



## GROWING REGIONS PROJECT SUMMARY

### “Unearth Etheridge: Tourism Developments along the Savannah Way”

Etheridge Shire Council has been awarded \$8.235 million in funding from the Australian Government through Round 1 of the Growing Regions Program, for the project titled “Unearth Etheridge: Tourism Developments along the Savannah Way”. The project must be completed by December 2026. Etheridge Shire Council commonly uses the term “Growing Regions project” to describe this project.

Etheridge Shire Council’s Growing Regions project will deliver four major transformative tourism infrastructure developments along the Savannah Way, providing peak visitor experiences which are critical for the economic growth of northern Australia. The developments are based on the Etheridge Shire’s Tourism Masterplan which sets a 10-year vision for the sustainable development of tourism, in accordance with key regional, state and national priorities. The four developments (‘project elements’) include (1) an extension to the Terrestrial Centre in Georgetown to house the Ted Elliot Mineral Collection; (2) a bird sanctuary viewing hub at Cumberland Dam; (3) improved walkways and visitor interpretation at Copperfield Gorge in Einasleigh; and (4) the creation of ‘Our Elders Trail’ in Georgetown to showcase First Nations leaders.

The design objectives underpinning Etheridge Shire’s drive for economic growth and diversification through tourism include: Consolidation: enhancing the existing tourism services and facilities with consistent visible branding; Place Activation: Creating a network of ‘hotspots’ to connect the vastness of the shire; Heritage Conservation: Collating local histories through community consultation to offer more complete heritage-based tourism offerings and increase community pride; and Co-Creation: developing new attractions that empower communities while bringing innovation.

The four project elements will strengthen Georgetown’s position as a central hub along the Savannah Way and disperse visitors through the communities of Forsayth and Einasleigh through place activation of a peripheral node at Copperfield Gorge. The developments will complement existing iconic attractions in the Shire such as Cobbold Gorge, Talaroo Hot Springs, and Undara Lava Tubes, that are already under pressure from over-tourism in peak season. The four developments will diversify visitor experiences in the region, extend visitor length of stay and expenditure, and generate meaningful employment for locals, with an emphasis on indigenous employment.

#### **1) Extension to Terrestrial Centre and upgrade of Ted Elliot Mineral Collection exhibition.**

Located in Georgetown, the Terrestrial Centre houses the Ted Elliot Mineral Collection and is also the Visitor Centre. This development will enhance services and experiences and contributes to the preservation of geological, environmental and cultural heritage for the local community and visitors. This project element includes two main parts: the design and construct of a redeveloped Terrestrial Centre; and the design and fit-out of the revamped Ted Elliot Mineral Collection.

#### **2) Construction of a bird sanctuary viewing hub at Cumberland Dam**

Cumberland Dam is a key stopover destination on the Savannah Way, 15km from Georgetown, well known to birdwatchers and used as a free camping facility by caravanners. The existing infrastructure (comprising a heritage chimney and faded signage about birds and place history) is insufficient to meet peak visitor numbers, causing negative impacts. This development offers a non-invasive and

environmentally friendly approach to guiding human interaction with the area, through improved accessibility, consistent signage and revitalised interpretation for visitors. It will include a new boardwalk, viewing platforms and bird hides.

### ***3) Enhancement of walkways and visitor interpretation at Copperfield Gorge***

The Copperfield Gorge at Einasleigh is an impressive geological feature created by lava flows that shaped the region. The Savannahlander train is one of the great rail journeys from Cairns crossing over the Gorge and stopping at Einasleigh. Einasleigh has limited infrastructure to support the influx of visitors from the train. The Tourism Masterplan outlines the urgent need to manage access to the Gorge and provide experiences which connect visitors to the rich and charismatic heritage of the town. This development will enhance the accessibility of the Gorge and provide enhanced interpretation of local geology and history. This enhancement will form a critical part of a heritage trail from the Savannah Way, accessible by self-drive and train markets, and connecting visitors to the stories of local people that shaped the historical tapestry of the area.

### ***4) Creation of 'Our Elders Trail' in the park beside the Terrestrial Centre to showcase First Nations leaders.***

The trail will feature key stories of First Nations elders and will complement emergent indigenous tourism experiences in Etheridge Shire. Alongside the Terrestrial Centre is Heritage Park, which currently includes the Georgetown Peace Monument (comprised of plaques recognising international peace leaders), two playgrounds, public toilets, BBQs and tables. To complement these facilities and the exhibits within the Terrestrial Centre, the trail will extend visitor engagement from the Ted Elliot Mineral Collection via a small outdoor amphitheatre beside the redeveloped Terrestrial Centre, and invite visitors into Heritage Park, where they can learn more about local indigenous heritage.