

BRIEFING PAPER

Prepared for: Tablelands Futures Corporation (TFC)

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Agreed scope: A succinct summary of the proceedings of the ATCC Event 26/02/2015 and the key priority themes identified by the participants.

A new pathway to diversification and sustainable economic growth: The Blue Economy and how it can strengthen and transform existing industries through new value realisation in the Tablelands.

BACKGROUND

At an event hosted by the Atherton Tablelands Chamber of Commerce (ATCC) on 26 February 2015, Blue Economy expert Stewart Christie facilitated a workshop aimed at identifying local Blue Economy opportunities in the Tablelands region.

This paper provides an overview of the Blue Economy, a summary of the ideas discussed by participants at the workshop and a synthesis of the priority themes identified. Although outside the scope of this project, an 'Opportunity Snapshot' has been prepared which highlights opportunities that link to both the workshop discussion and strategic direction of TFC.

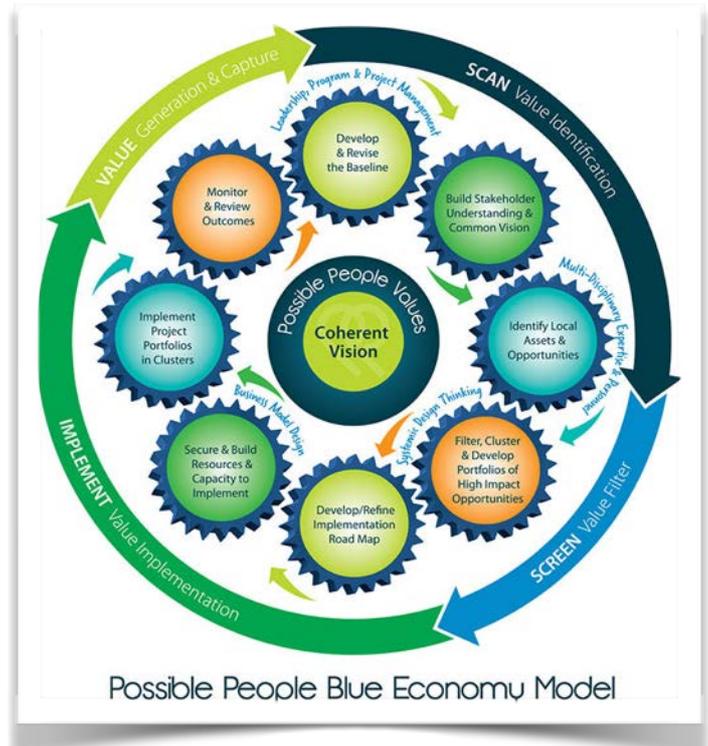
ABOUT THE BLUE ECONOMY

The Blue Economy is innovative systems approach for re-designing local economies by using locally available resources and technology in a way that reduces waste and is in harmony with nature. The core objective being the creation of new business models, more jobs and community wealth.

The Blue Economy was founded by Gunter Pauli and has been substantiated by over 180 cases globally making it increasingly clear that through the adoption of a Blue Economy business model it is possible to generate more revenue, whilst creating more jobs and remaining competitive on the global market.

Stewart Christie, founder of Possible People (a progressive economic design and implementation firm at the leading edge of sustainable economic development) has studied the Blue Economy in great depth and is one of only two experts based in Australia.

At the ATCC workshop, Stewart demonstrated to participants how a region such as the Tablelands, could achieve a dramatic shift in the local economy through the adoption of Blue Economy strategies in existing businesses models and through the development of new opportunities both in the private and public sectors.



Economic Benefits of Adopting a Blue Economy Approach

A number of case studies presented highlighted the benefits of adopting a Blue Economy approach, including:

- reduced capital and operational costs;
- the creation of more local jobs;
- new business opportunities;
- increased profitability of existing businesses; and
- increased resilience of communities.

The case studies can be found on the Possible People website or by clicking [here](#).

