

# Brisbane Valley Rail Trail

*Environmental Scan*



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# Contents

Executive summary .....	2
<b>01. Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Grow Your Own Regional Workforce program .....	5
1.2 Why the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail .....	6
1.3 Project scope and objectives .....	8
1.4 Governance and methodology .....	12
<b>02. Overview of the BVRT region .....</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1 Demographic profile .....	15
2.2 Workforce and labour market profile .....	24
2.3 BVRT business profile .....	27
2.4 Job vacancies .....	28
2.5 Education attainment profile .....	30
2.6 Vocational education and training activity .....	32
2.7 VET and employment pathways .....	34
2.8 BVRT regional development .....	38
2.9 Employment projections and jobs growth .....	39
<b>03. Industry sector overview for the BVRT region .....</b>	<b>40</b>
3.1 Industry sectors and regional operations .....	41
3.2 Workforce profile .....	46
3.3 Training profile for tourism .....	50
3.4 Training pathways .....	52
3.5 Vocational training and tertiary education infrastructure .....	55
3.6 Employment projections and job growth .....	56
3.7 Labour shortages and recruitment challenges .....	58
3.8 Skills and training requirements .....	62
3.9 Future opportunities .....	66
<b>04. Conclusions .....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>05. Index .....</b>	<b>72</b>
5.1 List of Figures .....	73
5.2 List of Tables .....	73

# Executive summary

The Brisbane Valley Rail Trail (BVRT) region has a unique opportunity to harness tourism as a catalyst for regional development, community cohesion and workforce resilience. Stretching across Ipswich, Somerset, South Burnett and Toowoomba, the BVRT spans over 11,000 square kilometres and connects diverse towns that are experiencing rapid population growth and economic transition. As the region shifts away from traditional industries such as agriculture and manufacturing, demand is rising for skilled workers in tourism, hospitality, health and service-based sectors.

Strategic planning at both departmental and whole-of-government levels is helping to shape the region's future. The Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads' *Brisbane Valley Rail Trail Strategic Plan* identifies the BVRT as a major tourism asset and outlines priorities for infrastructure improvements, connectivity, safety and visitor experience.<sup>1</sup> Complementing this, the Queensland Government's *Destination 2045* strategy positions tourism as a long-term economic driver and supports regional areas like the BVRT corridor to develop experience-rich, sustainable tourism offerings that are well-integrated with local communities and workforces.<sup>2</sup>

The Grow Your Own (GYO) Regional Workforce initiative offers a place-based response to these challenges. This environmental scan forms Stage 2 of a four-phase planning process led by Queensland Country Tourism in partnership with Jobs Queensland. It provides the evidence base for a co-designed regional workforce plan focused on building local capability, enhancing workforce participation and supporting inclusive economic growth.

## Regional workforce pressures

- ▶ Labour shortages are acute in key tourism and hospitality roles, including chefs, cooks, kitchenhands, tour guides.
- ▶ Workforce participation is constrained by an ageing population (median age 40.6), with some portions of the focus region well above the state average.
- ▶ Seasonal employment, high turnover, casualisation and underinvestment in relevant training exacerbate recruitment and retention challenges.
- ▶ Youth unemployment remains elevated (~9 per cent), signalling weak school-to-work transitions and untapped early-career potential.
- ▶ Population growth along the BVRT corridor is likely to be uneven, with strong growth in the south and stagnation in the north, creating varied pressures on services and infrastructure.

1 Department of Transport and Main Roads. (2021). *Brisbane Valley Rail Trail Strategic Plan*. Brisbane: Queensland Government. [https://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/\\_/media/bvrt/bvrt-strategic-plan.pdf?rev=8722cbe30ee34f0fb532c31478646f02&sc\\_lang=en&extension=pdf&size=22552762&hash=46C9B76B53C5D30D656EB9AE0C3CA87E](https://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/_/media/bvrt/bvrt-strategic-plan.pdf?rev=8722cbe30ee34f0fb532c31478646f02&sc_lang=en&extension=pdf&size=22552762&hash=46C9B76B53C5D30D656EB9AE0C3CA87E)

2 Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation. (2025). *Destination 2045*. Brisbane: Queensland Government. <https://d1w2s48w6qezjg.cloudfront.net/media/Destination%202045%20-%20Delivering%20Queenslands%20Tourism%20Future.pdf>

## Training and skills alignment

- ▶ Educational attainment is low, with only 52.1 per cent of residents having completed Year 11 or 12 (compared to 63.6 per cent statewide) and just 8.7 per cent holding a bachelor's degree or higher.
- ▶ Vocational education and training (VET) enrolments (~18,000 annually) are steady, but completion rates remain low, particularly in tourism and community services (averaging 30–34 per cent).
- ▶ While interest in apprenticeships, particularly in hospitality, is strong, clearer pathways and more structured industry engagement are needed. Additionally, greater awareness and action are required to address the limited skill requirements of many low-entry-level roles.
- ▶ Micro-credentials and workplace-integrated learning are emerging as critical tools for flexible, responsive upskilling.

## Local business and labour market dynamics

- a. The region's economy is dominated by microbusinesses: over 90 per cent are sole traders or firms with fewer than 20 employees and more than 60 per cent report turnover under \$200,000 per year.
- b. These businesses represent both entrepreneurial energy and economic vulnerability, especially within the tourism ecosystem.
- c. 37.8 per cent of working-age residents are not currently in the labour force, highlighting the need to engage underutilised talent, including mature-aged workers, carers and First Nations people.
- d. Digital capability, business resilience and human resources planning remain capability gaps for many local employers.

## Opportunities for workforce development to explore further during consultation

- ▶ Embed workforce planning into tourism and regional infrastructure initiatives.
- ▶ Activate untapped labour pools through targeted outreach, inclusive recruitment and flexible work options.
- ▶ Strengthen youth engagement through apprenticeships, structured industry placements and school-based career development.
- ▶ Enhance training alignment through short-form credentials, employer partnerships and localised program delivery.
- ▶ Expand First Nations employment and enterprise opportunities, fostering cultural inclusion and regional leadership.
- ▶ Improve workplace culture and career development support to address staff retention and wellbeing.

By addressing these priorities through a tailored, place-based workforce plan, the BVRT region can sustainably manage growth, support a resilient tourism economy and enhance the capacity of local communities to shape their own workforce futures.



01

# Introduction



## 1.1 Grow Your Own Regional Workforce program

The Queensland Government collaborates with industry, business, community and government stakeholders to build a strong, skilled workforce that supports the state's economic prosperity. Given the distinct industry profiles and workforce challenges across Queensland's regions, applying a regional perspective to workforce planning and capability development is essential to address local needs and opportunities.

Jobs Queensland (JQ) is working alongside regional and industry partners to support locally driven workforce planning through its GYO Regional Workforce program. GYO is facilitating the development and implementation of co-designed, place-based workforce strategies. These projects focus on locally driven solutions, led by regional stakeholders.

Research suggests that connection to family and community is important to tourism workers.<sup>3</sup> A strong connection to their region often motivates individuals to continue living and working locally. When workers, especially those with families, are established with local services, such as having children enrolled in local schools and partners with employment, they can be hesitant to relocate to another region.<sup>4</sup> This creates a strong foundation for the GYO Regional Workforce program model, which encourages regions to enhance the skills and abilities of their local population to meet the present and future demands of local industries.

3 Robinson, R.N., Kralj, A., Solnet, D.J., Goh, E., and Callan, V. (2014). *Thinking: Towards a better understanding of frontline hotel worker retention*. United States: International Journal of Hospitality Management. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0278431913001138?via%3Dihub>

4 Jobs Queensland. (2023). *Supporting individuals in the transition to future work framework*. Ipswich: Queensland Government. [https://jobsqueensland.qld.gov.au/\\_resources/files/pdf/supporting-individual-transition.pdf](https://jobsqueensland.qld.gov.au/_resources/files/pdf/supporting-individual-transition.pdf)

## 1.2 Why the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail

The Brisbane Valley Rail Trail (BVRT) is a vital tourism and economic asset, stretching 161 kilometres through regional Queensland. Recognised as a strategic priority by the Queensland Government and multiple regional councils, the trail plays a significant role in driving visitation, local business growth and employment. However, its continued success is increasingly challenged by persistent workforce shortages and a widening skills gap, which threaten the sustainability of the trail's economic contribution. The region needs a dedicated workforce plan to address these critical workforce shortages and support the growth of the local tourism industry.

The Queensland Government's *Destination 2045* strategy provides a timely and relevant policy backdrop for this work.<sup>5</sup> As part of a 20-year vision to double visitor spending and position Queensland as a global tourism leader, the strategy prioritises the development of regional experiences like the BVRT. It places a strong emphasis on ecotourism, local storytelling, workforce capability and small business growth. The Queensland Government recognises that nature-based attractions such as the BVRT are critical to achieving the state's tourism and economic ambitions. Investment in trails, regional aviation and tourism infrastructure under *Destination 2045* reinforces the trail's role as both a recreational asset and a driver of long-term economic resilience.

Recent findings from a visitor report on the BVRT highlight the diversity of visitor demographics, including families, fitness enthusiasts, retirees, those interested in agritourism, guided experiences and

boutique producers.<sup>6</sup> This varied visitor mix generates strong demand for skilled workers across key sectors such as accommodation, food services, retail, trail maintenance and specialised tourism services. Yet the ability to attract and retain skilled staff remains a major constraint, exacerbated by seasonal patterns and competition from other sectors.

Data from the 2023 Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) *Workforce Report* further underscores the severity of these shortages, particularly in frontline staff, tour guides and digital marketing roles.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, high staff turnover and a growing need for employees with soft skills, digital marketing expertise and business acumen highlight the need for targeted workforce interventions. The BVRT *Visitor Research Report* reinforces that a stable, well-trained workforce is essential for enhancing visitor experiences, sustaining economic growth and strengthening the region's tourism industry – yet nearly all operators interviewed for that report expressed concern and frustration about the current supply of labour and skills in the region.

The alignment of the BVRT with Queensland's *Destination 2045* strategy presents a valuable opportunity to unlock the trail's full potential. Through a dedicated, place-based workforce strategy, the BVRT can serve as a leading example of how regional Queensland can deliver high-quality visitor experiences while fostering sustainable economic growth. Strengthening the local workforce will be essential to ensuring the trail continues to contribute meaningfully to the region's prosperity and supports the broader goals of a thriving, future-ready tourism industry.

5 Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation. (2025). *Destination 2045*. Brisbane: Queensland Government. <https://dlw2s48w6qezjg.cloudfront.net/media/Destination%202045%20-%20Delivering%20Queenslands%20Tourism%20Future.pdf>

6 The University of Queensland and The Service Innovation Alliance (SIA). (2024). *Brisbane Valley Rail Trail (BVRT) visitor research program report – phase 2*. Brisbane: The University of Queensland. <https://experiencesomerset.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/BVRT-Visitor-Research-Program-Phase-2-FINAL-REPORT.pdf>

7 Queensland Tourism Industry Council. (2023). *QTIC workforce priorities report*. Brisbane: Queensland Tourism Industry Council. <https://qticazure.blob.core.windows.net/crmblobcontainer/QTIC%20Workforce%20Priorities%20Report.pdf>



## 1.3 Project scope and objectives

Queensland Country Tourism (QCT) and Jobs Queensland have established a partnership to understand the current labour market challenges, the scale of the skills shortages and opportunities to address future workforce needs along the length of the BVRT.

This environmental scan provides a historical point-in-time reference to support future consultation activity and the development of a workforce development plan specific to the BVRT's future skills needs.

### **This workforce planning project will:**

- ▶ provide insights into the current labour market challenges experienced along the BVRT
- ▶ identify the scale of the labour and skills shortages
- ▶ identify opportunities to address current and future workforce needs to support the BVRT.

Through the development of a dedicated workforce plan that prioritises skills development, job placement support and industry collaboration with educational institutions, the region's ability to fill existing labour gaps, support long-term tourism resilience, economic stability and employment opportunities for the communities along the BVRT will be significantly strengthened.

### **Geographic scope**

The BVRT is a 161-kilometre scenic trail stretching from Wulkuraka in Ipswich to Yarraman in the Toowoomba region, following the former Brisbane Valley railway line. Originally built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to support timber, dairy and livestock industries, the rail corridor has since been transformed into a long-distance recreational trail that links a diverse set of communities across Southeast Queensland.

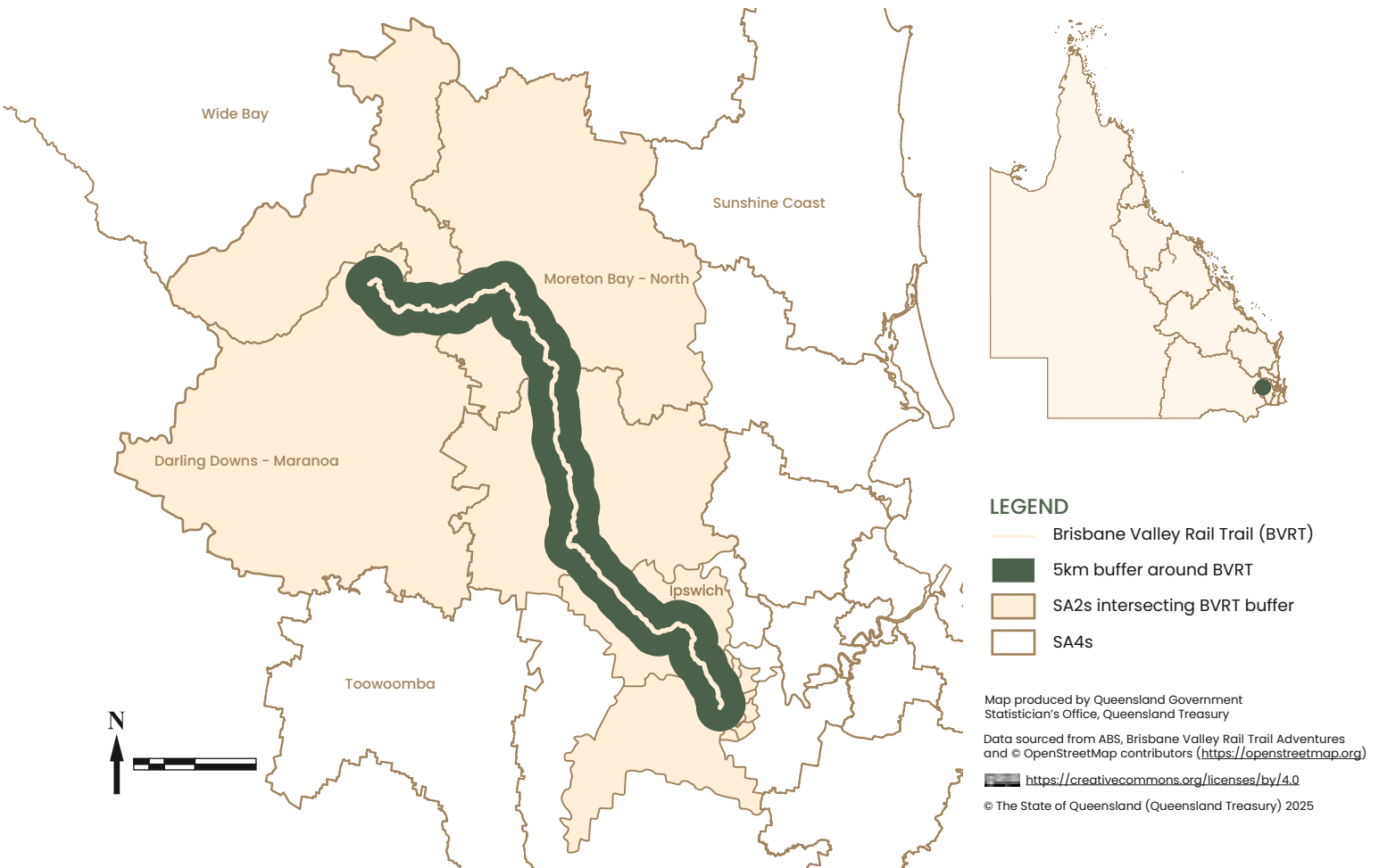
Extensive rehabilitation works have restored and reconnected sections of the trail in recent years, making it accessible for a variety of non-motorised uses including walking, trail running, cycling and horse riding. The route meanders through farmland, forests and rolling hills, offering sweeping views of the Brisbane Valley and passing through key trail towns such as Esk, Blackbutt and Linville. With a mix of sealed and gravel surfaces, the BVRT caters to a broad spectrum of outdoor users and has become a popular destination for both locals and visitors.

The BVRT has also become a significant driver of regional tourism. The trail attracts trail runners, cyclists, hikers, equestrians and ecotourists, who in turn stimulate demand for accommodation, food services, retail and guided experiences. Trail-linked enterprises such as bike hire and repair, guided tours, pop-up food businesses and short-stay accommodation, are growing contributors to the regional economy. Businesses like the Esk Caravan Park, which partners with other local providers, highlight the economic interdependence emerging along the trail.

Historically dependent on primary industries, the region is now transitioning to a more service-oriented economy, with tourism, hospitality and experience-based businesses gaining prominence. The trail's development has supported a revival of many small towns, offering both economic and social benefits. In addition to supporting traditional tourism, the BVRT plays an increasingly important role in promoting ecotourism, active tourism and outdoor recreation, showcasing the area's natural beauty, cultural heritage and biodiversity.

**Figure 1** The BVRT region

**BRISBANE VALLEY RAIL TRAIL AND QUEENSLAND STATISTICAL AREAS, 2021**



For the purposes of this environmental scan, the BVRT region is defined using the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS 2021) and includes 15 Statistical Area Level 2 (SA2) regions: Brassall, Churchill–Yamanto, Crows Nest–Rosalie, Esk, Ipswich–Central, Ipswich–East, Ipswich–North, Karana Downs, Kilcoy, Leichhardt–One Mile, Lowood, Nanango, North Ipswich–Tivoli, Raceview and Rosewood. These areas were selected based on their intersection with a five-kilometre buffer zone around the trail, capturing both directly adjacent communities and their surrounding catchments. Figure 1 presents a visual representation of this defined region.

