

# GUNNEDAH

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY CONDITIONS



Northern  
Basin  
Review



## ● Gunnedah and surrounds, What the research tells us

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

## ● Gunnedah and surrounds, From the locals' point of view

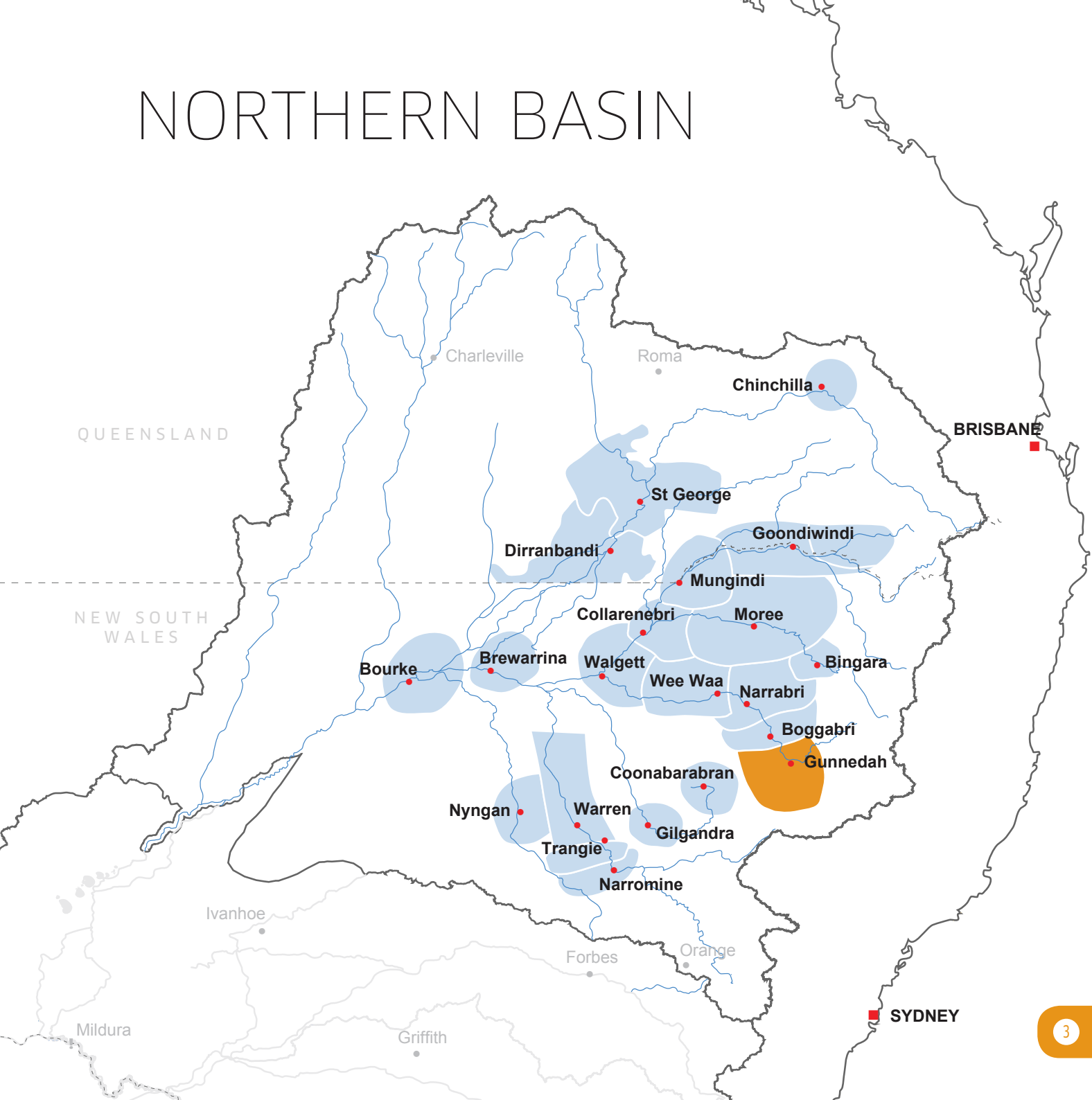
- Looking back
- Managing change
- What is happening

Gunnedah is a service centre for agriculture and mining in central New South Wales. While the population of the community has been increasing since 2001, the period between 2001 and 2006 saw the town population fall. These changes are associated with the shift in the local economic structure where mining operations increased since 2001, and particularly from 2008 onwards.

