

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM STRATEGY 2015-2019





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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### E1 Overview

Yarriambiack Shire is in the north east of the Wimmera Southern Mallee region. The north of the Shire is characterised by the dunes of the Lowan Mallee and sandy plains of the Mallee, while the south of the Shire is part of the undulating plains of the Wimmera. Warracknabeal is the largest township in the Shire, followed by Murtoa, Hopetoun, Minyip, Rupanyup and Beulah. Warracknabeal is centrally located in the Shire; 57 kilometres north of Horsham and around 350 kilometres north east of Melbourne.

The Shire economy is highly dependent on broadacre farming and so are the Shire's urban centres, which have economies that have built their business bases to contribute to agribusiness supply chains and to provide services to farming communities. The agricultural activity is dominated by wheat, barley, lambs and wool, grain legumes, and oilseeds. This agricultural focus has given the Shire and its towns many distinctive features, strong resilience and connected communities, but it has also led to decades long population decline as farms have become bigger and more automated, and the financial returns from agricultural commodities have continued to decline in an increasingly competitive global environment.

The total resident population of Yarriambiack Shire has been decreasing by an annual average of 1.28% over the past decade. In 2013, the population was 7,018 (having declined from 7,982 in 2003)<sup>1</sup>.

### E2 Economic Development Focus

Yarriambiack Shire Council does not currently have the financial resources to support a highly proactive economic development work program, and has determined that it is currently unable to support a dedicated economic development staff function. Despite this situation, Yarriambiack Shire will have a continuing role in economic development.

This strategy embraces Yarriambiack Shire's agreed economic development directions:

- ❖ Continuing to strongly support the broadacre farming industries in the Shire, which will always be a major fabric of the Yarriambiack economy: Grains, grain legumes and oilseeds, and sheep for wool and meat.
- ❖ Encouraging the expansion of intensive agricultural enterprises (which are more likely to establish) following the construction of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline.
- ❖ Maximising local value adding to agricultural products. This will include marketing, logistics and unique relationships; not just adding value to products (through packing, grading, mixing, milling, etc).
- ❖ Being a rural Victorian leader in facilitating Community Enterprises, potentially as a 'model' municipality through alliances with philanthropic and/or social enterprise peak groups.

<sup>1</sup> ABS Regional Population Growth, Australia (April 2014)



- ❖ Seeking investment and regular upgrades for critical town and rural assets (road, rail, airstrips, recreation areas, parks, waterways and storages, historic features and commercial and industrial precincts).
- ❖ Supporting the Shire's strong and caring communities in their efforts to retain and enhance services, attract visitors and new residents, and to implement innovations.
- ❖ Theming towns and providing a consistency in town entrances, streetscapes and interpretive information.
- ❖ Considering the costs and benefits of Council incentive and support packages for new and expanding businesses.
- ❖ Valuing, promoting and supporting trade and recreational events and community festivals, and maximising the economic benefits flowing from these events.

### E3 Economic Development Strategies

Yarriambiack Shire Council's Vision is:

*"In consultation with our community Yarriambiack Shire Council will provide a viable, sustainable and vibrant future"<sup>2</sup>.*

Yarriambiack's municipal strategic statement focuses on land use planning and development issues and initiatives which will be taken to implement and achieve an agreed vision. The vision embraces the concept of an active community with a diversified economic base integrated with a sustainable and productive agricultural industry. The proposed economic development strategies, and their associated actions, support Council's vision.

The strategies are designed to assist council staff to have an economic development focus across the organisation, without an explicit economic development staff unit. They assume Council will have an ongoing commitment to economic development facilitation and support in creating a climate for investment and innovation, and in being a proactive auspice (either alone or in partnership with community organisations) to attract economic development initiatives to the Shire.

**Strategy 1: Planning Scheme Provisions and Council Policies**

*Use Council policies and planning provisions to recognise and enhance the contribution made by Yarriambiack's major and emerging industries, in order to*

- *provide a supportive environment, and*
- *encourage new investment, job creation and innovation.*

**Strategy 2: Economic Development as a Multi-Disciplinary Function across Council Departments**

*Implement a whole-of-Council/multidisciplinary team approach to funding, facilitating and delivering economic development infrastructure projects.*

**Strategy 3: Facilitate Investment in Priority Industry Sectors**

*Maximise the efficient use of Council resources to promote and coordinate support (across all Council staff areas including planning, building, community services, operations and administration) for the targeted and high priority industries for economic development investment over the next five years.*

<sup>2</sup> Yarriambiack Shire Council Plan 2013-17

**Strategy 4: Collaborative Tourism and Branding**

*Facilitate local and regional collaboration in tourism activities, and establish a new Yarriambiack tourism brand position.*

**E4 Priority Economic Development Initiatives**

Although it is recognised that specific new opportunities will emerge, and some may dissipate, over the next five years, the following specific initiatives have been selected by Council and Senior Staff as major priorities.

**❖ Murra Warra Wind Farm Project**

Renewable energy company RES Australia is working towards the establishment of a 110 to 117 turbines wind farm at Murra Warra in the south-west of Yarriambiack Shire (between Minyip and Horsham), and Council expects a planning application to be lodged within the next 12 months. Council hopes to be able to approve this application, and to encourage the Victorian Government to fast-track its approval of this important development. The Murra Warra project estimated to involve capital development expenditure of \$650 million (a larger project than the Wimmera Mallee pipeline project, at \$500 million) with a construction workforce impact of 610 jobs.

Once operational, the Murra Warra wind farm venture will create 60 new jobs. The turbines will provide a non-farm revenue stream for 17 farming families, increase Council rate revenue by \$850,000 per year (\$21.25 million over 25 years), and contribute \$340,000 per year to the Yarriambiack Shire Community fund of \$340,000 per year.

**❖ Industrial Land Provision and Industrial Estate Feasibility**

Yarriambiack Shire has a shortage of serviced industrial land available for new or expanding businesses. Indeed, the Shire also has very limited areas, within the Planning Scheme, zoned for industrial use. An industrial estate feasibility assessment will be undertaken in order to make provision of serviced land, ahead of demand, in Warracknabeal, Hopetoun, Minyip and/or Murtoa. The feasibility assessment will be consistent with the urban growth plan for the selected town or towns.

**❖ Community Enterprises**

Yarriambiack Shire hopes to be a regional Victorian leader in establishing sustainable community enterprises. Arguably there is nowhere more likely for community enterprises to succeed than in Yarriambiack. 'We look after our own in the Wimmera' has long been a local mantra, and there is an impressive track record to prove it. Council will provide leadership in the implementation of community based retail, hospitality and recreation enterprises (by assisting community groups in assessing projects, forming relationships with potential venture partners, and securing funds).

**❖ Town Entrances, Streetscaping and Landscaping**

Council will design and construct attractive and consistent signage, central activities area streetscaping, and landscaping for town entrances, on an achievable and prioritised rollout schedule (over 3 to 5 years), commencing with the Shire's largest centres (Warracknabeal, Murtoa, Hopetoun, Minyip and Rupanyup). These improvements are overwhelmingly consistent themes in the Yarriambiack towns current Community Plans and in feedback from the business community, to help in revitalising the towns.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR COUNCIL

Yarriambiack Shire Council does not currently have the financial resources to support a highly proactive economic development work program. Indeed the Council has determined that it is currently unable to support a dedicated economic development staff function. There are compelling reasons why Yarriambiack Shire Council should maintain an economic development focus:

- The Shire is undergoing considerable structural change across its industries and communities.
- It is one of 17 local government areas in Victoria (of a total of 79 in the State) to record sustained population decline over more than a decade. Yarriambiack has experienced the third greatest rate of population decline.
- It has agricultural, natural resource, heritage and transport assets of strategic importance.
- There is a clear need to work collaboratively with other Shires to maximise opportunities and new initiatives at a regional level.
- The Shire has a relatively high level of socio-economic disadvantage.

Challenges associated with economic development directions in Yarriambiack Shire are also compelling:

- The Shire is not a discrete geographic or economic region, with quite different characteristics in the north and south, and extensive direct physical and economic links with other Wimmera and Southern Mallee areas. The north of the Shire is characterised by the dunes of the Lowan Mallee and sandy plains of the Murray Mallee, while the south of the Shire is part of the undulating plains of the Wimmera.
- Warracknabeal is the major urban area (with 2,300 residents), but the Shire has a large network of 'tier 2' townships (with populations between 300 and 800 residents) and a range of smaller towns and villages.
- The Shire's characteristics are not well recognised or understood by the general Victorian public or tourists.
- There are very limited financial resources to establish a long term economic development work program.
- The Shire is rated as socio-economically disadvantaged<sup>3</sup> with population decline, relatively high underemployment, low rates of workforce participation, an older age structure, and a relatively lower income structure.
- The Shire's economy encompasses 21.8% of the industry sub-sectors which exist across Australia, and its industry mix includes several sectors that are mature and/or in decline, resulting in differing levels of opportunity. Opportunities within the Shire vary from those which involve major infrastructure development, to modest initiatives to support community activities and small and micro businesses.

On balance, the need for Yarriambiack Shire to have a continuing role in economic development is substantial.

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA)



The objectives of the Economic Development Strategy (including tourism) have been to:

- Outline the current state of the Shire economy and demographic profile
- Provide an agreed direction for the economic development of the Shire that identifies desired economic characteristics and outcomes for the Shire and trends and activity that will influence the Shire's economy for the next three years.
- Ensure the strategy is consistent with other existing Council strategies and the functioning of Council.
- Provide suggested actions for Council and stakeholders to deliver over the next five years.

The economic development strategy has been prepared through the combined input of Yarriambiack Shire councillors and staff, many business leaders, and other community members and stakeholders. The process has been assisted by Street Ryan and Associates and Insight Communications.

## **1.2 APPROPRIATE ROLES FOR COUNCIL IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Accepted roles for local government authorities in Australia typically span a wide range of activities:

- To lobby and provide advocacy for the Shire's businesses and communities
- To provide leadership in innovation and coordination with respect to economic development initiatives and best practice
- To provide incentives/remove barriers to desired investment and job creation
- To provide close links between the public, business and community sectors in economic development through projects of interest to two or more
- To facilitate regional economic development initiatives beyond the local government area boundary
- To fill gaps in what isn't being done now to achieve economic development – by providing resources to (for example)
  - Stimulate clusters, networks, and supply chains
  - Encourage new entities (internal and external investment)
  - Conduct research
  - Manage special projects (while participating businesses continue to focus on their core activities).
- To develop economic development policies and commitments which have the longevity that only local government and/or the community/private sector can provide. State and Commonwealth programs come and go, typically with lifespans of 3-6 years, and often a longer lead time is needed to take initiatives from conception to full-scale implementation.

**Figure 1.1 Yarriambiack Shire Map**



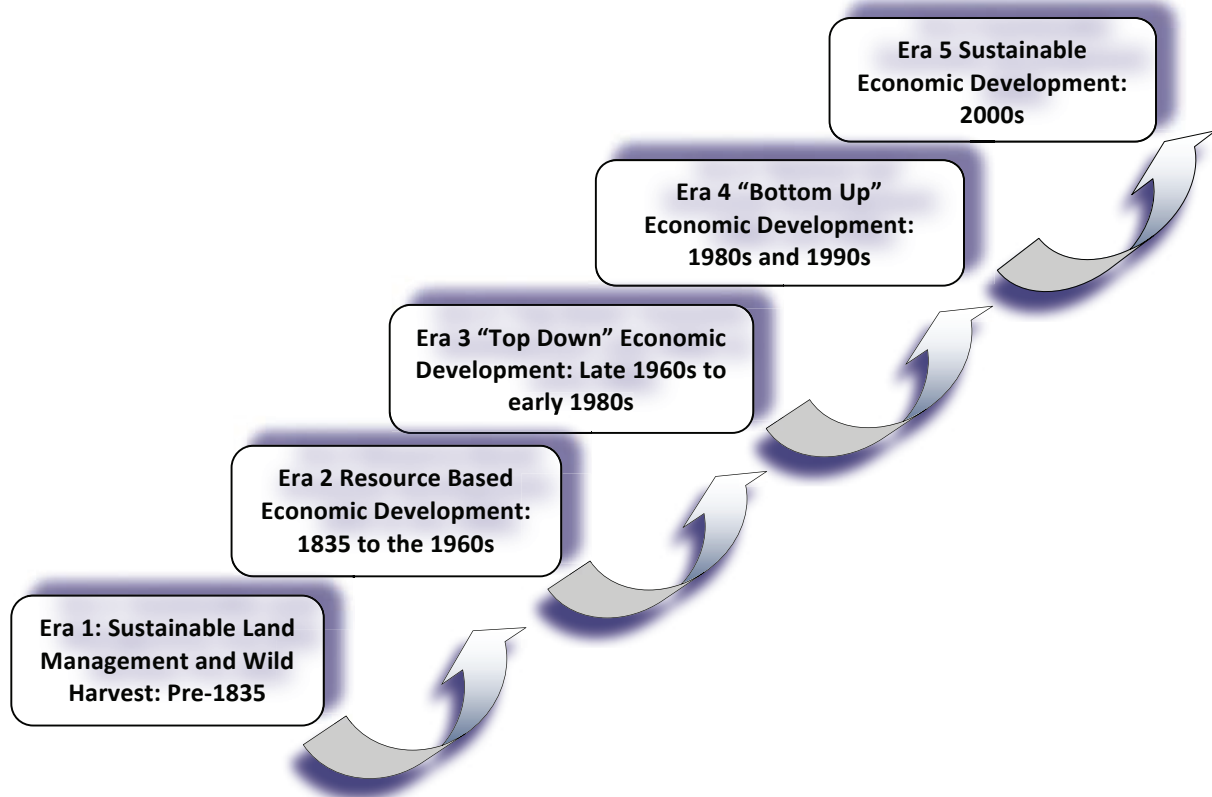
## 2. PROFILE OF YARRIAMBIACK SHIRE

### 2.1 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

There have been five broad eras in Victorian economic development shown in Figure 2.1; all have impacted on the economic nature of Yarriambiack Shire. They have been:

- Era 1: Balanced Land Management for Hunting/Wild Harvesting
- Era 2: Resource Based Economic Development
- Era 3: Top Down Economic Development
- Era 4: Bottom Up Economic Development
- Era 5: Sustainable Economic Development

**Figure 2.1 Victorian Economic Development Eras**



#### 2.1.1 Era 1: Balanced Land Management for Hunting and Wild Harvest

Before the colonisation of Victoria, Aboriginal tribal groups populated Yarriambiack Shire, managing available sources of food and water. The Shire provided plant (such as quandong) and animal (such as kangaroo and possum) foods as well as medicines and tools to support the pre-colonial economy.

In this era, Aboriginal tribal groups controlled tracts of land which were managed to sustain a population living in balance with the available sources of food and water. Yarriambiack (meaning 'creek tribes') is part of the traditional lands of the Wotjobaluk nation. When migratory lifestyles were the norm, mobility helped to live sustainably throughout the cycles of droughts and floods.

