

## Regional Strategic Planning Initiative



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# WIMMERA SOUTHERN MALLEE REGIONAL PLAN



## FINAL

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# 1 Introduction

This is the first Regional Plan for the Wimmera Southern Mallee developed as part of a new statewide regional planning approach - Regional Strategic Planning Initiative (RSPI).

This Plan has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the RSPI.

The Wimmera Southern Mallee (WSM) has a demonstrated track record of collaboration and partnership to deliver on major regional initiatives, such as the Wimmera-Mallee pipeline.

This culture provides the region with a sound platform to respond to the opportunities and challenges identified in this plan.

This plan includes:

- A statement of desired future (five years) development of the region - **The Region in Future**
- A description of the region's population and major drivers of change
- The plan's goals, strategic directions and areas for action for:
  - Economic growth, infrastructure, education and training
  - Water, natural resources and sustainability
  - Community well-being
  - Settlements and land use planning
- The governance and implementation of the plan

For each goal, the plan identifies a series of areas for action. Many of the actions however will contribute to other goals due to the linkages between the region's economy, environment and community well-being.

The regional plan is complemented by an informative document '*WSM Regional Plan - Discussion Paper*', which was prepared as part of the process of developing the regional plan.

The development of the Regional Plan has been led by a dedicated Project Control Group with support from specialised consultants.

The Project Control Group, chaired by Mr Philip Sabien, Clyne Foods, comprised representatives from the following organisations:

- Local government: West Wimmera Shire Council; Hindmarsh Shire Council; Horsham Rural City Council
- State government: Regional Development Victoria; Dept Sustainability and Environment; Dept Planning and Community Development
- GWMWater
- Grampians RDA (Regional Development Australia Grampians committee)
- Wimmera Development Association

There has been a range of input to the plan from community, industry and government via various consultative processes as well as extensive analysis of relevant plans, reports and studies.

## 2 The Region in Future

The Wimmera Southern Mallee is 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. This trait has been tested recently with the region being severely challenged by drought and years of low rainfall. This has impacted significantly on many aspects of the environment, community and economy.

However, the experience has positioned the region to be much better equipped to adapt to a changing climate. Now the region is moving forward and the outlook for the future is very positive.

The Wimmera Mallee pipeline has been constructed and with the implementation phase underway, the region expects to reap enormous benefits for community well-being, health of waterways and business development opportunities. Economic growth from the region's comparative advantages in grain production, mining, transport and manufacturing will continue.

Development of people is of vital importance to the region. There is a huge amount of talent at all ages in the region and so people need to be engaged and have ready access to education and training, particularly tertiary education and leadership development.

A healthy natural environment underpins the prosperity and liveability of the region. The shift to more sustainable practices by industry and communities will continue, as well as on-going improved management of natural resources in the agricultural sector. The region is actively pursuing different renewable energy generation options and this will continue to evolve as a new industry driving energy efficiency of the region. The developing nature-based tourism sector will

play a role in increasing regional awareness of the region's superb natural environment.

Typical of many agricultural-based economies, the region has experienced population decline. However recently the region's population has grown, as Horsham continues to grow and some small towns have halted population decline and are now seeing slight growth. Local towns and communities are becoming more engaged in opportunities to plan and drive change for community benefit. The delivery of essential community services requires new approaches to meet the needs of small rural communities. A cross- government agency collaborative approach working with local communities offers a way forward.

The region recognises the important roles played by Horsham and Stawell and also the role and function of the network of other towns and smaller rural areas. Settlement planning will consider the relationships between communities of common interest, beyond shire boundaries, to maximise outcomes for each local community.

Finally, the region must and will become better connected through improved transport and telecommunications infrastructure and services. This is essential for the region to continue to be competitive as a place to live and do business.

The Wimmera Southern Mallee offers a thriving rural alternative to share in the population growth forecast for Victoria.

### 3 Population and Drivers of Change

The Wimmera Southern Mallee encompasses the municipalities of Buloke, Hindmarsh, Horsham, Northern Grampians, West Wimmera and Yarriambiack.

The population of the Wimmera Southern Mallee is 57,100, concentrated in and around the regional centres of Horsham and Stawell. Horsham is the region's primary service centre and has experienced steady growth in recent years. Stawell, Warracknabeal, Nhill, Charlton, Dimboola and Donald are other larger towns in the region that provide a range of services and facilities. There are numerous small towns (population less than 1000) throughout the region.

The population decline across all Wimmera Southern Mallee shires, except Horsham, is typical of a trend that has been apparent for a number of decades in dryland agricultural areas. Across Victoria, small dryland towns are the only type of town to have experienced consistent declines in population since 1981.<sup>1</sup>

Recently there has been a clear slow down in population decline in some towns and growth in others with the net effect being that the region is now experiencing slight growth (Figure 3-1).

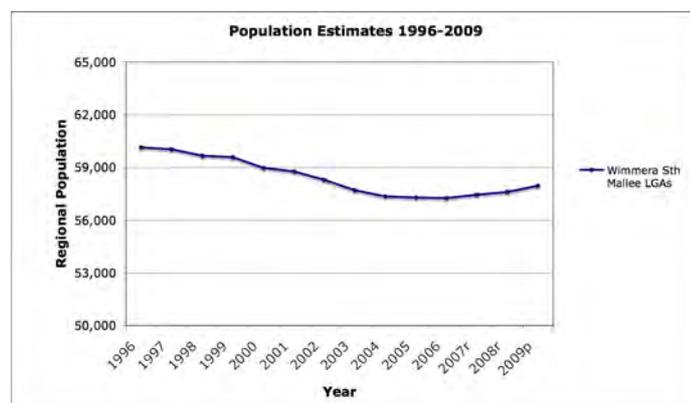
The general trend across dryland areas is that towns between one and two thousand people have experienced most population decline, due to job losses in agriculture and other sectors where services have been withdrawn, such as banking, government administration and education.<sup>2</sup>

The migration out of the region of young people for education and employment opportunities has been a key reason why the population has declined.

In the Wimmera Southern Mallee, there has been a consistent net migration out of young people to Melbourne or larger regional centres such as Ballarat for education and employment over the past thirty years.

Accompanying this loss of younger residents, for the majority of the period since 1981 there has been a net inward migration of residents in the 50-64 age bracket. Recent change is illustrated in Figure 3-2.