For the non-farming sector, there has been significant growth in manufacturing, government services jobs and mining-related activities. The agriculture sector is a mix of grazing, dryland farming and irrigation (mostly from groundwater). Employment in this sector has fallen by 4% since 2001.

The general social and economic conditions within the Gunnedah community indicate a reasonable capacity for adapting to change. Only a small volume of water has been recovered from this community to date and limited further water recovery is anticipated.

# NORTHERN BASIN





A scenic view of a lake under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. In the foreground, a boy in a red shirt and black shorts stands in the shallow water, looking towards the shore. A girl in a pink and white patterned shirt and black shorts stands on the shore next to a yellow kayak. A green kayak is also visible on the shore. The background shows a line of trees and distant hills.

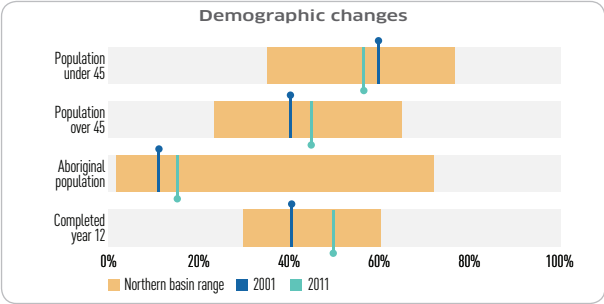
# Gunnedah and surrounds

## What the research tells us

# POPULATION

	2001	2006	2011
<b>Total area population</b>	12,168	12,367	12,974
<b>Total town population</b>	7,854	7,543	7,889

Between 2001 and 2011, the Gunnedah community population increased by 806 people (7%), mostly between 2006 and 2011. Between 2001 and 2006, population growth in the community outside the town area was exceeded by a fall in the town population. Across the 2006 to 2011 period, there was considerable population growth both within the town and in the community area beyond the town of Gunnedah. In 2011, 15% of



Gunnedah’s town population identified as Aboriginal.

In 2001, 40% of the town population was 45 years or older. This increased to 44% by 2011. During this period, there was an 11% increase in the number of people aged 45 years and older and a 6% decrease in the number of people under 45.

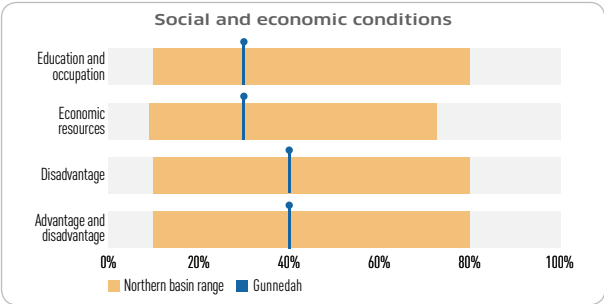
# EDUCATION

By 2011, 49% of people in the town (aged over 15) had completed year 12 and 27% had completed some post-school qualifications. This is an increase from 23% in 2001.

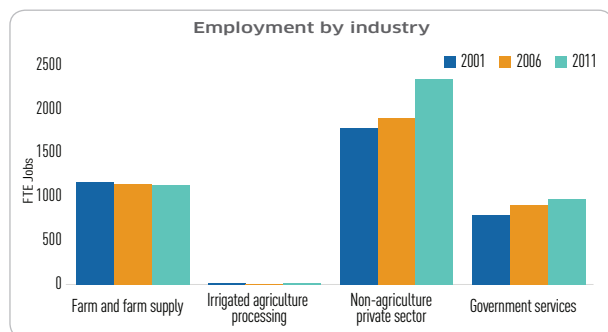
In 2011, Gunnedah town had index scores of 3 for education and occupation, 3 for economic resources, 4 for disadvantage, and 4 for advantage and disadvantage. For 2006, index scores were 2 for education and occupation, 3 for disadvantage, 4 for

economic resources and 4 for advantage and disadvantage.

## General social and economic condition



# EMPLOYMENT



In 2011, there were 4,465 full time equivalent (FTE) jobs in the Gunnedah community (excluding seasonal workers). Between 2001 and 2011, there was a 19% (708 FTE) increase in employment across this community. Most

of this increase occurred between 2006 and 2011. Unemployment in the town of Gunnedah was 7% in 2011.

