

Paroo Strategic Tourism Plan 2025-2030

DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

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Executive Summary

The value of tourism is important to the Paroo Shire, currently over \$11 million per annum.

The Paroo Shire Strategic Tourism Plan outlines a comprehensive vision and actionable roadmap to position the region as a distinctive outback destination, leveraging its unique cultural, historical, and natural assets.

The plan aims to;

- focus on building long term tourism offerings that are available all season long to encourage longer stays,
- extend the existing tourism season,
- develop our existing festivals into high quality sustainable events,
- increase visitor numbers and generate sustainable economic growth for local communities including Cunnamulla, Eulo, Wyandra, and Yowah.

Vision

To establish Paroo Shire as a premier outback tourism destination, recognized for its artesian water experiences, Indigenous tourism, rich cultural heritage, and unique natural attractions. By 2030, the Shire will be recognized for delivering high-quality, culturally immersive, and environmentally sustainable tourism experiences that attract visitors for extended seasons.

Strategic Objectives

- 1. Enhance the Visitor Experience**
 - Develop and promote distinctive experiences around artesian waters, First Nations culture, and outback adventures.
 - Improve visitor amenities, signage, and infrastructure to support a seamless and enjoyable journey.
- 2. Support Cultural and Sustainable Tourism Development**
 - Encourage sustainable tourism practices that protect the natural environment and celebrate indigenous culture.
 - Foster collaborations with local businesses, indigenous groups, and private operators to create a diverse range of tourism products.
- 3. Increase Regional Marketing and Brand Visibility**
 - Strengthen Paroo Shire's brand identity as an authentic outback destination, focusing on digital marketing, storytelling, and partnerships.
 - Promote key events such as the Outback Riverlights Festival and regional festivals to drive visitation.
 - Develop targeted campaigns to strengthen existing markets such as wellness travellers, 'not grey nomads', and cultural tourists.
- 4. Develop Year-Round Tourism**
 - Diversify tourism offerings to minimize the impact of seasonality.

- Promote year-round experiences including wellness retreats, river cruises, and cultural tours.
 - Enhance the quality of existing events, while developing additional attractions that encourage year-round visitation and longer stays.
5. **Boost Economic Impact and Community Engagement**
- Enhance event offerings and support privately run events that align with the Shire’s tourism vision, ensuring a balance between growth and community capacity.
6. **Build Capacity and Improve Stakeholder Collaboration**
- Strengthen partnerships with regional tourism bodies, Indigenous leaders, and local entrepreneurs to build a robust tourism ecosystem.
 - Provide training and capacity-building programs for local businesses and operators to elevate service standards.

Key Tourism Pillars

1. **Artesian and Wellness Tourism:** Position Paroo Shire and its hot springs as a wellness destination, offering visitors relaxation and therapeutic experiences.
2. **Cultural and Indigenous Tourism:** Highlight Paroo’s rich Indigenous heritage and cultural stories, working with First Nations communities to deliver authentic tours, art, and storytelling experiences.
3. **Events and Festivals:** Develop quality signature events like the Outback Riverlights Festival and support niche events to attract diverse visitor segments.
4. **Outback Nature and Adventure:** Promote natural attractions like the Warrego River, Yowah’s opal fossicking, Paroo River, and stargazing experiences.

Implementation and Monitoring

The strategic plan outlines a phased approach, with short-term, medium-term, and long-term actions. The tourism team will drive progress, track performance against key metrics, and adapt strategies in response to emerging opportunities and challenges.

Conclusion

The Paroo Shire Tourism Strategic Plan aims to unlock the region’s potential as a thriving tourism destination by harnessing its unique outback charm, artesian wonders, and vibrant cultural heritage. Through strategic investment, collaborative partnerships, and community engagement, Paroo Shire will achieve sustainable tourism growth that enriches both visitors and residents alike.

5-Year Strategic Tourism Plan for Paroo Shire (2025–2030)

Vision

To establish Paroo Shire as a premier outback tourism destination, recognized for its artesian water experiences, Indigenous tourism, rich cultural heritage, and unique natural attractions, while fostering sustainable growth, enhancing the visitor experience, and encouraging longer stays.