**Figure 3-1 Estimated resident population Wimmera Southern Mallee 1996-2009<sup>3</sup>**

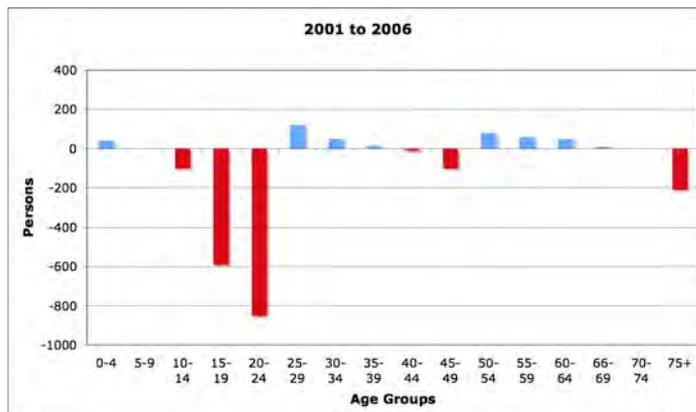


<sup>1</sup> Department of Planning and Community Development, *Towns in time*, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Planning and Community Development, *Towns in time*

<sup>3</sup> ABS, 3218.0 *Regional Population Growth, Australia* (released 30<sup>th</sup> March 2010 and 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2007)

**Figure 3-2 Net migration in the Wimmera by age group 2001-2006<sup>4</sup>**



The Wimmera Southern Mallee has the oldest population of any of Victoria’s regions, with Horsham the only town (and local government area) with fewer people aged 75 than the Victorian regional average. All other areas have older residents than the regional Victorian average, and at least three small towns with very high populations of people 75 and over.

It is uncertain whether the trends evident over recent years for the Wimmera Southern Mallee are likely to continue in the future. By 2021 (fifteen years from the last census), population decline had been projected for all shires except Horsham, with West Wimmera, Yarriambiack and Hindmarsh Shire likely to experience the greatest rate of population decline. Overall, the area had been expected to lose around 3500 of its residents by the year 2021.

Horsham, Stawell and other larger towns will benefit from migration from the small towns and other areas, driven by the retired farmer population in search of better services. Towns with available housing will attract people migrating from Melbourne driven by its higher housing costs.

Accompanying the fall in population will be a significant increase in the average age.

<sup>4</sup> *Victoria in Future 2008 – Wimmera*. State Government of Victoria.

## Drivers of Change

### *Increased agricultural productivity*

Increased agricultural productivity and larger farms has resulted in fewer farms and less demand for workers, leading to population loss. In the grains producing areas of the Wimmera Southern Mallee, this process has been particularly pronounced. Between 1971 and 2001, the number of farms fell from over 5000 to under 3000.

### *A changing climate*

Water availability is a major driver of economic growth, environmental health and liveability of the Wimmera Southern Mallee.

While the recent dry years are unlikely to continue, over the next 20 to 50 years, climate change is predicted to result in higher average temperatures, lower average rainfall, greater intensity of rainfall, and potentially an increase in the frequency of droughts.

Assuming a medium emissions future, it is predicted that by 2030 in Victoria, annual rainfall temperatures will rise between 0.6 and 1 degree and annual rainfall will fall by between 2% and 5% on current averages.<sup>5</sup> The Wimmera Southern Mallee is predicted to be among the most affected regions of Victoria.

Low rainfall is exacerbated by the fact that a reduction in rainfall leads to a proportionately greater reduction in streamflow (water flowing into storages). For example, in the Wimmera-Avon River catchments, streamflow is expected to fall by up to 20% by 2030, and as much as 50% by 2070.<sup>6</sup>

### *Global food demand*

The expected increase in global food demand will provide opportunities for food producing regions that can successfully adapt to climate change and other factors affecting agriculture, such as energy costs.

### *Liveability factors.*

Various factors influence people's choices on where to live include availability of employment, choice and affordability of housing, education, health, cultural and lifestyle features.

The region's recent growth in population is partly attributable to the region's attractiveness as a place to live compared to Melbourne, and this is expected to continue in future.

Connectivity between regions and Melbourne is also important.

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<sup>5</sup> [www.climatechangeinaustralia.com.au](http://www.climatechangeinaustralia.com.au). Current averages based on the past thirty years.

<sup>6</sup> Victorian Government. *Climate Change in the Wimmera*.

## 4 Regional Goals

### ***A Competitive and Innovative Economy***

Economic growth in the Wimmera Southern Mallee will be driven by:

- building on its comparative advantages in sustainable primary production and related value adding and service industries
- leveraging new industry development from the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline
- implementation, marketing and operation of the Wimmera Intermodal Freight Terminal
- innovative renewable energy solutions for future energy generation
- fostering growth in industry networks and clusters
- development of nature-based and outback experience tourism
- providing essential infrastructure (including telecommunications) to support new and existing businesses
- improving education and training outcomes

### ***A Healthy and Resilient Environment***

Achieving a healthy and resilient environment in the face of a changing climate will be driven by:

- the sustainable management and use of water resources
- effective natural resource management and sustainable agricultural practices
- improved knowledge of, and adaptation to, climate change and its impacts
- well-informed communities

### ***Community Well-being***

The Wimmera Southern Mallee is a wonderful place to live and will become even more attractive for existing and new residents with:

- innovative models of community service delivery to meet local needs
- valued and supported volunteers
- provision of a broad range of housing choice, affordability and availability
- improved health outcomes
- engaged and connected young people
- thriving sports and recreation clubs and facilities

## 5 A Competitive and Innovative Economy

### 5.1 REGIONAL GOAL

Economic growth in the Wimmera Southern Mallee will be driven by:

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- development of nature-based and outback experience tourism
- providing essential infrastructure (including telecommunications) to support new and existing businesses
- improving education and training outcomes

#### CONTEXT:

The Wimmera Southern Mallee is a strong agricultural producing region where agriculture over the last five years has accounted for close to 30% of total employment. This share of employment is projected to remain relatively steady over the next ten years<sup>7</sup>.

Other major employers include health care and social assistance, retail trade and manufacturing. In terms of relative strength compared with the Victorian average, the region is highly dependent on agriculture. In some areas such as the northern part of Yarriambiack Shire, agricultural employment can be as high as 45%.<sup>8</sup>

As with other agricultural regions, the Wimmera Southern Mallee is relatively under-represented in the likes of professional, scientific and technical services, wholesale trade and telecommunications.

The Wimmera Southern Mallee is expected to see its workforce shrink over the next ten years (-0.3% p.a.), mainly due to lack of population growth, but also lack of industry

growth. This is because the region is over-represented in industry sectors with weaker growth profiles.

