Ms Angela Verde

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Dear Angela ,

# Murrindindi Shire Council response to the DEDJTR Regional Service Delivery Model and Strategic Directions for Regional Policy

Murrindindi Shire Council appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the above review being undertaken for the Minister for Regional Development and requests that these comments be included within the submissions to the review.

By way of introduction, Council believes that there is a need for the continuation of the role of Regional Development Victoria which has served as a vital project partner and facilitator on a broad range of community, infrastructure and economic development projects throughout regional Victoria.

In this regard, Council believes that the Hume Regional Growth Strategy process has addressed many of the issues raised in this review and provides an excellent framework for future development within the Hume region. There is a need to ensure that there is not a loss of the momentum gained in the development and implementation of this Strategy.

## General response points

## Definition of territory

The Hume region is vast and diverse and it is a concern of the small rural Councils that regional strategic planning can be dominated by the larger regional cities.

It is important to ensure that the diverse and local perspective is not lost when considering regional planning; otherwise the focus will always be on the larger centres at the expense of smaller towns and municipalities. It is Council's view that an integration of planning and support between small and regional municipalities will lead to greater benefits for the region as a whole.

## Priority setting

Further to the above point regarding territories, enhanced recognition of working clusters within the region is essential. For example, the Goulburn River Valley Tourism alliance of Councils has established a strategic cluster that provides economies of scale and benefits to both small and larger municipalities.

This recognition of clusters would facilitate a better alignment of regional planning and priority setting activity with the output of localised partnership activity. Essentially this point is to redress the issue of locally endorsed priorities often not being able to compete with larger, more significant projects on a whole of Hume region bidding basis.

## Partnership brokerage

* Councils generally have good working relationships with abutting Councils, but there is scope for brokerage support to relationships beyond these regional networks. For example, there may be a project collaboration opportunity with a like sized I similar composition Council in say East Gippsland. RDV and other agencies have an important role in brokering these relationships via knowledge and information sharing amongst regions.
* The importance of 'whole of government' approaches to policy development and strategy should be priorities. One example is the relationship between the provision of first-rate early years services for families and the subsequent positive impact on population retention and workforce participation in regional and rural areas. Such outcomes need the combined focus of (for example) the Department of Education and Training and DEDJTR, working in partnership with local communities.

## Service delivery

* An approach to service delivery which takes into account emergent needs would be most helpful. For example, the capacity to call in departmental /agency expertise using regional officers as a conduit is essential. In this regard agencies have a state wide 'database' and perspective at their disposal and could better use 'outside of region' relationships and expertise for local benefit.
* Greater flexibility and speed of response time in funding programs to support new business investment is also a critical service delivery element. Prompt responses to new business investment are fundamental to progressing development and building investment confidence.
* Finally, reverse input/direction would be helpful in understanding what agencies need of Councils in terms of economic development. The field of economic development is such a discretionary space and Council resourcing varies greatly. Some discussion regarding minimum service levels and what functions need to be allocated to this would go some way in redressing the perpetual issue of better resourced Council's being better able to secure grants/program support. Flexibility in the capacity of support that can be provided by RDV needs to match the resource needs rather than resource capacity of Councils, especially small rural municipalities.

## Emergency Management and Resilience Building

* Contemporary emergency management practices in Victoria tend to focus on risk profiles but with very little discussion on 'capabilities' - that is, what does a particular community have that they can draw on to mitigate their risk. This is in contrast with the USA where 'risk and capability mapping' is used in the development of emergency management plans. Focussing just on risk is only half the story and Council believes that an integrated approach, involving RDV, is required at the State level.
* Community resilience as a goal will be enhanced through genuine, robust community planning that empowers communities to identify opportunities, endorse priorities and develop partnerships to achieve outcomes. Resilience is a multifaceted, intrinsic quality and if it is to flourish, shared responsibility needs to be matched with shared control. Council believes that RDV should have a role, along with other State Government agencies, in facilitating programs that enhance community resilience.

## Specific response points

**What are the major economic, social and demographic issues facing regional Victoria?**

Council believes that the following provide an overview of the major issues facing regional Victoria, based upon the perspective that is gained from Murrindindi Shire:

* There is a need to identify and build on regional / local strengths (e.g. outdoor/ natural / landscape tourism, specialised agri business and the houseboat building sector in Murrindindi Shire)
* Likewise, there is a need to build upon key strengths that are identified in the regional strategies such as the Hume Regional Growth Plan
* There is a need to enhance connectivity within and outside regions, including both roads and public transport. Transport infrastructure is particularly important for the facilitation of new and expanding industry
* Connectivity is particularly important for areas such as Murrindindi Shire that do not have a major transit corridor (e.g. enhance the linkages to Seymour)
* An inhibitor to growth is the slow pace at which communications infrastructure is being expanded and upgraded. In particular, the delays in the broadband rollout, the limited mobile phone coverage in rural areas and the lack of reticulated gas are all impediments to business expansion and regional economic growth
* The lack of diverse housing opportunities, particularly aged care facilities and low cost housing reduce the ability for older residents and low income residents to remain in regional Victoria
* There is a need to enhance and streamline approaches/synergies for inter-municipal and sub-regional attractions/issues (e.g. Lake Eildon, Great Victorian Rail Trail, Tourism regions, etc)
* Limited educational opportunities (not only post-secondary but also early years and secondary education) are not only requiring students and families to leave regional areas, they are a disincentive for families and young adults to move to regional Victoria
* The process to obtain regulatory permits hinders business development. There is the potential to streamline approvals processes or have state officers that work alongside businesses as they move through the regulatory process. Council has welcomed the expansion of opportunities within the rural planning scheme zones but believes that these changes could be supported by more streamlined approvals processes

