

BINGARA

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY CONDITIONS



The famous Roxy (photo by Sven Wildschut). Flickr CC BY-SA



Northern
Basin
Review



Bingara Library (photo by State Library of NSW), Flickr

Bingara and surrounds, What the research tells us

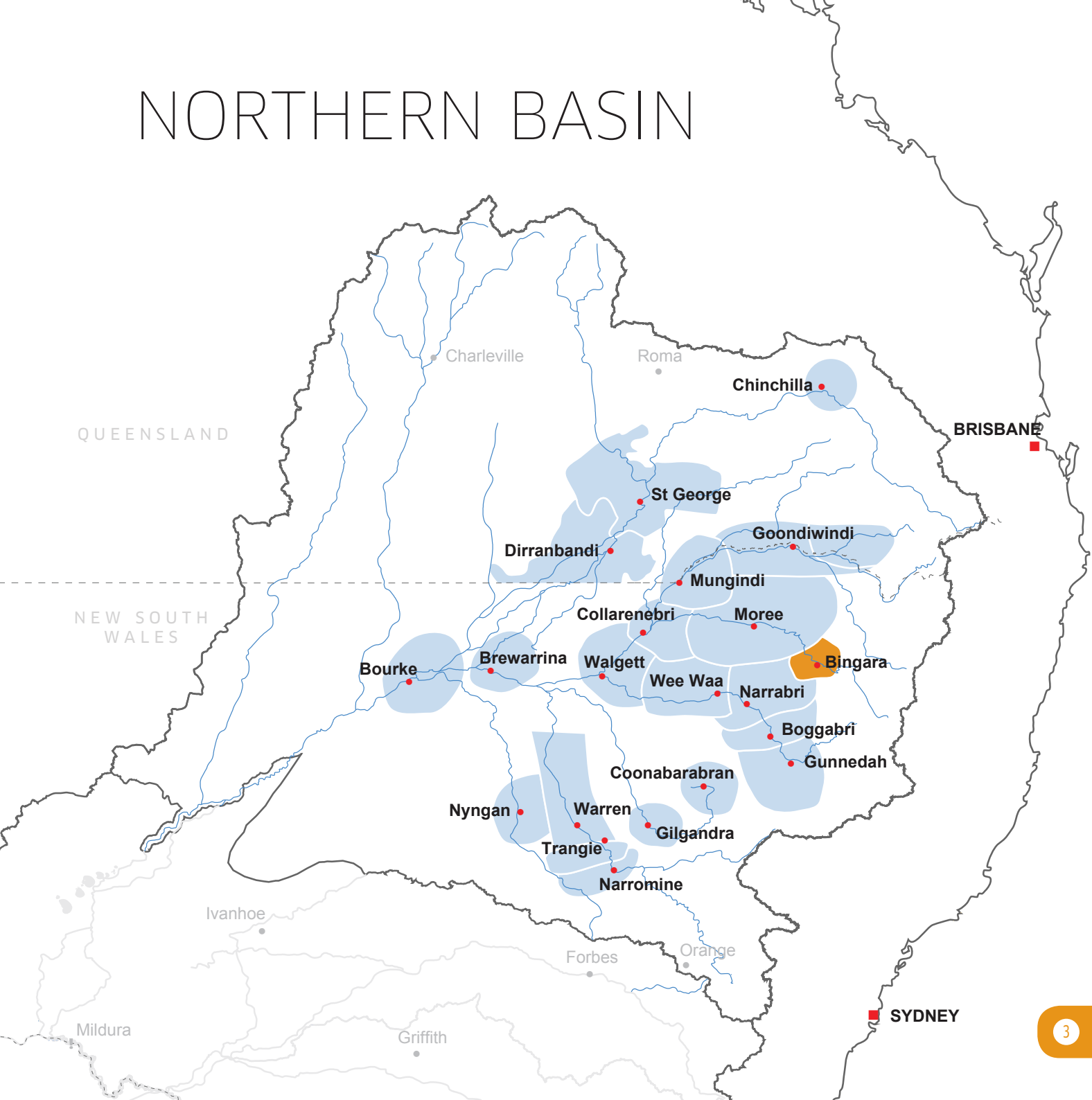
- Population
- Education
- Employment
- Land use
- Water availability

Bingara and surrounds, From the locals' point of view

- Looking back
- Managing change
- What is happening

Bingara is a small grazing community with little irrigated agriculture, a stable population and rising employment since 2001. Key influences on the economy are tourism based around the Gwydir River and increasing numbers of government services jobs.

