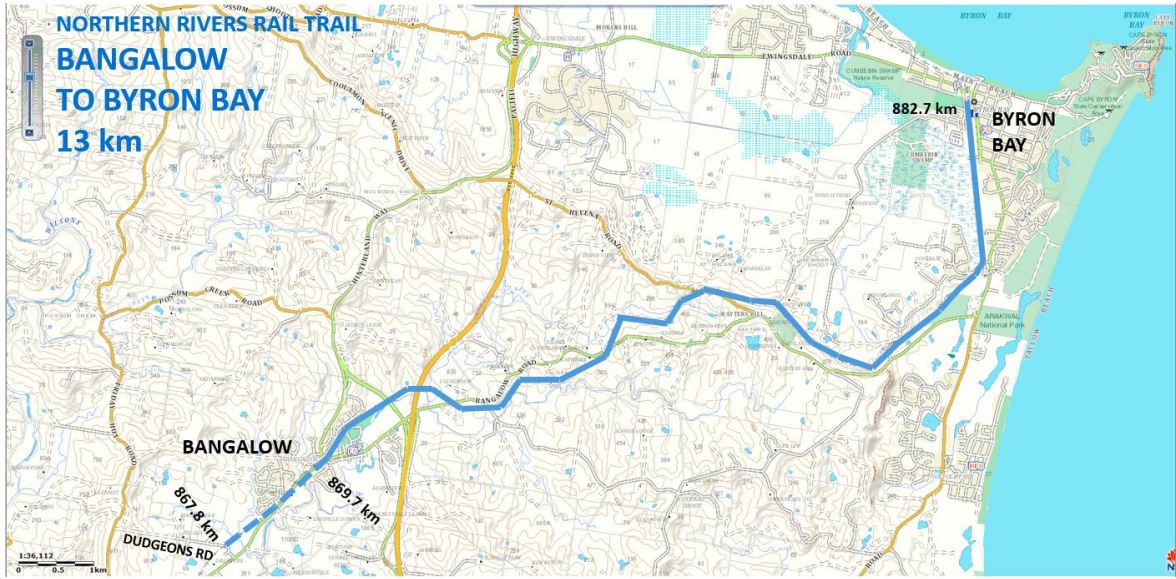
Appendix 5: Food Drink Businesses along or near the Northern Rivers Rail Trail (estimated)