## How can we drive regional growth? Key policy levers:

Council believes that there are a number of factors that drive regional growth which include the following initiatives:

* Promote increased and more efficient linkages and connections for both road usage and public transport
* Align infrastructure provision to the needs of the area/form of development. Funding of such infrastructure provision to be a shared responsibility of state and local government as well as private industry
* Expand State government role in the facilitation of major projects
* Investment from the State Government in major projects/attractions (both cash and inkind) especially in localities where Councils do not have the capacity to provide leverage support
* Facilitate area/industry strengths - examples for Murrindindi Shire are the tourism/ outdoor and agricultural industries and an equestrian and equine activities, in essence the nature based economy
* Identify and attract appropriate industry to key locations throughout regional Victoria
* Attract footloose industries from Melbourne
* Support enhanced education options to align with and service existing and potential businesses and lifestyles (e.g. in Murrindindi Shire there is a need for wider education offerings with an emphasis upon options for existing and emerging industries such as Aged Care, Allied Health, Hospitality, Outdoor Recreation and the houseboat building sector)
* Provide major project facilitation at a State Government level
* Establish a land use planning regime that is streamlined and provides certainty whilst acknowledging the need to reflect local circumstances
* Support for local strategic planning work which identifies and creates opportunities for future land use and development

## Current regional strategic and related planning models

* Significant work has been undertaken in the development of the Hume Regional Growth Plan which has provided an important framework for regional and local planning.
* Local government develops local planning strategies and policies which enable the facilitation and implementation of state and regional policies. These range from structure plans through to economic development strategies and health and wellbeing·plans. However, to ensure that these plans remain current, local government requires assistance from the state government in the development and implementation of regionally significant projects and plans.

# Murrindindi Shire Council's key priorities /broad policy directions and possible actions and recommendations to drive regional economic growth

Council's key priorities and policy directions are guided by the significant work that has been undertaken in recent years to establish a strategic direction for the Murrindindi community In October 2014 Council adopted its Murrindindi 2030 Vision. This work has been guided by extensive community consultation and provides a framework upon which future directions will be established. Through its Economic Development Strategy, Community Health and Wellbeing Plan and its recent review of its Local Planning Policy Framework future priorities have been established. These can be summarised as follows:

* Attracting people/industries to the area
* Building upon regional/area strengths and opportunities
* Preparing and implementing structure plans and urban design frameworks
* Creating development opportunities for peri-urban areas closer to metropolitan Melbourne such as in the Kinglake Ranges
* Facilitating diverse housing choices including aged care facilities and low cost housing
* Facilitating a range of lifelong educational and learning opportunities ranging from early years through to post-secondary opportunities
* Advocating for enhanced telecommunications upgrades, especially in relation to mobile phone and broadband communications
* Advocating for improved public and private transport infrastructure and services including those of the transport isolated and vulnerable members of the Murrindindi community
* Facilitating tourism and other nature based businesses
* Encouraging part time living and lifestyle based businesses

## Any comments/feedback on the key functions of DEDJTR including:

Council believes that the key strengths of RDV need to be maintained and could be enhanced through the adequate resourcing of its support and facilitation roles. In particular, it believes that the key functions of DEDJTR should include the following:

* Establish and use a project facilitation team to identify I assist proponents and local government with major regional projects
* Promote and further develop existing and future agricultural opportunities particular to a region/area
* Facilitate projects that capture and harness natural resources in sub­ regions/ areas
* Facilitate flexible funding arrangements that enhance linkages and better connections (roads and public transport)
* Utilise a decisionmaking framework that considers/supports regional needs and opportunities
* Support the development of meaningful, authentic tourism experiences based on an area's identified strengths and opportunities
* Utilise innovative models such as the Flying Squad support local government strategic program delivery.

## Comments/recommendations regarding the mix of structural, governance and strategic models for regional service delivery

Council believes that the appropriate governance and strategic models for regional service delivery should include the following principles and objectives:

* Strengthen/enhance alliances between state and local government and private industry
* Utilise strategic models that includes both economic development and community development
* Adequately resource RDV to ensure that it has the capability to delivery its key functions
* Establish structured relationships between Federal and State agencies where there are strategic overlaps and where project funding can be leveraged from a range of sources.
* Facilitate access to flexible funding to support locally identified and supported initiatives. These programs have the potential to leverage local enthusiasm, support and energy and also encourage communities to define their own aspirations and locally relevant solutions.

In conclusion, Council has appreciated the strong support that it has received from RDV over many years and believes that there potential to build upon the strengths of this regional service delivery model. Council welcomes the opportunity to participate in this review and is willing to provide additional supporting information if required.

Yours sincerely



Margaret Abbey

Chief Executive Officer