Collectively, these SA2s span more than 11,000 square kilometres and cross four local government areas: Toowoomba, South Burnett, Somerset and Ipswich. While some sections of the trail, such as Yarraman and Wulkuraka, occupy relatively small areas within their respective LGAs, others like Esk, Lowood and Kilcoy serve as significant local hubs. Table 1 outlines the alignment of major trail towns with their corresponding statistical and administrative boundaries.

**Table 1** Regional and statistical area alignment across BVRT trail towns

Trail Town	Surrounding Area SA2s	SA4 Areas	Regional Council
<b>Yarraman</b>	Crows Nest – Rosalie	Darling Downs – Maranoa	Toowoomba
<b>Blackbutt</b>	Nanango	Wide Bay	South Burnett
<b>Benarkin</b>	Nanango	Moreton Bay North	South Burnett
<b>Linville</b>	Kilcoy	Moreton Bay North	Somerset
<b>Moore</b>	Kilcoy	Moreton Bay North	Somerset
<b>Harlin</b>	Kilcoy	Ipswich	Somerset
<b>Toogoolawah</b>	Esk	Ipswich	Somerset
<b>Esk</b>	Esk	Ipswich	Somerset
<b>Coominya</b>	Lowood	Ipswich	Somerset
<b>Lowood</b>	Lowood	Ipswich	Somerset
<b>Fernvale</b>	Lowood Karana Downs*	Ipswich	Somerset
<b>Wulkuraka</b>	Brassall Churchill – Yamanto Ipswich – Central Ipswich – East Leichhardt – One Mile North Ipswich – Tivoli Raceview Rosewood	Ipswich	Ipswich

\* Karana Downs SA2 is the shared boundary SA2 between Fernvale and Wulkuraka's SA2s  
Source: Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Edition 3.

Demographic data for the BVRT region are based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS), July 2021. In some instances, data have been compiled from alternative geographical boundaries using population distribution

at a specific point in time. As a result, historical estimates for these geographies may differ from those in previously produced profiles due to updates to the underlying population-weighted concordance. Caution is advised when making comparisons over time.



## Industry scope

For the purpose of this report, tourism and its associated impacts have been classified according to selected Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC) categories (see Table 2). Statewide figures for Queensland are also provided for reference.

**Table 2** Projected growth for key tourism industries in Queensland<sup>8</sup>

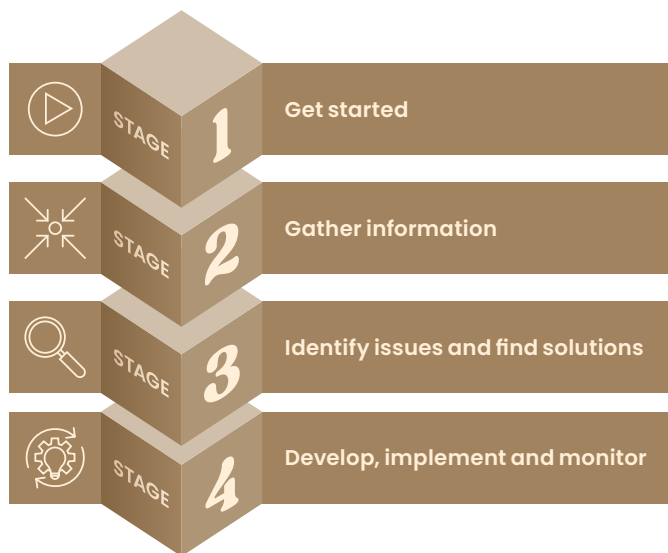
ANZSIC Division	Employment 2023-2024	Employment 2027-2028	Percentage change
<b>Retail trade</b>	280,647	289,839	3.3
<b>Accommodation and food services</b>	204,810	212,484	3.7
<b>Transport, postal and warehousing</b>	156,561	162,645	3.9
<b>Administrative and support services</b>	94,129	96,960	3
<b>Arts and recreation services</b>	45,594	47,679	4.6
<b>Rental hiring and real estate</b>	48,685	50,737	4.2

8 Jobs Queensland. (2025). *Anticipating future skills*. Ipswich: Queensland Government. <https://jobsqueensland.qld.gov.au/anticipating-future-skills>

## 1.4 Governance and methodology

Effective workforce development is an ongoing process that unfolds across four key stages. Stage 1 involved initiating the project, establishing partnerships and defining objectives. The current environmental scan represents Stage 2: Gathering information to build an evidence base for future planning. As shown in the figure below, the next steps will involve identifying specific workforce challenges and co-developing targeted solutions (Stage 3), followed by implementation and monitoring by relevant stakeholders (Stage 4). This structured approach ensures that local action is grounded in regional needs, informed by data and aligned with broader economic and community goals.

**Figure 2** Four stages of workforce planning



STAGE 1
Get started

To support the delivery of the project, QCT engaged university partners at The University of Queensland and Griffith University, bringing together a team of work and employment experts, with extensive experience working alongside BVRT stakeholders and a deep understanding of state, national, regional and global tourism workforce challenges. The project team comprises of QCT, the university partners and an Expert Advisory Group. This group includes representatives from:

- ▶ Queensland Country Tourism
- ▶ The University of Queensland
- ▶ Griffith University
- ▶ Jobs Queensland
- ▶ Visit South Burnett
- ▶ South Burnett Regional Council
- ▶ Somerset Regional Council
- ▶ Toowoomba Regional Council
- ▶ Queensland Department of Education
- ▶ Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation
- ▶ Queensland Tourism Industry Council
- ▶ Our Country Advisory Service.

The project team meets with the Advisory Group on a regular basis and engages with members for guidance, support and endorsement. Close collaboration with the Advisory Group and other key regional stakeholders will ensure that the project and its outcomes are shaped by strong local engagement and community input. This locally driven, collaborative approach is designed to embed regional insights, reflect community needs and align existing and emerging workforce initiatives across the BVRT corridor. Ultimately, the project seeks to deliver innovative, practical and place-based workforce solutions tailored to the region.



STAGE

2

## Gather information

To establish the current demographic and economic profile of the BVRT region and its surrounding areas, a comprehensive methodology was adopted, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative desktop research. Primary data sources included a custom regional report from the ABS developed in collaboration with Queensland Treasury, alongside government publications, regional statistics, industry reports and marketing studies. These sources provided in-depth insights into the regions demographic composition, workforce characteristics and key industries.

Analysis focused on population size, age distribution, income levels and migration trends to better understand the demographic landscape and the region's tourism and economic needs. The research also examined the employment profile of the region, highlighting major occupations and industries that underpin the local economy. Employment data was sourced from national labour surveys, ABS census information and regional economic reports to build a clear picture of the workforce structure.

Particular attention was given to primary industries such as health care and social assistance, education and training, agriculture, manufacturing and natural resources, assessing their roles within the broader economic ecosystem. This analysis enabled the identification of sectors with growth potential and opportunities for deeper integration of tourism into the local economy.

Given the BVRT region's overlap with multiple administrative and reporting zones, the availability of precise, region-specific data was occasionally limited. Where direct data was unavailable, the closest relevant geographical reporting level such as local government areas, statistical regions or tourism zones were used. These instances are noted in the footnotes, where applicable.



STAGE

3

## Identify issues and find solutions

This stage involves analysing the insights gathered through the environmental scan to pinpoint key workforce gaps, challenges and opportunities. Drawing on sector-level trends, employer feedback and regional context, a tailored workforce development plan will be co-designed with local stakeholders. The plan will outline priority roles, critical capabilities, training needs and strategies for recruitment, retention and upskilling. It will also consider the unique characteristics of the BVRT region, including seasonal fluctuations, limited training access and the prominence of microbusinesses. This planning stage will culminate in a roadmap for workforce action, tailored to the needs of industry, community and government partners.



STAGE

4

## Develop, implement and monitor

Stage 4 shifts from planning to action. It involves implementing the agreed strategies through coordinated delivery of training, employment support, school engagement and place-based initiatives. Relevant agencies, such as regional councils, registered training organisations (RTOs), chambers of commerce and industry bodies will play key roles in operationalising the workforce plan. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation will be essential to ensure responsiveness to emerging needs, with clear metrics to track outcomes such as training uptake, job placement and local business capability. While the current project concludes at Stage 3, successful implementation in Stage 4 will depend on strong local partnerships and sustained investment in workforce readiness.



02

# Overview of the BVRT region



## 2.1 Demographic profile

As outlined in Section 1.4, this analysis draws on multiple data sources to build a comprehensive population profile of the BVRT region. Due to the absence of a single dataset covering the entire trail, information was compiled from various geographical reporting levels. Additionally, many towns along the trail are classified as ‘tiny’ or ‘small’, which limits the availability of detailed population data.

### Current population and demographics

The BVRT region spans approximately 11,147.9 square kilometres and intersects four regional councils responsible for supporting and managing different sections:

1. **Somerset Regional Council:** Esk, Toogoolawah and Linville
2. **Ipswich City Council:** Wulkuraka (southern terminus)
3. **South Burnett Regional Council:** Blackbutt and Kingaroy (northern section)
4. **Toowoomba Regional Council:** Yarraman (northernmost point)

These councils collaborate in promoting tourism, supporting local economies and maintaining the trail’s infrastructure and amenity.

To provide a more granular view of the population centres along the trail, Table 3 presents demographic profiles of key BVRT towns. It includes town-level population estimates and a brief description of demographic characteristics based on the 2021 Census.

While some towns like Fernvale and Lowood have populations over 3000 and attract a mix of young families and retirees, others such as Linville and Benarkin are very small, with populations under 150. These smaller communities often rely on tourism and trail-related visitation to support local businesses. Many towns along the trail have older population profiles, especially in rural and agricultural areas, with a growing number of retirees contributing to local demand for services and amenities.

To understand the broader population footprint of the BVRT, Table 4 summarises the estimated resident population across three levels of geographic scope: the core trail towns, a five-kilometre buffer around the trail and the wider grouping of Statistical Area Level 2 (SA2) regions that intersect the trail corridor.

**Table 3** Town demographics, Brisbane Valley Rail Trail

Town	Population	Demographics
<b>Wulkuraka (within Ipswich)</b>	1325 (232,000)	Diverse urban centre; broad age range and cultural mix
<b>Fernvale</b>	3629	Predominantly families and retirees; median age 36 years
<b>Lowood</b>	4082	Mix of young families and older residents; median age 38 years
<b>Coominya</b>	1029	Rural community; older population
<b>Esk</b>	1641	Significant retiree population; popular with tourists
<b>Toogoolawah</b>	1200	Agricultural town; families and older adults
<b>Harlin</b>	211	Sparsely populated; primarily agricultural land
<b>Moore</b>	286	Small population; retirees and local business operators
<b>Linville</b>	133	Tiny historical town; limited data available
<b>Blackbutt</b>	799	Ageing population; timber heritage and tourism
<b>Benarkin</b>	61	Associated with Blackbutt; similar demographics
<b>Yarraman</b>	1127	Rural town; gateway to South Burnett; mixed age groups

Source: ABS, *Census of Population and Housing, 2021, QuickStats*

**Table 4** Total population by geographic scope

Measure	Estimated resident population
<b>Trail towns</b>	16,167
<b>Five-kilometre buffer zone</b>	72,331
<b>Broader SA2 groupings</b>	149,099

Source: ABS, *Census of Population and Housing, 2021, QuickStats*

The BVRT region accounts for approximately 2.9 per cent of Queensland's total population. According to ABS estimates, around 16,167 people reside in trail towns directly linked to the BVRT. The five-kilometre buffer zone captures a larger population of approximately 72,331 people (48.5 per cent), reflecting the trail's proximity to a variety of rural and peri-urban communities. When including the full SA2 catchment, the population rises to nearly 150,000. This broader scope is useful when considering commuting patterns, local service demand and the potential reach of trail-linked economic development initiatives.

These figures also highlight the trail's role in connecting otherwise dispersed communities and its potential to support regional resilience. As local governments and industry stakeholders consider future investments in infrastructure and workforce development, understanding these demographic patterns provides an important foundation for targeted planning.

## Population growth

Between 2018 and 2023, the region experienced modest average annual population growth of 0.9 per cent, approximately half the Queensland average (1.8 per cent).<sup>9</sup> However, growth varies significantly within the region:<sup>10</sup>

- ▶ **Toowoomba, Moreton Bay – North and Wide Bay SA4 regions** averaged 1.9 per cent annual growth.
- ▶ **Ipswich**, one of South East Queensland’s fastest growing areas, recorded an average annual growth rate of 2.6 per cent.<sup>11</sup>
- ▶ **Rosewood**, near Wulkuraka, showed the highest growth at 3.9 per cent annually.<sup>12</sup>

To illustrate these regional differences, Table 5 presents average annual growth rates for the BVRT region and selected surrounding Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4) regions, alongside the Queensland state average.

**Table 5** Estimated annual population growth (2018–2023)

Region/State	Average annual growth rate
<b>BVRT Region</b>	<b>0.9%</b>
Toowoomba	1.6%
Moreton Bay – North	2.4%
Wide Bay	1.6%
<b>Average</b>	<b>1.9%</b>
Ipswich	2.6%
<b>Queensland</b>	<b>1.8%</b>

Source: ABS, *Regional population*, various editions

These trends suggest emerging pressure in some communities along the trail, particularly at the southern end, while northern and rural segments may continue to face population stagnation or slow growth. This variation will have implications for local service demand, workforce availability and infrastructure investment, particularly as the region continues to position itself as a hub for tourism and recreation.

Looking ahead, the BVRT region is forecast to undergo substantial population growth over the next 25 years. Figure 3 below presents projected average annual growth for the BVRT region and Queensland from 2021 to 2046.

### Key insights from the projection include:

- ▶ The BVRT region is expected to grow by 111,608 people between 2021 and 2046.<sup>13</sup>
- ▶ Projected average annual growth of 2.3 per cent, well above the Queensland average of 1.4 per cent.
- ▶ Rosewood forecast to be the fastest growing town, with an annual increase of 7.1 per cent, reaching 80,188 residents by 2046.

9 Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Regional population by age and sex*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/regional-population-age-and-sex/latest-release>

10 Queensland Government Statistician’s Office. (2024). *Regions. Population projections*. Brisbane: Queensland Government. <https://www.qgso.qld.gov.au/statistics/theme/population/population-projections/regions>

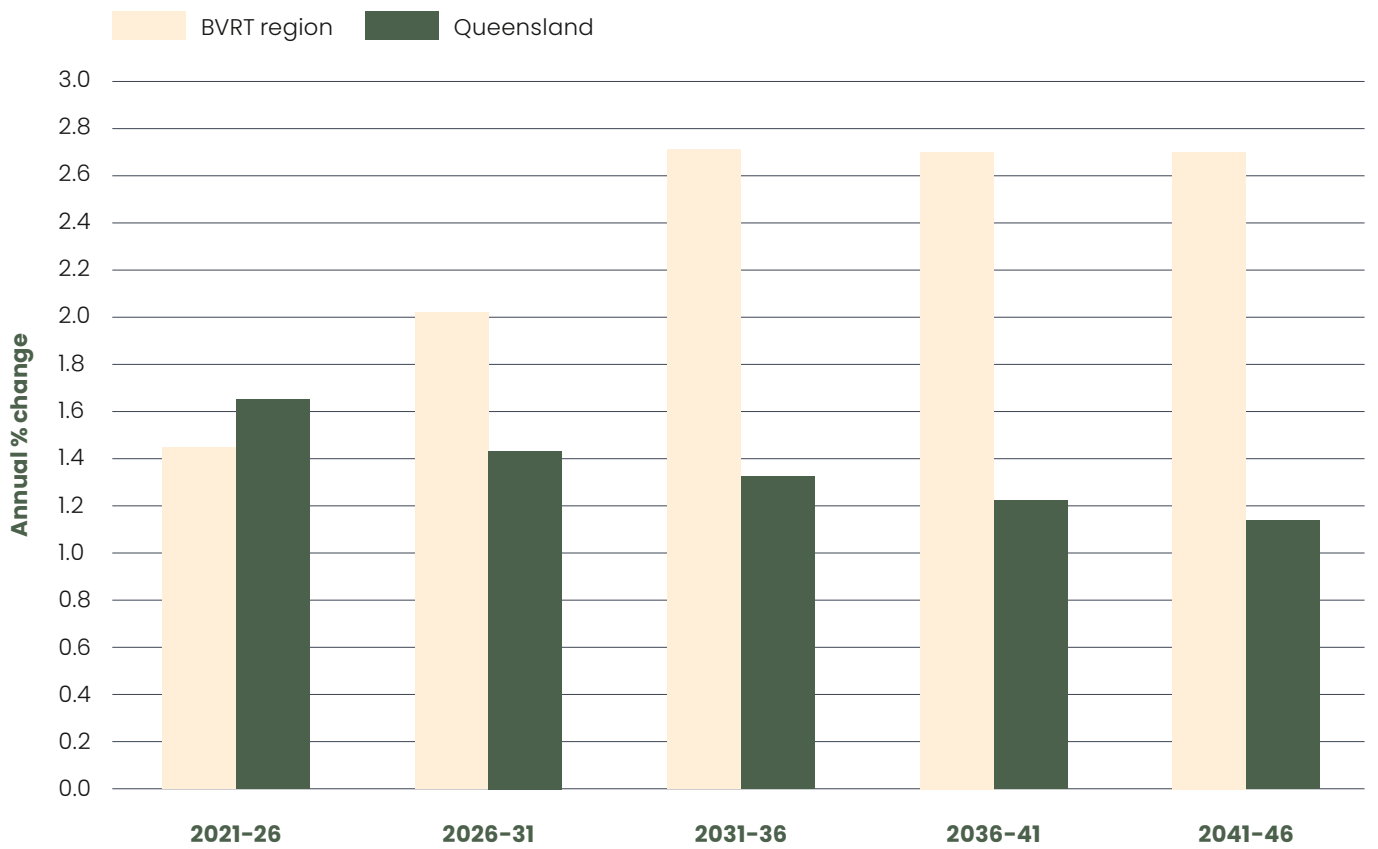
11 Queensland Government Statistician’s Office. (2024). *Population growth highlights and trends: Queensland regions, 2024 Edition*. Brisbane: Queensland Government. <https://www.qgso.qld.gov.au/issues/3061/population-growth-highlights-trends-qlc-regions-2024-edn.pdf>

12 Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2025). *Regional population*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/regional-population/latest-release#key-statistics>