While agriculture continues to dominate the local economy, employment within the sector has been declining, falling from 26.2% in 1996, to 20.2% in 2006. There has been employment growth in other sectors, particularly in health and community services, personal and other services, and accommodation, cafes and restaurants.<sup>9</sup>

The Wimmera Southern Mallee has been identified as the most exposed to climate change in Victoria because of its relatively undiversified economy.<sup>10</sup> To counter the risks of this exposure, it is imperative that the region's agricultural sector be well positioned to withstand a changing climate and that the region more broadly is positioned to diversify its economy.

Expansion of other sectors such as manufacturing, primarily associated with food processing and agricultural equipment, transport, mining and tourism is expected. Located between Melbourne and Adelaide with strong freight and transport capacity,

<sup>7</sup> Access Economics (2009) Victorian Regional Economic Outlook

<sup>8</sup> ABS Workforce employed in agriculture as a percentage of the total workforce, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> ABS Census data 2006.

<sup>10</sup> State of Victoria (2009) *Victorian Climate Change Green Paper*

the region is ideally placed as a centre for food manufacturing and grain value adding. Freight transport and associated service businesses at Horsham and Nhill are well-placed to grow. Western Victoria is an important source of mineral sands, predominantly rutile, ilmenite and zircon, and there are prospects for growth in gold mining as well. Also the region offers significant potential for nature-based tourism, with its array of national parks and wilderness areas, and outback experiences.

Additionally, there is strong regional interest in the development of a renewable energy

industry. Sustainability Victoria identified a major part of the Wimmera Southern Mallee as the having greatest potential for producing electricity from crop biomass in Victoria and the region is also highly suited to wind and solar energy generation.

As with other agricultural regions distant from capital cities, the attraction and retention of skilled people in sectors such as health, manufacturing, education and public administration continues to be a challenge.

## 5.2 STRENGTHENING THE REGIONAL ECONOMY

### **STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1:**

#### ***Strengthen the Farming Sector's Capacity to Prosper in a Changing Climate***

The Wimmera Southern Mallee is a major agricultural and food producing region. Its good soils and past history of reliable rainfall have led to the development of an agricultural industry that generates in excess of \$1.6 billion and directly supports over 5,800 jobs plus further jobs indirectly in associated manufacturing and transport. Today, the region produces more than half of Victoria's total grain crop, oilseeds and pulses.<sup>11</sup>

However, agriculture, and particularly grain production, is facing significant challenges. The industry has experienced dry conditions over the last ten years that have had flow-on effects for both employment and towns in the region. A study on the impacts of the 2006 drought<sup>12</sup> reported that the regional loss of agricultural production was estimated at \$1.05 billion of regional output with a further indirect loss of \$130 million from other sectors. This had an immediate flow-on effect of a reported loss of 245 full-time equivalent

jobs in the agribusiness sector alone in the region.

Climate change is expected to result in a continuation of these trends, although perhaps not to the same extent as the recent droughts. The region is expected to experience higher average temperatures (0.8°C by 2030), particularly in summer, and less rainfall (-4% by 2030), particularly in spring (-11% by 2030). By 2070, under a high emissions growth scenario, Horsham's temperatures are projected to resemble those of present day Wentworth, New South Wales, while annual rainfall would be similar to present day Nhill.<sup>13</sup> This makes the Wimmera Southern Mallee one of the regions most vulnerable to climate change.

The agricultural sector will also be affected by climate change policy. The introduction of an emissions trading scheme would see, in the medium term, fuel, fertiliser and energy prices rise. However, there may be opportunities to achieve credits for changing fertiliser, livestock and crop residue practices.

<sup>11</sup> REMPLAN – Regional Specific Economic Modelling (ABS Datasets) Wimmera Southern Mallee Region 2008, Compelling Economics Pty Ltd

<sup>12</sup> RM Consulting Group & WIDCORP (2007) *Wimmera Southern Mallee drought report*

<sup>13</sup> DSE, *Climate change in the Wimmera region*, State of Victoria, 2008, p.5.

Local experts believe lower yields and increased costs will likely lead to a continuation of current trends of technological development, greater mechanisation and farm amalgamation to achieve larger holdings.<sup>14</sup> As in the past, this will mean some of those that are currently farming will leave the industry and remaining properties will have fewer labour requirements. As such, agriculture and manufacturing employment is projected to fall by more than the average for regional Victoria.<sup>15</sup>

To prosper as the climate changes, farmers will need:

- plant varieties, technology and farming systems appropriate to the evolving climatic and economic conditions
- localised and accurate weather information to enable decisions to be made as seasons unfold
- business, financial and decision-making skills for an increasingly complex and uncertain environment

- an understanding of how climate changes will affect the profitability of their current enterprises and, in some cases, assistance to plan for that.

The region is well equipped to conduct locally relevant research with strong agricultural research, development and extension expertise clustered at the Grains Innovation Park in Horsham and leading industry groups such as Birchip Cropping Group in the region. Partnering with the new Centre for AgriBiosciences being developed by the Department of Primary Industries and La Trobe University would provide these regional groups access to world-leading scientists and state-of-the-art technology, equipment and facilities

#### INTENDED OUTCOMES

Research and development of new plant varieties and farming systems and improved short- and long-term information will equip the agricultural sector to adapt to the climate as it changes while enhancing its production capacity.

Areas for Action	Suggested Lead Agency (& collaborating partners)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Analysis of the impacts of different climate change scenarios on the future productivity of the region to enable communities, the industry and individual businesses to plan for the range of eventualities.</li> </ul>	DPI (Industry groups, local governments, WMSA)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use scenario analysis information in AgFutures projects (and other relevant projects) to improve farmer understanding of what climate change will mean for them and expand the number of communities participating in AgFutures.</li> </ul>	DPI (DPCD)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Grains Innovation Park and Birchip Cropping Group expand research and development of frost-, drought- and disease-resistant plant varieties and sustainable farming systems.</li> </ul>	DPI / BCG (GRDC & industry groups)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support farming sector to adapt enterprises to make best use of water provided through the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline</li> </ul>	DPI (Industry groups)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Promote opportunities for new agricultural investment appropriate to water resource availability and land capability.</li> </ul>	DPI (WDA, local government)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide weather watch radar in the Wimmera Southern Mallee to enable more timely and effective on-farm operations.</li> </ul>	Bureau of Meteorology
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Development of R&amp;D partnerships with the new Centre for AgriBiosciences to ensure access to leading scientists, technology and facilities to progress regional priorities for agricultural R&amp;D.</li> </ul>	DPI (Industry groups)

<sup>14</sup> Finding from 15 March 2010 workshop held in Horsham titled: *Increasing the adaptive capacity of the agriculture sector to climate change*.

