



MESSAGE

The 'Our Valley, Our Future' project is all about creating a strong, sustainable and vibrant community for everyone who lives, works and plays in the Mitta Valley.

The project builds on the fact that small communities which are great places to live, work and visit are essential to the sustainability of rural Victoria.

'Our Valley, Our Future' is a collaboration between the Mitta Valley Advancement Forum, Gardiner Foundation's Strengthening Small Dairy Communities Program, Alpine Valleys Dairy Pathways Project and Towong Shire Council.

The project is managed by a committee of project partners and community members, and will run for the next three years with a project manager. After that, it is up to us as a community to work with our partners to achieve our goals.

The committee has worked with the greater community over the past twelve months to better understand the needs and desires of the people who live, work and play in the Valley.

The community insights gathered through the consultation period have been critically assessed and compiled into the development of the Mitta Valley Community Plan.

Over the next three years, the 'Our Valley, Our Future' project will focus on supporting the local economy, building local opportunities, increasing capacity and skills and creating sustainable partnerships. The project will bring many opportunities to the Valley – the opportunity to plan together, to achieve projects, to access funding and to build our community's capacity.

We are very excited to launch the Mitta Valley Community Plan and look forward to working together with the community to implement it.

To get involved, you can contact the project team at mail@ourvalley.com.au or the Project Manager, Jaime Carroll on 0448 013 395.

CONTENTS

- MESSAGE2
- OVERVIEW.....4
- OUR FOCUS.....5
- OUR INSIGHTS6
- OUR PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES7
- OUR Big IDEAS 10
- OUR ECONOMY 11
- OUR COMMUNITY..... 12
- OUR PLACE 13
- NEXT STEPS 15

OVERVIEW

The 'Our Valley, Our Future' project is all about creating a strong sustainable and vibrant community for everyone. It is about us understanding what our needs are and what we want our future to look like. Importantly, it is also about recognising what we need to do to achieve this future.



OUR FOCUS

We understand that our community is interconnected, and that our capacity to achieve a strong and vibrant future will be based on our ability to focus on and address a range of different priorities and needs.



OUR INSIGHTS

To better understand the issues, needs, and priorities of the community, the steering committee and project manager has undertaken community consultation in the form of visitor surveys, community surveys and a community planning day.

Consultation activity

Date	Activity	Who participated
29 March 2013 – 12 April 2013	Our Valley Our Future Visitor Survey	41 people completed and submitted surveys: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 44% of visitors are couples, and 34% visit on their own, 19% are families and 5% come in groups. • 76% of visitors are aged over 50 years, and 22% are aged in their thirties. • 40.4% came to visit family or friends, 24.5% were after a short getaway and 19.3% came for outdoor activities. • 41.4% stayed with family or friends, and 17.2% camped. • People stayed for an average of 3 nights. Visitor nights ranged from 0-14 days. • 90.2% had visited the area before. • 97.6% said that they would return. • 47.7% heard of the Mitta Valley through friends, 22.7% through family and 11.4% through the internet. • 22% were from Albury/ Wodonga, 2.4% from Tallangatta, 16.8% from regional Victoria and 12.1% from Melbourne. 4.8% travelled from regional NSW with 9.7% travelling from Sydney. 19.4% travelled from Canberra and 2.4% from Rockhampton in far north Queensland. The biggest distance travelled by tourists was from Karratha 2.4% and Perth 4.9%.
20 May 2013 – 3 June 2013	Our Valley Our Future Community Survey	97 people completed and submitted surveys: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender – 42.7% male and 57.3% female. • Age – 2.1% are under 20 years, 45.7% are aged 21-50 years, and 52.1% are aged 51 years of over. • Currently living – Mitta Mitta 22.2%, Rural/farm 26.3%, Dartmouth 18.2%, Eskdale 15.2%, and Tallandoon 6.1%. • 12.1% of respondents were non-residents. • Respondents have lived in Mitta Valley for an average of 23.3 years.
23 June 2013	Our Valley Our Future Community Planning Day	Over 100 people participated in the planning day. For the 50 people who completed personal information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender – 46.8% male and 53.2% female. • Currently living – Mitta Mitta 40.0%, Dartmouth 10.0%, Eskdale 27.5%, and Tallandoon 5.0%. • 12.1% of respondents were non-residents.

In addition to the consultation activity listed above, the Our Valley, Our Future project also had access to two summary reports prepared by University of Melbourne PhD student Michael Santhanam-Martin. His research is looking at how agriculture contributes to the sustainability of rural communities, and he's looking at the dairy industry in the Mitta Valley as his case study. Between August 2012 & May 2013 Michael carried out 25 interviews on dairy farms and 18 interviews across the wider community. 64 people in total participated in these interviews.

