
TOWONG SHIRE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

2022-26

Urban Enterprise
For Towong Shire Council

April 2022

The Towong Shire Economic Development Strategy was prepared by Urban Enterprise in collaboration with Towong Shire Council.

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ACRONYMS

AAGR	Average Annual Growth Rate
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
DMP	Destination Management Plan
EDS	Economic Development Strategy
ERP	Estimated Resident Population
IVS	International Visitor Survey
LGA	Local Government Area
PA	Per Annum
NVS	National Visitor Survey
TNE	Tourism North East
TRA	Tourism Research Australia
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Index for Areas
SME	Small to Medium Enterprise

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Gross Regional Product	The total value of final goods and services produced in the region over the period of one year.
Output	Represents the gross revenue generated by businesses/organisations in each of the industry sectors in a defined region. This term is also referred to as total sales or total income.
Employment	Employment data represents the number of people employed by businesses/organisations in each of the industry sectors in a defined region. Employment data presented in this report is destination of work data. That is, no inference is made as to where people in a defined region reside.
Regional Exports	Represents the value (\$) of goods and services exported outside of the defined region that have been generated by businesses / organisations in each of the industry sectors within the region.
Daytrip Visitor	Those who travel for a round trip distance of at least 50 kilometres, are away from home for at least 4 hours, and who do not spend a night away from home as part of their travel. Same day travel as part of overnight travel is excluded.
International Visitor	A person is defined as an international visitor to Australia if they are currently a resident overseas, have been in Australia for less than one year and are aged 15 years or over.
Overnight Visitor	People aged 15 years and over who undertake an overnight trip of one night or more and at least 40 kilometres away from home are referred to as overnight visitors. Only those trips where the respondent is away from home for less than 12 months are in scope of the NVS.
SEIFA	Developed by the ABS, this measures the relative level of socio-economic advantage and disadvantage for a defined area. The index score is based on a weighted combination of census variables that reflect disadvantage (e.g. income, education, employment, etc.), which is then standardised around the national average score of 1,000. A higher score on the index reflects a lower level of disadvantage. Therefore, a score above 1,000 indicates a lower level of disadvantage relative to the national average, while a score below 1,000 indicates a higher level of disadvantage relative to the national average.
High Country	The High Country is a defined tourism region in Victoria's north-east, which includes seven shires – Alpine, Benalla, Indigo, Mansfield, Murrindindi, Towong and Wangaratta – and the three major alpine resorts of Falls Creek, Mt Buller and Mt Hotham. The region is represented by a regional tourism board (Tourism North East).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

The Towong Shire Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026 (EDS or Strategy) is a key strategic document for Towong Shire Council (Council) to help plan for future economic growth over the next five years.

Prepared in collaboration with Urban Enterprise, the Strategy is designed to provide strategic direction for **business development, investment attraction, resident attraction** and **sustainable growth** in the Shire. This includes clear objectives and an action plan for Council to help implement the Strategy and grow the Towong economy, focusing on the economic opportunities for the townships and sub-regions within the municipality.

The information in this Strategy is informed by independent research and analysis, as well as consultation with industry representatives, community groups, businesses, Council and Government stakeholders.

This report has been developed concurrently with the Towong Shire Destination Management Plan (DMP). Key directions from the Destination Management Plan have been included in the Economic Development Strategy, however the DMP provides greater depth on strategies and projects which will grow Towong's visitor economy.

TOWONG SHIRE

Towong Shire is a rural municipality located in the Hume Region in Victoria's north-east, bordering NSW to the north and east and Albury-Wodonga to the west. It is the largest municipality in the Hume Region (6,675 square kilometres), as well as the least populated (6,102 residents), making it one of the least densely populated areas in Victoria. This presents numerous challenges for Council, including service delivery, asset management and community engagement.

The area is primarily known for agriculture, with a vast amount of productive farmland that comprises around 30% of total land in the Shire. This is the primary driver of Towong's economy, employment as well as its community identity.

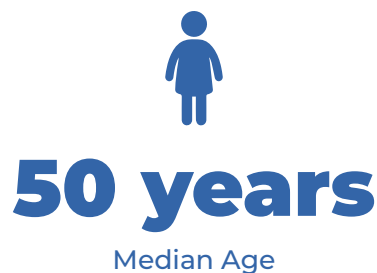
The Shire also offers unique water-based assets, including Lake Hume, the Murray River, Mitta Mitta River, Dartmouth Dam, as well as nature-based attractions such as Burrowa Pine Mountain National Park and Mount Granya State Park. These products contribute to Towong's amenity and rural lifestyle offer for residents and visitors.

There are many communities dispersed across the Shire, which providing support services to residents, industry and visitors. Key townships include Tallangatta (administrative centre) to the west and Corryong (service centre) to the east, with other significant towns including Mitta Mitta and Eskdale in the south-west, as well as Bellbridge and Bethanga in the north-west.



DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Key indicators and trends relating to the Shire's population were examined, which helped inform the following implications for future economic growth.



Low Rates of Population Growth

Contributing to the relatively small population base has been historically low levels of population growth, which increased by 184 residents (0.3% p.a.) between 2011 and 2020.

Growing the population base is critical for economic development, as this increases the supply of local labour, generates local consumer spend to support business growth, and stimulates economic activity. Therefore, the development of population attraction and retention strategies is an important priority for Council.

An Ageing Population

With a median age of 50 years (compared to the Regional Victoria median of 41 years) Towong Shire has one of the oldest age profiles in Victoria. The population is forecast to continue to age, with growth expected in the number of 'senior' and 'elderly' residents over 70 years.

An ageing population is difficult to sustain, given the impact on demand for health care and aged care services and diminishing supply of younger working age residents. Therefore, population attraction strategies should be targeted at younger age profiles to provide a more sustainable population base and support workforce growth to meet industry needs.

Housing and Dwelling Supply

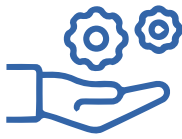
The number of private dwellings is also projected to increase (0.5% p.a.) at a rate considerably lower than the Regional Victoria average (1.4% p.a.) between 2021 and 2036. Whilst this is in response to the low rates of population growth, it is important that the Shire provides sufficient housing to meet demand.

Although housing prices have increased state-wide, the housing market in Towong is comparatively affordable, with median prices approximately \$150,000 less than the Regional Victorian average. This provides an opportunity for the Shire to leverage housing affordability as an incentive to attract new, and retain existing, residents.

Increased residential land supply in Tallangatta and Bellbridge will support housing and population growth within commuting distance of Albury-Wodonga.

ECONOMIC PROFILE

The Shire's economy is relatively small, particularly in the context of the Hume Region, which is attributed (in part) to the low population base. Key economic indicators for 2020 includes:



\$560 M

Total Output



\$168 M

Regional Export Value



2,003

Local Jobs



920

Registered Businesses

Economic Drivers and Specialisations

Primary Industries and Trade

Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing is the main contributor to the economy and employment in the Shire, generating 38% of total output (\$214 million), 69% of regional export value (\$115 million) and supporting 35% (or 697) local jobs. This is primarily driven by the beef and dairy farming industry, as well as some forestry activities.

Supporting and growing agriculture will help maintain Towong's economy into the future. Agricultural output provides a significant opportunity to add value to other industries, particularly the manufacturing sector (via downstream processing) and transport (delivery and distribution of primary production).

Population-Driven Services

Population attraction provides flow-on economic benefits to key industries that support residential development, including the construction and property sectors, which generates total output of \$132 million (or 23%) and supports 166 (or 8%) local jobs.

In addition, key services such as retail trade and hospitality, such as accommodation and food services, provide amenity to residents, account for most town centre trading and support visitation to the Shire.

Public and Service Sector Industries

The provision of social services, including health and education, as well as public administration services, supports a large proportion of local jobs (556 jobs or 28%), with these industries directly impacted by the rate of population growth and age profile of residents. As such, maintaining access to these services – in line with future demand – will enhance liveability, support resident attraction and drive workforce growth in the Shire.



Employment and Workforce

Towong Shire has a relatively low unemployment rate of 2.6% (March 2021), which has decreased over time and is lower than the Regional Victoria average of 4.7%. Whilst low unemployment rates are seen as a positive outcome for communities, at 2.6% it represents an issue for businesses seeking to attract labour and may impact on business growth.

Resident and workforce attraction will be critical to supporting a healthy economy in Towong in the future.

Towong has a relatively low job containment rate of 64% - representing the proportion of residents that both live and work within the Shire – which is attributed to high rates of 'job leakage' (26%) that escapes to Albury-Wodonga.

This presents issues with staff recruitment for some local businesses that compete with Albury-Wodonga for labour. However, it also provides opportunities to attract commuting employees in strategic locations, such as Bellbridge and Tallangatta.

Business Base

Almost all businesses in the Shire are either 'non-employing' (73%) or small businesses that employ less than 20 people (26%), which is driven by the high proportion of agricultural businesses in the Shire (55%), most of which are small-scale family businesses or are not labour intensive.

Therefore, the EDS needs to consider industry growth and diversification initiatives, in order to create local job opportunities and expand the jobs base. Supporting small business should also be a key focus of economic development in Towong Shire.

Other knowledge-based industries, including 'white-collar' professional and financial services, are underrepresented in the Shire, due to a small population base and competition for services in nearby Albury-Wodonga. Promoting growth in these industries – through remote/flexible working opportunities – will help diversify the jobs base and support business investment in Towong.



The Visitor Economy

Towong has the smallest visitor economy in the High Country region – relative to the other LGAs – which indicates that tourism is a developing industry for the Shire. This is reflected by low levels of visitation (195,000 visitors in 2019) and visitor spend (\$29.3 million in 2019), as well as relatively low levels of yield generated per visitor.

Supporting a successful visitor economy is important for sustainable economic development in the Shire, as it diversifies the industry base, creates local jobs and generates direct expenditure. Council should focus on growing both the value and volume of tourism, as well as implementing strategies that helps develop Towong into a desirable visitor destination.

COVID-19 Recovery

Given the economy’s reliance on agriculture, which is less labour intensive and non-consumer facing, Towong’s economy – which experienced a small decrease in output and employment in mid-2020 – has grown above pre COVID levels.

Whilst the industry make-up has facilitated economic recovery and growth at an aggregate level, ongoing targeted support will likely be required for businesses that rely on travel and population movements – particularly retail, hospitality (i.e. food and accommodation) and personal services.

Therefore, Council should provide recovery assistance to specific businesses that are more severely impacted by restrictions and encourage long-term resilience, which will promote business and workforce growth across a more diverse range of industries.

Sub-Regional Approach

Due to the Shire’s large and varied geography, diverse townships and dispersed population/business base, the EDS provides analysis and strategic direction at a sub-regional level:

- Tallangatta
- Upper Murray
- Mitta Valley
- Peninsula

The table on the following page summarises the economic strengths, barriers to growth and potential economic opportunities for each sub-region.

	Strengths	Challenges	Economic Opportunities
Tallangatta Sub-Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Proximity to Albury-Wodonga · Tallangatta's role as a regional service centre · Nature-based assets (e.g. Lake Hume) and recreation (e.g. High Country Rail Trail) · Development infrastructure (water and sewerage) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Supply of zoned residential and employment land · Lack of industry representation · Town centre vacancies · Supply of skilled workers · Limited access to Lake Hume 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Tallangatta town centre activation and enhanced role as a regional service centre · Attract population-driven businesses (retail, personal services, service-industrial) · Commuter destination and hub for remote workers · Support growth in the visitor economy · Downstream processing of agricultural output
Upper Murray Sub-Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Corryong's role as a regional service centre (servicing towns across the Victorian and NSW border) · Strong industry representation · Country University Campus · Corryong Airport · Tourism assets and experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Residential and employment land supply in Corryong · Lack of services in smaller townships (e.g. health, education, retail) · Remote and isolated townships · Youth retention · Poor transport infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Corryong town centre activation and enhanced role as a regional service centre · Value-add opportunities for agriculture (e.g. downstream processing) · Corryong Airport activation and commercialisation · Agricultural training and education pathways · Corryong as a visitor hub and events destination
Mitta Valley Sub-Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Water-based assets (Mitta Mitta River and Dartmouth Dam) · Strong industry representation · Agribusiness branding (Mitta Valley Beef) · Mitta Mitta's role as a visitor destination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Small population base · Lack of services in the region · Lack of development infrastructure · Remote and isolated townships · Residential and employment land supply in Eskdale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Downstream processing of agricultural output · Mitta Mitta activation as a 'visitor-ready' destination · Enhance Eskdale's role as a community and service hub · Activation of Dartmouth Dam and township · Rural industry jobs growth
Peninsula Sub-Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Proximity to Albury-Wodonga · Lake Hume access · Development infrastructure in Bellbridge · Trail infrastructure (e.g. Great River Road) · Strong industry representation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Small population base · Lack of services in the region · Lack of commercial town centre · Lack of development infrastructure · Supply of zoned residential and employment land · Poor transport infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Commercialisation and activation of Bellbridge · Bellbridge's role as a tourist destination and commuter town (inc. hub for remote workers) · Bethanga's role as a commuter town and hub for remote workers · Residential development in Bethanga · Lake Hume activation

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

VISION

“ Towong Shire will strengthen its economy through population attraction, a high-value and innovative rural industry and tourism industry growth. ”

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

1.

Increase the rate of population growth and retention.

2.

Support skilled workforce growth to service industry and residents.

3.

Promote Towong Shire as a destination of choice for residents and visitors.

4.

Improve liveability outcomes for residents.

5.

Support the development of a more efficient and productive agricultural sector.

6.

Advocate for investment in strategic infrastructure to meet community and industry needs.

7.

Develop a more diverse business base, inc. rural industry, population service industries and tourism industry.

8.

Support visitor economy growth through development of high-quality tourism product, infrastructure and experiences.

9.

Support local businesses to stimulate investment, growth and promote resilience.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THEMES AND TRANSFORMATIVE PROJECTS

The economic development framework includes four key themes, with defined outcomes, which supports the strategic direction for economic development in the Shire. This is used to identify potential transformative projects as well as other project opportunities for Towong, which are explored later in this Strategy.



Theme 1. Population Driven Economy

Overview

Promote economic development through population attraction and retention, facilitating growth in population-based services and industries.

Outcomes

- 1.1** Increase in population growth and retention rates
- 1.2** Diversify the industry mix and expand the jobs base

Transformative Projects

- Housing and Settlement Strategy
- Masterplanning and Activation Strategies for key water-based assets (Lake Hume, Dartmouth Dam, Mitta Mitta River), as well as Townships (Bellbridge Village and Mitta Mitta)
- Domestic Wastewater Management Plan and Integrated Water Management Plan
- Township Enhancement Program
- Tallangatta Showgrounds Precinct Activation Strategy
- Employment Land Strategy
- Industry Attraction Strategy



Theme 2. A Thriving and Sustainable Rural Industry

Leverage rural industries of competitive advantage, including agriculture, forestry and energy production, to generate economic growth.

- 2.1** Increase agricultural value and output
- 2.2** Increase jobs in rural industry
- 2.3** Infrastructure investment to support rural industry growth

- Upper Muray Agribusiness Branding
- Agriculture Strategic Plan (in progress)
- Country University Campus (Corryong)
- Abattoir / Protein Recovery Plant (Mitta Valley)
- Energy Resilience and Reliability Project (Upper Murray)



Theme 3. Visitor Economy Growth²

Overview Grow the visitor economy by increasing the number of visitors to the Shire, extending the length of stay and increasing visitor spend.

- Outcomes**
- 3.1 Accommodation
 - 3.2 Food, Beverage and Farmgate
 - 3.3 Nature and Water
 - 3.4 Ride
 - 3.5 Infrastructure, Amenity and Activation
 - 3.6 Branding, Marketing and Awareness
 - 3.7 Industry Development and Collaboration

- Transformative Projects**
- Small Scale Accommodation Interventions
 - Cudgewa Valley Wilderness Retreat
 - Holiday Park Reinvestment Program
 - Bellbridge Boathouse
 - Corryong Distillery
 - Old Tallangatta Butter Factory Revitalisation
 - Visitor Experience Enhancement Plan at Burrowa-Pine Mountain National Park and Mount Granya State Park
 - Corryong Golf Course Redevelopment
 - Murray River Multi-Day Canoe Trail
 - Lake Hume Masterplan (refer Theme 1)
 - Mitta Mitta Destination Mountain Bike Park
 - High Country Rail Trail Improvement and Extension
 - Mt Elliot Gravity and Adventure Park
 - Tallangatta Gravity Mountain Bike Park
 - Township Enhancement Program (refer Theme 1)
 - Mitta Mitta Activation Plan (refer Theme 1)
 - Bellbridge Village Masterplan (refer Theme 1)
 - Tallangatta Foreshore Stage 1 - Destination Playground, Cafe and Trail
 - Content and Imagery Database
 - Branding and Digital Strategy
 - Touring Itineraries
 - Business Attraction and Investment Facilitation Strategy
 - Half Yearly Tourism Industry Information and Networking Forums



Theme 4. Business Development and Support

Provide ongoing business support to create a thriving business community and promote long-term business and workforce growth.

- 4.1 Adopt best-practice approaches to economic development
- 4.2 Create a connected and capable business base
- 4.3 Build business resilience

- Business Engagement Project
- Towong Entrepreneurs Program

²Note: The information included in Theme 3 aligns with the recommendations of the DMP. Further information on the outcomes, transformative projects and other project opportunities can be found in the DMP document.

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

The Towong Shire Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026 (EDS or Strategy) is a key strategic document for Towong Shire Council (Council) to help plan for future economic growth over the next five years.

Prepared in collaboration with Urban Enterprise, the Strategy is designed to provide strategic direction for **business development, investment attraction, resident attraction** and **sustainable growth** in the Shire. This includes clear objectives and an action plan for Council to help implement the Strategy and grow the Towong economy, focusing on the economic opportunities for the townships and sub-regions within the municipality.

The information in this Strategy is informed by independent research and analysis, as well as consultation with industry representatives, community groups, businesses, Council and Government stakeholders³.

This report has been developed concurrently with the Towong Shire Destination Management Plan (DMP)⁴. As tourism is a subset of the economy, the information included in the DMP is also relevant to future economic growth in the Shire, which has resulted in some overlap in the recommendations of both documents. More detailed information relating to the visitor economy, including objectives and growth opportunities, can be found in the DMP document.

