

Gladstone Region Wellbeing
Our Journey Story
to 2021



We acknowledge the Bailai, Gooreng Gooreng, Gurang and Taribelang Bunda people, the traditional custodians of this land. We pay respect to Elders, past, present and emerging. We extend this respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The emergence of Gladstone Region engaging in action Together (GRT)

Timeline

- **Mid 2019** – Government invite Gladstone to partner as a Stronger Places, Stronger People (SPSP) demonstration community
- **Nov 2019** – Community workshops share the invitation with community and a Working Group of local volunteers is established
- **2020** – The Gladstone SPSP Working Group commence groundwork to assess community interest in accepting the invitation, and develop the structure for local establishment of the SPSP initiative
- **Sept 2020** – foundation funding from Government partners resources two local part-time staff to enable the early work with community, capture Gladstone’s story and assess data
- **Nov 2020** – June 2021 – community workshops and engagements develop community engagement practices, dissect data, unpack complex social issues, identify community priorities and develop the vision and goals of GRT
- **Jan 2021** – a local Leadership Group is established following a public recruitment campaign attracting passionate community members with a shared vision
- **Feb 2021** – the Leadership Group are inducted and receive a handover from the Gladstone SPSP Working Group with goals to achieve by June 2021
- **Sept 2020 to June 2021** – Community voice informed a community-led strategy, data baseline report and journey story as pre-requisites to form a 3-year partnership with Government

During this period Gladstone Region engaging in action Together (GRT) emerged

- **June 2021** – a successful proposal was presented to the Australian and Queensland Government on behalf of the Gladstone Region community to partner over a 3-year period to end June 2024

The Gladstone Region engaging in action Together (GRT) logo features a design by local Traditional Owner graphic designer, Iona Nahow, from Mantis Gladstone.

The First Nations artwork includes a yarning circle. A yarning circle is an important process within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture to learn from a collective group, build respectful relationships, and to preserve and pass on cultural knowledge.

The inclusion of this design overlay on the GRT logo represents the whole of the Gladstone Region coming together to collectively improve community wellbeing.



‘Happy Rock’ (Glad-stone)

Gladstone Region’s long-term and newly inducted locals share a common local vocabulary that includes affectionately terming residents Gladstonites or Gladvocates, our city, as Happy-Rock or Glad-Vegas, and refers to our region as the ‘engine room’ or ‘economic powerhouse’ of Queensland.

Introduction

In **2020**, Gladstone embraced an opportunity to change the course of the future for the people that call the Gladstone Region home.

Our region has a rich cultural past held by our Traditional Owners with stories and songlines that have been kept and shared for thousands of years. Our elders and their families are generous and enthusiastic in their interest in sharing their knowledge and passing on their wisdom for the benefit of current and future generations.

Built around a natural harbour, our region today is one of global significance. Abounding in natural and man-made assets. Our region has a long history of attracting people from across Australia and around the world wanting to benefit from its lifestyle and employment opportunities.

However, despite the wealth our region offers, we have seen growing disadvantage in the lives of our local people and in our communities, over a five-year period, with a growing demand for welfare and support services and an unacceptable decline in the wellbeing of children in our region.

Our community has decades of demonstrating collaboration capability, coming together to co-design solutions in response to specific critical issues impacting the lives of residents. The community was well positioned to act in response to these new challenges, but the rate of change had made it hard to quantify the emerging issues to target efforts and to get ahead of the curve. The pressure of the growing demand was beyond available capacity, forcing reactive responses and restricting opportunities to step back and see what proactive action could be taken as a collective.

Stronger Places, Stronger People

Stronger Places, Stronger People (SPSP) is an initiative of the Australian Government in partnership with state and territory governments and communities to disrupt disadvantage and create better futures for children and families, through community-led change, using a collective impact model.

The Australian Government and the Queensland Government partnered with the Gladstone Region community to resource and enable our community to:

- develop a shared agenda for change
- develop a locally designed strategy and action plan to solve complex issues being faced
- use a Collective Impact model and learn together to drive the work
- continuously seek community voice to inform the work through inclusive engagement
- underpin the work with robust measurement for evidence-informed decision making

Gladstone was identified as one of 10 demonstration communities across Australia. Two of the identifying eligibility characteristics of SPSP communities are:

- markers of entrenched disadvantage, combined with
- a promising degree of community readiness to lead a long-term social change endeavour

**So how was Gladstone chosen?
And how did we arrive here ?
This is our Gladstone Story.**

“ **The opportunity presented by the Stronger Places, Stronger People initiative enabled the mobilisation of community to centralise, and harness the collective energy of all stakeholders, to define priority issues and to proactively get ahead of the social challenges that had emerged.** ”

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This narrative is informed by a collection of community stories, observations and anecdotes that collectively provide a community perspective on the events and dynamics of the last 10 years or more of 'life in the Gladstone Region'.

It does not capture every event or represent every view, but it does reflect a range of lived experience and diverse voices and is intended as an 'impression' of events that led to the emergence of 'GRT'.

To learn more about our region through numbers – please ask us for a copy of the Gladstone Region Wellbeing Baseline Data Report.

Section One -
SPSP Eligible



Our Disadvantage Profile

Our region has not historically been recognised as having a high profile of entrenched disadvantage. In fact, Gladstone’s high average incomes and industry investment have often created perceptions of a wealthy community. However, two significant characteristics have continued to replay in trends experienced as a result of the region’s economic make up.

Economic Inequity

As a relatively small regional town that hosts global resource giants, Gladstone city offers high incomes to those ‘in’ industry, which results in a two-tier economy for residents. This divide is further exacerbated by the town’s Boom-and-Bust growth cycle which creates an inflated cost of living for specific periods of time, further widening the divide between the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’.

This raises questions around equity and inclusion. Who gets to be on the ‘in’ and who doesn’t – and why not?



Migration Attraction

As an additional complexity, the second characteristic, also a result of the Boom-and-Bust cycle, is the conditions created that make the region a migration magnet, attracting people to move to the region from within Queensland or across Australia in search of employment during the Boom, or reduced cost of living during the Bust.

