

2025 Federal Election

Toowoomba Region Business Priorities



TOOWOOMBA
CHAMBER



OPEN NOW





SMALL BUSINESS is a BIG Deal

Over **98%** of the region's businesses are small

We are an entrepreneurial city, a small business city that is the backbone of the Toowoomba regional economy. We are crucial to the region's sustainability and growth.

We know this, as the research undertaken by McCrindle as part of the Toowoomba Business Performance Sentiment Index identified that over 98% of the region's businesses are small. Yes, small businesses dominate the Toowoomba business landscape.

Small businesses are critical for the city's wealth generation and success. They also play an enormous role in our region by giving back to our community by supporting numerous community and sporting organisations and not for profit companies. That means when small business hurts our whole community hurts too.

The Toowoomba Chamber wants to see a turbocharged region, so businesses can expand, and more money can flow directly into the local economy. A region where business and people talk about Toowoomba being THE place for business, throughout the nation.

The Federal Government plays a critical role in small business success. How? By communicating and engaging with small business to enable growth. By creating enabling regulation to bring economic prosperity to a region. Rewarding small business. And much more.

Our research indicates that national economic conditions, housing, infrastructure, and the red tape burden are key roadblocks, holding Toowoomba business and the nation back.

All Australians depend heavily on small businesses to meet their personal and their family's day-to-day needs.

Australia has over 2.6 million businesses, of which 97.2% have 19 employees or less. Businesses contribute in the order of 500 billion in economic activity or one third of the nation's GDP each year. Businesses employ an estimated 5 million people or 42% of nations workforce. We say small business DESERVES BETTER.

We are the independent voice of business in our region. We will continue to advocate loudly to ensure the voice of business is heard.

Myfanwy Rigby,

Toowoomba Chamber President



About the Chamber

The Toowoomba Chamber of Commerce is an independent organisation that advocates on behalf of local businesses at local, state, and federal levels to ensure the business community has a voice.

The Toowoomba Chamber of Commerce journey commenced on 12 October 1899, stirred into action by the business community due to the “special opportunities afforded by a digest of the ideas and experiences of an association of business” and the need that “a vigilant and united body can readily discuss anomalies and abuses which if left unchecked work to the detriment of the community”.

The Toowoomba Chamber of today, continues to build on those foundations.

The Toowoomba Chamber plays a critical role in connecting our members across the local business community to establish and grow strong, lasting networks as well as explore opportunities to access supply chain networks and build business brands.

Our full program of events and dedication to outreach provides the platform to strengthen existing networks, develop new contacts, connect with business leaders, and continue to improve and learn to maximise growth opportunities.

With over 600 members, the Toowoomba Chamber is one of the largest regional Chamber of Commerce organisations in Australia and Queensland largest regional Chamber of Commerce.

We are proud partners of the Darling Downs Regional Alliance which represents over 1000 businesses in the Toowoomba Regional Local Government area.

Outreach
13 million

Members
600+

Established
1899

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Chamber of Commerce**
is an independent organisation
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TOOWOOMBA
**CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE**

Summary of key Toowoomba Region Business Needs

Over the past few months, the Toowoomba Chamber has been working to create Toowoomba Region Business Priorities to advocate for small business on matters at the upcoming Federal government election and beyond.

The work draws on feedback from the Board, our members, and Darling Downs Regional Alliance, and was tested

Importantly, the Toowoomba Region Business Priorities consider our research such as the Toowoomba Business Sentiment Index, RSM Australia Tax Advocacy Advice, CBD Economic Profile, and the like. Research to enable a better understanding of the needs of the business community.

The Toowoomba Region Business Priorities addresses the areas of infrastructure, Maintenance and Sustainability of Rural Areas, Regulatory Reform, Housing, and a Shovel Ready Infrastructure Pipeline.

A series of requests have been identified to enable a clear understanding of the business needs to be addressed, the business impact, the facts and data, its connection to government, and how it can be done.

In summary, the Key Toowoomba Region Business priority needs are:

- invest in the design and business case for a Conference and Event Centre, Community infrastructure and associated uses;
- create a national Regional Infrastructure Fund;
- increase investment in rural areas – Infrastructure, food security, and climate variation initiatives, and abandon taxes like those proposed on unrealised capital gains;
- develop a regional, rural, and remote national framework, emphasising the need for consistent legislation and policy classification;
- implement a doing business taskforce; and
- build inland rail to Gowrie, now.