Strategic Goals

Monitor & Enhance Return on Investment

- Ensure our financial and data baseline is accurate.
- Have procedures in place to monitor accurate tourism data.
- Record visitation, demographics, spend for shire and events.
- Calculate our Shire's return on tourism investment and ensure we realise value for money.
- Be prepared to adapt and grow as opportunities arise and outside influences change.
- Collect and analyse data on Free Camp / Low-cost parking usage and benefits / cost to towns.
- Prepare for, plan and seek external funding for new and improved experiences.

Enhance Visitor Experience & Services

- Improve infrastructure and services to meet modern visitor expectations.
- Develop additional unique attractions such as a riverboat cruise, a permanent light installation, , Opal Experiences and cultural and food tourism to add additional points of interest. Explore the concept of a Eulo Heritage Centre.
- Expand upon existing experiences in surrounding towns such as Yowah's Opal tourism.
- Work to ensure the shire, as a whole, benefits from additional attractions.
- Upgrade the Cunnamulla Museum and its digital archives, preserving and showcasing local history.

Promote Cultural, Sustainable & Eco-Friendly Tourism

- Encourage eco-tourism practices and environmental conservation.
- Leverage Paroo's artesian waters for health and wellness tourism.
- Assist in development of First Nations cultural tours and attractions.
- Showcase Paroo's unique ecosystems through guided eco-tours, birdwatching, river cruises, and Indigenous-led cultural experiences.
- Emphasise our National Parks and The Outback Experience.

Increase Shire Awareness and Brand Identity

- Review the existing brand of “Live Like a Local”,
- Build upon Paroo as a hot springs destination further incorporating artesian wellness into its tourism brand.
- Continue to promote and build upon the interest in the “Cunnamulla Fella”
- Promote new attractions such as a riverboat cruise, upgraded museum, and cultural tours to attract visitors for longer stays.
- Leverage digital marketing strategies, including social media, influencer partnerships, and user-generated content.
- Promote the successes of the Visitor Information Centre and new experiences within the shire by means of regional and nationally recognised awards.
- Work with operators to increase their profile, and work towards consistent branding and messaging.
- Ensure our Outback Experience branding is strong.

Extend the tourism season for as long as possible

- Diversify tourism experiences to minimize the impact of seasonality.
- Promote year-round experiences including wellness retreats, river cruises, and cultural tours.
- Enhance the quality of existing events, while developing additional attractions that encourage year-round visitation and longer stays.

Foster Community Involvement & Partnerships

- Engage local businesses, Indigenous groups, and residents in tourism development.
- Promote local products, crafts to enhance the tourism economy.

- Provide support to local operators running events designed to encourage visitors into region.

Collaborate with the entire Southwest and Outback Regions

- Promote the Natural Sciences Loop, Southwest QLD and regional events in surrounding shires to encourage visitation to our region.
- Use joint marketing to promote the regions for a lower cost to our Shire.
- Located on a crossroads of two main highways mean a large percentage of visitors to other regions must pass through Paroo. Their success equals our success.
- Collaborate to enhance and develop the Adventure, Matilda Way and Border Region drive routes.
- Increase signage to region and drive routes outside of our shire, within the SW region.
- Partner with regional tourism boards, tour operators, and other regional museums to build a well-rounded visitor experience.

Build upon existing events to develop high quality sustainable events

- Develop Outback River Lights to be a quality Arts, Lights, Culture and Food Festival to highlight the start of the “Tourism Season”
- Expand upon the Cunnamulla Fella Roundup to create a quality Outback Event celebrating the Outback Lifestyle.
- Concentrate our event efforts into making these events better, but not necessarily bigger until Cunnamulla has the accommodation and infrastructure to handle increased visitation.
- Develop smaller events during the season, not to necessarily increase visitation, but to increase the quality of the shire’s experiences and encourage existing visitors to stay longer.