³The list of consultees is detailed in Appendix A.

⁴Prepared by Urban Enterprise in 2021 for Towong Shire Council.



REPORT STRUCTURE

The report includes the following chapters to clearly demonstrate the research undertaken, evidence obtained and the recommended directions for the economy:

Strategic Context

An overview of the key influences on Towong's economy, including its regional context, supporting government policies and macroeconomic trends.

Demographic Profile

A profile of Towong's population and key socio-economic indicators, including key indicators and trends that will impact the local economy.

Sub-Regional Profile

A profile of Towong's population and key socio-economic indicators, including key indicators and trends that will impact the local economy.

Economic Profile

A profile of the Shire's economy, including industry contributions to the economy and employment, an assessment of the local business base and the role of tourism.

Economic Development Framework

Details the strategic directions and themes to support economic growth in the Shire. This includes the areas of focus and opportunities for Council to achieve the agreed vision and objectives for economic development.

Action Plan

A guide for Council and relevant stakeholders to implement the projects and opportunities identified in the Strategy, supported by recommended actions and timeframes (*note: this will be completed as part of the final EDS report*).



STRATEGIC CONTEXT



ABOUT TOWONG SHIRE

Towong Shire is a rural municipality located in the Hume Region in Victoria's north-east, bordering NSW to the north and east and Albury-Wodonga to the west.

The Shire is located approximately 200km north-east from Melbourne (at its nearest point), while the closest regional city – Albury-Wodonga – is approximately 15km from the western-most point of the Shire.

It is the largest municipality in the Hume Region (6,675 square kilometres), as well as the least populated (6,102 residents), making it one of the least densely populated areas in Victoria⁵. This presents numerous challenges for Council, including service delivery, asset management and community engagement, with these issues to be explored throughout the EDS.

The area is well-known for agriculture, with a vast amount of productive farmland that comprises around 30% of total land in the Shire. This is the primary driver of Towong's economy, employment as well as its community identity.

The Shire also offers unique water-based assets, including Lake Hume, the Murray River, Mitta Mitta River, Dartmouth Dam, as well as nature-based attractions such as Burrowa Pine Mountain National Park and Mount Granya State Park. These products contribute to Towong's amenity and rural lifestyle offer for residents and visitors.

There are various communities dispersed across the Shire, which provide support services to residents, industry and visitors. Key townships include Tallangatta (administrative centre) to the west and Corryong (service centre) to the east, with other significant towns including Mitta Mitta and Eskdale in the south-west, as well as Bellbridge and Bethanga in the north-west.

⁵Population density is around 1.1 persons per square kilometre.



SUB-REGIONAL APPROACH

The geography of Towong is large and varied, with diverse townships as well as a dispersed population and business base with different needs and priorities.

As such, it is necessary that the EDS provides analysis and strategic direction at a **sub-regional** level to reflect the unique issues and opportunities (where relevant) of the four sub regions that make up Towong Shire, depicted in the above map.

This includes.

- Tallangatta
- Upper Murray
- Mitta Valley
- Peninsula

This map highlights the key townships within each sub-region and estimated resident populations.

POLICY CONTEXT

The following documents were examined to inform the development of this Strategy, including local and regional government strategies that has implications for economic development in Towong.

Regional Documents

- Tourism North East, Three Year Strategy 2019
- Hume Regional Growth Plan 2014
- The Hume Strategy for Sustainable Communities 2010-2020

Shire-Wide Documents

- Towong Shire Economic Recovery Action Plan 2020
- Towong Municipal Recovery Plan 2020
- Towong Healthy Communities Plan 2018-2021
- Towong Shire Council Plan 2017-2021
- Towong Shire Council Youth Plan 2019-2023

Local Documents

- Upper Murray 2030 Vision Plan
- Our Bellbridge Strategy 2015
- Our Valley Our Future (Mitta Valley) Strategic Plan 2013-2016
- 'Tallangatta Tomorrow' Masterplan
- Walwa And District (CRC) Strategic Plan

At a local level, the *Council Plan* outlines Council's strategy to create a healthy, vibrant and prosperous region, including a focus on community wellbeing, asset management and economic and tourism development. Whilst recent documents prepared by Council focus on achieving economic and business recovery, via the *Economic Recovery Action Plan* and *Municipal Recovery Plan*, to respond to the impacts of COVID-19 and the 2020 bushfires. This indicates that key priorities for the Shire includes sustainable economic development, which balances community and environmental outcomes, with emphasis on recovery assistance to help the region grow.

There have also been several localised plans delivered by key townships and sub-regions across the Shire, each of which provides a list of key investments and activities designed to support community and economic development. These are tailored to meet the specific needs of local communities and should inform and support economic development at a holistic level.

At a regional level, several strategies relevant to the Hume Region have important implications for the Shire. The *Hume Regional Growth Plan* looks to create a thriving and dynamic economy by capitalising on the unique competitive advantages in the region. This specifically includes Towong leveraging its relatively large catchment along the NSW border and proximity to Albury-Wodonga, as well as managing growth whilst maintaining its key natural assets.

It is important that the Economic Development Strategy aligns with other local and regional documents to help garner the support of key stakeholders and encourage collaboration to help deliver, as well as advocate for, key projects and initiatives.

In addition, the visitor economy is supported by Tourism North East strategies, which focus on key product pillars to drive tourism growth in the region and develop Victoria's High Country into a leading visitor destination. Whilst this provides direction at a regional level, there is a lack of strategic focus at a local level for the Towong visitor economy. **This provides opportunity for Council to pursue activities that meet the needs of the local tourism industry, whilst also aligning its objectives to the regional priorities.**



LOCAL GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Local Government plays an important role in facilitating economic growth within their municipalities. Typically, Council's role in economic development includes business engagement and support, business and investment attraction, promoting liveability outcomes and undertaking advocacy efforts.

In terms of investment attraction, it is important for local Governments to provide and encourage an economic environment that is conducive to attracting private investment. Council can assist private investment by providing leadership, creating a consistent and streamlined regulatory environment, conducting market and industry research, and business case development.

Common objectives adopted for economic development across Local Government include:

- **Supporting the existing business base** - promoting growth within the existing business base.
- **Attracting new businesses and jobs** - promoting growth by attracting new investment and businesses.
- **Growing the visitor economy** - economic development units often support the local tourism industry.
- **Promoting liveability and sustainable communities** - with an increasing focus on environmental sustainability.
- **Undertaking advocacy efforts to attract infrastructure funding.**

To help achieve these objectives, Councils often work in partnership with local industry and community representatives, such as chambers of commerce, to meet the needs of residents as well as the business community.

Economic Development in Towong Shire

Council currently provides 1.4 FTE – spread across three employees – dedicated to economic development activities (as well as a full-time Agricultural Officer - 1 FTE). The role of the economic development team includes business engagement and support, workforce development, advocating for public and private infrastructure investment and ensuring the community has access to key social and community services.

However, Council's efforts are supported by a range of national, state, regional and local organisations that support economic development activities within Towong. These organisations – summarised in Appendix B – undertake key supporting activities as follows:

- **State-level.** Includes government agencies that provide funding to support economic growth initiatives, as well as service providers that manage key assets (e.g. land, energy, water) to facilitate community and economic outcomes.
- **Regional-level.** Key government and private partnerships that support community and businesses across neighbouring municipalities – and advocate on behalf of the region – to achieve common economic development goals.
- **Local-level.** Localised organisations that represent specific communities or destinations within Towong Shire, to help meet the specific needs of the community and businesses (through engagement initiatives, strategy development and funding advocacy). Many of these organisations were developed in response to the recent bushfires and COVID-19, to assist with economic and community recovery efforts.

MACROECONOMIC INFLUENCES

The following external economic influences, which impact the national and state economies, will have implications for economic growth in Towong Shire.

COVID-19 Impacts on the Economy

Business Recovery

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the national economy, as restrictions on trading and travel impact communities and businesses. As Victoria continues to adapt its COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, it is likely that the pandemic will have an ongoing impact on the state and local economy.

Some industries, particularly those that rely on population movements, such as retail and hospitality, have been affected to a larger extent and require more intensive and ongoing business support. Conversely, many rural municipalities, such as Towong have been less affected by COVID-19 restrictions, as these economies are typically driven by primary industries that are less labour intensive and non-consumer facing.

Council should focus on providing targeted support for businesses that have been more severely impacted by ongoing restrictions, to promote industry diversity and support local jobs.

Rise of remote and flexible working arrangements

An outcome of COVID-19 has been the rise of remote working, particularly for traditional 'office-based' industries, such as professional and financial services, which has adapted its operations to allow employees to work from home on a regular basis.

This provides significant opportunities for regional and rural areas to attract residents from metropolitan and regional centres, due to the increased prevalence of remote working which provides more flexibility in choosing a place of residence, along with the health and lifestyle advantages associated with living in a more sparsely regional environment.

This may lead to the attraction of new residents in rural municipalities across Victoria, including Towong.

Growth in domestic travel

The decline in international tourism – due to travel restrictions and uncertainty on the global pandemic situation – is likely to have a positive impact on domestic travel, including inter and intra-state movements. A significant uplift in domestic tourism was experienced at the end of 2020, and this is expected to continue once Victorian and NSW restrictions ease towards the end of 2021.

This will see more Victorians and NSW residents holidaying domestically, which provides opportunity for many rural destinations – including Towong Shire and may lead to an uplift in the visitor economy.



Agricultural Trends

According to Agriculture Victoria, the industry is experiencing change, with agricultural businesses facing new challenges and opportunities. This will have implications for the Towong economy, which is largely driven by agriculture:

- **Infrastructure:** Addressing supply chain inefficiencies including improving road and rail freight flows, using ports more efficiently and maintaining airfreight capacity.
- **International demand for food:** A growing international middle class – particularly from fast-growing Asian markets – is demanding more food and increasing pressure on food and fibre production within Australia. This includes a shift in demand to meet changing consumer preferences for organic and specific dietary products.

- **Climate change:** This remains an ongoing challenge across the industry, as volatile weather conditions create uncertainty for farmers and agricultural land/produce becomes more susceptible to extreme weather events such as floods, rainstorms and drought.
- **Innovation:** Opportunities exist in new and emerging technologies to increase productivity and remain competitive in a global environment. This includes the increased use of robotics, biotechnology and digital and wireless technologies for data measurement, weather monitoring, animal monitoring, geospatial monitoring and water management and chemicals.

Energy

The energy sector is experiencing change both nationally and globally as new technologies emerge, combined with government commitments to sustainable practices. As a result, there is increased demand for investment in new, clean energy technologies and products to increase energy efficiency and reduce emissions.

Economic Transition

The Victorian economy is transitioning away from industrial and primary industries to a knowledge and service-based economy. Recent analysis identifies that the sectors forecast to drive future economic growth in Victoria are population-driven industries and professional services, including health care, education, professional and financial services, agribusiness and tourism.

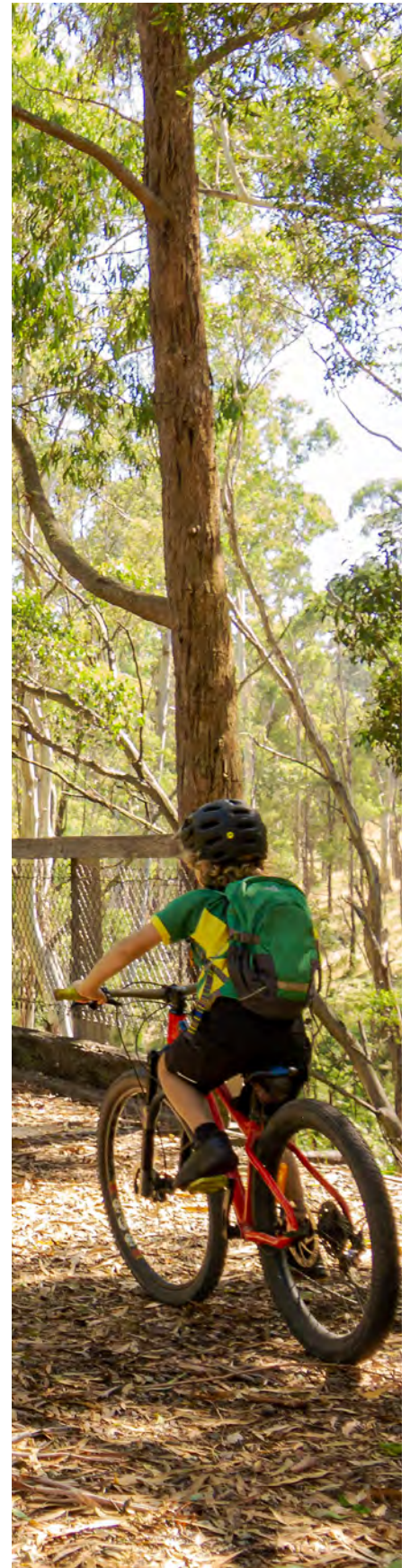
Victoria is well-placed to capitalise on this transition, by leveraging its educated labour force, access to sophisticated technologies and innovative products.

This economic shift provides an opportunity for Towong to diversify its industry base and increase local job opportunities, particularly for key emerging and growth sectors.

Importance of Small to Medium Enterprises

Small to medium enterprise (SME) – which can be defined by businesses that employ less than 20 people – plays a crucial role to the health of the national economy. SMEs make up around 98% of all businesses in Australia, contribute to 32% of Australia's GDP and supports 41% of the workforce (4.7 million employees).

This is particularly relevant for Towong, as almost all businesses are SMEs (99%), driven by the agricultural sector. Therefore, providing supporting infrastructure and services to existing and new SMEs is critical for business growth in the Shire and will help create economic and employment outcomes.





Growing Demand for Health Care

The population of Victoria is ageing, with the number of people aged over 65 years expected to triple by 2056. Additionally, the number of people aged 85 and over is expected to quadruple. This is attributed to an increase in life expectancy and advancements in health care.

Whilst this will increase employment and promote growth in health care, it will also increase demand for services, placing pressure on resources and infrastructure and contributing to increases in government health care spending.

This is particularly relevant for Towong, which has one of the oldest age profiles in Victoria (median age of 50). As a result, demand for health care services and residential aged care will significantly increase over the medium to long term. This will influence future infrastructure requirements and investment priorities in the Shire, particularly to maintain the health and wellbeing of elderly residents.

Environmental Sustainability

In 2016, the Victorian Government committed to legislating a long-term target for Victoria of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Victoria's Climate Change Act (2017) aims to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions and a climate-resilient community and economy.

In response, the promotion and adoption of environmentally sustainable practices is playing an increasing role within economic development and influencing how local governments operate.

Many rural areas, particularly those that rely on primary industries, are exploring green economy opportunities to promote environmental sustainability. This includes reducing agricultural waste through resource recovery activities, as well as promoting circular economy practices for existing businesses. In addition, there is growing demand for investment in renewable energies, such as solar and wind farms, to provide a more localised and reliable source of energy for businesses and residents.

Towong is well placed to capitalise on this demand via its agricultural business base, which can strategically use existing farmland for renewable energy projects, particularly as agricultural businesses seek to diversify income through 'off-farm' income streams.

This focus on sustainability will inform future decision making and investment priorities within the Shire.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

This section provides a demographic profile of Towong Shire, including key population, housing and socio-economic indicators that has implications for future economic growth opportunities.



TOWONG SHIRE DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT

POPULATION

6,102

Current Population 2021

6,246

Projected Population 2036



+121 (+0.2% p.a.)

Population Change 2021 - 2036

AGE PROFILE



50

Median Age
2016

Service Age Group	2016	2036	Change (no.)	Change (%)
Babies and pre-schoolers (0 to 4)	277 (5%)	240 (4%)	-37	-13%
School-aged and youth (5 to 24)	1,224 (20%)	1,025 (16%)	-199	-16%
Young workforce (25 to 34)	456 (8%)	469 (8%)	+13	+3%
Parents and homebuilders (35 to 49)	965 (16%)	1,220 (20%)	+255	+26%
Older workers and pre-retirees (50 to 59)	1,020 (17%)	667 (11%)	-353	-35%
Empty nesters and retirees (60 to 69)	1,009 (17%)	864 (14%)	-145	-14%
Seniors (70 to 84)	844 (14%)	1,375 (22%)	+531	+63%
Elderly aged (85 and over)	193 (3%)	386 (6%)	+193	+100%

Service age groups divide the population into age categories that reflect typical life-stages. They indicate the level of demand for services that target people at different stages in life and how that demand is changing.

DWELLING AND HOUSING PROFILE



2.3 Average Household Size
2016



95% Dwelling Type
Separate House



Household Composition 2016

1. Adult Couples **37%**
2. Families **31%**
3. Lone Person **30%**

3,204

Current Dwellings 2021

+229 (+0.5% p.a.)

Dwelling Growth

2021 - 2036

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE

974 SEIFA Score

39th most disadvantaged LGA in Victoria (out of 79)

2.6%

Unemployment Rate
March 2021

64%

Job Containment Rate
2016

PROPERTY MARKET INDICATORS 2019



66 Property Sales (houses)
10-year average: 70

\$230K Median Property Prices (houses)
10-year growth: +90k (+64%)

Note: The data included in this section has been compiled by Urban Enterprise from a combination of sources, including: REMPLAN, ABS Census data, Victoria in Future and the Victorian Valuer-General.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Note: The demographic projections for Towong were prepared prior to the onset of COVID-19 and the ongoing effects of the pandemic, which has already had a significant impact on population movements. The short-term evidence shows that intrastate migration from metropolitan centres to regional Victoria increased by 62% between March 2020 and March 2021⁶, which has offset any reductions in overseas/interstate migration. These intrastate migratory patterns can (anecdotally) be attributed to a variety of factors such as the increased prevalence of remote work, fewer restrictions in-region and the health and lifestyle benefits associated with living in a sparsely populated regional environment.

As such, it is likely that the current forecasts are conservative for Towong (as well as for Regional Victoria) and population growth rates are expected to increase in the short to medium term.

Population Growth

Towong Shire has the smallest population base in the Hume Region, with an estimated resident population of 6,102 (2021). The Shire has historically experienced low levels of population growth, increasing by +184 residents (or 0.3% p.a.) between 2011 and 2020.

Current forecasts predict continued low rates of growth, with the population expected to increase to 6,246 residents (+121 or 0.2% p.a.) by 2036. These forecasts are considerably lower than the Regional Victoria average, which is expected to increase by 1.3% p.a. over the same period⁷.

