



Ballina Chamber of Commerce

Submission on Draft Community Strategic Plan 2025–2035, Delivery Program 2024–2028, and Long-Term Financial Plan 2024–2034

Date: 16/05/2025

To:

General Manager

Ballina Shire Council

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Submission via: www.yoursayballina.com.au

Introduction

The Ballina Chamber of Commerce (the Chamber) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Community Strategic Plan (CSP) 2025–2035, Delivery Program 2024–2028, and Long-Term Financial Plan (LTFP) 2024–2034.

As the leading voice of the local business community, representing a diverse membership across retail, hospitality, services, health, construction and tourism sectors, the Chamber acknowledges Council’s work in articulating a long-term vision and appreciates the efforts made to engage the community in shaping it. We offer the following feedback to strengthen the strategic alignment of these documents with the needs of the business sector and the broader local economy.

Submission Summary

The Chamber supports the broad directions outlined in the draft documents and commends the continued focus on sustainability, infrastructure, and community connection. However, we identify a number of areas where enhanced clarity, prioritisation or action would provide stronger outcomes for local businesses and the economic future of the Shire.

Key Issues and Recommendations

1. Town Centre Revitalisation and the Public Realm Strategy

We welcome the scheduled preparation of a Public Realm Strategy in 2024/25 and strongly encourage its application to the continued enhancement of Ballina and Lennox Heads' town centres.

Recommendation:

Ensure the strategy includes business precincts as priority focus areas and establishes measurable goals (e.g. increased pedestrian activity, shop occupancy, footpath trade capacity) aligned with the economic aspirations of the CSP.

2. Tourism and Destination Promotion

The relatively low prioritisation of tourism in the community survey should not be interpreted as grounds for funding withdrawal. The local visitor economy remains critical to job creation and business sustainability.

Recommendation:

Retain and adequately resource the Destination Management Plan. Consider adding internal community education strategies to reinforce the value of tourism to the Shire's prosperity.

3. Economic Development Strategy (EDS)

The Chamber notes the lack of transparency around the current EDS implementation and outputs. We, however, welcome a co-designed, revised and publicly accessible strategy that is appropriately resourced. We consider this to be essential to guide investment attraction, business support, digital enablement, and economic resilience.

Recommendation:

Commit to a timely review or refresh of the EDS and formally include the Chamber and other business stakeholders in its co-design and monitoring.

4. Ballina Byron Gateway Airport

We support Council's continued investment in the Airport as a key economic driver for the region. We encourage further focus on business connectivity, freight capability, and commuter access.

Recommendation:

Consider a long-term airport precinct development plan that incorporates transport links, logistics capacity, and innovation hub potential.

5. Planning and Development Efficiency

We support Council's targets for DA processing times and certificate issuance.

Recommendation:

Commit to public quarterly reporting on DA performance and service standards to build confidence among investors and developers.

6. Industrial Land Availability

The Chamber welcomes the proposed actions to release land at Russellton and Southern Cross estates, noting a strong market demand for serviced industrial land.

Recommendation:

Maintain momentum on approvals and infrastructure delivery to enable timely release. Communicate status and timelines with business stakeholders.

7. Affordable Housing and Workforce Retention

Housing access is a critical barrier to employment across retail, tourism, aged care and education sectors.

Recommendation:

Support the development of key worker housing through planning incentives, partnerships, and land-use flexibility. The Chamber is open to working with Council to identify practical pilot sites or models.

8. Youth Employment and Job Pathways

The Chamber recognises the importance of youth engagement and employment in supporting a vibrant local economy.

Recommendation:

Collaborate with local schools, training providers, and the Chamber to design a local youth internship or mentorship program as part of Council's commitment to community wellbeing and workforce development.

9. Rates and Financial Transparency

While we appreciate Council's effort to gradually reduce the business rate share, we believe progress is too slow given the historic imbalance and lack of direct benefit to business through the earlier economic development plan delivery. We also note that

Ballina Shire Council is charging business a premium that sits well above that of comparable councils across the State.

Recommendation:

Accelerate the rebalancing of the business rate burden and establish a Business Rates Advisory Group to support transparency and fairness in rate policy.

10. Events and Cultural Activation

Events serve as a vital platform for business exposure, community engagement, and visitor attraction.

Recommendation:

Coordinate more closely with the Chamber and other organisers on event scheduling, precinct activation, and shared marketing to amplify impact.

Closing Remarks

We thank Council for the opportunity to contribute to this public consultation. The Chamber remains committed to constructive dialogue and collaborative partnership with Ballina Shire Council to ensure our Shire remains a place where businesses can thrive, jobs are created, and economic opportunity is accessible.

We welcome further discussion or clarification on any of the matters raised and look forward to participating in the next phases of strategy implementation.

Yours sincerely,

Matt Prentice
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