



Brunswick Heads. Simple Pleasures.

# BRUNSWICK HEADS BUSINESS SURVEY SUMMARY 2019

**Brunswick Heads.** Chamber of Commerce.

**Our mission:** To foster a dynamic local business sector encouraging sustainable and innovative development in line with the community's vision for Brunswick Heads.

## ABOUT THE SURVEY

The sixth Brunswick Heads Business Survey was undertaken by the Brunswick Heads Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) in November 2019. The Survey is one of the many initiatives undertaken every 3 years by the strong and proactive member-based Chamber.

Responses from 70 of the 108 businesses who received surveys (65% return rate) represented an excellent cross section of businesses, which resulted in lots of data and meaningful findings. The Business Survey Report provides the community with invaluable qualitative and quantitative data for application in three main areas.

1. The survey is a useful and practical tool for tracking the economic health of Brunswick Heads (Bruns) over several years and for evaluating the success of the economic renewal strategies and projects that have been implemented by the Chamber, its subcommittees and taskforces over the last 3 years.
2. The survey presents a 2019 "snapshot" of the Brunswick business sector, with very useful data and material for members, new or prospective new businesses, the Chamber, the local Byron Shire Council and grant bodies.
3. The survey provides an opportunity for the business community to give feedback on all aspects of doing business in the town. The aggregated ratings, identified issues and suggestions for improvement to the business and town environment will be utilised. The Chamber will be provided with direction and input for strategic planning for the future. The information and data can be used in funding applications and submissions to protect the town and making it a better place to live, work and enjoy our Simple Pleasures and highly valued village lifestyle.

There was no funding from government or Council or resources within the Chamber to conduct the survey in 2018 or 2019. With some lateral thinking, implementation of the Business Survey this year was made possible by incorporating it into the "Surveys & Awards" project, funded by Nortec and led by Jacqui Caban. Thanks to additional cash and in-kind sponsorship from the several businesses and considerable time volunteered by others for the analysis, report writing and presentation, the 2019 Survey was produced.

## 2019 SURVEY SPONSORS



## OVERVIEW

In the last four years the Chamber, its taskforces and subcommittees have been busy following up the many recommendations from the 2015 Business Survey. The 2019 survey confirms that the Chamber's strategies and efforts have been positive for the town and businesses.

The extensive list of achievements since 2019 include;

- Extensive makeover of the Visitor Centre (VC)
- Social media promotion, in-house brochure production
- Mullum2Bruns Paddle, Old & Gold and Photo Comp.
- Collaborative youth & fishing seats on Tweed St
- Launch & running of annual Customer Service Awards
- Engagement with Council with some great outcomes for the Terrace road works & water fountain.
- Submission writing to Council on many strategies, eg Business & Residential Lands Strategies, & Bike Plan.
- Lobbying of Council to successfully stop unwarranted and unwanted paid parking to protect our businesses.
- Grants & political lobbying, resulting in new computers for the VC and new toilet amenities at Torakina Park.
- Strong partnerships built with Nortec for the VC Work for the Dole Program & with Falls for the 'Taking Care of Bruns during Falls' Project to mitigate any issues.
- Organising regular networking, fundraising & launch events to bring the business community together.

The range of shops and services in Brunswick is incredible for a town of its size. A significant influx of some new and one-of-a-kind businesses in the last five years has brought fresh energy and creativity into the town to complement the existing range of micro and small enterprises. There have been lots of changes: several new interesting destination shops, new cafes and fine dining restaurants. Shop and motel refurbishments and repurposing of old buildings have enhanced the existing eclectic mix. Collectives & business hubs have emerged to deal with the financial challenges of running a small business. Our eco-friendly tourism businesses are still operating, but our much loved fishing co-op closed.

Brunswick Heads remains a tourism dependent town, but even more so than in 2015. Although spared from severe weather events, Bruns businesses reported tight margins, skill shortages and being very time poor. They are worried about unpredictable tourism fluctuations, increased costs and online competition. Dissatisfaction with Council has increased since 2015 re: infrastructure, DA processing, and rates. Concerns with Council's push for paid parking and proposals to reduce holiday letting are noted often.

Businesses provided many suggestions for improving the town's economy. They want the Chamber to continue with its current full program of initiatives. They nominated town improvements, promotion, VC services, events and lobbying and submission writing as top priorities. The beach, river, location, friendly people & visitors and the laid back village character and lifestyle are highly prized, but with the influx of new blood, reinforcement of our Simple Pleasures brand and town values is needed.

## BRUNSWICK BUSINESS PROFILE

- Almost half the businesses (48.6%) were established in Brunswick in the last 5 years, with 11.4% starting up in the last year. (Both figures up since 2015).
- Only 21.4% of businesses have been operating for more than 15 years, so 78.6% have little awareness of the extreme economic challenges pre 2000.
- In the last year the commercial vacancy rate has risen from 2% to 3.6%, the highest since 2006.
- Brunswick has no industrial base or manufacturing. Motor repair businesses have decreased since 2015.
- Brunswick has an excellent number of professional & employment businesses for its size.
- Apart from tourism accommodation, retail is the most common business type (29.7%), then hospitality (23.4%), health & wellbeing & professional services.
- The retail sector is made up of many eclectic little shops and some destination shops, contributing to Brunswick's village charm. Many have diversified, selling a wide range of products. 3 with larger spaces have reinvented themselves as collectives.
- There are 27 food outlets & eateries, and many changes in the cafe landscape – closures, revamped businesses, a relocation and several new cafes have opened with young owners, especially on Tweed St.
- The health and well-being sector has grown and the professional sector remained solid. Two business hubs have emerged in the last year & another is planned.
- A revitalisation of Tweed St in the last 4 years, led by new young business owners and refurbishments. Business activity, vehicle & foot traffic has increased.
- Businesses repeatedly noted they were time poor.