Central Business District – Events and Conference Centre, Community and associated uses



THE MATTER

The Toowoomba Central Business District is the jewel of our region. And understanding its business make-up, employment characteristics, strengths, and gaps, along with its roles and impact within the city's urban boundaries, the broader Toowoomba local government area, the region, state, and nation is essential in developing good policy. Any heart needs constant focus and attention to understand the critical factors that keep it activated.

Our CBD requires a catalyst infrastructure project and with collective effort and collaboration between business, government, and the community, we can make it happen.

CURRENT BUSINESS IMPACT

- Lack of a catalytic investment is restricting long-term growth and sustainability; and
- The lack of a tourist drawcard, parking arrangements, housing, accommodation and public green space is having a big impact on the most common business types in the CBD, reducing customers and client base.

FACTS AND DATA

The Toowoomba CBD:

- contributes 8.1% of GDP to the Toowoomba region;
- employs in the order of 8,521 people;
- has a direct and in direct economic impact across the whole Toowoomba local government area, Queensland and nationally;
- largest number of businesses by industry share are professional services, rental and real estate and retail trade;
- most common business types are cafés and restaurants, hairdressing and beauty services and accounting services;
- when comparing the Toowoomba CBD against a control group of other CBDs consisting of Townsville, Ballarat, Bendigo, Albury-Wodonga; Mackay, Rockhampton, Bunbury, Bundaberg and Coffs Harbour, the control group performs better in key areas being tourism, accommodation, education and training and public administration; and
- needs consideration of what other Local government authorities do in other cities like Williamstown who offer a parking permit service for business owners, delivery vehicles, construction workers and the like to support local businesses day to day operations and development.

The Toowoomba Chamber of Commerce and CBD Revitalisation Advisory Committee and others have been advocating for many years about the need for a major piece of infrastructure investment in the city centre to ignite the city heart.

In 2020, work undertaken by the Toowoomba Chamber identified the need for a significant piece of game changing public infrastructure investment in the city centre.

In 2021, the Explore and clarify CBDRAC priorities reaffirmed the work of the Toowoomba Chamber.

In 2023, this need was again reaffirmed, as part of the Toowoomba Chamber research titled: Toowoomba Inner CBD Economic Profile and Impact.

CONNECT WITH GOVERNMENT

The Federal Government plays a key role in infrastructure through funding, partnerships, and programs.

MAKE THE REQUEST

Fund the design and business case to enable a Toowoomba Conference and Events Centre, Community Infrastructure and associated uses to create a shovel ready project to deliver:

- conference and events centre with a capacity of between 1700 and 1800 (events hub), growing opportunities for arts, culture and development of the creative industry and other sectors;
- 78 residential apartments to contribute to the alleviation of the housing crisis, whilst activating the CBD with people;
- an urban park to bring the Garden City into the city centre creating a greener CBD;
- two levels of public parking to increase the available, proximity and convenience of places to park in the CBD;
- office space in the order of 400m², to address the city's projected growing administration workforce;
- retail, restaurant, bars, cafes, and an urban forecourt linking the Ruthven and Margaret Streets to the city's cultural hub - The Empire; and
- a 4-5 star hotel and associated parking enhancing local accommodation options.

IDENTIFY HOW IT CAN BE DONE

Providing \$1.5 million in funding the design and business case, with the Toowoomba Chamber being the Federal Government delivery partner.



OUTLINE THE BUSINESS BENEFIT



- ✓ An activated CBD, with increased foot traffic and local spend.
- ✓ A fairer and consistent approach to CBD parking for all Toowoomba.
- ✓ A safer CBD.
- ✓ Housing choice for employees.
- ✓ A greener city.

Maintenance and Sustainability of Regional and Rural Areas



THE MATTER

The Toowoomba region has a rich resource base driven by agriculture and resource management. The rural areas are abundant with resources, with Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries is the region's number 1 industry by business count.

The region's unique townships like Oakey, Pittsworth, Millmerran, Highfields, Crows Nest, Clifton, Greenmount, Goombungee, Cambooya, Clifton, Yarraman and other smaller townships, not only support and service the surrounding resources, but are themselves a major tourist attractors and core to the area's history.

The region, its, rural areas and townships need constant attention, support, and care. The regions' identity needs protection.

