



# Sunshine Coast: The place to be

Raising entrepreneurial ventures through  
an ecosystem of support

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ENCOURAGING

AN **ENTREPRENEURIAL**  
CULTURE”

# Acknowledgements

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The content and findings are that of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect or represent the official views of the USC or SCC.

# About USC School of Business: Entrepreneurship

The School of Business at the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) is committed to business education and research that is relevant to its community and keeps pace with the constantly evolving business environment. USC's researchers collaborate with the local and national governments to deliver innovative, high-quality research with real impact. Particularly, this research project focuses on one of Australia's national priorities, namely how to facilitate and stimulate innovation and entrepreneurship within regional areas.

The research team for this project has both the academic and practical expertise to use an evidence based method to collect and analyse both qualitative and quantitative data to assess the interests of relevant actors. Participation was voluntary and all responses are kept confidential, thereby adhering to the Ethical Standards of USC.

# About Economic Development Branch at Sunshine Coast Council

Sunshine Coast Council played a collaborative role in the development of the Sunshine Coast Regional Economic Development Strategy 2013-2033. This strategy sets the direction for regional economic growth including entrepreneurship and innovation. The Economic Development Branch within Council facilitates a range of programs and policies that help deliver upon the objectives of the strategy, with a particular focus on the five key pathways including: Leadership, Collaboration and Identity, Capital Investment, High-Value Industries, Local-to-Global Connections and Investment in talent and skills. In partnership with industry leaders representing the seven highvalue industries, a variety of programs have been developed and delivered to benefit local business. Sunshine Coast Council Local Business Development facilitators and High-Value Industry facilitators welcome contact from local business to learn more. For further information go to:

[www.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/business](http://www.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/business).



# About the research team



## Dr Retha de Villiers Scheepers

Senior Lecturer, Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management  
The University of the Sunshine Coast

Dr Retha de Villiers Scheepers is a Senior Lecturer in Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the University of the Sunshine Coast, and was the research project lead on assessing entrepreneurship support programs as a means to stimulate economic development, which culminated in this report. Her research into entrepreneurial decision-making and innovation performance, as well as being actively involved in the startup community drives her current research focused on investigating the impact of emerging, regional entrepreneurship ecosystems. She is also part of the international Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Dynamics Research group dedicated to understanding and informing the dynamics of people, places and processes to nurture entrepreneurial behaviour.



## Dr Erica Mealy

Lecturer, Information and Communications Technology  
The University of the Sunshine Coast

Dr Erica Mealy joined the Faculty of Arts, Business and Law at the University of the Sunshine Coast in February 2016. Erica is an accomplished software engineer interweaving time in the IT industry with her university teaching experience over a 20 year period. Dr Erica Mealy has a passion for inspiring the next generation of innovators and professionals. Her dual specialty in Information Technology and User Design allows her a unique perspective on the drivers of business and technology innovation.



## Professor Michael Clements

Chief Academic Officer - Australian Technical and Management College

Professor Clements is the Chief Academic Officer at Australian Technical and Management College, Melbourne, Australia. As CAO, Professor Clements has overall responsibility for the Academic Leadership and delivery of Tertiary Higher Education, VET and Professional Year programs offered by ATMC. He has a long, established academic career teaching and researching in universities across Australasia, Europe, UK and Asia. He has held a number of Senior Management Leadership positions in various Higher Education Institutions across Australia, including Head of School of Business, and Acting Dean at The University of the Sunshine Coast, University Professor of Industry Engaged Learning, Swinburne University, Director of the Industry Internship Programme, Faculty of Commerce at the University of Wollongong.



## Mrs Anne Lawrence

Head of Industry Development - Economic Development Branch  
Sunshine Coast Council

Anne Lawrence has experience providing economic analysis, business strategy and market research to a wide variety of clients and now works within the Sunshine Coast Council focusing on the Regional Economic Development Strategy. With a focus on the region's High-Value Industries, collaboration principles and several game-changer infrastructure projects, Anne and her team drive a range of projects in partnership with the business community for regional economic benefit.

