

2024-25 ANNUAL *Report*



Central Highlands Development Corporation is the lead economic and tourism development agency for the Central Highlands in Queensland, Australia.

Our region includes the communities of Arcadia Valley, Bauhinia, Blackwater, Bluff, Capella, Comet, Dingo, Duaringa, Emerald, Rolleston, Sapphire Gemfields, Springsure, and Tieri.



OUR VISION

Driving economic opportunities to support the Central Highlands as a dynamic inland region of choice.

OUR PURPOSE

We advocate for a sustainable region and economic growth by enhancing our workforce, promoting our region, and supporting our businesses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Central Highlands Development Corporation (CHDC) respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the Lands across the Central Highlands and pay our respect to their Elders past and present.

Our office is located on the Lands of the Western Kangoulou Peoples.

We thank our 2024-25 major funding partners



Front Cover

The CHDC Board with Central Highlands Regional Council (CHRC) Mayor Janice Moriarty and CEO Aaron Johansson celebrating the 10th annual Farm to Fine Dining.

Opposite

Blackdown Tableland National Park, captured during a four-day tourism shoot of the region's must-see attractions.

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CHAIR'S *Report*

CR GAI SYPHER

It's been a privilege to be at the helm of the Board during what's been another productive and purposeful chapter for CHDC. After welcoming two new directors, Greg Christensen and Laura Letts, the Board hit its stride in 2024-25, leveraging its unique blend of expertise, experience and passion for the Central Highlands to provide a steady hand to the Corporation.

The Board continues to be proud to represent such a proactive organisation. A significant amount of work is poured into CHDC's many projects and much of that isn't always visible to the public. This annual report is therefore an opportunity to share the story of what we've accomplished together.

A perfect example is the 10th Central Highlands Farm to Fine Dining regional produce showcase. This high-calibre event embodies CHDC's commitment to advocating for the region with key decision-makers, showcasing our pride in the Central Highlands, and demonstrating the strength and sustainability of our vision.

This annual report also underscores another of CHDC's signature strengths and that is its ability to excel across multiple fronts. From business building workshops to a roadmap for innovation; from collaborating on housing solutions to claiming our share of the tourism market, we're championing economic development from all angles.

After what's been achieved this year, I want to take this moment to thank the many people who made it possible. Our CEO Peter Dowling deserves special recognition for his exceptional leadership, and I continue to be inspired by the staff's energy, skill and professionalism. My deep appreciation also goes to the businesses, industry bodies, government agencies and individuals who partner with CHDC to achieve our goals.

There is more work to be done. There are many opportunities and challenges ahead for the Central Highlands, particularly against the backdrop of so much global change. With the dedication of our team, the guidance of our Board and the support of our corporate partners, I'm confident CHDC can rise to the occasion.



CEO'S *Foreword*

PETER DOWLING

The past 12 months have been defined by a focus on delivering tangible outcomes for the Central Highlands. Across workforce initiatives, business support, and industry development, our team has worked to make a meaningful impact on our region.

A standout for the year was our continued progress on the *Central Highlands Workforce Development and Accommodation Strategy* (WDAS). We achieved real-world outcomes, including the staged release of Council land for housing and a revised Economic Stimulus Framework to attract private development. Our Childcare Alliance and *Smart Move* talent attraction campaign have further advanced solutions to ease critical workforce shortages.

Alongside workforce initiatives, we strengthened support for the local business community. Our working lunches and events fostered connections and shared insights, while development workshops gave businesses practical tools to navigate today's challenges.

The Central Highlands' reputation as an agricultural powerhouse was highlighted at two Farm to Fine Dining events and AGTECH24. The launch of the *Central Highlands Agricultural Capability Statement* and a new industry video further showcased the region's strengths in food and fibre.

We also promoted the region as a destination of choice, guided by a new tourism action plan. Highlights included a tourism shoot, regional advertising, national television exposure on Sunrise, and the ongoing work of our Visitor Information Centres.

I extend my sincere gratitude to CHDC staff, our Board, and our many corporate partners. Your energy and collaborative spirit have been key to our achievements. This year also brought board changes, and I would like to farewell independent director Bronwyn Roberts and thank her for her valuable contributions. At the same time, we welcomed new independent directors Greg Christensen and Laura Letts, who bring fresh perspectives and expertise to the board.

Looking ahead, the Central Highlands remains a region of immense potential. The work detailed in this report demonstrates our unwavering commitment to helping our community innovate, adapt, and prosper in the years to come.



OUR Board



**Councillor
Gai Sypher**
Chair

Cr Sypher is currently serving her fourth term on the CHRC. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree with majors in Sociology, Welfare and Aboriginal Studies, a Masters degree in Management (HR) and has completed the Australian Company Directors Course. She has 18 years' experience in senior leadership at CQUniversity.



**Councillor
Rachael Cruwys**
Deputy Chair

Cr Cruwys, Deputy Mayor of CHRC and lifelong Capella resident, has deep roots in the cattle industry. A Churchill Fellow in Brahman genetics and marketing, she remains active in commercial and stud cattle operations. She also brings experience in local government, corporate services, and finance.