Significant population growth is expected across Regional Victoria, over and above current projections, as intrastate migration rates increase from metropolitan areas to regional locations in response to COVID-19 (i.e. rural health and lifestyle benefits, flexible working arrangements, etc.). This presents an opportunity for Towong Shire to capture some of these migrating residents, through targeted population attraction strategies and strategic investments, and compete with surrounding regional destinations.

Age Profile

Towong Shire's population has a median age of 50, which is substantially older than the median age of 41 for Regional Victoria. As such, over half the population is aged over 50 years, while around one-quarter of residents are aged over 65 years.

The population is expected to age over time, with the number of 'senior' and 'elderly' residents over 70 years projected to increase by 724 (70%) by 2036. Conversely, the number of young, school-aged residents aged under 24 years is projected to decrease by -236 (-81%).

This is reflected in the recent changes in government school enrolments within the Shire, which has seen enrolments *reduce* by 134 (or 13%) between 2015 and 2020 – whilst the State has experienced a 13% growth in enrolments over the same period.

An ageing population – with an increased number of retired elderly residents – will have implications for economic growth, as this will diminish the supply of local labour and increase demand for, and costs of, health care and aged care services. Therefore, an area of focus should be on attracting younger working age residents to help sustain the economy.

⁶<https://www.realestateview.com.au/news/national/record-people-leaving-capital/>

⁷Population projections across Australia are likely to change in the short to medium term once the impacts of COVID-19 on migration patterns are known.



Housing and Dwelling Profile

Consistent with the older age profile in the Shire, the largest proportion of household type are adult couples with no children (37%) – i.e. retirees – while the proportion of family households (31%) is significantly lower than the Victorian average of 40%.

Attracting more families is critical to supporting economic growth, as this will increase the local labour force, increase local expenditure and support community engagement.

In addition, the housing stock is predominantly low-density separate houses (95%), which is consistent with many rural municipalities and provides an opportunity to attract families and retirees seeking a change from high-density metropolitan housing.

Consistent with the low rates of population growth, private dwellings are forecast to increase by +229 (or 0.5% p.a.) between 2021 and 2036, which is considerably lower than the Regional Victoria growth rate of 1.4% p.a.

The provision of suitable housing in key townships is critical for the Shire to be able to attract more residents, particularly as demand for housing in Regional Victoria has significantly increased in line with recent intrastate migratory patterns.

The property market has also been impacted by historically low demand for housing, with housing sales averaging 70 p.a. between 2010 and 2019. As such, median housing prices in the Shire (\$230,000 in 2019) have remained comparatively low compared to Regional Victoria (\$382,500). Having relatively affordable housing is a key attractor for new residents, particularly those squeezed out by high property prices in metropolitan areas and regional centres.

Although the recent demand for housing has increased property prices across the State, maintaining relatively affordable housing is critical to resident and workforce attraction and should remain a focus for Council.

Socio-Economic Profile

The socio-economic profile of residents is typically measured by The Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA), which is based on key variables that reflect disadvantage, notably income, education and employment. The Towong Shire's SEIFA score of 974 – which is below the national average of 1,000 – indicates a relatively higher level of disadvantage in the municipality. This ranks Towong as the 39th most disadvantaged in the state (out of 79 Victorian LGAs). However, this places Towong as the third most advantaged LGA in the Hume Region.

Whilst improvements can be made to increase the socio-economic status of residents, the Shire performs relatively well against neighbouring municipalities, driven by low rates of unemployment (to be explored in the Economic Profile section).

This provides a good foundation in which Council can undertake community development activities to increase Towong's score closer to the national average.

ECONOMIC PROFILE

The following details key economic, employment and industry drivers for Towong Shire, which provides critical information to inform future economic development opportunities. This includes an overview of COVID-19 impacts over time and ongoing recovery.

Where possible, results are benchmarked against Regional Victoria to provide context and indicate areas of competitive advantage.



TOWONG SHIRE ECONOMIC SNAPSHOT

KEY INDICATORS 2020



\$560 M

Total Output



\$168 M

Regional Export Value



2,003

Local Jobs



920

Registered Businesses

ECONOMIC PROFILE 2020

TOP INDUSTRIES BY OUTPUT



38% Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing (\$214 M)

2. Construction (13% or \$74 M)
3. Rental, Hiring & Real Estate Services (10% or \$58 M)
4. Health Care & Social Assistance (7% or \$37 M)
5. Manufacturing (6% or \$33 M)

TOP INDUSTRIES BY EXPORT



69% Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing (\$115 M)

2. Manufacturing (10% or \$17 M)
3. Accommodation & Food Services (6% or \$10 M)

EMPLOYMENT PROFILE 2020

TOP INDUSTRIES BY EMPLOYMENT



35% Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing (697 jobs)

2. Health Care & Social Assistance (14% or 277 jobs)
3. Education & Training (9% or 176 jobs)
4. Construction (8% or 160 jobs)
5. Retail Trade (6% or 129 jobs)

TOP OCCUPATIONS 2016



34% Managers

2. Professionals (14%)
3. Labourers (14%)

BUSINESS PROFILE

TOP INDUSTRIES BY BUSINESS COUNT 2016



55% Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing (507 businesses)

2. Construction (10% or 94)
3. Rental, Hiring and Real Estate (6% or 57)

73% Non-Employing Businesses

26% Small to Medium Businesses (1-19 employees)

VISITATION 2019



195,000
visitors

61% Domestic Daytrip Visitors

39% Domestic Overnight Visitors



Purpose of Visit

1. Holiday and Leisure 48%
2. Visiting Friends and Family 31%
3. Business 12%



3 nights Average length of stay per visitor

VISITOR SPEND 2019



\$29.3 M
Total Visitor Spend

\$62 Average Spend per Domestic Daytrip Visitor

\$287 Average Spend per Domestic Overnight Visitor

ECONOMIC PROFILE

The following details key economic, employment and industry drivers for Towong Shire, which provides critical information to inform future economic development opportunities. This includes an overview of COVID-19 impacts over time and ongoing recovery.

Primary Industries and Trade

Towong Shire is a developing rural economy that generates \$569 million in annual output, has an export value of \$168 million and supports 2,003 local jobs.

The Shire's economy is primarily driven by agricultural activities, with key economic drivers and specialisations categorised as follows:

- **Primary industries and trade** - key sectors include Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing, Manufacturing and Transport.
- **Population-driven services** - key sectors include Construction, Rental, Hiring & Real Estate, Retail and Accommodation & Food Services.
- **Knowledge and public sector industries** - key sectors include Health Care & Social Assistance, Education & Training and Public Administration & Safety.

Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing is the main contributor to the economy and employment in the Shire, generating 38% of total output (\$214 million), 69% of regional export value (\$115 million) and supporting 35% (or 697) local jobs. This Shire is well-placed to support agricultural growth going forward, given its historical attachment to farming and large tracts of agricultural land, which comprises 30% of total land in Towong.

This industry is predominantly driven by **Sheep, Cattle and Dairy Farming**⁸ (mostly beef and dairy farms), followed by some **Forestry & Logging**⁹ activity. To support the sustainable growth of these sectors and ensure it remains competitive, Council and businesses should focus on ways to grow jobs in agriculture, add value to the industry and increase the level of production.

The role of agriculture is critical to the Shire, particularly as it supports industries within the supply-chain network for downstream processing, transport and distribution of raw materials.

This has created a **manufacturing** sector that is inherently linked to production of raw materials in the Shire, driven by meat processing. The sector is important to the Shire as it generates 10% of exports value (\$17 million) 6% of output (\$32 million) and supports 4% (74) local jobs. Therefore, there are clear opportunities to leverage agricultural output produced in the Shire and grow manufacturing, particularly downstream processing, which can support business investment and generate positive economic and employment outcomes.

As these industries grow, there will be further opportunities for the **transport** sector to add value to regional exports by facilitating the delivery and distribution of both raw and processed materials.

⁸Generates output of \$177 million, export value of \$102 million and supports 629 local jobs.

⁹Generates output of \$19 million, export value of \$8 million and supports 26 local jobs.

Population Driven Services

This includes key industries that are directly impacted by the level of resident (and visitor) demand, including demand for services and infrastructure.

Through residential growth and property development, the population drives the **construction** and **property** (i.e. Rental, Hiring & Real Estate) sectors, which, when combined, generates total output of \$132 million (or 23%) and supports 166 (or 8%) local jobs. These industries, particularly residential construction are supported by population growth, which also promotes local employment opportunities.

In addition, resident and visitor demand for goods and services are key drivers of **retail trade** and **hospitality**, such as accommodation and food services, which accounts for 244 (12%) local jobs and \$37 million (7%) in output. These sectors provide important amenity to residents, account for most town centre trading and support visitation to the Shire. As such, these are critical services that can promote economic diversification (and sustainable growth) in the Shire and support local employment in key townships.

Knowledge and Public Sector Industries

These industries include public services – such as **health** and **education** – as well as government-related services, such as **public administration**, which are key services that support community health, wellbeing and engagement. They are relatively high employing sectors (supporting a total of 556 or 28% local jobs) that are directly impacted by the rate of population growth.

In particular, the ageing population will generate increased demand for health and aged care services. This will likely generate employment and training opportunities in these sectors to service demand, as well as influence future investment priorities in the Shire. Whilst Council must also ensure new and existing residents have access to quality support services to support population attraction and retention.

The current industry make-up of the Shire also demonstrates a lack of representation in ‘white-collar’ industries, such as professional and financial services. This is attributed to a small population base and competition for services in nearby Albury-Wodonga. Promoting growth in these industries – through remote/flexible working opportunities – will help diversify the jobs base and support business investment in Towong.





EMPLOYMENT PROFILE

Unemployment

Towong Shire has a relatively low unemployment rate of 2.6% (March 2021), which has decreased over the last few years and is lower than the Regional Victoria average of 4.7%. While this typically indicates positive economic growth, declining unemployment could also be the result of a small local labour force and/or a decrease in local job opportunities.

This has implications for economic development, as worker attraction is a key driver of business growth and investment. As such, Council's focus should be to grow the local workforce, which can facilitate business growth and help create local job opportunities.

Job Containment

Job containment indicates the proportion of residents that both live and work within the Shire, compared to residents that travel outside the LGA for employment. This is a key indicator for employment, as high rates of job containment can indicate that there are sufficient and suitable jobs available locally to support the local skills and qualifications of the labour force.

Towong has a relatively low job containment rate of 64%¹⁰, with majority of 'job leakage' (26%) escaping to the nearby Albury-Wodonga regional centres.

Whilst this demonstrates the need to grow local jobs and support the resident workforce, it also presents opportunities to attract residents that can commute to Albury-Wodonga and leverage the rise of remote/flexible working.

¹⁰Compared to neighbouring rural municipalities including Alpine Shire (job containment of 74%) and East Gippsland Shire (job containment of 89%).

Employment by Industry

Employment by industry is often a key indicator of industry strength within a municipality, with the top employing industries being:

- **Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing** - 697 jobs (35%), majority of which are attributed to the Sheep, Cattle and Dairy Farming sub-sector (629 jobs or 31%).
- **Health Care and Social Assistance** - 277 jobs (14%), mostly attributed to hospital and health services.
- **Education and Training** - 176 jobs (9%), mostly attributed to pre-school and school education.
- **Construction** - 160 jobs (8%), mostly attributed to residential construction services.
- **Retail Trade** - 129 jobs (6%)

This reinforces the strength of agriculture in the Shire, as well as key sectors that service and support the population, such as Health, Education, Construction, that should remain a key focus for Council.

The graph below examines the proportion of industry jobs in Towong against the Hume Region, which highlights areas of strength for the Shire.

Towong has a significant comparative advantage in **Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing**, which supports 35% of local jobs compared to 9% across the Hume Region. Supporting this industry will, therefore, maximise economic and employment outcomes for the Shire.

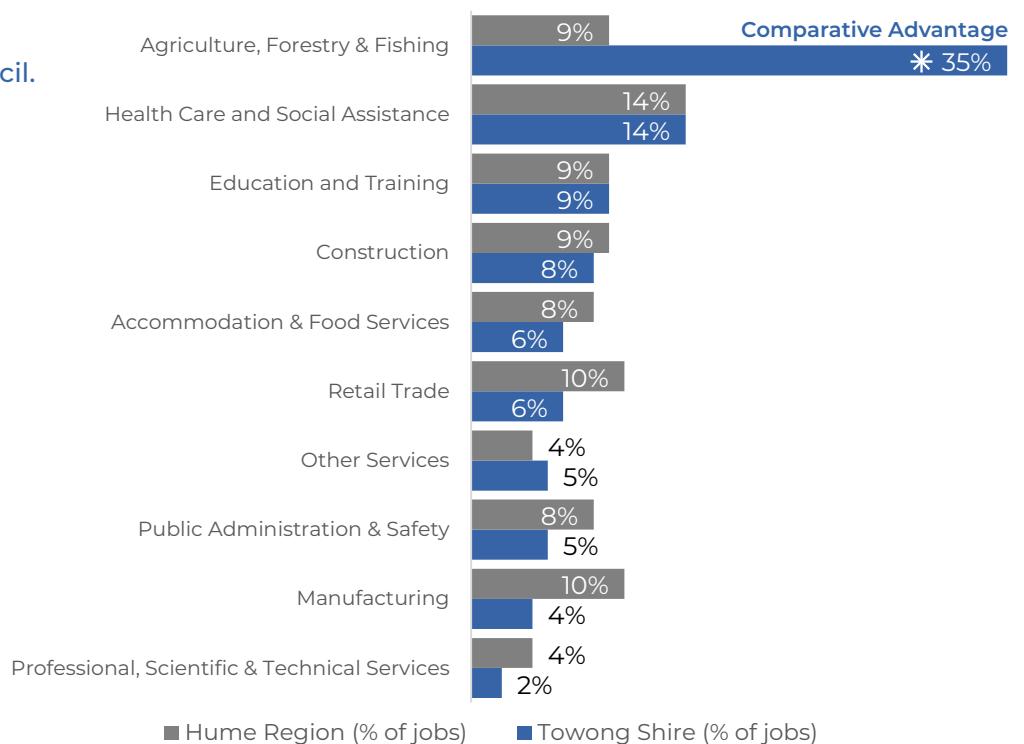
However, other industries where Towong has a lower proportion of jobs can indicate potential areas of growth and future areas of focus. This includes key population and visitor services such as Retail, as well as Accommodation and Food Services, which is stronger in the Hume Region due to the size of the population and tourism industry.

Therefore, achieving resident and visitor attraction in Towong will present the opportunity to grow the employment base in these sectors.

Manufacturing is also relatively small in Towong (4% of jobs compared to 10% across the Hume Region) yet has enormous potential to grow through leveraging the strength of agricultural production in the area. **Professional Services** is relatively small given the rurality of the Shire and distance to significant urban centres, yet has opportunity to grow through the rise of remote and flexible working.

Identifying and focusing on these areas of strength and potential growth, to expand the jobs base, is critical for economic development in Towong.

Industries of Employment (2020)





BUSINESS PROFILE

As of 2020 there are 920 businesses registered in Towong, almost all of which are 'non-employing' (73%) or small businesses¹¹ (26%). In contrast, only 1% of businesses employ more than 20 people, which can be attributed to the relatively low density nature of the Shire's business base.

This is attributed to the large proportion of agricultural businesses in the Shire (55% of total), most of which are small-scale family businesses or are not labour intensive.

Supporting agricultural businesses is crucial to help sustain the economy. However, consideration should also be given to attracting employing businesses in a diverse range of industries to promote business investment and create local job opportunities.

¹¹Employ less than 20 people.

VISITOR ECONOMY PROFILE

In 2019¹², Towong Shire attracted **195,000 visitors** (6% of High Country visitation) and generated direct visitor spend of **\$29.3 million** (4% of spend in the High Country). Based on this data, Towong has the smallest visitor economy in the High Country region – relative to the other LGAs – which indicates that tourism is a developing industry for the Shire.

A profile of the visitor market found that visitation is driven by domestic daytrip (61% of total) and domestic overnight (39% of total) visitors. The Shire does not attract international markets, with the industry protected from the COVID-19 related decline of international tourism. Almost half of these visitors are 'holiday/leisure' visitors (48%), followed by visiting friends and relatives (31%).

In addition, the activities undertaken by visitors reflect the Shire's strengths in nature-based tourism and outdoor recreation experiences, with over 85% of visitor activities involving sightseeing, visiting national parks, bushwalking, water activities and cycling.

The visitor economy is typically an important driver of economic output, via visitor spend. However, visitors to the Shire generate a relatively low level of visitor yield for both daytrip (\$62 per visitor, compared to an average of \$91 for the High Country) and domestic overnight markets (\$287 per visitor, compared to an average of \$473 for the High Country). This is attributed to several factors, including (note: these issues are explored in greater detail in the Towong Shire DMP):

- A lack of commercial accommodation, which reduces the proportion of high-yielding overnight visitors.
- A high proportion of overnight visitors (54%) that stay in non-commercial (i.e. free) accommodation.
- A lack of commissionable product, with the main attractions being inactivated nature-based product that does not promote visitor spend.
- A lack of supporting visitor amenity, such as food, retail, entertainment, to attract visitor spend.

Supporting a successful visitor economy is important for sustainable economic development in the Shire, as it diversifies the industry base, creates local jobs and generates direct expenditure. Council should focus on growing both the value and volume of tourism, as well as implementing strategies that helps develop Towong into a desirable visitor destination.

¹²Prior to the impacts of the 2020 bushfires and COVID-19 restrictions.



COVID-19 IMPACTS AND RECOVERY

Analysing the short-term and ongoing impacts of COVID-19 on businesses and the economy is important to identify focus areas for recovery assistance and ensure the economy returns to growth.

In terms of economic output, the economy experienced monthly decreases between April and December 2020. This ranged from a peak loss of \$2 million (-4.3%) in May 2020 to a relatively small decrease of \$0.1 million (0.2%) in December 2020¹³. However, from January 2021 monthly output returned to growth above pre-COVID levels, increasing by \$0.5 million (1.1%) in June 2021¹⁴.

In terms of employment, the Shire experienced monthly job losses between April 2020 and January 2021, with the peak impact again occurring in May 2020, which saw a decrease in 45 jobs (-2.2%). However, from February 2021 the level of monthly employment marginally increased above pre-COVID levels, with an additional 9 jobs created (0.4%) in June 2021.