<sup>15</sup> SGS Employment Study for RDV, 2009.

## **STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2:**

### ***Build the Region's Nature-based and Outback Tourism Industry***

Tourism in the Wimmera Southern Mallee is focused largely on the nature-based experiences of the region's national and state parks, which are popular for a range of outdoor activities such as bushwalking, cultural heritage, birdwatching, rock climbing, mountain biking, four wheel driving and camping.

The natural environments of Big Desert Wilderness Area, Wyperfeld National Park and Little Desert National Park offer a semi-arid desert experience within easy traveling distance from Melbourne. Wetlands and lakes are another significant feature of the region. The region also is host to numerous events and festivals that are locally significant, while many parts of the region are rich in Aboriginal heritage.

A resurgence in water-based tourism and recreation is expected resulting from the water saved via the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline.

The Grampians National Park is one of Victoria's most popular holiday destinations with over 1.25 million visitor days per year of which one-quarter are from overseas (second only to Port Campbell National Park). Emerging climate trends, particularly wildfire threat, are impacting on the traditional tourism products for the region.

Mt Arapiles – Toon State Park is widely regarded as the top rock climbing area in Australia and is world-renowned. It receives 125,000 visit days annually of which 43% are from interstate and 19% are international visitors. Of Victoria's national parks and alpine resorts, Mt Arapiles has the highest proportion of interstate visitors and the third highest proportion of international visitors<sup>16</sup>.

Grampians Tourism drives a coordinated approach to tourism in the Grampians

region. Steps are underway to develop a coordinated approach in the western and northern area of the Wimmera Southern Mallee. Tourism Alliance Victoria reported that there is potential for development of tourism based on history, cultural heritage and agriculture within the Buloke, Hindmarsh, West Wimmera and Yarriambiack shires. These aspects are, in the main, relatively under-developed as tourism products. An important first step will be to create a regional organization to develop products and marketing.<sup>17</sup> The four shires have adopted the report and will establish local tourism associations with a view to establishing a new regional body in future.

Growth of tourism in the northern and western parts of the region can be partly driven by leveraging from the strong visitor numbers to the Grampians.

#### **INTENDED OUTCOMES**

This strategy will strengthen the regional economy by growing an industry sector that has competitive advantages in nature-based tourism and enabling the development of new tourism activity in the region.

<sup>16</sup> Tourism Victoria (2008) *Victoria's Nature-Based Tourism Strategy 2008-2012*

<sup>17</sup> Tourism Alliance Victoria (2009) *Wimmera Mallee Tourism Project*.

<b>Areas for Action</b>	<b>Suggested Lead Agency (&amp; collaborating partners)</b>
a. Development of local tourism associations in the Shires of Hindmarsh, Buloke, Yarriambiack and West Wimmera to form the foundations for sustainable tourism growth	Local Government (Tourism Victoria)
b. A regionally cooperative approach to tourism marketing across the Wimmera Southern Mallee to leverage the benefits from visitors to the Grampians	Local Government (Grampians Regional Tourism Organisation)
c. Strengthen alignment between Tourism Victoria's Regional Tourism Marketing Plan and tourism industry development needs in the Wimmera Southern Mallee	WDA (Local government, Tourism Victoria)
d. Development of the Grampians Long-Distance Icon Walk to strengthen the Grampians as a destination for nature-based tourism	Parks Victoria (Local Government, tourism groups)
e. Infrastructure provision in Halls Gap, Wartook Valley and Natimuk/Mount Arapiles to service existing tourism demand.	Local Government
f. Assist tourism businesses in fire-prone areas to re-focus their promotion and business development	RDV (Tourism groups, Tourism Victoria)
g. Foster locally significant community-driven events and festivals that stimulate tourism growth in the region	RDV (Local Government)

### **STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3:**

#### **Facilitating Industry Clusters and Building on Regional Strengths**

Expansion of industry sectors such as manufacturing, primarily associated with food processing and agricultural equipment, transport and mining is sought.

Located between Melbourne and Adelaide with strong freight and transport capacity, the region is ideally placed as a centre for food manufacturing and grain value adding. Freight transport and associated service businesses at Horsham and Nhill are well-placed to grow. Western Victoria is an important source of mineral sands, predominantly rutile, ilmenite and zircon, and there are prospects for further growth in gold mining.

There is scope for industry cluster development to build on the specialization and comparative advantage of the region in order to attract new investment, encourage

local expansion and stimulate startup of new companies.

Business development from the Wimmera Mallee pipeline will be promoted as the pipeline becomes fully operational. Intensive livestock industries are one example of potential new business growth for the region

#### **INTENDED OUTCOMES**

Capitalising on the region's strengths is a sound economic development approach that will provide secure and on-going employment.

<b>Areas for Action</b>	<b>Suggested Lead Agency (&amp; collaborating partners)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Expand the focus of the Wimmera Grains Cluster to incorporate industry leadership, marketing and business development</li> </ul>	WDA (Grains Cluster businesses)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Foster export development opportunities through the Wimmera Manufacturers Network</li> </ul>	WDA (Manufacturing businesses)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support sustainable development of the gold and mineral sands mining industries</li> </ul>	DPI (DSE, local government, industry)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Investigate business development opportunities associated with freight transport and other compatible industries at the Wimmera Intermodal Freight Terminal, the Nhill Trailer Exchange and other towns.</li> </ul>	WDA (Local government, industry)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Position the region to capitalise on business growth and development opportunities from the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline.</li> </ul>	WDA (GMMWater, Local government, RDV)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop a regional promotion and branding strategy to reposition external perceptions of the region and promote the region as a place to live, work and invest</li> </ul>	RDV (Local Government)

## 5.3 ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

### CONTEXT:

Infrastructure is a key enabler of economic growth and community development.

In the Wimmera Southern Mallee, a critical priority is that broadband and mobile phone coverage is improved to metropolitan standard.

The Wimmera Mallee Pipeline is a major infrastructure project that will make a significant difference to the economy, environment and liveability of the region as it becomes fully operational and the benefits of water savings are realised.

Running through the Wimmera Southern Mallee, the Western Highway is the principal road link between Melbourne and Adelaide, serving interstate trade between Victoria and South Australia. Currently more than 5500 vehicles travel the highway west of Ballarat daily including 1500 trucks. This traffic is expected to double by 2025.

To improve road safety and enhance road freight efficiency, upgrading the Western Highway to a four lane highway between Stawell and the South Australian border is a long-term aspiration of the Wimmera Southern Mallee.