The non-agriculture private sector is the largest employer in the Gunnedah community, representing 52% of all jobs in 2011. Between 2001 and 2011, employment in this sector increased by 31% (561 FTE). Most of the sectoral growth was between 2006 and 2011, with substantive growth in mining jobs (from 110 FTE in 2006 to 370 FTE in 2011) and in manufacturing.

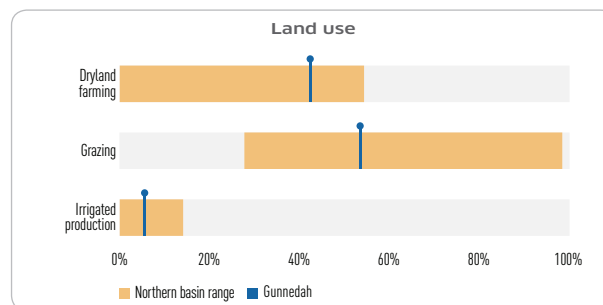
Between 2001 and 2011, government services jobs increased by 23% (187 FTE) while employment in the agriculture and agriculture supply sector fell by 4% (41 FTE).

# LAND USE

Land use in the Gunnedah area is a mix of dryland farming (42% of the community land area) with 53% of the land area used for grazing. Irrigated production accounts for a maximum of 5% of the land area.

The irrigated area has varied between 5,600 and 12,700 hectares. The maximum area developed for irrigated production equates to around 1 hectare per person. Agricultural

production includes beef, lamb, pork, wheat, cereal and oilseed and dryland and irrigated cotton.







## IRRIGATION WATER AVAILABILITY

Water entitlements held by farmers in the Gunnedah community include surface water and groundwater resources of the upper Namoi catchment. Prior to the recovery of water for the environment by the Australian Government, farmers in the upper Namoi held entitlements to 5 GL of surface water and 66 GL of groundwater. Around 1% of the community's surface water entitlements have been purchased by the Australian Government to date.



# Gunnedah and surrounds

## From the locals' point of view

### Looking back

Land in the Gunnedah area was taken up in 1833, with John Johnston building a homestead and woolshed in the area.

Lake Keepit Dam was completed in 1960. It was built for flood mitigation and irrigation. During the 1960s, the population of Gunnedah grew steadily as the wool boom hit the area. Cropping in the area also took off as a result of increased mechanisation, the availability of water and the introduction of summer crops.

Residents around Gunnedah told us that the Shire has gone through a number of 'boom and bust' cycles in agriculture and mining.

Former mayor, farmer and now Deputy Mayor of Gunnedah Shire Council, Gae Swain, told us that Gunnedah was a very different town in the late 1990s and early 2000s than it is today. In 1999, real estate agents told us you could buy a house in town for \$35,000.

During her time as Mayor, Gunnedah saw two small mines close, the local abattoir close, crippling droughts followed by devastating floods. Mrs Swain said the implementation of the water sharing plans also saw the entire town come out to protest against the reforms.



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*'It was a very emotional time. It was distressing and every time a media person wanted to talk to you it was about how the community was dying. We were a media company's delight as there was always something happening.'* Gae Swain

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However, by 2008, Gae said Gunnedah started to turn around as the mining industry expanded significantly again.

Waylon Allen from Rural Co told us that over the last few years, there has been an increase in the demand for smaller properties around Gunnedah – between 200 and 1,000 acres.

Waylon said these smaller farms have seen one family member running the place during the week, while another has a full time job in the mines. However, he says this market is very volatile.

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*'As soon as the area hears about something happening in the mines, everyone gets very hesitant to purchase in the area.'* Waylon Allen

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## Managing change – a business owners view

Michael Broekman is the fifth generation of his family to be at Namoi Valley Brickworks – a family owned company since 1959.

Now the General Manager, Michael, says while the overall business is strong, locally sales around Gunnedah have been a bit flat in recent years due to a downturn in the agricultural sector and the slowing in the mining industry.

In the 1950s and 60s, Michael told us that sales in the Gunnedah and surrounding districts accounted for more than 75% of the business here. By the 1980s, better transport networks allowed Namoi Valley Brickworks to diversify into different markets around NSW. Nowadays, the Gunnedah area accounts for just 10% of sales.