OUR PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES

The nine biggest challenges and priorities facing the Mitta Valley were identified through community research. The challenges identified were:

1. Business and employment
2. Farming
3. Tourism
4. Community infrastructure
5. Communication
6. Housing
7. Our young people
8. Our ageing population
9. Social cohesion

Business and employment

Respondents have obvious concern about the need to support current businesses in the Valley to ensure that they are sustainable and operate effectively into the future.

Additionally, lack of diversity within the business offering is seen as an issue. Respondents would like to attract locals and new residents to develop new business opportunities that provide great diversity to the residents of the valley.

Employment was the key issue that was identified through the surveys with over half of respondents listing it as an issue that affects the community. Furthermore, many respondents identified the need to develop diverse, local employment opportunities as a significant priority for the future of the valley – especially employment opportunities for young people.



Agriculture is a significant industry within the valley. The nature of employment in the agricultural industry has changed and there are ongoing challenges such as milk prices and outside farm investment and management.

For those seeking well paying, non-agriculture professional employment some people felt that the main option is to commute to outside

employment centres. The proximity of the Mitta Valley to such areas can be a disincentive. Many people also felt that there are limited employment options for young people who require jobs to build their skills.

Farming

Agriculture is a key industry in the Mitta Valley and has been throughout the Valleys history. Increasingly, the industry has faced challenges that have resulted in some areas of farming becoming less profitable.



Some farmers reported that milk prices have impacted on the viability of small dairy farms and that many farms now struggle to support more than one family. This is seen to have resulted in a lack of incentive for interested young people to stay on farms and within the community.

Some people were concerned that some farmers are moving off the land, subsequently selling to outside investors, or looking at subdividing their land as smaller allotments.

Many community members highlighted the potential to grow and develop more diverse farming industries that built on existing strengths – such as beef farming, selling of local produce, food/farming tourism and environmental management practices.

Tourism

Many people felt that tourism was an area of potential for the Valley. There is a current lack of attractions and accommodation for visitors and this was identified as a real barrier for local tourism.

Many people were focused on achieving a vibrant ecotourism product that would see the development of a sustainable aspect of the local community and economy.



Community infrastructure

Feedback from the surveys indicated that while sport and recreation are well supported in the valley, there is a need for greater facilities, programs and services that support early childhood and health service delivery.

There is a lack of childcare, before and after school care, and kindergarten opportunities in Mitta Valley. Additionally, some people felt that there was a need for more programs for young children and families such as playgroups in the area.

Access to health and medical services are limited. Particularly health services for both families and aged persons.

The programs, services and facilities that are most important to people in the Valley are new netball courts, community based emergency services, childcare, tennis, gym and exercise classes, pool and playgrounds, more walking/ cycling tracks, playgroup/mothers group, yoga and wellbeing.

Communication

Poor connectivity of communication channels is a key issue in the Mitta Valley.

There is poor mobile phone coverage at Tallandoon, Noorongong and Dartmouth. Broadband internet access is limited throughout the Mitta Valley. ADSL is only available at Dartmouth and Eskdale, otherwise access is via NextG, satellite or dial-up. Additionally, reception of AM/FM radio and terrestrial television is poor. Television reception is principally via satellite from northern Australia that lacks local news and advertising content.

Housing

There is a shortage of residential land and housing to accommodate families in the valley. Land shortages limit the opportunity for new houses to be built. Additionally, houses are being bought as weekenders and can be poorly maintained, lowering the appearance of residential properties.

Many people are concerned that there is very little rental stock in the valley making it hard to attract new residents.

Our young people

Many young people are not staying in Mitta Valley and some people are concerned that those that are staying are increasingly disengaged with their community.

There is a lack of jobs for school leavers and young people need to travel outside the area to access tertiary education providers.

This is shifting the population to an ageing population with a comparably higher median age than the rest of the state.

There will always be difficulty in keeping young people in rural areas. There is also great benefit for young people to leave, gain a further education and some worldly skills and experience. However, effort needs to focus into activities that ensure that the Valley is attractive and easy for people to move back to, especially when they have their own families.



Our ageing population

The population of Mitta Valley is ageing. The median age of residents in Mitta Valley is 49 years old, according to 2011 Census date. This is considerably older than the median age of Victorians which is 37 years.

This puts more pressure on the provision of aged services and primary health.

Location	Median Age
Dartmouth	51 years
Eskdale	47 years
Tallandoon	47 years
Mitta Mitta	51 years
Mitta Valley	49 years
Towong Shire	47 years
Victoria	37 years

The services, programs, facilities and support provided by local service providers needs to be concentrated on meeting the need of the population, which in this case is proportionately older than other areas. Consideration should also be given to strategies that lower the overall age of the population.