**Councillor
Karen Newman**
Director

Cr Newman brings extensive local government experience, with a focus on community engagement and strategic planning. She also runs a consultancy business and is actively involved in several professional associations and local groups.



Ciarán Hallinan
Independent
Director

Mr Hallinan is an experienced senior executive and company director with qualifications in engineering and business. He brings a strong track record of success across both public and private sector organisations, with expertise in energy, resources, and infrastructure.



Laura Letts
Independent
Director

Ms Letts is a senior lawyer and governance professional with extensive experience in the resources and energy sectors, with particular interest in energy transition. She is passionate about ensuring regional communities benefit from the resource industry. Ms Letts holds a Masters in Natural Resources Law and is a Fellow of the Governance Institute of Australia.



**Greg
Christensen**
Independent
Director

Mr Christensen is a seasoned chair, director, and executive with 30 years' experience across government, agribusiness, and manufacturing. Through his business, StepUpQ, he supports regional Australia with process improvement and executive coaching. He holds an MBA in International Management and is a certified Advisory Board Chair.



**Councillor
Joseph Burns**
Alternate
Director

Cr Burns has called the Central Highlands home for nearly 40 years. Alongside his wife, he owns and operates a small business in Emerald. Cr Burns studied law at James Cook University and has extensive experience in supervisory and training roles across the mining, agricultural, and manufacturing industries.



Peter Dowling
Company
Secretary

Mr Dowling has been CHDC's Chief Executive Officer since 2022 and is an experienced senior leader in regional development and community relations. He has worked across urban, regional and rural settings for private, public and not-for-profit organisations. People, communities and regions are very important to Mr Dowling.

FAREWELL

We extend our sincere thanks to outgoing board member **Bronwyn Roberts** (2020–2024), one of our first independent directors. With strong foundations in agriculture and governance, a passion for the Central Highlands, and a championing of women in leadership, Ms Roberts made an enduring contribution throughout her tenure.

OUR Staff



Peter Dowling
Chief Executive Officer



Deb Barns
Regional Development



Ashleigh Vann
Business



Roger John
Visitor Economy



Jess Davison
Agribusiness



Kylie Hawkins
Board and Events



Nicky Fisher
Communications



Rowena Davies
Research and Collateral



Kelly Corbishley
Finance and Human Resources



Sharon Alexander
Administration

OUTGOING

Lisa Ferguson, Administration, to August 2024.

VISITOR INFORMATION Centre

CHDC is also supported by the tireless contributions of casual and volunteer staff at our visitor information centres.



Pamela Gangadoo
Visitor Information Centres

CENTRAL QUEENSLAND HIGHLANDS

Emerald

Casual

Barry Rumpf
Carol Ferguson
Helen Smith
Karen Meilak
Marion Edwards
Mark McCarthy

Volunteer

Barry Rumpf
Carol Ferguson
Delma Winten
Elizabeth Wright
George Bourne
Glen Wass
Helen Smith
Jean Bourne
Jeanette Wass
Karen Meilak
Lyn Schumann
Marion Edwards
Sharyn Heiskari

SPRINGSURE

Springsure Federation Woolshed

Casual

Catherine Cahill
Vicki Scott

Volunteer

Allan Scott
Bev Donohue
Bronwyn Baker
Catherine Cahill
Cathy Sypher
Christine Rolfe
Diane McNamara
Edna Blake
Evie Milner
Gail Nixon
Jo Willimott
John 'Macca' McNamara
Nola Chipman
Rowan McNamara
Springsure Corrective Services
Vicki Scott

BLACKWATER

Blackwater International Coal Centre

Casual

Doug Dickens
Mark McCarthy
Rosie Dickens
Tamsin McBeth-Wells

DUARINGA

Duaringa Historical and Tourism Centre

Casual

Olive Smith
Tanya Dickens

Volunteer

Alfred Fuller
Carol Finger
Lyn Challacombe



BUSINESS GROWTH

2025 BUSINESS LUNCH WITH BERNARD SALT AM

Held in May, CHDC's 2025 Business Lunch featured keynote speaker Bernard Salt AM, one of Australia's leading demographers and social commentators. The event offered an insightful look at the Central Highlands' current economic landscape and the trends shaping its future.

Key takeaways:

- *Never bet against Australia.* With our wealth of natural talents and assets, Australia will continue to be a prosperous country. We effectively have, and are, what everyone else wants.
- *We are at peak rebellion politically.* One-third of Australian voters now give their first preference to non-major parties, although this is likely to reduce at the next federal election.
- *From childcare to aged care.* Like Australia more generally, the Central Highlands' population is shifting from family-focused to one of retirees, as more people opt to stay put in their later years.

Bernard's presentation and event images are available at chdc.com.au.

A special thanks to Emerald State High School and Marist College Emerald students who joined us.

Thanks to our partners Local Buying Foundation and CQUniversity.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

Microsoft 365

In partnership with Thrive Admin Services, CHDC offered beginner and advanced sessions in Excel and Word, along with Teams and Outlook workshops, to help small businesses use Microsoft 365 tools more confidently and effectively.

