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Published May 2022



# A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

Destination Port Stephens (DPS) has developed an ambitious plan to grow our region's visitor economy by 2025 despite an extremely uncertain and disruptive environment with the current global pandemic.

Our 2022-25 Strategic Plan, provides the direction for action over the next three years and builds on our COVID-19 recovery plan and prior three-year strategy.

Despite the current challenges, the future is bright for the Port Stephens visitor economy and this strategy will be a key enabler of our recovery and growth. The investments we make and the actions we deliver, particularly over the next three years, will restore confidence in the visitor economy and set the course for a prosperous and vibrant future.

Our key target over the next three years is to generate \$1 billion in visitor expenditure by 2025 – that is equivalent to \$2.7 million a day.

The Board of Destination Port Stephens contributed to the development of this new strategy to set the direction for the organisation over the next three years. The plan is built on five strategic priorities that will be regularly reviewed and adjusted to reflect the ongoing environment and emerging priorities and aspirations of our region.

On behalf of Destination Port Stephens, the Board would like to express our gratitude for the continued support and investment by Port Stephens Council.

We are incredibly proud of what our region has to offer and the importance of the visitor economy which contributes to creating jobs, driving investment and infrastructure as well as builds prosperity for our industry, local businesses and the community.

Collaboratively, our commitment is to rebuild a vibrant and sustainable visitor economy as we continue to respond to COVID-19 with new thinking and flexibility to drive growth in visitation and spend in Port Stephens.

#### Destination Port Stephens Board of Directors

Andrew Macdonald (Hotel Nelson/Little Nel)

Frank Future (Imagine Cruises)

Andrew Smith (Worimi Aboriginal Land Council/ Sand Dune Adventures)

Sarah Smith (Crest Birubi Beach)

David Brown (NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service)

Melissa Turner (Moonshadow-TQC Cruises)

Matthew Borger (Newcastle Airport)

Steven Peart (Port Stephens Council)

Janelle Gardner (Port Stephens Council)

\*As at January 2022



# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The strategic priorities and actions are to be implemented by Destination Port Stephens in partnership with industry and stakeholders over a three year timeframe.

Destination Port Stephens will focus on five strategic priorities designed to improve our competitive position, stimulate demand, build capability and grow the visitor economy:

DESTINATION MARKETING

Develop innovative marketing programs to drive brand awareness and increased visitation.

2 LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

Leading the growth of the Port Stephens visitor economy through expert knowledge, advocacy and industry and stakeholder engagement.

BIG EVENTS AND BIG IDEAS

Support investment and development.

PRODUCT/INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

Improve the quality of tourism product in the region through support, education and training to enhance the visitor experience.

5 FORM A FRAMEWORK FOR SUCCESS

For Destination Port Stephens to be a sustainable, consultative and effective organisation focused on driving results.



# INTRODUCTION

Destination Port Stephens (DPS) is a non-profit, incorporated body supported by Port Stephens Council (PSC), owned by members and autonomously managed by a Board of nine industry representatives.

Funding for DPS is sourced primarily from an annual investment from Port Stephens Council, members, strategic partners and grants. To continue to grow the visitor economy, requires industry – the members – to support the organisation.

DPS role is to develop and implement marketing and product development programs in partnership with members and industry stakeholders to increase destination/brand awareness and drive propensity to visit across key domestic and international visitor source markets.

DPS also advocates for members in areas of policy and regulation across the visitor economy and builds collaborative networks to create opportunities for the local tourism industry.

Due to COVID-19 over the past few years, our operating environment has never been more complex...with unprecedented impacts across the visitor economy. We recognise that we need to remain flexible to ensure the best support and outcomes for the Port Stephens tourism industry and to maximise the region's tourism potential.

Port Stephens remains in a strong position due to our open spaces and natural environment which lends to the desires of travellers. We have an incredible destination with great appeal, a surrounding regional population base of over 1 million consumers, and Australia's largest city of more than 5.3 million people just 2.5 hours away to draw from, as well as an airport that is focused on expanding capacity and within three years securing direct international services.

Our focus is to drive destination marketing and destination development opportunities to increase overnight visitor spend to reach our goal of \$1 billion in visitor expenditure in Port Stephens by 2025.