A feature of the Wimmera Southern Mallee is its numerous towns with populations less than 1,000. With infrastructure that varies in its adequacy to meet the current (and future) needs of those communities, it is expected that innovation will be required to make the best use of existing infrastructure. However infrastructure planning needs to consider the travelling population and tourism impacts on small towns, eg. Halls Gap, in addition to the resident population needs.

### **STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4:**

#### ***Innovative and Sustainable Energy Solutions***

Energy plays a vital role in the manufacturing and food processing industries in the region, and has the potential to be another industry in its own right (renewable energy).

The development of distributed or decentralised power supplies in the region has emerged as a key issue to address.

It is possible for some forms of renewable energy to more accurately meet the energy needs of local businesses and communities and thereby assist in their growth.

Local manufacturing businesses and food processors use significant amounts of energy in the form of heat from electricity and heat and flame from gas. While businesses in Horsham and Stawell have

access to natural gas, others in Nhill, Warracknabeal and St Arnaud for example rely on bottled gas, which can cost up to twice that of natural gas. Meanwhile, there is anecdotal evidence that the current electricity system is approaching its capacity and, faced with declining reliability, local businesses have implemented back-up arrangements.

Industries' energy demands are likely to increase in the future with several businesses planning expansions and Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water's needs rising in order to operate the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline. Conversely, natural gas development is unlikely to extend to new areas, instead occurring around existing supply points, and the cost of energy generally is likely to increase as a carbon

price is factored into the cost of fossil fuels and transmission maintenance and augmentation become more expensive.

In this environment, it is appropriate to consider decentralised (distributed) forms of energy. Not only do these energy sources reduce transmission losses and therefore cost, they may also be able to provide a more reliable supply of energy and, in some cases, are less reliant on fossil fuels.

There are several options in the Wimmera Southern Mallee, including liquefied natural gas, biogas, biodiesel, solar, wind and biomass. These forms of energy could either be fed into the existing electricity and gas networks, or could form localised sources for individual or small groups of businesses.

At the network scale, there is concern that the approach to regulated pricing for distribution businesses provides little incentive for them to invest in (or encourage) distributed generation or demand management<sup>18</sup>. This disincentive is compounded by the power imbalance between small demand management or distributed generation proponents and distribution businesses<sup>19</sup> which can make it difficult for small companies to access information about the distribution costs and to achieve low cost access to the network. Although the Australian Energy Market Commission is in the process of developing dispute resolution procedures, these may not cover the power imbalance between

distribution businesses and distributed generation proponents. At the individual or combined business scale, there is little evidence of local businesses coordinating and they generally lack sufficient resources and technical skills to identify the energy source most appropriate for them.

Demonstration projects at this scale would not only show local businesses what can be achieved, but would enable them to learn from each other and form relationships with experts in state government and academia.

In the immediate future, some increased supply capacity is required to provide reliability to, and enable the expansion of, existing businesses and facilitate the development of new businesses. Without augmentation of the existing networks, the only way to achieve this is through improving the energy efficiency and demand management of existing businesses and thereby freeing up network capacity.

#### INTENDED OUTCOMES

Greater use of distributed energy generation and improved energy efficiency in the Wimmera Southern Mallee would increase the reliability of energy in the region, while reducing its costs and potentially free up existing supply capacity.

This is critical for the further development of the manufacturing and alternative industries that can help diversify the region's economy.

Areas for Action	Suggested Lead Agency (& collaborating partners)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a demonstration of distributed energy generation at Nhill, using local sources of energy to supply the Nhill Hospital, Luv-A-Duck, local silo manufacturers and Lowan Wholefoods.</li> </ul>	RDV (Sustainability Victoria, WDA, Hindmarsh Council, WMSA)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distributed energy generation considered for other towns (population &lt;1,000) using solar, wastes and biomass, wind and geothermal sources.</li> </ul>	RDV (WMSA, local government)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seek clear and efficient approvals processes to enable small, local generation businesses easier access to the distribution network.</li> </ul>	DPI (WDA)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide incentives and training for local businesses and energy efficiency practitioners to improve energy efficiency in the region and free up existing supply capacity.</li> </ul>	Sustainability Victoria (WMSA, WDA & RDV)

<sup>18</sup> CSIRO, *Intelligent Grid: A value proposition for distributed energy in Australia*, CSIRO, Canberra, 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Szatow 2008

## **STRATEGIC DIRECTION 5:**

### ***Broadband and mobile phone coverage standards enable the whole region to be competitive and liveable***

Telecommunications, especially mobile and broadband services, are critical to improve the productivity of business and the future competitiveness of regions. Access to modern communication networks can reduce the disadvantage of remoteness faced by businesses and communities in rural areas of the Wimmera Southern Mallee.

Given its dispersed and ageing population, the Wimmera Southern Mallee is particularly dependent upon information and communications technology to improve services and liveability. The current level of broadband and mobile service provided to the Wimmera Southern Mallee is poor, disadvantaging existing residents by increasing social isolation and limiting services, and reducing the attractiveness and liveability of the region for new or potential residents.

Telecommunications improvements can play a significant role to improve emergency response. This will be particularly important in the future given climate change will bring an increase in natural disaster such as bushfire. With an ageing population, the people of the Wimmera Southern Mallee will be particularly vulnerable to events such as these, being less able to cope with and contribute to emergency management efforts. Older residents are less physically active, less able to leave their homes, and more reliant upon others to assist them. Mobile and broadband technology will enable isolated people to remain up to date with events and help them to respond, as well as assisting the emergency services to undertake prevention and response.<sup>20</sup>

The Commonwealth government will invest heavily in the National Broadband Network over the next eight years, aiming to deliver

fibre to every town over a thousand households (only eight towns in Wimmera Southern Mallee >1000 people), with remaining coverage through wireless and satellite technology.<sup>21</sup> In the Wimmera Southern Mallee, towns likely to receive fibre optic from a line linking Melbourne to Adelaide would include Horsham and Stawell. Being 50km from the line, St Arnaud may receive fibre optic, however Warracknabeal, for example, is likely to be deemed too far away to obtain the service.

The State government's *Broadband Framework* 2005 aims to boost broadband access, improve affordability, develop a more competitive market, and make the most effective use of the technology. The *Victorian Innovation Statement* 2008 commits to funding NG broadband in key regions of the state where it is absent.

The Grampians Region Technology Audit and Study will assist in demonstrating regional readiness and the benefits that can be achieved as a result of an early rollout of the National Broadband Network in the Wimmera Southern Mallee and Central Highlands. The study will produce a Wimmera Southern Mallee ICT Plan that maps current ICT adoption levels and service satisfaction and identifies areas of pent up demand for ICT services. This will provide guidance for regional priority setting and investment that addresses business and community needs.