One such case study included a coffee company which, through its traditional business model, generated income from coffee sales. By collecting the coffee waste, it now also generates revenue from mushrooms farmed on the waste. Whatever is left over after harvesting the protein rich fungi is provided to local farmers for high quality compost. One revenue model was transformed into three.

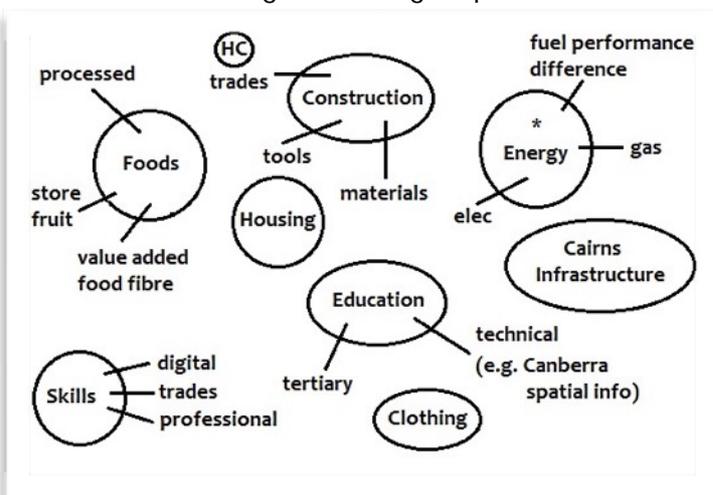
Another case study outlined how an island in the Baltic Sea turned an unviable carrot farming venture into a series of inter-connected high value add businesses that created 350 jobs and a Dutch textile company developed an innovative business model that leased jeans rather than selling them to its customers.

Through an explorative process, participants agreed that this evolution could be possible for the Tablelands region if local businesses and government departments only had the leadership, tools and support to evolve their business models towards the full use of all available resources and clustering activities in order to achieve higher levels of efficiency.

THE IDEA GENERATION PROCESS

At the ATCC workshop, participants discussed the following in small groups:

1. Identify the basic services and goods that are needed on the Tablelands that are currently provided from elsewhere
2. Identify potential customers
3. Review and add to the list of identified assets (using a pre-prepared handout sheet) in your business or community that are currently under-utilised that could potentially meet this need
4. Group potential ideas that have greatest synergies and filter into identifying the short-term (low hanging fruit), medium and longer term



The image displayed above depicts a snapshot of the discussions held in once group. Data from all the group's discussions was collected and has been synthesised and summarised on the following page by industry grouping.

KEY THEMES

Food & Agriculture

Locally produced: seasonal fresh produce, processed food

Importing: processed food, fresh produce, general household supplies, processing service and packaging supplies

Underutilising: prime agriculture land - quality soil and water availability

Opportunities: increase value add opportunities; turn waste into biomass, compost; improve efficiency through data; on-line Platform to share and trade waste or 'seconds' agricultural products

Human Capital, Education, Research & Development

Importing: tertiary education, technical and professional education, research and development, specialists and professionals, digital capability, innovation

Underutilising: skilled labor force, youth and aged; creatives and artists; local, state and federal government assets

Tourism

Importing: tourism marketing services, 4-5 star accommodation (Cairns)

Underutilising: national parks, forest and trails, adventure sport (i.e.) mountain bike tracks, indigenous and cultural, food and agriculture tourism, eco-tourism

Energy

Importing: electricity, gas and fuel

Underutilising: Lake Tinaroo & Barron River system for hydro; solar; wind

Telecommunications

Locally produced: Ravenshoe Telco

Importing: service provider, equipment

Underutilising: infrastructure (i.e. bandwidth)

Transport

Underutilising: public transport (i.e. local bus service); Mareeba Airport under-utilised asset

Water

Importing: Bottled water

Underutilising: Lake Tinaroo for recreation and energy generation

Construction & Commercial Real Estate

Importing: building materials, expertise

Underutilising: waste produced from construction and demolition; vacant Main St buildings and shop fronts; industrial estate

Waste

Importing: waste from Cairns (Mareeba)

Underutilising: waste produced from agriculture; general waste

OPPORTUNITIES FOR TFC

In synthesising the above ideas, a range of opportunities were identified which align with TFC's Strategic Objectives (listed below).