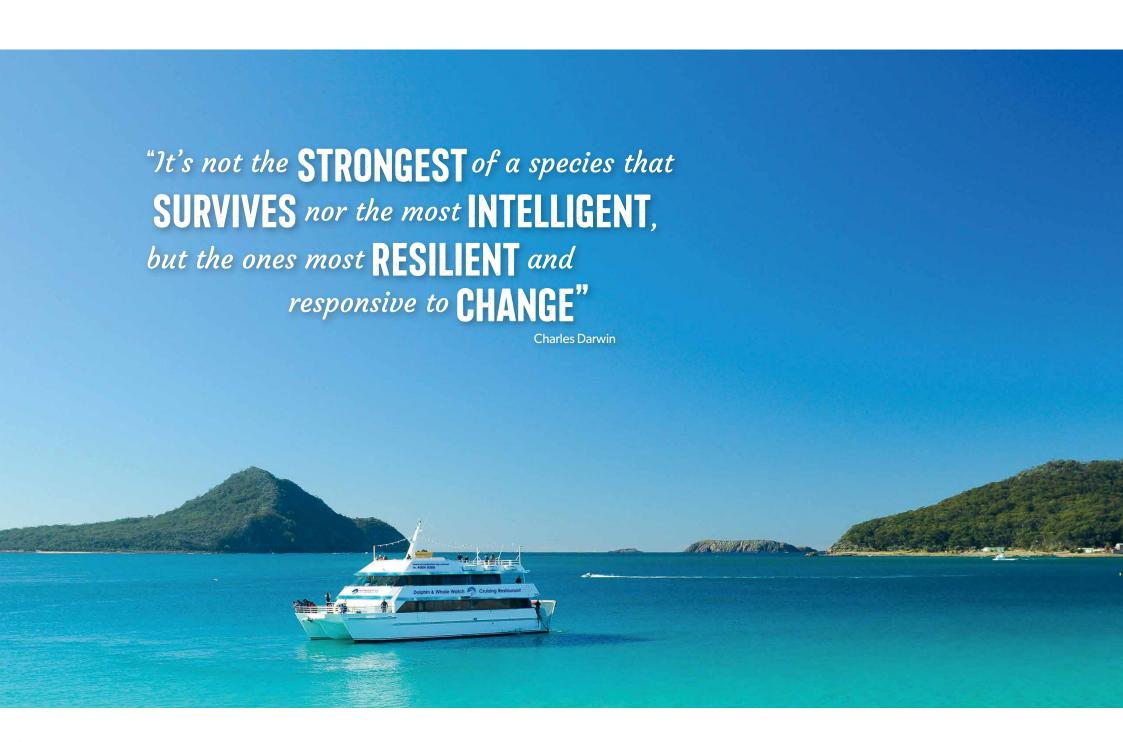
In striving to achieve this ambitious goal, in a world of continual disruption and uncertainty, the Port Stephens' visitor economy will need to remain resilient to be sustainable. We aim to foster a profitable industry that delivers employment opportunities and economic benefits and in turn preserves our natural assets and improves the tourism experience for our visitors and the way of life for the local community.



# **OUR PURPOSE**

To lead an innovative and collaborative tourism industry and deliver destination marketing to drive a strong visitor economy creating an attractive environment for tourism investment.





### THE PORT STEPHENS EXPERIENCE

Port Stephens is recognised as one of NSW leading regional tourism destinations attracting over 1. 7 million visitors in the year ending June 2021. Whilst COVID-19 destroyed the international market from early 2020, domestic demand has been increasing post lockdowns and restrictions.

Home to almost 73,000 people, Port Stephens is located just north of Newcastle and 2.5 hours drive north of Sydney on the NSW North Coast.

Anchored by a tranquil bay and pristine Marine Park, framed by awe-inspiring sand dunes and rugged National Parks, Port Stephens is one of the most beautiful natural 'stages' on earth. The powerful beauty of the region is more than just scenery, it's a backdrop for everything that plays out in the destination. Its very nature shapes the lifestyle, experience and attitude of locals and visitors alike.

Serviced by Newcastle Airport and easily accessible by road, the region's portfolio of tours and attractions are exceptionally well rated by visitors. Our product mix is punctuated by diversity, with contrasting products effortlessly co-existing from holiday parks to luxury accommodation, fish and chips to fine dining, and bike hire to world-class wildlife experiences.

It's true that many destinations offer incredible adventure experiences, but nowhere else in Australia can match the extraordinary range of 'bucket-list' worthy encounters of Port Stephens. Swimming with wild dolphins in turquoise waters; quad biking through the Southern Hemisphere's largest moving sand dunes;

joining a camel train as it trails across Birubi Beach at sunset to seeing Humpbacks breach in the country's longest whale watching season.