Roadmap to Results: Business Plan Essentials

Developed and delivered by the Australian Institute of Management, this workshop guided participants through writing a business plan, with many using it to support their entries for the Central Highlands Business Excellence Awards.

AI and Other Tools for Business

Presented by Regional Business HQ as part of the Australian Small Business Advisory Services' Digital Solutions Program, this session introduced AI tools like ChatGPT and Asana and explored how small businesses can use them to save time, create content, and improve efficiency.

Building Your Team and Your Brand

Mentors Angie Martin from The Growth Manager and James Parker from Fresh Perspective visited Emerald through the Queensland Government's Mentoring for Growth Program. They provided practical strategies to help businesses attract staff and refine their marketing messages. In addition to the workshop, the mentors delivered personalised sessions to local businesses.

Digital Safety Essentials

This free Lunch and Learn workshop, facilitated by Site Support, covered scam awareness, data security, and backup strategies, with tailored cyber check-ins for attendees. Funded through the Queensland Government's Better Local Business Grant, the event formed part of Queensland Small Business Month.

Creating Content for Social Media

Presented by Regional Business HQ, this workshop covered photography, video, and editing tips to help businesses produce effective social media content. This workshop was delivered as part of the Australian Small Business Advisory Services' Digital Solutions Program.

Online Opportunities

CHDC continued to promote a wide range of online workshops and resources throughout the year, giving businesses flexible access to skill-building opportunities across marketing, finance, technology, and more.

2025 CENTRAL HIGHLANDS BUSINESS SURVEY

The 2025 Central Highlands Business Survey found that business conditions remained stable in 2024-25, with most indices showing little change.

Key findings included:

- 78% of businesses reported maintaining or improving their overall performance amid ongoing cost and staffing pressures.
- Rising costs remain a key concern, with 85% of businesses experiencing increases in fuel, freight, insurance, and compliance expenses.
- Staffing challenges persist, particularly in agriculture, health, and service industries, where difficulty attracting and retaining skilled workers continues to limit growth.
- Business sentiment for the year ahead is cautiously optimistic, with forecasts indicating improvements in revenue, staffing levels, and customer demand.

“If I try to absorb the rising costs into my products, then the prices get too expensive for customers so I just have to absorb that into my profit margin instead.”

Kylie Stacey, Online Lolly Shop

CHDC conducts the annual survey to measure local business conditions and tailor support and projects accordingly.

The full report is available at chdc.com.au.

TAP INTO TENDERS

CHDC's free Tap into Tenders newsletter offers a curated list of government and private procurement opportunities across the Fitzroy region. In 2024-25, more than 20 editions were delivered to 524 subscribers, providing valuable leads to secure new contracts and expand their operations.

2025 CENTRAL HIGHLANDS BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARDS

The Central Highlands Business Excellence Awards are a biennial celebration of our outstanding local businesses. In 2024-25, preparations for the 2025 awards included a complete redesign of event collateral and the completion of nominations, entries, and initial assessments.

Public voting generated 111 nominations, with 58 businesses going on to complete detailed entries. Judges Ben Hughes (Hughes et al), Dominique Lamb (Queensland Small Business Commissioner), and Jennifer McGuire (AusIndustry) shortlisted 31 finalists across 11 categories, with site visits scheduled for July.

We commend all participating businesses for the significant time and effort involved. Many found the process valuable for reflecting on their operations, updating business plans, and gaining fresh perspectives.

Award winners will be announced at a gala dinner on 6 September 2025.

NETWORKING EVENTS

More than 120 people took part in 10 networking events throughout the year, building new connections and strengthening local business relationships. The informal format continues to attract a mix of regulars and new faces, creating a welcoming space for growing professional networks.

Thanks to our event hosts Capricornian Restaurant, Hops & Vine Tapas Bar, Route 66 Motor Inn, Inner Bean Hub, Outback Tavern and Steakhouse, The Social Hub, and Western Gateway Motel.

CENTRAL HIGHLANDS GRANT FINDER

More than 276 local businesses, not-for-profit organisations, and community groups have registered on CHDC's online grant portal, Central Highlands Grant Finder. In 2024-25, users viewed over 1,500 grants, with CHRC's Rise Up Central Highlands and Bravus' Community Partnerships Program attracting the most interest. Popular search terms included *solar* and *not for profit*.

grantguru.com/au/chdc



1. Networking Events
2. Building Your Team and Your Brand Mentors
3. AI and Other Tools for Business
4. Networking Events
5. Central Highlands Business Survey
6. 2025 Business Lunch with Bernard Salt AM



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

CENTRAL HIGHLANDS WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY

CHDC made significant progress on the WDAS in 2024-25, tackling regional workforce, housing, and liveability challenges through coordinated projects and strong stakeholder collaboration.

ACTION 1 – Workforce and Accommodation Collective

The Workforce and Accommodation Collective (WAC) continues to meet regularly, bringing together industry, government, and community stakeholders to share updates, navigate challenges, and advance WDAS initiatives.