NORTHERN BASIN





Bingara and surrounds

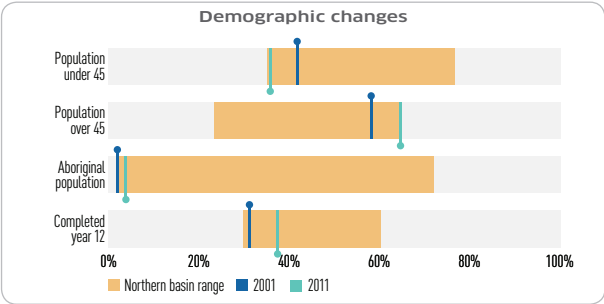
What the research tells us

POPULATION

	2001	2006	2011
Total area population	1,695	1,696	1,779
Total town population	1,165	1,203	1,091

The population of the town and community of Bingara has remained fairly constant over time. In this relatively small community, the town population has remained around 1,150 people while the whole community has varied by around 1,700 people. In 2011, 3% of Bingara’s town population identified as Aboriginal.

In 2001, 58% of the population was 45 years or older. This increased to 65% by 2011. The



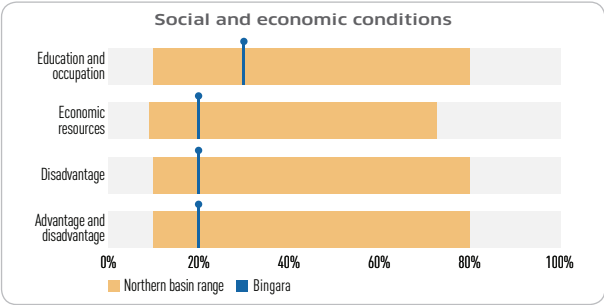
change in population includes a 5% increase in the number of people aged 45 years or older and a 22% decrease in the number of people under 45 years. Most of this demographic change occurred between 2006 and 2011.

EDUCATION

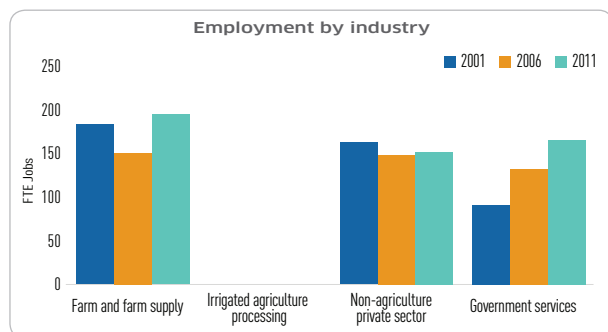
In 2011, 37% of people in the town (aged over 15) had completed year 12 and 21% of the town population had attained some post-school qualifications. This increased from 16% in 2001.

In 2011, the town of Bingara had an index score of 2 for economic resources, 2 for disadvantage and advantage, 2 fo disadvantage, and a score of 3 for education and occupation. For 2006, Bingara had similar scores with 3 of the indices, having a score of 1.

General social and economic condition



EMPLOYMENT



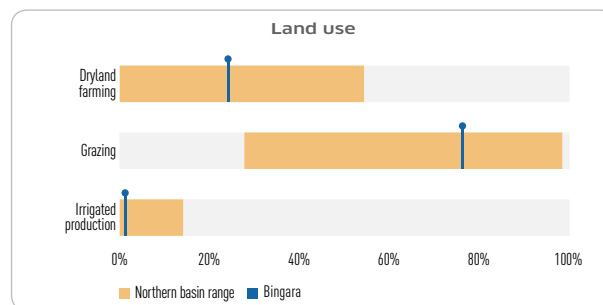
In 2011, there were 510 full time equivalent (FTE) jobs in Bingara (excluding seasonal workers). This represents a 17% increase in FTE jobs in the Bingara area since 2001. Most of this increase occurred between 2006 and 2011. The unemployment rate in the town of Bingara was 7% in 2011.