In early-2020, the new destination brand "Incredible by Nature" was developed in consultation with industry and launched in an integrated campaign in mid-2020. The new brand encompasses three of Port Stephens' defining strengths. 'Incredible' reflects the extraordinary experiences on offer, 'nature' reflects the unique natural environment, and 'by nature' reflects the humble and laid back nature of the beautiful villages within Port Stephens.

'Incredible by Nature' provides a highly adaptable platform to celebrate all the unique and amazing ways that Port Stephens and its people continue to be incredible on a daily basis. It provides an exciting framework for rich and compelling stories from this truly extraordinary destination to be shared which will build destination awareness and motivate consumers to visit.

A focus on immersive, authentic, unique and environmentally sustainable experiences that embrace our rich culture will grow visitor spend and meet consumer demands. There are opportunities for existing tourism operators to expand and diversify the experiences they offer and build yield as well as to create new opportunities to expand the current visitor offering.

The 2022-25 Strategic Plan identifies key opportunities for the destination to further grow the visitor economy whilst enhancing the economic, social and ecological sustainability of the region.



# THE PORT STEPHENS VISITOR ECONOMY

The Port Stephens visitor economy has been impacted by COVID-19 primarily in year ending June 2020 and we will again see the impacts of lockdowns in year end June 2022.

For year ending June 2021, the total number of visitors to Port Stephens was just over 1.7 million (up 2%) who spent over 2.5 million nights (up 5%). Overall growth was impacted by COVID-19 obliterating international visitors and visitor nights.

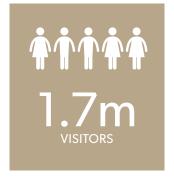
The domestic market to Port Stephens achieved strong growth between 2017 and 2019 with an annual growth rate of 9% before the impacts of COVID-19. In 2020, visitation declined before rebounding in 2021 with a 20% increase in domestic overnight visitors.

Visitor expenditure increased by 25% to reach \$705 million in year end June 2021. This equates to \$1.9 million a day into the local economy. Growth in visitor expenditure was from domestic overnight visitors and more than compensated for the loss in international visitor expenditure however this did not assist local businesses to the same extent e.g. those that attracted a high volume of international visitors.

Source: National and International Visitor Surveys, Tourism Research Australia

Please note: International day trip visitors are not reported. It is estimated that Port Stephens, prior to COVID-19, received 150,000-200,000 international day trip visitors per annum which contribute an additional estimated \$8 million to the local economy each year.

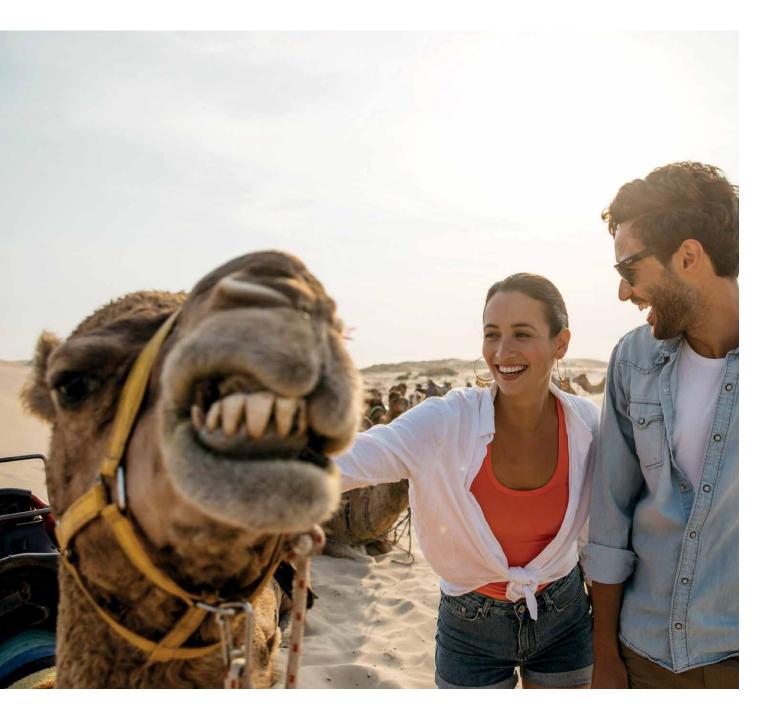
Year end June '000	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	5yr Avg.
Domestic overnight visitors	677	741	810	713	858	760
% change	9%	9%	9%	-11%	20%	-
Domestic nights	2174	2217	2512	2217	2514	2327
% change	4%	2%	13%	-12%	15%	-
Av. night stay	3.2	3	3.1	3.1	3	3
Domestic day visitors	633	818	917	952	860	836
% change	-17%	29%	12%	4%	-10%	-
International overnight visitors	37	49	43	26	0	31
% change	42%	32%	-12%	-40%	-100%	-
International nights	171	160	175	166	0	134
Year end June total visitors	1347	1608	1770	1691	1718	1627
% change	-4%	19%	10%	-6%	2%	-
Year end June total nights	2345	2377	2687	2383	2514	2461
% change	8%	1%	13%	-11%	5%	-
Visitor expenditure \$m	-	535	606	569	705	-
% change	-	-	13%	-6%	24%	-