The short-term impact of COVID-19 was somewhat lessened by the economy's reliance on agriculture, which is less affected by the restrictions in population movements. This has enabled the economy to grow in recent months beyond pre-COVID levels.

However, many businesses reliant on the visitor economy – including retail and hospitality – continue to be affected by ongoing travel restrictions and are likely to require recovery support. Visitor data for 2020 shows that total domestic visitation decreased by 5% (12,000 visitors), which led to a 10% decrease (\$2.2 million) in visitor spend¹⁵. While there was a slight increase in domestic daytrip visitation, which is attributed to the easing of restrictions over the 2020-21 summer season, the high-yielding overnight market significant decreased by 18% (in terms of visitation and spend).

With the expectation that restrictions will ease toward the end of 2021, Council and industry should prepare for a substantial rise in domestic tourism and identify strategies that leverages both interstate and intrastate travel.

In addition, businesses that service the visitor economy will require some form of recovery assistance to help continue trading as well as adapt to a 'COVID-normal' operating environment.

¹³Figures are compared against the pre-COVID-19 monthly output for March 2020.

¹⁴June 2021 reflects the latest data published to-date. However, this is expected to be revised following the ongoing lockdowns in Victoria and NSW.

¹⁵Compared to 2019 visitor data.

SUB-REGIONAL PROFILES

The following examines Towong at a sub-regional level, including a profile of key townships¹⁶ – which provide important services and amenity – as well as agricultural land use, which is the primary industry driver for the Shire.

This approach helps identify variations across the municipality with regards to economic strengths, barriers to growth and potential economic opportunities. This will ensure Council actions for economic development is tailored to meet the specific needs and requirements of communities and industry.

The information included in this section is based on a combination of desktop research and analysis, as well as consultation with industry and community representatives.

¹⁶Townships were included based on the provision of residential-zoned land (exc. rural living or farming zone)





TALLANGATTA SUB-REGION PROFILE



Overview

Tallangatta township is the key population centre in this region. It was originally located in the Murray River Valley but moved in the 1950s when the Hume Weir was built, and flooding was imminent. The town was transferred eight kilometres to the west, where it now currently lies on the banks of Lake Hume.

Tallangatta is the second most populated township in the Shire – with just over 1,000 residents – and has a relatively large commercial centre (73 businesses).

The township has basic water and sewerage infrastructure to support both residential and commercial developments. However, there is limited existing supply of residential and employment land.

There is also a high level of amenity in the town – in terms of retail, food and community facilities – which helps support residents and visitors. Additionally, there is also good access to quality services such as education, health and aged care, which are key drivers of population attraction.

Tallangatta	
Population (2020)*	1,082
Proximity to Albury-Wodonga	35 min
Commercial Properties	73
Planning	
Residential Land Supply**	✗
Employment Land Supply**	✗
Infrastructure	
Development Infrastructure	✓
Reticulated Sewerage	✓
Amenity	
Supermarket/General Store	✓
Petrol Station	✓
Food Services	✓
Community Facilities	✓
Services	
Education	✓
Health	✓
Aged Care	✓

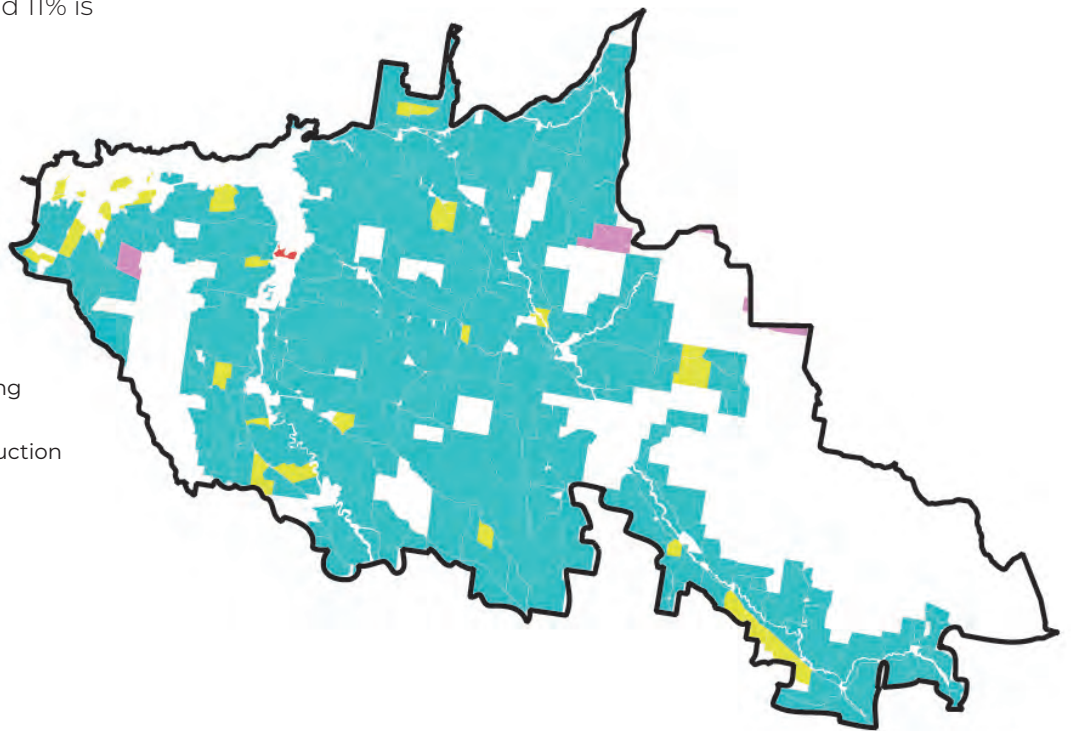
Note: *The 2020 population applies VIF growth rates to the 2016 Census data
 ** Includes TZ and MUZ land which can be used for residential or employment uses

Agricultural Land Use

Most of the land within the Tallangatta sub-region is agricultural land (58%), of which 85% is for livestock grazing, such as cattle farming and 11% is timber production.

LAND USE TYPE

- Native Vegetation
22 ha (0.1%)
- Livestock Grazing
40,699 ha (85%)
- Mixed Farming and Grazing
2,104 ha (4%)
- Commercial Timber Production
5,167 ha (11%)
- Sub-Region Boundary



Strengths

Proximity to Albury-Wodonga

Tallangatta township is a 35 minute drive to Albury-Wodonga, making it an ideal destination for commuters that work in the regional city, whilst also providing access to the large visitor base.

Regional Service Centre

The provision of key services (health, education, community facilities) and high-level of amenity (retail, food) helps establish the town as a key service centre for surrounding residents, as well as for visitors.

Assets and Recreation

With Lake Hume frontage and key recreation product including the High Country Rail Trail, the sub-region offers quality outdoor leisure activities for residents and visitors.

Development Infrastructure

With Tallangatta serviced by reticulated water and sewerage, there is growth potential for both residential and business development.

Challenges

Land Supply

There is a lack of suitably zoned residential and employment land (based on existing supply) to facilitate significant growth in population or industry.

Industry Support

There is a low level of business networking, collaboration and industry engagement, which can be attributed to the lack of industry representation or peak industry body.

Town Centre Vacancies

The town centre has unutilised retail spaces and a lack of diversity to meet the needs of residents or visitors.

Workforce Supply

There is a lack of local skilled workers to meet demand for existing businesses, which limits business growth. This is exacerbated by limited opportunities for education or training pathways in the area.

Lake Hume Access

Despite lake frontage, there is limited access to Lake Hume which constrains utilisation of this key natural asset.



ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Tallangatta town centre activation and enhanced role as a regional service centre.

Attract population-driven businesses (retail, personal services, service-industrial).

Commuter destination and hub for remote workers.

Support growth in the visitor economy.

Downstream processing of agricultural output.



UPPER MURRAY SUB-REGION PROFILE

Overview

The Upper Murray sub-region, which encompasses the eastern half of the Shire, includes the key townships of Corryong, Towong, Walwa and Cudgewa. The area stretches to the southern NSW border, encompassing border towns within the Snowy Valleys municipality, including Khancoban and Tooma. Although the EDS focuses on the Towong portion of the Upper Murray, the shared boundary with NSW provides opportunities for cross-border collaboration for mutual benefit.

This area is the furthest from Melbourne and other Regional Centres in Victoria and, as such, is a relatively self-contained economy. Corryong serves as the regional service centre for the Upper Murray, including the border towns in southern NSW. As such, it provides key services and amenity to residents, workers and visitors across the sub-region, which are supported by the relatively large business base (over 100 commercial properties). In particular, the town services and houses employees for the Snowy Hydro Scheme (Khancoban power station), which is a critical project that contributes to local economic activity and employment across the sub-region.

Corryong also supports visitation to the sub-region, as it is home to the only visitor information centre in the Shire and also supports significant events such as the annual Man from Snowy River Bush Festival. In contrast, the other key townships within the Towong portion of the Upper Murray (Walwa, Towong and Cudgewa) are more rural and generally support surrounding rural industry and farming.

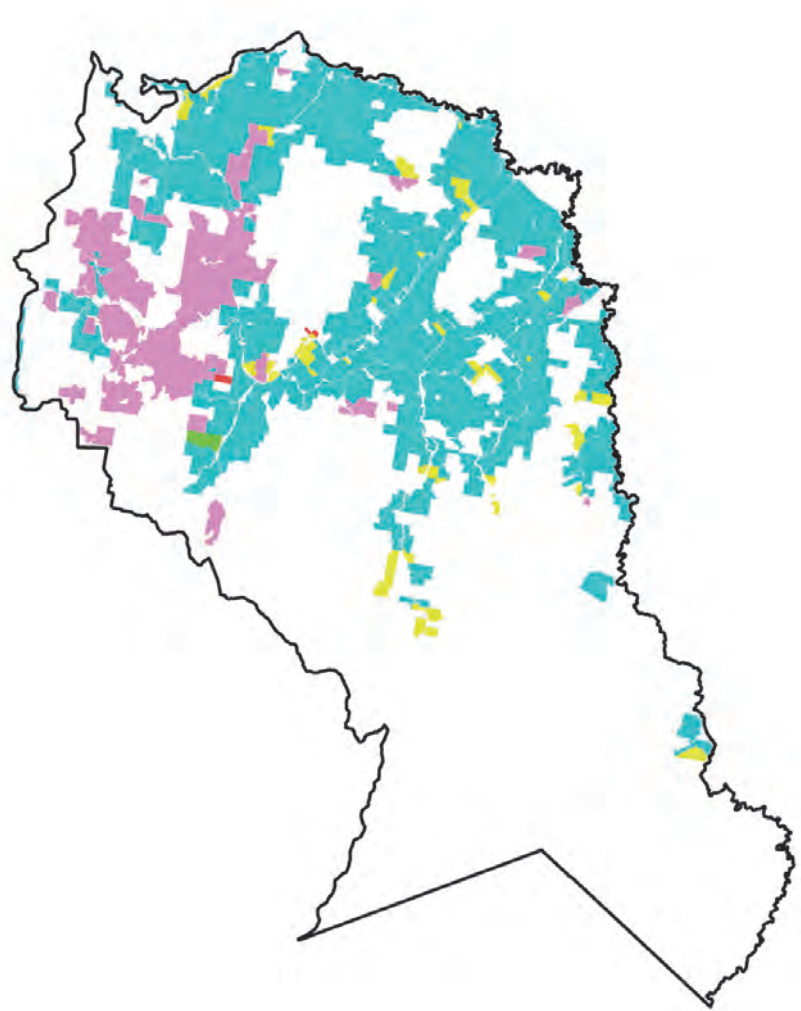
	Corryong	Walwa	Towong	Cudgewa
Population (2020)*	1,348	177	132	261
Proximity to Albury-Wodonga	1 hr 30 min	1 hr 30 min	1 hr 30 min	1 hr 30 min
Commercial Properties	112	13	5	4
Planning				
Residential Land Supply**	✗	✓	✓	✗
Employment Land Supply**	✗	✓	✓	✗
Infrastructure				
Development Infrastructure	✓	✓	✗	✓
Reticulated Sewerage	✓	✓	✗	✗
Amenity				
Supermarket/General Store	✓	✓	✗	✗
Petrol Station	✓	✓	✗	✗
Food Services	✓	✓	✗	✗
Community Facilities	✓	✓	✗	✓
Services				
Education	✓	✓	✗	✗
Health	✓	✓	✗	✗
Aged Care	✓	✗	✗	✗

Note: * The 2020 population applies VIF growth rates to the 2016 Census data
 ** Includes TZ and MUZ land which can be used for residential or employment uses

Agricultural Land Use

Around one-third of land in the Upper Murray is used for agricultural purposes, including livestock grazing (78% of agricultural land) and timber production (16%).

This is mostly confined to the northern parts of the sub-region, bordering with NSW and Tallangatta.



LAND USE TYPE

- Native Vegetation
151 ha (0.2%)
- Livestock Grazing
79,894 ha (78%)
- Mixed Farming and Grazing
5,435 ha (6%)
- Livestock - Special Purpose
420 ha (0.4%)
- Commercial Timber Production
15,465 ha (16%)
- Sub-Region Boundary



Strengths

Corryong Regional Service Centre

Corryong support residents, workers and visitors to the Upper Murray, as well as smaller NSW border towns, with access to key services and amenity. This includes basic water and sewerage infrastructure to support residential development.

Industry Support

The Upper Murray supports industry and local businesses through well-represented organisations, such as Upper Murray Inc.

Country University Campus (Corryong)

Corryong has a newly developed satellite site for the Ovens Murray Regional University Campus, which is a remote learning facility to promote education and training pathways.

Corryong Airport

This is a Council owned asset that could be better utilised to improve accessibility to the region and support residents, industry and visitors.

Tourism Assets and Experiences

The Upper Murray has a well-developed visitor economy, driven by its connections to The Man from Snowy River (which supports cultural product and events) as well as nature-based attractions (e.g. Murray River, Pine Mountain, trail infrastructure).

Challenges

Land Supply in Corryong

There is limited housing stock in Corryong and supply of residential land to support population growth. In addition, more employment land (industrial and commercial) is needed to support business growth.

Lack of Service in Smaller Townships

Although Corryong is a key service centre for the region, the smaller townships (Towong, Walwa and Cudgewa) offer limited amenity, infrastructure and services to support residents or visitors. As such, most economic and employment activity is driven by Corryong.

Remoteness

The remoteness of the Upper Murray is a key barrier to economic development, with all townships approx. 1.5 hours' drive from Albury-Wodonga. This impacts liveability outcomes, as access to large-scale urban centres (and provision of quality services, retail and entertainment) is limited.

Youth Retention

The retention of youth has been a key challenge for the Upper Murray, particularly due to a combination of remoteness, training pathways as well as a lack of diverse recreation product. This impacts on population growth and reduces workforce supply to support industry growth.

Transport Infrastructure

Poor road (and public) transport, both to and within the Upper Murray, contributes to the remoteness of the area and constrains access to key regional/urban centres.



ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Corryong town centre activation and enhanced role as a regional service centre (servicing towns across the Victorian and NSW border).

Value-add opportunities for agriculture (e.g. agri-business branding and downstream processing).

Corryong Airport activation and commercialisation.

Agricultural training and education pathways.

Corryong as a visitor hub and events destination.



MITTA VALLEY SUB-REGION PROFILE

Overview

The Mitta Valley covers the region between Lake Hume and the Dartmouth Dam, connected by the Mitta Mitta River. It includes the key townships of Mitta Mitta, Dartmouth and Eskdale.

Eskdale and Mitta Mitta were developed in the mining era during the 1800s. However after the mining industry declined, cattle farming expanded in the region, leading to agriculture being the primary form of industry in the Mitta Valley.

Dartmouth was set up in the 1970s to house and facilitate the construction of the Dartmouth Dam, which is the largest dam in Victoria and used for irrigation as well as recreation, such as fishing and boating.

The key townships play specific economic roles within the sub-region as follows:

- Mitta Mitta is the key tourist destination, with visitors attracted to its destination pub (Mitta Pub) and nature-based assets along the Mitta Mitta River.
- Eskdale, which has the largest population in the sub-region, operates as the community and service hub for residents.
- Dartmouth has the Dartmouth Dam as a key attractor for water-based recreation (for residents and visitors). However, with a small population and limited amenity it is often viewed as a secondary destination in the valley.

	Mitta Mitta	Eskdale	Dartmouth
Population (2020)*	171	242	104
Proximity to Albury-Wodonga	1 hr 5 min	1 hr	1 hr 15 min
Commercial Properties	6	9	6
Planning			
Residential Land Supply**	✓	✗	✓
Employment Land Supply**	✓	✗	✓
Infrastructure			
Development Infrastructure	✗	✓	✓
Reticulated Sewerage	✗	✗	✓
Amenity			
Supermarket/General Store	✓	✓	✓
Petrol Station	✓	✓	✗
Food Services	✓	✓	✓
Community Facilities	✓	✓	✗
Services			
Education	✓	✓	✗
Health	✗	✗	✗
Aged Care	✗	✗	✗

Note:






* The 2020 population applies VIF growth rates to the 2016 Census data

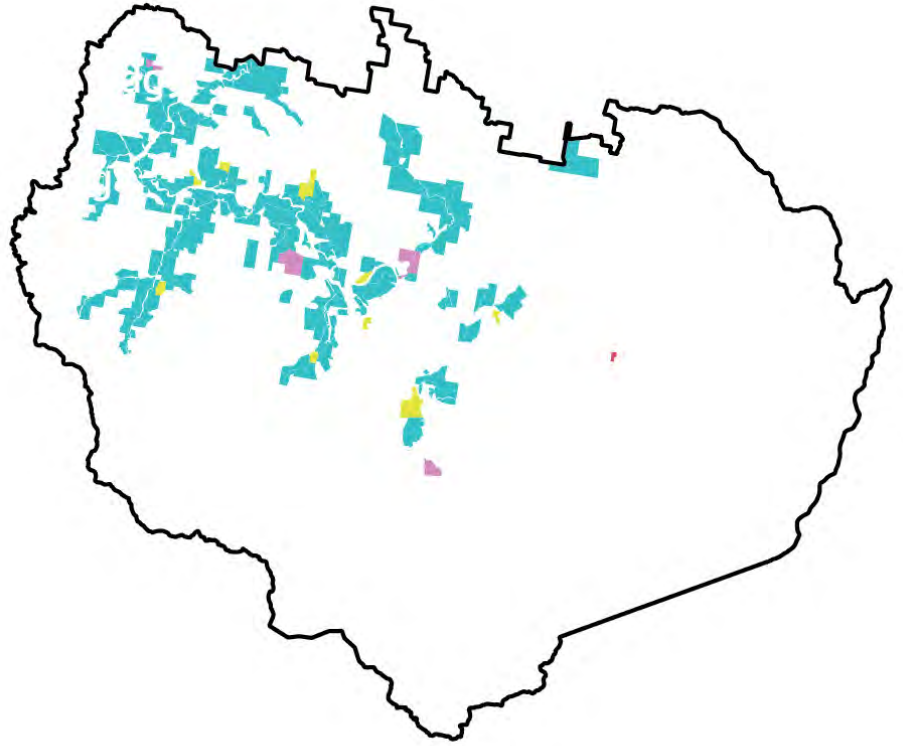
** Includes TZ and MUZ land which can be used for residential or employment uses

Agricultural Land Use

The Mitta Valley has the lowest proportion of agricultural land in the Shire (9%), with almost all of this land used for livestock grazing – specifically cattle and dairy farming.