Within the Shire, Lubeck, Lah, Warracknabeal, and Rupanyup were all focal points for camps, while Yarriambiack Creek was a 'highway to Lake Corrong'.

Aboriginal land management was consistent, well planned and sustainable. Aboriginal people were land managers and they farmed, but were not dependent on farming<sup>4</sup>; mobility enabled the land to be managed 'lightly' and in response to seasonal and other climatic events.

### 2.1.2 Era 2 Resourced Based Economic Development

In the resource based economic development era, throughout Victoria and Australia, urban settlements and regions developed around either agricultural or mineral resources, or a transport link (especially rail).

An economy built around indigenous plants and animals rapidly gave way to the exploitation of gold, timber and pastures for livestock production (both sheep and cattle initially). The change from Aboriginal land management to a pastoral economy in Yarriambiack was effected during the 1840s, when the greatest clashes occurred between Aboriginal communities and European settlement. It was a period of *"relentless invasion during which time over half the estates of the Wotjabaluk, especially their sacred totem sites on creeks, rivers and lakes, had been registered as sheep and cattle stations"*<sup>5</sup>.

Early settlement began in the more fertile lands in the south and central parts of the Shire with access to water from the Yarriambiack Creek and continued northward along the creek. Settlement of the more remote areas to the north and west, however, largely did not occur until the early twentieth century after water supply and transport schemes were extended to those areas.

The transformation of the Wimmera to agricultural production and the clearing of Mallee Scrub paved the way for the era of resource based economic development. Land and Pastoral Lease Acts made it easier for those moving into marginal land such as the Mallee by reducing rental and extending licence periods, and encouraging improvements and rabbit extermination.

New dryland farming techniques, including use of superphosphate fertilisers and mechanised harvesters were a part of the agricultural revolution. *"The history of human interaction with the natural environment in Yarriambiack Shire is repeatedly one of attempting to overcome natural barriers to settlement and agricultural expansion, and meeting the limitations ultimately imposed upon these by nature in each successive expansion"*<sup>6</sup>.

With the development of freehold selections in the 1870s, sites were set aside for the establishment of townships. Many of the first towns in the Shire were excised from the early pastoral runs. For example, the township of Murtoa was surveyed and established in 1873 just two years after the 1871 selections by the initial settlers within the Longerenong and Ashens pastoral stations. In the same year, 24 allotments for another township were surveyed from Longerenong and Warranooke stations, to later become Rupanyup. The

<sup>4</sup> Gammage, Bill (2011) *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia*, Allen and Unwin

<sup>5</sup> Taylor, Phil (1996), *Karkarooc: A Mallee Shire history 1896-1995*, Yarriambiack Shire Council.

<sup>6</sup> Yarriambiack Shire Heritage Study Volume 1 (2012)

township of Minyip was surveyed in 1875 on land separated from the Kirkwood and Sheep Hills pastoral stations.

Warracknabeal, which was part of Scott's pastoral run was proclaimed in 1884, but the site was already established as an important centre for the surrounding pastoral and farming district, with the first school in 1879, the first newspaper in 1885, and railway connection in 1886. By 1888 Warracknabeal had a population of 500 residents<sup>7</sup>.

Construction of railways had a major impact on the development of Yarriambiack Shire and its network of towns, from the late nineteenth century. The importance of railways in this era of economic development can be seen by the location of towns (along rail routes) and the extensive infrastructure that accompanied the railways, such as silos and bunkers, sheep and cattle yards, and goods sheds and platforms, grain shed platforms, loaders and weighbridges.

As the twentieth century unfolded, closer settlement (including soldier settlement schemes following the two world wars), expansion of railway networks and water supply schemes led to the development of numerous small towns across Yarriambiack Shire. National parks and reserves were created to preserve remaining natural Lowan Mallee areas from destruction.

The development of secondary industries began with the processing of products from the pastoral operations (such as butter, cheese and flour), followed by bakeries and blacksmith shops in the towns. The first blacksmith forge was opened in Warracknabeal when there were just 4 houses in the town. Bakeries, a coach builder and a flour mill all commenced operations in Warracknabeal in the 1880s, as well as the first agricultural machinery implement manufacturer, employing up to 40 workers during the busiest time of the year<sup>8</sup>.

In Yarriambiack, the imposition of wheat quotas in 1968, led ultimately to diversification and the increase in area of crops other than wheat. These broader range of crops included barley, field lupins, canola, chickpeas, faba beans, oats and lentils.

Towards the end of the resource based era of economic development, there were 61 factories in Yarriambiack Shire employing more than 300 people. Agricultural machinery and equipment manufacturing continued to be a competitive strength of Yarriambiack Shire's secondary industry, and there were also flour mills still operating in Warracknabeal and Murtoa.

### 2.1.3 Era 3 "Top Down" Economic Development

In the 1960's and 1970s regional economic development and decentralisation policy in Australia inspired a number of programs aimed at attracting industries, jobs, and population (in that order) to regional centres. The philosophy was that new or expanded businesses, usually in the agricultural, manufacturing or mining sectors, would bring with them economic, employment and population growth, both directly and through multiplier effects in the services sectors.

<sup>7</sup> Wimmera Region Resources Survey (1961), Central Planning Authority and Wimmera Regional Committee.

<sup>8</sup> Wimmera Region Resources Survey (1961), Central Planning Authority and Wimmera Regional Committee.



Many of the ‘top down’ policies stemmed from a perception that Australia’s growing population was becoming too urbanised and, more significantly, too concentrated around Australia’s capital cities and that an interventionist approach was needed in order to ensure balanced development was achieved and that major capital cities were not over-developed. A legacy of the Resource Era of Economic Development is Australia’s settlement patterns, moulded in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which laid the foundation for this urbanisation; enabled by settlement concurrent with the most significant transportation innovations in history (rail, steamship and motor vehicles).

Not only is Australia’s population highly urbanised, it is highly *metropolitan-ised*, with the majority of resident population located in the capital cities. The “top down” regional economic development approach concentrated on reducing this metropolitan concentration by decentralising of selected industries to prioritised regional centres. Governments continued to offer location incentives to relocating businesses during this era (such as freight rebates, rates ‘holidays’, cheap or low cost land and support with employment programs).

The relationship between agricultural, manufacturing and mining sectors, called the ‘basic’ industries<sup>9</sup>, jobs and the rest of the economy could be measured and targets for growth established. Regional strategic plans or, more correctly, development programs, were then formulated and related to planning, marketing, infrastructure, and service provision to achieve these targets. This approach was incorporated in the Australian Growth Centres program, and Victorian government decentralisation policies through the 1970s-1980s.

In Yarriambiack Shire, limited major business investment was attracted during this era, although there were both expansions and contractions in food processing and diversified agriculture, and growth in tertiary services and tourism.

In some areas, where particular centres have many competitive and location advantages, diversified natural resources, diversified industry mix and substantial government commitment, ‘top down’ intervention can still be relevant. However, in the overwhelming majority of regional areas the impact of labour market changes and changing economic circumstances has meant that basing economic strategies solely on the growth of production sectors is no longer a sound strategy. More significantly, almost all industry sectors are at least partly ‘basic’ in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, due to technology, globalisation and mobility. That is, most industries produce income from products and services that are consumed by people from outside the region (eg retailing, health services, professional, scientific and technical services).

#### **2.1.4 Era 4 Community Based, or Bottom-Up, Economic Development**

The 1980s and 1990s saw an important shift in the approach to regional development wherein it became accepted that economic growth is more effective when it occurs from the “bottom up”, with local communities involved in planning, investing in, and implementing new opportunities.

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<sup>9</sup> Basic industries were defined as those who brought a net economic benefit to a region because its products or services were not consumed within the region of production. So they brought income into the region which then flowed through the regional economy.

Rationale for the shift towards local community based economic development has come from the knowledge that (except for totally new “greenfield” developments, like a new mining centre<sup>10</sup>):

- Most new initiatives originate from within regions:
- The majority of new employment comes from the growth and diversification of existing businesses
- Most new regional investment comes from existing businesses, local public authorities and existing residents
- Most innovation comes from existing local entrepreneurs and skilled residents.

The arrival of the community based, or ‘bottom up’ era also coincided with Australian government policies to phase out all forms of protectionism for industry and to promote a global ‘level playing field’. The rationale was that Australia had a relatively small domestic market, abundant resources and a high standard of living which could only be maintained by innovative and competitive industries that could compete on a world scale, with competitive Australian exports, therefore more than matching any threats to local industries from imports.

Governments, both Commonwealth and Victorian, continued to have a role by supporting community economic development through policies and programs which stimulated and facilitated local and regional initiatives. Local Government had the prime role in facilitating and supporting community action.

During the ‘bottom up’ economic development era, almost all local government authorities in Australia began to employ economic development officers and established economic development units within their permanent organisational structures. During the ‘top down’ era, economic development had not emerged as a profession in its own right and people working in economic development (within Commonwealth, State, or specific regional organisations) were employed in teams that had an economic development function in combination, but they were trained as marketers, planners, surveyors, engineers, property managers or economists. Yarriambiack has had some economic development staffing in recent years.

### **2.1.5 Era 5 Sustainable Economic Development**

Economic development approaches during the early period of the 21<sup>st</sup> century continue to reflect the requirement of local communities to develop business initiatives and local employment to meet the needs of existing and expected population, rather than to assume that the attraction of development from outside will, by itself, create the necessary flow-on effects.

The significance of investment from within communities has not been dampened by the fact that knowledge based industries allow businesses to locate anywhere. Although traditional infrastructure and location barriers are less important for these businesses, their location decisions usually relate to the alliances, family connections or lifestyle considerations of the business owner, key employees or entrepreneurs.

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<sup>10</sup> Although in recent times mining developments have been organised as fly-in/fly-out or drive-in/drive-out arrangements, and not building the infrastructure for a new town or community

Economic development has shifted towards “creating a climate for innovation” rather than the traditional objective of the past “to create a climate for investment”.

Unprecedented new issues such as climate change, population ageing and globalisation of production and knowledge industries are changing the economic landscape dramatically and challenging the foundations of economic development theory and practice. For the first time since colonisation regional growth is now actively challenged, and frequently opposed, by local communities who protest that the price of growth is too high if it has a major impact, or even the risk of an impact, on:

- Local lifestyles or enjoyment of lifestyles
- Environment, cultural or heritage assets
- Health, safety and security.

Therefore, the new era is bringing an integration of economic, environmental and community development policy and practice. The new dimension brought to economic development from a focus on sustainability and innovation is at the core of economic vitality and quality of life. An innovative economy helps to create a healthy community.

*“Economic growth – meaning a rising standard of living for the majority of residents – more often than not fosters greater opportunity, tolerance of diversity, social mobility, commitment to fairness, and dedication to democracy. In contrast when an economy stagnates the resulting frustration generates intolerance, ungenerosity, and resistance to greater openness of individual opportunity”<sup>11</sup>*

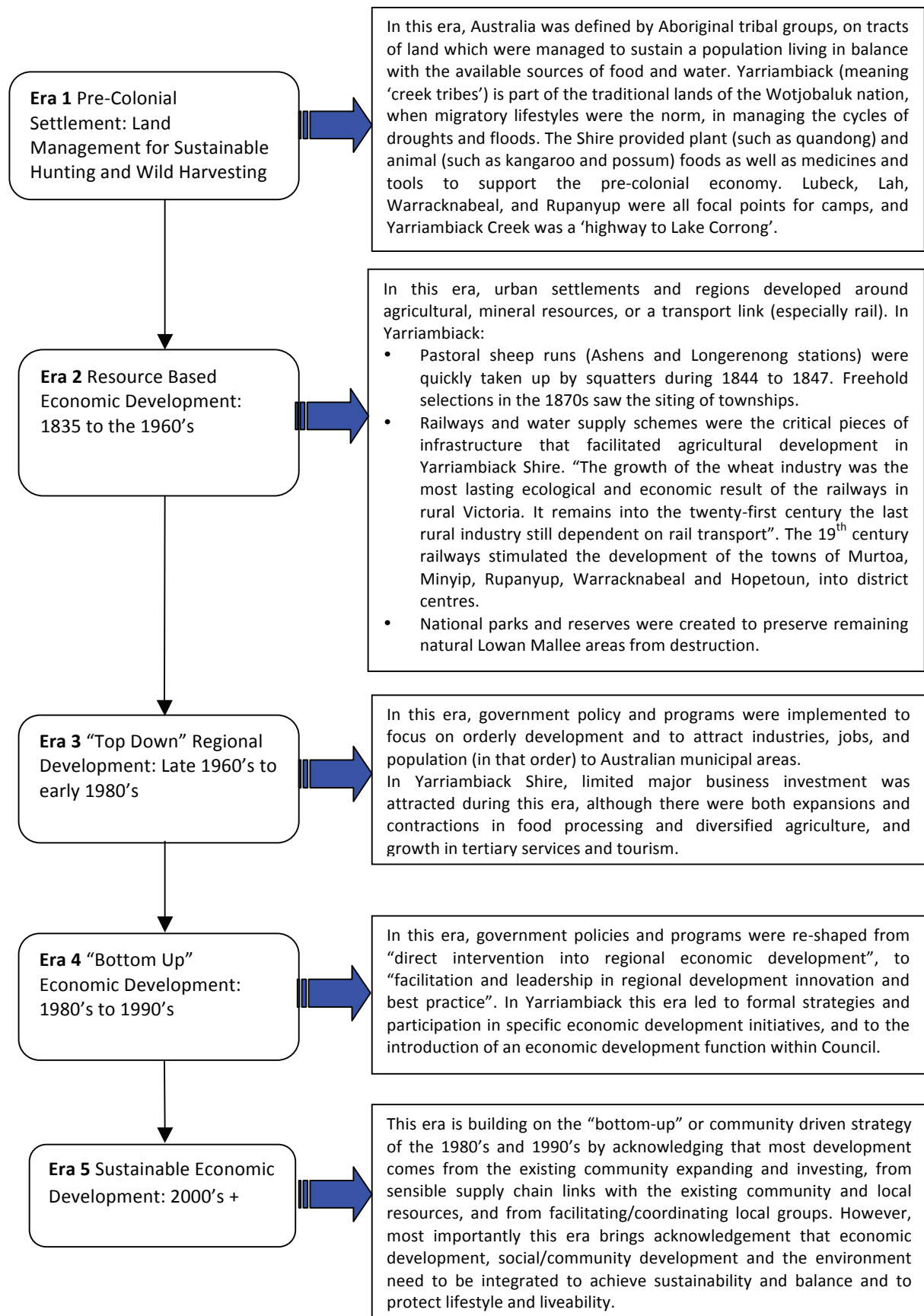
A summary of the regional economic development eras and the broad impact on Yarriambiack Shire is presented in Figure 2.2.

Community based approaches and mechanisms for regional employment and economic development have become accepted as the most effective and most sustainable way to achieve local development; in Victoria, Australia and around the world. This acceptance is based on two prime factors.