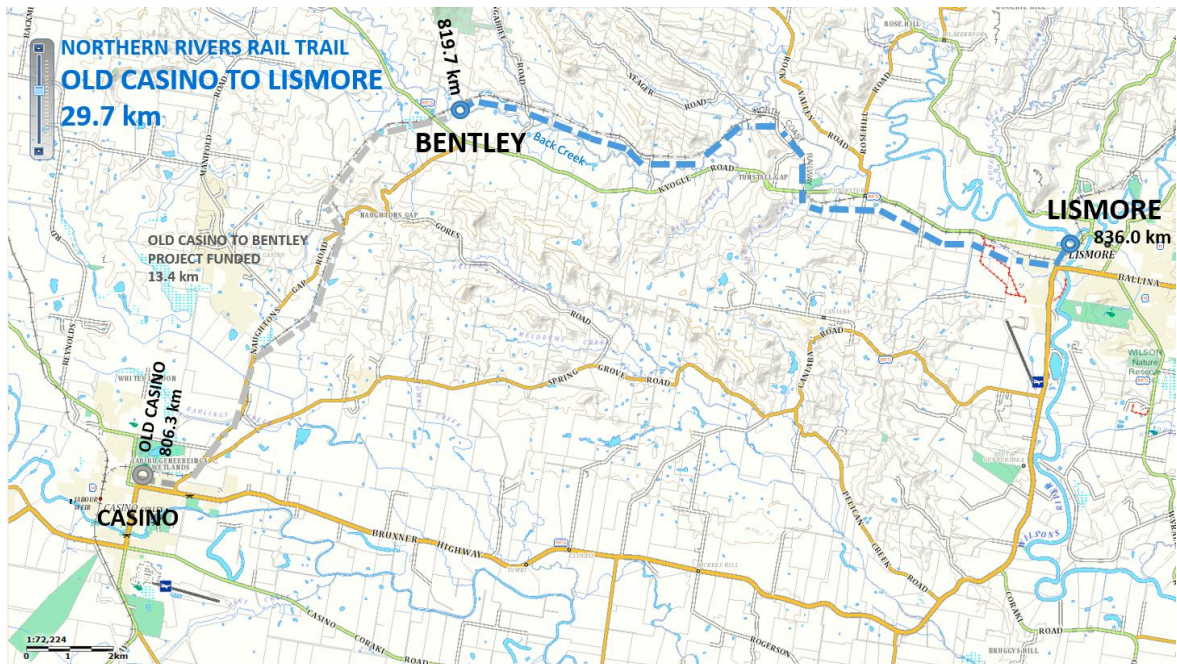
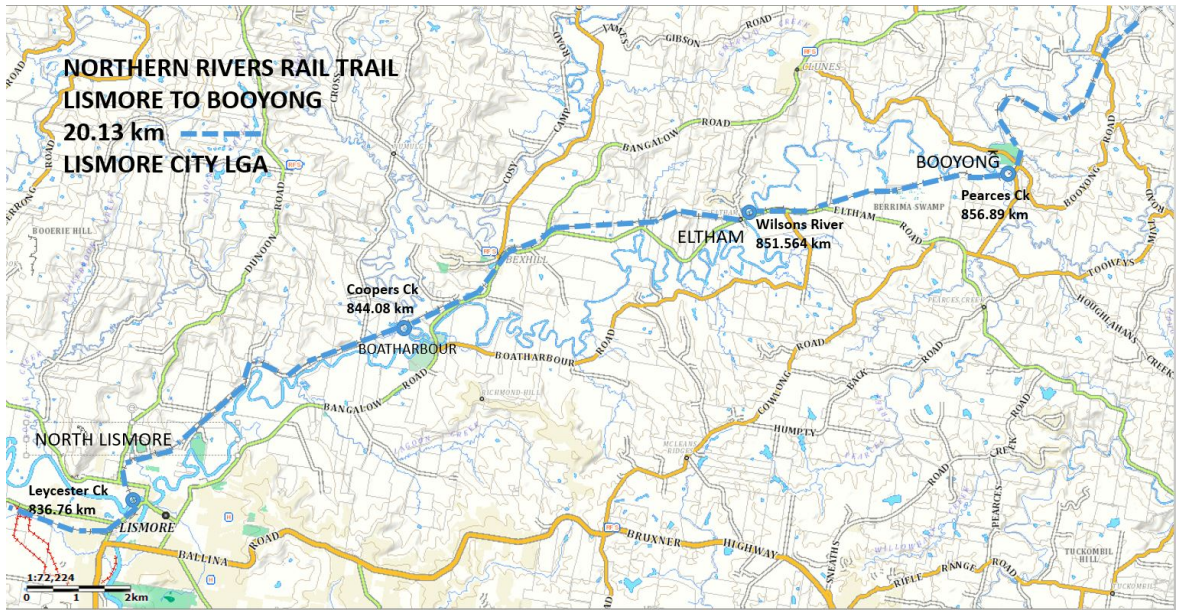
Town/Village	Est. No. Restaurants & Cafes	Examples of Restaurants & Cafes	Examples of Pubs, Bars, Distilleries
Murwillumbah	94	Austral Café Potager Bacaro Gallery JuJus	Husk Farm Distillery (Tumbulgum) Tumbulgum Tavern Tweed River House Barcoo Gallery Riverview Hotel Imperial Hotel Courthouse Hotel
Stokers Siding	3	Hosanna Café Mavis's Kitchen & Cabins Uki Cafe	
Burringbar	3	Elwood Café Burringbar Burringbar District Sports Club Tweed Valley Farmhouse Cheese Factory	
Mooball	2	Moo Moo Roadhouse Post Shop Café	Victory Hotel
Crabbes Creek	0		
Yelgun	1	The Bean Van (Yelgun rest Area)	
Billinudgel	3	Moonshine Coffee Roasters Coolamon Coffee Co	Billinudgel Hotel
Federal	2	Doma Café Byron Moonshine Coffee	
Mullumbimby	50	Rock N Roll Coffee Company Punch and Daisy Café	Wandana Brewery Courthouse Hotel Middle Pub Mullumbimby Bowling Club Mullumbimby RSL
Brunswick Heads	33	Cadeau Bar & Restaurant Old Maids Burger Store Bruns Bakery Footbridge Cafe	Hotel Brunswick
Myocum	0		
Tyagarh	0	The Farm (Ewingsdale)	
Byron Bay	163	Barrio (Arts & Industry Estate) The Sun Bistro (Sunrise) Beach The Balcony Fishheads	Stone & Wood Brewery Lord Byron Distillery Rails Hotel The Northern Beach Hotel
St Helena/ Talofa	0		Cape Byron Distillery
Bangalow	39	Sparrow Coffee Woods Café Harvest (Newrybar)	Bangalow Hotel Bangalow Bowling Club
Binna Burra	1	The Hut	
Nashua	1	Frida's Field	
Booyung	0		
Eltham/Clunes	2	Clunes Store	The Eltham Hotel
Bexhill	0		
Woodlawn	0		
Lismore	95	La Baraca Flock Espresso	Italo Sports Bar Gollan Hotel Civic Hotel Northern Rivers Hotel
Bungabee	0		
Bentley	0		
Naughton's Gap	0		
Casino	38	Walkers Street Café & Bar Mecca Cafe	Tattersalls Hotel Hotel Cecil Casino RSM Casino Golf Club