# **TOURISM FORECAST**

# DOMESTIC TOURISM FORECAST 2021-22 TO 2025-26\*

Domestic visitation is forecast to return to around its prepandemic level in 2022-23, then surpass the previous (2018-19) peak in 2023-24.

A more moderate growth trajectory is forecast for the period between 2023-24 and 2025-26.

The number of domestic overnight trips is expected to increase by 4 percent in 2021-22 and by 21 per cent in 2022-23.

Over the two years from 2023-24 to 2025-26, domestic overnight trips are forecast to increase at an annual average growth rate of 2.7 percent.

\*Source: Tourism Research Australia Domestic Tourism Forecasts 2021-22 to 2025-26

# INTERNATIONAL TOURISM FORECASTS

The next round of international forecasts will be published in late 2022. Previous forecasts were produced in 2019 (pre COVID-19).



# **SITUATION ANALYSIS**

The following analyses outlines the current situation of Destination Port Stephens and considers the challenges and opportunities that exist to improve the organisation and grow the visitor economy.

#### **STRENGTHS**

- Strong destination brand with a fresh new campaign.
- Stable, skills-based industry-led Board, including Local Government representation.
- Port Stephens Council are supportive and invest in Destination Port Stephens.
- Successful history of implementing marketing and product development programs in partnership with members and industry stakeholders to increase visitor expenditure.
- Strong relationship with Destination NSW and other key organisations including Newcastle Airport.
- Nimble and responsive organisation.
- Collaborative membership.
- Tourism is the key economic driver in this area.
- Diverse range of tourism experiences, attractions as well as accommodation and natural asset rich.

#### **CHALLENGES**

- Financial resourcing and reliance on one main source of funding.
- Stakeholders and local business do not have a clear understanding of DPS role and responsibilities.
- Managing the expectations of members, local business and stakeholders.
- Setting practical and achievable goals for a small team.
- Co-operative marketing partnerships limited number of members who invest.
- Ensuring ongoing relevance and value to members.
- Maintaining a strong, industry led Board and experienced staff.
- Tourism is a highly competitive industry that can be impacted by many factors.

#### **OPPORTUNITIES**

- Embrace consumer trends where the destination has a strength e.g., experience with purpose (involvement and contribution), health and wellbeing, nature and wildlife etc.
- Target high yield segments of the market to increase visitor spend.
- Encourage tour operators to develop more high end experiences rather than focusing on volume to build yield.
- Support tourism operators with product development opportunities.
- Identify product gaps and opportunities to encourage the development of new products and experiences.
- Expand awareness in the general community to better understand the role of DPS and the value of tourism in our local economy.
- Better communication with members to determine areas of importance to meet expectations.
- New infrastructure developments including: Newcastle airport runway expansion by 2023; Tomaree Coastal Walk; Birubi Point Interchange, Worimi Ecotourism Resort as well as upgrades to town centres and public spaces.

#### **THREATS**

- COVID-19 pandemic impacts and uncertainty.
- Primary funding secured for three years only.
- Operator insurance costs are becoming prohibitive or for adventure tourism operators difficult to obtain.
   Existing operators may close. Barrier to entry to new operators.
- Lack of diversification of some product offer/ experiences. Too many after the same slice of the pie.
- Funding programs from Government is unpredictable.
- Membership support is not secure as tourism can be impacted by many factors including economic, natural disasters, consumer confidence and pandemics.
- Local government elections and changes to Council priorities.