Plan for future infrastructure development

- Collaborate to develop masterplans for key tourism areas of town
- Plan, and budget for upgrades to tourism infrastructure, signage, facilities
- Work with Economic Development to support and enhance existing tourism businesses.
- Investigate the feasibility of a Cunnamulla Waterpark or similar significant tourism and community development

Key Initiatives & Actions

Artesian Water Experiences & Hot Springs Development

- **Further Develop Artesian Wellness Tourism:**
 - Continue to establish Paroo Shire as a hot springs and artesian destination focusing on the natural benefits of its artesian waters for relaxation and wellness.
 - Promote artesian baths and spa facilities, thermal pools, spa treatments, and wellness experiences integrated with outback nature.
 - Work with existing and new operators to launch other wellness retreats and packages that compliment artesian bathing and wellness, (but don't have to include artesian water) such as spa treatments, meditation, yoga and Indigenous wellness traditions.
- **Sustainability Focus:**
 - Ensure environmentally sustainable practices in all artesian bath developments, utilizing renewable energy and promoting responsible water management.
- **Cultural Integration:**
 - Incorporate Indigenous stories and healing practices related to water into the artesian experiences, providing unique cultural narratives for visitors.

First Nations Cultural Tourism

- **Collaboration with Indigenous Groups:**
 - Support local Indigenous communities and organisations to create cultural experiences, emphasizing storytelling, bush tucker tours, and traditional art.
 - Collaborate and create an indigenous short movie to tell an appropriate story suitable as a tourism opportunity to be displayed in either the “Cunnamulla All Aboard, VIC or a brand-new light and sound show in Cunnamulla or the town relevant to the particular language group (eg. Kunja in Cunnamulla, Budjiti in Eulo, and so on).
- **First Nations Tour Development:**
 - Provide support to establish guided Indigenous tours that focus on local history, land connection, and spiritual traditions, including the cultural significance of the rivers, creeks and artesian waters.
 - If these tours are based in one of the Shire’s towns, other than Cunnamulla, being Eulo, Wyandra or Yowah, it will also boost the profile and economic benefits to that town.
 - Assist in the creation of an Indigenous stargazing tour, taking advantage of our outback night skies and including stories of the relevance to first nations interpretations.
- **Employment & Cultural Preservation:**
 - Create an Indigenous Trainee position in the Tourism team with the role to be based at the Visitor Information Centre
 - Ensure Indigenous artifacts and histories are appropriately and accurately displayed within the Museum.

Sustainability & Environmental Stewardship & Awareness

- **Sustainable Tourism:** Promote sustainable tourism by supporting the integration of environmentally responsible practices into the artesian baths, riverboat cruises, and light installations.
- **Eco-Tourism:** Develop nature-based tourism packages around Paroo's natural assets, including birdwatching, stargazing, and wildlife tours, leveraging nearby national parks and the Warrego and Paroo Rivers.
- **Eco-Friendly Practices:** Encourage accommodation providers, tour operators, and restaurants to adopt sustainable practices, such as reducing plastic use, conserving water, and using renewable energy sources.
- **Conservation Education:** Create educational campaigns and visitor programs focused on local conservation efforts, such as wildlife protection, sustainable land use, and responsible tourism practices. Work with the local agricultural sector to create and promote education pieces on Organic certified grazing and cropping, also Regenerative Agriculture practices.
- **Heritage Preservation:** Ensure that heritage sites and natural landmarks are protected while providing access for visitors, incorporating best practices in heritage conservation.
- **Outback Acknowledgement:** Celebrate that we are the Outback and promote all it has to offer, including remoteness, and the natural and genuine way of life.
- **Solar Eclipse and Night Skies:** Increase awareness and recognition for opportunities to take part in total Solar Eclipses in 2028 and 2030 through our Shire and the ongoing opportunities for star gazing and "Night Sky Parks".

Food and Produce Tourism

- **Food in Existing Events:** Include food and drink displays, workshops, demonstrations and tastings in existing events.
- **New Food Events:** Create a new event for the shire highlighting local and regional foods, including bushtucker, honey, dates, beef, lamb, goat, camel, fish, chutneys and other produce.
- **Railway Dining Car:** Investigate the feasibility for a period dining experience in a railcar based at the old Railway Station to be operated by an existing or new food business in town.
- **Farm and Cellar Door:** Build upon the existing locally made produce and encourage new businesses to create locally made and sourced food and drinks.

- **Food Trail:** Create a food trail in region or throughout the SW region highlighting local produce.