- (i) Most new businesses, new investment and new jobs in any region are generated by the existing community: Research in Australia suggests that the proportion is at least 70%.
- (ii) “Top down”, government initiated regional employment and economic development programs are rarely sustained. They are shaped, funded and often concluded within just one term of government office, yet their successful implementation and maturation may have a “lead time” of more than a decade.

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<sup>11</sup> Friedman, BM (2005), “The Moral Consequences of Economic Growth” Alfred A. Knopf

**Figure 2.2 Australian Economic Development Eras and Yarriambiack Shire**

## 2.2 YARRIAMBIACK'S PEOPLE

Yarriambiack Shire is in the north east of the Wimmera Southern Mallee region. The Wimmera Highway crosses the LGA at its southern end, passing through the township of Murtoa, the Borung Highway passes through the township of Warracknabeal in the centre south, and the Henty Highway extends up the middle of the Shire, passing through Warracknabeal, Beulah and Hopetoun.

Warracknabeal is the largest township in the Shire, followed by Murtoa, Hopetoun, Minyip, Rupanyup and Beulah. Warracknabeal is centrally located in the Shire; 57 kilometres north of Horsham and around 350 kilometres north east of Melbourne.

Yarriambiack's economy is highly dependent on broadacre farming and so are the Shire's urban centres, which have economies that have built their business bases to contribute to agribusiness supply chains and to provide services to farming communities. The agricultural activity is dominated by wheat, barley, lambs and wool, legumes, and oilseeds. This agricultural focus has given the Shire and its towns many distinctive features, strong resilience and connected communities (*"we look after our own in the Wimmera"* is a regional mantra), but it has also led to decades long population decline as farms have become bigger and more automated, and the financial returns from agricultural commodities have continued to decline in an increasingly competitive global environment. Boom and bust cycles created by severe climatic conditions and global pricing swings have made it difficult to attract new generations of farmers.

The total resident population of Yarriambiack Shire has been decreasing by 1.28% per annum on average over the past decade. In 2013, the population was 7,018 (having declined from 7,982 in 2003)<sup>12</sup>. The Shire achieved its peak population at the 1933 Census of Population and Housing, but has recorded declines at all Censuses since 1981. Table 2.1 summarises the changes in population over the 30 year period 1981 to 2011, in the Shire's main towns plus Woomelang and Beulah. It indicates:

- All towns have experienced population decline over the 30 years
- The towns in the north of the Shire have experienced the greatest rate of population decline in recent years
- Warracknabeal and Rupanyup recorded the lowest rates of decline
- Murtoa is the only town where the decline in population has been stemmed, and the town recorded a population increase of 0.92% per annum on average between 2006 and 2011.

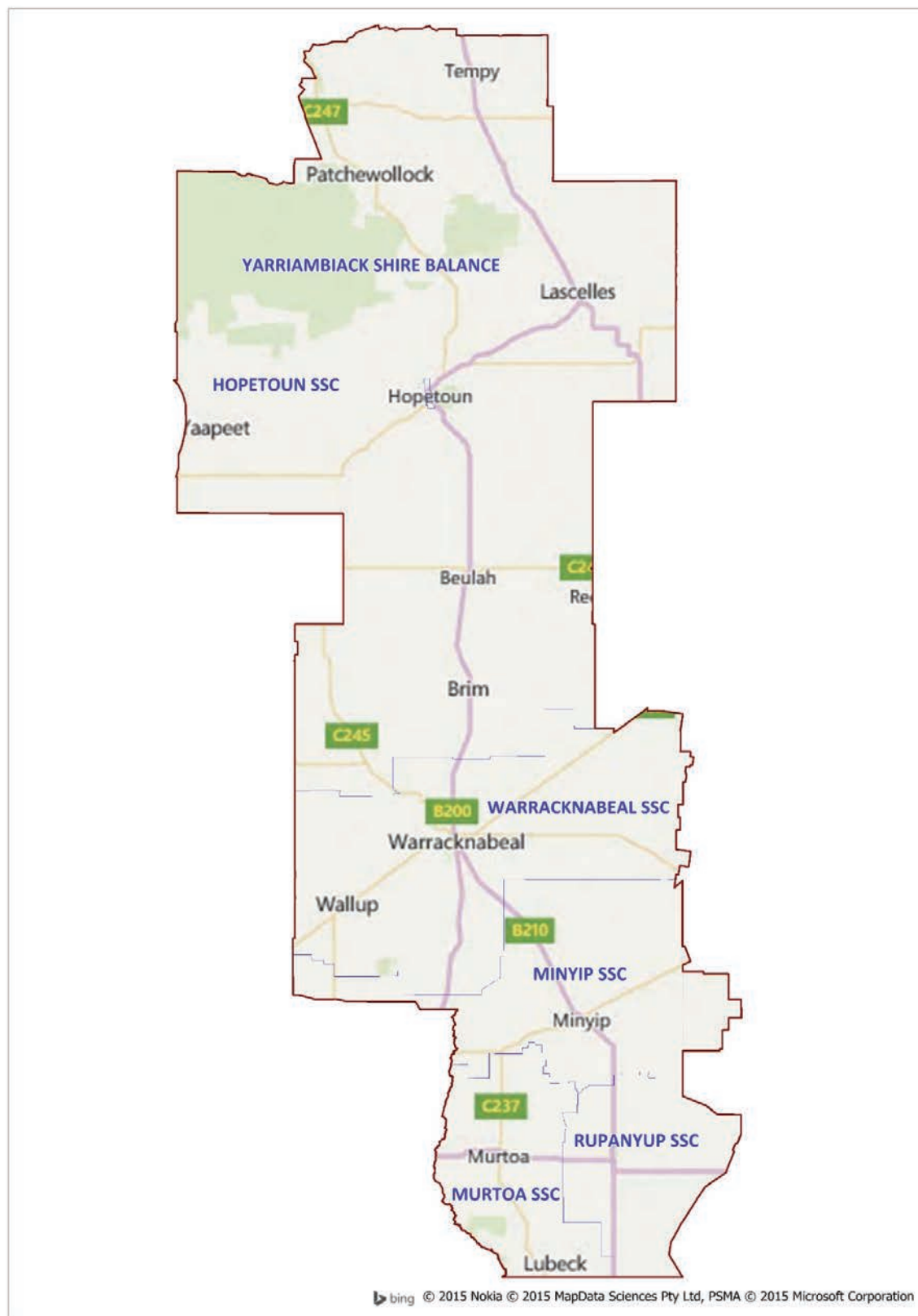
Current State Government population projections for Yarriambiack Shire<sup>13</sup> suggest that the population could reduce to 6,800 by year 2021, then stabilise and achieve modest growth (to 6,845 residents) by 2031.

<sup>12</sup> ABS Regional Population Growth, Australia (April 2014)

<sup>13</sup> Victoria in Future, 2014



**Figure 2.2 Yarriambiack Shire Map Showing SSC Boundaries**



**Table 2.1 Population Change in Yarriambiack Shire Towns: 1981-2011**

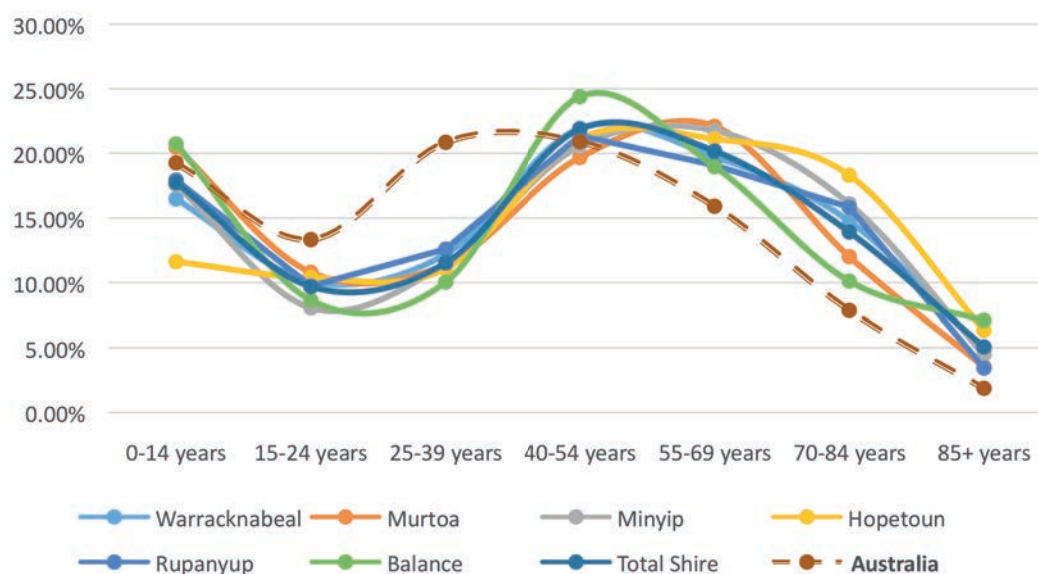
	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011	% pa 1981-2011
Warracknabeal	2,735	2,689	2,687	2,493	2,490	2,421	2,302	-0.57%
Murtoa	946	863	878	839	773	748	783	-0.63%
Hopetoun	832	750	704	670	625	586	528	-1.50%
Minyip	567	543	497	475	436	437	419	-1.00%
Rupanyup	406	446	422	407	399	370	344	-0.55%
Woomelang	290	275	221	217	211	194	186	-1.47%
Beulah	290	292	246	226	203	201	177	-1.63%

The age structure of Yarriambiack Shire's communities tend to be older than Australian averages. Table 2.1 and Figure 2.3 indicates that:

- Murtoa and the "Yarriambiack Rural Balance"<sup>14</sup> have a higher than average proportion of 0-14 year old residents than the national average.
- All Yarriambiack towns and districts have substantially lower than average proportions of residents aged 15-39 years. This reflects the out-migration of young people during their further and tertiary education training, but also suggests that this is not offset by in-migration of younger people to start their careers, and their families, within the Shire.
- Yarriambiack Shire has an above average proportion of residents aged 40-54 years with only Minyip and Murtoa slightly below average.
- For all age cohorts, from 55 years and older, all Yarriambiack towns and districts have higher than average population levels. Hopetoun has the oldest age structure in the Shire.

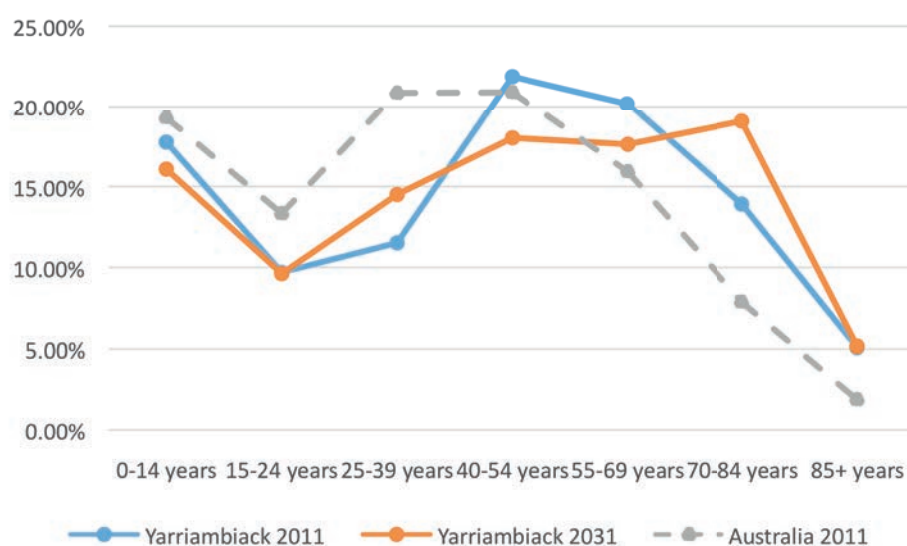
The age profile of the Shire is already older than Australian, regional Victorian and Victorian averages, and this ageing structure will become more pronounced over the next twenty years, which will create further demand for a wide range of additional services. Only 12.3% of Yarriambiack's resident population were born overseas (compared with the Australian average of around 28%).

<sup>14</sup> Yarriambiack Rural Balance includes the towns of Beulah, Brim, Woomelang, Speed, Tempy, Yaaapeet, Lascelles, Patchewollock and all districts outside those covered by the main towns.

**Figure 2.3 Age Structure of Yarriambiack Communities 2011****Table 2.2 Estimated resident population by age, Yarriambiack Towns and Districts (SSCs), 2011**

	0-14 years		15-24 years		25-39 years		40-69 years		70+ years	
	number	%	number	%	Number	%	number	%	Number	%
Warracknabeal	452	16.5	277	10.1	335	12.2	1,144	41.7	536	18.5
Hopetoun	66	11.6	59	10.4	63	11.1	240	42.3	140	20.6
Murtoa	203	20.5	107	10.8	113	11.4	414	41.8	154	15.5
Minyip	118	17.6	54	8.1	77	11.5	184	42.3	138	20.6
Rupanyup	94	17.9	51	9.7	66	12.6	212	40.4	101	19.3
<b>Yarriambiack Shire</b>	<b>1,228</b>	<b>17.7</b>	<b>671</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>797</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>2,911</b>	<b>42.1</b>	<b>1,314</b>	<b>19.0</b>

SOURCE: Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of Population and Housing 2011

**Figure 2.4 Age Structure of Yarriambiack Shire in 2011 and Projected 2031**

## 2.3 YARRIAMBIACK'S INDUSTRIES

The Shire covers land area of 732,580 hectares, of which:

- 6459,567 hectares is used for dryland agriculture
- 62,721 hectares is reserved for conservation or natural environments
- 18,505 hectares is used for intensive purposes.
- 1,783 hectares is water courses and catchments.

The dryland farming area produces one quarter of Victoria's total production of wheat and barley and is noted for the production of lambs and wool. Legume and oilseed crops are very important and alternative livestock enterprises are also well established.

Table 2.3 summarises the number of private sector enterprises in Yarriambiack (ie excluding government enterprises and agencies).

The number of farms in the municipality has steadily declined with the average farm increasing in size. Changes in farm size and numbers reflect increased efficiency; fewer people producing more in order for the grain industry to remain profitable in the face of deregulated markets and declining returns.