### **ENABLERS FOR GROWTH**

As the lead agency for the visitor economy, DPS will continue to play an important role in partnership with the tourism industry, public sector and Government agencies. Increasing capacity and the quality of Port Stephens' tourism product and infrastructure is essential if we are to continue to grow visitation to the destination and remain competitive.

#### 1. A UNITED INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY.

Tourism industry, stakeholders and community to be united in priorities.

#### 2. SOLID PARTNERSHIPS.

Successful collaboration between tourism, industry, public sector and Government agencies, investors and other stakeholders.

#### 3. QUALITY PRODUCTS AND EXPERIENCES.

Support start-up and scale-up investment across the visitor economy.

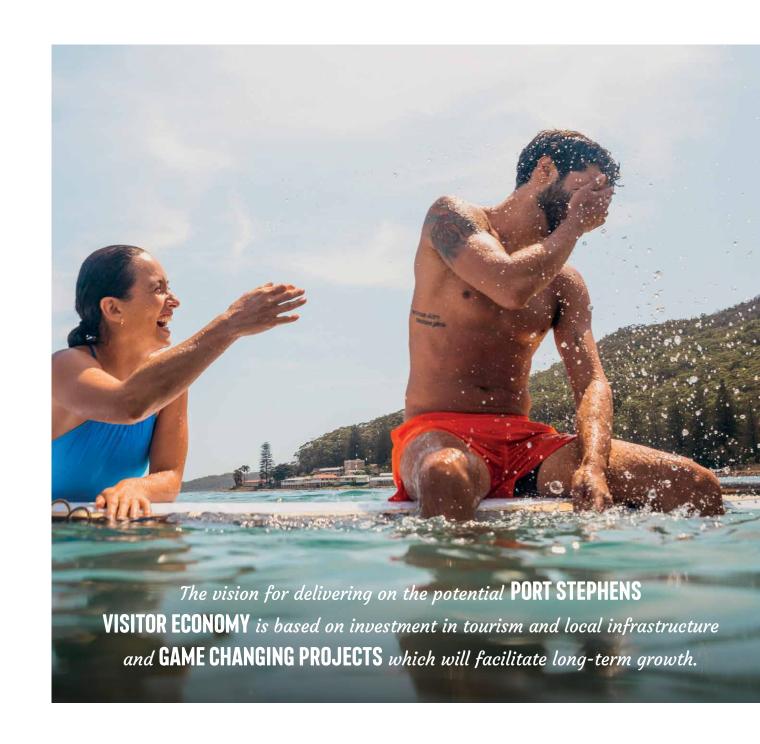
# 4. COOPERATIVE MARKETING INVESTMENT TO DRIVE DEMAND.

Increase investment in marketing programs to drive demand.

#### 5.BRINGING NEIGHBOURHOODS TO LIFE.

Support the creation of vibrant villages and towns that embrace visitors and increase the economic benefits of tourism.

Appendix 1 – Gaming Changers



# STRATEGIC PRIORITY ONE: DESTINATION MARKETING

Develop innovative marketing programs to drive brand awareness and increased visitation

Partnerships with Destination NSW (DNSW), Newcastle Airport and key distribution partners will ensure marketing campaigns leverage investment, create new opportunities for members and deliver a more effective return on investment for stakeholders.

- Broaden the reach of brand/destination awareness and target priority growth markets.
- Embrace digital technology.
- Increase yield across Port Stephens.
- Inform decision-making with data, research and insights.
- Develop key partnerships to extend marketing reach and investment.
- Leverage State (Destination NSW) and Federal (Tourism Australia) opportunities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES	
ACTION	PARTNERS
1.1 Continue to build destination awareness and appeal in core overnight markets – Sydney and Regional NSW – to drive increased overnight visitation.	Lead: DPS Partners: DNSW and Industry
1.2 Work in partnership with Newcastle Airport to drive interstate visitation focused on Melbourne and SE Qld as well as new routes that have potential to drive domestic visitation.	Lead: DPS/Newcastle Airport Partners: DNSW, Airlines, Travel Trade, Industry and other LGA's
1.3 Target markets to drive day tour visitation to attractions, tours and events.	Lead: DPS Partners: Industry, Event owners/organisers
1.4 Leverage state and federal domestic marketing and funding programs to promote Port Stephens.	Lead: DPS Partners: DNSW, Tourism Australia, Industry
1.5 Promote experiences and itineraries to increase length of stay and yield.	Lead: DPS Partners: Industry
1.6 Identify new trends and review tourism research and statistics available at a national, state and local area to inform decision making.	Lead: DPS Partners: Industry
1.7 Continue to develop commissionable product and promote to trade and industry partners to increase inclusion in itineraries and packages promoted to consumers.	Lead: DPS Partners: DNSW, Tourism Australia, Industry
1.8 Maintain relationships with international trade partners and activate in- market engagement once consumer demand returns to rebuild inbound visitation.	Lead: DPS Partners: DNSW, Tourism Australia, Industry
1.9 Support Newcastle Airport to secure international direct services from 2023 (runway upgrade due for completion 2023).	Lead: Newcastle Airport Partners: DPS, DNSW, Tourism Australia, Industry and other LGA's.