13 Queensland Government Statistician’s Office. (2024). *Regions. Population projections*. Brisbane: Queensland Government. <https://www.qgso.qld.gov.au/statistics/theme/population/population-projections/regions>



**Figure 3** Projected population change, BVRT region and Queensland



Source: QGSO, Queensland Government Population Projections, 2023 edition

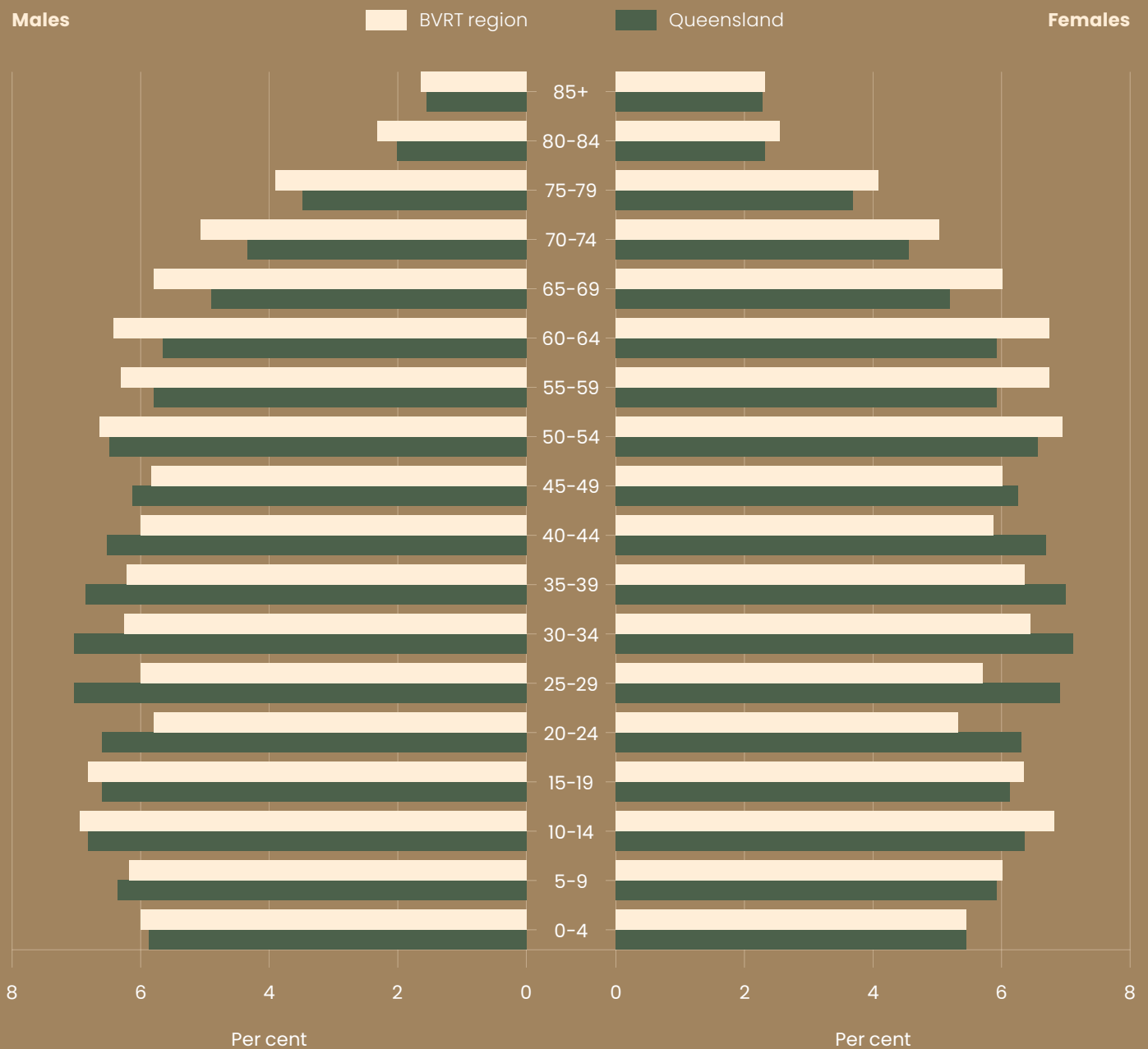


## Age distribution

The BVRT region has an older population profile than the Queensland average, a trend that has become more pronounced over the past decade. This demographic pattern has implications for labour supply, service demand and future workforce planning, particularly in sectors such as tourism, hospitality, health and community services.

Figure 4 below presents the age and gender structure of the region compared with Queensland overall. It clearly shows a higher proportion of older residents, particularly those aged 55 and over, across both genders.

**Figure 4** Population by age and gender



Source: QGSO, Queensland Government Population Projections, 2023 edition



Table 6 presents changes in median age between 2013 and 2023 for both the BVRT region and Queensland overall.

**Table 6 Median age, BVRT region and Queensland (2013-2023)**

	BVRT region	Queensland
<b>June 2013</b>	37.6	36.7
<b>June 2023</b>	40.6	38.5
<b>Change</b>	<b>+3</b>	<b>+1.8</b>

Source: ABS, 3235.0, *Population by Age and Sex, Regions of Australia*

Over the decade, the BVRT region's median age increased by three years, from 37.6 in 2013 to 40.6 in 2023. This change is nearly double the statewide increase of 1.8 years. The upward shift in median age reflects both the out-migration of younger people and the in-migration of retirees and older workers, particularly to smaller towns offering lifestyle appeal.

This ageing trend is also reflected in the working-age population. Table 7 compares the distribution of the population aged 15–64 across three age bands, based on 2013 data for the BVRT region and Queensland.

**Table 7 Working population, BVRT region and Queensland (2013)**

	BVRT region	Queensland
<b>15–24 years</b>	12.1%	12.8%
<b>25–44 years</b>	24.4%	27.6%
<b>45–64 years</b>	25.8%	24.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62.3%</b>	<b>64.7%</b>

Source: ABS, *Regional population, various editions*

As shown, the BVRT region had a smaller proportion of residents aged 25–44 (24.4 per cent) compared to the state average (27.6 per cent) and a higher share aged 45–64. This points to a mature workforce with fewer young entrants, a pattern that may limit succession planning and workforce renewal unless addressed through targeted attraction and retention strategies.

The trend is evident across the region, for example:

- ▶ Esk has the highest median age at 55.9 years.
- ▶ Nanango (near Yarraman) experienced the most significant increase in median age, rising 6.8 years between 2013 to 2023.
- ▶ This is consistent for both males and females.

Looking ahead, the ageing trajectory is expected to continue, albeit at a slower rate. Table 8 shows projected median ages across the BVRT region and Queensland through to 2046.

**Table 8 Median age projections by SA2, BVRT region and Queensland**

	BVRT region	Queensland
<b>2026</b>	41.2	39.5
<b>2036</b>	41.5	40.8
<b>2046</b>	41.4	41.6
<b>Change</b>	<b>+0.2</b>	<b>+2</b>

Source: QGSO, *Queensland Government Population Projections, 2023 edition*

- ▶ Esk SA2 is expected to retain the highest median age (61 years by 2046).
- ▶ Kilcoy SA2 is projected to have the largest increase, rising 4.1 years to 49.8.

While the age gap between the BVRT region and the Queensland average is projected to narrow slightly, the demographic structure will continue to skew older. This presents both challenges and opportunities for regional development and workforce planning.

An ageing population can constrain workforce participation and increase demand for age-related services. However, it also offers potential benefits:

- ▶ Occupations with a higher share of workers aged 55+ are less prone to labour shortage. Only 19 per cent of these roles report shortages, compared with 44 per cent of occupations with younger workforces.
- ▶ Older workers contribute to workforce stability and lower turnover and can help address shortages in sectors such as aged care, tourism and hospitality.

 The region's future workforce strategy will benefit from a balanced approach, one that supports intergenerational knowledge transfer, enables flexible work participation for older adults and actively attracts younger talent to underpin renewal and growth.

<sup>14</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *General Community Profile. 2021 Census Community Profile*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/search-by-area>

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

## First Nations population

Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples make up 5.8 per cent (approximately 8309 people) of the BVRT region's population, surpassing the Queensland average of 4.6 per cent.

To provide broader context:

- ▶ As of the 2021 Census, around 33.6 per cent of Australia's total Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander people's population resided in Queensland, a total of approximately 273,000 people.
- ▶ Across Queensland, the median age for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples was 23 years in 2021, notably younger than both their non-Indigenous counterparts and the regional population, with over 52 per cent aged under 25.
- ▶ The Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples' population in Queensland experienced a 25.3 per cent increase between 2011 and 2021 and is projected to grow by another 25.1 per cent by 2031.

While regional data regarding Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples' participation in the labour force, education or health outcomes is currently unavailable, Queensland-wide insights suggest productive engagement. Over 56 per cent of working-age Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Queensland are in the workforce and more than 43 per cent are aged 24 or younger, pointing to a strong base for future regional inclusion strategies.

## Residential mobility

The BVRT region has a lower-than-average residential mobility:

- ▶ 14.2 per cent of residents moved in the past year (Queensland: 17 per cent)<sup>14</sup>
- ▶ 39.1 per cent moved within the past five years (Queensland 44.8 per cent)
- ▶ Brassall (near Wulkuraka) recorded the highest five-year mobility rate of 49.7 per cent.

## Cultural diversity

Cultural diversity is relatively low in the region:

- ▶ 12.1 per cent of residents were born overseas (Queensland: 22.7 per cent)
- ▶ Common countries of origin: United Kingdom, New Zealand and the Philippines
- ▶ 4.7 per cent speak a language other than English at home; most report high English proficiency.<sup>15</sup>

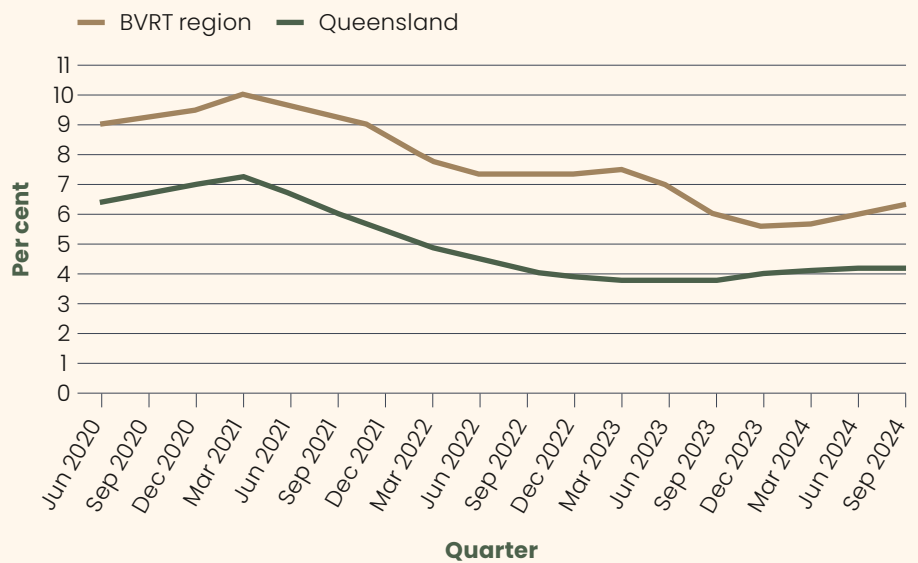


## 2.2 Workforce and labour market profile

The BVRT region faces ongoing workforce participation challenges, including elevated unemployment, above average youth employment and a high proportion of people not in the labour force. These factors have implications for local economic resilience and the capacity to meet growing labour demand in tourism, construction, agriculture, aged care and hospitality.

Figure 5 provides a comparison of unemployment rates in the BVRT region and Queensland as of September 2024.

**Figure 5** Unemployment rate, BVRT region and Queensland



(a) Based on a 4-quarter smoother series.

Source: Jobs and Skills Australia, *Small Area Labour Markets*, various editions

Table 9 complements the figure, showing the total number of unemployed individuals and the regional labour force. The unemployment rate in the BVRT region stands at 6.3 per cent, significantly higher than the Queensland average of 4.1 per cent.<sup>16</sup> This elevated rate has remained relatively consistent since 2020, reflecting persistent localised labour market challenges in the region. Within the region, disparities are evident: Leichhardt – One Mile records the highest unemployment rate at 14.8 per cent, while Karana Downs has the lowest at 1.3 per cent.

**Table 9** Unemployment and labour force, BVRT region and Queensland, September 2024

	BVRT region	Queensland
<b>Unemployed</b>	4592	125,421
<b>Labour Force</b>	73,311	3,042,659
<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	6.3%	4.1%

(a) Based on a 4-quarter smoother series.

Source: Jobs and Skills Australia, *Small Area Labour Markets*, various editions

Youth unemployment remains a key concern in the region. Table 10 shows youth unemployment rates (ages 15–24) across key SA4 regions. While there has been some recent progress, the average youth unemployment rate across the BVRT region remains elevated at 9 per cent, slightly above the state average of 8.9 per cent.<sup>17</sup> Moreton Bay – North recorded the most significant improvement, with youth unemployment falling from 16.2 per cent to 8.6 per cent. In contrast, Wide Bay experienced a sharp increase, rising from 8.2 per cent to 13.2 per cent.

**Table 10** Regional youth unemployment, SA2 regions and Queensland, April 2025

	April 2024	April 2025	Annual percentage change
Ipswich	13%	10.2%	-2.7
Toowoomba	11.5%	7.9%	-3.6
Moreton Bay – North	16.2%	8.6%	-7.6
Wide Bay	8.2%	13.2%	+5.1
<b>Average</b>	<b>12.2%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>+3.2</b>
<b>Queensland</b>	<b>9.3%</b>	<b>8.9%</b>	<b>-0.4</b>

Source: ABS, Labour Force, Australia, Detailed

<sup>16</sup> Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. (2025). *SALM smoothed SA2 datafiles (ASGS 2021) – December Quarter 2024*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.dewr.gov.au/employment-research/resources/salm-smoothed-sa2-datafiles-asgs-2021-december-quarter-2024>

<sup>17</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2025). *Labour force, Australia, detailed*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed/latest-release>



A further concern is the high proportion of working aged people not in the labour force in the region, 37.8 per cent, compared to 32 per cent across Queensland. This reflects both the region's older age profile and a greater reliance on income support payments such as the age pension, carer allowance, disability support pension and Family Tax Benefit A.

However, the higher-than-average percentage of people receiving JobSeeker payments suggests the presence of individuals seeking employment, although this may not directly translate to readily available labour. The duration of time on income support is an important factor, as long-term reliance may reflect entrenched patterns of generational unemployment or underemployment. This has been observed in other regions, where labour force disengagement can become embedded over time. While there may be untapped labour potential, targeted strategies are needed to address barriers to workforce participation and support sustainable employment outcomes.

As key industries such as tourism, agriculture, construction, aged care and hospitality face increasing pressure to fill roles, there is a strategic opportunity to activate underutilised segments of the population. This includes:

- ▶ Mature ages workers, who may be open to re-engagement with the right support and flexible working arrangements.
- ▶ Young jobseekers, who could benefit from targeted training, apprenticeships and early career pathways.
- ▶ People with caring responsibilities or disability, who may require tailored job design or accessibility improvements to participate.

Efforts to link regional training programs with local employment opportunities, improve public transport connectivity and support inclusive employment practices could be pivotal in addressing workforce gaps and improving economic participation.

## 2.3 Brisbane Valley Rail Trail business profile

The BVRT continues to stimulate economic activity across a diverse set of industries, not only in tourism but also in trail maintenance, artisan production, event coordination and local retail.<sup>18</sup> As a recreational asset attracting a wide range of users, the BVRT provides consistent foot traffic that benefits both traditional visitor economy businesses and broader regional enterprises.

The region is home to just under 10,000 registered businesses, located within a short distance of the trail. The business landscape is dominated by non-employing sole operators (64.5 per cent) and small businesses with a significant proportion operating as sole traders. Table 11 presents the number of registered businesses by employment size across the BVRT region compared with Queensland overall.

**Table 11 Registered businesses by employment size, BVRT region and Queensland**

	BVRT region	Queensland
<b>Non-employing</b>	<b>6416</b> (64.5%)	<b>312,614</b> (61.2%)
<b>1-4 employees</b>	<b>2563</b> (25.8%)	<b>134,743</b> (2.4%)
<b>5-19 employees</b>	<b>794</b> (8%)	<b>48,130</b> (9.4%)
<b>20-199 employees</b>	<b>200</b> (2%)	<b>14,076</b> (2.8%)
<b>200+ employees</b>	<b>6</b> (0.1%)	<b>881</b> (0.2%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>9942</b>	<b>510,444</b>

Source: ABS, *Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits, July 2020 – June 2024*

The BVRT region has a higher share of non-employing businesses (64.5 per cent) than the Queensland average (61.2 per cent) and a slightly lower proportion of medium-sized firms with 5-19 employees. This reflects the region's entrepreneurial culture and the prevalence of self-employment and small-scale operations in rural communities. Only a small fraction of businesses employ more than 20 staff.

In addition to employment size, business turnover provides insight into the financial scale and maturity of local enterprises. Table 12 shows the distribution of businesses by annual turnover for the BVRT region and Queensland.

**Table 12 Total number of businesses by annual turnover**

	BVRT region	Queensland
<b>\$0 to less than \$200K</b>	<b>6087</b> (61.2%)	<b>280,962</b> (55%)
<b>\$200k to less than \$5M</b>	<b>3718</b> (37.4%)	<b>211,866</b> (41.5%)
<b>\$5M to less than \$10M</b>	<b>99</b> (1%)	<b>8749</b> (1.7%)
<b>\$10M or more</b>	<b>82</b> (0.8%)	<b>14,076</b> (1.7%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>9979</b>	<b>510,444</b>

Source: ABS, *Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits, July 2020 – June 2024*

Over 60 per cent of BVRT businesses report annual turnover under \$200,000, compared to 55 per cent statewide. This underscores the dominance of micro-enterprises and lifestyle-based businesses, many of which serve local residents or seasonal visitors. Businesses with turnover between \$200,000 and \$5 million account for 37.4 per cent of the regional total, slightly below the state average (41.5 per cent).<sup>19</sup> Less than 2 per cent of BVRT region businesses exceed \$5 million in annual revenue.