LAND USE TYPE

-  Native Vegetation
18 ha (0.1%)
-  Livestock Grazing
16,013 ha (93%)
-  Mixed Farming and Grazing
661 ha (4%)
-  Commercial Timber Production
560 ha (3%)
-  Sub-Region Boundary





Strengths

Water-Based Assets

The Mitta Valley comprises significant water-based assets – including Mitta Mitta River and Dartmouth Dam – that provide quality recreation opportunities for residents and visitors.

Industry Support

The local industry is well-supported by industry bodies, including Mitta Valley Inc and local Community Recovery Committees. This promotes business collaboration and advocacy efforts to support industry growth.

Agribusiness Branding

The Mitta Valley has a well-recognised branding for its beef production – Mitta Valley Beef – which provides benefits for producers (including increasing market appeal and realising new market opportunities).

Mitta Mitta's Role as a Visitor Destination

Mitta Mitta is a key tourism asset for the sub-region, with natural attractions and visitor amenity, that could be leveraged to support visitor growth.



Challenges

Small Population Base

The small population base has implications for economic growth, as it constrains commercial activity and limits job opportunities in the region.

Lack of Development Infrastructure

The lack of reticulated water and sewerage in Mitta Mitta – and lack of reticulated water in Eskdale – is a key barrier to residential development and population attraction.

Remoteness

With key townships at least a one hour drive from Albury-Wodonga (the nearest urban centre), Mitta Valley is relatively remote. This impacts access to key services and amenity, which are critical for population and visitor attraction.

Access to Key Services

There is a lack of key social services in the region, particularly education, health and aged care, with residents forced to travel to Tallangatta for access. This has significant implications for liveability outcomes in the Mitta Valley.

Land Supply in Eskdale

Although Eskdale is the key population centre for the Mitta Valley, there is a lack of suitably zoned residential and employment land, which impacts population growth and business investment.



ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Downstream processing of agricultural output.

Mitta Mitta activation as a 'visitor-ready' destination.

Enhance Eskdale's role as a community and service hub.

Activation of Dartmouth Dam and township.

Rural industry jobs growth.

A photograph of a steel truss bridge spanning a body of water. The bridge's structure is composed of dark grey steel beams forming a series of triangles. The water below is calm with some ripples. In the background, there are rolling hills with sparse vegetation under a cloudy sky. A white, rounded rectangular text box is superimposed on the left side of the bridge structure.

PENINSULA
SUB-REGION PROFILE



Overview

The Peninsula sub-region, which is surrounded by Lake Hume and the Murray River, includes the townships of Bellbridge, Bethanga, Talgarno and Granya.

It is accessible to Albury-Wodonga via the Bethanga Bridge that crosses Lake Hume, with the sub-region known for its rural lifestyle and nature-based attractions.

Most of the sub-region lacks key services, amenity and infrastructure to support population and business growth, or attract visitors.

Although given its proximity to Albury-Wodonga, there is potential to shape the role of key townships – particularly Bellbridge and Bethanga – to promote economic development.





	Bellbridge	Bethanga	Granya	Talgarno
Population (2020)*	370	199	99	219
Proximity to Albury-Wodonga	30 min	30 min	40 min	35 min
Commercial Properties	1	4	1	1
Planning				
Residential Land Supply**	✗	✓	✓	✗
Employment Land Supply**	✗	✓	✗	✗
Infrastructure				
Development Infrastructure	✓	✗	✗	✗
Reticulated Sewerage	✓	✗	✗	✗
Amenity				
Supermarket/General Store	✗	✗	✗	✗
Petrol Station	✗	✗	✗	✗
Food Services	✗	✓	✓	✗
Community Facilities	✗	✓	✗	✓
Services				
Education	✓	✗	✗	✓
Health	✗	✗	✗	✗
Aged Care	✗	✗	✗	✗

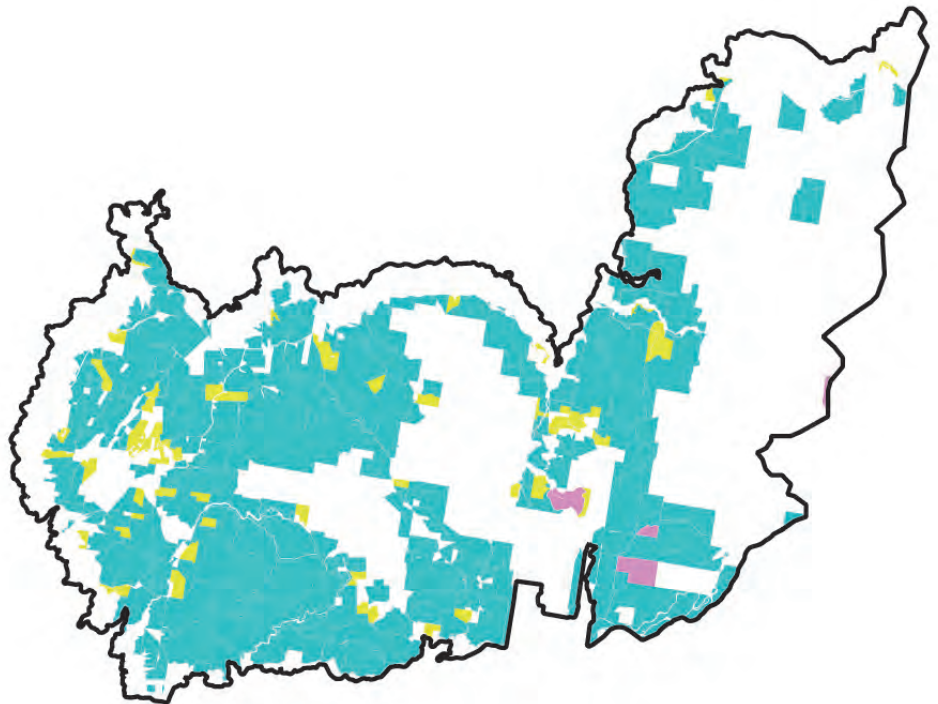
Note: * The 2020 population applies VIF growth rates to the 2016 Census data
 ** Includes TZ and MUZ land which can be used for residential or employment uses

Agricultural Land Use

There is significant coverage of agricultural land across the sub-region, which comprises 45% of all land. This is predominantly livestock grazing, such as cattle farming.

LAND USE TYPE

-  Livestock Grazing
31,626 ha (92%)
-  Mixed Farming and Grazing
2,343 ha (7%)
-  Commercial Timber Production
378 ha (1%)
-  Sub-Region Boundary



 **Strengths**

Proximity to Albury-Wodonga

Bellbridge and Bethanga are around a 30 minute drive to Albury-Wodonga, providing residents with access to services and the potential for residents to commute to the regional city for employment. This also provides key townships with access to the Albury-Wodonga visitor base, allowing them to support and attract visitors.

Lake Hume Access

Bellbridge provides the best access to Lake Hume in the Shire, in an area that has the most reliable water supply. This promotes the asset and increases lake utilisation for water-based recreation, which supports resident liveability and visitor attraction.

Development Infrastructure (Bellbridge)

Bellbridge is serviced by reticulated water and sewerage, providing opportunity for residential, tourist and business development.

Trail Infrastructure

The Great River Road passes through the Peninsula townships, which is one of the Shire's premier touring assets and a key driver for tourism.

Industry Support

The community and industry is supported by the Berringa Peninsula Community Network, which includes representatives from the Talgarno, Bellbridge, Bethanga and Granya communities. This committee supports economic and social activities across the Peninsula and is in the process of developing a local Chamber of Commerce.

 **Challenges**

Small Population Base

With a small population base, combined with low rates of growth, there is limited commercial activity, business investment and local job opportunities for residents.

Lack of Town Centre

There is no significant town centre in Peninsula, which limits the level of amenity for residents and visitors. This is a key constraint for population growth and visitor attraction (as well as jobs growth).

Lack of Development Infrastructure

There is a lack of development infrastructure (water and sewerage) in Bethanga, Talgarno and Granya, which is a constraint to residential development and population growth.

Land Supply

Most townships (excluding Bethanga) have limited supply of zoned residential and employment land, which limits the potential of the region to undertake any significant population growth or business investment.

Access to Key Services

Residents do not have access to quality health and aged care within the region (and limited access to education). This impacts liveability outcomes and is a key barrier to resident attraction.

Transport Infrastructure

The road infrastructure across the region is poor, which affects connectivity to/from Albury-Wodonga for both residents (seeking access to services) and visitors.



ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

- Commercialisation and activation of Bellbridge.**
- Bellbridge's role as a tourist destination and commuter town (inc. hub for remote workers).**
- Bethanga's role as a commuter town and hub for remote workers.**
- Residential development in Bethanga.**
- Lake Hume activation.**

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

VISION

“ Towong Shire will strengthen its economy through population attraction, a high-value and innovative rural industry and tourism industry growth. ”

The vision for economic development in Towong is informed by Council's vision and mission for the community, as articulated in the Council Plan (2017-21):



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

1.

Increase the rate of **population growth** and **retention**.

2.

Support **skilled workforce growth** to service industry and residents.

3.

Promote Towong Shire as a **destination of choice** for residents and visitors.

4.

Improve **liveability outcomes** for residents.

5.

Support the development of a more **efficient** and **productive agricultural sector**.

6.

Advocate for **investment in strategic infrastructure** to meet community and industry needs.

7.

Develop a more **diverse business base**, inc. rural industry, population service industries and tourism industry.

8.

Support **visitor economy growth** through development of high-quality tourism product, infrastructure and experiences.

9.

Support local businesses to stimulate investment, growth and promote resilience.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THEMES

The economic development framework includes four key themes with defined outcomes, which support the strategic direction for economic development in the Shire. This is used to identify projects and opportunities to achieve economic growth.

These themes and outcomes are summarised below.

The following pages detail the strategic context for each theme, the potential transformative projects (which are determined by alignment to the economic development objectives), as well as other project opportunities to be considered by Council, to help achieve the identified outcomes.

Council's role in delivery and implementation of the proposed projects can range from lead, support, to advocate (with the key tasks and responsibilities to be detailed in the Action Plan).



Theme 1. Population Driven Economy

Promote economic development through population attraction and retention, facilitating growth in population-based services and industries.

- 1.1 Increase in population growth and retention rates
- 1.2 Diversify the industry mix and expand the jobs base



Theme 2. A Thriving and Sustainable Rural Industry

Leverage rural industries of competitive advantage, including agriculture, forestry and energy production, to generate economic growth.

- 2.1 Increase agricultural value and output
- 2.2 Increase jobs in rural industry
- 2.3 Infrastructure investment to support rural industry growth



Theme 3. Visitor Economy Growth

Grow the visitor economy by increasing the number of visitors to the Shire, extending the length of stay and increasing visitor spend.

- 3.1 Accommodation
- 3.2 Food, Beverage and Farmgate
- 3.3 Nature and Water
- 3.4 Ride
- 3.5 Infrastructure, Amenity and Activation
- 3.6 Branding, Marketing and Awareness
- 3.7 Industry Development and Collaboration



Theme 4. Business Development and Support

Provide ongoing business support to create a thriving business community and promote long-term business and workforce growth.

- 4.1 Adopt best-practice approaches to economic development
- 4.2 Create a connected and capable business base
- 4.3 Build business resilience



THEME 1 POPULATION DRIVEN ECONOMY

Promote economic development through population attraction and retention, facilitating growth in population-based services and industries.

Towong Shire has the smallest population base in the Hume Region, with 6,102 residents, and is also forecast to experience the lowest rate of growth (+121 residents or 0.2% p.a.) over the next 15 years.

Population growth is critical to economic development as it:

- Promotes business growth and investment in a more diverse mix of industries that support residents, ranging from retail, entertainment and personal services to construction and service-industrial businesses.
- Improves the quality of social and community services, including health, education and aged care.
- Supports increases in local spend, which facilitates businesses growth and activation of town centres.
- Increases workforce supply and local job opportunities.
- Facilitates investment in strategic infrastructure.

Achieving economic development through population attraction (and subsequent growth of population-driven industries) is particularly important for Towong Shire as it will help increase the level of economic activity whilst also contributing to industry diversification – leading to more sustainable economic growth.

KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- ↗ **Population growth above historic and current projected rates.**
- ↗ **Increase in investment enquiries, planning and building permits relating to residential development.**
- ↗ **Increase in investment enquiries, planning and building permits for commercial and industrial properties.**
- ↗ **Increases in the number of local businesses.**
- ↗ **Increases in the number of local jobs.**
- ↗ **Increase in the proportion of residents attaining tertiary education qualifications.**
- ↗ **Decrease in vacancy rates for commercial properties in town centres.**

OUTCOME 1.1

INCREASE IN POPULATION GROWTH AND RETENTION

Population growth and retention is a significant issue for Council. Given the size of the Shire and low population density – with residents dispersed across four sub-regions – there are challenges in providing consistent and high-quality services to enhance liveability and attract residents.

In particular, this growth should be targeted towards younger cohorts and families, to help grow the labour force and stimulate local spend, which will provide for a more sustainable community and economy.

Given the recent economic trends and migratory shifts towards Regional Victoria, it is important key townships have the capacity to accommodate residential growth. While at the same time, the provision of accessible and quality services (i.e. education, training, healthcare, etc.) and key infrastructure (i.e. roads, water, energy, etc.) is critical to support resident attraction and incentivise relocation to the Shire.

In addition, the key assets across the Shire – including nature-based attractions – need to be enhanced and activated in order to provide quality recreation product that strengthens the Shire's appeal to existing and prospective residents.

Therefore, Council should focus on activities and investments that support population growth and retention across the Shire.

Transformative Project: Housing and Settlement Strategy

Prepare an overarching Housing and Settlement Strategy for Towong Shire to support population growth across the municipality (particularly in the key service centres of Tallangatta and Corryong).

This Strategy will ensure there is adequate land supply and housing in residential areas in key townships, which will help to drive residential development and attract residents.

This project will influence future planning for Towong to ensure the needs of current and future residents are met, focusing on:

- Current capacity and availability of townships to accommodate residential growth.
- Maintain the unique character and identity of townships.
- Identify the future housing needs and land requirements to support growth.
- Ensure that future growth is supported by relevant infrastructure and services.

Transformative Project: Masterplanning and Activation Strategies

Water-Based Masterplans

Prepare masterplans to activate and enhance utilisation of the significant water-based assets in Towong. These assets are vital to the unique identity of the Shire, promotes liveability outcomes for residents and attracts visitors. The following masterplans were identified as priorities:

- Lake Hume Masterplan
- Dartmouth Masterplan (including the Dam, township and Lake Banimboola)
- Mitta Mitta Riverfront Precinct Masterplan

These strategies will identify infrastructure requirements, improve accessibility and promote recreation at these key locations.

Township Masterplans

In addition, the masterplanning and activation of strategic destinations was identified as a priority to help commercialise, attract businesses and enhance resident and visitor amenity. This includes the following key projects:

- Bellbridge Village Masterplan
- Mitta Mitta Activation Plan

These projects are also included in the Towong Shire DMP and listed under Theme 3 of this document.



Transformative Project: Domestic Wastewater Management Plan and Integrated Water Management Plan

A key barrier to residential development is the availability of basic development infrastructure in key townships, including reticulated water and reticulated sewerage (which is provided by North East Water). The provision of this infrastructure will help support residential development and future population growth.

The preparation of an up-to-date Domestic Wastewater Management Plan and Integrated Water Management Plan will outline the water and infrastructure needs for the Shire, determine cost requirements and identify potential funding sources.

The key recommendations from these Plans will be considered by North East Water and other key stakeholders with the aim to develop the necessary infrastructure to facilitate residential growth.

Transformative Project: Township Enhancement Program

Identify opportunities to enhance and activate the town centres of community and service hubs in Towong. This will help support population attraction by improving amenity for residents (and visitors), focusing on:

- Streetscaping improvements and general beautification activities.
- Public art installations.
- Open spaces and plantings.
- Pedestrianising key precincts.

This program should consider the key townships in each sub-region, including Bellbridge, Corryong, Mitta Mitta, Eskdale and Tallangatta.

These projects are also included in the Towong Shire DMP and listed under Theme 3 of this document.

Transformative Project: Equine Trails Enhancement

Work with DELWP to undertake an assessment of existing parks to identify opportunities for new and enhanced bush riding horse trails.

Review existing trails (e.g. HCRT) to ensure they are equine friendly where appropriate, and ensure promotion of these trails.

Transformative Project: Tallangatta Showgrounds Precinct Activation Strategy

Tallangatta Showgrounds includes camping ground and open space to the west of the town centre and adjacent to Lake Hume. Prepare a strategy that will identify infrastructure and amenity upgrades required to promote activation of the site, improve amenity and increase utilisation of the precinct. This should consider the needs of the equine industry through engagement with the sector.