Between 2001 and 2011, employment in the agriculture and agriculture supply sector remained fairly consistent at around 195 FTE. Employment in the non-agriculture private sector fell by 7% (11 FTE) across this period, mostly between 2001 and 2006. The number of FTE jobs in government services increased by 81% (74 FTE).

The increase in the government services sector by 2011 meant the three main employment sectors – agriculture and agriculture supply, non-agriculture private and government services were of a similar size.

LAND USE

Bingara's agricultural industry is predominantly based on dryland production, with grazing accounting for 79% of the land use in the area and dryland farming covering 21%. The area of irrigated production is quite small, with less than 50 hectares at the most identified as being irrigated for lucerne, pasture and other feed stock.



IRRIGATION WATER AVAILABILITY

In the Bingara area, a small volume of water entitlements are held in the Gwydir catchment. To date, there has not been any water recovery from the Bingara community.





Bingara and surrounds

From the locals' point of view

Looking back

Prospectors flocked to the Bingara district in the 1880s when copper, then diamonds were discovered. At the time, Bingara was the largest producer of diamonds in Australia.

Bingara's main street boasted 5 general stores, 6 hotels, butchers, bakers, saddlers, clothing and furniture stores, and all the shops and services necessary to make the town and surrounding district largely self sufficient.

By the 1930s Bingara's business centre had contracted to roughly the size it is today – with transport making it easier for locals to shop at larger centres such as Inverell and Tamworth.

Agriculture has always been a pivotal industry for the town, with a good service industry to support local farmers. Cattle and sheep have been the main agricultural industries in Bingara.

In 2004, Bingara Shire Council amalgamated with neighbouring Yallaro Shire, to become Gwydir Shire Council. The main office for the newly created shire was set up in Bingara.

Gwydir Shire Council's Economic Development Officer, Georgia Standerwick told us that around 10 years ago, several businesses in the main street changed hands after 20 to 30 years of local ownership. Many say this time saw a slow-down in the local economy as the new owners adjusted.

During the 1990s, backpackers became a common sight in this town. For 11 years, the Imperial Hotel welcomed up to two backpacker buses every night from tour company Oz Experience. Eric Olzol was, and still is, the owner of this hotel. He said at this time, they could accommodate more than 140 people a night.

'The backpackers made people in Bingara a whole lot friendlier. They are more welcoming. People from outside town aren't strangers anymore. It was really good for the town. Now you walk down the street and people say hello.' Eric Olzol

Bingara hosted the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia rally in town and established free campsites along the Gwydir River in 2008. Locals say this is when the 'grey nomad' market kicked into gear

for Bingara. It is now a common sight to see dozens of caravans and campervans parked up and down the Gwydir River.

Since being voted the number one free camp site in Australia (inland) by the Caravan and Motorhome on Tour Magazine last year, Bingara has seen a 15% increase in grey nomads visiting the town.

'Not only is it picturesque (the Gwydir River), it attracts visitors from all walks of life. We have those who want to fish, swim, canoe, white water raft and those who simply want to camp on its banks and enjoy its tranquillity.' Georgia Standerwick

Managing change – a business owner's view

Agricultural supply business McGregor Gourlay opened its doors in Bingara in 2002, after buying out a locally-run father and son supply store – Druitt Farm Centre.

Since that time, McGregor Gourlay has grown the business and spent considerable resources on upgrading the facilities, to accommodate the needs of its rural client base.

Leonie Southwell has worked at McGregor Gourlay for 4 years, and says this month saw record sales for this business.

'We are actually a business that does better in the dry times because farmers are buying feed for their stock.'