This profile highlights both the vibrancy and vulnerability of the local economy. On one hand, the concentration of small businesses suggests high levels of innovation and community-based enterprise. On the other, it points to limited capacity to absorb economic shocks, scale rapidly and invest into human resource management. Strengthening business resilience, particularly in areas such as digital capability, customer experience, supply chain reliability and cross-promotion with other trail-linked services, will be essential to maximising the BVRT's economic potential.

18 The University of Queensland and The Service Innovation Alliance (SIA). (2024). *Brisbane Valley Rail Trail (BVRT) Visitor Research Program Report – Phase 2*. Brisbane: The University of Queensland. <https://experiencesomerset.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/BVRT-Visitor-Research-Program-Phase-2-FINAL-REPORT.pdf>

19 Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2024). *8165.0 Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/business-indicators/counts-australian-businesses-including-entries-and-exits/latest-release#data-downloads>

## 2.4 Job vacancies

### Understanding labour market trends and opportunities

Tracking labour market movements is essential for identifying where workforce opportunities and constraints may emerge. The Internet Vacancy Index (IVI), compiled by Jobs and Skills Australia, offers a near real-time view of employer demand across occupations and regions. While IVI regions do not align precisely with the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS), the Toowoomba and South West Queensland IVI region provides a close approximation for the BVRT corridor.

Nationally, Australia has experienced strong employment growth over the past decade.<sup>20</sup> However, job advertisements have recently declined in 10 of the past 12 months, with total postings falling by 10.9 per cent (or 27,400 fewer postings) in the year to January 2025. Despite this decline, January 2025 recorded a 4 per cent increase, suggesting early signs of recovery.

Queensland followed similar trends, with a 4.3 per cent increase in job advertisements in January 2025. Over the year, Queensland had the third-lowest annual decline in recruitment activity (-4.2 per cent). However, regional disparities remain stark: 70.4 per cent of job advertisements in December 2024 were concentrated in capital cities. This highlights the persistent challenge for rural and regional communities, like those along the BVRT, in accessing employment opportunities.

### Regional vacancy trends

In the Toowoomba and South West Queensland IVI region, which encompasses much of the BVRT corridor, job advertisement trends over the past year have followed a steady but cyclical pattern, broadly mirroring Brisbane's labour market trend.<sup>21</sup>

The most advertised occupation groups in the region (monthly averages) were:

- ▶ Professionals: 577
- ▶ Technicians and trades workers: 426
- ▶ Community and personal service workers: 331
- ▶ Clerical and administrative workers: 288
- ▶ Labourers: 275.

In comparison, Brisbane saw significantly higher job advertisements, with:

- ▶ Professionals: 8354
- ▶ Clerical and administrative workers: 4944
- ▶ Technicians and trades workers: 4003
- ▶ Managers: 3425
- ▶ Community and personal services workers: 2932
- ▶ Sales workers: 2328.

For tourism-related occupations in the Toowoomba and South West Queensland regional IVI over the 12 months to January 2025, monthly averages were as follows:

- ▶ Sales workers (incl. assistants and support workers): 203
- ▶ Hospitality, retail and service managers: 83
- ▶ Hospitality workers: 63
- ▶ Food trade workers (e.g. chefs): 52
- ▶ Food preparation assistants: 11
- ▶ Cleaners and laundry workers: 49
- ▶ Sports, travel and personal service workers: 25
- ▶ Arts and media professionals: 9
- ▶ Sales, marketing and public relations professionals: 11.

However, these figures may underrepresent the actual demand, particularly in tourism and hospitality industries where casual, seasonal and part-time roles are common. Many businesses choose *not* to advertise such roles due to low response rates, high turnover or the costs of recruitment, suggesting that the IVI data may understate workforce needs in these industries.

20 Jobs and Skills Australia. (2025). *Labour Force Trending*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/labour-force-trending>

21 Jobs and Skills Australia. (2025). *Internet Vacancy Index*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/internet-vacancy-index>

## Seasonal variations and industry insights

Although precise statistics are unavailable, tourism along the BVRT appears to follow strong seasonal patterns, with peak visitation during the cooler months. Job advertisements in the region tend to decline noticeably from May to August, likely due to the colder climate compared to nearby areas such as Brisbane, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast. This seasonal slowdown particularly affects weather-sensitive industries like agriculture and tourism. In contrast, job advertisements for machinery operators and drivers show a more significant decline during the summer months (December to February), possibly due to heat-related work slowdowns and end-of-year business closures. These seasonal trends underscore the importance of targeted infrastructure and service planning, especially as demand continues to grow for nature-based and regional tourism experiences.



## 2.5 Education attainment profile

### Highest level of schooling completed

Educational attainment in the BVRT region lags behind the Queensland average, with potential implications for workforce readiness and participation in higher-skilled roles. Just over half (52.1 per cent) of the region's residents have completed Year 11 or 12 (or equivalent), compared to 63.6 per cent across Queensland.<sup>22</sup> Table 13 presents the highest level of schooling completed by residents in the BVRT region and Queensland as a whole.

**Table 13** Highest level of schooling completed, BVRT region and Queensland (2024)

	BVRT region	Queensland
<b>Did not go to school, or year 8 or below</b>	<b>7267</b> (6.6%)	<b>178,101</b> (4.4%)
<b>Year 9 or 10 or equivalent</b>	<b>36,756</b> (33.3%)	<b>989,350</b> (24.6%)
<b>Year 11 or 12 or equivalent</b>	<b>57,532</b> (52.1%)	<b>2,554,330</b> (63.6%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>110,518</b>	<b>4,017,211</b>

Source: ABS, *Census of Population and Housing, 2021, General Community Profile – G16*

Within the region, educational attainment varies notably by location:

- ▶ **Karana Downs SA2** had the highest proportion of residents who completed Year 11 or 12 (or equivalent), at 77 per cent.
- ▶ **Nanango SA2** recorded the highest share of residents who did not attend school or completed only up to Year 8, at 9.2 per cent.

This variation in educational attainment across the BVRT region may influence local workforce readiness and the need for targeted upskilling initiatives.

<sup>22</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *General Community Profile. 2021 Census of Population and Housing*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/search-by-area>

## Non-school qualifications

Post-school educational attainment in the BVRT region also falls below the state average. Only 56.7 per cent of residents aged 15 years and over hold a non-school qualification, compared to 62.5 per cent for Queensland. Moreover, only 12.4 per cent have completed a bachelor's degree or higher, well below the state average of 21.9 per cent. Table 14 provides a breakdown of non-school qualifications by level for both the BVRT region and Queensland.

**Table 14 Non-school qualifications<sup>(a)</sup>, BVRT region and Queensland (2021)**

	BVRT region	Queensland
<b>Bachelor degree or higher<sup>(b)</sup></b>	<b>14,326</b> (12.4%)	<b>918,468</b> (21.9%)
<b>Advanced diploma or higher</b>	<b>9,815</b> (8.5%)	<b>395,615</b> (9.4%)
<b>Certificate<sup>(c)</sup></b>	<b>30,104</b> (26.1%)	<b>927,894</b> (22.1%)
<b>Persons with a qualification<sup>(d)</sup></b>	<b>65,393</b> (56.7%)	<b>2,618,666</b> (62.5%)
<b>Total persons</b>	<b>115,423</b>	<b>4,191,812</b>

(a) Includes persons aged 15 years and over with a qualification within the scope of the Australian Standard Classification of Education.

(b) Includes bachelor degree, graduate diploma, graduate certificate and postgraduate degree.

(c) Includes Certificate, I, II, III and IV and Certificates not further defined responses.

(d) Includes inadequately described and not stated level of education responses.

Source: ABS, *Census of Population and Housing, 2021, General Community Profile - G43 and G49*

There are also notable gender differences in attainment:

- ▶ 73 per cent of females aged 25–44 in the BVRT region hold a non-school qualification, compared with 65.6 per cent of males.
- ▶ Statewide, the gap is narrower, with 79 per cent of females and 74.7 per cent of males holding qualifications.

While overall educational attainment remains relatively low, there is evidence of gradual improvement. The share of people holding advanced diplomas or diplomas increased from 13.2 per cent in 2011 to 15 per cent in 2021, suggesting a steady shift toward higher levels of formal training.

These educational patterns suggest a region with a practical, experience-based workforce but lower levels of formal qualification attainment compared to the state average. This presents both challenges and opportunities for local labour markets. Lower completion rates of senior secondary school and tertiary education may limit access to specialised roles and reduce workforce mobility. However, the strong presence of certificate-level qualifications and the rise in diploma completions highlight a foundation that can be built upon.



To meet future labour and skills demands, there is a clear need to invest in flexible, locally accessible training pathways that align with employer needs and support lifelong learning across all age groups.

## 2.6 Vocational education and training activity

The Vocational education and training (VET) system plays a vital role in preparing the workforce to meet evolving industry demands. In the BVRT region, VET activity has remained relatively stable over the past few years. A peak in enrolments occurred in 2021, with 20,170 program enrolments, before declining slightly in 2022 and stabilising in 2023.<sup>23</sup> Over the past three years, enrolments have averaged approximately 18,393 per year.<sup>24</sup>

Consistent with this trend, program completions have also decreased, dropping from 7525 completions in 2021 to 6140 in 2022, with a modest increase to 6360 completions in 2023. While enrolment levels remain steady, completion rates indicate room for improvement in supporting students to finalise their qualifications.

The diversity of VET program completions reflects the broad range of employment opportunities across the region. Table 15 outlines completions by industry sector in 2023

**Table 15** VET programs completed in the BVRT region (2023)

Course industry	Programs completed
Natural and physical sciences	145
Information technology	60
Engineering and related technologies	1125
Architecture and building	335
Agriculture, environmental and related studies	185
Health	400
Education	70
Management and commerce	900
Society and culture	935
Creative arts	165
Food, hospitality and personal services	560
Mixed field programmes	475
<b>Total</b>	<b>2300</b>

Source: NCVER, *Atlas of Total VET*

Many of these industries offer greater stability and more favourable working conditions than tourism, making recruitment and retention in the industry more challenging.



## Apprenticeships and traineeships

Beyond traditional VET pathways, apprenticeships and traineeships (including school-based pathways) offer additional opportunities to grow the regional workforce. These models are particularly valuable for employers unable to offer full-time roles, and they support young people in gaining entry-level experience.

Strengthening connections between schools and industry and improving access to high-quality career information, continue to be key focus areas for supporting future workforce development. A range of government programs are currently working to advance progress in these areas:

- ▶ **School to Work Transitions program:** operating across 12 projects statewide, this initiative has supported more than 1400 students at risk of disengaging from education or training.<sup>25</sup>
- ▶ **Career education program:** available to students in Years 7-10, this program is helping state school students plan for their futures in education, training and employment.
- ▶ **Regional School Industry Partnership Managers:** deployed throughout Queensland to build and facilitate school-industry relationships, connecting students to real-world career pathways.

## Industry-specific workforce challenges

Despite these initiatives, the hospitality industry continues to face long-term workforce challenges, particularly in attracting and retaining young workers.<sup>26</sup> While these issues predate the COVID-19 pandemic, they have intensified in its aftermath.

Key barriers include:

- ▶ demanding working conditions and irregular hours
- ▶ lower starting wages and limited job security
- ▶ high employee turnover rates
- ▶ limited perceived opportunities for career progression
- ▶ growing concerns among youth about mental health and work-life
- ▶ technological changes in the industry leading to feelings of being unprepared or under-skilled.<sup>27</sup>

Additionally, broader economic pressures, including rising housing costs and inflation are prompting young people to pursue better-paid, more stable employment in other industries.

These trends underscore the need for targeted industry engagement, improved career messaging and workforce development strategies that can attract and retain talent in the hospitality and tourism sectors within the BVRT region.

23 Using the same collection of 15 SA2 areas as outlined in the methodology

24 NCVET. (2025). *Total VET students and courses*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research. <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/collections/students-and-courses-collection/total-vet-students-and-courses>

25 Department of Trade, Employment and Training. (2025). *Queensland Workforce Strategy 2022-2032 Progress Update August 2024*. Brisbane: Queensland Government. [https://www.publications.qld.gov.au/ckan-publications-attachments-prod/resources/cf65c5f0-7c65-4dd9-b760-67bbe3a5a198/qws-progress-report-aug-2024\\_final.pdf?ETag=cf730e69b0a0201d08b6e9b5d0b50134](https://www.publications.qld.gov.au/ckan-publications-attachments-prod/resources/cf65c5f0-7c65-4dd9-b760-67bbe3a5a198/qws-progress-report-aug-2024_final.pdf?ETag=cf730e69b0a0201d08b6e9b5d0b50134)

26 Liu-Lastres, B., Wen, H. and Huang, W.J. (2023). *A reflection on the Great Resignation in the hospitality and tourism industry*. United States: International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management; Baum, T., Mooney, S.K.K., Robinson, R.N.S. and Solnet, D. (2020). *COVID-19's impact on the hospitality workforce - new crisis or amplification of the norm?* United States: International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management

27 Baum, T., Mooney, S.K.K., Robinson, R.N.S., and Solnet, D. (2020). *COVID-19's impact on the hospitality workforce - new crisis or amplification of the norm?* United States: International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management.

## 2.7 Vocational education and training and employment pathways

This section provides insights into the training programs and employment pathways available within the BVRT region, highlighting areas of strong demand, potential skill shortages and opportunities for workforce development. Table 16 presents the top 15 VET programs by enrolment in the BVRT region in 2023.

**Table 16** Top 15 VET program enrolments, BVRT region (2023)<sup>28</sup>

Qualification	Enrolments
<b>Certificate II in Skills for Work and Vocational Pathways</b>	1075
<b>Certificate III in Business</b>	730
<b>Certificate III in Fitness</b>	610
<b>Certificate III in Individual Support</b>	580
<b>Certificate I in Construction</b>	495
<b>Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care</b>	480
<b>Certificate II in Engineering Pathways</b>	440
<b>Certificate II in Hospitality</b>	350
<b>Certificate III in Carpentry</b>	265
<b>Certificate III in Hospitality</b>	265
<b>Certificate II in Sport and Recreation</b>	250
<b>Certificate IV in Training and Assessment</b>	250
<b>Diploma in Business</b>	225
<b>Certificate III in Electrotechnology Electrician</b>	205
<b>Certificate III in Supply Chain Operations</b>	175

The most popular qualifications indicate sustained interest in community services (health care and personal support), business services, construction and tourism, travel and hospitality. These enrolments reflect demand across a range of entry-level and foundational skill positions, which are critical for supporting local industry growth and service delivery.

<sup>28</sup> NCVER. (2024). *Total VET Program Enrolments by SA2, 2023*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research. <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>

## Completion by training package

While enrolments are strong in many fields, a persistent issue in the VET system is low program completion rates. On average, only 30 per cent of enrolments result in completions across the region. Table 17 provides a breakdown of enrolments and completions by parent training package in 2023, highlighting significant variation between industry.<sup>29</sup>

**Table 17** Training package enrolments and completions (2023)

Parent training package	Enrolments (2023)	Completions (2023)	Average completion percentage
<b>Community Services (CHC)</b>	2425	640	26.4
<b>Business Services (BSA, BSB)</b>	1730	635	36.7
<b>Construction, Plumbing and Services Integrated Framework (BCF, BCG, BCP, CPC)</b>	1315	300	22.8
<b>Tourism, Travel and Hospitality (SIT, THH, THT)</b>	1235	425	34.4
<b>Foundation Skills (FSK)</b>	1220	430	35.2
<b>Sport, Fitness and Recreation (SIS, SRC, SRF, SRO, SRS)</b>	1015	315	31
<b>Metal and Engineering (MEM)</b>	945	290	30.7
<b>Health (HLT)</b>	815	320	39.3
<b>Resources and Infrastructure (BCC, DRT, MNC, MNM, MNQ, RII)</b>	715	190	26.6
<b>Automotive Industry Retail, Service and Repair (AUR)</b>	695	215	30.9

Source: NCVER, VOCSTATS

Some fields, such as construction and community services, are experiencing particularly low completion rates (23 per cent and 26 per cent respectively), putting additional pressure in training organisations and limiting the talent pipeline for key industries. The tourism industry is also impacted, with just over one-third completion in relevant qualifications, raising concerns about the future availability of a trained and job-ready workforce in the region.

<sup>29</sup> NCVER. (2024). *Total VET Program Enrolments and Completions by SA2, 2023*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research. <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>



## Skill set enrolments

In addition to full qualifications, short-form credentials and skill sets are being used to quickly build targeted capabilities across industries. Table 18 shows the top five skill set enrolments in 2023, which reflect local industry needs in mining, electrical safety, health care, disability support and tourism.

**Table 18** Top five skill set enrolments (2023)

Top five skill set	Enrolments
Surface coal mine safety	95
Electrical safety testing of electrical cord connected equipment and cord assemblies	75
Swimming and water safety teacher	60
Assist clients with medication	40
Food safety supervision	40

Source: NCVER, VOCSTATS

Skill sets aligned to mining safety, electrical testing, health care and food safety were among the most common. Notably, tourism and hospitality-specific skill sets are underrepresented, despite the sector's recognised importance to the region, exploration of barriers to enrolments and completions will occur during consultation.

## Intended occupational outcomes

VET enrolment data also reveals the top intended occupations of learners, reflecting career aspirations and aligning with regional workforce demand. Table 19 summarises the top five intended occupations in 2023.

**Table 19** Intended occupational outcomes for VET learners

Occupation	Enrolments
General clerks	1275
Nursing support and personal care workers	1025
Hospitality workers (nft)	810
Welfare support workers	720
Child carers	660

Source: NCVER, VOCSTATS

The leading occupations suggest alignment with workforce demand in clerical, health care, hospitality and community services.<sup>30</sup> These fields are essential to the region's economic base and social infrastructure.

30 NCVER. (2024). *Total VET Program Enrolments by SA2, 2023*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research. <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>

## Apprenticeship and traineeship trends

Complementing the broader VET landscape, apprenticeships and traineeships are a significant contributor to the region's workforce pipeline. Table 20 outlines the top five program areas by apprenticeship/trainee commencements in 2023, reaffirming the importance of health care, construction, food services and education.