Upgrading Museums & Digital Archives

- **Museum Upgrade:**
 - Expand and modernize the Cunnamulla Museum with interactive exhibits on local history, Indigenous Heritage, and the Great Artesian Basin.
 - Enhance physical infrastructure, improving lighting, and informational displays to create a more immersive visitor experience.
 - Collaborate with Eromanga Natural History Museum to have on loan and display a new Eulo Megafauna Exhibit within the Cunnamulla Museum and cross promote experiences.
- **Eulo Heritage Centre:**
 - Work with Budjiti Aboriginal Corporation and the local Eulo community to explore the concept and feasibility of a Centre exploring First Nations, Megafauna, and other local topics of importance.
 - Exploring the concept of local management and stewardship.
- **Wyandra Powerhouse Museum:**
 - Work with Wyandra Progress Assoc to investigate the feasibility of preserving and displaying the exhibits from the previous Wyandra Powerhouse Museum.
 - Exploring the concept of local management and stewardship.
- **Digital Archives & Virtual Exhibitions:**
 - Develop a digital archive to preserve historical materials, such as photographs, oral histories, and documents from local families and Indigenous communities.
 - Ensure this digital archive is accessible to the public.
 - Create virtual museum exhibits accessible online, offering a preview to potential visitors and increasing engagement with distant audiences.
 - Develop existing VR headsets to provide additional museum experiences.
- **Cultural Integration:**
 - Feature Indigenous cultural contributions, historical events, and ongoing traditions, working closely with local communities to ensure accurate representation.

- **Educational Programs:**
 - Develop programs targeting school groups, history enthusiasts, and travellers interested in Paroo's rich history and culture.
- **Art Gallery:**
 - Expand the variety of artists and mediums on display to include other regional and high-quality art projects.
 - Have special exhibits each year, focussing on a historical or culturally significant subject.
 - Increase the length of each exhibit to 6 weeks and reduce the annual quantity of exhibitions to focus on quality vs quantity.
 - Explore the feasibility of having a well profiled artist conduct an Exhibition coupled with them delivering learning opportunities (eg. workshops, etc).

Visitor Information Centre - Physical and Online presence

- **Visitor Information Centre Shop and Tourism Displays:** Develop retail offerings to include key pillars, of Branded, Local, Indigenous and Artesian retail offerings, concentrating on quality, high margin products.
- **Online Shop:** Create online store to increase retail sales.

Yowah & Opal Experiences

- **Opal Workshops:** Work with YOMCSI to hold and promote regular opal/ jewellery workshops during the season to increase gemstone interest and sales in opals encouraging longer stays.
- **Opal Cutting/Polishing Demonstrations:** Additionally work with YOMCSI to hold and promote daily/regular opal cutting/polishing demonstrations encouraging visitors to fossick, purchase and pay for jewellery services.
- **Yowah Opal Festival:** Assist in the promotion, advice and support for running a successful annual festival.
- **Yowah Tailgate Community Markets:** Promote and encourage attendance and visitation to Saturday seasonal markets.

Community Engagement & Partnerships

- **Networking Nights:** Facilitate bi-monthly networking nights at varying locations across the shire, to exchange information and create networks.
- **Visitor Information in all Shire Towns:** Develop a tourism/visitor service in all towns within the shire by utilising existing external opportunities. Provide, material, knowledge and financial support.
- **Tourism Education:** Work with and support local operators one on one to educate on digital marketing, social media and provide interested businesses with training opportunities provided by other organisations.
- **Award Recognition:** Work with and support local operators to be aware of, enter and win suitable awards to increase the profile of each business and the shire as a whole.
- **Trade Ready Programs:** Work with and support local operators one on one to increase trade ready businesses in the shire to ensure increased profiles and perceived quality of our tourism sector.
- **Collaboration with Indigenous Communities:** Prioritize partnerships with Indigenous groups to promote cultural tourism and respect for the area's Aboriginal heritage.
- **Regional Tourism Networks:** Continue to build strategic alliances with tourism boards/committees in neighbouring shires, sharing resources and co-marketing regional attractions.
- **Southwest Region Drive:** Work with and lead SWQROC, Natural Science Loop, Matilda Way and Adventure Way groups to encourage drive markets through to Paroo Shire.
- **External Events:**
 - Develop a strategy for attracting externally run and managed events to the Paroo Shire.
 - Work with existing external events to promote, assist, advise and support to ensure success and benefits to the shire.