APPENDIX 6: Northern Rivers Rail Trail Section Maps: Crabbes Creek to Casino









APPENDIX 7: Summary of Findings – Tweed

Opportunity	Key considerations
Destination hubs (where visitors stay)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tweed has a number of important destinations with a good range of accommodation where visitors can stay overnight and also be drawn from for Rail Trail experiences – Tweed Heads, Kingscliff, Pottsville, Cabarita, Casuarina Completion of significant rail trail and development of hinterland trail experiences with links to accommodation options in Tweed
Key Precincts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heritage listed Murwillumbah Railway Station will be utilised as the Rail Trail base
Connect Villages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus effort on clusters that connect to existing offerings and tourism routes and trails that link villages to enhance awareness and dispersal beyond the coast - - Stokers Siding, Burringbar, Mooball, Crabbes Creek Potential for development of new and existing businesses to support users of the rail trail, such as: cafés and restaurants, accommodation providers (B&B's, campsites, hostels, hotels, farmstays, lodgings), cycle provision, hire and repair companies, stables and saddleries and gift shops Villages along the Murwillumbah to Crabbes Creek section also have some interesting operations that may appeal to Rail Trail visitors
Connect the Coast and Waterways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the option to connect to Coast Walk/Cycle Trail through Wooyong Road Explore the potential of connecting the rail trail north of Murwillumbah via a River Trail system that connects all the small jetties along each of the villages (Fingal, Chinderah, Tumbulgum, Condong and Murwillumbah Tweed has 11 tours mainly focus on boat hire, river and kayak cruises and whale watching as well as 7 fishing operators and 3 surf schools
Transport operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tweed has 2 local tour and transport operators
Cycling & Walking Tours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently only 2 Cycling hire and tour operations are based out of cycle shops in Tweed
Nature Based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently only one NBT operator in Tweed area NPWS has expressed its desire to partner with the region to support operators of the Tweed Byron Hinterland Trail, appealing to the international visitor as packaged and bundled products with premium accommodation and culinary options Although the Tweed has a magnificent natural environment and many visitors want to explore away from the coast, there are very few tracks and trails that allow visitors to explore and learn about this magnificent environment Work with NPWS to connect the rail trail to Nightcap Track at Upper Burringbar Nightcap National Park (near Lismore), Whiam Whian SCA (near Minyon), Awarkwal National Park (Byron) and Cape Byron State Conservation Area (Byron) are the only areas with existing tourism operators, highlighting the potential of these areas to connect to a rail trail experience Wollumbin National Park does not allow commercial tour operations Develop new tracks that link the new Tweed Bryon Hinterland Trails and rail trail
Packaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish partnerships with arts and culture, food & wine, adventure and other nature based operators will assist in lengthening visitor stay and expenditure in the Region.
Arts & Creative Industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arts & creative industries a strength of Tweed area Connect the Region's art galleries and creative industries, such as the Tweed Regional Gallery and the Margaret Olley Art Centre
Food & Drink	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong cluster of 'food tours and product'
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider family product development and connection to rail trail – e.g. Crystal Creek Miniatures
Accessible Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessible tourism is a strength of the Tweed area
Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product gap - low impact eco-resort in Hinterland Glamping experiences, higher quality small-scaled headland area tourism development Opportunity to support the increase of small scale STRA accommodation in Murwillumbah and in villages along the rail trail