1. Greater economic return on the region's assets
2. Increased business and industry growth and diversification
3. Increased employment and training opportunities (quantity and range)

TFC may wish to consider the various roles it could adopt in relation to these opportunities; ranging from facilitator to project leader, research investor or seed funder.

Whilst outside the scope of this project, an 'Opportunity Snapshot' has been provided to generate discussion by the TFC Board and it is noted that a vast number of Blue Economy opportunities exist within the region in each of the above identified areas. In order for these to be realised, TFC will need to provide proactive leadership and a commitment to:

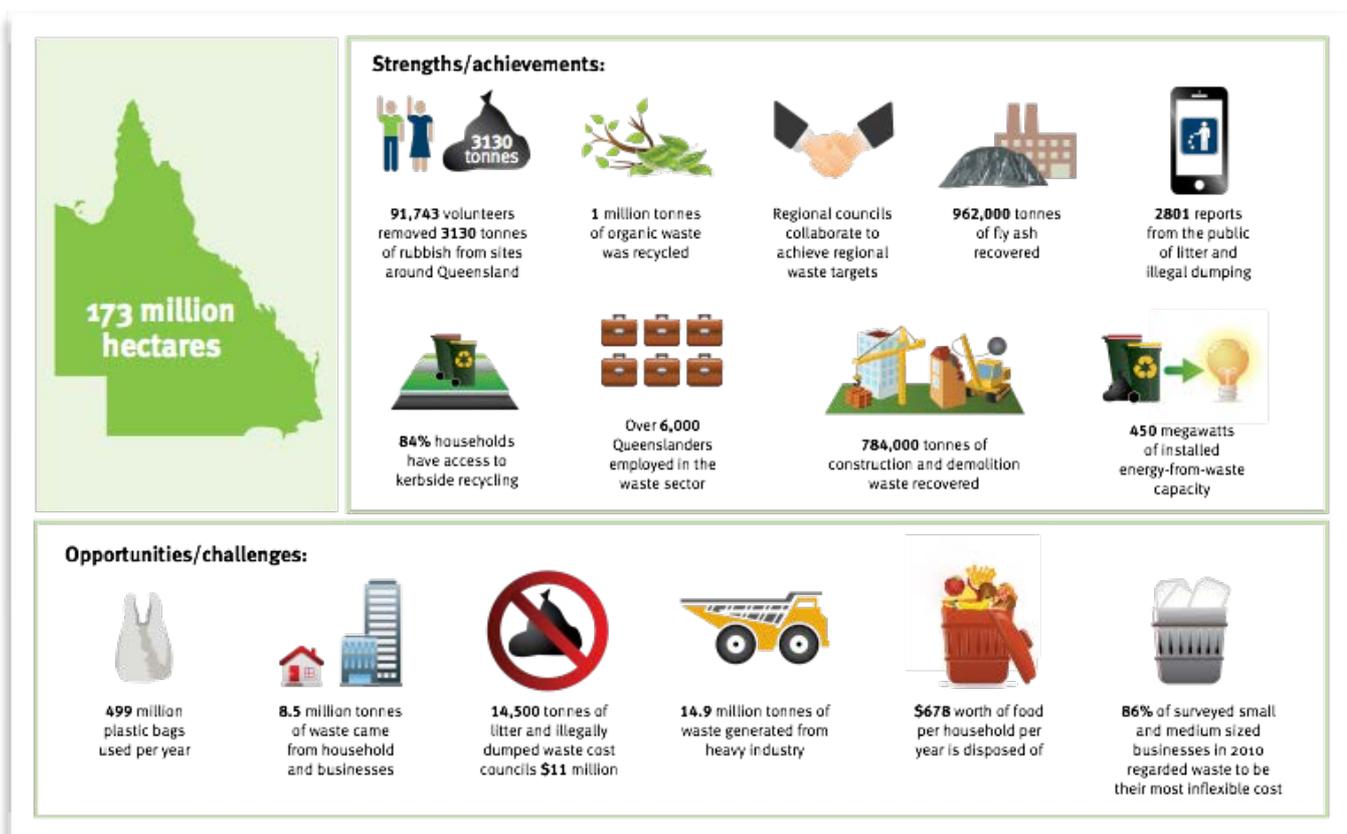
- Link players
- Encouraging community conversations
- Provide information and representation
- Collaborate to leverage funding