Riverboat Cruise Activation

- **Warrego River Cruise:**
 - Work to ensure the successful introduction of a riverboat cruise along the Warrego River, offering scenic tours with commentary on local wildlife, Indigenous significance, and historical facts.
 - Assist in the development of sunset cruises and night cruises tied to the permanent light installation, creating a captivating experience for visitors and encouraging overnight stays.
 - Ensure integration of mindfulness and wellness experiences on the water, promoting relaxation and connection with nature.
- **Environmental Education:**
 - Assist to incorporate educational content about river ecosystems, artesian water management, and conservation efforts into the cruises, providing a deeper understanding of the natural landscape.
- **Accommodation Packages:**
 - Encourage partnerships with local accommodations to offer riverboat cruise packages that include extended stays, encouraging visitors to spend multiple nights in the shire.

Enhance Existing Events

- **Outback River Lights Festival**

- Key elements of the festival to be River, Lights, Art, Food, Indigenous and Music
- Enhance the quality of the festival by adding premium experiences, such as more cultural workshops, and higher-quality performances to allow the event to develop and grow in line with the growth of accommodation and facilities in the region.
- Include elements of food and drink as main features of the festival. Consider and incorporate long table dinner, degustation or progressive meals throughout hotels in town.
- Investigate activations across the shire including the towns of Eulo, Wyandra and Yowah for additional events within the festival.
- Integrate Indigenous elements such as dance, food, culinary and art exhibitions.
- Investigate and maintain a database of First Nations artists and entertainers from out of region to be part of festival and supplement local suppliers. Encourage these First Nations artists to explore opportunities to mentor local artists.

- **Cunnamulla Fella Roundup:**

- Improve the quality of rodeo events by encouraging more professional entrants, an extended rodeo program and related events throughout the day or weekend.
- Work to ensure the event is recognised as one of the premier rodeos within our region.

- **Third Party Events:**

- Work with existing external events operators to promote, assist, advise and support to ensure success and benefits to the shire.
- Support other external events operators to create, develop and hold new events within the shire.

- **Smaller in-season events**

- Create, manage or assist and promote smaller quality events during the existing season to increase the quality and desirability of our shire to encourage extended stays and repeat visitation.

- Work in with the Western Touring Circuit schedule to provide opportunities to enhance tourists' time in the shire.

Grants and Exterior Funding

- **Tourism Feasibility Studies:** Investigate and highlight 6 tourism projects of varying sizes and backgrounds at any one time. Create draft project summaries with costings, concept design and community support to enable quick and easy application to future grant funding opportunities as they become available.
- **Grant Applications:** Monitor and apply for all grants as available using feasibility studies above

NB: More than 6 individual projects to commence planning are listed below

Permanent Light Installation

- **Concept and Location:**
 - Develop a permanent light installation that adds a stunning visual attraction to the town, serving as a focal point during night-time activities.
 - The installation could highlight Indigenous art, stories and outback landscapes, symbolizing Paroo's connection to the land and culture.
 - An additional nighttime activation will encourage longer stays and reduce the occurrences of single day visits.
 - The lighting of the main street, trees, Darby Land Bridge, Centenary Park should all be considered.
 - Featuring the Cunnamulla Fella into future light installations, should also be considered.
- **Permanent Outdoor Movie Projection**
 - A short free light projection (movie) run automatically each evening would encourage overnight stays, complement existing movie /storytelling (Cunnamulla All Aboard, Artesian Basin Movie at the VIC) and add to the cultural and historical appeal of the town.
- **Visitor Engagement:**
 - Integrate the light installation with the riverboat cruise and other night-time events, enhancing the overall visitor experience.
- **Sustainability:**

- Ensure the light installation is eco-friendly, powered by renewable energy such as solar, aligning with Paroo’s commitment to sustainability.
- **Incorporation into other objectives**
 - The installation and opening of such displays will align with the Outback Riverlights Festival

Railway Experience Upgrades

- **Cunnamulla to Wyandra Rail Journey**
 - Create a daily return Rail Journey from Cunnamulla to Wyandra, including high tea at Wyandra.
- **Rail Trail**
 - If using the line for an active journey isn’t possible then utilising the route as a “Rail Trail” bicycle or walking trail.
- **Dining Car Experience**
 - Investigate the creation of a period style dining car experience offering fine dining in period surroundings located at Cunnamulla Railway Station. Work with existing shire food operators in regard to feasibility.
- **Cunnamulla All Aboard**
 - Update original show and create second sound and light show to be shown at alternative time slots to appeal to returning travellers and further increase lengths of stay.
- **Support for Council’s Advocacy with Qld Rail**
 - Tourism team provide information and other support to CEO and Mayor to support their advocacy efforts in re-classifying key parts of the Railway precinct to “inactive” to facilitate simpler processes for non-rail tourism activity.