## Executive summary

The Sunshine Coast is one of Australia's top ten significant urban areas, and becoming one of Australia's leading city regions of the 21st century. Projected to grow to 550,000 residents by 2040, the region has a vibrant economy, offering a superior lifestyle to residents and businesses. Significant capital investment is underway, with a new Maroochydore Greenfield city centre being established; a \$1.8 billion tertiary teaching hospital opened in 2017; the Sunshine Coast Airport being expanded to deliver Australia's next international gateway; and \$81 million expansion of the University of the Sunshine Coast completed in 2015. The vision for the Sunshine Coast was collaboratively determined under the Sunshine Coast Economic Development Strategy 2013-2033. Economic growth is underpinned by strong leadership, investment in essential infrastructure, fostering business growth in high-value industries, a focus beyond the Sunshine Coast's boundaries to both domestic and global markets and nurturing the talent and skills of the workforce. The recent \$1 million Regional Innovation Program co-funded by Advance Queensland, the Sunshine Coast Council, Noosa Council, Regional Development Australia Sunshine Coast support the entrepreneurial community and leverage regional strengths in areas of innovations. Regions are vital to economic prosperity as innovative activity tends to be concentrated geographically, due to the social interdependencies and economic and intellectual assets within the entrepreneurship ecosystem. Entrepreneurship support from universities and government contribute to create a supportive ecosystem, where entrepreneurial activity can thrive.

This research report investigates regional entrepreneurship support in South East Queensland (SEQ), specifically the Sunshine Coast by:

- 1 constructing a baseline visual representation of the role-players providing support to entrepreneurs, either as their core function, or as one of their activities in June 2016, based on two key informant focus groups;
- 2 proposing a regional entrepreneurship ecosystem support model with a SEQ as a case study, comparing Brisbane, the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast as embedded cases (July – August 2016), based on 36 interviews, 30 policy documents and 45 hours of observation;
- 3 focusing on the voice of the entrepreneur as key users of support regarding the relevance of support (during 2016) based on 13 focus groups with 70 Sunshine Coast entrepreneurs; and,
- 4 developing entrepreneurial firm personas to improve the design and value proposition of support programs (during 2017).

These four aims were addressed using a mixed method research design, which drew on multiple data sources to gain a comprehensive picture of support in the entrepreneurship ecosystem of SEQ, and the Sunshine Coast specifically.

# "Entrepreneurial capital"

- Bernard Salt



550,000   
The Sunshine Coast is projected to grow to 550,000 residents by 2040

\$1.8 billion tertiary teaching hospital



New Maroochydore Greenfield city centre being established



Sunshine Coast Airport Expansion Project



University of the Sunshine Coast \$81 million expansion



## Sunshine Coast Regional Economic Development Strategy 2013-2033

Growth is underpinned by strong leadership, investment in essential infrastructure, fostering business growth in high-value industries.



# Key findings

The findings of this report improve understanding of regional entrepreneurship support programs and develop pilot measures for these programs in order to inform policy development.