**Table 2.3 Yarriambiack Shire Business Enterprises**

Industry Sector	Number of Enterprises		Estimated Turnover (\$)
	2011	2013	
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	626	609	\$261,840,000
Manufacturing	16	18	\$11,490,000
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	4	6	\$585,000
Construction	60	55	\$9,445,000
Wholesale Trade	30	23	\$21,615,000
Retail Trade	49	38	\$17,545,000
Accommodation and Food Services	28	25	\$3,240,000
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	40	39	\$16,475,000
Information Media and Telecommunications	2	3	\$15,000
Financial and Insurance Services	30	27	\$4,010,000
Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services	62	69	\$7,750,000
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	23	12	\$3,775,000
Administrative and Support Services	22	13	\$3,035,000
Education and Training	5	3	\$15,000
Health Care and Social Assistance	12	7	\$5,150,000
Other Services	40	38	\$8,260,000
Not Classified	7	26	\$2,890,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,059</b>	<b>1,011</b>	<b>\$377,135,000</b>

Note: This table excludes government/public sector departments and agencies

SOURCE: ABS Business Register 2011 and 2013

Table 2.4 shows that agriculture employs 28% of the Shire's workers, followed by Health Care and Social Assistance, Retail and Transport, Postal and Warehousing. Warracknabeal is the largest town and other significant townships include Murtoa, Hopetoun, Minyip, Rupanyup and Beulah. Yarriambiack's population in 2011 was 7,498, having declined at an average annual rate of 0.7% over the last 5 years and 1.4% over the last year.



Table 2.4 also categorises employment into major industry sectors: Primary, secondary, tertiary, quaternary and quinary. The primary sector has always been the major employer in Yarriambiack Shire, although the share of total employment has reduced steadily for more than 50 years. The quinary sector (comprising industries which predominantly provide services to individuals and households) is the second largest employing sector in the Shire.





**Table 2.4 Employment by Industry in Yarriambiack Shire 2001-2011**

Sector	Industry	2001		2006		2011		% pa change
		Jobs	%	Jobs	%	Jobs	%	2001-11
<b>Primary</b>	Agriculture, forestry and fishing	1,104	33.17%	906	30.09%	764	27.81%	-3.61%
	Mining	3	0.09%	6	0.20%	9	0.33%	11.61%
	<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>1,107</b>	<b>33.26%</b>	<b>912</b>	<b>30.29%</b>	<b>773</b>	<b>28.14%</b>	<b>-3.53%</b>
<b>Secondary</b>	Manufacturing	166	4.99%	129	4.28%	114	4.15%	-3.69%
	Electricity, gas, water and waste services	42	1.26%	32	1.06%	25	0.91%	-5.06%
	Construction	107	3.22%	125	4.15%	134	4.88%	2.28%
	<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>9.47%</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>9.49%</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>9.94%</b>	<b>-1.42%</b>
<b>Tertiary</b>	Wholesale trade	120	3.61%	99	3.29%	101	3.68%	-1.71%
	Retail trade	325	9.77%	299	9.93%	237	8.63%	-3.11%
	Transport, postal and warehousing	172	5.17%	174	5.78%	171	6.22%	-0.06%
	<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>617</b>	<b>18.55%</b>	<b>572</b>	<b>19.00%</b>	<b>509</b>	<b>18.53%</b>	<b>-1.91%</b>
<b>Quaternary</b>	Information media and telecommunications	22	0.66%	17	0.56%	19	0.69%	-1.46%
	Financial and insurance services	52	1.56%	39	1.30%	37	1.35%	-3.35%
	Rental, hiring and real estate services	10	0.30%	8	0.27%	8	0.29%	-2.21%
	Professional, scientific and technical services	47	1.41%	46	1.53%	64	2.33%	3.14%
	Administrative and support services	56	1.68%	38	1.26%	35	1.27%	-4.59%
	Public administration and safety	89	2.67%	107	3.55%	112	4.08%	2.33%
	Education and training	258	7.75%	223	7.41%	202	7.35%	-2.42%
	<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>534</b>	<b>16.03%</b>	<b>478</b>	<b>15.88%</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>17.36%</b>	<b>-1.12%</b>
<b>Quinary</b>	Accommodation and food services	126	3.79%	97	3.22%	88	3.20%	-3.53%
	Health care and social assistance	427	12.83%	471	15.64%	466	16.96%	0.88%
	Arts and recreation services	23	0.69%	14	0.46%	6	0.22%	-12.57%
	Other services	104	3.13%	104	3.45%	86	3.13%	-1.88%
	<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>680</b>	<b>20.44%</b>	<b>686</b>	<b>22.77%</b>	<b>646</b>	<b>23.51%</b>	<b>-0.51%</b>
	Inadequately described/Not stated	75	2.25%	77	2.56%	69	2.51%	-0.83%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3,328</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>3,011</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>2,747</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>-1.90%</b>

SOURCE: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2011

## 2.4 YARRIAMBIACK'S VISITORS

Yarriambiack Shire has a range of experiences, assets and strengths which attract visitors. These include:

- Significant agricultural heritage collections, buildings and museums, including the Murtoa Stick Shed, Woods Farming Heritage Museum and Wheatlands Museum.
- A convenient base from which to explore national parks including Wyperfeld, Little Desert, Big Desert, Murray Sunset, Hattah-Kulkyne; and other natural attractions including Lake Albacutya Park, Annuello Flora and Fauna Reserve, Lake Corrong and Lake Lascelles.
- A variety of lakes in the shire also attract people interested in water sports, or quiet lake-side camping.
- Events, such as:
  - Patchewollock Music Festival
  - Y Fest, Warracknabeal
  - Barley Banquet, Rupanyup
  - Mallee Machinery Field Days, Speed
  - Murtoa's Big Weekend
  - Flower Show, Woomelang
  - Agricultural and Pastoral Society Shows
- A variety of cafés, hotels, craft outlets and 'op shops' in different towns.
- Ten caravan parks and camp grounds in attractive locations in the shire which attract touring visitors.



Food produce grown in the Shire is currently relatively unknown to most visitors, and some products are very limited in accessibility. However, there is potential for local produce to add more value to the Shire's tourism experiences (and tourism expenditure has the potential to add value to the agricultural sector) if the produce is packaged, branded and promoted for consumption by visitors and residents.

Local produce currently includes:

- Lentils and chickpeas packaged in small quantities by the Wimmera Grain Company;
- Barley, split peas, wheat, canola (grown in the area for bulk markets, but not packaged and branded for availability in small quantities for niche markets and visitors);
- Meat (lamb, beef, pork) is available at local butchers but not always promoted as locally produced;
- Honey is available in local stores in a limited number of locations;
- Eggs are available in local stores in a limited number of locations.

Overall the Wimmera Mallee Tourism Region (which includes the Shires of Yarriambiack, Buloke, Hindmarsh and West Wimmera) has 141,000 domestic overnight visitors, staying an average of 2.25 nights for a total of 317,000 visit nights<sup>15</sup>. The Shire's key tourism markets, by reason for travelling, are summarised in Table 2.5. All these markets offer opportunities for future growth in visitation and expenditure in the Shire, since they are growth segments for regional Victoria, and/or there is a strong match with the Shire's product strengths.

**Table 2.5: Current Tourism Market Segments for Yarriambiack Shire**

Market Segment by Purpose of Visit	Why Yarriambiack Shire Appeals
a. Touring – caravans and recreational vehicles (RVs) – generally retirees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiet, uncrowded, fresh air, healthy living</li> <li>• Sites are comparatively cheap or free</li> <li>• Some sight-seeing opportunities</li> </ul>
b. Outdoor adventure – water skiing, boating, four wheel driving (4WD'ing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally uncrowded and picturesque water courses</li> <li>• 4WD tracks in parks</li> </ul>
c. Agribusiness – business tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field days, on farm product launches and farm seminars</li> <li>• Central location for Wimmera Southern Mallee business networks</li> </ul>
d. Visiting friends and relatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Younger generations returning to visit friends and family</li> <li>• Family research (genealogy)</li> </ul>
e. Special interest, eg. car clubs, motorcycle clubs, field naturalists, bird watchers, heritage enthusiasts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiet touring roads (except during harvest season)</li> <li>• Close proximity to national parks and reserves</li> <li>• Heritage assets and museums</li> </ul>
f. Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity to experience the Wimmera Mallee cultural lifestyle, strong community connection</li> <li>• Special interest themes, such as agricultural machinery (both vintage/heritage and latest technologies), busking (at the Y-Fest) and seasonal harvest celebrations (eg the Barley Banquet)</li> </ul>

SOURCE: Discussions with tourism industry stakeholders 2014

In general, touring retirees tend to visit the smaller towns in the shire, and families tend to visit Warracknabeal, while events attract visitors of all ages. There are quite limited options for families in the Shire's smaller towns, with the exception of water-based activities in the warmer months in many locations.

<sup>15</sup> Tourism Research Australia, Regional Profiles 2012-13

Yarriambiack Shire Council is an active participant in Wimmera Mallee Tourism (WMT), a tourism marketing and development collaboration which commenced in 2011. WMT also includes representatives from the Shires of Buloke, Hindmarsh and West Wimmera, who work together with the aim of increasing visitation and expenditure to the region. To date, key marketing activities have included:

- Attendance at Caravan and Camping Shows
- WMT Facebook page
- Development of a brand tagline, 'Explore Victoria's Wildwest'
- Digital initiatives including a website, [www.wimmeramalleetourism.com.au](http://www.wimmeramalleetourism.com.au), and social media program.
- Regional visitor information at Mallee Machinery Field Days in Speed.

Local tourism organisation, Yarriambiack Tourism Association (YTA), includes tourism and community representatives from across the shire. It provides input to the tourism activities of YSC and WMT, as well as undertakes its own initiatives. In particular, YTA manages a Facebook page which promotes activities, events and attractions in the shire.

## 2.5 YARRIAMBIACK'S TOWNS

### 2.5.1 Warracknabeal

*"Warracknabeal's rise to dominance in the district was really confirmed when it became a railhead and could act as the jumping-off point into the Mallee country to the north, when it too was beginning to bloom into commercial value"<sup>16</sup>.*

Warracknabeal grew quickly after the railway was opened in the 1880s and it became a recognised regional centre during the inter-war era. The Age newspaper noted, in 1939, that "government policy envisaged Warracknabeal as a regional centre through which it could affect the social and economic conditions of the wider region. In 1954, the town's population exceeded 3,000 residents. By 1981, the population had declined to 2,735 and has decreased at an average 0.6% per annum for following 30 year period, and in 2011 was 2,302 persons.

The community vision (2013) for Warracknabeal is very much directed toward economic development. It is, to *"continue to create opportunities for economic growth and development for the ongoing sustainability of the township"*.

The Community Plan notes Warracknabeal is serviced by Rural North West Health Services, Warracknabeal and St Mary's Catholic Primary School and Warracknabeal Secondary College, as well as the Warracknabeal Special Developmental School and Woodbine Inc. Among the other major businesses in the town are Wilken Engineering, Bell's Farma Products, Smale Farm Equipment, Belle-View Trading, Emmett Motors, JJ O'Connor and Sons, Warrack Home Timber and Hardware, and the Creekside and Royal Mail Hotels.

<sup>16</sup> Priestley, Susan (1967), Warracknabeal: a Wimmera centenary, Jacaranda, Brisbane.

The Warracknabeal Community Plan has identified priority projects for achieving its community vision over the next few years. Some of these priority projects are included in the economic development strategies in Chapter 4, and some have been addressed, implemented, or partially implemented since the community plan was documented:

- Assessment of demand and funding for a community bus service
- Develop strategies to enable annual festivals to be financially independent
- Marketing of allotments on the town's industrial estate
- Continual improvements to the town's Leisure Centre
- Assessment of a free, short-term wayside stop for recreational vehicles, to encourage further visitation
- Assess and pursue renewable energy (solar and wind) projects within the Warracknabeal district
- Pursue options for establishing a new residential housing estate.
- Maintain and upgrade town signage and 'streetscape' the town entrances.
- Undertake a program of repairs and maintenance for the Town Hall precinct.
- Construct a pedestrian bridge at the northern end of the Yarriambiack Creek weir.

Warracknabeal has an active business organisation, Warracknabeal Action Group (WAG), which is a link between the businesses in the town (predominantly the commercial traders) and the resident community. The WAG Committee has 10 owners and managers, from a diverse mix of businesses, but with a good collaborative spirit.

WAG does not currently have a membership base, but intends to re-instate a membership system, to assist in delivering a work program of:

- Forums and workshops (on topical issues such as broadband communications, government regulations, taxation)
- 'Shop local' initiatives
- Christmas promotions.

Beyond WAG, most of the community based committees in Warracknabeal are resourced by older volunteers who have contributed for many years, and could not be expected to develop and steer new innovative projects. Warracknabeal's commercial centre is showing signs of 'fatigue' with several empty commercial spaces, and many aged structures that could benefit from either individual renovation, or streetscape work to refresh the overall image. Notably, some of the vacancies in Warracknabeal's central activities area are a result of business refocusing or restructuring (for example, the closure of Target, partially offset by new ventures such as Country Essentials), rather than simply reductions in levels of trade. Implicit in the Warracknabeal Community Plan is the need to place high priority on an upgrade of Warracknabeal's commercial centre, and substantial aesthetic improvements to the town's five main road entrances.

## 2.5.2 Murtoa

Murtoa was originally known as 'Marma Gully' when settled in 1873. It formed part of the Longerenong and Ashens pastoral stations and was situated adjacent to Lake Marma, which supplied water to the town. By 1882, Murtoa was a significant centre, accommodating a coach building and agricultural implement works and a cordial manufacturer as well as retail, food service and transport and storage functions.



The town's population was 1,197 in 1947, but declined gradually (but consistently), at an average annual rate of 0.9%, for the next 60 years to accommodate 748 persons in 2006. Murtoa is the first town in Yarriambiack Shire to have stemmed the long-term trend in population decline, and recorded a population growth between 2006 and 2011, to reach 783 persons.

Murtoa is beginning to be considered as a 'tree change' town for people working in Horsham Rural City, looking for a more rural lifestyle/rural community. Housing availability in Murtoa is a limiting factor in this emerging trend. Once, the tree-change phenomenon was a trend that occurred in locations relatively accessible to the major metropolitan areas, whereby people would choose a rural lifestyle in small communities and commute to work in a metropolitan area. The Mornington Peninsula and Yarra Valley to the east of Melbourne were early examples of the tree change trend. However, this trend has extended to small communities which are accessible to major provincial cities, which are becoming dense urban areas; examples include Bannockburn near Geelong, Buninyong near Ballarat, and Yackandandah near Albury-Wodonga. Arguably, Horsham Rural City is becoming a large enough provincial city to stimulate this trend, and Murtoa is well placed to develop as a commuter town, in balance with its own established business base. This established business base means that there are also residents of Horsham and elsewhere who commute to Murtoa to work.

The community and economic 'mood' in Murtoa is positive. A 2011 Latrobe University study noted three other factors which have helped to improve the economic performance of Murtoa: *"Firstly, the corporatisation of grain handling operations in the early 1990s rejuvenated employment in that industry and Murtoa had expanded its role as a regional centre. Secondly, local trucking and grain distribution and freighting businesses were stimulated by the corporatisation. And thirdly, a local joinery took advantage of redundant buildings near the railway line and established a successful business serving a large part of the Wimmera"*.

The community vision (2013) for Murtoa acknowledges the connection between residents, economy and environment. It is, to be *"a township and district that is economically and environmentally sustainable, vibrantly exciting and appealing for potential new residents"*.