Those arriving during the boom, attracted by higher availability of work or the allure of high incomes associated with construction work, sometimes find themselves caught short as work is not found or the rising cost of living impacts on their ability to make-ends-meet even with improved employment.

A consequence of the boom is the intense efforts of the housing market to keep up to rental demand to house incoming temporary construction workforce and new operations staff moving to the area to take up long-term roles. Developers following housing market peaks are waiting in the wings when big industry projects receive their government approvals to construct, often having speculated on greenfield residential sites ahead of

project approvals. Investors keen to enter the investment market or to add to their portfolio of investment properties also trigger new builds as existing market availability starts being bought out, growing supply within the lucrative rental market.

The end result is an oversupply of housing that emerges during the bust, as project workforce move out and consequently as rental prices fall, in line with reduced demand. The lower rental prices and lower cost of living attract a new wave of in-migration chasing a cheaper cost of living.

“After the LNG construction, some rentals fell below the cost for Government supplied social housing, with desperate landlords turning to Facebook and Gumtree, offering rock bottom rents as an alternative to leaving their properties empty or risking repossession of over-capitalised investments”

The Gladstone Region offers a unique case study as efforts to address disadvantage must consider two distinctly different audiences, the established (sedentary) population and its more transitory populations.

Community Readiness

When SPSP arrived as an opportunity for the Gladstone Region in 2019, demonstration of collective impact elements had been present for many years prior, but the lack of a central ‘organising’ mechanism or Backbone had often seen efforts derail before reaching desired outcomes.

Industry Stakeholders contributing to enabling community voice, bring to town global best practice community consultation practices and partnership models to engage and include community voice in social planning exercises. Our community aspirations have been recorded through these industry resourced projects to guide community investment and as a road map to harness community energy towards common goals.

These projects have left a legacy foundation in the form of a map charting the path for the community towards a future of their own design. Currently the Gladstone Region Vision 2035¹ published in 2015, is utilised as the most recent reflection of community values and aspirations for Gladstone’s future.

In 2019 a harvest of two days of social sector discussions at the Changing Lives, Changing Communities² event recorded challenges and potential starting points for solutions, centered around the question, **“What will it take to create communities where everyone contributes, matters and belongs?”**.

These records of community aspirations for the future and start-up strategies to get there, are the most recent of many community consultations, including those required for social impact assessments for industry construction projects or Council planning consultations intended to manage growth impacts for the community. These reports record community values, regional assets and strengths, and gaps and shortfalls identified in relation to the aspirations of the community.

Although there is a view, that the voice is often the ‘usual suspects’ and that sometimes the voices of our most disadvantaged, or those with the highest need, is missing, including those transitory residents who may not voluntarily participate in community consultation opportunities.

While the works have been valuable in setting a course of desired action for community wellbeing, the challenge has been maintaining momentum due to a lack of dedicated and consistent resources to drive the work across the whole community. The reports are often found collecting dust on office shelves instead of open on desktops where they can support outcomes.

These false starts for community-led change, combined with consultation fatigue has resulted in reduced participation rates for new initiatives which creates a perception of community wariness or apathy. However, this has proven to be quickly overcome once trust is built and reliability in the form of consistency and progress is demonstrated.

The Gladstone Region has demonstrated capacity to mobilise in response to emerging or escalating critical issues and although the critical mass tends to fall away during the ‘quieter’ times when the issues are less visible, core groups maintain consistent vigilance on specific issues of passion. This had traditionally occurred in issue specific pockets such as Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) or Mental Health. However, with no centralised mechanism to correlate trends or map progress or observe inter-related trends across sectors or measure whole of community efforts and outcomes.

At the time that the SPSP opportunity arrived for Gladstone, many emerging collectives appeared to be gearing up for increased alignment. The invitation to partner in the SPSP initiative provided the platform our community needed to come together. Trust in the process was renewed under the reassurance that enablers of the collective impact process (backbone, engagement, action planning and measurement) could be resourced for a three-year period to create the ongoing momentum required to demonstrate outcomes.

¹Gladstone Region Vision 2035, Futureeye (2015) – GRT acknowledges funding partners of this initiative: Gladstone Regional Council, Gladstone Ports Corporation, Australia Pacific LNG Conoco Phillips, and the Rio Tinto Community Fund Gladstone representing Queensland Alumina Limited and Rio Tinto Yarwun.

²Changing Lives, Changing Communities Harvest, QCOSS (2019) – GRT acknowledges funding partners of this initiative: Gladstone Regional Council, QDN, NDIS, QCOSS and ADCQ

Collision Course of Local Collectives

Decades of community mobilisation around key issues has eventuated in the perfect storm of collectives all on a similar trajectory, raising the potential for an aligned and combined approach to improving community wellbeing.

Built on many of the traditional institutions that have formed the lifeblood of rural and regional communities over the decades such as the Country Women's Association (CWA), Returned Service Men's League (RSL) and Service Clubs such as Rotary and Lions, our community had a strong foundation to respond to local needs with home grown solutions.

Home Grown Solutions

The last 30+ years have seen other community-led groups and organisations emerge to meet community needs such as improved opportunity and lifestyle for residents living with a disability or response to growing domestic and family violence.

These home-grown human service organisations are doing incredible things for the region having emerged to meet a specific need at a specific point in time and maintaining momentum and sustainability to continue to meet community needs and create benefit including:

- **Gladstone Women's Health Centre**
- **Nhulundu Health Services** (an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service delivering integrated, comprehensive primary care health services)
- **Integreat** (previously 'WIN' - Women's Intercultural Network and Welcoming Intercultural Neighbours)
- **Gladstone Community Linking Agency** (GCLA - disability and aged care services)
- **Roseberry Qld** (Youth & Family services)

Coordinated Community Response to Domestic and Family Violence (CCRDFV)

Formed from a small group of concerned locals over 30 years ago, CCRDFV was formally founded in 1996 and is a great example of community-led action that has seen individuals mobilise and collaborate around a shared agenda and mature and adapt to the needs of the community and maintain relevance to funders over time.

Most recently we have seen a shift to co-location of services and aligned service models aimed at a 'one door' approach to providing holistic support and early intervention.