#### **INTENDED OUTCOMES**

This strategy will overcome the current disadvantage faced by industries and communities from sub-standard broadband and mobile phone coverage.

<sup>20</sup> Commonwealth of Australia. *Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee Report*.

<sup>21</sup> Department of Broadband, Communication and the Digital Economy. National Broadband Network: 21<sup>st</sup> century broadband [http://www.dbcde.gov.au/broadband/national\\_broadband\\_net\\_work](http://www.dbcde.gov.au/broadband/national_broadband_net_work). Accessed 22 December 2009.

<b>Areas for Action</b>	<b>Suggested Lead Agency (&amp; collaborating partners)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop a regionally supported approach to drive improvement in broadband and mobile phone coverage in the Wimmera Southern Mallee for towns with populations less than 1,000.</li> </ul>	WDA (local government, key community and business organizations)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Wimmera Southern Mallee ICT Plan development and implementation</li> </ul>	Grampians RDA Committee (WDA, local government)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop innovative local ICT solutions through community planning initiatives</li> </ul>	Local government

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 6:

### **Transport infrastructure supports the needs of the region's industries and communities**

Historically, the carriage of grain to silos and ports (Melbourne, Geelong and Portland) dominated intra- and inter-regional transport of freight in the Wimmera Southern Mallee. This however is changing.

The growth of the mineral sands industry in the north of the region and timber in the south is seeing greater transport of these goods to the Port of Portland. Additionally, recent droughts have affected grain production reducing the volume of grain being transported. Despite this, a rise in private grain marketing, the closure of grain handling facilities and a reduction in rail services have seen growth in the road transportation of grain compared with rail and the use of roads not traditionally used for that purpose in the past.<sup>22</sup>

While these trends can be expected to continue in the short term, the longer term is less certain. Government commitments to standardize the rail network and upgrade the Principal Freight Network for both rail and high performance freight vehicles may see greater use of rail freight. However, if climate change reduces the region's grain production capacity as expected, road transport of grains may increase. An analysis of these trends and the development of a regional freight strategy would ensure industries' needs are met and balanced with concerns of the community.

Horsham is also an important point on the Melbourne to Adelaide route, being approximately halfway between the two cities. The Melbourne-Adelaide rail line, which passes through Horsham and has an intermodal hub at Doon, is part of the larger East-West corridor that includes the Sydney-Adelaide and Adelaide-Perth rail lines. Growth on the Melbourne-Adelaide rail line is projected to grow at 2.6% per annum

between 1999 and 2025,<sup>23</sup> while the Western Highway is expected to experience growth of 2.38% per annum, higher than any other Victorian non-urban link.<sup>24</sup>

The Wimmera Regional Transport Plan Review<sup>25</sup> noted the importance of duplicating the Western Highway to the South Australian border and establishing a Horsham bypass to reduce the safety and cost implications associated with the increased traffic.

High quality, regular and efficient passenger transport in the Wimmera Southern Mallee and to the region is essential for residents to access services and work, study and recreation opportunities and to attract people to the region.

Accessibility to Melbourne has been identified as a key factor in attracting people to regional Victoria.<sup>26</sup> There is community demand for improvements to the existing bus / train service between the region and Melbourne, particularly for a train service for the Ararat to Horsham leg of the journey

Meanwhile, air travel has significant time and accommodation savings over other transport options and is important for corporate and government travel to and from the region. Horsham Rural City Council has developed a business case to improve the north-south runway at the Horsham aerodrome, at a cost of \$1.3M. Council has committed \$300 000 to the project, with the remaining funding sought from state government. If the runway can be improved to a suitable standard, regional stakeholders believe that a regular passenger service operating five days per week between Horsham and Melbourne would become popular for corporate and government organisations similar to that between Hamilton and Melbourne.

<sup>22</sup> Wimmera Regional Transport Group (2008) *Wimmera Regional Transport Plan – 2008 update*.

<sup>23</sup> BTRE (2006) *Demand projects for AusLink non-urban corridors: Methodology and Projections*, Working Paper 66, Commonwealth of Australia.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Wimmera Regional Transport Group (2008) *Wimmera Regional Transport Plan – 2008 update*.

<sup>26</sup> State of Victoria 2008. *Victorian Transport Plan*.

The Wimmera Southern Mallee's has a well-developed airport network with aerodromes at Horsham, Stawell, Donald, St Arnaud Warracknabeal, Hopetoun, Nhill and Edenhope. These aerodromes are used for aviation training and servicing as well as playing a critical role to in emergency fire and ambulance services, but need continual upgrade and maintenance.

Finally, improved public transport services and maintenance of the airport network is essential to the region. Rising petrol prices (predicted to triple or quadruple by 2030) will affect residents in regional areas more so than their metropolitan counterparts given the large distances travelled and their low incomes<sup>27</sup> driving a higher demand for public transport. Additionally, the Wimmera Southern Mallee's population above 75 is expected to increase by 4000 people by 2036, doubling the number of people currently in this age bracket, and older people are less likely to drive cars. Public transport is particularly important for these elderly residents and for young people to access services, shops and entertainment.

Currently, local public transport consists of private contractors in Horsham and Stawell, taxis in Horsham, Dimboola, Stawell and Warracknabeal and local bus services between some of the region's towns. There are also trials of further bus services and volunteer taxi services. However, there are gaps in these services and some are not accessible to young people. The role of community transport in the region is another transport option that may become more necessary in future where public transport is unviable.

#### **INTENDED OUTCOMES**

Improving the transport infrastructure and services within the Wimmera Southern Mallee would see better connection of people within the region to health and education services and recreation opportunities and of the region to Melbourne.

It would also address several of the safety issues associated with freight carriage within the region and the growth in traffic along the Melbourne to Adelaide transport corridor that transects the region.