- Comparative to entrepreneurial ecosystems in Brisbane and the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast population displays a high degree of early stage entrepreneurial activity. Despite the low geographical density and industry concentration in this region, there are high levels of social and cognitive proximity between actors, is facilitated through networks and associations, such as Silicon Coast, Chambers of Commerce and industry bodies, for example, the Food and Agribusiness Network.
- Multiple role-players provide varied support to entrepreneurs in the local ecosystem. These role-players include lead entrepreneurs, mentors, network groups, universities, government agencies and programs, incubator-accelerators and co-working hubs, in addition to financial capital and material infrastructure in the form of transport and internet.
- Leadership within the Sunshine Coast Entrepreneurial Ecosystem features strongly and can best be described as distributed leadership, with different role-players taking the lead depending on the initiative or support provided. Given the dynamic nature of entrepreneurship ecosystems, it is critical that a compelling, shared vision drives future development, as duplication and internal rivalries in the absence there-of could derail development efforts.
- Entrepreneurial and innovative activity is found throughout the business lifecycle and not only in the early stages. However, many established Sunshine Coast organisations in traditional industries find the entrepreneurship and innovation terminology challenging, inhibiting their involvement in the innovation agenda.
- The Sunshine Coast shows a low degree of industry specialisation, compared to Brisbane and the Gold Coast, given it is in an earlier stage of economic development. Yet, industry specialisation evident in innovation clusters illustrates the need for the region to develop and grow targeted industries.
- Multi-level government policies (ie federal, state and local levels) influence entrepreneurial activity. Sunshine Coast entrepreneurs generally find local government very supportive, and the recent increase in support programs and initiatives at multiple levels helpful, especially the diversity of programs from Advance Queensland. However, red tape, onerous licensing, taxation and high labour costs limit the growth of entrepreneurial ventures.
- There is a high awareness of the Innovation Centre and Spark Bureau's mission to promote local entrepreneurial development. However, relatively few entrepreneurs on the Sunshine Coast access these hubs, and the perception is that incubator membership programs are exclusive and non-transparent.
- Entrepreneurial activity on the Sunshine Coast is a result of a heterogeneous group of entrepreneurs, who differ in generations, venture development stage, growth ambition and industry. This is reflected in 14 entrepreneurial personas, who can be categorised into five archetypes namely: support central (who support other entrepreneurs), experienced leaders, growth-focused, economically active and a group of entrepreneurs new to the area.
- Entrepreneurs who move to the area, including migrants and immigrants, represent underutilised human capital who are experienced and have national and international networks. These individuals could potentially collaborate with locals to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities, however they are often unaware of the entrepreneurial activities on the Sunshine Coast and the collaboration potential or where to find like-minded people.
- A number of initiatives engage youth in entrepreneurial activities, however, there are few programs targeting the next stage after startup. To ensure the career momentum of this engagement is leveraged, successful global policies, programs and initiatives could be studied and adapted to nurture an entrepreneurial mindset among youth, to contribute as innovative, proactive citizens.
- Australian startups that embark on global growth (scaling) rarely remain in the country, as investment capital, experienced mentors and networks, and regulatory frameworks may be more accessible and attractive in other entrepreneurship hotspots, such as Singapore, San Francisco, Berlin and others. However, international experience shows that it is possible to attract experienced entrepreneurs back home to nurture the next generation of entrepreneurs.
- Six actionable interventions can help ensure the Sunshine Coast becomes the place to be with a healthy regional entrepreneurship ecosystem.