# STRATEGIC PRIORITY TWO: LEADERSHIP & ADVOCACY

Leading the growth of the Port Stephens visitor economy through expert knowledge, advocacy and industry and stakeholder engagement.

- Develop excellent working relationships with local industry and key stakeholders to deliver DPS strategic objectives.
- Provide leadership and innovation across the visitor economy.
- Engage the community to make tourism everyone's business and promote the value of the visitor economy to the region.
- Maintain existing members and continue to grow membership of DPS.

ACTION	PARTNERS	
2.1 Maintain relationships and target strategic partners that will contribute to growing the Port Stephens visitor economy.	Lead: DPS Partners: DPS Board	
2.2 Champion the role of tourism as a creator of jobs and economic growth for Port Stephens and advocate for the tourism industry at federal, state and local government level.	Lead: DPS Partners: Port Stephens Council, Business Port Stephens, Industry	
2.3 Yearly promotion of the value of tourism to Port Stephens to target local residents and business community e.g., Tourism Week.	Lead: DPS Partners: Industry, Port Stephens Council, Business Port Stephens	
2.4 Engagement with local business and community groups to promote the value of tourism to Port Stephens.	Lead: DPS Partners: Local Business and Community Groups	
2.5 Develop a three year communication and engagement plan to engage existing members and attract new members.	Lead: DPS	
2.6 Share insights, trends and visitation information with members, strategic partners and local media.	Lead: DPS Partners: Port Stephens Council, Newcastle Airport, Business Port Stephens	
2.7 Advocate on behalf of the tourism industry to gain support for education, training, product development and infrastructure funding to achieve Port Stephens visitor economy target.	Lead: DPS Partners: Industry, Destination Network, DNSW	
2.8. Investigate Ecotourism accreditation for the destination and encourage industry to adopt sustainable practices to meet consumer demand and minimise the impact of tourism on the environment.	Lead: DPS/Port Stephens Council Partners: EcoTourism Australia, Plastic Free Port Stephens, Port Stephens Eco Network, Industry	

# STRATEGIC PRIORITY THREE: BIG EVENTS AND BIG IDEAS

#### **Support Investment and Development**

Destination Port Stephens will work on behalf of members, in partnership with stakeholders, to lobby and provide support for investment in game changing projects, innovative place making and events to deliver on the potential of the Port Stephens' visitor economy.

- Support investment in infrastructure, events and place-making activity.
- Lobby for investment in game changing projects.
- Support strategies to create a vibrant destination.

ACTION	PARTNERS	
3.1 Lobby for investment in game changing projects to deliver on the potential Port Stephens' visitor economy.	Lead: DPS Partners: Industry	
3.2 Drive investment and event attraction demand by building a vibrant tourism destination through marketing.	Lead: DPS, Port Stephens Council Partners: Event Organisers, Industry	
3.3 Provide promotional opportunities for local events to create awareness and drive participation.	Lead: DPS, Port Stephens Council Partners: Event Organisers, Industry	
3.4 Support place making strategies to build vibrant places via marketing to attract the local community and tourism visitation to public spaces, waterfronts, neighbourhoods and retail centres.	Lead: DPS Partners: Port Stephens Council, Industry	
3.5 Assist event organisers to build capacity in planning and running events.	Lead: DPS, Port Stephens Council Partners: Event Organisers	
3.6 Secure conferences, incentive programs and corporate events to secure high yield business visitors.	Lead: DPS Partners: DNSW, Industry, Tourism Australia	

# STRATEGIC PRIORITY FOUR: PRODUCT AND INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

Improve the quality of tourism product in the region through support, education and training to enhance the visitor experience.