<b>Areas for Action</b>	<b>Suggested Lead Agency (&amp; collaborating partners)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Development of a <i>Western Victoria Regional Freight Strategy</i> that plans for changes in demand from the agricultural, forestry and mining industries.</li> </ul>	VicRoads (Local governments)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Successful implementation, marketing and operation of the Wimmera Intermodal Freight Terminal</li> </ul>	Horsham RCC (RDV, WDA)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Progress Western Highway bypass at Horsham to improve amenity and safety of Horsham and freight transport efficiency.</li> </ul>	VicRoads (Horsham RCC)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Duplication of the Western Highway to the South Australian border to provide a safe road transport corridor through the region.</li> </ul>	VicRoads (WDA, Local Government)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assessment of the social, environmental and economic value of connecting the Wimmera Southern Mallee and Melbourne via fast passenger train service.</li> </ul>	DoT (DPCD)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Upgrade of the north-south runway at Horsham aerodrome and assessment of potential for commercial passenger service.</li> </ul>	RDV (Horsham Rural City Council)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Transport Connections Program be expanded significantly to provide appropriate and accessible services in all towns.</li> </ul>	DoT (DPCD)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maintain the capacity of the region's aerodrome network to support emergency services and other aviation requirements.</li> </ul>	DoT

<sup>27</sup> RSPI 2008. *Transport and Connectivity Position Paper*.

## 5.4 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Wimmera Southern Mallee requires a regionally specific approach to increasing skills and workforce participation because of its relatively narrow economic base, high vulnerability to the negative impacts of climate change and its small, declining and ageing population.

Total employment growth is forecast to be slow, with a major decline in employment in agriculture, however significant employment growth is forecast for health & community services, transport & storage, construction and other human services. These industries are already experiencing difficulties finding suitably qualified applicants for higher skilled jobs.

These skill shortages can be addressed by three broad strategies:

1. retrain workers from industries with declining employment;
2. attract skilled workers from outside of the region; and
3. train the emerging local workforce (young people) in these skill areas.

Programs have been in place to address these strategies:

- the *Rural Skills Connect – Wimmera Initiative*, which aims to better utilise the skills of the ‘on farm’ sector and address vital skills gaps in the region;
- the *Wimmera Southern Mallee Skilled Migration Initiative*, which is attracting skilled migrants to the region; and
- the *Wimmera Trade Training Centre*, which is being established to promote and enhance training opportunities in identified skills shortage areas within the region.

However, when compared with the State average, young people within the Wimmera

Southern Mallee have significantly lower participation in post secondary education and training, and significantly higher rates of deferral from such training. There are concerns within the regional community that this situation may be exacerbated by the recent trend of reduced participation in pathway programs (e.g. VETiS & SBNA) within schools.

Furthermore, the number of small schools (primary and secondary) and the number of schools with declining enrolments in the region is high and many schools are finding it difficult to attract appropriately qualified teachers to deliver a comprehensive range of learning programs.

Thus, there are increasing barriers to the provision of and access to a comprehensive range of learning opportunities at all levels of the education system. This issue must be addressed if the Wimmera Southern Mallee is to meet its needs for increased skills in the future.

### **INTENDED OUTCOMES**

Increased education levels for all young people in the Wimmera Southern Mallee.

Increased proportion of young people undertaking post secondary education and training within the Wimmera Southern Mallee.

Growing industries within the Wimmera Southern Mallee will have greater access to skilled employees to meet their needs.

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION 7:**

**Provide access to a comprehensive and contemporary range of learning programs from K-12, regardless of location.**

Areas for Action	Suggested Lead Agency (& collaborating partners)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rationalise learning programs offered by individual schools and expand access via use of ITC and shared teaching resources</li> </ul>	DEECD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attract and train trainers from within the local community to develop and deliver locally relevant learning programs</li> </ul>	DEECD, ACE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build collaborative partnerships between training providers to foster and encourage alternative models of training provision in small communities</li> </ul>	WSM LLEN, DEECD (Local Government, ACE, TAFE, private RTOs, industry)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop the ACE sector as a viable pathway between school and TAFE/University</li> </ul>	DEECD, ACE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extend access to Community VCAL to all communities</li> </ul>	WSM LLEN, DEECD (Local Government, industry)

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION 8:**

**Increase locally accessible post secondary education and training opportunities.**

Areas for Action	Suggested Lead Agency (& collaborating partners)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review impact of State Government policy, <i>Securing Jobs for your Future - Skills for Victoria</i>, on the delivery of post secondary education and training in 'thin' markets, eg. Wimmera Southern Mallee</li> </ul>	Skills Victoria (UB, WorkCo/Longerenong & other regional providers)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seek Government, industry and community support to increase course offerings at existing campuses within the Wimmera Southern Mallee</li> </ul>	UB, WorkCo/Longerenong (Skills Victoria, ACE, WSM LLEN, Local Government, industry)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop outreach programs to extend delivery of course offerings to those communities beyond the existing campuses</li> </ul>	UB, WorkCo / Longerenong, (WSM LLEN, ACE, Local Government, industry)

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION 9:**

**Attract and retrain workers to meet immediate workforce needs.**

Areas for Action	Suggested Lead Agency (& collaborating partners)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retain and expand the <i>Wimmera Southern Mallee Skilled Migration Initiative</i></li> </ul>	WDA (Local Government)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retain and expand the <i>Rural Skills Connect – Wimmera Initiative</i></li> </ul>	WDA and Local Government) (RDV)

## 6 A Healthy and Resilient Environment

### 6.1 REGIONAL GOAL

Achieving a healthy and resilient environment in the face of a changing climate will be driven by:

- the sustainable management and use of water resources
- effective natural resource management and sustainable agricultural practices
- improved knowledge of, and adaptation to, climate change and its impacts
- well-informed communities

#### **STRATEGIC DIRECTION 10:**

#### ***Sustainable Management and Use of Water***

Recent droughts and climate change are key drivers of change in the Wimmera Southern Mallee. Whilst the construction of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline will deliver significant water savings and a better quality secure water supply, the CSIRO project that water availability will decrease by as much as 62% under a high climate change scenario by 2055. This level of reduction in inflows to storages may reduce the amount of water savings that can be achieved, thus creating further challenges for water allocation and sustainable use.

A huge community investment (local, State and Commonwealth) has been made to construct the pipeline, now the priority for the region is to determine how best to utilise this resource for the future productivity, sustainability and liveability of the region. Water for river health and for recreation are just two examples of the many critically important roles that water has in people's lives.

A significant challenge is determining how to manage the balance between water availability (allocation) and security.

The *Western Region Sustainable Water Strategy*, in development, examines the needs of the region's towns, industry, agriculture and the environment over the next 50 years under a range of possible

climate scenarios, and sets water resource management priorities and actions.

The Draft Western Region Sustainable Water Strategy raises the following questions about water sharing in the Wimmera Southern Mallee:

- Do you think the reliability should be the same for all entitlements supplied from the pipeline?
- If different entitlements receive different reliability as water availability declines, what uses should have priority?
- How should we manage the water for growth in a dry future?