# Is the Sunshine Coast the place to be for entrepreneurs?

## Research method



Sunshine Coast Entrepreneurship Ecosystems Map



Case study comparing BNE, GC & SC



Voice of the entrepreneur



Entrepreneurial personas

## KEY FINDINGS

### Sunshine Coast

High degree early stage entrepreneurial activity

Distributed leadership

Supportive local government



Multi-level government policies influencing entrepreneurial activities



### Prosperous

Heterogeneity of entrepreneurs

Quality mentors

High growth potential ventures



### Opportunities

Few entrepreneurs access hub

Limited entrepreneurial supply chains

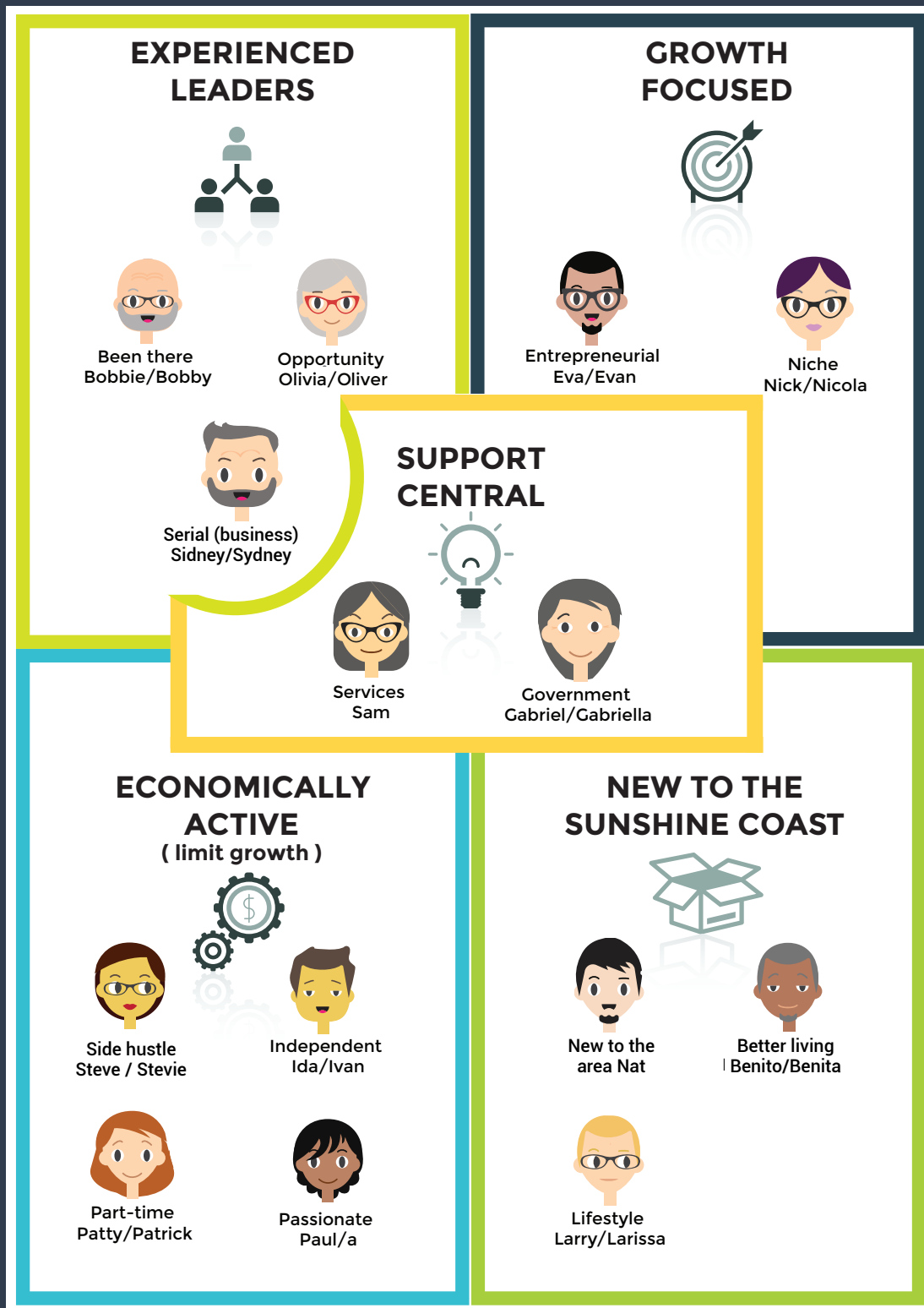
Lack of private investment/risk capital

Low degree of industry specialisation

Terms inhibit innovation engagement

# 14 ENTREPRENEURIAL PERSONAS

categorised into 5 archetypes



**Diverse motivations drive entrepreneurs**

**Personas are beneficial to:**

- Improve communication of support offered, based on entrepreneurs' motivations
- Design relevant support initiatives and programs

# INTERVENTIONS

## Action-focused entrepreneurship education accreditation

Example: Mountain Creek Coding and Innovation Hub for students and teachers

## Entrepreneurship mentor training & accreditation

Example: Sunshine Coast Chamber Alliance mentoring program and other local programs