The Philip Street Communities and Families Precinct (Launch date 2021)*

A community led collaborative model that moves beyond co-location to collaboration, an evolving social infrastructure project that focuses on wellbeing connection and lifelong learning.

The Precinct is designed to strengthen Gladstone's community and social service system by the clustering of community facilities to improve and enhance service delivery and community outcomes through collaboration.

The Precinct brings together a range of resident and visiting services in one multi service facility, to meet the multiple needs of community in one location and enable improved access to services through warm referrals in a space that offers a sense of community.

Gladstone Mindcare – Opened February 2021

Mindcare promotes improved mental health and wellbeing by empowering our community through education, information and connectivity to enable our community to be mentally well, resilient and stigma free.

Also providing co-location of services within a collective impact model, the Gladstone Mindcare Hub offers an inclusive community space to ease the way for community members to access information and referral to support mental health, alcohol and other drug challenges, reducing feelings of stress and vulnerability.

The diversity of the Mindcare members network enables the right mix of services to meet the needs of each individual for early interventions through social connection and health promotion activities and support to access specialised treatment-based approaches.

*Opened October 2021

Government Collective Initiatives

In addition to home grown collective initiatives, our community benefits from Government instigated initiatives aimed at collective organising for place-based and locally co-designed solutions. These initiatives fund backbone roles to enable community organising and alignment within specific sectors or with a limited cross-sector scope often with an early intervention or prevention objective.

Communities for Children (CfC) is a facilitating partner project funded by the Australian Government. CfC empowers families to function more effectively in the vision of 'Living, learning and growing together for stronger families and stronger futures.'

CfC is hosted by Gladstone Area Promotion and Development Limited (GAPDL). Through their partner network, CfC advocates that parents and carers have the most critical role to play in their child's health, wellbeing and education.

The Local Level Alliance (LLA) is an inclusion of the Family and Child Connect (FaCC) services, funded by the Queensland Government, that aims to strengthen connections between local services that work with vulnerable families. The LLA is also based on place-based service system optimisations to ensure families are supported with an integrated mix of services that respond to local needs and issues and provide families with the right support at the right time. A key objective of the LLA is the reduction of the number of children at risk and in out-of-home care.

Connect 4 Children is a Queensland Government strategy supporting communities to develop local solutions for local priorities to help give all children a great start and improve the wellbeing of children prior to school. Each Connect 4 Children location creates a Birth-5 plan identifying key priorities focused on innovation and alignment of program and service delivery using evidence-based decisions to achieve their goals. In the Gladstone Region, the Connect 4 Children strategy is a collective of local stakeholders named GROW (Gladstone Response to Outcomes for Wellbeing).

Other roles are funded in our wider region focused on local needs and strategies to inform government resourcing and support including specific health roles such as the Australian Government's Primary Health Network (PHN) with key objectives of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of medical services for patients, particularly those at risk of poor health outcomes, and improving coordination of care to ensure patients receive the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

Despite all the hard work of the community to address our own needs, the demand for service keeps growing and even with increased funding, the evidence to support that we are improving our overall community wellbeing is limited.

Strong Foundations

With the identification of the Gladstone Region as an SPSP demonstration community, came the opportunity to more clearly connect the dots between existing efforts in a single strategy, action plan, and measurement framework.

A combined measurement framework will assist us to track progress towards improved community wellbeing and to provide the evidence base to support community identified priority needs.

By harnessing our collective community energy in our shared aspirations for our community's future, we can optimise resources and efforts, reduce duplication risks and achieve improved wellbeing outcomes for our community.

To learn more about how SPSP will build on the strengths of existing community momentum, ask us for our community strategy.

Section Two -

Our Unique Gladstone Region



Our Characteristics

In general, our Gladstone Region community is astute and empowered, able to articulate concerns and ask for what we need. Often underestimated as a small backwater town, visitors and investors are often pleasantly surprised by the maturity of the region.

We have a reasoned approach to objection or challenge and a balanced consideration of economic, environmental and social benefits.

Our region experiences significant in and out migration, which is sometimes quoted for the reason people feel less connected to the community, as relationships can be transitory with new people coming and going. The same reason is stated for those who experience strong connection to the place, with an 'expat' style feel, newly arriving residents can experience being quickly enveloped into community life by those who were also once new here and are ready to share what they have, including their knowledge and networks.

While the region doesn't suit everyone, the people of the Gladstone Region are welcoming, supportive, generous and involved. Ready to jump into action if a call for help is heard.

"Community" is commonly the answer given to the question **"what do you love about living here?"**

The natural assets of our region are a standout to most new residents and visitors, and the other most frequently stated reason for 'loving where we live'.

Nestled between the Southern Great Barrier Reef and sandstone gorges, the region is known for its natural wonders, offering stunning coastline, secluded white sand beaches, lakeside recreation and freshwater and saltwater fishing and classic Australian farmland scenes complete with Brahman Bulls, windmills and the country pub. A paradise for those boating, camping, fishing enthusiasts.

Home to Industry Giants

Our region's 'big' natural assets are matched by the scale of its industry sites built around Gladstone's natural deep water harbour.

The Gladstone Region boasts

- Two of the world's largest alumina refineries
- An aluminium smelter
- Power station
- Six LNG trains located across three sites
- Cement and chemical manufacturers and
- Queensland's largest multi-commodity port

The region has a significant reliance on the resource industry for its economic base, Gladstone's economic climate is directly influenced by resource market trends, primarily metals and energy (oil) prices, and can conversely be buffered from broader economic fluctuations as a result of its local economic stability.

During the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2008, the community would reference 'The Gladstone Bubble' in the context of an independent economic micro-climate, that protected the local community, to a degree, from the extent of the economic challenges felt elsewhere.



Traditional income disparity between stereotypical blue collar (manual labour) roles and white-collar (non-manual) roles is blurred in Gladstone.

Resource industry employment in our region relies on both skilled and unskilled workforces and provides significantly high wages maintaining high average income statistics.

The attraction to these high paying roles can have the downside of lower job security where resource market trends can impact on workforce retention.