## DOING BUSINESS IN BRUNSWICK HEADS

- As a place to do business, businesses rate Brunswick Heads on average as 7.5 out of 10 (slight drop from 7.6 in 2015). 69.9% rated Bruns good or excellent.
- The location close to the highway & airport is valued.
- January and December are the best trading months, followed by April then October & September.
- June, May, August, then February & March are the worst trading months. July has improved since 2015.
- Brunswick is a tourist dependent town, even more so since 2015. 91.7% of businesses surveyed now rely on tourists to some extent. For 66.7% of businesses, tourism makes up half or more of their trade. For 26.7%, tourism provides 80% or more of their income. (The figures would be higher if the holiday lets with 100% tourism reliance were included).
- Businesses like events. The ratings for individual businesses depend on location. Even if individual businesses benefit minimally, they rate them much higher for the town. Old & Gold & Woodchop rate #2 for businesses, but #1 for the town. Bluesfest is on top for businesses but drops below the Mullum2Bruns Paddle and the Photo Comp for town benefits.

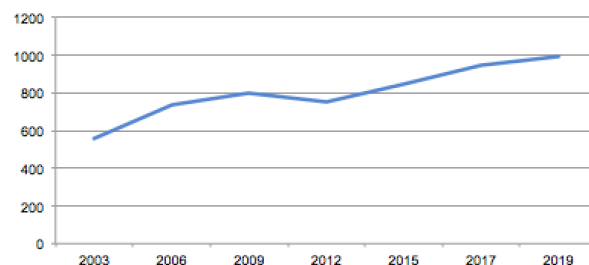
## BUSINESS PLANNING AND SUPPORT

- Price, followed equally by range & availability are considered to be barriers to customers buying locally.
- 67.2% of businesses expect increased demand for services/products in the next 2 years, some expect to take on some extra staff and some will downsize. The number of businesses expecting to increase staff is 12 full-time, 12 part-time and 7 casuals (all net figures).
- Businesses identify work/life balance, marketing and social media as the business management skills most in need of improvement.
- E-mails are by far the most preferred method of receiving news and info, followed by Business After Hours, then texts, Instagram and Facebook.
- Businesses prefer working co-operatively through work/client referrals, marketing & strategic planning.
- Businesses want the Chamber to continue all services.

## EMPLOYMENT

- Brunswick has many micro and small businesses.
- 20.3% are sole traders and 28.1% employ 2-4 staff.
- 28.1% employ 5-9 staff (up from 2015).
- 20.8% employ 10 or more staff (up from 2015).
- The 64 responding businesses in town employ 461 staff between them. With 138 businesses, this extrapolates to 992 jobs in town – a 17.4% increase in the last 4 years, but with flattening a bit since 2017.

Job growth 2003-2019



- 30% jobs are full-time, 14.3% part-time and 55.7% casual. Since 2017 full-time staff stayed much the same, there was a small net drop in part-time staff, and a small net increase in casual staff. Some jobs can't be filled.
- 38.6% have difficulty finding suitable employees in all sectors, but especially chefs & baristas (up from 2015).
- 11.5% have difficulty retaining staff.
- 75% of business have staff with 80% or more locals.
- 71/138 businesses were surveyed in June 2019. Of 412 staff, 337 drive to work Mon-Fri & 178 on the weekend.

## CONCERNS

- Infrastructure/services dissatisfaction with warehousing, DA process, phone services, then inspections/licensing. Roads, footpaths and toilets are mentioned elsewhere.
- The highest costs of doing business in Brunswick are rates, DA approvals, inspections & licencing, leasing equipment and rents. (3 out of 5 are Council related).
- Energy costs dropped down the list since 2015.
- Paid parking: 92.2% opposition in 2015. Now 94.4% of CBD businesses predict negative impacts on their business from periodic paid parking and advise why.
- Council's proposal to reduce holiday letting days from the current 365 days to 180 or 90 days pa will impact tourism and most businesses in Bruns & jobs will be lost.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Maintain our village charm & the Simple Pleasures activities by reinforcing our branding, mission and town values with another Simple Pleasures campaign.
- Run or support extra activities in Feb, March & August.
- Secure funding for VC to ensure staffing and keep open.
- Extend/expand social media promotion, co-operative marketing, and cross-referrals between businesses, embracing the new young demographic.
- Support collectives and business hubs and create initiatives to support our struggling retailers.
- Ask Council to include the most urgent infrastructure improvements in next year's budget and follow up.
- Persuade Council to shelve any paid parking proposals and keep the status quo for holiday letting in Bruns.
- Work with employment agencies to resolve shortages.
- Engage proactively in all masterplanning processes for the town (eg Boat harbour, holiday parks, Tweed St)
- Continue Chamber activities (eg VC, marketing, town improvement, newsletters, events, advocacy, lobbying, business development, partnering & networking).
- Involve more businesses in activities and manage our limited resources to achieve as much as possible.
- Continue to partner with Council, community groups and other organisations outside Bruns to get the best outcomes for our businesses, in line with the community vision for the town. Try to do more with less!