## Attract successful, experienced Queensland entrepreneurs located elsewhere to relocate

Example: Attraction campaigns, tagline: Your HQ with IQ

## Provide introduction service to new arrivals on the Sunshine Coast

Example: Sunshine Coast Regional Innovation Program Team (#SCRIPT) concierge project

## Incentives for established firms to engage with early stage ventures

Example: Local Government procurement programs as model for private sector

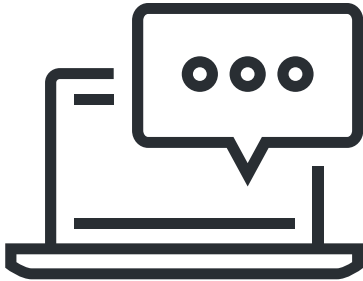
## Industries in diversity & depth

Example: Sunshine Coast Council High-Values Industries Program and Investment Attraction Programs

Six actionable interventions can facilitate the Sunshine Coast's development as a healthy ecosystem, with specific examples already underway.



# Key recommendations

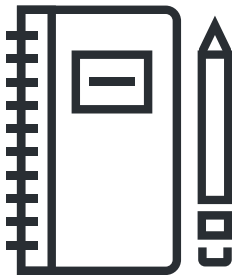


## Position Sunshine Coast as an attractive destination for entrepreneurs

Develop and build the value proposition of the Sunshine Coast as an attractive and desirable destination for starting and growing a new venture, by virtue of superior quality of life, economic growth potential, supportive local and state government, existing complementary industry clusters and well-founded networks.

## Offer a sound, comparable infrastructure

Ensure the material infrastructure related to transport (ie road and air) and internet (in terms of speed) is competitive to other similar, global destinations.



## Incubation and acceleration programs need transparent criteria and outcomes

Providers of entrepreneurship support, incubation and acceleration programs need to ensure that selection to these programs is transparent and that value proposition delivers what was promised to secure their brand reputation.

## Encourage young entrepreneurs to gain formal education

Given the importance of skills and talent for succeeding in entrepreneurial endeavours, youth entrepreneurs should be encouraged to study whilst pursuing their venture. As global evidence shows that most established entrepreneurs are graduates, an entrepreneurship education alongside their other studies will be invaluable.



## Validate personas

The personas developed in this research should be validated locally and in other regions, and used by support providers to ascertain changes required to the personas.

## Use the regions brains trust

Ensure continued collaboration through networks and utilise the collective brains trust of the region through design-thinking workshops focused on regional issues related to SCEE improvements.



## Leverage local strengths

Leverage local strengths by building on the existing knowledge and emergent opportunities within industries, while pooling resources through an industry association that advocates for collective interests of members.



## Universities should deliver future-focused, skilled graduates

Universities should ensure they provide relevant, future-focused graduates with the needed skills and exposure to contribute to local business development and growth, through work-integrated learning initiatives. Similarly, role-players in the entrepreneurship ecosystem should engage with faculty and be involved in developing the talent within the region.

## Monitor regional performance

Monitor and measure the performance of the regional entrepreneurship ecosystem, based on a rigorous research approach, to ensure evidence-based decision-making and accountability.



## Prioritise and implement interventions

Examine the six suggested interventions to address the pain points in the ecosystem, based on the voice of the entrepreneur focus group discussions. In particular, the introduction service for new entrepreneur arrivals on the Sunshine Coasts should be a relatively simple process.

## Involve existing SMEs in innovation agenda

Involve established small, medium and large organisations in the Sunshine Coast innovation agenda.



## Ensure compelling shared vision drives distributed leadership

Ensure continued distributed leadership within the SCEE through a compelling, shared vision.



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**PLACE TO BE**  
**FOR ENTREPRENEURS**

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**To read of copy of the full report visit:**  
<http://digitalsunshinecoast.com.au/ecosystem>