ACTION 2 – Property Review

CHDC, alongside Infinitum Partners, worked with Council and major property holders to identify opportunities to optimise land and housing assets.

The *CHRC Land Assessment Report (October 2024)* developed a priority site framework and highlighted redevelopment opportunities to boost housing and workforce accommodation. This work has already led to the staged release of surplus Council land and funding for housing upgrades.

ACTION 4 – Build 12 in 12

Following the 2023–24 EOI process, CHDC supported proponents in navigating residential development and approval pathways with Council. This engagement contributed to key policy changes, including the staged release of Council land and updates to the Economic Stimulus Policy to better support new housing projects.

A modular display home was delivered in partnership with Duke Housing, Kestrel Coal Resources, and CHRC, and opened to the public to demonstrate the speed and quality of modular construction. Kestrel later purchased the home and generously donated it to the Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service, where it now provides much-needed staff accommodation at Emerald Hospital.

The initiative also supported the approval of a 14-home modular development in Emerald, adding to the region's long-term housing pipeline.

ACTION 5 – Childcare Alliance

In September 2024, CHDC secured Jobs Queensland's Grow Your Own funding for the Enhancing Early Childhood Education and Care (EECEC) project to address shortages in the sector.

In partnership with Astute Early Years Specialists and Infinitum Partners, the first stage focused on Emerald and Blackwater. Activities included centre assessments, a regional survey, community forums, a four-part workforce webinar series, and tailored one-on-one workforce planning sessions.

These initiatives helped identify local needs, workforce gaps, and opportunities for long-term investment. Community input has been central to shaping future priorities, with a second stage under consideration to explore locally tailored strategies and potential international recruitment to support sustainable workforce growth.

ACTION 7 – Investment Incentives

A review of regional incentives identified ways to better encourage property development. Insights from Build 12 in 12 were provided to Council, informing the December 2024 release of a revised Economic Stimulus Framework.

The Framework's new Stream 5 reimburses development application fees and infrastructure charges for long-term residential accommodation, helping lower upfront costs and attract private sector investment.

ACTION 8 – Fairer Airfares

CHDC continued its push for affordable, reliable flights by engaging with Qantas, the Federal Member for Flynn, and other stakeholders.

The *Fairer Airfares* position paper, launched in July, set out six clear actions to improve affordability, frequency, and subsidy access. Highlighting Emerald Airport's role in workforce retention, healthcare, and regional development, the paper is now central to CHDC's advocacy efforts.

The *Fairer Airfares* paper is available at chdc.com.au.

ACTION 9 – Talent Attraction Campaign

CHDC advanced the *Smart Move* campaign, the region's largest recruitment drive, to showcase the Central Highlands as a great place to live, work, and build a career.

Featuring job opportunities across priority industries such as childcare, construction, health, mining, and education, the campaign shared authentic stories from locals in hard-to-fill roles, offering potential candidates real insight into working and living in the Central Highlands.

Launched in October 2024 with support from Neon Logic and regional employers, *Smart Move* used a multi-channel approach, including social media, Google, YouTube, print, and airport and outdoor signage, ensuring broad reach across Queensland, New South Wales, and beyond.

The campaign delivered more than 3.7 million impressions, 425,000 video views, and over 40,000 clicks, significantly raising the region's recruitment profile and providing stakeholders with valuable tools to attract and retain skilled workers.



Watch the campaign videos here.

Planning Institute of Australia Award

The WDAS earned a Commendation in the *Improving Planning Processes* category at the 2024 Queensland Awards for Planning Excellence, recognised for strong stakeholder engagement and the ongoing work of the WAC in delivering practical housing and workforce solutions.

JOBS HUB CENTRAL QUEENSLAND HIGHLANDS

Jobs Hub Central Queensland Highlands, CHDC's free online employment platform, recorded a 35% increase in traffic, clocking more than 12,600 users, largely driven by the *Smart Move* campaign.

Despite this growth, job views fell 11% to 32,000, reflecting the 5% fall in job listings to just over 1,900. This trend aligns with broader market conditions, with the Jobs and Skills Australia Internet Vacancies Index showing job advertisements across Queensland fell by 7.6%.

An encouraging result was that 20% of the Jobs Hub listings were manually entered by employers, rather than being sourced from other websites, which is double the previous year.



1. Planning Institute of Australia Award
2. Build 12 in 12 Modular Display Home
3. *Smart Move* Campaign Signage
4. Childcare Alliance (EECEC)
5. *Smart Move* Campaign Premiere
6. Childcare Alliance (EECEC)



ADVOCACY AND PROMOTION

FARM TO FINE DINING

Farm to Fine Dining once again reinforced the Central Highlands' position as a powerhouse in Queensland's agricultural industry in a unique year that saw two events held: the ninth annual event in July 2024 and the tenth in June 2025.

The events, held in Brisbane, showcased the Central Highlands' exceptional and diverse produce through carefully curated menus, while giving producers and stakeholders the opportunity to connect with influential leaders from agriculture, trade, and investment.

2024 Showcase Dinner

The ninth event brought together more than 75 guests, including then-Federal Agriculture Minister Murray Watt and then-Queensland Agriculture Minister Mark Furner.