Summary of Findings – Byron

Opportunity	
Destination hubs (where visitors stay)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Byron has a number of important destinations with a good range of accommodation where visitors can stay overnight and also be drawn from for Rail Trail experiences – Byron Bay, Brunswick Heads, Bangalow
Key Precincts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The refurbishment of Railway Park on Jonson Street Byron Bay & restoration of the rail corridor in the centre of Byron Bay
Connect Villages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Byron Bay Railroad Company operates a Solar Train on three kilometres on the rail corridor linking the Byron Town Centre with the North Beach precinct and Byron Arts Estate. The Bangalow Village Plan acknowledges that a significant opportunity exists in using the rail corridor to provide pedestrian and cycle pathways linking the northern and western residential areas to the village centre, primary school and sports fields including renewing the old station building as part of the wider rail corridor activation Our Mullumbimby Masterplan Integrate the village with the multiuse rail corridor and the Story Trail The new Federal Village Masterplan will provide a roadmap for sustainable development in and around Federal village Although not directly on the Rail Corridor, the village of Federal is located 9 kilometres from Binna Burra and 18km from Eltham (on the Rail Trail). Federal has experienced increases in visitation and also in development application activity due to its hinterland location, park and popular cafés
Connect the Coast and Waterways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 x ocean and river tour operators and 15 x watersports
Transport operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13 local transport operators
Cycling & Walking Tours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently 4 cycling & hire businesses, only one walking tour
Nature Based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Byron Shire Draft Sustainable Visitation Strategy identifies ‘nature based tourism’ and ‘indigenous culture’ as a focus for product development Natural attractions are a strength Gap - indigenous art and cultural centre 9 NBT operators, currently only one aboriginal tourism operator – current operator in Arakwal NP
Arts & Creative Industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Byron Shire Draft Sustainable Visitation Strategy identifies ‘arts and creative industries’ as a focus for product development Arts and creative industries is an experience strength
Food & Drink	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Byron Shire Draft Sustainable Visitation Strategy identifies ‘food experiences’ and ‘agritourism’ as a focus for product development Byron has a strong cluster of ‘food tours and product’ estimated 160 businesses
Wellness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Byron Shire Draft Sustainable Visitation Strategy identifies ‘wellbeing and health retreats’ as a focus for product development Byron is well-known as a health and wellness hub
Equestrian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 horse-riding operators
Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Byron has a large amount of properties – backpackers, holiday homes/apartments, hotels, serviced apartments, small scale & STRA Culturally themed eco-accommodation was identified as a gap in Byron

Summary of Findings – Lismore

Opportunity	Considerations
Destination hubs (where visitors stay)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around Lismore CBD
Key Precincts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rail trail will connect to recreational and retail areas – Riverside, City Centre, Sport & Recreation, Health • The South Lismore Train Station is situated in a highly visible location on the riverside, however it is currently in a state of disrepair. The community vision for the area - ‘core to civic life, the station is bustling once again with new community-focused & leisure uses that acknowledge & celebrate the creative & industrial nature of South Lismore’ • The Rail Trail will also link directly with the Lismore Parklands Project, a \$24 million revitalisation project located in the heart of the Lismore CBD, adjacent to the main shopping precinct, in the Sport and Recreation Precinct
Connect Villages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bexhill and Eltham could be appealing village stop-overs
Connect the Waterways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some river/water based operators (7)
Transport operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No current tourism transport operators in the area
Cycling & Walking Tours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of walking and bike tracks around Lismore (20) • No current walking or cycling tour operators
Nature & Water Based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only one local food tour operator • Promote culturally appropriate Aboriginal tourism opportunities • Investigate opportunities arising from the subregion’s track and Rail Trail links • 19 Natural Attractions & Gardens listings for Lismore • Rocky Creek Dam, Kadina Park, Friends of the Koala are identified as top things to do
Free vs Paid Product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free product makes up more than 80% of the product on offer
Arts & Creative Industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are 17 Arts & Creative Industries listings in Lismore (Byron 11 and Ballina 15) – opportunity to create arts & creative industries hub around Lismore
Food & Drink	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only one local food tour operator • Lismore has a good range of food and drink businesses (95) • There are few businesses located between Eltham and Lismore suggesting there is a need for ‘food and drink product’ development in suitable locations along these sections of the rail trail • Allow ‘pop-up’ coffee carts/food vans at suitable locations along the rail trail • . A recent example is a the ‘Flora Food Van’ that has been parked at the front of the old South Lismore train station • How to activate farm gates and farm trail events for interested producers along the rail corridor • How to encourage and support local hospitality businesses to be ‘open for business’ along the rail trail • Opportunity for Retail and local food, drink and agri-tourism operations in villages along the rail trail and inland towns
Retail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate boutique commercial, tourist and recreation activities in rural landscape areas where they do not conflict with primary production
Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lismore has a good stock of motel accommodation (307 rooms), • Accommodation options are abundant within the basic 1-star, mid-range and 3-star categories, there is a limited number of higher-quality properties • Product gap - built attractions, 4-5-star accommodation options, self-contained accommodation, destination holiday park, 4-5-star eco higher-end resort • Higher-quality, boutique hotels and/or glamping, branded destination holiday parks to encourage further growth in the family market & higher visitor spend • Low impact eco focused sustainable options of a smaller scale in hinterland areas and/or in agricultural areas • Opportunity to increase small-scale accommodation – B & Bs, cabins, farmstay, pub accommodation, STRAs – Eltham to Lismore/Lismore to Bentley