**Table 20** Intended industries of choice for apprenticeship/trainees ranked

Program area	Commencements
<b>Human welfare studies and services</b>	1420
<b>Building</b>	1365
<b>Food and hospitality</b>	1325
<b>General education programmes</b>	1220
<b>Teacher education programmes</b>	1150

Source: NCVER, VOCSTATS

Low VET completion rates across several training packages pose a risk to the supply of skilled workers, particularly in key industries such as tourism, construction and community services. While skill sets and short courses are helping to meet targeted industry needs, they remain underutilised in some areas.

Apprenticeships and traineeships continue to play a vital role in workforce development, especially in the health, construction and education industries. To address emerging workforce challenges, there is clear need to ensure ongoing alignment between training programs and industry demand, alongside strategies that supports students to successfully complete their qualifications.



## 2.8 Brisbane Valley Rail Trail regional development

Investment in the region is expected to grow, particularly in the ecotourism sector. This growth is likely to increase demand for tour operators, accommodations, cafes and other related services. The BVRT is set to be a key enabler of the Queensland Government's *Destination 2045* strategy, supporting its ambition to position Queensland as a world-class ecotourism destination.<sup>31</sup> Complementing this, the Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads' *Brisbane Valley Rail Trail Strategic Plan* provides a five-year blueprint to guide the sustainable development, management and promotion of the trail.<sup>32</sup> It outlines clear priorities for infrastructure upgrades, improved trail connectivity, enhanced visitor experiences and stronger governance, all of which support the BVRT's role as a major tourism asset.

*Destination 2045* outlines a broader and more ambitious vision for Queensland's tourism future, aiming to deliver 45 new ecotourism experiences across the state. It also seeks to leverage opportunities associated with the lead-up to and legacy of the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The project advisory team has played a key role in identifying developments and investments aligned with these strategic goals, ensuring the BVRT and surrounding communities are well-positioned to contribute to and benefit from Queensland's long-term tourism and economic growth agenda.

- 1. Farmville Restaurant Development:** Council-approved project featuring outdoor bike racks, EV charging stations with CCTV and approximately 300m<sup>2</sup> of space to support hospitality and tourism.
- 2. Duncan Accommodation and Events Space:** Development approval granted for a mixed-use facility designed for both accommodation and event hosting.
- 3. BVRT Trail Expansion:** Investment aims to enhance outdoor recreation and tourism, with completion anticipated mid-2027.
- 4. Toogoolawah Community Hub:** A \$5.7 million project well underway, including a swimming pool and extended gym, focused on community use and tourism appeal.
- 5. The Condensery Art Gallery Expansion (Somerset):** \$3 million investment to expand arts and events space, improve functionality and explore potential accommodation development.
- 6. Toogoolawah Library and Cultural Centre:** Scheduled to begin in late 2025 or early 2026, this \$5.2 million project includes a new carpark and aims to enrich cultural and community access.
- 7. BVRT Art Installations:** A \$400,000 investment will fund public art installations along the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail to enhance cultural tourism.

The Brisbane Valley Rail Trail (BVRT) represents a significant regional tourism asset whose long-term success depends on delivering a consistently high-quality user experience through coordinated management and regular maintenance. The Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads oversees the implementation of the *BVRT Strategic Plan*, which focuses on sustainable infrastructure improvements, enhanced trail connectivity, upgraded visitor facilities and effective governance frameworks.

While volunteer contributions remain valued, they are not sufficient to sustain the trail's extensive infrastructure. Continued collaboration and support from local councils, community groups and other stakeholders are essential to the trail's long-term viability and its role in driving regional economic development.

31 Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation. (2025). *Destination 2045*. Brisbane: Queensland Government. <https://dlw2s48w6qezig.cloudfront.net/media/Destination%202045%20-%20Delivering%20Queenslands%20Tourism%20Future.pdf>

32 Department of Transport and Main Roads. (2021). *Brisbane Valley Rail Trail Strategic Plan*. Brisbane: Queensland Government. [https://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/\\_/media/bvrt/bvrt-strategic-plan.pdf?rev=8722cbe30ee34f0fb532c31478646f02&sc\\_lang=en&extension=pdf&size=22552762&hash=46C9B76B53C5D30D656EB9AE0C3CA87E](https://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/_/media/bvrt/bvrt-strategic-plan.pdf?rev=8722cbe30ee34f0fb532c31478646f02&sc_lang=en&extension=pdf&size=22552762&hash=46C9B76B53C5D30D656EB9AE0C3CA87E)

## 2.9 Employment projections and jobs growth

Projecting employment growth in the BVRT region is challenging due to limitations in regional-scale forecasting and inconsistencies across datasets. However, population increases and rising visitation along the BVRT are expected to generate greater demand for workers, particularly in tourism, hospitality, health care, construction and personal services.

Growth is likely to intensify existing skills shortages and labour pressures that already affect regional Queensland. According to Jobs Queensland's Hospitality on the Horizon environmental scan, the hospitality sector alone will need an additional 56,000 workers by 2033, with strong demand for food and beverage attendants, baristas, kitchenhands and chefs.<sup>33</sup> While this figure is Queensland-wide, it suggests upward pressure on regional job markets such as the BVRT corridor, where tourism is an economic driver.

More broadly, the report emphasises that rural and regional areas face:

- ▶ **Persistent workforce shortages**, especially in entry-level and seasonal roles.
- ▶ **Limited access to training**, which constrains supply of qualified workers.
- ▶ **Retention challenges**, as younger workers are drawn to metropolitan areas or more stable industries.

In the BVRT region, these challenges will be amplified by the projected 111,608-person population increase and corresponding 2.3 per cent annual growth rate, outpacing the Queensland average. Greater residential density near trailheads, such as in Rosewood, Esk and Kilcoy, is expected to drive demand for hospitality, accommodation, health services, construction and transport workers.

Employment trends will also be shaped by broader structural changes in the economy. The *Hospitality on the Horizon* report points to increasing expectations for:

- ▶ **Digital fluency**, including the use of online booking systems, mobile ordering and marketing tools.
- ▶ **Sustainability and waste reduction skills**, in response to regulatory and consumer pressures.
- ▶ **Emotional intelligence and communication**, especially in customer-facing roles.

These insights reinforce the need for proactive and regionally tailored workforce planning. Without targeted action, the BVRT region risks falling behind in attracting, retaining and upskilling the workers needed to support sustainable growth.

<sup>33</sup> Jobs Queensland. (2024). *Hospitality on the Horizon, Queensland Hospitality Industry Environmental Scan*. Ipswich: Queensland Government. [https://jobsqueensland.qld.gov.au/\\_resources/files/pdf/Hospitality-on-the-Horizon-Queensland-Hospitality-Industry-Environmental-Scan\\_V6.pdf](https://jobsqueensland.qld.gov.au/_resources/files/pdf/Hospitality-on-the-Horizon-Queensland-Hospitality-Industry-Environmental-Scan_V6.pdf)





# Industry sector overview for the BVRT region



### 3.1 Industry sectors and regional operations

The BVRT region hosts a diverse economic landscape, combining traditional industries such as agriculture, farming, livestock and mining with an increasingly service-oriented workforce. While sectors like agriculture and manufacturing continue to underpin regional identity and business activity, they do not represent the largest sources of employment, underscoring a disconnect between economic output and workforce composition.

#### Leading sectors by employment

Table 21 shows the five industries that account for the highest share of employment in the BVRT region, based on 2021 Census data.

**Table 21** Five largest employing industry sectors in the region

Industry sector	Percentage
<b>Health care and social assistance</b>	14.7
<b>Retail</b>	9.4
<b>Education and training</b>	9.1
<b>Manufacturing</b>	8.9
<b>Public administration and safety</b>	8.8

Source: ABS, *Census of Population and Housing, 2021, General Community Profile - G54*

Health care and social assistance is the region’s largest employing sector, reflecting national trends. Retail, education and public administration are also major contributors, while manufacturing remains significant despite long-term structural decline. However, the region shows the highest industry specialisation ratios in agriculture, forestry and fishing and manufacturing (both with a ratio of 1.54) which aligns with the area’s historical economic development patterns.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> The specialisation ratio refers to the percentage of workers in each industry within the BVRT region to the percentage workers in each industry for Queensland. A specialisation ratio above 1.00 indicates BVRT region has a larger share for that category than in Queensland. Similarly, a specialisation ratio below 1.00 indicates BVRT region has a smaller share for that category than in Queensland.

Figure 6 compares the BVRT region's employment profile to the Queensland average across key industries.

**Figure 6** Percentage of employment by industry, BVRT region and Queensland



(a) Total used to derive percentages includes inadequately described and not stated responses.  
 Source: ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2021, General Community Profile – G54

Relative to the state average, the BVRT region has a much higher concentration of workers in agriculture, manufacturing and construction. Conversely, knowledge-based sectors such as professional services and finance are underrepresented, reflecting the region's rural character and limited access to higher-skill urban labour markets.



Table 22 highlights the five industry sectors that experienced the highest absolute employment growth between 2011 and 2021.

**Table 22** Growing industry sectors in the region

Industry sector	Employees 2011	Employees 2021	Growth percentage
<b>Health care and social assistance</b>	6579	8757	+33.1
<b>Arts and recreation services</b>	497	642	+29.2
<b>Education and training</b>	4285	5430	+26.7
<b>Administrative and support services</b>	1476	1867	+26.5
<b>Construction</b>	4158	5202	+25.1

Source: ABS, *Census of Population and Housing, 2021, Time Series Profile - T34*

Service-based sectors have led regional employment growth, particularly in health, education and administrative support. Health care and social assistance has emerged as the fastest-growing industry between 2011 and 2021, adding 2178 jobs over the decade. Its share of the regional workforce increased from 12.3 per cent to 14.7 per cent, consistent with broader trends across Queensland.<sup>35</sup>



Growth in arts and recreation services is also notable, potentially linked to increasing cultural tourism and trail-based visitation.

<sup>35</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Time Series Profile. 2021 Census Community Profile*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/search-by-area>

Table 23 presents industries that recorded employment declines between 2011 and 2021.

**Table 23** Declining industry sectors in the region

Industry sector	Employees 2011	Employees 2021	Decline percentage
<b>Wholesale trade</b>	1772	1369	-22.7
<b>Manufacturing</b>	6408	5287	-17.5
<b>Information media and telecommunications</b>	391	332	-15.1
<b>Mining</b>	800	715	-10.6
<b>Transport, postal and warehousing</b>	3321	3079	-7.3

Source: ABS, *Census of Population and Housing, 2021, Time Series Profile - T34*

Several traditional sectors have declined over the same period, with job losses in wholesale trade, manufacturing, media and telecommunications, mining and transport.<sup>36</sup> This trend indicates a broader decline in traditional trade occupations and reinforces the importance of economic diversification and investment in new industries, such as tourism, through the BVRT.

Employment levels by industry also provide insight into the workforce requirements of the region. Table 24 compares regional growth with state-level trends in key industries related to tourism.

**Table 24** Employment by industries related to tourism, BVRT region and Queensland

Industry sector	Number of workers in BVRT region	BVRT growth (2011 - 2021)	Queensland growth (2011 - 2021)
<b>Transport, postal and warehousing services</b>	3079	-7.3%	8.2%
<b>Rental hiring and real estate</b>	781	+10.3%	+16%
<b>Retail trade</b>	5591	-1.9%	+4.1%
<b>Administrative and support services</b>	1867	+26.5%	+26%
<b>Accommodation and food services</b>	3201	+18.5%	+24%
<b>Arts and recreational services</b>	642	+29.2%	+32%

Source: ABS, *Census of Population and Housing, 2021, Time Series Profile - T34*

Although most tourism-related sectors have grown, they generally lag behind the state average. This suggests there may be further untapped potential for tourism-linked employment growth, particularly in accommodation, food and recreation. It is important to acknowledge that substantial investment in the trail since 2021 may not yet be fully reflected in this data.

<sup>36</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Time Series Profile. 2021 Census Community Profile*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/search-by-area>

Table 25 provides a breakdown of registered businesses by industry, along with specialisation ratios comparing the BVRT region to Queensland as a whole.

**Table 25** Registered businesses by industry, BVRT region and Queensland, June 2024

Industry sector	BVRT region	Queensland	Specialisation ratio
<b>Agriculture, forestry and fishing</b>	2099 (21.1%)	41,581 (8.1%)	2.59
<b>Mining</b>	37 (0.4%)	1923 (0.4%)	0.99
<b>Manufacturing</b>	431 (4.3%)	18,367 (3.6%)	1.20
<b>Electricity, gas, water and waste services</b>	34 (0.3%)	1618 (0.3%)	1.08
<b>Construction</b>	1786 (18%)	87,002 (17%)	1.05
<b>Wholesale trade</b>	225 (2.3%)	14,365 (2.8%)	0.80
<b>Retail trade</b>	523 (5.3%)	29,408 (5.8%)	0.91
<b>Accommodation and food services</b>	293 (2.9%)	19,896 (3.9%)	0.76
<b>Transport, postal and warehousing</b>	752 (7.6%)	39,058 (7.7%)	0.99
<b>Information media and telecommunications</b>	47 (0.5%)	3984 (0.8%)	0.61
<b>Financial and insurance services</b>	240 (2.4%)	21,214 (4.2%)	0.58
<b>Rental hiring and real estate services</b>	741 (7.5%)	59,508 (11.7%)	0.64
<b>Professional, scientific and technical services</b>	778 (7.8%)	63,290 (12.4%)	0.63
<b>Administrative and support services</b>	373 (3.8%)	23,609 (4.6%)	0.81
<b>Public administration and safety</b>	13 (0.1%)	1282 (0.3%)	0.52
<b>Education and training</b>	136 (1.4%)	7942 (1.6%)	0.88
<b>Health care and social assistance</b>	646 (6.5%)	40,595 (8%)	0.82
<b>Arts and recreation services</b>	150 (1.5%)	7159 (1.4%)	1.08
<b>Other services</b>	629 (6.3%)	28,398 (5.6%)	1.14
<b>Not classified</b>	9 (0.1%)	287 (0.1%)	1.61
<b>Total<sup>(a)</sup></b>	<b>9942 (100%)</b>	<b>510,444 (100%)</b>	<b>1.00</b>

Refer to explanatory notes for additional information.

(a) Includes inadequately described and not stated responses.

Source: ABS, *Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits, July 2020 – June 2024*

Agriculture accounts for over 21 per cent of all businesses in the BVRT region, more than double the state average, followed by strong representation in construction and transport. However, tourism-related businesses such as accommodation and food services remain underrepresented relative to state benchmarks.<sup>37</sup>

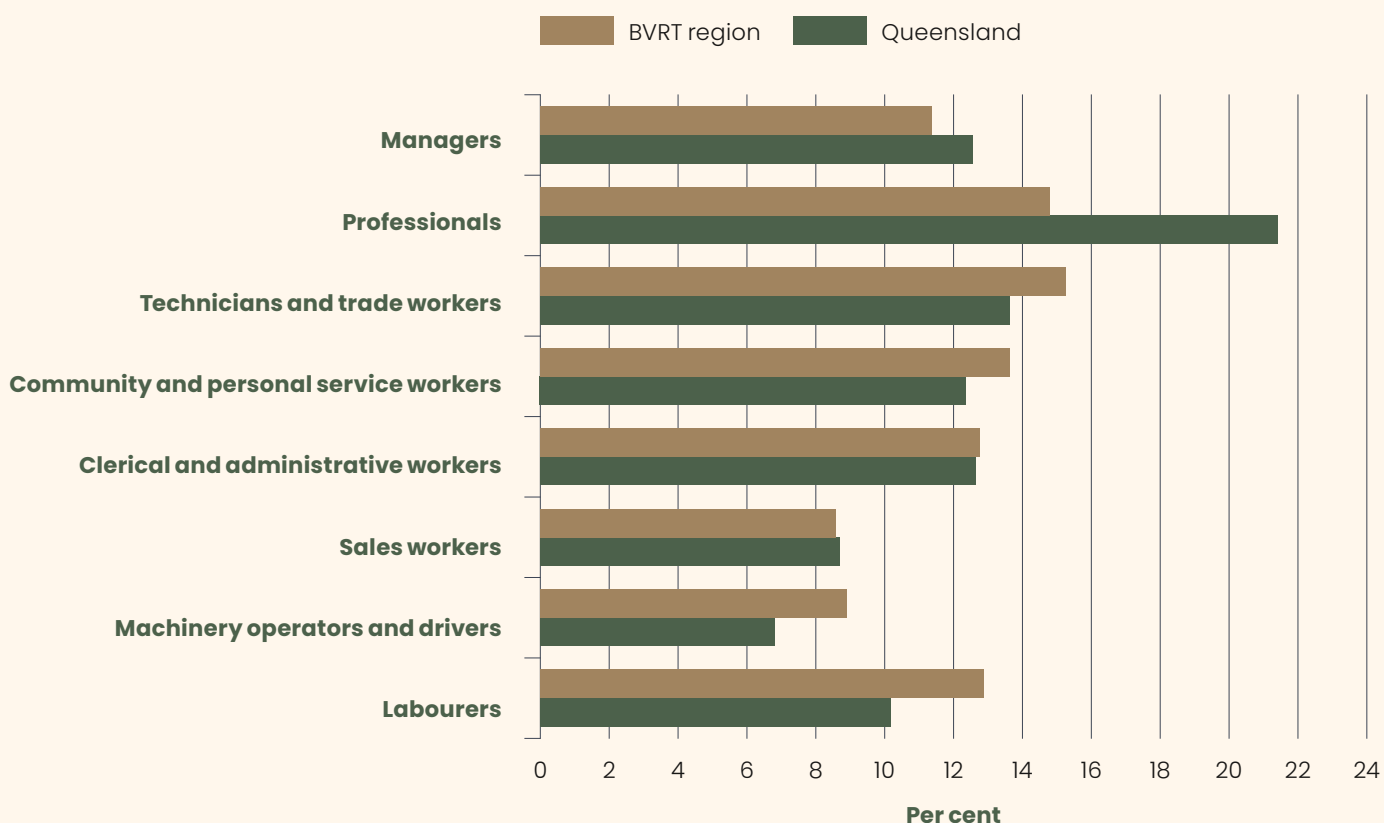
<sup>37</sup> Note: This is based on the collection of the wider SA2 areas noted in Section 1.5 and as such extends slightly beyond the five-kilometre radius around the BVRT.