CURRENT BUSINESS IMPACT

- Poor connectivity in rural areas and towns (eg roads and services) is restricting long term growth and sustainability;
- Poor quality infrastructure like roads;
- Insignificant investment in long term food security and green infrastructure;
- Lack of a national framework for regional, rural and remote areas; and
- Inconsistent application of our identity as a regional city.

FACTS AND DATA

- Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries are the region's number 1 industry by business count. In 2023, there were more than 3,500 businesses from this sector located in our region;
- In 20/21, Toowoomba 'economy id' identified the total value of agricultural output in Toowoomba was \$1,091m;
- Rural areas, their resources and townships are significant contributors to the region's character and economic prosperity; and
- Excluding the Capital, Toowoomba is the largest inland city, it is Capital of the Darling Downs and Great Southwest.

CONNECT WITH GOVERNMENT

The maintenance of infrastructure needed to support this fundamental part of the region's identity, lifestyle and growth must continue to be valued for their important role in our region's economic wealth.

MAKE THE REQUEST

- Fund more township and rural infrastructure.
- Protect Toowoomba's regional identity.

IDENTIFY HOW IT CAN BE DONE

Grow Federal government departments in regions;

Implement government place-based decision-making frameworks;

Fund food security and climate variation initiatives for individuals, not just organisations;

Increase the instant write-off for primary producers;

Abandon unrealised capital gains tax;

Create a national framework for regional, rural and remote areas; and

Create a dedicated Regional Infrastructure Fund.



OUTLINE THE BUSINESS BENEFIT



- ✓ Improved oversight and reporting will ensure attention is paid to rural areas and townships and the impacts in decision making is understood.
- ✓ Wealth generator for business.
- ✓ Employment creator.
- ✓ Enhanced investment in the region.
- ✓ Decentralisation of the Region's population by increasing the livability of regional centres.

Regulatory Reform



THE MATTER

A regulatory environment that is excessive and unnecessarily complex, restricts business confidence and where inefficiently implemented, inconsistently enforced and with poor response times and lengthy delays, is a cost burden on business and increases costs of delivery services and products to the ratepayer.

CURRENT BUSINESS IMPACT

- Increased costs mean job losses;
- Increased regulation equates to less productivity;
- Inefficiently implemented, inconsistently enforced regulation, with poor response times and lengthy delays from government, results in an increased cost burden on business; and
- Regulation developed in a vacuum and poorly communicated creates confusion and increased costs on business which is passed onto the local community.

FACTS AND DATA

In Queensland, 82% of businesses say that red tape costs have increased since 2021 and the financial administration compliance burden has increased 100% from \$25,000 to \$50,000 in the same period.

43% of businesses have confirmed they spend six or more hours a week on regulatory compliance.

The Toowoomba Performance Sentiment Index Findings and Toowoomba Annual Survey of businesses demonstrate that 'red tape and administrative burden' remains the number one issue of concern for local businesses.

CONNECT WITH GOVERNMENT

The federal government plays a key role in regulation development and reform to ease the cost of doing business and cost of living impacts on Australians.

MAKE THE REQUEST

Create a mechanism to interrogate and remove excessive, unnecessarily complex regulation to build business confidence and our nations competitiveness.

Ensure an inclusive and collaborative approach to drafting and reviewing regulation that is open and transparent.

Create mechanisms for greater accountability around implementation, regulatory response times and understanding the financial impact of new regulation on business and the community in general.

IDENTIFY HOW IT CAN BE DONE

Creating a 'Red Tape Taskforce' between local business and the Federal government to interrogate regulation such as industrial relations.

Involving the regional business community in the drafting of new regulations, and in the development of policy.

Creating a Business Liaison Program, like the model used by the Reserve Bank of Australia.

Creating responsibility for an elected official to be the lead in creating Better Regulation and Reducing Red Tape and streamlined government processes through oversight and regular reporting.

Increasing the legal definition of small businesses under the Fair Work Act from 15 to 25 employees.

Simplifying the industrial relations laws for small businesses by amending the definition of casual employees.



OUTLINE THE BUSINESS BENEFIT



- ✓ An efficient regulator protects jobs, builds business confidence.
- ✓ An efficiently implemented, consistently enforced regulation, with agreed turnaround times reduces the cost burden on business.
- ✓ Regulation developed together in an open and transparent way develops rapport and understanding by all parties, creating the right 'fit for purpose' regulation.
- ✓ Better Regulation and Red Tape oversight and reporting will ensure constant attention is paid to regulatory and business impacts in decision making.