Summary Key Findings – Richmond Valley

Opportunity	Considerations
Key Precincts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Old Casino Station precinct has been designed to cater to visitors needs, with amenities, storage areas, tourist bus drop-off and ample parking The Primex site Bentley Road area is an easily accessible, open rail corridor expanse with some existing service infrastructure providing opportunity for potential amenities, a camping ground, playground and bridge experience over Back Creek Bridge
Connect Villages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Rail Trail will provide a key non-motorised link for businesses and residents with the town centres and suburbs of Casino and Lismore
Connect the Waterways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Richmond Valley currently has 2 river tours (Casino and Evans Head)
Transport operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Richmond Valley has no local tourism transport operators
Cycling & Walking Tours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need For a coordinated approach to consider the supporting infrastructure and facilities needed to present Casino as a bike/walking-friendly town Opportunity to develop and position the Richmond Valley as a distinct walking, cycling and mountain bike tourism destination on the North Coast Although mountain biking is a different cycling experience to rail trails, it is useful to consider if there are potential opportunities to promote mountain biking as a complementary activity to the rail trail around New Italy
Nature & Water Based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13.5km eco recreational experience through natural farming regions of the Northern Rivers of NSW' Increasing awareness and further activating nature-based tourism experiences provided by national parks, State forests, reserves, rivers and waterways The area has abundant nature-based assets, the challenge is how to activate these in a sustainable way to attract new nature based visitors Richmond Valley currently offer no local paid nature based tours and 1 wild river tour
Arts & Creative Industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish an Art and Historic Trail: ongoing consultation will occur with the local Aboriginal Community and Council are looking at options of how to represent the Aboriginal Community on the rail trail as well as strategies to incorporate the local Galibal dialogue; how the local stories can be told and logical locations for local Aboriginal art to be integrated/displayed Casino – arts & antiques
Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Old Casino Railway Station (referred to as the 'Railway Museum') - opportunities associated with heritage assets located on the rail trail Casino to Eltham Opportunities to interpret the historic rail line and its history in promotional material at strategic nodes along the route and resting places Boasts a number of significant heritage structures and infrastructure with the dis-used rail-line serving as a tangible connection to the regions agricultural and industrious past and its conservation will serve as an education tool
Food & Drink	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with local tourism and hospitality operators to create Casino as an appealing, visitor-friendly town in preparation for the completion of the Casino to Bentley section of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail. Create and promote agri and cultural tourism experience trails to encourage visitor dispersal Although agriculture is a main industry for the Richmond Valley, agri-tourism experiences are still mainly underdeveloped There are few food and drink businesses located between along the Lismore to Casino sections. This suggests there is a need for 'food and drink product' development in suitable locations along these sections of the rail trail Need to consider the type of hospitality product/experiences that will be offered in revitalised rail corridor precinct and hubs (e.g. Naughton's Gap, Bentley, How to activate farm gates and farm trail events for interested producers along the rail corridor How to encourage and support local hospitality businesses to be 'open for business' along the rail trail
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For an average leisure ride with the family, this leg of the trail would take approximately 60 minutes depending on the pace of all family members Mini Railway The 'Bat' tunnel is a point of interest with many opportunities to explore; potential for tunnel access, views from on top, quiet nature sounds from below, and mini train cycle experience

Opportunity	Considerations
Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving visitor accommodation quality and capacity is necessary to attract new and high yield visitors to stay longer and explore the local area. There have been challenges in the past to attracting accommodation investors • Higher quality 4-5-star accommodation, limited bars, cafes and restaurants, wildlife sanctuary, Aboriginal tourism product • Destination holiday park, 4-star resort, food and beverage outlets • Higher-quality, boutique hotels and/or glamping which could be operated on a seasonal basis and to supplement existing accommodation sites particularly in areas such as Lismore, Kyogle, Richmond • The introduction of low impact eco focused sustainable options of a smaller scale in hinterland areas and/or in agricultural areas • Review of the 2020 Audit data of the number of rooms for Bed and Breakfasts, Boutique Cabins, Farmstay and Pub Accommodation showed, not surprisingly, the dominance of Byron (45%) and an opportunity for the other Northern Rivers areas to increase their stock of small-scale accommodation. • There are only 5 STRA listings in the Casino area

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