## 3.2 Workforce profile

The workforce profile for the BVRT region provides a high-level view of occupational trends but has limitations due to the absence of detailed data on specific tourism-related roles (e.g. waiters, cooks, housekeepers). This makes it challenging to develop a granular understanding of the current and emerging workforce needs within the tourism industry.<sup>38</sup>

Figure 7 shows the percentage of employment by occupation for the BVRT region compared to Queensland as a whole, using broad (major group) occupation categories from the 2021 Census.

**Figure 7** Percentage of employment by occupation, BVRT region and Queensland



(a) Total used to derive percentages includes inadequately described and not stated responses.  
Source: ABS, *Census of Population and Housing, 2021, General Community Profile – G60*

38 Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *General Community Profile. 2021 Census Community Profile*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/search-by-area>

### The key observations are that:

- ▶ Professionals are the largest occupational group in Queensland overall, but they make up a smaller proportion in the BVRT region. This suggests a lower concentration of highly qualified roles locally.
- ▶ Technicians, trades workers and community and personal service workers are more prominent in the BVRT region than statewide, reflecting the region's emphasis on practical, service-oriented jobs, many of which are relevant to construction, maintenance, aged care and tourism.
- ▶ The community and personal service workers category is likely to include a significant portion of the region's tourism workforce; however, there will undoubtedly be tourism work occurring in the technical, trade and professional category.
- ▶ The labourer and machinery operator and driver categories are also more heavily represented in the BVRT region, consistent with the area's agricultural, industrial and resource-based economic activity.
- ▶ The proportions of sales workers and clerical and administrative workers are broadly in line with state averages.
- ▶ Managers are slightly more common in the BVRT region than across Queensland, likely reflecting the higher proportion of sole traders and small business owners operating locally.



Together, these patterns reinforce the region's strong alignment with hands-on, operational and service-based workforces, many of which are essential for both the visitor economy and broader regional industries.

At the sub-major group level, the most common occupations in the region include:

- ▶ Carers and aides (7.2 per cent)
- ▶ Sales assistants and salespersons (6.1 per cent)
- ▶ Specialist managers (5 per cent)
- ▶ Automotive and engineering trades workers (4.6 per cent)
- ▶ Education professionals (4 per cent).

While these roles are not exclusively tourism-focused, their prevalence reinforces the interconnected nature of tourism with other sectors. For example:

- ▶ Sales assistants are often employed in retail outlets catering to visitors.
- ▶ Specialist managers may include roles in accommodation, event coordination or park operations.
- ▶ Carers and aides reflect the ageing workforce and visitor population, highlighting opportunities for accessible and inclusive tourism services.

These overlaps underscore the importance of cross-sectoral workforce strategies to support tourism growth in the region.



## Workforce summary by Local Government Area

Data availability varies across the four local government areas that comprise the BVRT region. Where possible, tourism workforce and economic contribution figures are provided below.

In the Toowoomba Regional Council, tourism continues to play a substantial economic role. In 2022–2023, the region generated \$978.8 million in tourism revenue, with \$504.6 million in total value added to the economy.<sup>39</sup> According to 2021 data, the tourism workforce in Toowoomba consisted of 4465 people. Of these, 37.8 per cent worked full-time, while 62.1 per cent were employed part-time or were temporarily away from work.<sup>40</sup> This indicates a tourism labour force that is largely casualised or dependent on flexible working arrangements.

Within the Somerset Regional Council, day trippers make up a significant portion of the visitor base, accounting for 73 per cent of total visitation. In response, the council has committed to strengthening its visitor economy by influencing the enablers of tourism growth through targeted economic strategies.<sup>41</sup> These initiatives aim to boost annual visitor expenditure from \$66 million to approximately \$73 million. Economic modelling suggests that this uplift of \$7 million could directly generate 57 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs, with an additional

27 FTE jobs created indirectly through production and consumption multipliers. Currently, there are an estimated 205 tourism-related businesses in Somerset, out of a total of 2100, with about half of these classified as non-employing businesses.

In the South Burnett Regional Council, tourism contributed to \$103.5 million in revenue during 2022–2023, resulting in \$63 million in value added to the local economy. The 2021 tourism workforce comprised 595 people, of whom 32.1 per cent worked full-time and 67.2 per cent were employed part-time or were temporarily not working. This high proportion of part-time workers highlights the casual and seasonal nature of the tourism workforce in the area.

The City of Ipswich recorded the highest tourism revenue in the region, with \$1,278.3 million generated in 2022–2023 and \$602.7 million.<sup>42</sup> In 2021, the local tourism workforce included 3930 people, with 31.3 per cent employed full-time and 68.6 per cent work part-time or away from work.<sup>43</sup> Similar to other areas in the BVRT region, the predominance of part-time and flexible roles indicates that much of the tourism industry relies on a contingent workforce to meet fluctuating demand.

39 National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIER). (2025). *Toowoomba, Tourism value*. Compiled and presented by economy.id. Findings based on use of NIEIR data. <https://economy.id.com.au/toowoomba/tourism-value>

40 National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIER). (2025). *Toowoomba, tourism workforce*. Compiled and presented by economy.id. Findings based on use of NIEIR data <https://economy.id.com.au/toowoomba/tourism-workforce>

41 SC Lennon and Associates Pty Ltd. (n.d.). *Somerset Tourism Strategy, 2021–2025, Volume 2: Supporting Analysis and Recommendations*. Esk: Somerset Regional Council. <https://www.somerset.qld.gov.au/downloads/file/2909/somerset-tourism-strategy,2021>

42 National Economic and Industry Research (NIER). (2025). *City of Ipswich, Tourism value*. Compiled and presented by economy.id. Findings based on NIEIR data. <https://economy.id.com.au/ipswich/tourism-value>

43 Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *City of Ipswich, tourism workforce*. Compiled and presented by economy.id. Findings based on ABS data. <https://economy.id.com.au/ipswich/tourism-workforce>

### 3.3 Training profile for tourism

In 2023, there were approximately 1230 program enrolments in tourism-related training across the broader BVRT tourism region. These enrolments were aligned with the course classifications SIT, THH and THT, which cover Tourism, Travel and Hospitality programs within the VET framework.<sup>44</sup> The most popular qualifications were the Certificate II in Hospitality (420 enrolments) and the Certificate III in Hospitality (390 enrolments), reflecting strong demand for foundational skills in the hospitality sector.

Table 26 outlines the main VET qualifications considered part of the tourism industry training pipeline. These are primarily drawn from the SIT training package, which includes qualifications directly linked to roles in tourism, travel, hospitality, cookery and events.<sup>45</sup> While retail qualifications also support the tourism economy, they have been excluded from this training-specific overview due to their broader application across multiple industries.

Tourism-related VET enrolments have remained relatively stable across the region in recent years. However, some localities have seen encouraging signs of growth. For instance, Leichhardt – One Mile recorded an increase in SIT enrolments from 70 in 2021 to 100 in 2023, while Nanango saw enrolments double from 40 to 80 over the same period. These increases may reflect more responsive training offerings or improved visibility of tourism-related career opportunities.

Despite these gains, several SIT qualifications recorded very low or zero enrolments. Qualifications related to travel, guiding, event management and patisserie remain underutilised, indicating either limited delivery capacity or low perceived demand. Furthermore, while cookery and kitchen management pathways did attract some enrolments (e.g. 80 in Certificate II in Cookery, 45 in Certificate III in Commercial Cookery), these were relatively modest compared to the hospitality qualifications. This suggests that the pipeline may be skewed towards frontline hospitality roles rather than culinary or management-focused positions.



There is also considerable variation in course availability across the region, with some areas offering only three SIT-aligned courses and others providing up to seven. This uneven training landscape points to differing levels of local infrastructure, provider capacity and program accessibility, which could affect the ability of learners to pursue tourism careers without relocating or studying online.

Higher education options are available for students wishing to pursue advanced qualifications. Approximately 26 undergraduate and postgraduate programs relevant to tourism, hospitality and event management are accessible either in-person or online. Providers such as Griffith University, Southern Cross University, Swinburne University, the University of Tasmania, Torrens University Australia and Edith Cowan University offer flexible study options that support career progression in tourism-related fields, particularly for those seeking to upskill or transition into management roles.

While the SIT training package provides a vital foundation for tourism workforce development, the narrow focus on entry-level hospitality qualifications, combined with low uptake of advanced courses, raises questions about the pipeline's ability to meet the diverse and evolving skills needs of the BVRT tourism sector. Addressing this imbalance through targeted investment, course expansion and stronger industry-training alignment will be essential for ensuring a resilient and future-ready workforce.

44 NCVER. (2024). *Total VET students and courses by SA2 for SIT courses*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>

45 Training.gov.au. (2023). *Training package, SIT Tourism, Travel and Hospitality Training Package, Release 02/Mar/2023*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://training.gov.au/training/details/sit/qualifications>

**Table 26** Tourism, travel and hospitality related qualifications

Industry qualification	Number of VET enrolments in 2023 <sup>(a)</sup>
<b>Certificate I in Tourism (Australian Indigenous Culture)</b>	-
<b>Certificate I in Hospitality</b>	75
<b>Certificate II in Tourism</b>	70
<b>Certificate II in Hospitality</b>	420
<b>Certificate II in Cookery</b>	80
<b>Certificate III in Tourism</b>	10
<b>Certificate III in Travel</b>	5
<b>Certificate III in Guiding</b>	-
<b>Certificate III in Events</b>	5
<b>Certificate III in Hospitality</b>	390
<b>Certificate III in Hospitality (Restaurant Front of House)</b>	0
<b>Certificate III in Commercial Cookery</b>	45
<b>Certificate III in Catering</b>	0
<b>Certificate III in Patisserie</b>	0
<b>Certificate III in Asian Cookery</b>	-
<b>Certificate IV in Travel and Tourism</b>	0
<b>Certificate IV in Guiding</b>	-
<b>Certificate IV in Hospitality</b>	50
<b>Certificate IV in Kitchen Management</b>	5
<b>Certificate IV in Catering Management</b>	-
<b>Certificate IV in Patisserie</b>	-
<b>Certificate IV in Asian Cookery</b>	-
<b>Diploma of Travel and Tourism Management</b>	0
<b>Diploma of Event Management</b>	0
<b>Diploma of Hospitality Management</b>	25
<b>Advanced Diploma of Travel and Tourism Management</b>	-
<b>Advanced Diploma of Event Management</b>	-
<b>Advanced Diploma of Hospitality Management</b>	-

(a) Rounded to increments of 5  
Source: NCVET, VOCSTATS

## 3.4 Training pathways

### Entry-level pathways

#### PREREQUISITES TO ENTER THE INDUSTRY

For most entry-level roles, businesses in the BVRT region typically seek candidates with a strong work ethic, a willingness to learn, punctuality and sound customer service and communication skills. Awareness of workplace health and safety is also valued. While no formal qualifications are required, prior experience in tourism, retail or hospitality is advantageous. Many businesses provide onboarding support through local induction programs run by councils or employers, which may include training in basic food handling, visitor information, trail safety and customer interaction standards.

#### ENTRY-LEVEL QUALIFICATIONS AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Although formal qualifications are not essential, several vocational certificates can enhance job readiness. These include Certificate II and III in Hospitality (for frontline, kitchenhand and accommodation roles), Certificate II in Outdoor Recreation or Conservation and Ecosystem Management (for trail and park-related roles) and Certificate I or II in Tourism or Retail Services (for visitor centre or sales roles). Uptake of these qualifications varies across the region depending on local training availability and employer demand.

#### SCHOOL-BASED TRAINING

School-based programs provide early exposure to the sector, although participation is limited in some areas. The Gateway to Industry Schools Program (GISP) offers structured pathways for students aged 15–19 and is designed to build industry awareness and employability skills. However, no schools in the Somerset or South Burnett regions currently participate in the Tourism and Hospitality sector of GISP, limiting access for local students. Transitions from GISP into employment or further training are also inconsistent and not well-tracked.

#### VET IN SCHOOLS (VETiS)

The Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) program is more widely available and enables Queensland students in Years 10–12 to complete a government-funded Certificate I or II aligned with industry priorities. Courses such as Certificate II in Hospitality, Tourism or Cookery are offered at no cost to eligible students and may be delivered by schools, TAFE or other Skills Assure Suppliers (SAS). Despite this, participation across the BVRT region remains limited. Key barriers include a lack of strong school-industry partnerships in rural areas and unclear pathways from VETiS into long-term employment or further study.

## Further learning vocational pathways

### **SPECIFIC COURSES AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES**

Post-school qualifications from AQF Level 2 to Diploma are available but often require travel to Ipswich, Toowoomba or Brisbane. These include Certificate III and IV in Commercial Cookery or Hospitality, Certificate IV in Outdoor Leadership (limited availability) and Diploma-level qualifications in Event Management or Travel and Tourism. Travel and accommodation costs may limit participation for regional learners.

### **MICRO-CREDENTIALS**

Many roles in the sector benefit from short form training such as Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA), food safety and handling, first aid, CPR and trail safety or incident response. Feedback from employers and registered training organisations (RTOs) suggests uptake is constrained by inconsistent delivery, limited awareness of funding options and a lack of customisation for small-town tourism settings. More modular and mobile training options, including online and community-based delivery, would better support local workforce needs.

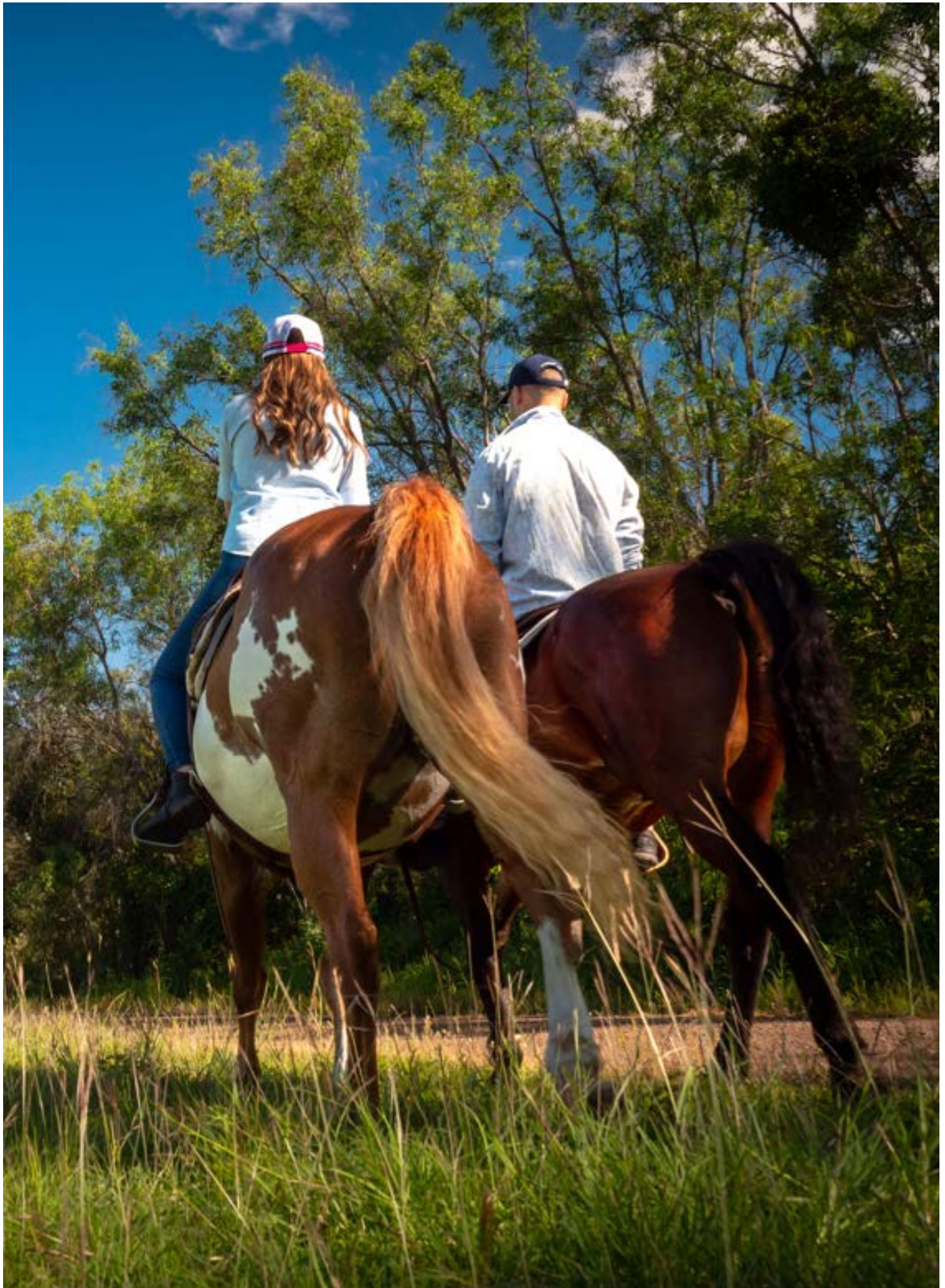
### **SKILLED POSITIONS**

Professional roles such as head chefs, tourism officers and park guides typically require qualifications at the Certificate IV or Diploma level. However, these career pathways are not well promoted to local school leavers or adult career changers, which may limit the regional talent pipeline for skilled roles.

## Tertiary education pathways

### **UNIVERSITY-LEVEL OFFERINGS**

Tertiary pathways in tourism and hospitality are limited for students based in the BVRT region. While universities such as The University of Queensland, Griffith University, Southern Cross University and Bond University offer Bachelor (AQF Level 7) and Master (AQF Level 9) programs in tourism, hospitality and event management, these offerings are generally city-based and not directly aligned with rural or nature-based tourism contexts. Some institutions provide flexible or blended delivery models, but students still face challenges including mandatory travel for in-person intensives or block placements, limited course availability per semester, high upfront costs and concerns about local relevance.



### 3.5 Vocational training and tertiary education infrastructure

The Queensland Vocational Education and Training system plays a critical role in supporting the upskilling of the regional workforce, including those employed in the tourism industry. Eligible individuals can access subsidised programs such as the Career Start and Career Boost (previously known as Certificate 3 Guarantee and Higher-Level Skills) initiative, which help participants gain industry-relevant qualifications at little or no cost.<sup>46</sup> These programs are designed to improve employment outcomes by equipping workers with practical skills aligned to current and emerging industry needs.