Shovel Ready Infrastructure Pipeline



THE MATTER

Infrastructure spending will future proof the region. New catalytic infrastructure grows the economy, and an identified pipeline of projects ensures the continued flow of employment in the region.

Federal government spend in the regions will confidence in the business community by committing to and working hard to secure major projects, plan, and have shovel ready projects ready to go that will benefit the region.

CURRENT BUSINESS IMPACT

- Loss of business confidence.
- Lack of long-term vision inhibits investment.
- Makes the region uncompetitive.
- Drives investors to other regions.

FACTS AND DATA

Infrastructure refers to roads, transportation, power and water supplies, phone towers, internet, buildings such as hospitals, police stations, fire stations, art galleries, parks, and the like. These types of infrastructure are vital systems that play an important role in economic development and business growth.

An investment in infrastructure enables business to grow, cities and regions to flourish and improves collective wealth. It enables greater productivity and growth in the delivery of goods and services.

The right infrastructure facilities business growth provides jobs and reduces economic disruption helping to maintain an equilibrium.

Infrastructure investment stimulates the economy as seen by the Toowoomba Bypass which provided an estimated \$2.4 billion dollar boost to the region.

CONNECT WITH GOVERNMENT

The Federal Government plays a critical role in infrastructure investment to build community resilience and prosperity and has a track record in building regional sports stadiums, transport networks and enriching communities with arts and culture Initiatives.

MAKE THE REQUEST

Build Inland Rail to Gowrie.

Deliver faster rail between Toowoomba and Brisbane.

Working with stakeholders to deliver water security for Toowoomba and the region.

Delivering a 15,000 to 20,000 seat permanent sports stadium with allied services and programs to develop sporting opportunities in our region.

Funding an events and conference centre for the Capital of the Darling Downs and Southwest.

IDENTIFY HOW IT CAN BE DONE

Providing quarterly public updates on the progress of major infrastructure investments.

Partnerships with all levels of government, prioritise project management planning and approvals to allow progress to occur.

Using the private sector as delivery partners to complete the design and construction of projects and business cases for major infrastructure.

Create a dedicated Regional Infrastructure Fund.



OUTLINE THE BUSINESS BENEFIT



- ✓ Economic investment in the region.
- ✓ Jobs growth.
- ✓ Housing for all.
- ✓ Build business confidence.

Housing

THE MATTER

Many sectors of the business community understand the impact of a lack of housing is a deterrent to business attraction, is a disincentive to attracting a workforce, impacts on the ability of businesses to deliver their service, affects the image of the city, and inhibits business growth and success.

CURRENT BUSINESS IMPACT

- Inability to attract a workforce.
- City image.
- Homelessness and affordability.
- Business attraction and employment.
- Stifles investment.

FACTS AND DATA

In 2021, Toowoomba Regional Council did not have sufficient supply of residential land.

In 2021, Toowoomba Regional Council used constrained land, like Koala Habitat, to boost the residential land supply figures.

In 2021, the Toowoomba business community compiled a range of solutions to address the business impacts from lack of housing.

In 2022, Toowoomba was identified as having the highest amount of rental stress in the country.

In 2022, an affordable housing supply in Toowoomba was questioned as housing prices soared in part due to lack of supply.

In 2023, physical homelessness on the streets of Toowoomba is highly visible.

CONNECT WITH GOVERNMENT

Housing is fundamental to all Australians and our housing market has a significant influence on several key social and economic aspects of society.

Housing provides a stable base from which we can participate in society, form families, and enjoy retirement. Housing can determine lifetime education, employment, and health outcomes.

Housing has a significant impact upon investment, productivity and participation, as well as consumption and saving trends across the economy.

MAKE THE REQUEST

Help with housing supply.

Facilitate the delivery of more housing choice.

IDENTIFY HOW IT CAN BE DONE

Directly fund local government to deliver social and affordable housing and infrastructure for housing such as water and sewerage.



OUTLINE THE BUSINESS BENEFIT



- ✓ Economic investment in the region.
- ✓ Jobs growth.
- ✓ Housing for all.
- ✓ Build business confidence.



Connect with us.