Social cohesion

Consultation shows that people within the Mitta Valley feel that there are two main issues relating to social cohesion. The first is the perception that many have that there is a current unwillingness of residents from different towns to unite to work together for the overall benefit of the valley.

Secondly, there appears to be a growing divide between permanent and non-permanent residents. Some permanent residents feel that the 'weekenders' don't embrace the local culture - 'Weekenders' are left isolated in the community and don't feel connected to groups and activities.



OUR BIG IDEAS

Throughout the consultation, community members had the opportunity to identify 'big ideas' that they would like to see happen in the Valley. These ideas represent the opportunities that we have, and the excitement that we hold for the potential of the Valley:

- Build a retirement home.
- Develop a themed adventure playground.
- Encourage a new business to employ 20-30 people.
- The provision of professional financial administration of Magorra Public Park.
- A pedestrian bridge from Magorra Park to the DSE land bordering Snowy Creek.
- Sewerage for Mitta and Eskdale.
- Employment businesses.
- Community, co-operation on a major project.
- Onsite camping and 4WD expo.
- Combined mountain bike and horse riding track complex in Mitta.
- Sewerage to all townships.
- Permanent water at Tallangatta.
- Mobile coverage between Tallangatta and Murray Valley Highway.
- A network of cycle/ walking tracks.
- Employment opportunities.
- Attract a business that employs people.
- A brewery on the corner of Mitta North Road and Dartmouth Road.
- Exploit the completion of the Omeo Highway to promote new businesses.
- Re-zone townships and farms to allow development.
- Good quality motel accommodation.
- Co-operation between communities.
- Aged care services to accommodate ageing population.
- Town water for Mitta and sewage for both towns.
- Omeo Highway finished and better promoted.
- A cottage industry to be successful.
- A farmers' market.
- A triathlon or someone start a rafting business on the river.
- Community groups that support a modern and professional community identity.
- Focus on sustainable and profitable farming practices.
- Improve tourism opportunities.
- Improve the drinking culture attached to the football scene.
- Water bottling plant and beef farming co-operative.
- Maybe an animal and bird park.
- A motel or retirement home built.
- The sealing of the highway through to the coast and Alpine regions.
- Develop a business incubator to create a diverse range of new businesses and attractions in the Mitta Valley.
- Reticulated sewerage to the towns.
- Walking tracks in and around the Eskdale township, especially down to the sports complex.
- Build a kindergarten.
- Omeo Hwy updated.
- Development of a 'Mitta Valley', milk and beef brand.



OUR ECONOMY

Our goal

To raise the profile of the Mitta Valley, as a key competitive force in the agricultural market, and to become a front-of-mind location for quality, sustainable, and effective economic development.

Our priorities

1. Grow the local dairying industry.
2. Support established businesses to be more productive and profitable.
3. Create growth in local tourism.
4. Grow existing businesses.
5. Increase new businesses.
6. Effectively market the Valley.

Our challenges

- Out distance from other towns.
- Isolated approach of individual producers.
- Competing and immediate commercial priorities.
- Challenges in agricultural profitability.

Things we need to consider

- Availability of skills and expertise to drive new initiatives.
- Access to financial support.
- What is the actual demand for new businesses?
- Growth in our economy relies on growth of other aspects of our community such as housing and telecommunication.

Our actions

Objective 1.1: We will expand the economic opportunities within the Valley to support a growth in business, industry and employment.

- Undertake a needs analysis with existing businesses to better understand the areas where they require support and develop short term actions accordingly.
- Develop an innovative project that links existing businesses owners with new business operators within the Valley to encourage opportunities for knowledge sharing and professional growth.
- In partnership with land owners, local and state government and other relevant stakeholders, develop opportunities to more support more effective and efficient land use within the Mitta Valley to support economic growth and prosperity.

Objective 1.2: We will have a strong and resilient dairying industry within the Valley.

- Support existing programs, networks and initiatives that focus on strengthening the local dairy industry and advocate for their ongoing focus on supporting Mitta Valley farmers.
- Expose the potential productivity and profitability of dairying in the Valley.
- Explore and showcase alternative models of farming that address identified challenges and support sustainable and profitable options for dairying.
- Develop and implement a mentoring and support program for young dairy farmers in the Valley.

Objective 1.3: We will utilise our natural assets to foster a growth in our tourism sector.

- Establish a tourism task force aimed at growing tourism in the Mitta Valley.
- Research possible tourism business opportunities for development within the Valley and promote the range of opportunities available.
- Explore and support innovative models of developing tourism initiatives within the Valley.

Objective 1.4: We will improve the perception of Mitta Valley in the broad tourism, residential and commercial market.