Industry maintenance, ‘shut-down’, work comes in inconsistent cycles, impacting on employment consistency for locals that rely on it for core income and creating a migratory population that follow construction or shut-down projects. Gladstone relies on drive-in-drive-out (DIDO) or fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) contract workforce, from outside the region to meet industry needs and over years has grown its own base of this workforce that reside here and travel for work in other locations. The result of this is many families with a family member working away from home for extended periods.

High paying construction roles come in short bursts in the region, creating great advancement opportunities for those interested in investing for the future, or a quick lived ‘high-roller’ experience for those more predisposed to living paycheck to paycheck. But with the often-impressive income opportunity also comes inherent risks, particularly for those most vulnerable. Trends synonymous with the migrant gold mining days, related to expendable income and transient lifestyles, see a prevalence of social issues such as drug and alcohol or gambling addictions or low financial management

capacity seen in unsustainable spending habits and debt accrual.

The high number of industry employees is a visual characteristic of the region with new arrivals often commenting on the ‘sea of high-vis’ wherever you go. Even away from the worksites, high-vis uniforms can be seen pushing mowers in residential front yards or on recreational boats out fishing, as the sun-smart, readily available and disposable, recreational ‘uniform’ of Gladstone.

Trends characteristic of the Gladstone Region, such as high per capita recreational vessel registrations, contribute to the stereotype associated with the Gladstone Industry Employee as having an inclination towards expenditure on high-value, leisure assets, disproportionate to incomes.

Yards of average sized homes are often seen filled with the ‘toys’ associated with luxury lifestyles ranging from jet skis and showcase motorcycles to RVs and generous sized recreational boats.

The risks associated with expenditure on high turnover recreational assets vs long term financial security is the creation of asset-rich, cash-poor bottom-lines for families. This plays out in the short lag times seen in the region between employment downturns and welfare dependency.

A result of this lifestyle trend is that traditional key indicators of economic contraction, such as empty shop fronts in the main street, are preceded in our region by vacant lots and suburban streets lined with these ‘toys’ bearing ‘for sale’ signs.

“ We can often see it coming long before the data tells us that there is a problem, we see families selling up their possessions on Facebook, but sometimes they don’t present until they are facing eviction from their rental property. ”

Industry construction booms bring a fixed and limited period of wealth generation for those that want to benefit from the ‘make hay while the sun shines’ opportunity. However, despite the inevitable end to construction project related employment or business, a surprising number of individuals and businesses fall into debt and bankruptcy at the end of each new project.

More about the impacts of Boom-and-Bust on our community in Section Three

Boomtown

In 2013 the Queensland Music Festival (QMF) chose Gladstone as the location of one of their ‘biggest’ projects, synonymous with the size of the industry that the performance was to showcase. The show took its audience back through history charting the growth of the region through its industrial development, right back to the first waves of workforce in their caravans ready to make history in the construction of QAL. In addition to creating a vibrant showcase of Gladstone’s booming past, the event made a significantly positive impact on community pride, acknowledging the uniqueness of Gladstone’s story and celebrating the people who have contributed and participated throughout its history.



Gladstone Goes Large With Boomtown - A Production So Epic, No Mere Stage Can Hold It.

Gladstone is a proud boom town and its people love to share stories of the good and the bad that have come with these waves of settlement over the past 50 years. Of course, there is no better way to tell a community story than through a community musical; but Boomtown is no ordinary musical.

The largest QMF project to date, this is a musical theatre production on a scale you’ve never, ever seen before. With an original commissioned script and score and with a 300 strong cast – all from Gladstone – the spectacle that is Boomtown engulfs the entire Gladstone Marina

foreshore with the waterways and Spinnaker Park as the dramatic and inspiring backdrop. Told through a young boy’s eyes, Boomtown is a fantastical journey through Gladstone’s past, present and future to its true heart.

An incredible industrial set, a massive fire-breathing dragon, ethereal floating sculptures and a rather large number of Hi-Viz Zombies. With four astounding performances, these creations – forged in steel and sweat and light and spirit – provide the exquisite framework upon which the people of Gladstone share what it means to them to be a community.

Living in the Regions

Underneath the industrial overlay and characteristic Boom-and-Bust cycle that predict benefits and pressures felt by our Gladstone Region communities, we also experience the characteristic elements of regional and rural life that are true of communities across regional Queensland.

Top ranking issues reported by community consistently include:

- Housing pressures - particularly at the time of this report as the COVID-19 Pandemic sees a constriction of housing availability, increased emergency housing demand and increasing homelessness reaching crisis points across Australia
- Childcare – availability and affordability and its impacts on both the most vulnerable and on the working masses
- Health services – limited services within our region due to a hub-and-spoke model with Rockhampton as a regional service centre and specialist appointments often requiring travel to Rockhampton, Bundaberg or Brisbane impacting on individuals and families
- Mental Health services – limited specialist services in the area and wait times that risk escalation and exasperation of issues being experienced
- Transport – public transport limitations that impact on access to service and social connection
- Social connectedness – as the communities across the region see change in local populations, made worse in our region with Boom-and-Bust migration trends
- Skills attraction and retention is a challenge for all regional areas, and is made more challenging for small business and human service sector employers competing with the attraction of high industry wages
 - Local smaller employers are often the launching pad for career seekers growing their skills and experience to enter industry
 - High employee turn-over comes at more than the cost to re-recruitment as role specific training and relocation costs are commonly requirements to re-fill roles and impact on service consistency and quality and subsequently retention of customers
- The introduction of the NDIS has created further draw on skills with more human service staff taking up roles in the disability sector
- Critical human service roles, that find it hard to compete with industry wages find roles left empty for long periods, reducing capacity to service the region, often at times when the region is experiencing growth in disadvantage
- Some critical government departments have reported experiencing 25% vacancy in core roles, even recently, as skills availability have not matched growing demand
- Additional social challenges associated with mining towns are felt by our region, including
 - Shift-work, long shifts, male dominated workforces with traditional workplace cultures and DIDO and FIFO work come with a perception of increasing risks associated with family breakdown and domestic and family violence
 - High income and easy access to drugs is reported to be an issue for policing and community with use of the methamphetamine ICE often raised by community as a priority issue of concern and felt to be the cause of related social wellbeing factors

Our Hidden Disadvantage

Our region enjoys significant community investment in the form of social infrastructure and opportunities including recreational, training and employment funded by its industry base.