Cunnamulla Waterpark

- **Waterpark Concept, Design and Construct:** Expand upon the artesian springs concept to include a water park for both our local community and to create the appeal as Paroo being an **Oasis in the Outback**. A destination for water and wellness.
- Consider this (Oasis in the Outback) to be our Shire Tag line in 2030 and beyond, dependent on future global weather patterns and the local prospect of drought.

Infrastructure Development

- **Upgrade Facilities:** Budget to invest in improving visitor facilities such as Low-Cost Parking, signage for key attractions like the Warrego River Cruises, Cunnamulla Fella Centre, Artesian Time Tunnel, Cunnamulla All Aboard and the Cunnamulla Hot Springs.
- **Accommodation Supply:** Work with Economic Development and existing accommodation providers to ensure provision of a limited number of higher quality 4-star accommodation options for High Yield Travellers (defined as out of region travellers with above average spend).
- **Business Collaboration:** Work with Economic Development and existing business to enhance business offerings, including;
 - Laundromat
 - Car Hire
 - Powered Caravan sites 365 days a year
 - Quality Spa Treatments to compliment the hot springs experiences.
 - A variety of dining options to appeal to different markets
- **Town Signage & Entrance:** Work with businesses to upgrade and improve existing signage at town entries.
- **Signage Audit** – Including realignment of signage, removal of “No Cycle” signs in Cunnamulla Centre and new signage for River Walk, Cunnamulla All Aboard and future tourism operations.
- **Town Centre:** Purchase and install new street flags, to enhance the shire and highlight events through the year. Create a plan for exchange and replacement to tie in with key events.
- **Robbers Tree:** Upgrade signage and install sculpture, we understand this is already included within the current infrastructure budgets.
- **Shire Hall / Hot Springs Land Use Masterplan:** The land to the rear of the Shire Hall and Front of CHS has great community potential. Recent turfing and infrastructure work to fix drainage issues have benefitted the area greatly, but a carefully considered masterplan could put the area to greater use.

Marketing & Promotion

- **Review the existing branding of the Paroo Region.**
 - Consider updating “Live Like a Local” branding.
 - If new branding is decided, update branding on assets as they come up for renewal in; websites, brochures, retail stock and other collateral.
- **Target Key Markets:**
 - Focus on attracting health and wellness travellers, the ‘not grey nomads’ nature lovers, history enthusiasts, and those seeking immersive cultural experiences.
 - Highlight Paroo Shire’s artesian baths, First Nations tours, museum upgrades, riverboat cruises, and light installation as key attractions.
 - Attend a greater number of Caravan and Camping shows, as part of the SW Tourism Group to promote the shire to those that “bring their own accommodation”.
- **Digital Campaigns:**
 - Strengthen online presence by showcasing the shire’s natural beauty, wellness opportunities, and rich cultural heritage.
 - Engage influencers in wellness, history, and eco-tourism to promote Paroo as a must-visit destination.
- **Digital Assets:** Employ creator to re-shoot and update existing digital tourism video and still imagery for use in tourism campaigns and marketing.
- **Drive Itineraries;** Review, update and create new drive itineraries to feature the new tourism experiences.
- **Enter, Win and Promote Tourism Awards:** including
 - Qld Tourism Awards
 - Tiny Towns Award
 - Best of QLD Award
 - Trip Advisor Award
 - Visitor Information Centre Award
 - Eco Tourism Awards

Conclusion

This comprehensive 5-year strategic plan positions Paroo as an integrated wellness and cultural destination. By promoting its artesian baths, upgrading the museum and digital archives, activating a riverboat cruise, and developing additional experiences, enhancing existing events, Paroo will attract a broader audience and encourage longer visitor stays while maintaining its unique charm and sustainability.

DRAFT