Employers also have the opportunity to strengthen their workforce pipelines by recruiting trainees and apprentices into their businesses. This not only provides valuable on-the-job training for new entrants but also supports succession planning and staff development. Support services for both employers and apprentices are available through the Queensland Government's Apprenticeships Info service and the Apprentice Connect Australia providers.<sup>47</sup> These services offer advice and assistance throughout the duration of the apprenticeship or traineeship and can help address issues such as training delivery, performance concerns or contract changes.

In addition to formal training pathways, programs such as the Gateway to Industry Schools (food, wine and tourism) initiative are helping to build long-term capability by linking education and industry. This program connects schools with local businesses and training providers, offering students hands-on learning experiences that expose them to real-world career opportunities in the tourism, hospitality and food industry.<sup>48</sup> By participating, students are better positioned to make informed career decisions and are more likely to transition smoothly from school into further training or employment.

Similarly, Local Skills Solutions is a program designed to assist industry and community focused organisations to identify localised workforce challenges and develop and deliver projects that provide direct training pathways towards secure and meaningful employment.

Local Skills Solutions adopts a co-design and delivery model to encourage industry and communities to work together to identify gaps in local vocational education and training delivery and develop direct, practical training solutions (projects) to respond to these gaps.

VET in the BVRT region is delivered primarily by TAFE Queensland and several smaller RTOs. Key campuses in Ipswich, Toowoomba and Kingaroy provide access to Certificate II–IV and Diploma qualifications in hospitality, tourism, events and outdoor recreation. However, physical distance, transport limitations and inconsistent course scheduling can hinder access for residents of smaller BVRT towns. Mobile training models and outreach programs are rare and there are few mechanisms for aggregating local demand to make delivery viable.

Key gaps identified during research that may be explored during consultation include:

- ▶ lack of accredited trail maintenance and outdoor leadership programs
- ▶ limited digital literacy training for operators needing to manage online bookings and marketing
- ▶ absence of hospitality business management qualifications tailored for micro-enterprises.

46 Queensland Government. (2025). *Free and reduced-cost training*. Brisbane: Queensland Government. <https://www.qld.gov.au/education/training/subsidies>

47 Queensland Government. (2025). *Apprenticeships Info – support for apprentices, trainees and employers*. Brisbane: Queensland Government. <https://www.qld.gov.au/education/apprenticeships/support>

48 qcwt. (n.d.). *Gateway to Industry Schools – Tourism and Hospitality*. Stanthorpe: Queensland College of Wine Tourism. <https://qcwt.com.au/schools-program/https-gateway2tourismhospitality-com-au/>

## 3.6 Employment projections and job growth<sup>49</sup>

Between 2021 and 2026, Queensland's hospitality industry is forecast to grow by approximately 8–10 per cent, according to Jobs Queensland and ABS data. While specific regional projections for Scenic Rim, Somerset and South Burnett are not available, local strategies aim to increase visitation and tourism's economic contribution. This growth reflects recovery from pandemic-era declines and rising demand for domestic, nature-based tourism. However, the sector continues to face urgent labour supply issues, particularly in casual hospitality, cleaning and maintenance roles, with persistent skills shortages and workforce pressures. If training and recruitment systems remain unchanged, projected demand will likely outpace available workforce supply, increasing pressure on already stretched local businesses.

Tourism generates extensive ripple effects across the economy, driving job creation both directly and indirectly. While the most visible employment occurs within accommodation and food services, tourism also stimulates demand across a broad range of industries, including transport, postal and warehousing services, retail trade, rental hiring and real estate, arts and recreational and administrative and support services, and even construction. These layers of indirect employment are essential to understanding the full economic impact of tourism, especially in regions like the BVRT where visitor experience is diverse and immersive. The following projections focus on Queensland-level insights and provides a broader picture of industry growth expected by 2027–2028.

In the accommodation and food services industry, strong growth is expected across several key sub-industries. Pubs, taverns and bars are projected to grow by 4.6 per cent, while cafes, restaurants and takeaway food services are forecast to expand by 4.1 per cent. The accommodation and clubs (hospitality) subsectors are each projected to grow by 1.7 per cent. These trends reflect ongoing consumer demand for social and leisure experiences. The occupations driving this growth include kitchenhands, waitstaff, sales assistants, housekeepers, chefs, cooks and baristas, many of whom are employed in tourism hotspots and hospitality venues throughout the BVRT region.

Administrative and support services also contribute to the tourism economy, particularly in areas such as cleaning, event planning and travel bookings. Notably, employment services are forecast to grow by 5.8 per cent, followed by travel agency and tour arrangement services at 3.2 per cent. Building cleaning, pest control and gardening services are expected to grow by 1.8 per cent, while other administrative services are also forecast to rise by 3.2 per cent. Occupations within these areas include domestic cleaners, human resource professionals, conference and event organisers, general clerks and tourism and travel advisors, all of which support the broader functioning of tourism operations.

The arts and recreation services industry will also see notable employment growth. Creative and performing arts activities are expected to expand by 6.2 per cent, with sports and physical recreation activities growing by 4.9 per cent. Gambling activities (3.8 per cent) and

<sup>49</sup> Jobs Queensland. Industry profiles. *Anticipating Future Skills*. Ipswich: Queensland Government  
<https://jobsqueensland.qld.gov.au/anticipating-future-skills/industry-profiles>

amusement or other recreational activities (2.2 per cent) also show positive trajectories. These industries underpin the recreation appeal of regions like the BVRT, where activities and events are a major drawcard. Associated occupations include sports coaches, visual arts and music professionals and hospitality workers who help deliver these experiences.

The construction industry, while not traditionally seen as a tourism-related industry, plays a vital enabling role, especially in infrastructure development for tourism precincts and accommodation upgrades. Within this industry, residential construction is projected to see a significant 14 per cent growth, while building and installation services, such as electricians and plumbers, are expected to grow by 3.3 per cent. Other construction services, including handyman and fencers, will increase by 1.8 per cent. Although building completion services (e.g. painters and plasterers) are expected to decline slightly by 0.8 per cent, the industry overall remains a crucial backbone to regional tourism development.

In the rental, hiring and real estate services industry, changes in accommodation and transport preferences have implications for employment. Real estate services are forecast to grow by 5.9 per cent, while other goods and equipment rental and hiring services are expected to grow by 3.3 per cent. However, property operators and motor vehicle rental and hiring are projected to decline by 1.8 per cent and 0.2 per cent respectively. These shifts highlight the need to adapt tourism offerings and business models in response to visitor behaviour, particularly the growing trend of self-contained and

nature-based travel seen in the BVRT. Retail trade is another vital sector linked to tourism, with strong growth forecast in areas serving both locals and visitors. Supermarkets and grocery stores are expected to grow by 2.9 per cent, while pharmaceutical and other store-based retailing will see a 5.9 per cent rise. Clothing, footwear and personal accessory retailing is projected to grow by 2.4 per cent, and specialised food retailing, such as artisan goods and local produce, is set to grow by 4.7 per cent. These areas support jobs for sales assistants, shelf fillers, pharmacists, retail managers and butchers, many of whom play a role in delivering the regional tourism experience.

Finally, the transport, postal and warehousing industries are critical for supporting tourism-related logistics and mobility. Road freight transport is expected to grow by 3.2 per cent, postal and courier services by 2 per cent and warehouse and storage services by 4.7 per cent. Importantly for the BVRT, road passenger transport is expected to grow by 4.6 per cent, supporting visitor access to trailheads and accommodation. Key occupations in these sectors include truck and delivery drivers, couriers, mail sorters, forklift operators and bus or coach drivers, all essential to keeping goods and people moving across regional Queensland.

## 3.7 Labour shortages and recruitment challenges

The BVRT region is home to more than 149,099 people (based on the SA2 estimates) and projected to grow significantly, with an additional 111,608 residents expected over the next 25 years.<sup>50</sup> This equates to an average annual growth rate of 2.3 per cent, well above the Queensland average of 1.4 per cent per year (Figure 3). The growing popularity of the region is expected to continue, placing further pressure on an already constrained workforce. Key workforce and skills challenges include:<sup>51</sup>

- 1. Seasonal employment and high turnover rates:** The tourism industry across the BVRT region experiences fluctuating demand throughout the year, making it difficult to maintain a stable workforce. Many businesses struggle to find and retain staff before peak periods, leading to service delivery challenges and operational constraints.
- 2. Competition from other industries:** Tourism employers frequently compete with higher-paying or more stable sectors such as construction, retail logistics and health care. This challenge is especially acute for frontline and entry-level roles, where transferable skills are common.
- 3. Demand for specialised skills:** There is a growing need for workers with digital marketing expertise, business acumen and strong interpersonal skills to enhance the visitor experience. These roles are becoming increasingly critical to BVRT's tourism growth, particularly among micro-business operators who often require staff to 'wear multiple hats'.
- 4. Recurring shortages in key roles:** According to the 2023 Queensland Tourism Industry Council Workforce Report, significant shortages persist in frontline roles (e.g. waitstaff, bar staff, front office, retail), tour guides, cooks and chefs and digital marketing professionals.
- 5. Workforce readiness:** Employers across the region report difficulties in attracting younger workers who possess the social, emotional and communication skills required in customer-facing roles. Resilience, initiative and the ability to work in fast-paced or high-pressure settings are increasingly important but underdeveloped in school leavers and early-career workers.

50 Queensland Government Statistician's Office. (2024). *Regions. Population projections*. Brisbane: Queensland Government. <https://www.qgso.qld.gov.au/statistics/theme/population/population-projections/regions>

51 The University of Queensland and The Service Innovation Alliance (SIA). (2024). *Brisbane Valley Rail Trail (BVRT) Visitor Research Program Report – Phase 2*. Brisbane: The University of Queensland. <https://experiencesomerset.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/BVRT-Visitor-Research-Program-Phase-2-FINAL-REPORT.pdf>; Queensland Tourism Industry Council. (2023). *QTIC Workforce Priorities Report*. Brisbane: Queensland Tourism Industry Council. <https://qticazure.blob.core.windows.net/crmblobcontainer/QTIC%20Workforce%20Priorities%20Report.pdf>

Table 27 shows the number of registered businesses in tourism and related industries.

**Table 27** Registered business by industries related to tourism, BVRT region

Industry	Number of businesses	% of total	Change June 2022 to June 2024
<b>Transport, postal and warehousing services</b>	752	7.6	+5.8%
<b>Rental hiring and real estate</b>	741	7.5	+3.5%
<b>Retail trade</b>	523	5.3	-6.3%
<b>Administrative and support services</b>	373	3.8	+18%
<b>Accommodation and food services</b>	293	2.9	+2.1%
<b>Arts and recreational services</b>	150	1.5	+5.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2832</b>	<b>28.6%</b>	

Source: ABS, *Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits, July 2020 – June 2024*

Collectively, these industries account for 2832 businesses, or 28.6 per cent of all businesses in the BVRT region. This suggests tourism may influence a larger share of businesses than even primary industries like agricultural or construction (see section 4.6 for detailed projections). While the number of retail trade business has declined recently, other industries linked to tourism are showing strong growth, potentially outpacing what the current workforce can sustain.



## Specialised occupations in demand

Chefs, cooks and kitchenhands are consistently among the occupations experiencing significant pressure. National data shows that the return of diners to restaurants, pubs and cafes after the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns brought a surge in recruitment.<sup>52</sup> However, inflation and rising cost-of-living pressures are now affecting both ends of the hospitality industry.

- ▶ Rising input costs are eroding already tight profit margins.
- ▶ Consumers are cutting discretionary spending, leading to fewer dining out occasions.

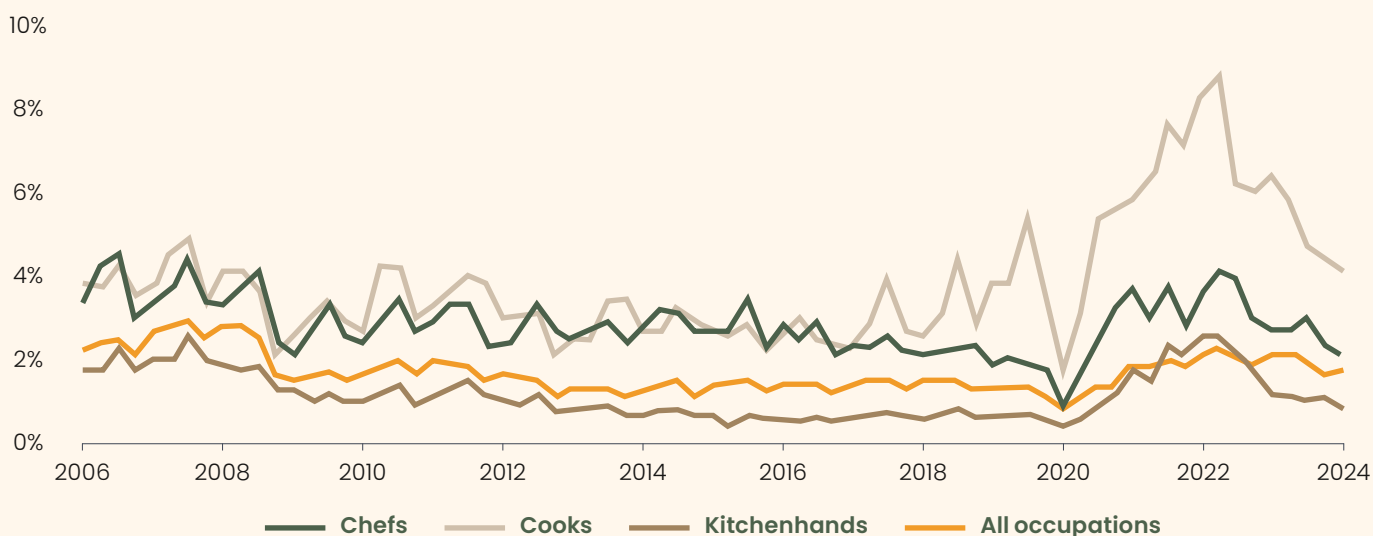
Vacancy rates (i.e. online job advertisements as a proportion of employment) have shown sustained demand for chefs and cooks over the last two decades (Figure 8).<sup>53</sup>

Since 2017, vacancy trends have diverged, possibly due to the broader industry deployment of cooks, 17 per cent of cooks work in the health care and social assistance industry compared to only 6 per cent of chefs.<sup>54</sup> Between May 2014 and May 2024:

- ▶ Chefs increased by 53.3 per cent (to 126,000 nationally).
- ▶ Kitchenhands grew by 17.6 per cent, but only 1.2 per cent in the last year (now 149,000).
- ▶ Cooks remained stable around 40,000.

As labour market conditions tighten, fewer kitchenhands and cooks are being hired to support chefs, increasing pressure on remaining staff. The relative ease of filling kitchenhand roles (Skill Level 5, often trained on the job) contrasts with the higher educational requirements of chefs (Skill Level 2) and cooks (Skill Level 3).<sup>55</sup>

**Figure 8** Vacancy rates for chefs, cooks and kitchenhands (May 2006 – May 2024)



Source: ABS, *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed*

52 Jobs and Skills Australia. (2025). *Labour Force Trending*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/labour-force-trending>

53 Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2024). *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed>

54 Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). TableBuilder. Microdata and TableBuilder. *Statistics*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/tablebuilder>

55 Jobs and Skills Australia. (2025). *Labour Market Update - March 2025*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/publications/labour-market-update-march-2025>

This example illustrates broader challenges across the tourism workforce. Verified shortages in regional Queensland include:<sup>56</sup>

- ▶ hotel or motel managers
- ▶ accommodation and hospitality managers
- ▶ tour guides
- ▶ waiters
- ▶ cooks and chefs.

Broader regional challenges also extend to construction project managers, technical and sales representatives and retail managers.

Table 28 summarises the current shortage status of key tourism-related occupations in Queensland, as identified by Jobs and Skills Australia.

**Table 28** List of key tourism jobs and shortage status

Occupation	Shortage status (Queensland)
<b>Waitstaff</b>	Not in shortage (only in NSW and NT)
<b>Bar attendants</b>	No shortage
<b>Baristas</b>	Not in shortage (only in rural NSW)
<b>Chefs/cooks</b>	Verified nationwide shortage
<b>Hotel managers</b>	In shortage
<b>Accommodation/hospitality managers</b>	In shortage
<b>Sales/events</b>	No verified shortage (except NT)
<b>Retail managers</b>	Not in shortage, but anecdotal regional shortages
<b>Tour guides</b>	Verified shortage

Source: Jobs and Skills Australia, *Occupation Shortage List*

While some roles are not technically listed as ‘in shortage’ at the state level, employer reports from the BVRT region suggest more acute pressures, particularly in hard-to-fill or seasonal positions. This highlights the importance of distinguishing between labour shortages (insufficient applicants) and skills shortages (applicants lacking required capabilities), both of which are evident in the region’s tourism labour market.

## Youth pathways and school leaver programs

School-based apprenticeships and traineeships are in place in some regions through the Gateway to Industry Schools Program (GISP) and supported by VET in Schools (VETiS) offerings. However, participation remains limited in regions traversed by the BVRT.

Barriers include:

- ▶ limited awareness among students of tourism careers
- ▶ lack of industry placements in rural towns
- ▶ poor alignment between training delivery and business needs
- ▶ minimal coordination between schools, employers and RTOs.

Introducing regional programs where Year 10–12 students engage in structured industry experiences may offer a model for the BVRT region. These programs could combine taster days, micro-credentials (e.g. RSA, food safety) and mentoring from local operators.

<sup>56</sup> Jobs and Skills Australia. (2024). *Occupational Shortage List*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/occupation-shortages-analysis/occupation-shortage-list>

## 3.8 Skills and training requirements

The tourism, hospitality and service sectors across the BVRT region are entering a period of gradual growth and diversification, spurred by increased visitation, trail investment and regional events. However, the workforce remains under strain due to the region's small population base, ageing demographics, limited training access and constrained housing availability. Labour and skills shortages are evident in both entry-level and mid-tier roles, particularly in sectors such as hospitality, outdoor recreation, retail and tourism infrastructure. Upskilling, career development and workforce readiness are emerging as regional priorities. Based on findings throughout this scan, including the following areas are identified as immediate and mid-term workforce development priorities across the BVRT region.