Local produce featured:

- Fair Dinkum Fresh ham and lamb
- Australian Agricultural Company Wagyu eye-fillet
- Blackwater High School Reconciliation Project pumpkin
- New Dawn Honey
- Costa Group mandarins
- Like Mum Used to Make peach mustard and peanut brittle

Tenth Anniversary Milestone

The 10th-anniversary event welcomed more than 80 guests, including Queensland Minister Dale Last, Queensland Senator Anthony Chisholm, State Member Sean Dillon, and Federal Member Colin Boyce.

To commemorate the milestone, attendees received a book chronicling all of the menus and producers from the past decade. Guests also viewed a video featuring the producers from that evening, filmed on their farms, offering a personal glimpse into the people and stories behind the plates.

Local produce featured:

- Marathon Wagyu striploin
- Costa Group mandarins
- Manulife macadamias
- Murphy Farming sorghum and heritage wheat
- Gersbach Family Farming chickpeas
- Weemah Farming sesame seeds
- New Dawn Honey
- Seed and Flour edible flowers
- Broken Plains Farming mung beans

Menu booklets and event images are available at chdc.com.au.



Watch the 2025 event video here.

REGIONAL REPRESENTATION

Throughout the year, CHDC actively represented and promoted the Central Highlands at various industry and government events, including the Queensland Information Centres Association Conference, the CRC TiME Annual Forum, the Regional Australia Institute National Summit, and the Queensland Futures Institute's *Investing in Regional Queensland*. The team also participated in evokeAG, Australia's premier agrifood innovation event.

CHDC welcomed a diverse range of visitors, providing valuable opportunities to showcase the region and strengthen relationships with key stakeholders. Visitors included representatives from Japan's Ichinoseki City Council; State Member Sean Dillon; Queensland Minister for Transport and Main Roads Brent Mickelberg; and Queensland Minister for Regional and Rural Development, Natural Resources and Mines, and Manufacturing Dale Last.

ADVOCACY AND STRATEGIC INPUT

CHDC provided input on key government strategies and policies, contributing to the Queensland Government's agriculture-focused *Primary Industries Prosper 2050* and tourism-focused *Destination 2045*. The organisation also made a written submission to the Queensland Government's inquiry into volunteering, aimed at addressing barriers to participation.

CHDC advanced key actions from the WDAS (see page 10) through targeted advocacy. This included using the *Fairer Airfares* document in discussions with Qantas and engaging with Queensland Government Employee Housing representatives to explore solutions for workforce housing.

CORPORATE & REGIONAL PROMOTION

CHDC's website and social media pages continued to be the core platforms to communicate our work and showcase the region, reinforced by electronic direct mail and media releases.

Website

The CHDC website recorded almost 1,400 visitors per month, up 7% on the previous year, and the average time they spent on the website increased by 40% to reach over one minute.

The near-3,000 views of AGTECH24 makes it the site's most popular page, followed by Tap into Tenders at more than 2,500 views.

Social Media

While the CHDC Facebook page grew its audience by 32%, reaching 12,000 users on average each month, there was a 3% fall for the LinkedIn page, which clocked a monthly average of 7,600 impressions.

The highest performing Facebook post was a series of social photos from AGTECH24 while a photo of the CHDC Board meeting newly elected State Member Sean Dillon was the most popular post on LinkedIn.

Electronic Direct Mail

CHDC's fortnightly eNews and regular alerts were distributed to 1,200 subscribers via the Vision 6 platform.

The enewsletter averaged 136 clicks per edition, a slight drop from the previous year, with a story on CHDC's fairer airfares advocacy generating the highest interest at 328 clicks.

Out of 19 alerts distributed throughout the year, a reminder about AGTECH24 tickets achieved the highest readership, with a 63% open rate among subscribers.

Media Coverage

CHDC's media presence was strong this year, with our events and campaigns frequently featured in local and regional publications.

Farm to Fine Dining secured the most coverage, including a segment on TV's WIN CQ News and articles and social photo spreads in Queensland Country Life (QCL) and Emerald Today.

Emerald Today and its sister newspaper CQ Today also spotlighted several other projects including stories on the talent attraction campaign and business awards and two pages of photos from the Regional Transformation Working Lunch.

AGTECH24 was well supported with extensive pre- and post-event coverage by QCL.



1. Farm to Fine Dining
2. Farm to Fine Dining
3. Farm to Fine Dining
4. Fairer Airfares Advocacy with Qantas
5. CHDC Board and State Member Sean Dillon
6. WDAS Advocacy with then-Queensland Minister for Resources and Critical Minerals Scott Stewart



INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

VISITOR ECONOMY

VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRES

More than 12,500 travellers called into the Central Queensland Highlands Visitor Information Centre (VIC) in Emerald, with a further 6,193 assisted at the satellite centres in Springsure, Daringa, and Blackwater. The centres continued to play a key role in welcoming and guiding visitors through the region.

The Emerald centre was recognised at the 2024 Queensland Information Centres Association (QICA) Conference, receiving an award for its outstanding volunteer team, while long-serving volunteer Glen Wass was named Volunteer of the Year.