Leonie Southwell

Leonie told us this was the first year she has seen people 'dry-sow' their oat crop, in the hope of rain.

John Bishton bought the local supermarket – Country Fresh IGA – 5 years ago. This is the largest private employer in the town. John Bishton employs 13 full-time staff and 15 casuals.

Since taking over, John has grown several sections of the store including the liquor department and hardware section. He's introduced a line of furniture to give his business a point of difference. This has attracted shoppers to Bingara. He says business turnover has grown by 25%.

John Bishton lives in the neighbouring town of Barraba and says he has seen the effects of the state government's process of shire amalgamation on that town.

John says the grey nomads industry also adds about \$150,000 a year to his turnover.

'I just wish the government would look at decentralisation programs. Bingara could handle double the amount of people and it would do so much for the local economy and job opportunities.'

John Bishton

What is happening now?

From an agricultural perspective, Bingara is renowned as cattle country. Most farmers in the district run cattle, with just a few running sheep. The majority of crops grown around Bingara are oats for cattle fodder.

There are a handful of farmers in the district who have irrigation licences and use these to produce lucerne hay or to grow crops to finish their cattle.

Raewyn and John Boland are local farmers who run around 1,000 head of cattle. Just over 18 months ago, they purchased another local farm, with a water licence.

'We think this has drought-proofed our operation and has given us options. Before we had the irrigation block, we had to sell the stock when they were weaned from their mothers. Now we have the option to grow them out and have more flexibility when we sell them.'

Raewyn Boland

The Bolands now sell around 6,000 bales of lucerne hay each year and say the water licence has lifted their turnover by 25%.

Like many regional councils, the Gwydir Shire Council is trying to attract new industry to set up shop in town. Councillor Kathryn Egan told us that the Gwydir Shire is trying to attract the poultry and

hydroponic industry to town – but both need the security of water.

'It's early days, but our isolation seems to be a stumbling block. We believe we have good reason for people to come to Bingara because our schools are great, we have no crime, and we have great medical facilities. Our lifestyle is great and our kids want for nothing.' Kathryn Egan

Locals are also campaigning against cold water pollution that they say affects their precious Gwydir River. Locals told us the badly designed release systems from Copeton Dam allow a large amount of cold stagnant water into the river. In their view, this is having a detrimental effect on fish and the ecology.

Bingara has spent many years building its recreational fishing industry for locals and tourists, and residents say government has to be mindful that its decisions around cold water releases affect their fishing industry and tourism opportunities.

This town is focusing a lot of efforts on attracting grey nomads to visit Bingara, in the hope they might stay. The local butcher says this market now makes up 30% of his business.

The health of the Gwydir River is pivotal to the town as many businesses now rely on the tourist market.

Chrissie Smyth and her husband Russell set up Ray White in Bingara 18 months ago. Around the same time, McGregor's also entered the real estate market.

In 2014, there were just 6 homes sold in Bingara. In 2015, the 2 real estate agents combined sold more than 30 homes. Chrissie said most of the homes have been purchased by grey nomads who have travelled to Bingara and decided to return.

According to Chrissie, more than 60% of homes sold for under \$200,000 and 82% for under \$300,000.

The Imperial Hotel has also changed its business structure over the last few years to capitalise on the growing tourism market and changing demographics in the town. It now sells more coffee than alcohol. This hasn't been good for profits, but the owners say it's improved their lifestyle.

Locals say while the schools are good in Bingara, the hunt for quality education in larger centres is driving young families out of town and also stopping people from moving here.

Business leaders also say internet access is hampering development, as Bingara isn't on the NBN. Existing internet options are unreliable.

Published by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (November 2016)

GPO Box 1801 Canberra ACT 2601

Phone: (02) 6279 0100

Web: mdba.gov.au

MDBA publication no: 30/16

ISBN (online): 978-1-925221-91-6

© Murray-Darling Basin Authority 2016



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>



/md_basin_auth



/mdbauth



getinvolved.mdba.gov.au



engagement@mdba.gov.au