Michael currently employs around 20 staff at his Gunnedah plant, which has remained stable over the last 20 years. However, he said what has changed is the ability to attract quality staff, who are willing to work.

However, despite these challenges, the Gunnedah businessman says Namoi Valley Brickworks has a positive outlook.

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*'As long as we stay focussed and connected to the market, there is a long term future.'* Michael Broekman

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Robert Hoddle has been growing oranges on his property just outside Gunnedah for 12 years.

While he has been farming in the area for more than 30 years, the decision to go into

citrus followed the implementation of water sharing plans for the upper Namoi and Lower Namoi Regulated River Sources. Before growing oranges, Mr Hoddle was growing irrigated lucerne and pasture for cattle.

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*'The water sharing plans forced us to change when the government took 70% of our allocation.'* Robert Hoddle

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After investing around \$750,000 to alter his enterprise, Robert is now a proud horticulturist, with a 40 hectare orange crop. His crop produces around 1,500 tonnes of oranges annually.

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*'I think we are a good example of using water in the most efficient way possible. We pump directly from the bore to the tree. It is environmentally sustainable.'* Robert Hoddle

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Earlier this year, Robert sent his first shipment of oranges to China and says the export industry is opening a lot of doors for his business.

Attracting local workers at picking time has been a major issue for Gunnible Oranges over the last five years. Robert says he has recently become an accredited employer for the Australian Government's Seasonal Work Program that allows him to employ a group of workers from Tonga during his picking season.

## What is happening now?

Namoi Valley Brickworks' Michael Broekman is also now the President of the Chamber of Commerce. He reported that economic activity in the town has slowed down over the last few months and real estate has 'flattened out over winter'.

The Gunnedah Basin contains around 11% of the estimated recoverable coal reserves in New South Wales. There are currently 3 coal mines operating within the Gunnedah Shire and there are a further 3 proposals for new mines.

Gae Swain said she has never seen the district looking better – and she has been here for more than 50 years.

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*'We have had enough (rain) for it to really be looking good. We have had it consistently. It's been rain, rain, rain.'* Gae Swain

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Gae said prior to the rain earlier this year, croppers around the area were anxious about putting in crops as the last few years have been tough.

At Gunnedah South Public School, student numbers have increased from 450 to 610 since 2010. However, both St Xaviers School (364) and St Mary's College (394) said student numbers were stable. Numbers have dropped at Gunnedah High School from 550 to 410.

The town is the administrative, service and retail centre for the Gunnedah Shire and draws customers from surrounding villages such as Curlewis, Breeza, Carroll and Tambar Springs.

Gunnedah has three industrial areas, with business primarily servicing the agricultural, mining and transport sectors. The agricultural supply sector is very competitive in Gunnedah, with more than 6 rural suppliers.

Pursehouse Rural is one of those suppliers and Operation Manager, Gavin Batinic says that they are in a favourable position as there is both winter and summer cropping in the area.

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*'From Dubbo south, if the winter crop does not come off, that's all the business gone for the year.'* Gavin Batinic

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About 20 years ago, Gavin said servicing irrigators represented around 50% of their business. Now he says irrigators account for about 10%.

He told us that they have responded to change over time, and strengthened the business, by spreading their risk geographically with branches now operating in western New South Wales and into Queensland.

The Gunnedah Regional Saleyards is now one of the largest saleyards in New South Wales. The centre is licensed for 5,000 head and sells over 120,000 cattle a year.

Beef producers in the district are now also benefiting from the favourable weather conditions here and the record prices being enjoyed across the industry.

Peter Spackman has been doing property valuations here for more than 40 years. In that time, he has focussed on both commercial and rural properties.

Peter said there has unprecedented growth in the rural sector since the mid 1990s. Commercial rentals in town are stable and the mines have had a significant impact on the town.

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*'Our economy has two parts and our rural economy can't afford to lose any more water as we need that to maintain production.'* Peter Spackman

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Gae Swain concluded by saying Gunnedah is a strong community that has been through a fragile stage.

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*'You drive up the main street and it is busy. That tells me that it is strong and a lot is happening. All communities have to realise that there has to be more than one industry in town or they won't survive.'* Gae Swain

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