Individual wealth and community wealth are very visual, from the luxury vessels at the Marina to the parklands and eateries that have expanded and matured through industry investment.

Industry investment in community infrastructure and assets have propelled the growth and liveability of the small city forward each time a new industry construction wave occurs.



Award winning East Shores Precinct

Our community offers a relaxed and privileged lifestyle with rich community assets supported by a lucrative industry base, however the hardships being felt by some of our families and children can be hidden just below the surface.

Industry funding enhances government investment that keeps the region clean and tidy, reducing signs of disadvantage and supporting social services to respond to the symptoms of disadvantage such as homelessness and poverty. This reduces the outward visibility of disadvantages that might be seen in other locations such as litter, graffiti, street begging, rough sleeping or public intoxication.

This is a significant positive for the liveability of the region and contributes positively to those experiencing disadvantage that might have access to services with more capacity than other areas.

However, this outward utopia has developed a subtle unintended detriment with growing disadvantage being hidden from public view.

The significantly growing pressure on the social sector and alarming increase in disadvantage being experienced by our community has been less obvious to the general population, reducing any feelings of urgency to respond.

High average incomes and physical signs of wealth have masked the community issues that are a reality of life for many children and families who are in crisis in our region.

Hidden Numbers

Inhibitors to revealing the true story of disadvantage in our community are further aggravated in the form of the data-driven evidence we rely on.

Often public statistics used are presented by Local Government Area (LGA) or bigger Regions, in our case, Gladstone LGA and Central Queensland.

Geographic grouping of the diverse communities within our region, as defined by our local government area boundaries, hides the day-to-day experience of our residents in their own unique community.

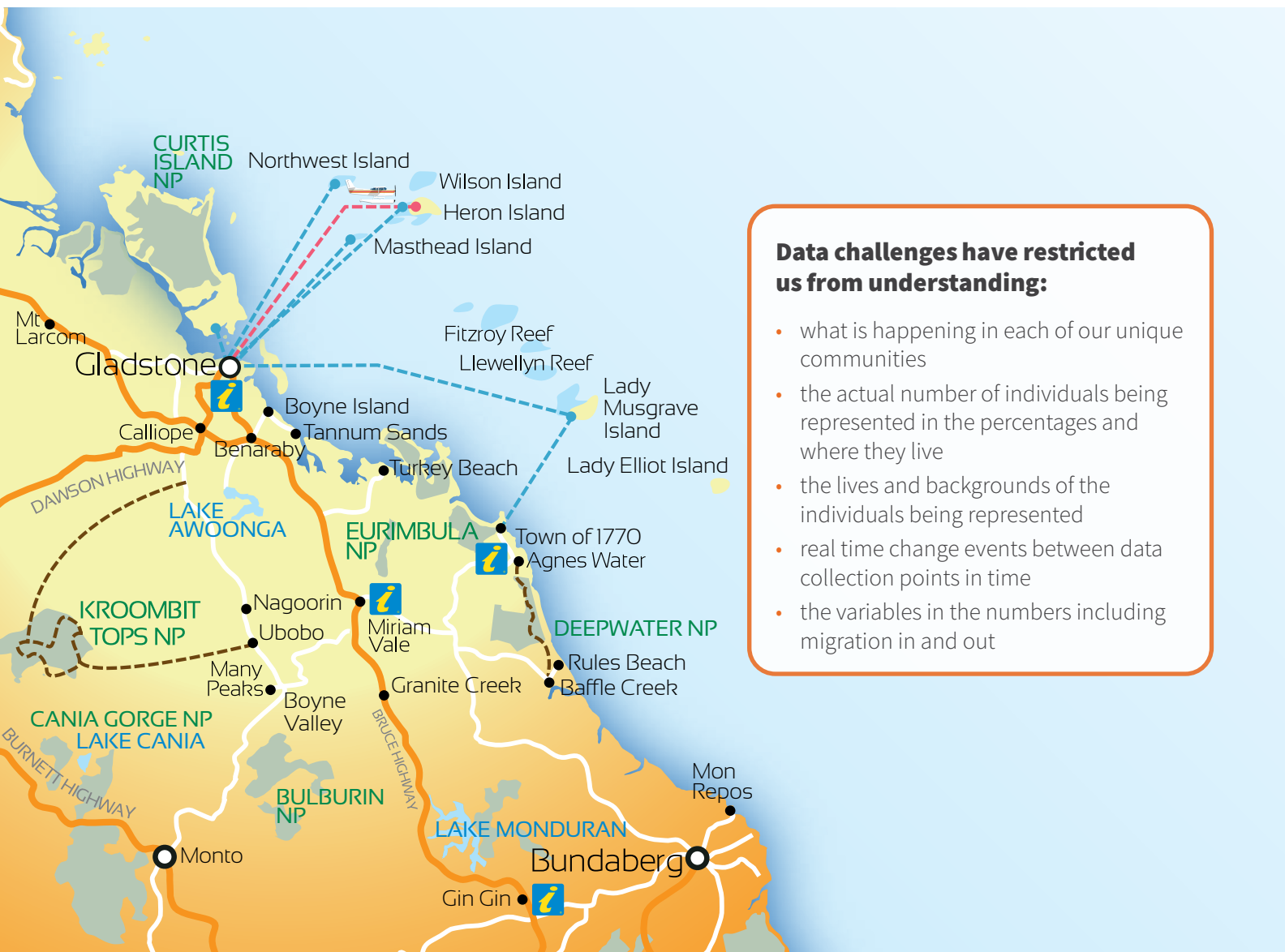
Social indicator data presented for the Central Queensland Region reports numbers for a population of 669,240 people, more than 10 times larger than the population of the Gladstone LGA.

The Gladstone Region is made up of many uniquely distinct communities in specific geographic locations,

each with their own characteristics, demographic, economic, social, and environmental factors.