The Community Plan notes the major employers in the town are Murtoa College, Graincorp, K&J Baker Cartage Pty Ltd, Solomit Industries, Schier Cabinet Makers, and Dunmunkle Health Services.

The Murtoa Community Plan has identified priority projects for achieving its community vision over the next few years. Some of these priority projects are included in the economic development strategies in Chapter 4, and some have been addressed, implemented, or partially implemented since the community plan was documented:

- Concept design developing the Barrabool Nature Reserve (including a track from Barrabool to Lake Marma)
- Continued support for Murtoa's major annual event, the Big Weekend
- Maintenance and upgrading works and marketing for the Caravan Park
- Establish a community gymnasium at the Murtoa Recreation Centre
- Continue to support, upgrade and further development of the town's Community Units
- Maintenance and promotion of the Murtoa Community website, and the additional development of a social media site (Facebook)
- Pursue rezoning of the former school site to become a residential or commercial subdivision.
- Continuing development of facilities at Lake Marma.
- Assess the potential to extend or improve visiting medical services.
- Support the Neighbourhood House in delivering community education, personal development and social inclusion programs
- Install an access ramp at the Murtoa Post Office
- Improve community transport by promoting volunteer drivers for Dunmunkle Health Services, and investigation improvements to the public bus service.
- Undertake initiation and project planning activities for a proposed Rabl Park and Wayside Stop development.
- Development of the Murtoa Stick Shed as a tourism and heritage enterprise (with a Committee of Management, access arrangements, and marketing)
- Prepare a Murtoa Streetscape Plan.
- Sporting facility improvements (change rooms and first aid room at the swimming pool, and synthetic green at the bowling club).
- Establish a community based arts committee.

### 2.5.3 Hopetoun

Hopetoun is located on the Yarriambiack Creek 61 kilometres north of Horsham. Its founder was Edward Lascelles who purchased 'Lake Corrong' station in 1878 and by 1891 subdivided over 26,000 acres of his land into 60 agricultural allotments averaging 480 acres each, while 84 township allotments were also carved out. The town itself was named in honour of the Governor of Victoria (and first governor-general), Earl Hopetoun. Lascelles was a pioneer in regional economic development marketing. He produced a full colour prospectus, in 1893, entitled The Mallee Country of Victoria and its Wonderful Resources. He even convinced the London Times to run a feature article on Hopetoun and district. All of this was used by Lascelles to promote investment in Hopetoun.

The town's population was 832 in 1981, and has declined at an average annual rate of 1.5%, for the next 30 years to accommodate 528 persons in 2011. Important businesses and enterprises in Hopetoun are Kalari Mineral Sands, Rural North West Health, Hopetoun Bulk Storage, and Gateway BEET (Business, Education, Employment and Training).

Hopetoun is a gateway to the Wyperfeld, Hattah-Kulkyne and Murray-Sunset National Parks, and is adjacent to Lake Lascelles and Lake Corrong.

The Hopetoun community is generally enthusiastic about the attributes of the town and district, its future prospects, and the potential for local community members to take on new business initiatives. The community vision (2014) for Hopetoun embraces these community attitudes. It envisages *“a township that is welcoming, visually vibrant, economically durable, environmentally sustainable and adequately resourced”*.

The Hopetoun Community Plan has identified priority projects for achieving its community vision over the next few years. Some of these priority projects are included in the economic development strategies in Chapter 4, and some have been addressed, implemented, or partially implemented since the community plan was documented:

- Introduce additional after school activities
- Secure additional funding and support for the agricultural show
- Build additional shade and seating at the bowling club
- Encourage business owners to develop their shopfronts (to improve the overall streetscape), and to utilise empty shop windows for historic, tourist and business displays.
- Renovate and extend the Hopetoun Recreation Reserve clubrooms.
- Establish a community garden (with associated skills training and access for all ages)
- Establish a compost making depot
- Construct a plantation near the tourist precinct (Lake Lascelles and Caravan Park) to conceal GWM Water's fences area.
- Erect historic interpretive boards around town, and conduct other tourism promotions.
- A feasibility study and opportunity identification for new independent living units/residential accommodation
- Lobby for improved internet coverage and television reception
- Extend Lake Lascelles to include unused reservoir as a wetland and fishing area
- Schedule and conduct regular community market days.
- Upgrade the Memorial Hall.
- Assessment of the potential to upgrade the old Bon Bon building
- Upgrade the pavements in the town centre
- Establish a 'pop up shop' as an outlet for local makers and producers, and an additional town attraction.
- Install seating and playground equipment at Poulton Park
- Landscaping and upgrades for the ski club
- Construct a solar heating system for the swimming pool.
- Upgrade the RSL Building to become a multi-purpose recreation facility
- Install a permanent shade structure for the skate park
- Develop a brick entrance for the town.



#### 2.5.4 Minyip

The township of Minyip was surveyed in 1875 on land separated from the 'Kirkwood' and 'Sheep Hills' pastoral stations. Most of the four sections with ten half-acre lots surveyed for the township in the same year. The town flourished as a service centre for the surrounding cereal cropping district for a century, and was selected by television producers (Crawford Productions) in 1984 as the town to be featured as "Coopers Crossing" in the long running television series The Flying Doctors.

The town's population peaked at 788 in 1954, declined to 567 by 1981 and continued to decrease at an average annual rate of 1.0%, for the next 30 years to accommodate 419 persons in 2011. Important businesses and enterprises in Minyip are Wimpak Exporting Company, Dunmunkle Engineering, Leith Engineering, Rupanyup/Minyip Community Bank (Australia's first community bank, shared with Rupanyup), and Donald Mineral Sands.



The community vision (2014) for Minyip is more directed to community attributes than economic development (although a healthy economy is implicit in the pre-conditions for a strong and attractive community). The vision statement seeks *"a community that is tranquil, prosperous, progressive, aesthetically vibrant and offers an attractive lifestyle for youth"*.



The Minyip Community Plan has identified priority projects for achieving its community vision over the next few years. Some of these priority projects are included in the economic development strategies in Chapter 4, and some have been addressed, implemented, or partially implemented since the community plan was documented:

- Introduce an annual concert at the agricultural show.
- Implement an arts project to paint power poles in the town
- Resurface the Bushland Reserve with a bluestone mix
- Establish water recycling and solar pumping in Church Street to irrigate the oval and bowling greens and fill wetlands. A complementary project is to install a water capture system from grain silos, to also use for oval irrigation.
- Upgrade Emma's Buildings (former Flying Doctors set and now café) with disabled and ramp access, solar panels, heating and cooling and panelling
- Upgrades for the golf club.
- Rezone appropriate land and develop an industrial estate, ahead of demand.
- Establish a walking track which links town features, including the wetlands and bushlands.
- Establish and maintain a Minyip website.
- Develop a master plan for the Recreation Reserve incorporating upgrades and new projects.
- Implement a maintenance program at the Senior Citizens building.
- Develop and implement a town streetscape plan.
- Marketing of Minyip's tourism facilities and attractions.
- Make provision for truck parking near the wetlands and caravan park
- Link the town's walking tracks to the main street/central activities area
- Create welcome packs, or 'newcomer kits', for new residents
- Further development of the wetlands and caravan park area (with solar hot water, tree planting, reticulated water, information board and facility upgrades).





### 2.5.5 Rupanyup

Rupanyup is located on Dunmunkle Creek, was first surveyed in 1873, and was first known as Karkarooc and then Lallat, an Aboriginal word meaning “branch hanging over water”. The surrounding area was previously part of two pastoral stations; ‘Longerenong’ in the west and ‘Warranooke’ in the east.

Rupanyup, like other Yarriambiack towns, is in the heart of an important dryland cereal and grain legume production area. The population of the urban locality of Rupanyup peaked at 650 persons in 1954 and this population has declined by 1.0% per annum on average over the past 57 years. Important businesses and enterprises in Rupanyup are Wimmera Grain Company, Dunmunkle Health Services, Tyler’s Hardware and Rural Supplies, Emmett Motors, and Rupanyup/Minyip Community Bank (Australia’s first community bank, shared with Minyip). Wood’s Farming and Heritage Museum is the pre-eminent visitor attraction in the town. The town has an active and committed Consultative Committee.

The community vision (2013) for Rupanyup reflects the clear ‘can do’ and resilient spirit of the community. It is, *“to have a township and district that is welcoming, environmentally rich, aesthetically pleasing, vibrant and economically prosperous”*.



The Rupanyup Community Plan has identified priority projects for achieving its community vision over the next few years. Some of these priority projects are included in the economic development strategies in Chapter 4, and some have been addressed, implemented, or partially implemented since the community plan was documented:

- Showcase local talent through the Rupanyup art and craft gallery, providing a reason for travellers to stop.
- Implement a community garden project
- Undertake a retail revitalisation program for the town’s central area (also linked to the town beautification project)
- Monitor, and take appropriate action over, school and kindergarten enrolments.
- Undertake feasibility assessments for energy savings and alternative energy generation options in the town (focusing on solar and wind, with biodiesel being currently deferred).
- Conduct a review of Dunmunkle Health Services with a view to maintaining and enhancing local service levels, and attracting a local doctor.
- Secure appropriate land and develop an industrial estate, ahead of demand.
- Analysis of community housing needs and opportunities.
- Establish a men’s shed

- Undertake a redevelopment program for Mount Rupanyup including a walkway to a rotunda on the summit and a walkway lined with native plants and gardens.
- Upgrade the lighting at the Recreation Reserve.
- Finalise payment of debt on the new Community Centre, and construct the west entrance.
- Develop a master plan for the restoration of Rupanyup railway station and secure the building.
- Maintenance and upgrades at the Rupanyup swimming pool
- Complete the town sewerage system and evaluate financial impacts on residents.
- Develop and implement a town beautification plan.
- Develop new town communications methods.
- Maintain and enhance town promotion and tourism activities
- Create a 'meandering trail' which link Rupanyup, Minyip and Murtoa via back roads and railway reserves (a 'rail trail' type track)
- Develop a strategic plan for Woods Farming and Heritage Museum, with associated extensions and marketing programs.

### 2.5.6 Other Towns

Other significant towns in Yarriambiack Shire are:

- Beulah
- Brim
- Woomelang
- Speed and Tempy
- Yaapeet
- Lascelles
- Patchewollock
- Lubeck.

Beulah and Woomelang each have local populations of more than 150 people, and the other towns are smaller. They all have a small business community, with some of the important businesses and enterprises being:

- Beulah: Rural North West Health, North West Ag Services, Naylor Engineering, and Shannon Brothers Transport
- Brim: RM Dixon and Sons and McPherson's Farm Supplies and General Store
- Lascelles: The Minapre Hotel
- Patchewollock: Rural Transaction Centre
- Speed: Poole and Jackson
- Woomelang: North West Ag Services
- Yaapeet: Complete Auto and Ag.

Beulah and Brim are sizable towns along the Henty Highway and Yarriambiack Creek; Woomelang is in the north west and home to the Cronomby Tanks Recreation Reserve; Patchewollock in the far north is a gateway to Wyperfeld National Park; Yaapeet is on the western boundary of the Shire and is a gateway to Lake Albacutya; Speed is the home of the Mallee Machinery Field Days.



The majority of these towns have community plans with visions *to retain the sustainability and liveability of the area*, with a wide range of initiatives, encompassing

- Improving the visibility and aesthetics of the town through signage, streetscaping and/or landscaping
- Enhancing features, or reasons, for visitors to stop in the town and spend some time. Typical proposed features include:
  - Travellers rest areas
  - Camping and caravan parks
  - Historical buildings, displays and interpretive material
  - Walking and bike tracks
  - Events
  - Art, craft and/or food outlets.
- Maintenance of community, sporting and recreation facilities (such as pools, clubhouses, sporting venues, and halls)
- Emergency/crisis response management
- Maintaining or securing essential infrastructure.

### 3. POSITIONING FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

This chapter presents a summary of results from regional research, discussions with key stakeholders, and comments and feedback from discussions with many of Yarriambiack's business leaders: Owners and managers of significant businesses in the Shire.

#### 3.1 REGIONAL CONTEXT

The municipalities in the Wimmera Southern Mallee region share many attributes, values and lifestyles and they rely on shared infrastructure. The region is a well-connected and relatively homogenous community, less affected by the major multicultural changes impacting on other parts of Victoria. The region's municipalities share economic characteristics and opportunities for economic development.

Throughout the region, farming practices are dominated by broadacre, dryland cropping systems based on wheat rotated with other cereals, oilseeds (such as canola) and grain legumes (such as faba beans, lentils and chick peas). Farm sizes vary, with the majority in the range 600 to 800 hectares, and some larger than 5,000 hectares.

The Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Plan (of Regional Development Australia) identifies the region as *"a proud agricultural region where participating in the life of its small towns and communities has been and continues to be a defining trait of the community"*<sup>17</sup>.

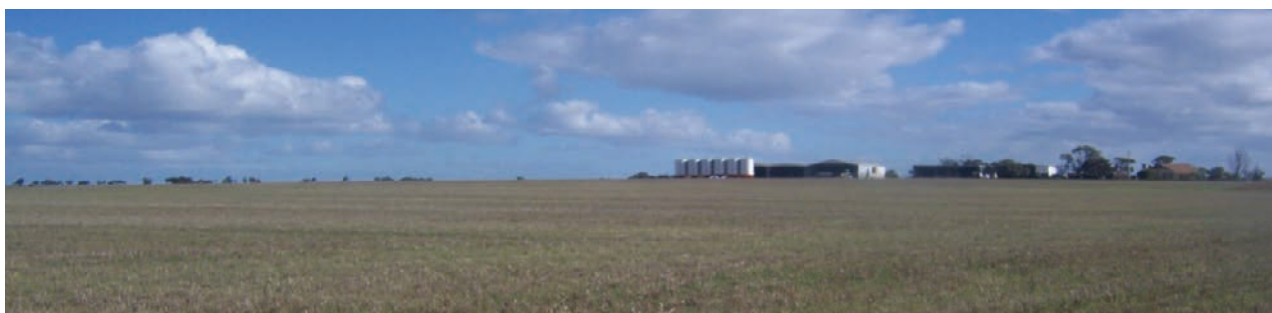
The drivers of change identified in the regional plan are:

- Increased agricultural productivity, larger farms and reduced demand for workers.
- A changing climate.
- Global food demand providing opportunities for food producing regions that can successfully adapt to climate change and other factors impacting on agriculture.
- Liveability factors.

Associated with these drivers of change are three regional goals.

- Regional Goal One: A Competitive and Innovative Economy.
- Regional Goal Two: A Healthy and Resilient Environment.
- Regional Goal Three: Community Well-being.

Yarriambiack Shire's Economic Development Strategy makes a contribution to these goals.



<sup>17</sup> Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Plan, Final June 2010

Important, distinguishing competitive strengths of the Wimmera Southern Mallee in general, and Yarriambiack Shire in particular, are as follows.