VIC Coordinator Pamela Gangadoo marked 10 years of dedicated service, including five years as a volunteer and five years in a full-time role. Carol Ferguson was also recognised for her 35 years of service.

WHAT'S ON CENTRAL QUEENSLAND HIGHLANDS

What's On Central Queensland Highlands, an events calendar targeted at visitors, continued its steady audience growth. The website recorded almost 55,000 views, a 64% increase on the previous year, and about 90% of the 16,000 users were from outside the Central Highlands.

A listing for local Anzac Day services was the site's most popular page, recording 599 views in April. *Markets* and *Emerald* were popular search terms.

TOURISM SHOOT

A four-day tourism shoot captured some of the Central Queensland Highlands' best attractions, visiting Capella, Emerald, Lake Maraboon, Sapphire Gemfields, Blackwater, Bedford Weir, and Blackdown Tableland National Park. The shoot produced more than 80 high-quality images and a hero destination video, showcasing the region's diverse landscapes and experiences.

These assets will be used in the upcoming Visitor Guide, across the Central Queensland Highlands website and social media channels, and were featured in a two-week digital advertising campaign. The hero video is also planned for rotation at the Emerald Airport and Central Queensland Highlands VIC.



Watch the hero video here.

DESTINATION MARKETING

Social Media

Facebook remained the strongest platform, reaching 637,000 people, similar to the previous year. The most popular posts featured Boowinda Gorge at Carnarvon Gorge (132,000) and free camping at Springsure's Lions Park (121,000). Followers increased by 83%, largely due to the digital advertising campaign.

On Instagram, the most popular content was a reel of the Sapphire Gemfields (8,500). While overall reach is smaller than Facebook, Instagram reached 29,800 users, an increase of 185% compared with the previous year.

Social Media Advertising

Following a slow start to the 2025 tourism season and the development of new video and photo assets, a two-week digital advertising campaign was launched for the Central Queensland Highlands. Running across Meta and YouTube, it generated 316,000 impressions, reached 76,000 users, drove 8,200 website visits, and gained 658 new followers on Facebook.

Website

An increase in traffic to the Central Queensland Highlands website reflects its success in informing and inspiring travellers. The audience grew by 21% compared to last year, with 122,000 page views and nearly 63,000 users.

This result is largely thanks to advertising for the *Smart Move* talent attraction campaign and CHDC's new hero tourism video. A light upgrade and refresh of the website also improved its performance.

Camping and Caravanning Shows

In 2024-25, CHDC represented the region at key camping and caravanning shows, including the 2024 Rockhampton Outdoor Adventure Expo, 2025 What's On in Emerald Expo, and the 2025 Let's Go Queensland Supershow in Brisbane. The events provided valuable opportunities to promote the Central Queensland Highlands to the drive and short-break markets.

Sunrise

The Sapphire Gemfields enjoyed national exposure when Channel 7's Sunrise television program broadcast its weather crosses live from Rubyvale in May 2025. Organised and funded by Queensland Country Tourism with support from CHDC, the broadcast highlighted the community spirit, local stories, and unique character of the Sapphire Gemfields to audiences across Australia.

Print Advertising

To further elevate awareness of the Central Queensland Highlands, CHDC secured advertisements in the 2025 *Outback Traveller's Guide* and the 2025 *Queensland Country Travel Planner*.

Brochures

CHDC produced new promotional materials, including the Emerald Town Map and the Emerald Regional Botanic Gardens brochure. Work also commenced on developing a refreshed Visitor Guide to further support the region's tourism promotion.

GEOTRAIL

CHDC, in partnership with Central Highlands Regional Council, secured funding to refresh the Sapphire Gemfields Interpretive Trail panels through the Queensland Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation's Building Bush Tourism Fund. Extensive research informed the development of new sign content and maps, and fresh designs are being created to enhance the visitor experience. The project is scheduled for completion in April 2026.

TOURISM24

CHDC's TOURISM24 event brought together industry leaders, local businesses, and stakeholders to explore the key drivers and challenges shaping tourism in the Central Highlands. The forum focused on strategies for growth and collaboration to strengthen the region's tourism sector.

Speakers included:

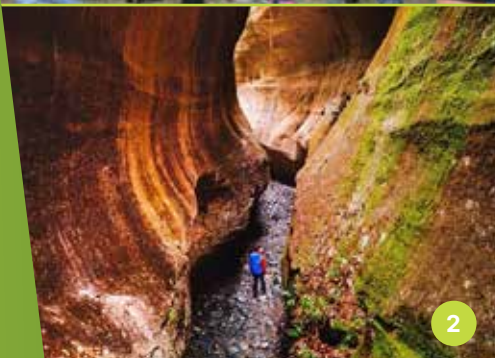
- **Matt Bron, Tourism and Events Queensland**, outlined Queensland's *Drive Tourism Marketing Strategy 2032*, highlighting the importance of drive tourism, the growth of multi-destination holidays, iconic drive routes, and traveller needs.
- **Michelle Weston, Caravan Parks Association of Queensland**, provided insights into visitor trends and sector performance, discussing barriers to growth such as regulatory requirements, costs, and delays in developing caravan park infrastructure.
- **Adrian Burns, Central Highlands Regional Council**, showcased the Ghungalu Nunee Parkland project in Blackwater and the ongoing development of the Emerald Regional Botanic Gardens as examples of place-based initiatives enhancing visitor experiences and community wellbeing.