### Sector trends shaping skills and training needs

#### HOSPITALITY AND ACCOMMODATION

Staffing pressures persist in hospitality, particularly in kitchens and frontline roles. Businesses report difficulties recruiting workers with both practical skills and the ability to work independently. Sustainability issues are becoming more prominent, especially in relation to waste reduction, energy use and local sourcing. Some operators are adapting menus to reduce food waste or prioritise low-mileage ingredients. Digital tools (e.g. booking systems, inventory apps) help improve efficiency but are not yet consistently embedded. Capacity to train and retain staff remains a more pressing issue than technology adoption.

#### TOURISM AND OUTDOOR RECREATION

The BVRT's growing popularity as a trail-based destination is generating demand for a broader range of tourism products and services, from self-guided itineraries to hosted tours and experience-based packages. Local tour operators and guides are increasingly central to this offering, delivering curated experiences that blend storytelling, cultural interpretation and outdoor activity. These roles require interpersonal confidence, local knowledge and a strong focus on visitor safety. Sustainability considerations are embedded in this work, particularly through strategies to reduce environmental impact, protect natural assets and encourage responsible tourism. Digital tools such as online booking platforms, mapping apps and visitor feedback support delivery, but the sector remains highly reliant on human interaction, seasonal availability and community-based enterprise.



### **RETAIL AND VISITOR SERVICES**

Retailers across the BVRT region serve both locals and tourists, often doubling as informal ambassadors for the area. Employers value staff who are personable, adaptable and willing to take initiative in dynamic environments. Digital tools such as point-of-sale systems, inventory tracking apps and mobile payment platforms are now standard, though many businesses continue to rely on informal, relationship-based service. Increasingly, retailers are integrating environmental and social values into their operations, reducing single-use packaging, prioritising locally made or ethically sourced products and promoting circular economy principles. Frontline staff will be expected not only to understand these practices but to communicate them to customers, making environmental literacy, cultural awareness and regional product knowledge valuable emerging skills.

### **CONSTRUCTION AND TRAIL INFRASTRUCTURE**

Trail and tourism infrastructure is expanding, with upgrades to amenities, signage and public spaces. Most construction roles remain hands-on and physically demanding, but sustainability requirements such as erosion control, material reuse and energy-efficient design are becoming more visible in project briefs. Workers may be required to meet compliance standards related to environmental protection, particularly in riparian zones or heritage precincts.

### **AGRICULTURE AND AGRITOURISM**

Agriculture continues to underpin the region's economy, with some producers diversifying into agritourism to build resilience and create new revenue streams. These ventures highlight sustainability through local food systems, regenerative practices and 'paddock to plate' consumer engagement. Workers are often involved in growing, processing and serving food on-site, requiring flexibility and strong interpersonal skills. Digital skills are useful for managing online bookings or social media, but sustainability knowledge is increasingly part of the visitor experience.

### **EVENTS AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES**

Events and festivals contribute to the region's cultural identity and visitor appeal. They also generate short-term roles in logistics, entertainment and service delivery. Sustainability is increasingly influencing event planning, with attention to waste minimisation, local supplier engagement and low-impact design. Volunteers and staff may need to manage recycling stations, support inclusive access or promote active transport options. While many event tasks are hands-on, digital literacy supports logistics, communications and promotion. Environmental and cultural sensitivity are growing expectations across all creative and community-facing roles.

## Snapshot: immediate and mid-term skills needs



### Hospitality and accommodation

#### FRONTLINE SERVICE:

Waitstaff, café and bar attendants

#### COMMERCIAL COOKERY:

Qualified cooks and chefs, kitchenhands

#### SUPERVISORY ROLES:

Team leadership, rostering, sustainability practices

#### VENUE OPERATIONS:

Food safety, customer service, shift coordination



### Tourism, outdoor recreation and enterprise

#### TOUR GUIDES AND HOSTS:

Safety, storytelling, cultural interpretation

#### OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP:

Certificate IV qualification, risk management

#### EXPERIENCE DESIGN:

Signage, itinerary development, visitor engagement

#### MICROBUSINESS OPERATORS:

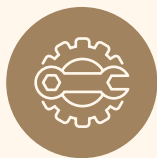
Guided tours, food trucks, e-bike hire, markets

#### BUSINESS CAPABILITY:

Online bookings, social media, digital content creation

#### SUSTAINABLE TOURISM:

Low-impact practices, environmental messaging, community connection



### Construction and trail infrastructure

#### LABOURERS AND TRADESPEOPLE:

Trail upgrades, signage, minor facility work

#### MAINTENANCE WORKERS:

Landscaping, caretaking, small repairs

#### ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE:

Work health and safety, erosion control, sustainable design

#### MOBILE WORK TOOLS:

Use of reporting and scheduling apps



### Agriculture and agritourism

#### DIVERSIFIED FARM STAFF:

Customer service, food safety, manual labour

#### AGRITOURISM SUPPORT:

Bookings, storytelling, small event delivery

#### SUSTAINABILITY LITERACY:

Local food systems, regenerative farming

#### DIGITAL OPERATIONS:

Social media, online sales, compliance



## Retail and visitor services

### **SALES ASSISTANTS:**

Point-of-sale systems,  
stock control, customer service

### **VISITOR CENTRE STAFF:**

Local knowledge, digital booking tools,  
regional promotion

### **SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION:**

Circular economy awareness,  
product knowledge



## Events and creative industries

### **EVENT STAFF:**

Logistics, vendor liaison,  
crowd and waste management

### **VOLUNTEER ROLES:**

Recycling stations, inclusive access,  
setup/pack-down

### **CREATIVES AND STALLHOLDERS:**

Product display, customer interaction, promotion

### **DIGITAL TOOLS:**

Social media, ticketing platforms, QR check-ins



## 3.9 Future opportunities

The BVRT region has a unique opportunity to harness tourism as a lever for regional development, community engagement and workforce activation. Analysis across demographic, labour market and education data highlights several levers for consideration and further discussion:

- 1. Shaping workforce strategy through population growth:** Rapid growth in key localities such as Fernvale, Nanango and the broader Somerset region presents a window to embed workforce planning in infrastructure, tourism and housing initiatives. Aligning workforce development with regional planning ensures that new residents can access employment opportunities while supporting local industry.
- 2. Activating untapped labour pools:** A striking 37.8 per cent of the region's working-age population is not in the labour force, far exceeding the Queensland average of 32 per cent. This presents a major opportunity for targeted re-engagement strategies, including foundational skills programs, return-to-work initiatives and employer-led pathways for people with caring responsibilities, disabilities or previous long-term unemployment.
- 3. Strengthening youth engagement and transitions:** High youth unemployment and a relatively low proportion of residents completing Year 12 highlight the need for stronger school-to-work transitions. Apprenticeship interest in food and hospitality suggests that industry-linked VET pathways could be leveraged to build aspiration, employability and retention among younger cohorts. There are numerous local businesses that have outstanding employment practices that can be used in this effort
- 4. Leveraging tourism as a workforce entry point:** Entry-level roles in accommodation, food services and recreation provide accessible employment pathways for early school leavers, people re-entering the workforce, First Nations people and migrants. These roles often require low formal qualifications, but can provide a bridge to more stable, long-term employment when paired with support and recognition frameworks.
- 5. Modernising skills development:** Reforms such as the Strategic Advisory Committee for Skills and Apprenticeships (SACSA) pilot and the growth of micro-credentials are changing the training landscape. Stackable skill sets, accelerated training for chefs and frontline roles and workplace-integrated learning could all help address labour shortages while improving retention and career progression.

- 6. Enhancing VET program responsiveness:** Current enrolments suggest interest in tourism and hospitality training, but completion rates remain low. Strengthening partnerships between TAFEs, schools, employers and local government can ensure training is contextualised, accessible and aligned with real job opportunities, particularly in events, food services, tourism operations and business services.
- 7. Maximising recent trail investment:** Upgrades to the BVRT and new destination branding efforts offer a strong platform to integrate tourism workforce planning into regional development. Workforce needs should be considered in promotional campaigns, funding proposals and precinct activation strategies to ensure the local workforce is ready to meet rising visitor expectations.
- 8. Supporting micro and small businesses:** With a high concentration of sole traders and micro-businesses in the region, there is scope to strengthen entrepreneurship support, digital skills and workforce planning for small operators. Many employers rely on family or seasonal workers and would benefit from shared recruitment platforms, localised HR support and access to flexible training options.
- 9. Fostering First Nations workforce inclusion and enterprise:** The regional tourism industry has the potential to not only grow economically but also contribute to social and cultural inclusion through a more diverse and representative workforce. A key opportunity lies in expanding employment and enterprise pathways for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the BVRT region. With 5.6 per cent of the population identifying as First Nations, there is a strong foundation for growing representation in all facets of tourism. Creating culturally safe, supportive and respectful work environments is essential to attracting and retaining First Nations employees.
- 10. Improving workplace culture and retention:** Finally, the *Hospitality on the Horizon* report highlights that poor workplace culture and burnout are key reasons for staff turnover in hospitality. Regional employers need support to improve job quality, including through better rostering, clear career pathways, mentorship and safe working environments. Improving employee experiences can help build a more stable workforce and reduce reliance on recruitment in a tight labour market.

Together, these opportunities underscore the value of a coordinated, regionally tailored workforce development plan, one that positions tourism not just as a driver of visitor numbers, but as a foundation for inclusive, sustainable regional growth.





04

# Conclusions

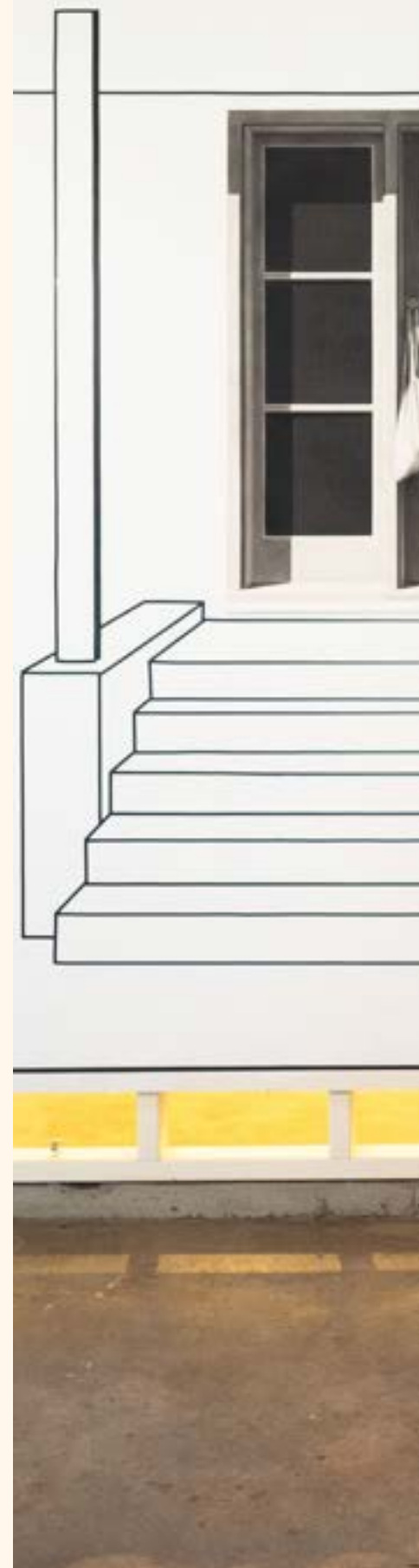


This environmental scan of the BVRT region reveals a dynamic but uneven workforce landscape shaped by demographic constraints, shifting industry demand and inconsistent access to training and employment pathways. The following key findings collectively underscore the urgent need for a dedicated, place-based workforce plan to support the region's continued growth and resilience will inform the next stage of this project:

- 1. Ageing population with low mobility and diversity:** Most communities across the region have a median age above the Queensland average, low rates of population mobility and limited cultural and linguistic diversity. These factors reduce natural labour market dynamism and may constrain future recruitment, innovation and community resilience.
- 2. Significant population growth—but high non-participation:** While the region is experiencing significant population growth (up to 4.3 per cent in some areas), this has not translated evenly into labour force participation. A substantial 37.8 per cent of working-age residents are not in the labour force, compared to 32 per cent statewide. This indicates untapped potential but also points to structural barriers to workforce engagement.
- 3. Low educational attainment and VET completions:** Just over half (52.1 per cent) of residents have completed Year 11 or 12, well below the Queensland average of 63.6 per cent. Despite steady enrolment in VET, completion rates remain low, particularly in tourism-related training packages (34 per cent completion). This weakens the regional skills pipeline at a time of increasing demand.
- 4. Opportunities in youth transitions and VET pathways:** Youth unemployment rates fluctuate across the region, pointing to both risk and opportunity. Hospitality roles are the third most common intended occupation for VET learners and apprenticeships in food and hospitality rank among the top five. This suggests strong interest that could be harnessed through improved transitions and clearer pathways to employment.
- 5. Intense competition for workers from service-based sectors:** Health care, social assistance, education and construction have seen significant employment growth and offer more stable and often better-paid roles than tourism. These industries are competing directly for talent, heightening recruitment and retention challenges in hospitality and tourism.

- 6. Industry transformation and decline of traditional sectors:** Manufacturing, wholesale trade and mining (all historically important to the region) have declined over the past decade. Tourism-related industries, by contrast, have grown, though some (e.g. retail and transport) still lag state averages. The BVRT continues to support job creation across diverse sectors, including food services, arts, recreation, accommodation and trail maintenance, but seasonal fluctuations and low wages continue to affect workforce stability.
- 7. Microbusiness dominance and economic fragility:** Around 61 per cent of regional businesses report annual turnover under \$200,000, higher than the Queensland average (55 per cent). The business base is dominated by sole traders and small operators, who are more vulnerable to seasonal variation and discretionary spending trends. This highlights the need for resilience-building and business capability support.
- 8. Skills shortages in specialised tourism roles:** State and national data confirm ongoing shortages in critical tourism roles such as chefs, cooks, hotel managers and tour guides. Vacancy rates for chefs and cooks have remained high for nearly two decades. National efforts to accelerate chef training pathways (e.g. through SACSA) reflect the scale and persistence of workforce pressures.
- 9. Mismatch between qualifications and industry uptake:** While a wide range of SIT-aligned qualifications are offered across the region, availability is uneven. Some areas offer just three courses, others up to seven. Learners express strong interest in hospitality careers, yet completion and employment outcomes remain limited. Targeted interventions are needed to better align course offerings with both learner aspirations and labour market demand.
- 10. Lack of tourism-specific data hinders planning:** The absence of granular occupational data (e.g. for waiters, cooks, tour guides) obscures tourism's full employment footprint. Broader categories such as 'sales workers' or 'community and personal service workers' may underrepresent the sector's contribution, complicating efforts to plan effectively. More detailed tourism labour data is needed for the BVRT region.

Together, these findings reinforce the urgency of developing a regional workforce strategy that addresses current labour shortages, strengthens long-term skills development and supports sustainable growth in tourism and allied industries. The BVRT represents a rare opportunity to shape an inclusive, future-ready regional economy, provided that training, employment and industry development efforts are strategically aligned. A coordinated workforce plan will be essential to realising this potential.





BRISBANE

VALLEY

RAIL TRAIL

05

# Index



## List of Figures

<b>Figure 1</b> The BVRT region.....	9
<b>Figure 2</b> Four stages of workforce planning.....	12
<b>Figure 3</b> Projected population change, BVRT region and Queensland.....	19
<b>Figure 4</b> Population by age and gender.....	20
<b>Figure 5</b> Unemployment rate, BVRT region and Queensland.....	24
<b>Figure 6</b> Percentage of employment by industry, BVRT region and Queensland.....	42
<b>Figure 7</b> Percentage of employment by occupation, BVRT region and Queensland.....	46
<b>Figure 8</b> Vacancy rates for chefs, cooks and kitchenhands (May 2006 – May 2024).....	60

## List of Tables

<b>Table 1</b> Regional and statistical area alignment across BVRT trail towns.....	10
<b>Table 2</b> Projected growth for key tourism industries in Queensland.....	11
<b>Table 3</b> Town demographics, Brisbane Valley Rail Trail.....	16
<b>Table 4</b> Total population by geographic scope.....	17
<b>Table 5</b> Estimated annual population growth (2018-2023).....	18
<b>Table 6</b> Median age, BVRT region and Queensland (2013-2023).....	21
<b>Table 7</b> Working population, BVRT region and Queensland (2013).....	21
<b>Table 8</b> Median age projections by SA2, BVRT region and Queensland.....	22
<b>Table 9</b> Unemployment and labour force, BVRT region and Queensland, September 2024.....	25
<b>Table 10</b> Regional youth unemployment, SA2 regions and Queensland, April 2025.....	25
<b>Table 11</b> Registered businesses by employment size, BVRT region and Queensland.....	27
<b>Table 12</b> Total number of businesses by annual turnover.....	27
<b>Table 13</b> Highest level of schooling completed, BVRT region and Queensland (2024).....	30
<b>Table 14</b> Non-school qualifications(a), BVRT region and Queensland (2021).....	31
<b>Table 15</b> VET programs completed in the BVRT region (2023).....	32
<b>Table 16</b> Top 15 VET program enrolments, BVRT region (2023).....	34
<b>Table 17</b> Training package enrolments and completions (2023).....	35
<b>Table 18</b> Top five skill set enrolments (2023).....	36
<b>Table 19</b> Intended occupational outcomes for VET learners.....	36
<b>Table 20</b> Intended industries of choice for apprenticeship/trainees ranked.....	37
<b>Table 21</b> Five largest employing industry sectors in the region.....	41
<b>Table 22</b> Growing industry sectors in the region.....	43
<b>Table 23</b> Declining industry sectors in the region.....	44
<b>Table 24</b> Employment by industries related to tourism, BVRT region and Queensland.....	44
<b>Table 25</b> Registered businesses by industry, BVRT region and Queensland, June 2024.....	45
<b>Table 26</b> Tourism, travel and hospitality related qualifications.....	51
<b>Table 27</b> Registered business by industries related to tourism, BVRT region.....	59
<b>Table 28</b> List of key tourism jobs and shortage status.....	61



Queensland  
**Country**  
TOURISM



**Queensland**  
Government