Additionally, the rate of change in our demographics is heavily influenced by waves of migration that happen in cycles that may only last 12-24 months. Entire in-migration and out-migration cycles can occur in-between census years, with any significant population changes invisible, hidden in the interval between the census nights spaced 5-years apart. Lag time in statistics are identified as a contributing factor to the inadequacy of data used to evidence changing needs in the region.

The small size of our communities compounds the issue, making it restrictive to publicise statistics that fall below a minimum number.



Data challenges have restricted us from understanding:

- what is happening in each of our unique communities
- the actual number of individuals being represented in the percentages and where they live
- the lives and backgrounds of the individuals being represented
- real time change events between data collection points in time
- the variables in the numbers including migration in and out

Good Intentions

Reaching the Regions

Power disparity between service providers and funders has also led to a disconnect in the intent and reality of service levels to meet demands across a large region.

“ We apply for the funding knowing that we won’t be able to meet the outputs because the disparity between the region size and the budget for transport, travel time or to resource a remote office makes it impossible to, but we apply anyway because we don’t want our community to miss out. ”

The pressure felt by services to ‘tick the boxes’ or commit to unrealistic expectations, to stay in the running for funding creates a risk that the real gaps and needs are not dealt with effectively. This sustains ineffective service delivery models and risks denying our most remote communities access to adequate services, or creating burnout in dedicated staff who continue to try to fit in more than the funding provides for.

The evidence of this detriment is seen within services, in the form of resentment, and between services in tensions, competition, and criticism. This is further reflected by residents of remote areas who voice that on the ground delivery of services does not match the expectations set by funders.

“ The government doesn’t hear us when we tell them that we don’t have access to services. They tell us we are receiving services, because their contracts say that they are being delivered in our area. We live here, we know that they aren’t. ”

Funding Hot Pot

In a classic catch 22, well intended solutions employed by local services to meet growing demand by seeking extra funding from alternate sources to subsidise or top up service capacity, could contribute to maintaining the status quo by diluting the urgency of the issue to the central set of stakeholders and decision makers.

With no central point monitoring volumes of resources being applied to specific issues, quantifying demand becomes challenging.

An additional consequence of not having a centralised approach to issue management is the risk that the service or program with the best grant writer may receive the most resources regardless of where it falls in community priority ranking.

Multiple organisations may also receive funding for similar purposes, sometimes with a unique purpose, delivery method or audience but often without combined measurement to track the combined outcomes for a specific issue. For example, five or more organisations may be receiving funding to address domestic and family violence (DFV) but without a requirement to align delivery or outcome measurements. This makes it challenging to track change in what is an already complex issue to measure.

This compounds universal challenges related to measurement and monitoring of outcomes. For example, increased reports of DFV, call outs or orders, may be a positive outcome resulting from increased awareness, confidence and social change to stop DFV early, versus an indicator of increased incidents.

Welfare Wealth

Our welfare sector includes numerous separate organisations, each providing similar or slight variations of financial or resource support to individuals and families unable to survive on their own income or government payments.

While each organisation may have an eligibility process, there is no coordinated approach or monitoring mechanism to assess individual access to support between these services.

While this is not a problem if everyone is getting what they need and wellbeing is being improved, it does increase the risk that individuals suffering from addictions, that can be further detrimented by increased expendable cash, are being further enabled to remain 'stuck' in their situation. This adds further complexity when impacting on other family members or on children who may be placed at increased risk as a result of worsening family conditions.

“We knew that the minority few were taking advantage of the system, doing the rounds to get what they could from each service before they wore out their welcome, but the risk of turning them away was that the kids wouldn't eat that day. We couldn't take that risk. We do what we can with the information we have.”

Welfare services report that the funding received for the area does not meet the needs of the community demand and so are further subsidised through charitable or other funding sources.

Additionally, our generous community answers any call for support, setting up food pantries and donation pages for household goods, baby supplies and everyday living items to share the wealth of the region with those most in need.

This flocking of good intentions creates a maverick approach to resourcing growing welfare demand.

As a result, social issues such as child disadvantage, family poverty, and youth disengagement are often underestimated or not captured to the full extent. This reduces the chance to inspire a sense of urgency to address the causal factors, and creates the potential to hold the conditions of disadvantage in place as it becomes the accepted 'norm'.

The other consequence is that the benefit or detriment of this plethora of support is impossible to evaluate without defining the demand, quantifying the support provided, and measuring the outcomes. In other words, without collectively measuring and evaluating our efforts, it is hard to know if what we are doing is helping our community in the long-term.

Mother Nature

Like many parts of Australia, natural disasters are increasingly disrupting community life with predictable financial and emotional wellbeing impacts. Over the last 10 years our region has been impacted by cyclone, flood, drought, and bush-fire events.

These impacts have been devastating to some rural communities in our region and created pressure on relationships between community, services and government agencies with response plans and expectations being a strong theme during the post-recovery stages.

These events have also seen the best of our communities, and have seen some relationships strengthen as stakeholders have worked together during events and in preparation for future events, taking lessons learned to strengthen recovery capacity and resilience.

Section Three -

The Boom and The Bust



The Boom

During Boom periods, the rush to take up residence in Gladstone city and suburbs creates a real estate agent’s dream and a human service provider’s nightmare as house prices soar and rental availability shrinks creating rental stress and displacing low-income earners impacted by a growing cost of living beyond their achievable income.

This ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ scenario plays out through many of the Boom-and-Bust cycle impacts, including those investors caught short with overcapitalised mortgages as rentals start to empty and rents and house prices fall. Most concerning though is the impacts on those most vulnerable who get caught in the change through no involvement of their own.

Housing price changes and availability pressures gradually reach across the region to the far-corners of the Gladstone LGA as those residents chasing lower costs of living move further out, while still retaining work in Gladstone city and surrounding industrial sites.

The rapidly rising cost of living during these periods can appear to apply to almost every human commodity, and is termed locally ‘the Gladstone Tax’, as general

lifestyle and household services experience extraordinary demand. A common story during a Boom period occurring over the summer months is of the arrival of a new industry family making the exciting move to tropical Gladstone to then discover they have a 6 week wait for an air conditioner installation. Alongside the housing price increases, this heightened demand for services and a willingness to pay above market price for immediate service is often blamed for the increased cost of living.