- It is the heart of Victoria's grain production (cereal and legume) and has been a source of innovation and efficiency in dryland production systems.
- Productive agricultural land has been the traditional basis for regional wealth, investment potential and sustainable industry creation.
- The region has both developed (Grampians National Park) and emerging (deserts, lakes and farm stay) tourism assets, offering a diversity of visitor experiences.
- There is a stable and accessible workforce (although somewhat ageing and with skills not necessarily well linked to new or changing jobs)
- There are reasonably well integrated agribusiness supply chains, flowing from research (especially agronomic and plant varieties) to agricultural input supplies, machinery and equipment, pre and post-harvest support, and processing/value adding.
- The region is accessible to south east Australian population centres (as markets, ports/distribution centres, and hubs for extended economic interactions).

There are several challenges and issues that impact on the economic outlook:

- Managing continuing structural change in agriculture, including changes to systems and practices in response to climate change and climate variability.
- Ensuring that expected diversification into intensive agriculture (derived from Wimmera Mallee Pipeline opportunities) and tourism are sustainable and of sufficient economic impact to help in sustaining the Shire's communities.
- Maintaining and extending services to meet the needs of the ageing population.
- Meeting threshold demand levels to justify provision of essential and lifestyle services and infrastructure.
- Avoiding skills and labour shortages to meet the new demands of changing industry sectors.



## 3.2 AGRICULTURE AND AGRICULTURAL SUPPORT SERVICES

### 3.2.1 Climate variability adds more uncertainty to agriculture and stimulates changes to farming practices.

Yarriambiack Shire has been exposed to climatic vagaries for thousands of years. Ebbs and flows of waterways, lakes and wetlands have been an enduring theme in the history of Yarriambiack Shire, influencing every facet of the economy and social activity. *“The most significant natural phenomenon to affect the history of human settlement in Yarriambiack Shire is the cycle connected with the abundance and scarcity of water – the extremes of flood and drought. The cycles of flood and drought have influenced the pattern and extent of settlement and the development of the agricultural economy”*<sup>18</sup>

Current scientific advice suggests the outlook is for climatic variations that are even more erratic than in the past, and that this presents challenges and opportunities. The opportunities relate to positioning the Shire (and broader region) as a centre for renewable energies, environmental management, efficient water capture and usage, and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. The challenges involve retaining the viability of dryland agricultural production, and in diversifying into more intensive agricultural production sectors, throughout climatic variations; droughts, floods, fires and other events.

The Wimmera Southern Mallee RDA<sup>19</sup> Regional Plan notes that the region is better equipped than ever to deal with droughts and other climatic events. It also notes that a healthy natural environment underpins the prosperity and liveability of the region requiring a continuation in the shift to more sustainable practices by industry as well as ongoing improved management of natural resources in the agricultural sector. The active pursuit of different renewable energy options is recognised as a potential new industry that will drive energy efficiency.

Different practices are part of the change in Yarriambiack agriculture. Adoption of conservation farming, no-till, direct drill, rotational plantings, and geographic positioning systems for precision farming and reduced soil compaction are all on the increase.

### 3.2.2 Seasonal variability and agricultural automation are reshaping Yarriambiack towns.

Seasonal variations not only have an impact on farming but still have a big impact on businesses in all the Yarriambiack towns, which emphasises that the ongoing restructuring of the local economy and jobs has not yet changed the overriding agricultural service centre functions of the Shire’s towns. These seasonal impacts combined with the seemingly ever increasing farm sizes and technology improvements mean that businesses have increased their trade area (ie the geographic spread of their customers). However, they also face new competition from businesses in other towns, beyond the Shire’s boundaries. Some agricultural service companies have multiple operations in Yarriambiack and other locations (such as North West Ag with branches in Warracknabeal, Beulah, Hopetoun, and Woomelang, and Emmett’s with branches in Warracknabeal and Rupanyup) while others have a single branch in Yarriambiack within a broader network (such as JJ O’Connor and Sons).

<sup>18</sup> Yarriambiack Shire Heritage Study Volume 1 (2012)

<sup>19</sup> Regional Development Australia

There are few agricultural machinery and equipment manufacturers remaining in Australia generally, so this is unsurprisingly the case in Yarriambiack which has been home to many broadacre farming innovations and manufacturing operations in the past. Businesses in Yarriambiack towns which were once manufacturers of agricultural implements, attachments and components have now changed their business to concentrate on individual projects (ie to jobbing operations) or no longer operate at all. Examples of how business has changed include:

- North West Ag was once primarily a supplier of tillage points and discs but over recent times has found that its greatest demand is for agricultural chemicals. New farming practices and technologies have also led to the hosting teams of agronomists (from a subsidiary business, Agrivision Consultants) operating out of every North West Ag office, providing services such as electromagnetic farm mapping, soil quality tests and on-farm planning. Many customers use a combination of Agrivision advisory services and North West Ag products.
- Bell Farma, a decade ago, was manufacturing tow bars and other attachments for trucks and other vehicles, but this has been entirely replaced with jobbing work; repairs, sheds, hitches, crushes and retailing of parts. The trade area for this business has extended up to a 100 kilometres radius from Warracknabeal.

### **3.2.3 Wimmera Mallee Pipeline is yet to achieve its potential.**

The majority advice among the Yarriambiack business communities is that the additional water security provided by the Wimmera Mallee pipeline has been warmly welcomed by the farm sector but there has not yet been a significant change to the type of farming activities being conducted. At this stage the pipeline has given some growers confidence to resume some farming enterprises which had been previously abandoned (such as running sheep or cattle in complement to cereal cropping), or to carry more stock and not cart water. Notably, there had been relatively good cropping seasons since the pipeline's completion until 2014, which reduced the level of interest in farm diversification.

Yarriambiack Shire's communities remain firm in their commitment to agricultural production as the ongoing mainstay of the local economy. The completion of the pipeline has added new security to the region's water supplies, and has further potential to open diversification opportunities for the Shire's broadacre growers, in areas such as:

- Sheep lot feeding
- Poultry production
- Tree and row crops
- Polyculture production.

Yarriambiack Shire, as part of the Wimmera Southern Mallee region, has several strengths or major strengths for intensive livestock production and that, generally, it is at least as suitable as other regions for intensive livestock production. Locational factors that are strengths for intensive livestock include:

- Proximity to feed supplies
- Biosecurity through the ability to apply suitable facility design and to apply buffer distances between uses/properties
- The potential for livestock industry growth and viability in the Wimmera Southern Mallee;

- Availability of local suppliers in equipment and maintenance.

The main intensive livestock opportunities which could lead to investment in Yarriambiack incorporate:

- Free-range (and to a lesser extent, organic) production systems. Growth in free range production for table eggs and poultry meat has begun in parts of the Wimmera Southern Mallee, and has further potential to enable growers to diversify their cropping enterprises by adding a breeding or grow-out production activity.
- Stockfeed manufacturing and formulation, both pelletised and mashed, to suit emerging production requirements (utilising local grains, free from added growth hormones and free from antibiotics).
- Technical, veterinary advice and shedding and systems supply.
- Intensive livestock industry collaboration in research, advisory services, value added product development, waste and by-product management, and production systems, labour force development, efficiencies in inputs (such as stock feed and litter) and logistics services.
- Bio-mass processing to produce thermal or other forms of renewable energy, and fertilisers, is an emerging opportunity that could best be developed through joint action across and beyond the region.
- Shared approaches to water savings and usage, renewable energies and other production efficiencies (again on a regional, rather than local, basis).
- Lot feeding of lambs, where one or more enterprise which adds another link in the lamb supply chain with the involvement of professional lot feeders who aggregate and finish stock (as their core business) and who have close relationships with processors, live-exporters, and retail and food service markets.

### 3.3 RENEWABLE ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES

#### 3.3.1 The Murra Warra Wind Farm has Strong Local Support

Renewable energy company RES Australia is working towards the establishment of a 110 to 117 turbines wind farm at Murra Warra in the south-west of Yarriambiack Shire (between Minyip and Horsham), and Council expects a planning application to be lodged within the next 12 months. This project will complement other wind farm developments by RES Australia, which are proceeding near Ararat and Penshurst. Together, the RES wind farming projects are expected to “inject \$1.5 billion into the surrounding communities over a 25 years lifespan”<sup>20</sup>. RES Australia operates 138 wind farming projects worldwide. The company has been measuring wind at Murra Warra for four years, with wind speeds measured up to 200 metres high. The Murra Warra project is estimated to involve capital development expenditure of \$650 million (a larger project than the Wimmera Mallee pipeline project, at \$500 million), and a construction workforce impact of 610 jobs (235 direct jobs and 375 indirect), utilising 100 motel beds in the region during peak construction phases<sup>21</sup>. Council estimates that the increased trade which will flow to local businesses during the construction phase will be \$6.4 million.

<sup>20</sup> Statement by RES Australia in *Wimmera Mail Times*, September 2014

<sup>21</sup> Yarriambiack Shire Council sourced data

Once operational, the Murra Warra wind farm venture will generate reticulated power to meet the needs of the equivalent of 180,000 houses. It will create 60 new jobs; 15 direct employees, and supporting 45 indirect jobs through contracts, supply chain connections, and household expenditure. The turbines will be located across 17 farming properties (occupying less than 1% of the farms' land area) and providing a non-agricultural dependent income stream for the 17 families involved. The local economic impact of the business will include:

- Increased Council rate revenue of \$850,000 per year (\$21.25 million over 25 years)
- A contribution to the Yarriambiack Shire Community fund of \$340,000 per year
- \$2.5 million in revenue to the host landowners
- \$35 million in wages for direct employees.

### **3.3.2 Mineral Sands Operations**

Kalari and Iluka have an involvement in Yarriambiack through a transport and logistics inter-modal facility at Hopetoun. The company has been road freighting the mineral sands from Iluka's mining operations near Ouyen to Hopetoun, where it is re-loaded to rail for shipment to Hamilton and southern ports. Although Iluka is shifting their mining focus from Ouyen to Balranald in the south of New South Wales, the inter-modal transfer at Hopetoun will continue. The company permanently hires cabins for staff in Hopetoun, and employs 33 people.

Donald Minerals Sands (DMS), a subsidiary of Astron Ltd, has an office base in Minyip. The company has had a presence in the Shire for 9 years and has been conducting drilling operations at several tenements in the district, to firm up the extent of mineral resources. Having proven the vastness of the mineral resources, the company is now looking for an investor to enable it to move to operations (extracting zircon, titanium, and other minerals for use in paint, cosmetics and medical applications). Subject to attracting an investor, the development is expected to involve \$500 million in capital expenditure, and the creation of around 80 jobs.

## **3.4 PLANNING, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITY SERVICES**

### **3.4.1 Planning guidelines should aid appropriate development**

There is considerable concern across the business community that, while planning controls are important to ensure orderly and appropriate development throughout the Shire, they are sometimes applied against the most stringent guidelines, without efforts to work through and overcome potential problem areas. There is a need for Council to adopt a supportive and collaborative approach in working with businesses to facilitate investments and to prepare conforming planning applications, especially when the proposals involve sustainable ventures, jobs and new investment.

### **3.4.2 Yarriambiack communities need to stay connected**

Community resilience and independence is an enduring strength of Yarriambiack towns and districts. But this is now being tested, due to:

- Mounting costs of road, bridge and other physical infrastructure, which are beyond the maintenance budget resources of Council.
- The ageing and 'stretched' volunteer base.
- Population thresholds in some of the smaller towns falling below the necessary level of viability to support re-investment in many businesses, particularly those where the owners are nearing retirement themselves.

Access to the latest communications technology in order to stay connected to community services and the global economy, and access to physical services (transport, power and water) will be important in keeping Yarriambiack towns liveable.

### 3.4.3 Housing Availability in Towns: Limited but Affordable

Lower market values have brought new people to several Yarriambiack towns, often driven by an affordability choice rather than a lifestyle or job choice. This is creating a situation where a proportion of residents are somewhat disenfranchised, with few social connections and low disposable incomes, and a shortage of quality housing for employees in the Shire's service sectors.

Household size has slowly decreased in the Shire for at least 3 decades. In 2001 the average household size was 2.54 persons per occupied dwelling, and by 2011 it had reduced to 2.22. Victoria in Future (2014) projections suggest that average household size will fall further, 2.13 persons per dwelling by year 2031. Single person households are already the largest household type in Yarriambiack (33.9% of all households in 2011, compared with 30.7% couples with children), and this is expected to remain the situation until at least 2031 (35.1% single person households and 30.4% couples with children).

Reducing household size should create demand for additional residential dwellings, somewhat offsetting the effect of reducing populations. However the Shire's residential housing stock has decreased by about 200 over the 10 year period (3,054 dwellings in 2001 and 2,852 in 2011). On average over the past five years there have been 10 new residential building approvals per annum in Yarriambiack Shire at about \$330,000<sup>22</sup> in construction value per dwelling, which tends to be somewhat higher than the local market value.

Research work undertaken by Wimmera Development Association<sup>23</sup> considered the attractiveness of investments in rental in order to meet the needs of in-migrating workers based on two differing investor types:

- Private investors (including community groups or community enterprises)
- Housing associations

In the development of some hypothetical scenarios, it was assumed that the rental return required by Housing Association type investors would be slightly higher than private investors (\$396 per week for the former and \$366 per week for the latter). These rent levels are considerably higher than the Yarriambiack Shire average dwelling rent level, which in 2011 was \$110 per week and just 0.8% of dwellings had weekly rent levels above \$275 per week. Nevertheless, investment in housing to meet the needs of incoming workers can be justified when the combined impacts of social and economic development benefits, rather than commercial returns, are taken into account. As with all community based ventures or social enterprises, these are precisely the circumstances in which they are justified.

Freeing-up, or releasing residential properties for which there are chronic 'rates in arrears' problems could also help to increase the local affordable housing stock.

<sup>22</sup> ABS Regional Profile 2013

<sup>23</sup> WDA and RDA (2013) Information Memorandum: Housing Investment Opportunities in the Wimmera Southern Mallee



### 3.4.4 Industrial Land Provision: to support new, expanding and diversifying business operations

Yarriambiack Shire has a shortage of serviced industrial land available for new or expanding businesses. Indeed, the Shire also has very limited areas, within the Planning Scheme, zoned for industrial use. This is expected to be addressed in the five largest towns through new urban growth plans.

In tandem with the urban growth plans, it would be timely to undertake an industrial estate feasibility assessment on the provision of serviced land, ahead of demand, in Warracknabeal, Hopetoun, Minyip and Murtoa. This feasibility assessment would be consistent with the urban growth plan for the selected town or towns.

The industrial land development feasibility should encompass:

- Identifying appropriate sites for industrial purposes and comparing the competitive advantages and opportunities affecting these areas
- Identifying disincentives to industrial investment.
- Identifying opportunities for linkages with existing businesses (particularly in grains processing, other agribusiness and transport providers).