OTHER PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES



- Undertake a Service Provision Audit to identify gaps in population-driven services (e.g. health, education, community facilities, service industries) and opportunities for improvements, including business/industry attraction.
- Investigate the opportunity to establish a remote higher education facility in Tallangatta that leverages the proximity to tertiary institutions in Albury-Wodonga and facilitates remote learning.
- Deliver and implement the Digital Infrastructure Strategy (in progress), to ensure residents have sufficient mobile and internet connectivity.
- Deliver and implement the Recreation Strategy (in progress), to improve the recreation options for residents (and visitors) to promote liveability outcomes.
- Investigate potential to develop recycling/resource recovery facilities at the Tallangatta and Corryong landfills to improve the sustainable use of waste, provide more efficient services and accommodate for residential growth.
- Prepare a transport infrastructure audit that identifies improvements (and funding) required for road transport, public transport and shared pathways, to ensure communities are connected and have access to safe and sustainable transport options. *Note: several transport projects are also included in the Towong Shire DMP and listed under Theme 3 of this document.*

OUTCOME 1.2

DIVERSIFY THE INDUSTRY MIX AND EXPAND THE JOBS BASE

The Towong Shire economy is currently constrained through a lack of industry diversity and reliance on agriculture, which comprises 55% of the business base. This has resulted in a lack of local employment opportunities and low workforce growth – as the agricultural sector is typically low-employing.

Achieving industry diversification and jobs growth is both an outcome of population growth and can support future resident attraction. More specifically, population growth will create business opportunities for population-driven industries to support residents, including retail, personal services, construction and service-industrial businesses.

Business investment in these industries is an effective way to enhance resident amenity, support liveability outcomes and increase future population growth rates. Another indirect outcome of business growth will be an increase in visitor amenity/services to ensure that the Shire is 'visitor ready' to support tourism. This will have flow-on economic benefits including increases in consumer spend at local businesses and creation of local employment opportunities, which will also attract more workers to the Shire.

As the business and jobs base becomes more diversified – and the economy is less reliant on agriculture – the Towong economy will become more sustainable and resilient, which is key to achieving long-term growth.

Council should, therefore, prioritise business growth and investment in population-driven industries to support residents, diversify industry and achieve key economic and employment outcomes.

This should include opportunities for key townships across the Shire to expand its business base to meet the needs of residents.

Transformative Project: Employment Land Strategy

Sufficient industrial and commercial land supply is needed in the Shire to support industry growth and business investment, which is needed to better service residents and growing the employment base.

The Shire's service centres, particularly in Tallangatta and Corryong have limited industrial and commercial land. Therefore, the preparation of an Employment Land Strategy will help ensure Towong has a sufficient supply of land to facilitate economic growth, diversify the industry base and create employment opportunities.

This Strategy will identify barriers and opportunities to provide sufficient employment land to meet the needs of existing and attract new businesses in strategic locations. This could include:

- Identifying current capacity and projecting future demand.
- Classifying the role of employment land in strategic areas.
- Recommending future supply requirements and provision of additional land (and supporting infrastructure).
- Considering alternative uses for unused land.

Transformative Project: Industry Attraction Strategy

Develop an Industry Attraction Strategy which identifies relevant population-driven industries (e.g. retail, personal services, service-industrial) to help meet the needs of current and future residents, workers and visitors. This should include business attraction and activation activities, which promotes the Shire's advantages and incentivises for business relocation.

OTHER PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES



- Implement structure planning already underway in key townships (Tallangatta/Corryong/Bellbridge), to promote urban renewal and accommodate for housing and employment growth.
- Prepare a Skilled Workforce Attraction Strategy – in collaboration with industry – to identify and address labour shortages as well as programs to upskill the labour force to meet industry needs (and increase local employment).
- Undertake a retail audit to identify gaps in retail provision in key population centres and opportunities to support existing/attract new retail businesses to service residents (and visitors). This could include training to help the industry adapt to shifts in the retail industry (e.g. increases in online retailing).
- Investigate the potential to develop co-working facilities and supporting infrastructure in commuter towns (e.g. Tallangatta/Bellbridge) to benefit from the increased prevalence of remote and flexible working. This could help attract employees from professional and finance industries, small businesses looking to relocate, as well as start-ups.





THEME 2



A THRIVING AND SUSTAINABLE RURAL INDUSTRY

Leverage rural industries of competitive advantage, including agriculture, forestry and energy production, to generate economic growth.

The Towong economy is driven by the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing (Agriculture) industry, which generates over one-third of total output (\$214 million or 38%), one-third of total employment (697 jobs or 35%) and over two-thirds of regional exports (\$115 million or 69%). This industry also contributes over half of the Shire's business base (55% or 507 businesses) in the Shire.

Agriculture is dominated by traditional cattle and dairy farming (contributing \$177 million in output and 629 jobs), which is typically land intensive and has a low employment density. While the secondary driver of agriculture is forestry and logging, which generates \$19 million in output. This impacts land use within the Shire, with 83% of all agricultural land used for Livestock Grazing and 11% for Commercial Timber Production.

Agriculture provides significant flow-on benefits to the economy, particularly through downstream processing of raw materials produced in the Shire. In terms of contribution to annual output, this benefits the Manufacturing sector, specifically the Meat Product Manufacturing (\$24 million) and Sawmill Product Manufacturing (\$6 million) sub-sectors.

Therefore, Agriculture is a key competitive advantage for the Shire and Council should focus on leveraging the strength of this industry to achieve economic and employment growth.

This should consider the specific issues relevant to Towong as well as the key macro trends and challenges facing the industry, including:

- Adopting sustainable practices in response to climate change and extreme weather events.
- Adapting production to meet the contemporary needs of consumers.
- Ensuring efficient and effective supply chains to meet domestic and international market opportunities.
- Identifying value-add opportunities to strengthen Agriculture and supporting businesses.

KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES



Growth in the agricultural sector (inc. output volume and value).



Increases in agricultural-related employment and business counts.



Increase in investment enquiries, planning and building permits relating to agriculture and forestry.



Increase the receipt of infrastructure funding from the public and private sector.

OUTCOME 2.1

INCREASE AGRICULTURAL VALUE AND OUTPUT

To maintain the competitiveness of Agriculture in Towong, which is critical to long-term industry growth, it is important that the volume and value of production increases. This can be achieved through investigating the following issues relating to Agriculture and realising industry opportunities:

- Improve supply chain efficiencies.
- Expanding export market opportunities, including domestic and global markets, and aligning produce according to market demand and consumer preferences.
- Harnessing innovative techniques and utilising new technologies to improve production efficacy and meet demand for raw materials.
- Identifying business diversification practices, including agritourism initiatives, food processing, etc.

To support agricultural output and grow its value, the industry also needs to adopt future-proofing measures to protect against the increasing threat of climate change and extreme weather events (which creates uncertainty for farmers). Therefore, businesses and Council should identify and advocate for sustainable land-use practices to ensure agriculture remains productive and contributes to economic development across the Shire.

This includes investment in new 'green' initiatives that promotes environmentally sustainable practices, which is critical to protect agricultural land, maintain output and support efficient industry operations.

Transformative Project: Upper Murray Agribusiness Branding

Investigate opportunities, in collaboration with industry, to establish an agribusiness brand for the Upper Murray. This would leverage the highly productive land, the volume of agricultural output and existing branding for the Upper Murray (which is already a well-established promotional tool for the sub-region).

This could provide substantial benefits to businesses in the region, including:

- Consolidate promotional activities.
- Enhance the market appeal of output.
- Increase the reach of output to broader domestic and international markets.

Transformative Project: Agriculture Strategic Plan (in progress)

Finalise and deliver the recommendations outlined in the Agriculture Strategic Plan to strengthen the sector and ensure it remains a key driver of economic and employment growth for Towong, focusing on:

- Human capital.
- Enhancing production and adding value to output.
- Ensuring food security and sustainability.
- Meeting the changing demands of consumers.
- Identifying global export opportunities.



OTHER PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES



- Explore the potential to diversify agricultural income opportunities (e.g. agritourism, renewable energy investment, small scale solar/wind farms, etc.).
- Develop an Agricultural Investment Prospectus to attract new agricultural businesses and promote business investment, which could increase industry output and create employment opportunities.
- Review and adopt optimal land use practices to safeguard against climate change and the threat of bushfires, to ensure agricultural land remains productive and output is maintained.
- Investigate opportunities to leverage Corryong Airport to support rural industry, including supply chain efficiencies, improving storage and distribution and expanding the export market potential.
- Prepare an investment strategy to support downstream value-adding of agricultural production, focusing on food processing (for beef and dairy production) and timber manufacturing (for forestry production).
- Investigate circular economy opportunities for rural industry to increase efficiencies in production, including the following existing activities identified in Regional Victoria:
 - The Advisory Stream for Process Innovation and Resource Exchange (ASPIRE) – an online marketplace for businesses to exchange their waste as a resource.
 - Business Development Program – Council and industry build capacity businesses to identify and implement circular economy activities.

OUTCOME 2.2

INCREASE JOBS IN RURAL INDUSTRY

Although Agriculture is the largest employing industry in the Shire, there are issues with workforce growth and attracting skilled employees.

The primary reason for this is the nature of the industry – particularly cattle farming – which is traditionally low-employing. As such, over three-quarters of agricultural businesses in Towong are ‘non-employing’. Other reasons for a lack of job growth (based on discussions with stakeholders) include:

- Lack of effective succession planning for new businesses and young farmers to take over existing agricultural land, particularly in circumstances where the farms are unused/dormant due to absentee landowners, retiring farmers, etc.
- Limited education and training pathways into agriculture (which is also highly variable across the Shire depending on location). This impacts the rate of younger cohorts – particularly school leavers – entering the agricultural workforce.
- Lack of appropriate accommodation or housing for potential employees.
- Tightly held agricultural land, making land acquisition difficult for new businesses to enter the market.
- The prevalence of small-scale, family owned and operated farms, which typically do not outsource employment.

Despite these challenges, the agricultural sector in Towong has the potential to support jobs growth through strategic and targeted interventions (with the assistance of Council and industry). This will help grow local agricultural businesses and generate positive economic outcomes for the Shire.

Transformative Project: Country University Campus (Corryong)

Promote and support the Country University Campus to increase enrolments and facilitate training and employment pathways to meet the industry needs of agriculture. This could include a long-term vision to utilise this campus as a regional hub for agricultural education and training – in collaboration with industry and employment providers.

This will help agricultural businesses that have issues recruiting skilled labour and will support employment growth in this industry.

OTHER PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES



- Promote succession planning to attract and retain young farmers in the Shire.
- Undertake a targeted employment attraction strategy for the agricultural sector, focusing on the specific needs of businesses.



OUTCOME 2.3

INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT TO SUPPORT RURAL INDUSTRY GROWTH

Consultation with industry and government stakeholders identified the need for strategic investment in infrastructure to support the development of rural industry. More specifically, this includes infrastructure that will help overcome key challenges for the agricultural sector and generate positive economic and employment growth.

Council and industry should identify and advocate for infrastructure projects that supports business investment, improves the operation of agricultural businesses and increases the value of output. In doing so, this is likely to generate additional income opportunities for the industry, which will drive business growth and create local job opportunities in the Shire.

Transformative Project: Abattoir / Protein Recovery Plant (Mitta Valley)

The consultation found that the beef produced in the Mitta Valley is exported outside the sub-region for processing due to a lack of infrastructure. Given the strength of the cattle farming, in combination with the Mitta Valley Beef branding, Council, in collaboration with the agricultural community, should explore the feasible options to build an abattoir (inc. mobile or permanent facility) and/or a protein recovery plant in the Mitta Valley.

This could provide significant value to the beef producers – by opening up export opportunities – and generate increases in industry output and employment in the sub-region.

Transformative Project: Energy Resilience and Reliability Project (Upper Murray)

Support the implementation of the Energy Resilience and Reliability Project – in collaboration with Upper Murray Inc. – to provide reliable and efficient local energy production in the Upper Murray.

The Upper Murray has an unreliable power supply, with power outages common in the region, particularly during periods of adverse weather. This is a significant problem for rural industry (and communities), which affects business operations and leads to a decline in agricultural output and business turnover.

The first two phases of this project involve the installation of energy nodes (solar system, batteries and generators) to improve the reliability of energy supply, with a future third phase (outside this Project) to establish micro-grids in Corryong and other towns.

Ensuring a reliable and effective supply of energy will help business growth and investment for rural industry, as well as improve amenity for Upper Murray communities.

OTHER PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES



- Deliver and implement the Digital Infrastructure Strategy, to ensure agricultural businesses have sufficient mobile and internet connectivity to improve operations and output.
- Prioritise strategic infrastructure requirements and advocate for funding to support rural industry growth, such as energy production, transport infrastructure.





THEME 3



VISITOR ECONOMY GROWTH

Grow the visitor economy by increasing the number of visitors to the Shire, extending the length of stay and increasing visitor spend.

Supporting growth in the visitor economy, through increases in visitation and spend, will help achieve positive economic outcomes for the Shire. Although tourism in the Shire is a developing industry (and provides a small contribution to the High Country visitor economy), there are substantial opportunities to establish Towong as a successful visitor destination, particularly through:

- Leveraging the region's natural and water-based assets, such as national parks, Lake Hume, Mitta Mitta River, Murray River, Dartmouth Dam.
- Providing supporting product and infrastructure to enhance visitor amenity and generate yield (e.g. quality accommodation, food and beverage, retail, etc.).
- Establishing 'must-do' experiences and events, including 'hero' activities that are of regional significance, to incentivise visitation to the region.

Growing the tourism industry is critical for economic development, as it stimulates business investment, promotes commercial activity and supports new local jobs. In addition, it will allow the Shire's economy to become less reliant on agriculture, which will promote economic diversification and sustainability.

KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- ↗ **Double visitation to Towong Shire from 195,000 to 400,000 by 2026.**
- ↗ **Grow daytrip yield per visitor from \$62 to \$91 by 2026, in line with Tourism North East's visitor profile.**
- ↗ **Grow overnight yield per visitor by \$100 per trip, from \$287 per night to \$387.**

Note: The information included in Theme 3 aligns with the recommendations of the DMP. Further information on the outcomes, transformative projects and other project opportunities can be found in the DMP document.

The following outcomes align with the DMP themes.

OUTCOME 3.1

ACCOMMODATION

Delivery of quality, contemporary and diverse accommodation stock to attract target markets and increase overnight stays and visitor yield.

Transformative Project: Small Scale Accommodation Interventions

Identify potential locations that provide a strategic opportunity for investment considering vantage points, secluded wilderness locations but reasonable proximity to nearest towns.

Promote and undertake an information session for land owners and businesses wishing to consider on farm or visitor eco accommodation.

Provide information relating to planning regulations and processes, case studies, costs and potential demand using data from TNE (Accommodation market research).

Consider sites that can be incorporated in the Lake Hume Activation Plan.

Transformative Project: Cudgewa Valley Wilderness Retreat

There is opportunity to develop an iconic wilderness retreat in the Cudgewa Valley, located in the picturesque valley between Mount Mittamatite and Burrowa-Pine National Park.

Transformative Project: Holiday Park Reinvestment Program

Reinvestment in holiday parks across strategic locations, including Tallangatta, Mitta Mitta, Walwa, Colac Colac and Dartmouth, is needed to elevate the parks to the quality standards expected by the contemporary visitor market.

OTHER PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES



- Tallangatta Eco-cabins
- Jervis Creek Eco-cabins
- Upper Murray Wilderness Fishing Lodge
- Murray River Glamping
- Lake Hume Lakeside Resort
- Corryong Hotel Motel Revitalisation

OUTCOME 3.2

FOOD, BEVERAGE AND FARMGATE

Investment in motivational and contemporary food and drink experiences to meet visitor expectations and leverage the region's high quality agricultural produce.

Transformative Project: Corryong Distillery

Delivery of a high quality distillery in Corryong would provide a destination food experience that leverages the natural aspect and attracts touring visitors. This may be colocated with the Corryong golf course.

Transformative Project: Bellbridge Boathouse

The delivery of a high quality bistro restaurant on the banks of Lake Hume provides an opportunity for lakeside activation and delivery of a destination food experience.

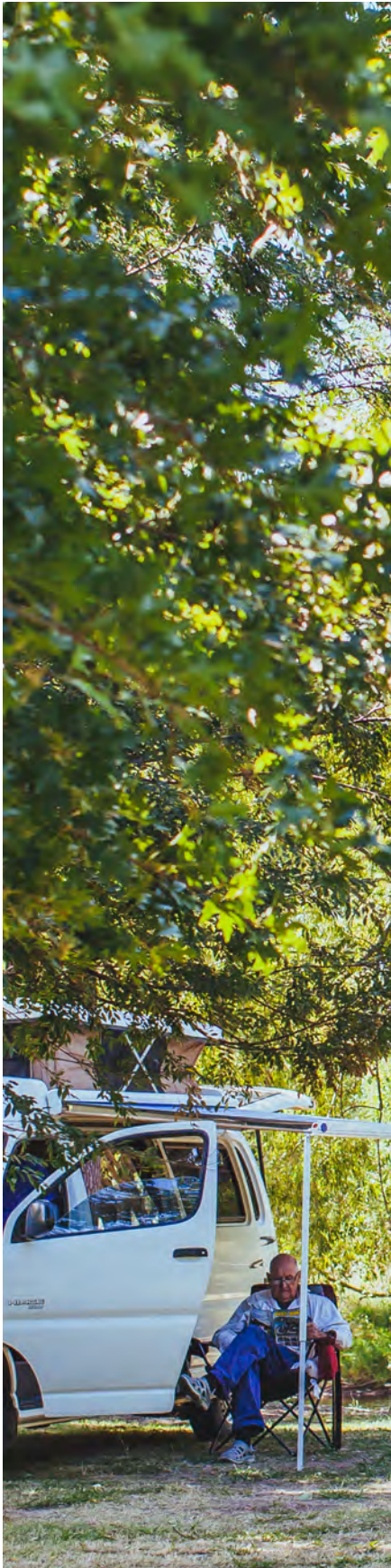
Transformative Project: Old Tallangatta Butter Factory Revitalisation

Reinvigorate the Old Tallangatta Butter Factory with a series of short and long-term food, arts, culture and event activations.

OTHER PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES



- Shipping Container Investment
- Peak-period Mobile Food Van
- Farmgate Prospectus



OUTCOME 3.3 NATURE AND WATER

Activate, harness and showcase key natural and waterway assets through investment and improved utilisation.

Transformative Project: Corryong Golf Course Redevelopment

Redevelopment of the Golf Course into a leading golf destination in Victoria through accommodation, a hub building and potential incorporation of a distillery to attract visitation.