This element of the Boom side of the cycle adds pressure to the region’s existing population, creating or magnifying vulnerabilities already being experienced. For some, the rising cost of living means leaving their accommodation to relocate outside the region or moving back in with family.

The LNG Boom in Gladstone during 2012-15 is noted as being the ‘biggest boom Gladstone will ever see’. The Boom saw 3 LNG facilities built on Curtis Island simultaneously with a single EPC contractor. Six LNG ‘trains’ (processing units) across the three sites have a combined LNG production capacity of over 25mtpa.

The Gladstone LGA population of 61,000 (2011) supported a workforce of 24,000 over the 3-year period with a peak of 11,000 employees. The EPC Contractor, Bechtel, released statistics at the time to assist the community comprehend the magnitude of the workforce size, which included 3,100 workers housed in temporary accommodation camps on the LNG sites that consumed 24,000 eggs per week.

The Bust

A consequence of the boom is the intense efforts of the housing market to keep up to rental demand to house incoming temporary construction workforce. Investors keen to enter the investment market or to add to their portfolio of investment properties trigger new builds to grow supply within the lucrative rental market.

The end result, once the demand predictably reaches its peak and starts to decrease, is an oversupply of housing that emerges during the bust as project workforce moves out and consequently rental prices fall in line with reduced demand. The lower rental prices, and reduced cost of living attract a new wave of in-migration chasing a cheaper cost of living.

“After the LNG construction, some rentals fell below the cost for Government supplied social housing, with desperate landlords turning to Facebook and Gumtree, offering rock bottom rents as an alternative to leaving their properties empty or risking repossession of overcapitalised investments.”

Pluses and Minuses

- Workforce move into the region to take up pre-secured roles, including from domestic and overseas locations – this workforce may be assisted by employers to relocate and may leave at the end of the contract to take up similar work elsewhere
 - this workforce is sometimes housed or may be responsible for securing their own accommodation but often with a housing subsidy to buffer the high rent costs
 - where workforce are provided accommodation, investors and developers benefit from the rates that industry construction projects are willing to pay and market prices rise on speculation and increase with growing demand for stock
 - stock that is built to increase availability in the market is designed for the corporate family, or multiple individuals, often spacious four-bedroom, two+ bathroom homes that contribute to an attractive lifestyle where relocation is for work. This reduces the volume of ‘affordable’ stock for first home buyers and renters in the lower socio-economic income bracket
- Workforce moves into the region on the attraction of work with no secure role to take up. Some of this more transient community are often stereotyped as arriving with their life packed into the car they arrive in. Characterised as opportunistic in their lifestyle and relocation habits, with short-term resources and little contingency planning in place, these new residents can be at risk of dependency and vulnerability
- Locals available for work secure high incomes for a period of time, providing positive saving and investment opportunities, with some young locals known to secure their first home early or to pay off a home or investment property before reaching 30
- Locals are given opportunities for promotion or other employment benefits as local employers lose staff to construction roles and are forced to implement retention initiatives such as housing subsidies
- Locals taking up roles in globally competitive construction projects alongside experts in their field, are given opportunities to grow their experience and skills increasing their networks and competitive edge for improved employment opportunity at home or away, including overseas posts that may provide career and lifestyle opportunities to them and their families
- As the housing market tightens, rental and purchase prices go up, impacting those on lower incomes. This results in migration out of the region seeking a lower cost of living
 - This impact is most relevant for our young people, retirees and our vulnerable, impacting on family support networks both emotionally and practically
 - Flow-on consequences include combined family households or restricted access to employment due to reduced family support for childcare
 - Our public service sector, which the community rely on for the stability of it’s liveability, including education, health and emergency services struggle to attract and retain key staff.
- Increased workforce also tightens availability of formal childcare options, restricting the working and earning capacity for some families
- A rise in house prices and an economic upturn also creates ideal conditions for those ready to leave the region who can benefit from house or business sales while prices are at a premium. This opportunity suits retirees whose investment has returned them a good nest egg that will have longer term value in a retirement location with a cheaper cost of living, or whose grown-up-children have moved away for work or study
- Vulnerable individuals and families, including those unemployed and those employed, but feeling the financial pressure related to the increased cost of living, may be further disadvantaged. This may exasperate pre-existing pressures such as family stress, addictions, mental health or domestic and family violence risks.



During the boom, services, often at capacity, have resorted to providing fuel vouchers as a solution to homelessness.

Families who have relocated but not found work and have depleted their resources, find themselves dependent on charitable services for life's basics. Some families resort to living in their cars after relocating with no employment or accommodation to come to and finding that the promise of a better life is not available to everyone. With no resources to support themselves locally, and no family or network to fall back on, the fuel vouchers act as a one-way ticket to return them to where they had left.

Housing Mitigations

Despite previous waves of Boom-and-Bust cycles in the Gladstone Region, some of the pitfalls recur each time, although in some cases, with lessening impact as lessons learned are captured and used to design mitigation strategies with community.

During the last boom, in addition to temporary accommodation located at construction sites for construction workforces, a permanent workforce camp was built at Calliope to accommodate construction and shut-down workforces as a contribution to the solution. The camp is a privately owned operation reliant on commercial viability to be a sustainable solution.

Affordable Housing projects have been funded by industry, being given exemptions for planning regulations for setbacks to maximise lot sizes and village design styles that break away from traditional high density housing projects. These projects have had mixed results with positive outcomes for rental prices but determinants such as overcrowding of on-street parking and a higher density of social and safety issues.

Regardless of the innovation and investments made in mitigations, the commercial housing market that drives real estate as an investment commodity continues to be the stronger force in its influence over house prices and rental costs.

Diversification

A commonly identified, long-term solution to flatten the peak of the Boom-and-Bust cycle that predictably follows industry construction is the diversification of industry. This has been a consistent economic priority to dilute the impact of unemployment and commercial closure following completion of industry project construction.