- Improve existing and support new Port Stephens tourism products and experiences.
- Encourage investment in new or renewed experiences in Port Stephens aligned with visitor demand.
- Provide ongoing support and advice to the tourism industry.
- Ensure industry are aware of funding available for product and infrastructure development.
- Assist industry to provide education and training to improve on staff retention and increase skills level.

ACTION	PARTNERS	
4.1 Provide advice and support to existing tourism products and experiences on opportunities to diversify to meet visitor demand.	Lead: DPS Partners: Destination Network, DNSW, Industry	
4.2 Assist tourism businesses to develop, promote and sell their tourism product.	Lead: DPS Partners: Destination Network, DNSW	
4.3 Identify and promote Hinterland experiences e.g., tiny houses, farmgate, food and wine etc to encourage visitors to disperse throughout the region.	Lead: DPS Partners: Port Stephens Council, Industry	
4.4 Develop itineraries to showcase the different villages of Port Stephens and experiences e.g. nature and adventure, food and wine, history and heritage, family fun etc.	Lead: DPS, Port Stephens Council Partners: DNSW and Industry	
4.5 Encourage investment in new as well as existing tourism product.	Lead: DPS Partners: Port Stephens Council, Destination Network, Business Port Stephens, Industry	
4.6 Ensure industry are aware of product and infrastructure development funding and encourage and assist to apply.	Lead: DPS, Destination Network  Partners: Port Stephens Council, Business Port Stephens, Industry	
4.7 Provide support to industry via education and training opportunities.	Lead: DPS Partners: DNSW, Business Port Stephens, TAFE NSW, Training Services NSW	

### STRATEGIC PRIORITY FIVE: FORM A FRAMEWORK FOR SUCCESS

For Destination Port Stephens to be a sustainable, consultative and effective organisation focused on driving results.

- Maintain sound financial management and build/ diversify revenue streams.
- Ensure an internal workforce that is stable, skilled and adaptable to the changing environments.
- Enhance our performance by ensuring we are relevant, effective and deliver a high value proposition to stakeholders, members and the community.
- Secure grants (where available) and member and industry partnership investment.
- Focus on service delivery to both external and internal clients and proactively deliver results.

ACTION	PARTNERS	
5.1 Monitor budget against cash flow and actual expenses.	Lead: DPS	
5.2 Prepare monthly financial reports for the board.	Lead: Accountant/DPS	
5.3 Review DPS income to ensure adequate funding is available to meet the organisation objectives.	Lead: DPS Board	
5.4 Keep informed of potential grant opportunities and where applicable apply for DPS funding.	Lead: DPS Partners: Destination Network, DNSW, Tourism Australia, Port Stephens Council	
5.5 Ensure members are aware of industry funding programs available for product and infrastructure development to maximise funding secured for the region.	Lead: DPS Partners: Destination Network, DNSW, Tourism Australia, Port Stephens Council, Industry	
5.6 Develop and communicate with staff and stakeholders the core values of the organisation.	Lead: DPS	
5.7 Mentor a team to ensure a high level of service to external and internal clients.	Lead: DPS	
5.8 Ensure allocation of resources is based on sound research, collaboration and responsible decision making.	Lead: DPS	
5.9 Review and monitor industry best practice to ensure DPS remains a leading industry organisation.	Lead: DPS	



# **APPENDIX 1: GAMECHANGERS**

To continue to grow the visitor economy will require investment in game changing projects which will provide infrastructure to facilitate growth.

- Increased aviation capacity into the region and commencement of direct international services.
- Rejuvenation of Nelson Bay and Raymond Terrace town centres.
- Redevelopment of Tomaree Lodge site into a world class tourism facility.
- Duplication of Nelson Bay Road and extension of M1 to Raymond Terrace.
- Increased investment in events and events infrastructure.
- World Heritage listed estuary and catchment.
- Accessible and inclusive infrastructure and experiences.
- Large scale 4 star+ conference and meeting facilities with onsite or close by accommodation.
- Investment in public infrastructure, facilities and services.

- Tomaree Coastal Walk.
- Birubi Interchange.
- Eco-tourism experiences and unique accommodation.
- Advocate for sustainable tourism practices to protect the future economic, social and environmental impact.
- Lobby for diversification of accommoation development.
- Nelson Bay foreshore public wharf (eastern groyne).
- Williamtown Special Activation Precinct.
- Hinterland experiences.
- Smart regions partnerships.