Transformative Project: Murray River Multi-Day Canoe Trail

Delivery of a multi-day canoe trail experience will deliver a unique experience of Australia's longest river, stopping at key townships to encourage private sector activation.

Transformative Project: Lake Hume Masterplan

Prepare a masterplan to enhance and activate Lake Hume, includes investigation of infrastructure needs at key locations to improve access and activation, and private sector activation opportunities. This will take into consideration water levels, regulations, and infrastructure requirements and constraints.

Transformative Project: Visitor Experience Enhancement Plan for Burrowa-Pine Mountain National Park and Mount Granya State Park

These parks have the opportunity to develop as hero nature-based assets for the Shire, due to the quality and amenity of their natural environments as well as the proximity to neighbouring towns, which provides opportunity to leverage yield from visitors.

Investment should prioritise trail, lookout and signage infrastructure to deliver a Summit Trail, Falls Lookout and elevated Summit Lookout. These investments will provide a photo-worthy opportunity, promoting the sharing of user-generated content and increasing brand awareness.

OTHER PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES



- Mitta Mitta Mountain Bike Park Hub
- Fishing Product Development Action Plan
- Mount Mitta Mitta Summit Walking Trail
- Mount Lawson Activation
- Parks Victoria Information Upgrade
- Lake Banimboola Masterplan
- Murray River Activation Project
- Mitta Mitta Riverfront Precinct Masterplan
- Equine Trails Enhancement

OUTCOME 3.4

RIDE

Invest in a range of trails infrastructure and formalise existing trails to position Towong as one of High Country's hero cycling destinations.

Transformative Project: Mitta Mitta Destination Mountain Bike Park

Mitta Mitta Mountain Bike Park already has funding for stage 1 which will deliver 29km of trail. A further stage which will double the trails to 60km will establish Mitta Mitta as a key mountain bike destination in the High Country.

Transformative Project: High Country Rail Trail Improvement and Extension

Delivery of the High Country Rail Trail extension from Shelley to Corryong will provide an important connection between Tallangatta and Corryong, and will deliver an iconic asset for the Shire.

Transformative Project: Mt Elliot Gravity and Adventure Park

The establishment of a gravity park at Mt Elliot would complement and support the hang-gliding launch site. The site will become suitable for shuttle buses to support both hang gliders and mountain bikers.

Transformative Project: Tallangatta Gravity Mountain Bike Park

Tallangatta has opportunity to establish both a private gravity mountain bike park, targeted at downhill, slopestyle and jumps market, as well as cross-country trails may be established in the DELWP Forest adjoining the site, which would be suited to a broader market.

OTHER PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES



- Support Development of Cycling Events
- Gravel and Cycle Loops
- Mountain Bike Trail Investment



OUTCOME 3.5

INFRASTRUCTURE, AMENITY AND ACTIVATION

Deliver high quality visitor infrastructure, services and amenity to improve the visitor experience and perception of Towong as a tourism destination.

Transformative Project: Township Enhancement Program

Refer Theme 1.

Transformative Project: Mitta Mitta Activation Plan

Delivery of an Activation Plan that supports the growth of Mitta Mitta is essential to meeting future demand. This should include:

- Commercial precinct planning
- Business attraction
- Investment in a sewer mine solution
- Accommodation investment
- Magorra Caravan Park redevelopment

This project is also referenced in Theme 1.

Transformative Project: Bellbridge Village Masterplan

Undertake a Bellbridge Village Masterplan to commercialise and activate the township, leveraging its potential dual role as a commuter town and visitor destination.

This project should focus on the establishment of a commercial foreshore precinct, attracting business investment and providing amenity and services.

This project is also referenced in Theme 1.

Transformative Project: Tallangatta Foreshore Stage 1 Destination Playground, Cafe and Trail

Towong Shire Council has embarked on a masterplan for the Tallangatta Foreshore overlooking Lake Hume. The precinct already has a tourist park, parkland and boat launching facilities, however there is potential to activate this part of town further.

The masterplan identifies the opportunity for the following:

- Destination playground
- Café overlooking Lake Hume
- Expansion of the existing splash park
- Trail network

OTHER PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES



- Digital Infrastructure Strategy
- Seal the Lake Road
- Corryong Airport Commercialisation
- Benambra-Corryong Road Sealing Feasibility Study
- Tintalra Foreshore Masterplan
- Strategic Infrastructure Advocacy
- Tallangatta Showgrounds Precinct Activation Strategy
- Man From Snowy River Australian Music Festival
- Concept Plan and Feasibility Study for Tallangatta's Notable Town Status
- Dartmouth Masterplan

OUTCOME 3.6

BRANDING, MARKETING AND AWARENESS

Delivery of a cohesive and consistent brand through marketing, collateral and events to promote increased awareness.

Transformative Project: Content and Imagery Database

Delivery of a high quality imagery, video and content database is required to improve digital promotion and marketing activities.

Transformative Project: Branding and Digital Strategy

Build on the brand framework project currently being delivered by Tourism North East to deliver a consistent branding approach aligned to market understanding of the Shire, as well as a digital strategy to guide digital marketing.

Transformative Project: Touring Itineraries

Following the development of a high quality website(s), develop a range of interactive touring itineraries to promote exploration of the Shire and dispersal across the broader region.

OTHER PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES



- Man From Snowy River Australian Music Festival
- Pick Your Own Produce Event
- Physical Collateral Review and Refresh
- Signage Strategy
- Omeo Highway Masterplan
- Upper Murray Cross-Border Tourism Plan

OUTCOME 3.7

INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT AND COLLABORATION

Support continued development and enhancement of industry in Towong's sub regions and strengthen collaboration across industry.

Transformative Project: Business Attraction and Investment Facilitation Strategy

Develop a Business Attraction Strategy which identifies relevant tourism investment opportunities to grow visitor demand and elevate the Shire's product offering.

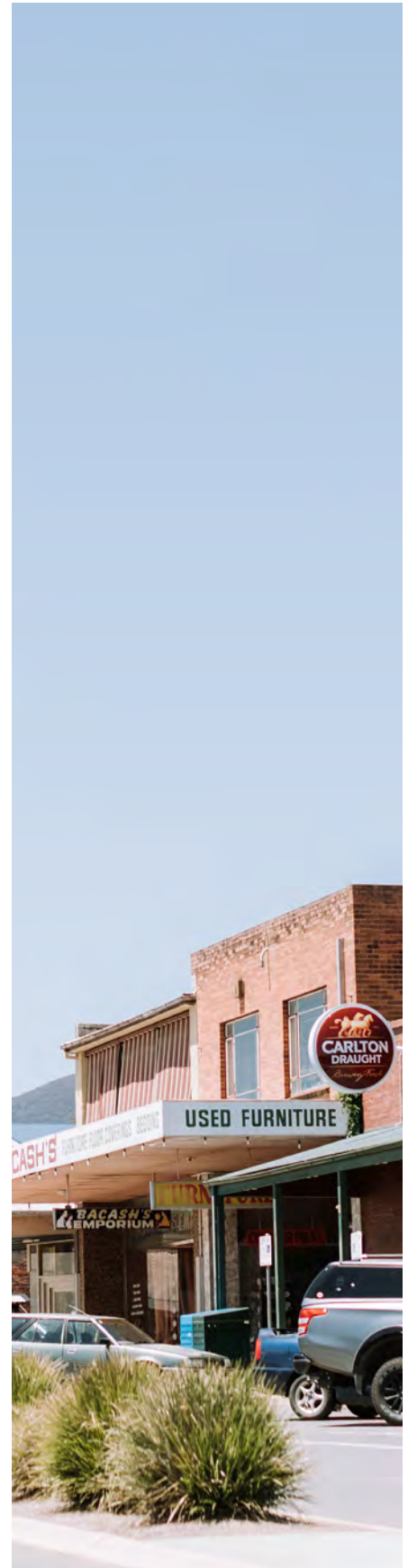
Transformative Project: Half Yearly Tourism Industry Information and Networking Forums

There is opportunity for a half-yearly information and networking event that connects businesses, provides them an update on Council activities, and allows industry to share their activities. The delivery of this forum across the three sub-regions will provide opportunities for local networking, and partnership and collaboration between private operators, as well as private operators and Council.

OTHER PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES



- Encourage sign up to Tourism North East's Industry Development Program
- Better Approvals Process (in progress)
- Product and Experience Packaging
- Workforce Attraction Strategy





THEME 4



BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

Provide ongoing business support to create a thriving business community and promote long-term business and workforce growth.

A key function of Council's Economic Development Unit is to:






- Support businesses development
- Facilitate business growth and investment
- Promote business attraction

Each of these activities are designed to achieve economic and employment outcomes for the Shire.

Providing business support and encouraging business development is particularly important in response to the impacts of COVID-19, which have severely restricted trading and operations of key sectors. Ensuring businesses have the tools to adapt, recover and grow in the long-term is critical to sustaining a prosperous business base.

In addition, the Shire's business base, of which 98% is considered 'non-employing' or 'small', lacks the resources and capabilities to capitalise on growth opportunities. Therefore, many of these businesses require support and/or training from Council and relevant industry bodies to achieve growth outcomes.

KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES

-  **Develop and maintain an up-to-date business database.**
-  **Increase the business attendees at training, mentorship and networking events (run by Council).**
-  **Record the number and frequency of business engagements.**
-  **Reduce the average time taken to provide a planning permit decision.**
-  **Return all industries to pre-COVID levels of output and employment.**

OUTCOME 4.1

ADOPT BEST-PRACTICE APPROACHES TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Council faces significant challenges to achieving economic development outcomes, including:

- Limited resources, with 1.4 FTE dedicated to economic development (and tourism) split across two employees, as well as a full-time Agricultural Officer (1 FTE).
- The geography of the Shire, with the business base dispersed across several townships, many of which are relatively isolated from Council offices.

This creates inefficiencies in economic development practices, with resources spread thinly across a large area, making it difficult to engage with and support many businesses. This subsequently limits the activities and projects that Council can undertake or support.

An Economic Development Australia (EDA) survey conducted in 2021, which benchmarked economic development staffing resources for local councils across Australia, found that rural councils employ an average of 1.3 FTE dedicated to economic development.

Whilst Towong Shire staffing for economic development is slightly above this average, having a small number of staffing resources limits the capacity of Council to achieve desired outcomes. Therefore, expanding the level of staff solely dedicated to economic development can improve efficiencies and increase productivity in economic development.

In addition, it is important that Council clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of the economic development unit, and identifies its priorities, to ensure resources are used efficiently and effectively to support business growth and investment.

OTHER PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES

- Prepare an Economic Development Business Plan that clearly documents and defines the roles and responsibilities of the economic development team, including the resources to achieve identified objectives.
- Progress the 'Better Approvals' process undertaken by Council, in collaboration with government and industry, to streamline planning permit applications, help businesses overcome regulatory barriers and support business investment.



OUTCOME 4.2

CREATE A CONNECTED AND CAPABLE BUSINESS BASE

Building a connected and engaged business base helps facilitate industry collaboration, information sharing and creates B2B opportunities. This is vital to a thriving business community and ensures businesses have the skills and relevant support system to grow, particularly as most businesses are small and require additional resources to encourage growth.

This could be achieved through a range of training, professional development and networking activities, provided on an ongoing basis and targeted to meet the specific needs of industry. A local business survey, conducted in 2021, identified the following priority topics to enhance business capability and support business development in the Shire:

- Marketing
- Social media and online tools
- Financial management
- Accounting advice
- IT training

This should be achieved through Council and industry partnerships, to help identify the varying requirements of businesses and target those businesses in need of professional development.

Transformative Project: Business Engagement Project

Develop an engagement plan that guides Council's interactions and partnerships with Government and industry, focusing on:

- Information sharing and collaboration.
- Identify shared priorities across industry for advocacy purposes.
- Increase opportunities for funding to deliver priority projects/infrastructure.

This could be supported through the development of an up-to-date Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software that allows ongoing communication with local businesses.

Transformative Project: Towong Entrepreneurs Program

Establish a program that attracts and supports Towong entrepreneurs, including innovative SMEs and start-ups. This may include grants, business support activities and mentoring, designed to promote business growth, increase business investment and establish a more diverse employment base.

Note: This program could be complemented by the delivery of co-working facilities and supporting infrastructure, which was identified in Outcome 1.2.

OTHER PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES

- Provide ongoing workshops, mentoring and training for businesses, in collaboration with industry, focusing on development opportunities to build capability and support business growth.
- Promote business to business connections and networking, including local businesses, industry representatives and regional organisations, to facilitate information sharing and provide business support.
- Regular communication and promotion of external private and public support programs and resources available to businesses, including through traditional communication channels, such as newsletters and contemporary communication channels, such as social media.



OUTCOME 4.3

BUILD BUSINESS RESILIENCE

Council's efforts have been increasingly focused on business and economic recovery, particularly in response to the 2020 bushfires and ongoing impacts of COVID-19. This includes a range of recovery activities designed to minimise losses in business revenue, create job opportunities and support growth back to pre-COVID levels.

Whilst the economy has begun to recover from the peak impacts of COVID-19 (in mid-2020), there will be specific industries that require targeted support, particularly those that have been impacted by the ongoing restrictions in NSW and Victoria.

In particular this includes providing support businesses that rely on tourism and population movements, including retail, hospitality and personal services, focusing on:

- Increasing revenue
- Minimising job loss
- Supporting the transition to a COVID-normal operating environment, such as social distancing, density limits, etc.

The type of support provided should not only assist with short-term recovery, but also provide businesses with the tools and capabilities to overcome future external shocks.

OTHER PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES



- Deliver the Municipal Recovery Plan and Economic Recovery Action Plan (currently in progress).
- Provide disaster recovery assistance, such as promoting access to grants, financial/business planning, to help businesses combat the effects of COVID-19 and respond to future external shocks.
- Targeted assistance to help businesses alter operations and comply with COVID-19 restrictions, including supporting online presence/e-commerce opportunities, providing outdoor dining permits, printing QR codes, etc.

ACTION PLAN

The following Action Plan provides a guide for the delivery of the project opportunities identified in the Economic Development Strategy over the next five years. It includes relevant actions, responsible stakeholders, and indicative timeframes categorised as follows:

- Short term (1 year);
- Medium term (2-3 years);
- Long term (3-5+ years); and
- Ongoing.

The Action Plan also details the relevant location for each project, which can range from a sub-regional to a Shire wide opportunity.

The EDS will be implemented over time in partnership between Council (led by the Economic Development and Tourism team within the Community and Planning directorate), as well as government agencies, local business and industry representatives, private investors and the community.

The EDS will be reviewed every five years to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the community and is aligned to Council priorities. In addition, implementation of the Strategy will be monitored on an ongoing basis using the key performance measures (identified in the Economic Development Framework) and monitoring tools outlined below.





Outcome 1.1: Increase in Population Growth and Retention

Project	Location	Action	Stakeholder/s	Time frame
1.1.1. Housing and Settlement Strategy	Shire wide	<p>Prepare a Housing and Settlement Strategy for the Shire to support population growth across the municipality. The Strategy should influence future planning and focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current capacity and availability of townships to accommodate residential growth; • Maintaining the unique character and identity of townships; • Identify the future housing needs and land requirements to support growth; and • Ensure that future growth is supported by relevant infrastructure and services. 	<p>Lead Economic Development and Tourism</p> <p>Partner Land Use Planning</p>	Short term
1.1.2. Masterplanning and Activation Strategies	Shire wide	<p>Prepare masterplans to activate and enhance utilisation of significant water-based assets and strategic townships, to enhance residents and visitor amenity and attract investment. This includes the following key projects for consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water-based assets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lake Hume Masterplan; • Dartmouth Masterplan (including the Dam, township and Lake Banimboola); and • Mitta Mitta Riverfront Precinct Masterplan. • Townships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bellbridge Village Masterplan; and • Mitta Mitta Activation Plan. 	<p>Lead Economic Development and Tourism</p> <p>Partner Land Use Planning</p>	Medium term
1.1.3. Domestic Wastewater Management Plan and Integrated Water Management Plan	Shire wide	<p>A Domestic Wastewater Management Plan and Integrated Water Management Plan will outline the water and infrastructure needs for the Shire, determine cost requirements and identify potential funding sources. This will focus on developing necessary infrastructure to facilitate residential growth.</p>	<p>Lead Infrastructure and Environment</p> <p>Partner Land Use Planning</p> <p>North East Water</p>	Short term
1.1.4. Township Enhancement Program	Shire wide	<p>Identify opportunities to enhance and activate the town centres of community and service hubs in Towong (including Bellbridge, Corryong, Mitta Mitta, Eskdale and Tallangatta). This will help support population attraction by focusing on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streetscaping improvements and general beautification activities; • Public art installations; • Open spaces and plantings; and • Pedestrianising key precincts. 	<p>Lead Economic Development and Tourism</p> <p>Land Use Planning</p> <p>Partner Infrastructure and Environment</p>	Ongoing



Outcome 1.1: Increase in Population Growth and Retention (cont.)