- Develop a clear brand and marketing platform to more effectively position the Mitta Valley in a range of markets – including tourism, dairying, production and residential growth.

OUR COMMUNITY

Our goal

To be a happy, healthy, well and connected community where people know and trust their neighbours and embrace the spirit of the Valley.

Our priorities

1. Empower efficient and effective community groups.
2. Develop training, education and mentoring programs.
3. Increase community access to music and arts.
4. Support and strengthen our volunteer services.
5. Build community relationships.

Our challenges

- There is an existing division between residents of different villages.
- There are often poor connections between permanent and non-permanent residents.
- There will be an increasing need for comprehensive service provision especially for the ageing population.

Things we need to consider

- The happiness of our community is often linked to our ability to earn an income, access services and see opportunities within our community.
- Our community groups offer an important social and governance role within our community and both contributions are valuable.

Our actions

Objective 2.1: We will attract young people and families to live in the Valley.

- Communicate directly with young families who currently live within the Valley to better understand their needs and priorities.
- Create a working party that addresses and promotes the attractiveness of the area to young families.

Objective 2.2: We will have community groups that are effective, enjoyable and sustainable.

- Review the current community groups within the Valley and determine their needs, objectives, strengths and weaknesses.
- Review innovative models of community groups, and implement opportunities that support the long term viability and strength of community groups within the Valley.
- Assess and respond to the training and skill development needs of the community to ensure community groups are knowledgeable and efficient.

Objective 2.3: We will continue to ensure that the Valley is a positive, vibrant and connected community.

- Explore opportunities to record and recognise our history and story to ensure it is preserved for future generations.
- Deliver a series of events throughout the Valley that focus on bringing people together in celebration.
- Facilitate the increased role and prominence of local artists, performers and musicians within the community.

Objective 2.4: We will ensure that the Valley is a great place to grow older.

- Work with relevant organisations and service providers to ensure the Valley is considered in the implementation of services, programs and resources aimed at supporting older people.

OUR PLACE

Our goal

To maintain a modern lifestyle within the valley, without impacting on the beauty, health and peace of the environment.

Our priorities

1. Implement reticulated water in Mitta.
2. Effectively manage state land.
3. Increase and improve tracks and pathways throughout the Valley.
4. Increase housing stock within the Valley.
5. Improved access to communication and telecommunications.

Our challenges

- Consistency of delivery of communication technology throughout the Valley.
- Wild animal management.
- Maintaining housing integrity and presentation.

Things we need to consider

- Developing greater telecommunications capacity is an area that requires advocacy.
- Our lack of housing impacts on our ability to grow our economy and attract new residents.
- It is vital our community takes responsibility for community assets.

Our actions

Objective 3.1: We will have improved access to telecommunication services within the Valley.

- Advocate for the telecommunication needs of the Valley in partnership with Council, businesses and other relevant stakeholders.

Objective 3.2: We will have community and recreation facilities that meet the needs of our community now and in to the future.

- Advocate for an integrated approach to service delivery and community access, and strong community governance at the new Magoora Park Multi-Purpose Community Hub.
- Work with the State Government to ensure effective management and utilisation of State owned land –including management from weeds and feral animals.

Objective 3.3: We will develop infrastructure that supports the growth and prosperity of our community.

- Advocate for the delivery of reticulated water in Mitta.
- Facilitate the implementation of increased walking tracks throughout the Valley.

Objective 3.4: We will have diverse and high quality housing options available for residents and visitors to the Valley.

- In partnership with Council, undertake research to identify the need for additional housing within the Valley.



NEXT STEPS

The Our Valley, Our Future Plan will be used to guide the next stages of the project and will support the implementation of projects and actions as well as further research and planning.

It is from here that the community of the Mitta Valley will begin to advance the priorities identified within the plan. Through the establishment of Community Action Groups, each of the major priorities will be further progressed, and a range of specific actions will be identified.

The Our Valley, Our Future committee will support the establishment and planning of the following community action groups:

- Tourism
- Business
- Farming
- Families
- Community groups
- Events
- Community infrastructure

The groups will be established to help identify the best way to progress action within the community. For some priority areas, this may mean that more research needs to happen, for other areas the need to attract funding or financial support may be a precursor to action. For some priority areas, working groups will be able to determine a range of projects or activities that can be commenced straight away.

The Community Action Groups will be supported by the Our Valley, Our Future committee to implement actions and achieve long lasting results for the community.

This is an exciting time for the project as we move from planning to action. It is important that we continue to remain focused on the needs and priorities of our community whilst achieving meaningful, sustainable and long lasting outcomes. It is now that the whole community can come together to achieving exciting and beneficial change for the future of the Valley.



Our Valley, Our Future is proudly supported by

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