Community Pride

The negative economic and social impacts of the Boom-and-Bust cycle influence the region's reputation and sense of community.

Community pride is impacted even ahead of the Bust, when despair can be felt and front-page news provides a constant reminder of cases of local families or local business that did not emerge on the preferred side of the winners and loser's ledger.

Economically, this creates concern for tourist and investor attraction and a worsening of skills attraction to the region as Gladstone is painted in a poor light.

Campaigns to influence the community culture and increase positive perceptions have been reborn on numerous occasions with the last Bust being rebranded the Boom, Bust and Reset to provide hope and a reminder of the short period that Gladstone experiences in the 'bust' environment.

Over the years there have been multiple campaigns to market the region as a location of choice, to work, rest and play, promoting the liveability of the region.

Aside from marketing campaigns, most locals appear to agree that our region continues to offer the best of both worlds, employment and services beyond that of most regional centres and the lifestyle benefits of a smaller rural or coastal community, including easy access to world class natural assets, public safety, short commutes and community strength.

Our Trademark

The Boom-and-Bust phenomenon has become a trademark of the Gladstone Region, studied and almost revered as a key characteristic. The experience of Gladstone’s rapid growth has at times, been a commercialised product with visiting interstate and international delegations coming to learn about the impacts and mitigations first hand and PHD students coming to experience the on-ground impacts felt by the community.

Rumours spread around the country and urban myths about impacts often circulate with industry players feeling obliged to release ‘myth busting’ promotional materials to inform the community of facts.

Papers and books have been written about Gladstone’s growth including ‘Gladstone, city that waited’ (McDonald 1988) which was one of the first captures of the social change that occurred as an impact of rapid industrial development over a 25-year period from 1960 and its context within the history of Gladstone.

On their 1984 album ‘Frontline’, Australian folk-rock group Redgum released a song that coined the phrase the ‘Boomtown Refugees’ – the song was titled ‘Gladstone Pier’.

“and rumour said there’s a boom ahead, you can make your future here by the Gladstone Pier”

The song lyrics told the story of a young couple relocating to Gladstone chasing the dream of prosperity attached to the construction of a new smelter, only to find their dreams fade when the desired work was not in reach and the cost of living created pressures on their relationship.

“and the boomtown blues just fade to grey, and all that’s left are debts”

The Migration Variable

The relevance of Boom-and-Bust migration is important in the measurement of progress towards improved community wellbeing.

The displacement and attraction of our most vulnerable community members is a predictable outcome of rental price fluctuations but is challenging to quantify in real-time.

Without effectively quantifying migration in and out as a variable in the measurement method, the challenge of tracking community and population level changes in wellbeing as a direct outcome of service provision becomes almost impossible. Measurement is then restricted to measurement of individual outcomes which is difficult to track over time.

Section four -
And Now



Soon after the SPSP opportunity arrived for the Gladstone Region, the world was side swiped by the COVID-19 global pandemic. 2020 saw a new way of living and working for most global citizens, and while our region experienced relatively low impact, compared to other locations, there is no doubt that everyone around the world has experienced some kind of change in their own lives.

At the time of this report, the COVID-19 immunisation program was well under way in Australia but outbreaks were still impacting travel and social activity. The economic effects were just being fully realised including by small businesses and not-for-profit and community organisations.

The social outcomes of increased welfare payments during the pandemic had been identified as contributing to increased procurement of illicit drugs in our region which had exacerbated related domestic pressures and

conditions. The anticipated fall out from 2021 reductions in payments for JobKeeper and JobSeeker loadings were being felt and an increase in social media reports of opportunistic crime had begun to rise.

The reduced availability of rental properties and rising rents and housing prices were starting to displace individuals and families, including those most disadvantaged with increasing homelessness rising to be one of the most identified priority issues across both the human services sector and community.

Agnes Water – 2021 Boom Town

The COVID-19 pandemic brought an interesting turn of events for the beautiful coastal location of Agnes Water and 1770, as the region’s appeal as a domestic tourism location and a sea-change option had grown in profile. International travel restrictions and the push to promote domestic products within Australia to support economic sustainability within the sector has resulted in a continual tourism season with no respite. While at face-value, this seems economically advantageous, residents are reporting burn-out of local employees, some of whom are filling the places of the seasonal workforce of international backpackers unavailable due to COVID-19.

The over performing tourism market is leading landlords to move rental properties to short-term accommodation to optimise their investments with the growing tourism accommodation demands.

Housing pressures are being further felt because of home buyers relocating from more densely populated cities in southern states, attracted by the liveability of the region, and relative safety and freedom in relation to COVID-19. The region has experienced minimal impacts from lock-down periods and limited exposure to cases.

The opportunity to live in such an idyllic location, while maintaining a chosen lifestyle has been made more viable with increased remote working agreements and virtual workspaces as a necessity throughout pandemic lock-downs and the resulting technological advancements that have been embraced and are increasingly normalising working remotely.

This wave of new property purchase is seeing properties being bought sight-unseen.



Ready to Go

In 2019 a small group of passionate locals, fueled by others in their networks and social circles, committed to working with community and government partners to assess the SPSP opportunity for the Gladstone Region community and establish the foundations required to make the opportunity a reality.

The **SPSP Gladstone Working Group** paved the way for a partnership with Governments to secure the Gladstone Region as an SPSP Demonstration Community. Their dedicated work over a 15-month period prepared the ground for a **Leadership Group** to be recruited and inducted in early 2021 to take on the charge of the SPSP work for our region and finalise partnership arrangements with Government Partners. With a remit to enable community voice to inform key decisions for the region, one of their first responsibilities was to recruit a Backbone Team to resource the community.

With the knowledge of all that had come before, key stakeholders and community members agreed that now was the right time to draw together the strings to leverage the collective strength across the region in the shared aspiration of doing even better in improving community wellbeing.

Trusting that the collective impact model of the SPSP initiative and a locally resourced Backbone Team would provide the point of difference required to maintain the momentum and pick up from where other whole-of-community collectives had tailed off, it was agreed that the Gladstone Region Community would embrace the opportunity.





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