Industrial development which has potential in the main Yarriambiack towns (not all of which are necessarily suited to location on an industrial estate), include:

- Renewable energies and bio-fuels processing
- Grains, grain legumes and oilseeds processing and value adding
- Other food/agricultural product processing and value adding
- Packing
- Storage and warehousing
- Transport services
- Trades businesses.

### 3.4.5 Changes in Town Populations and Surrounding Districts

There is a perception among some community members that, over recent years, populations in the larger towns in the Shire have become relatively stable, while district populations continue to decline. This is not yet borne out by the available population data, which indicates that only Murtoa has achieved a turnaround in population in recent years. Perhaps the 2016 Census will support the community perceptions and anecdotal evidence on stability in other Yarriambiack towns.

### 3.4.6 Community Enterprises could lead the way, in combining social objectives and commercial realities.

Arguably there is nowhere more likely for community enterprises to succeed than in Yarriambiack. *'We look after our own in the Wimmera'* has long been a local mantra, and there is an impressive track record to prove it. For example, Community Bank branches had their origin in Rupanyup-Minyip, and Warracknabeal's Yarriambiack Lodge with its Montessori methods in improving quality of life, memory support and greater choice and decision making for people with dementia.

The need for new community enterprises in the Shire should only arise when and if private investors and business operators are either unable or unwilling to meet the communities' demand for products and/or services. Over the next few years, this need is likely in some Yarriambiack towns for:

- Supermarkets and convenience stores
- Accommodation and/or food service establishments
- Community recreation centres and integrated clubs.

As a direct result of the track record of Yarriambiack Shire communities, it has the potential to be a pilot area for a proposed Powering Super Communities program by the Bendigo Bank, and/or to partner philanthropic or social enterprise organisations in establishing community enterprises which will be a model for other parts of rural Australia.

### **3.4.7 Signage, town entrances and streetscapes.**

An overwhelmingly consistent theme in the Yarriambiack towns current Community Plans, as well as feedback from the business community, is the call for themed, attractive and consistent signage across the Shire, particularly at town entrances, together with town streetscaping programs to help in revitalising town central activities areas.

The main suggestions, for all significant towns, are:

- Install town entry 'welcome' signage that indicates 3-4 major attractions in the town, eg. caravan park, lake reserve, heritage walk.
- Position on major access routes, along with directional signage to main streets (especially at Warracknabeal).
- Signage could have a common style across the shire (reflecting shire's tourism brand) but reflect a unique theme and image for each town.
- Audit signage to key tourist facilities in each town, such as toilets, and address improvements required.
- Install town entry boards that provide information about local attractions and facilities, and their locations and opening hours.
- Review the road entries to all major towns to identify opportunities for beautification, such as landscaping and street lighting. Complement the town entry signage with a staged streetscaping program in each central activities area.

### **3.4.8 Health and aged care facilities are Shire strengths**

Demand for health services is growing in response to an ageing population, lifestyle-related diseases and new healthcare technologies. There are high expectations in the community about health services and outcomes, and spending on healthcare has consistently grown faster than GDP. In Yarriambiack 'health care and social assistance' is now the second largest industry by employment (after agriculture) and is one of few sectors that continues to grow.

The main employing sub-sectors in Yarriambiack are:

- Hospitals (100 jobs)
- Aged care residential services (57 jobs)
- Other allied health services (46 jobs)
- General Practice Medical Services (19 jobs).

Major health and social assistance employers in the Shire are Rural North West Health, Dunmunkle Health Services, and Woodbine Inc., each of which operate a range of subsidiary enterprises.

The impact of ageing in Australia, from the 'baby boomer' generation moving into retirement age cohorts for at least another twenty years (with retirement ages expected to stretch to 70 years), is well known. In percentage of the population terms, this impact will be very significant in Yarriambiack Shire, to the point where the "population pyramid" for the Shire will look more like a cube than a pyramid by 2031. Residents aged less than 60 years are expected to decline from 73% of the total in 2011 to 65% by 2026, with 35% in the retirement age range.

The economic development strategies in the wider Wimmera Southern Mallee region recognise the need to cater for an older aged population by strengthening local communities, planning for health and community services (the Wimmera Health Services Plan), and expanding the Department of Human Service's 'hubs programs' in priority towns, and community planning and development in smaller communities.

### **3.5 RECREATION SERVICES**

#### **3.5.1 Future social and sporting club mergers and working together are inevitable**

Sport, recreation and culture is a growth sector throughout Australia, but the growth is in non-traditional forms of recreation. Traditional sports such as football, bowls, tennis, cricket and golf have been among the main sports where mergers and/or working more closely together has become necessary. This is not just a result of reducing populations but also a change in the sport and fitness industries. Traditional forms of most sports have experienced changes in participation, in favour of short-term flexible options. For example, Auskick, AFL9s, T20 Cricket, Tennis Hotshots and the new bowls program Jack Attack have become popular participation forms within larger sports, as well as individual fitness programs which enable people to run, cycle, swim or use a gymnasium at times that suit their lifestyle.

#### **3.5.2 Water Storages are Key Liveability Assets**

Creeks, weir pools, and lakes are major features of many of the Shire's towns, including Warracknabeal, Murtoa, Hopetoun, Beulah and Brim. They provide social value (in terms of morale, pride, relaxation and community spirit) and improve overall liveability. At Hopetoun a stocked fish haven is being developed within Lake Lascelles, adding to the appeal for both locals and visitors.



### 3.6 TOURISM

#### 3.6.1 Tourism Challenges

Tourism visitation in the Shire has a relatively low base. There are challenges in conveying the tourism features of the Shire, encouraging current visitors to stay longer/return again, and attracting new visitors:

- It is about 4 to 4.5 hours drive to the Shire from major capital cities Melbourne and Adelaide), and 2.5 to 4 hours from major provincial cities (Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong), which are the origins of many of the shire's visitors.
- The Shire has quite a limited range of developed attractions, visitor infrastructure and amenities. In particular, there are few attractions for the family market.
- There are very limited accommodation options in the shire, many of which require upgrading to meet contemporary expectations and recent trends in tourism accommodation. There are some exceptions in recently upgraded caravan parks and the Mallee Bush Retreat.
- Weekend opening hours for dining venues and take-away food options throughout the Shire can be very limited. There is potential for collaboration across neighbouring townships to inform and coordinate trading times and services in order to better meet visitor needs. This information could be included on Google Maps so visitors can access information while travelling through the Shire.
- Communicating to visitors that there is recreation water in many towns, especially after news of dry conditions in the past year.
- New investment is needed by tourism operators (private sector businesses and/or community enterprise initiatives) to expand the number, range and quality of visitor experiences.
- Business closures in central activities areas of several towns have a flow-on effect to the availability of services for local residents, and consequently for visitors.

### 3.6.2 Promoting Yarriambiack's natural environment

Tourism in Yarriambiack is modest; being largely focused on events and heritage. There is potential to extend this range around farm, desert, water storages and other natural environment attractions.

Through collaboration with adjacent Shires, Yarriambiack can be part of a regional push to showcase the water-courses, colours, vegetation, and geological features of the outstanding parks in the region, including:

- Wyperfeld National Park
- Big Desert National Park
- Little Desert National
- Lake Albacutya Park, and
- Tourism jewel of the Wimmera, Grampians National Park.

A regional approach to tourism is needed to provide a compelling product offer, in order to enhance visitation levels to these, mostly natural, attractions across the Wimmera.

Farm tourism has potential in Yarriambiack, but may face health and safety barriers.

### 3.6.3 Events are a major part of Yarriambiack tourism: Maximise the benefits

Events attract significant local patronage, but many also appeal to visitors. They usually have low infrastructure costs, and are hosted with the voluntary support of local communities. They can also be held at most times of the year. Events should be supported, as feasible, to continue to deliver community and tourism benefits. Many of the events attract special interest or niche markets (such as those interested in fishing, vehicles or a particular sport) or are trade events (such as machinery field days), but they still generate strong visitation. Support for event organisers to identify and promote to their niche markets would greatly assist.

As an example of the significance of events in Yarriambiack, a brief economic impact assessment of the 2014 Mallee Machinery Field Days in Speed, as part of the economic development strategy project. The Mallee Field Days is one of the key agricultural machinery and equipment trade events in a crowded, but rationalising, annual program of field days. The event, in 2014 involved:

- 284 industry exhibitors of which 230 had open air sites and 54 undercover
- Yarriambiack Shire businesses are well represented among the exhibitors, with 13 having a base in Yarriambiack Shire: Wimmera Grain Company, Wimpak, Dunmunkle Engineering, Emmett Motors, JJ O'Connor and Sons, Smale Farm Equipment, Poole and Jackson, North West Ag, Agrivision, GrainCorp, Bell's Farma Products, Belle-View Trading, and Rupanyup Nursery.
- 8,000 visitors
- Input of over 5,500 volunteer hours
- Direct support to over 20 community organisations in Hopetoun, Speed, Tempy, Woomelang and Patchewollock, and towns in the adjacent Shire of Buloke (Sea Lake and Nandaly) and Rural City of Mildura (Ouyen).

The estimated economic contribution was \$719,750 as summarised in Table 3.1. These estimates do not include any of the business transacted at the event or subsequent equipment sales.



Towns in adjoining municipalities, Ouyen and Sea Lake in particular benefit, from the field days through accommodation and food services expenditure of exhibitors and visitors, and a range of community service organisations.

**Table 3.1 Estimated Economic Contribution of the Mallee Machinery Field Days, Speed in 2014**

Contribution	Amount	%
Exhibitor costs	\$267,900	37.22%
Attendee admissions	\$87,000	12.09%
Accommodation and food service	\$67,000	9.31%
Promotions and sponsor expenses	\$21,600	3.00%
Maintenance and site costs	\$131,700	18.30%
Total Direct	\$575,200	79.92%
Indirect (flow-on contributions)	\$144,548	20.08%
<b>Total Direct and Indirect</b>	<b>\$719,748</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

SOURCE: Street Ryan estimates from Field Days data, discussions and site visits



### 3.6.4 A New Agrifood Brand Positioning

Consistent with the overall structure of the Shire's economy, people outside the shire (ie the potential visitors) appear to associate the Shire with agrifood production (especially cereals and legumes) more than any other feature or attribute. Indeed the Shire's main tourism attractions, other than those that rely on natural or environmental features, are largely agricultural heritage attractions. However, tourism promotion does not tend to 'claim' the contemporary food production features as a source of pride, to encourage, and to exploit. The agricultural heritage attractions are of sufficient historic importance, and 'experiential' to be packaged into a destination in their own right. They include;

- The Murtoa Stick Shed, Murtoa ("the largest rustically-built structure in the world")
- The Wheatlands Museum, Warracknabeal
- Wood's Farming and Heritage Museum, Rupanyup
- The William Farrer monument, Minyip.

Although all the existing agricultural heritage attractions are excellent in their own right and invariably receive positive feedback from visitors, there could be greater integration of these attractions; in terms of packaging them into a single tour or visit trail, increasing their accessibility and operating hours, linking visits and tours to them with events, and combining them with contemporary agricultural tours and visits.

There is potential to encourage visitation by developing an appealing brand which combines the agricultural heritage and contemporary industry. Yarriambiack Tourism believes that “celebrating our great grains” could be a brand positioning which brings together the region’s agricultural history, current lifestyles, local produce, and promotes the scale of broadacre production (‘contributing to feeding the nation and the world’). This brand positioning should be used as an umbrella under which the various visitor experiences and products associated with agriculture can be promoted, such as:

- The scale and processes involved in local produce; grains, legumes, oilseeds, and lamb and the applications of these products (such as bakery, beer, and spreads)
- Agricultural production:
  - Industrial heritage (machinery and evolving farming practices over the generations in the Wimmera Mallee) via the machinery museums, the world unique Murtoa Stick Shed, tours, and trails.
  - Modern farming in the Mallee region, and associated culture and lifestyle – via agricultural and other local events. These provide a particularly good way for visitors to meet local residents and to experience a little of local life and culture.
  - Further development of products made from local produce at a small scale, such as dips from pulses, grain mixes and mueslis, microbrewery craft beers from Yarriambiack grains, would be valuable in providing a tourist consumable product range to strengthen the brand positioning.

### 3.6.5 Tourism Support Services and Attractions

Suggestions for expanded tourist support services and attractions are as follows:

- Investigating the potential for Yarriambiack Shire Council to develop more cabin type accommodation in their three caravan parks that would be available for casual holiday rental.
- While there is some effective, good quality onsite interpretation at various sites within the shire, there would be benefit in auditing existing interpretative information and extending the material to tell the story of each town’s history (including Indigenous and rural hinterland histories), characters and attractions. For some towns this may become a walking tour and could link with the Community Plans which aim to create trails and paths. Interpretive signage can encourage visitors to stay longer and potentially spend more in local communities.
- With the comparatively high level of return on investment for rental properties, from the existing residential and/or commercial housing stock (including buildings with heritage value) in Warracknabeal and some of the other main towns and on farms, holiday rental accommodation is worthy of feasibility assessment.
- Continue to offer the “Commercial Building Improvements Program” which has had some success upgrading properties in main streets.

- There are many worthy tourism related developments in the Current Community plans, such as:
  - Development of Murtoa's railway precinct (by the Historical Society) to tell more of the story of the area's grain history and local lifestyles.
  - Further expansion of Woods Farming Heritage Museum to include more displays and shedding.

### 3.6.6 Tourism Marketing and Visitor Information

The following steps and initiatives have been identified to lift tourism marketing and tourism information in the Shire.

- Clarify target markets and marketing activities associated with attracting new residents and visitors to the shire. While there is generally some overlap in approach, some activities should be specific to each purpose and market.
- Develop a variety of touring themed itineraries for different markets to make it easier for visitors to connect experiences according to geography, topics of interest and life stage (eg families). Starting itineraries from various entry points to the Shire, some itineraries should highlight popular attractions that will appeal to multiple markets. Others should be themed to specific interests and travel groups, such as retiree social groups and independent touring visitors interested in agricultural heritage.
- Each town to also develop itineraries to link attractions in their local area.
- In association with Wimmera Mallee Tourism (WMT), identify opportunities to leverage visitation to the Grampians region travelling through the shire to the Murray River and Mildura, through cooperative marketing activities.
- Provide support for promotion, and to co-ordinate the itineraries of groups visiting the shire's attractions. This would be very helpful for community-based organisations managing the Shire's museums and other attractions.
- In association with WMT, identify a series of low-cost options for local tourism businesses to promote themselves and encourage take-up of the opportunities.
- Improve the marketing linkages between the shire's attractions and local events to encourage visitors to attractions to consider attending an event, and vice versa.
- Increase the number of tourism operators who are providing content for WMT's social media campaigns, and the frequency of content input.
- The review of the WMT website should include opportunities to include a webpage per operator, as many operators don't have online content. It should ensure material can be updated directly by the operator, and include more content on the attractions, facilities and service available in each town.
- Visitor information is available within the shire at Warracknabeal Tourist Information Centre. It would be useful to locate a self-serve information kiosk in each town at a commercial or public facility which is open seven days a week.