The event provided a valuable opportunity to connect with industry, share insights, and advance a coordinated approach to growing the Central Highlands' tourism and events potential.

Thanks to our partners Local Buying Foundation and CQ Inland Port. Speaker presentations and images are available at chdc.com.au



1



2



3



4



5



6

1. Sunrise Broadcast
2. Carnarvon Gorge, most popular CQH Facebook post
3. Tourism Shoot at Blackdown Tableland National Park
4. TOURISM24
5. 2025 Let's Go Queensland
6. QICA Conference and Awards



INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

AGRIBUSINESS

AGTECH24

The future of Australian farming was on display in Emerald as the agtech community gathered for AGTECH24 on November 20–21. The event brought together producers, researchers, and tech startups to explore practical, field-ready solutions shaping the industry.

Day 1 – Emerald Town Hall

The first day featured trade displays and expert-led panels. Discussions covered topics like carbon and climate technology, innovation ecosystems, and how farmers are actively adopting new tech. The day concluded with the Farmers2Founders Dinner, connecting producers and startups for networking and collaboration.

Day 2 – CQ Smart Cropping Centre

Day two focused on hands-on demonstrations. Participants toured live machinery trials, tested new technologies in the field, and engaged with experts on applying innovative solutions in real-world farm settings.

Thanks to our partners *Diamond* Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Local Buying Foundation, *Ruby* Queensland Department of Primary Industries, *SwarmFarm* Robotics, *AusIndustry*, *Youth Tech* CQUniversity, *CQ Inland Port*, *The Capricornian Bank*, *NBN Business Fairbairn* Irrigation Network, *Field Solutions*, *Suncorp*, *In kind* Abode 37 Motel, *Emerald Today*, *Boiso's Electrical Services*, *Queensland Country Life*, and *CQ Commercial Laundry*.

A special thanks to Emerald State High School and Marist College Emerald students who joined us.



Watch the event video here.

Event images are available at chdc.com.au.

CAPABILITY STATEMENT

The *Central Highlands Agricultural Capability Statement* has been updated to reflect the region's current strengths and future potential. Building on the original 2018 publication, the new Statement highlights a \$1 billion agricultural sector and pinpoints emerging growth areas including meat processing, biofuels, oilseed crushing, and the Yamala Enterprise Area.

Developed with input from producers, industry bodies, and government agencies, it provides a practical tool to guide planning, support funding applications, and strengthen advocacy, reinforcing the Central Highlands' position as a productive, diverse, and innovative agricultural hub.

Read the Capability Statement at chdc.com.au.

Thanks to our partner Queensland Department of Primary Industries.

INDUSTRY VIDEO

Launched in June 2025, the mini-documentary *Central Highlands Agriculture – the future is growing here* showcases the region's thriving agricultural sector, featuring key commodities and capturing the people and innovation that underpin the local industry.

Despite weather-related delays, filming was completed over four days across 13 locations. The final production is a visually engaging resource available to businesses and industry organisations to promote the region to prospective staff and investors, and will be used by CHDC to support trade, investment and export promotion opportunities for the region.

The video has reached strong audiences on social media, including over 11,500 views on Facebook and almost 86,500 views through Facebook ads. Impressively, more than 9,200 viewers watched the video to the end, demonstrating strong audience engagement.

Thanks to our partner Queensland Department of Primary Industries.



Watch the video here.

FUTURES STATEMENT

The *Central Highlands Agribusiness Futures Statement 2025*, commissioned by CHDC and the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and prepared by Acclimate Partners, outlines a clear pathway for the region's agricultural growth.

While beef production and cropping remain the backbone, the Statement identifies strong potential in value-added processing, renewable energy, carbon and biodiversity markets, and biofuels. It also highlights challenges around water reliability, workforce shortages, freight infrastructure, and agtech adoption, while recommending practical, investment-ready solutions.

The document provides a roadmap for balancing the region's established strengths with new opportunities, positioning industry, government, and investors to make informed decisions that support long-term resilience.

Thanks to our partner Queensland Department of Primary Industries.

SMARTER, STRONGER AG

The Smarter, Stronger Ag Through Farm Data project wrapped up in 2024–25, delivering practical insights into how digital tools can lift productivity and resilience across the Central Highlands. Funded through the State Government's Agribusiness Digital Solutions Grants Scheme, the initiative has supported local producers to trial and adopt on-farm data management systems.

Two case studies were released this year showcasing local success stories. Emerald-based Marathon Wagyu demonstrated the value of remote stock water monitoring, saving hours of labour each day through the use of Farmbot technology. Meanwhile, Geddes Farming modernised its cotton and grains irrigation system with a customised digital platform, enabling real-time monitoring and smarter water management.