Project	Location	Action	Stakeholder/s	Time frame
1.1.5. Tallangatta Showgrounds Precinct Activation Strategy	Tallangatta	Prepare a strategy that will identify infrastructure and amenity upgrades required to promote activation of the site, improve amenity and increase utilisation of the precinct. This should consider the needs of the equine industry through engagement with the sector.	Lead Economic Development and Tourism Land Use Planning Partner Infrastructure and Environment	Short term
1.1.6. Recreation Strategy (in progress)	Shire wide	Deliver and implement the Recreation Strategy, to improve the recreation options for residents (and visitors) to promote liveability outcomes.	Lead Community	Short term
1.1.7. Recycling/ Resource Recovery Facilities	Tallangatta Upper Murray	Investigate the potential (i.e. feasibility) to develop recycling/ resource recovery facilities at the Tallangatta and/or Corryong landfills to improve the sustainable use of waste and provide more efficient services. If feasible, explore opportunities for funding and development of a facility.	Lead Environment Partner Assets	Medium term
1.1.8. Remote Higher Education Facility	Tallangatta	Investigate the opportunity to establish a remote higher education facility in Tallangatta that leverages the proximity to tertiary institutions in Albury-Wodonga and facilitates remote learning.	Lead Economic Development and Tourism Partner Regional higher education institutions (i.e. Charles Sturt, La Trobe, etc.)	Short term
1.1.9. Digital Infrastructure Strategy (in progress)	Shire wide	Deliver and implement the Digital Infrastructure Strategy, to ensure residents have sufficient mobile and internet connectivity.	Lead Assets Partner Economic Development and Tourism	Short term
1.1.10. Service Provision Audit	Shire wide	Undertake a Service Provision Audit to identify gaps in population-driven services.	Lead Economic Development and Tourism	Short term
1.1.11. Transport Infrastructure Audit	Shire wide	Prepare a transport infrastructure audit that identifies improvements (and funding) required for road transport, public transport and shared pathways, to ensure communities are connected and have access to safe and sustainable transport options. Prioritise transport infrastructure projects and advocate for funding to support population growth and retention.	Lead Infrastructure and Environment Partner Economic Development and Tourism	Medium term



Outcome 1.2: Diversify the Industry Mix and Expand the Jobs Base

Project	Location	Action	Stakeholder/s	Time frame
1.2.1. Employment Land Strategy	Shire-wide	<p>The preparation of an Employment Land Strategy will identify barriers and opportunities to provide sufficient employment land to facilitate business investment in strategic locations. This could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying current capacity and projecting future demand; Classifying the role of employment land in strategic areas; Recommending future supply requirements and provision of additional land (and supporting infrastructure); and Considering alternative uses for unused land. 	<p>Lead Land Use Planning</p> <p>Partner Infrastructure and Environment</p>	Short term
1.2.2. Industry Attraction Strategy	Shire-wide	Develop an Industry Attraction Strategy which identifies relevant population-driven industries to help meet the needs of current and future residents (and visitors). This should include business attraction and activation activities, promote the Shire's advantages and incentivise business relocation.	Lead Economic Development and Tourism	Medium term
1.2.3. Township Structure Plans (in progress)	Tallangatta Upper Murray Peninsula	Implement structure planning already underway in key townships (Tallangatta/Corryong/Bellbridge), to promote urban renewal and accommodate for housing and employment growth.	Lead Land Use Planning	Short term
1.2.4. Skilled Workforce Attraction Strategy	Shire wide	Prepare a Skilled Workforce Attraction Strategy – in collaboration with industry – to identify and address labour shortages as well as programs to upskill the labour force to meet industry needs (and increase local employment).	Lead Economic Development and Tourism	Medium term
1.2.5. Retail Audit	Shire wide	Undertake a retail audit to identify gaps in retail provision in key population centres and opportunities to support existing/attract new retail businesses to service residents (and visitors).	Lead Economic Development and Tourism	Short term
1.2.6. Co-working Facilities	Tallangatta Peninsula	Investigate the potential (i.e. feasibility) to develop co-working facilities and supporting infrastructure in commuter towns (e.g. Tallangatta/ Bellbridge) to benefit from the increased prevalence of remote and flexible working. This should be designed to attract employees from professional and finance industries, small businesses looking to relocate, as well as start-ups.	<p>Lead Economic Development and Tourism</p> <p>Partner Infrastructure and Environment</p> <p>Tallangatta CRC</p> <p>Peninsula Network</p>	Short term



KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND MONITORING TOOLS

Measure	Monitor
Population growth above historic and current projected rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually, via ABS data 'Population Estimates by Local Government Area'. • Annually, via 'Victoria in Future' reports.
Increase in investment enquiries, planning and building permits relating to residential development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually, via publicly accessible REMPLAN data (building approvals). • Annually, using Council databases.
Increase in investment enquiries, planning and building permits for commercial and industrial properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually, using Council databases (and recording the investment enquiries by business type and industry).
Increases in the number of local businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually, via ABS data '<i>Counts of Australian Businesses (by Local Government Area)</i>'.
Increases in the number of local jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually, via publicly accessible REMPLAN data. • Every four years, via the ABS census.
Increase in the proportion of residents attaining tertiary education qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually, via publicly accessible REMPLAN data. • Every four years, via the ABS census.
Decrease in vacancy rates for commercial properties in town centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually, using Council's Property Rates Database.



Outcome 2.1: Increase Agriculture Value and Output

Project	Location	Action	Stakeholder/s	Time frame
2.1.1. Upper Murray Agribusiness Branding	Upper Murray	Investigate opportunities, in collaboration with industry, to establish an agribusiness brand for the Upper Murray, promoting the highly productive land, the volume of agricultural output and enhancing existing branding. This should help consolidate promotional activities, enhance the market appeal, attract business investment and expand export opportunities to increase its value to the economy.	Lead Economic Development and Tourism Partner Upper Murray Inc Industry representatives (e.g. Alpine Valleys Dairy)	Medium term
2.1.2. Agriculture Strategic Plan (in progress)	Shire wide	Finalise and deliver the recommendations outlined in the Agriculture Strategic Plan to strengthen the sector and ensure it remains a key driver of economic and employment growth for Towong.	Lead Economic Development and Tourism	Short term and ongoing
2.1.3. Agricultural Diversification Opportunities	Shire wide	Explore the potential to diversify agricultural income opportunities through strategic investments, in collaboration with industry (e.g. agritourism, renewable energy investment, small scale solar/wind farms, etc.).	Lead Economic Development and Tourism Partner Industry representatives Tourism North East Community groups and recovery committees	Ongoing
2.1.4. Agricultural Investment Prospectus	Shire wide	Develop an Agricultural Investment Prospectus to attract new agricultural businesses and promote business investment, which could increase industry output and create employment opportunities.	Lead Economic Development and Tourism	Medium term
2.1.5. Land Use Management	Shire wide	Review and adopt optimal land use practices to safeguard against climate change and the threat of bushfires, to ensure agricultural land remains productive and output is maintained.	Lead Land Use Planning Partner Economic Development and Tourism	Short term



Outcome 2.1: Increase Agriculture Value and Output (cont.)

Project	Location	Action	Stakeholder/s	Time frame
2.1.6. Corryong Airport Opportunities	Upper Murray	Investigate opportunities to leverage Corryong Airport to support rural industry, including supply chain efficiencies, improving storage and distribution and expanding the export market potential.	Lead Infrastructure and Environment Partner Economic Development and Tourism	Short term
2.1.7. Downstream Value-Add Investment Strategy	Shire wide	Prepare an investment strategy to support downstream value-adding of agricultural production, focusing on food processing (for beef and dairy production) and timber manufacturing (for forestry production).	Lead Economic Development and Tourism Partner Industry representatives	Medium term
2.1.8. Circular Economy Opportunities	Shire wide	Investigate circular economy opportunities for rural industry to increase efficiencies in production, including the following existing activities/programs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Advisory Stream for Process Innovation and Resource Exchange (ASPIRE) – an online marketplace for businesses to exchange their waste as a resource; and • Business Development Program – Council and industry build capacity businesses to identify and implement circular economy activities. 	Lead Infrastructure and Environment Partner Economic Development and Tourism	Short term

Outcome 2.2: Increase Jobs in Rural Industry

Project	Location	Action	Stakeholder/s	Time frame
2.2.1. Country University Campus	Upper Murray	Promote and support the Country University Campus to increase enrolments and facilitate training and employment pathways to meet the industry needs of agriculture. This could include a long-term vision to utilise this campus as a regional hub for agricultural education and training – in collaboration with industry and employment providers.	Lead Economic Development and Tourism Partner Industry representatives Upper Murray Inc	Short term
2.2.2. Succession Planning	Shire wide	Promote succession planning to attract and retain young farmers in the Shire.	Lead Economic Development and Tourism Partner Industry representatives	Ongoing



Outcome 2.2: Increase Jobs in Rural Industry (cont.)

Project	Location	Action	Stakeholder/s	Time frame
2.2.3. Employment Attraction Strategy	Shire wide	Undertake a targeted employment attraction strategy for the agricultural sector, focusing on the specific needs of businesses. This will involve collaboration with industry to understand labour gaps/needs, as well as opportunities to attract rural labour to the Shire.	Lead Economic Development and Tourism Partner Industry representatives	Medium term

Outcome 2.3: Infrastructure Investment to Support Rural Industry Growth

Project	Location	Action	Stakeholder/s	Time frame
2.3.1. Abattoir/Protein Recovery Facility	Mitta Valley	Explore the feasibility to build an abattoir/protein recovery plant in the Mitta Valley, leveraging the strength of the cattle farming industry. This could provide significant value to beef producers by focusing on increasing export opportunities, as well as growing agricultural output and employment in the sub-region.	Lead Economic Development and Tourism Land Use Planning Partner Mitta Valley Inc	Long term
2.3.2. Energy Resilience and Reliability Project	Upper Murray	Support the implementation of the Energy Resilience and Reliability Project – in collaboration with Upper Murray Inc. – to provide reliable and efficient local energy production in the Upper Murray. This project includes the following phases: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase 1 and 2: The installation of energy nodes (solar system, batteries and generators) to improve the reliability of energy supply; and Phase 3 (a future third phase outside this Project) – Establish micro-grids in Corryong and other towns in the Upper Murray. 	Lead Mitta Valley Inc Infrastructure and Environment	Medium term
2.3.3. Digital Infrastructure Strategy (in progress)	Shire-wide	<i>Refer action 1.1.9 under Outcome 1.1</i>		
2.3.4. Infrastructure Advocacy	Shire-wide	Identify and prioritise strategic infrastructure requirements to support rural industry growth (e.g. energy production, transport infrastructure, etc.) and advocate for funding from relevant government agencies/private investors.	Lead Economic Development and Tourism Partner Victorian/Federal Government	Medium term



KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND MONITORING TOOLS

Measure	Monitor
Growth in the agricultural sector (inc. output volume and value)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually, via publicly accessible REMPLAN data. • Every four years, via the ABS census.
Increases in agricultural-related employment and business counts	Business count: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually, via ABS data 'Counts of Australian Businesses (by Local Government Area)'. <i>Local Government Area</i>). Employment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually, via publicly accessible REMPLAN data. • Every four years, via the ABS census.
Increase in investment enquiries, planning and building permits relating to agriculture and forestry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually, using Council databases.
Increase the receipt of infrastructure funding from the public and private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually, using Council databases.



The actions to support delivery of the project opportunities identified in this theme are detailed in the Towong Shire Destination Management Plan.



Outcome 4.1: Adopt Best Practice Approaches to Economic Development

Project	Location	Action	Stakeholder/s	Time frame
4.1.1. Economic Development Business Plan	Shire wide	<p>Prepare an internal Economic Development Business Plan that clearly documents and defines the roles and responsibilities of the Economic Development and Tourism team. This should be reviewed on an annual basis and include (at a minimum):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core activities/programs to be undertaken; • Objectives and outcomes to be achieved; • Resources required for delivery and implementation; and • Key actions, progress measures and reporting obligations. <p>Progress of this plan should be monitored using an internal performance reporting framework.</p>	Lead Economic Development and Tourism	Short term and ongoing
4.1.2. Better Approvals Process (in progress)	Shire wide	<p>Progress the 'Better Approvals' process undertaken by Council, in collaboration with government and industry, to streamline planning permit applications, help businesses overcome regulatory barriers and support business investment.</p>	Lead Land Use Planning	Short term and ongoing

Outcome 4.2: Create a Connected and Capable Business Base

Project	Location	Action	Stakeholder/s	Time frame
4.2.1. Business Engagement Project	Shire wide	<p>Develop an engagement plan that guides Council's interactions and partnerships with Government and industry, focusing on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sharing and collaboration; • Identify shared priorities across industry for advocacy purposes; and • Increase opportunities for funding to deliver priority projects/infrastructure. <p>This could be supported through the development of an up-to-date Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software that allows ongoing communication with local businesses.</p>	Lead Economic Development and Tourism	Short term and ongoing
4.2.2. Towong Entrepreneurs Program	Shire wide	<p>Establish a program that attracts and supports Towong entrepreneurs, including innovative SMEs and start-ups. This may include grants, business support activities and mentoring, designed to promote business growth, increase business investment and establish a more diverse employment base.</p>	Lead Economic Development and Tourism	Short term and ongoing
4.2.3. Business Training and Mentoring Programs	Shire wide	<p>Provide ongoing workshops, mentoring and training for businesses, in collaboration with industry, focusing on development opportunities to build capacity and support business growth.</p>	<p>Lead Economic Development and Tourism</p> <p>Partner Community groups and recovery committees</p> <p>Local businesses</p>	Short term and ongoing



Outcome 4.2: Create a Connected and Capable Business Base (cont.)

Project	Location	Action	Stakeholder/s	Time frame
4.2.4. B2B Connections	Shire wide	Promote business to business connections and networking, including local businesses, industry representatives and regional organisations, to facilitate information sharing and provide business support.	Lead Economic Development and Tourism Partner Community groups and recovery committees Local businesses	Short term and ongoing
4.2.5. Business Communication	Shire wide	Promote traditional and contemporary communication channels to the business community and provide access to information, opportunities and support programs (private and public) that encourages business growth and development.	Lead Communications and Media	Short term and ongoing

Outcome 4.3: Build Business Resilience

Project	Location	Action	Stakeholder/s	Time frame
4.3.1. Municipal Recovery Plan and Economic Recovery Action Plan (in progress)	Shire wide	Deliver the Municipal Recovery Plan and Economic Recovery Action Plan.	Lead Relief and Recovery*	Short term
4.3.2. Disaster Recovery Assistance	Shire wide	Provide disaster recovery assistance, such as promoting access to grants, financial/business planning, to help businesses combat the effects of COVID-19 and respond to future external shocks.	Lead Relief and Recovery* Partner Economic Development and Tourism	Short term and ongoing
4.3.3. COVID-19 Business Assistance	Shire wide	Targeted assistance to help businesses alter operations and comply with COVID-19 restrictions, including providing outdoor dining permits, printing QR codes, etc.	Lead Relief and Recovery* Partner Economic Development and Tourism	Short term

*Note: *Relief and Recovery* is a temporary directorate established with funding from Bushfire Recovery Victoria in the immediate aftermath of the 2019-20 bushfires to coordinate relief and recovery services.



KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND MONITORING TOOLS

Measure	Monitor
Develop and maintain an up-to-date business database	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and update annually, using the Australian Business Register (ABR) database or Council-operated CRM.
Increase the business attendees at training, mentorship and networking events (run by Council)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annually, with Council recording attendees.
Increase the number and frequency of business engagements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annually, with Council tracking and recording attendees the number of businesses contacted, purpose of engagement and outcome (either manually or through a Council-operated CRM).
Reduce the average time taken to provide a planning permit decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annually, using data provided by 'Know Your Council' website.
Return all industries to pre-COVID levels of output and employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quarterly, via publicly accessible REMPLAN data (COVID-19 Tools).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A **CONSULTATION SCHEDULE**

Community and Industry

Industry and Community Workshops in Corryong, Tallangatta, Mitta Mitta and Bethanga

Community and Industry Survey

Community Groups and Recovery Committees

Upper Murray Inc.

Upper Murray Community Recovery Committee

Tallangatta Community Recovery Committee

Peninsula Network

Berringa Peninsula Community Network

Government Agencies

DELWP

North East Water

Goulburn Murray Water

Parks Victoria

Agriculture Victoria

Industry

Corryong Health

Alpine Valleys Dairy

APPENDIX B GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE (ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT)

Key Stakeholders	Infrastructure Investment	Funding Support	Business Support	Community Support	Resources	Overview
National Organisation						
Regional Development Australia	✓	✓	✓			Regional Development Australia works to improve economic development across regional Australia, as well as attract investment and create jobs.
State Organisation						
Regional Development Victoria	✓	✓	✓	✓		Regional Development Victoria supports the economic development of rural and regional areas within Victoria. Regional Development Victoria works with regional businesses and communities and all levels of government.
Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)	✓	✓				DELWP manages a number of public forest reserves that include important nature-based tourism products.
Goulburn-Murray Water (GMW)	✓	✓				GMW manages the water in Lake Hume, Lake Dartmouth and the Murray River and also owns and operates a number of infrastructure assets.
North East Water	✓	✓				North East Water provides water and sewerage services to the North-East region of Victoria. They operate a number of water treatment facilities and waste water treatment plants with operations overseen by DELWP.
Agriculture Victoria	✓	✓	✓			Agriculture Victoria supports the growth and protection of farms in rural and regional communities across Victoria.
Regional Organisations						
Ovens Murray Regional Partnership		✓	✓	✓	✓	The Ovens Murray Regional Partnership provides the local community with the opportunity to have a greater say in their ensures the region has a strong position to advocate for local communities.
Alpine Valley Dairy Inc.			✓	✓		Supports and advocates for the dairy industry and the farmers throughout North East Victoria. The Alpine Valley Dairy Inc helps to educate and collaborate those across the industry.

Key Stakeholders	Infrastructure Investment	Funding Support	Business Support	Community Support	Resources	Overview
Local Organisations						
Towong Shire Council	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Towong Shire Council aims to provide business and economic support individuals in the Shire.
Upper Murray Inc			✓	✓		Upper Murray Inc works to promote and market the Upper Murray region, as outlined in the Upper Murray 2030 Plan. Additionally, the organisation is responsible for developing the assets in the region to increase visitation, marketing and producing collateral.
Mitta Valley Inc.			✓	✓		Mitta Valley Inc is a membership based organisation that offers access to a range of support services to individuals, organisation and businesses in the Mitta Valley. The organisation offers workshops, grant funding support, networking and branding and digital marketing to enhance economic and community development.
Berringa Peninsula Community Network			✓	✓		The Committee identifies and progresses activities, projects, and services to support the social, economic, environmental, natural, and built environmental goals of the Peninsula communities.
Tallangatta Rail Trail Advisory Group (TAG)	✓				✓	TAG is one of three community groups working with Parklands Albury-Wodonga to develop the High Country Rail Trail. TAG is responsible for the development and management of the Sandy Creek to Old Tallangatta section of the Rail Trail.
Tallangatta Neighbourhood House				✓		Tallangatta Neighbourhood House is a community group working to support and strengthen the local community social and recreational activities.
Upper Murray Community Recovery Committee			✓	✓	✓	The Upper Murray CRC is responsible for advocating for the needs of the community, assisting with proposals to attract funding and resources and contributing to the evaluation process to improve future disaster recovery efforts. The Upper Murray CRC is made up of smaller community CRCs, including Berringama/Lucyvale, Biggara, Corryong, Cudgewa, Nariel Valley, Thowgla, Tintalra, Walwa and Towong. The Upper Murray CRC represents and advocates for the smaller CRCs as well as representing the Upper Murray as a whole.