OPPORTUNITY SNAPSHOT

Rethinking Waste

In 2012-13 Queensland sent just more than half of the waste produced from everyday business and household activities to landfill. This highlights the significant room for improvement in waste reduction and recycling across the State.

The below image provides a snapshot of both the Strengths/Achievements and the Opportunities/Challenges relating to waste in Queensland.



Turning these challenges into opportunities through Blue Economy models could see the Tablelands region becoming a leader in waste reduction and recycling. This would align with our region's unique value proposition of being a pristine natural region as well as provide the platform for innovation, new enterprise creation and jobs growth.

Sample Opportunities

Curb Waste: In 2013 FNQROC formed a Regional Waste Management Group (formerly known as the Recycling Opportunities Investigation Group) to explore regional opportunities for waste management and recycling. To date it has been identified that such opportunities exist in the areas of tyres, scrap metal and green waste. Refer [here](#).

Opportunity to enter an existing dialogue and proactively seek out economic development opportunities for the Tablelands

- TFC could engage with FNQROC to discuss how they can support turning these opportunities into reality and lead a community wide campaign to curb waste, increase recycling and support new business development in recycled waste.

Glass: A comprehensive suite of geotechnical laboratory tests have been undertaken on samples of recycled crushed glass produced in Victoria to ascertain which samples exhibited geotechnical behaviour similar to natural aggregates. Vic Roads subsequently released a Technical Note on the Use of Recycled Materials for Road Construction and this has been followed by other states including Queensland.

The Far North Queensland Region looks after over 3000km of state and national roads and highways.

According to a report published in 2008 (prepared by GHD) Visy operates the major glass crushing facility in Queensland however (at the time of the report) there no process for the recycling of glass fines. The potential market size for glass fines in Queensland is considerable with a 2004 study reported 83,203 tonnes of glass going to landfill.

Opportunity to facilitate discussions with private sector and local government

- TFC could facilitate discussions with Tablelands Regional Council, Mareeba Shire council, FNQROC and private sector (i.e. Visy) to discuss glass recycling and reusing opportunity in the Tablelands region.

Wood, cardboard, forest and agricultural waste: In San Diego, private company [Ecor](#) takes cellulose fibres found in wood, cardboard, forest and agricultural waste, and turns it into new high value products including construction material. The process is surprisingly simple: the waste is mixed with water, heated, pressurised and made into sturdy panels and walls, tables, bowls, even glasses frames. Best of all, they contain no toxic additives and can be recycled at the end of their life-span.

A recent report commissioned by the Queensland University of Technology shows the potential for bio-refineries to produce \$20 billion dollars worth of plastics and fuels over the next two decades. The report finds the available biomass in Queensland could support seven bio-refinery projects spread throughout the State.

TFC identified strong future potential for strategic development of bio-based industries in the "Our Economy Our Future Atherton Tablelands 2013 Economic Snapshot & Industry Profile". The Blue Economy strongly aligns with this strategic opportunity.

Opportunity to lead the development of an emerging industry

- TFC could lead discussion with local government, researchers and industry to start a discussion about the right policy settings and investment required to bring this industry to fruition in the Tablelands region.