Both examples highlight how even targeted, practical agtech solutions can reduce costs, improve decision-making, and build long-term business resilience. The case studies, available as short videos, continue to provide inspiration and confidence for other producers considering digital adoption.



Watch the case studies here.

Thanks to our partner Queensland Department of Primary Industries.

CQ AGTECH SHOWCASE

CHDC was a supporting partner in the inaugural CQ AgTech Showcase, a two-day tour through the Central Highlands and Rockhampton regions. As a lead-in to the national evokeAG 2025 conference, the showcase featured visits to agtech innovators and producers, including SwarmFarm Robotics, Colorado Cotton, the CQ Smart Cropping Centre, and Marathon Wagyu. The program also included the Meet the Innovators dinner in Emerald, which celebrated local produce and agtech innovation.



1. AGTECH24 - Day 1
2. AGTECH24 - Day 2
3. AGTECH24 - Day 2
4. Central Highlands Agricultural Capability Statement
5. Smarter, Stronger Ag Case Study
6. Central Highlands Agriculture - the future is growing here



INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

RESOURCES

REGIONAL TRANSFORMATION WORKING LUNCH

More than 60 business and industry leaders gathered in Emerald in September for CHDC's Regional Transformation Working Lunch, which explored what economic transformation means for the Central Highlands.

The event centred on the Queensland Government's newly released *Regional Transformation Strategy 2024 Central Queensland*, designed to guide industries and communities through the opportunities of a decarbonising world.

Speakers included:

- **Michele Bauer**, Queensland Department of State Development and Infrastructure, outlined the strategy's development and priorities, including building sustainable industries, strengthening supply chains, and ensuring regional communities remain resilient and liveable.
- **Sam Thomasson**, Kestrel Coal Resources, shared how the company is adapting through automation, decarbonisation initiatives, and workforce development, emphasising the importance of collaboration in driving regional progress.

The discussions reinforced that transformation in the Central Highlands will be underpinned by innovation, infrastructure investment, and strong partnerships across government, industry, and the community.

Thanks to our partners Local Buying Foundation, CQ Inland Port, Power Learning and Hughes et al.

A special thanks to Emerald State High School and Marist College Emerald students who joined us.

Speaker presentations and images are available at chdc.com.au

ENVIROMETS

CHDC attended the enviroMETS Queensland workshop in Mackay, *Doing More with Our Holes in the Ground*, led by Dr. Peter Whitbread-Abrutat of Future Terrains International. The session explored sustainable post-mining land use solutions, shifting the focus from mine closure to economic transformation. EnviroMETS has also expressed interest in collaborating in the Central Highlands, and CHDC continues to support this engagement.

WORKING GROUPS

CHDC engages with a range of resource-related working groups to collaborate on local content, sustainability, and long-term economic transition. This includes facilitating the Central Highlands Resources Roundtable (CHRR), a forum that brings together local mining companies and Council, as well as actively participating in the Cooperative Research Centre for Transformations in Mining Economies (CRC-TIME) and the Queensland Local Content Leaders Network.

1. Regional Transformation Working Lunch
2. Regional Transformation Working Lunch
3. Regional Transformation Working Lunch





INVESTMENT ATTRACTION

The Central Highlands offers a diverse mix of infrastructure, property, and business investment opportunities. CHDC equips potential investors with local data and intelligence, connects them with industry contacts, arranges site tours, conducts impact modelling, and liaises with government representatives. In 2024-25, interest was received from a variety of sectors, including mining, agriculture, and property development.



CHDC Strategic Planning Day



STRATEGY AND PLANNING

FRONTIER CQ

Developed by Acclimate Partners, *Frontier CQ – An Innovation Roadmap for Central Highlands* outlines a new model for driving innovation and economic diversification across the region. Rather than a single precinct, it establishes a decentralised network of Innovation Nodes that leverage local strengths, industry clusters, and research capacity, making activity relevant, scalable, and connected to existing infrastructure.

Funded under the Queensland Government's Innovation Precincts and Places Strategy, the roadmap provides a phased plan: early engagement and investment case-building, scaling nodes, embedding governance, and maturing high-value sites. Initial focus is on agtech and smart cropping, with potential to expand into other sectors.

By creating a repeatable framework for collaboration, governance, and investment attraction, *Frontier CQ* positions the Central Highlands to attract investment, support innovation, and strengthen the region's economic future.

VISITOR ECONOMY ACTION PLAN

CHDC developed the *Central Highlands Visitor Economy Action Plan 2025–2028*, setting a clear direction for tourism growth in the region. The plan focuses on five key areas: strengthening the region's brand story, driving a year-round visitor economy, developing transformational experiences, building industry capacity through training and innovation, and fostering collaboration and collective investment to maximise regional economic and visitor outcomes.

CHDC STRATEGIC PLANNING DAY

CHDC kicked off 2025 with two days of strategic planning, bringing together staff and board members to set a shared direction for the year ahead. The sessions reflected on the alignment of the organisation's vision and purpose, considered emerging political, economic, and social shifts, and identified priorities with the greatest potential impact, from workforce development and housing to investment attraction and the visitor economy.



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