### 3.7 SUMMARY OF PRIORITISED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INDUSTRY SECTORS

The prioritised list of high, medium and low economic development opportunities, by industry sector, following the discussions with business leaders throughout the Shire, interviews with other stakeholders, and research on trends and industry outlooks, is summarised in Table 3.2

**Table 3.2 Summary of Prioritised Economic Development Industry Sector Opportunities**

Sector	High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
Primary	Intensive livestock (lamb finishing, poultry meat, eggs, game, pigs)		Beef lot feeding
	Pulses/grain legumes		Tree and vine crops
	Climate responsive systems		Mining
	Gourmet food niche production		Aquaculture
Secondary	Stock feed manufacture		Wood products manufacture
	Local product value adding		Metal and mineral product manufacture
	Agricultural machinery and equipment components		
	Housing for the services workforce		
Tertiary	Community retail enterprises	Road transport	Rail transport
		Specialist aviation	
		General retailing (themed, multi-faceted and community based)	
Quaternary		Enviro and agri-technologies	Training services
		Trade events	Finance and property services
			Professional, technical and scientific services
Quinary	Food services (café, catering, restaurant and specialty outlets)	Boutique accommodation	Specialist health services
	Agritourism, agrihistory and tourism trails	Sports/recreational enterprises and collaborative/merged clubs	
	Active aged care/retirement accommodation		



## 4. STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

### 4.1 RESOURCING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN YARRIAMBIACK SHIRE

Economic development has only been a functional area within local councils over the past 20 to 25 years, as the community based, or 'bottom-up' era of regional development has been unfolding. It makes sense for Councils to be involved, but the extent of involvement is necessarily limited at a time when rural Councils are under financial pressure and have difficulties in meeting infrastructure and maintenance demands. In this environment Yarriambiack Shire Council does not have the financial resources to support a highly proactive economic development work program.

Council has determined that it is currently unable to support a dedicated economic development staff function. With or without dedicated economic development staff, Council has a role in:

- Creating a climate for investment by, for example:
  - Facilitating adequate industrial, commercial and residential land in advance of demand.
  - Ensuring that soft and hard infrastructure is competitive and adequate to support efficient business operations
  - Crafting attractive town centres and entrances.
- Creating a climate for innovation by reducing barriers, streamlining processes, encouraging collaboration, and assisting businesses to access government programs and research and development partnerships.

The Yarriambiack Shire economic development strategies presented here are designed to assist council staff to have an economic development focus across the organisation, without an explicit economic development staff unit. They assume Council will have an ongoing commitment to economic development facilitation and support in creating a climate for investment and innovation, and in being a proactive auspice (either alone or in partnership with community organisations) to attract economic development initiatives to the Shire.

### 4.2 DIRECTIONS AND PRIORITIES

There is consistency in the economic development directions identified by the municipalities in the Wimmera Southern Mallee. Those that are appropriate for Yarriambiack are:

- Capitalising on opportunities to be derived from the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline
- Supporting innovative and sustainable energy solutions
- Addressing infrastructure deficiencies, particularly associated with transport and with telecommunications and information technology
- Encouraging existing businesses to thrive through providing access to information and support services
- Providing services (including infrastructure) that enhance the liveability of communities and addresses population drift away from the region
- Embracing a co-operative approach to tourism marketing and supporting the development of regionally significant tourism products, including provision of infrastructure to support those products
- Preparing for, and taking advantage of, opportunities associated with climate change and a low carbon emissions future
- Continuing to improve the efficiency of water utilisation and natural resource management.



Agreed Yarriambiack Shire economic development directions embrace:

- ❖ Continuing to strongly support the broadacre farming industries in the Shire, which will always be a major fabric of the Yarriambiack economy: Grains, grain legumes and oilseeds, and sheep for wool and meat.
- ❖ Encouraging the expansion of intensive agricultural enterprises following the construction of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline.
- ❖ Maximising local value adding to agricultural products. This could include marketing, logistics and unique relationships; not just adding value to products (through packing, grading, mixing, milling, etc).
- ❖ Being a rural Victorian leader in facilitating Community Enterprises, potentially as a 'model' municipalities for Bendigo Bank's Building Super Communities program, or through alliances with philanthropic and/or social enterprise peak groups.
- ❖ Seeking investment and regular upgrades for critical town and rural assets (road, rail, airstrips, recreation areas, parks, waterways and storages, historic features and commercial and industrial precincts).
- ❖ Supporting to Shire's strong and caring communities in their efforts to retain and enhance services, attract visitors and new residents, and to implement innovations.
- ❖ Theming towns and providing a consistency in town entrances, streetscapes and interpretive information.
- ❖ Considering the costs and benefits of Council incentive and support packages for new and expanding businesses
- ❖ Valuing, promoting and supporting events and community festivals.

There remain several important and topical areas which are not explicitly addressed in this Economic Development Strategy, but which are likely to require Council policy considerations over future years; perhaps beyond the term of this strategy, and perhaps during its term. They have not been explicitly included, in part because some are in their infancy as local economic development issues, and in part it is because the topics are sensitive among some Yarriambiack's business and community groups. The identified topical areas likely to emerge in the next few years for debate and direction/policy setting are:

- The viable and sustainable threshold for differing services in small towns and villages in the Shire, and the support they require in order to make best use of resources and to provide cost-efficient infrastructure. This is currently an issue in Woomelang, where the commercial centre is considered by the community to be 'in a state of crisis'.
- Agricultural practices and technologies that will sustain Yarriambiack's broadacre and biosecure farming sector as a world competitive food producer, and the appropriate balance and competitive strengths associated with each technology (such as organic farming, biological farming, intensive and semi-intensive production, and genetic engineering)
- Land management approaches and policies on rights to farm or rights to develop in prime agricultural, heritage or environmentally significant lands
- Targets for renewable energy generation (wind, solar, biomass conversion) or low carbon energy production (clean coal, nuclear, gas) and carbon sequestration. Council does support investment in renewable energy in the Shire, and the proposed RES Australia Murra Warra wind farm venture in particular.
- The dramatic changes to geographically dependent businesses, through competition from internet, e-commerce and accessible major centres.

## 4.3 DIRECTIONS AND STRATEGIES

Yarriambiack Shire Council's Vision is:

*"In consultation with our community Yarriambiack Shire Council will provide a viable, sustainable and vibrant future"<sup>24</sup>.*

Yarriambiack's Municipal Strategic Statement focuses on the key land use planning and development issues and initiatives which will be taken to implement and achieve an agreed vision. That vision embraces the concept of a prosperous community with a diversified economic base integrated with a sustainable and productive agricultural industry. Through the strategic considerations which can be undertaken by Council, other government and servicing agencies, industry and the community, the MSS can enhance the diverse strengths of the Shire and provide direction for its future development.

**Strategy 1: Planning Scheme Provisions and Council Policies.**

*Use Council policies and planning provisions to recognise and enhance the contribution made by Yarriambiack's major and emerging industries, in order to:*

- *Provide a supportive environment, and*
- *Encourage new investment, job creation and innovation.*

Specific actions for Strategy 1 are:

**1.1 Economic Development Assets in Policy and the Planning Scheme**

Recognise, through Council policy and the Council Planning Scheme, the ongoing assets associated with the Shire's agricultural, natural and heritage resources.

**1.2 Supply of Land for Economic Development**

Recognise, through Council policy and the Council Planning Scheme, the needs of Yarriambiack's towns for availability and choice in rural living, residential, and commercial land to support their long term viability.

**1.3 Agricultural Diversification**

Support agricultural producers looking to diversify their farming operations, particularly those associated with:

- Intensive and semi-intensive livestock, tree crops and row crops utilising water resources from the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline.
- Broadacre crop rotations and other measures to improve soil health, reduce environmental degradation and adapt to climate change.
- Differentiating Yarriambiack's agricultural products from commodities produced elsewhere in Australia and overseas.

**1.4 Renewable Energy and Minerals**

Support planning applications and major projects in renewable energy and sand mining which have overwhelmingly positive economic, social and environmental merit (in the short to medium term these are expected to include the Murra Warra Wind Farm development, and the extension of mineral sands logistics services by Kalari).

<sup>24</sup> Yarriambiack Shire Council Plan 2013-17

**Strategy 2: Economic Development as a Multi-Disciplinary Function across Council Departments.**

*Implement a whole-of-Council/multidisciplinary team approach to funding, facilitating and delivering economic development infrastructure projects.*

Specific actions for Strategy 2 are:

**2.1 Town Entrances, Streetscaping and Landscaping**

2.2.1 Design and construct attractive and consistent signage, central activities area streetscaping, and landscaping for town entrances, on an achievable and prioritised rollout schedule (over 3 to 5 years), commencing with the Shire's largest centres (Warracknabeal, Murtoa, Hopetoun, Minyip and Rupanyup), including a review of the signage and standards at key tourist facilities in each town, as well as town entry boards that provide information about local attractions and facilities, their locations and trading times.

2.2.2 For all significant towns in the Shire:

- Install town entry 'welcome' signage that indicates 3-4 major attractions in the town, eg. caravan park, lake reserve, heritage walk.
- Position on major access routes, along with directional signage to main streets (especially at Warracknabeal).
- Signage could have a common style across the shire (reflecting shire's tourism brand) but reflect a unique theme and image for each town.
- Audit signage to key tourist facilities in each town, such as toilets, and address improvements required.
- Install town entry boards that provide information about local attractions and facilities, and their locations and opening hours.
- Review the road entries to all major towns to identify opportunities for beautification, such as landscaping and street lighting. Complement the town entry signage with a staged streetscaping program in each central activities area.

**2.3 Community Enterprises**

Provide leadership in the implementation of community based retail, hospitality and recreation enterprises (by assisting community groups in assessing projects, forming relationships with potential venture partners, and securing funds and expand relationships with Reichstein Foundation and Sunshine Foundation).

**2.4 Industrial Land**

2.4.1 Provide attractive industrially zoned areas and serviced industrial land to support efficient secondary and tertiary sector businesses (including manufacturing, construction, trades related, storage, wholesaling, warehousing and transport operations).

2.4.2 Undertake a feasibility assessment of a Council owned industrial estate development, or a 'themed' industrial estate (eg based around grain or pulse value adding enterprises/activities) as part of the commitment to provide industrial development sites, in complement to urban growth plans and industrial zones in the Shire's five major towns.

## 2.5 Health and Social Services

Acknowledge that, while agriculture remains the mainstay of the Shire's economy, the health and social services industry needs to be a growth area for at least the next fifteen years in order to keep pace with increasing demand. To maximise this growth there must be proactive support for continued investment in health and aged care facilities providing independent, supported and full care residential and support services.

## 2.6 Housing Development

2.6.1 Collaborate with Wimmera Development Association, neighbouring Shires and potential developers to establish innovative developments in new housing.

2.6.2 "Release" residential properties where there are severe 'rates in arrears' issues. If these properties could be returned to the market for reoccupation, renovation, or demolition, it would significantly add to the stock of affordable housing in the Shire, and provide a new opportunity for both population and rates increases.

## 2.7 Recreational Water Assets

Promote the importance of the Shire's key creeks, weir pools, and lakes as major liveability assets of the Shire's towns, including Warracknabeal, Murtoa, Hopetoun, Beulah and Brim, and secure the highest possible priority for water allocation to ensure these water assets are maintained (requiring less than 1,000 megalitres per annum).

### Strategy 3: **Facilitate Investment in Priority Industry Sectors.**

*Maximise the efficient use of Council resources to promote and coordinate support (across all Council staff areas including planning, building, community services, operations and administration) for the targeted and high priority industries for economic development investment over the next five years.*

The specific actions for Strategy 3 are to ensure the Council team and Council stakeholders are aware of the high priority target areas, and have a cooperative approach in facilitating opportunities as they arise. The high priority economic development opportunity areas are:

### 3.1 Primary industry sectors:

#### Mainstream

- Intensive livestock
  - Lamb finishing
  - Poultry meat, eggs and game
  - Pigs

- Pulses

#### Niche

- Climate responsive systems
- Local gourmet food.

**3.2 Secondary industry sectors:**

- Collaborative marketing and logistics in agriculture
- Stock feed manufacture
- Local agricultural product value adding/processing
- Agricultural machinery and equipment
- Housing for the services workforce

**3.3 Tertiary industry sectors:**

- Retail and integrated commercial community enterprises in town centres.

**3.4 Quinary industry sectors**

- Food services
- Agritourism, agri-history tourism and tourism trails
- Active aged care/retirement

**3.5 Professional Development for Businesses**

Continue to provide professional development modules (through Council resources and linkages with Wimmera Development Association) for existing small businesses across all sectors, through

- Mentoring sessions
- Invigorating products/services
- Business improvement workshops.

**3.6 National Broadband Promotion**

Promote the opportunities to Yarriambiack businesses, in conducting online and efficient communication links, from the relatively early access to the national broadband network (NBN) that is programmed for the Shire.

**Strategy 4: Collaborative Tourism and Branding.**

*Facilitate local and regional collaboration in tourism activities and establish a new Yarriambiack tourism brand position.*

Specific actions for Strategy 4 are:

**4.1 Tourism Organisation Linkages**

Continue to build tourism marketing relationships between Yarriambiack Tourism, Wimmera Mallee Tourism and Grampians Tourism, and use these relationships to help in monitoring and conducting visitor research to improve the understanding of visitor perceptions of the Shire's experiences, visitation trends and behaviours.

**4.2 Tourism Branding**

Develop a clear brand positioning for Yarriambiack Shire based on local agricultural food production, and use it to guide promotional activities and the development of visitor experiences and events in the shire. The brand positioning should be informed by findings from the visitor research.



#### **4.3 Cabin and Camping Accommodation**

- 4.3.1 Investigate the potential to develop more cabin accommodation in their caravan parks, and encourage the tourism industry to upgrade existing accommodation properties.
- 4.3.2 Endorse the range of low-cost and designated free camping locations in the Shire, with access to power.

#### **4.4 Tourist Information**

- 4.4.1 Conduct an audit of interpretive information available in each town. Identify opportunities to improve the telling of local stories, and develop additional interpretive signage and information.
- 4.4.2 Install self-serve tourist information kiosks in each town at a location that is accessible seven days a week.

#### **4.5 Tours and Themes**

- 4.5.1 Package the agricultural heritage attractions into a visit experience for groups and independent travellers. The package would include The Murtoa Stick Shed, Wheatlands Museum, Wood's Farming and Heritage Museum and the William Farrer monument.
- 4.5.2 Develop and promote other themed touring itineraries (which focus on natural attractions, tracks and trails, heritage, and agrifood).

#### **4.6 Professional Development for Tourism Business Operators**

Continue to provide professional development learning opportunities for the local business community, including field trips, training sessions and networking nights.

#### **4.7 Sport and Recreation Events**

Promote the Shire's sport and recreation facilities and venues as locations for inter-regional competitions and events.





# **Yarriambiack**

**SHIRE COUNCIL**