A thorough community engagement process to examine these questions will be important to guide the management of water in future

Groundwater is a vital resource in the west of the region. The *West Wimmera Groundwater Management Strategy* is currently being developed by GWMWater in consultation with stakeholders to address concerns about reducing levels in some parts of the region and the desire for new groundwater use in some other parts of the region<sup>28</sup>.

The strategy will cover the West Wimmera Groundwater Management Area (GMA),

<sup>28</sup> 091214 West Wimmera Groundwater MSD.web.pdf – retrieved from <http://www.gwmwater.org.au/> on 18/01/10

which includes existing Water Supply Protection Areas of Apsley, Neuarpuurr, Kaniva and Telopea Downs, the Nhill GMA and the proposed Gymbowen GMA and surrounding areas. The strategy will address the future management of this resource, which has significant implications for industry development and sustainability in the West Wimmera.

At a local town level, there is an opportunity to improve the efficiency of use and management of all water resources through integrated water management planning, eg. Nhill integrated water management plan.

**INTENDED OUTCOMES**

Local ownership of the actions required to ensure sustainable water use in the Wimmera Southern Mallee.

The available water resource is utilised to maximise the future productivity, sustainability and liveability of the Wimmera Southern Mallee.

<b>Areas for Action</b>	<b>Suggested Lead Agency (&amp; collaborating partners)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ensure the process for establishing equitable water share of the available water supply in the Wimmera Southern Mallee enables wide community input.</li> </ul>	GWMWater
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Review the bulk entitlement shares for all water users in the Wimmera Southern Mallee</li> </ul>	DSE (GWMWater, Wimmera CMA)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop a water trading system for consumptive entitlements that will facilitate economic development by encouraging use for high value production.</li> </ul>	GWMWater (DSE)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Invest in research into the risks and localised impact of climate change on the water supply and the interaction between groundwater and surface water in the Wimmera Southern Mallee.</li> </ul>	DSE (GWMWater)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prepare Integrated Water Management Plans for priority communities of the Wimmera Southern Mallee</li> </ul>	GWMWater (Local Government, DSE, WCMA)

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 11:

### A Healthy Catchment

The Wimmera Southern Mallee is diverse with plains, desert and mountains, woodlands, grasslands, moist foothill forest and box ironbark forest, Mallee heath and Mallee woodlands. Average annual rainfall varies from up to 1000mm in the Grampians National Park to as low as 300mm in the northern plains. Features of the region include the many wetlands and lakes, the heritage listed Wimmera River, groundwater resources, indigenous and European heritage and over 600 parks and reserves.

The condition of the natural environment varies considerably. The major rivers and tributary creeks are all in very poor to moderate condition. The only waterways in good or excellent condition are located in the forested areas in the Grampians National Park. Recently, there has been some positive impact from environmental flows in the Wimmera River and some of its tributaries, such as Yarriambiack Creek, resulting from savings from the Wimmera Mallee pipeline.

Given most of the region has been cleared for agriculture, the region has 15% of its native vegetation remaining, most of which is in parks and State Forests. There are approximately 320 plant species and about 80 animal species that are rare or threatened.

There are several bioregions of note, including the Little Desert and northern part of the Greater Grampians bioregion.

Improving the health of the catchment requires action in:

- Strategically protecting and returning native vegetation to the landscape
- Working to improve the condition of waterways
- Supporting farmers in farming sustainably
- Controlling the impacts of introduced pests and weeds
- Providing information to the community about local environmental systems<sup>29</sup>

The Landcare communities of the Wimmera Southern Mallee have been very active in protecting and enhancing the natural environment. Continued support of Landcare is critical if the achievements of the past are to be maintained and built upon further.

The new State policy on land health directs investment towards flagship areas, biolinks and resilience of ecosystems. The Wimmera Southern Mallee is well placed to respond to the policy objectives.

Areas for Action	Suggested Lead Agency (& collaborating partners)
▪ Support development of biolinks in Wimmera Southern Mallee to improve extent and quality of native vegetation	Wimmera CMA (DSE)
▪ Support of the Landcare networks and groups to help achieve catchment management objectives	Wimmera CMA (DSE, DPI)
▪ Support for Landcare groups and networks as well as farmers and farmer industry groups to promote awareness and adoption of improved land management activities	Wimmera CMA (DSE, DPI)
▪ Maintain and enhance condition of flagship areas in the Wimmera Southern Mallee	Parks Victoria (DSE, Wimmera CMA)

<sup>29</sup> Wimmera CMA Corporate Plan 2009-2014

## **STRATEGIC DIRECTION 12:**

### ***A Community Living More Sustainably***

All Councils of the Wimmera Southern Mallee are concerned about, and taking action on, a range of environmental issues. The most common are measures designed to mitigate and adapt to climate change, including the reduction of energy use and consideration of alternative energy sources.

The Wimmera Mallee Sustainability Alliance represents six councils, the Wimmera CMA

and other local institutions and is making a contribution to tackling local and regional environmental issues. The group has highlighted climate change adaptation and mitigation among the key issues for the region. It is in the process of developing a Sustainability Strategy for the Wimmera Mallee.

<b>Areas for Action</b>	<b>Suggested Lead Agency (&amp; collaborating partners)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Strengthen regional understanding of climate change and associated risks to enable communities and institutions to develop mitigation and adaptation responses</li> </ul>	WMSA (Local Government, state government)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support implementation of Local Government Sustainability Accords</li> </ul>	Local Government (WMSA, Sustainability Victoria, DSE)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Embed climate change information and understanding into local community planning processes</li> </ul>	WMSA (Local Government)

## 7 Community Well-being

### 7.1 REGIONAL GOAL

The Wimmera Southern Mallee is a wonderful place to live and will become even more attractive for existing and new residents with:

- innovative models of community service delivery
- valued and supported volunteers
- provision of a broad range of housing choice, affordability and availability
- engaged and connected young people

- improved health outcomes
- thriving sports and recreation clubs and facilities

#### ***STRATEGIC DIRECTION 13:***

#### ***Strengthening local communities***

The Wimmera Southern Mallee has a number of characteristics that are highly valued by the community<sup>30</sup>:

- There is a strong feeling of community connectedness, with higher than average satisfaction with feeling part of the community, social network support, volunteering, and parental participation in schools compared to country Victoria
- Personal and community safety is strong surrounding perceptions of safety, crime and family violence
- Financial stress is lower in Wimmera LGAs, compared to country Victoria
- Housing affordability is considerably higher in the six Wimmera LGAs
- Higher proportion of citizenship engagement, with contribution to important issues and membership of decision-making boards or committees higher than the regional Victoria average

There are however other indicators of community well-being where the region

performs less well. These are mainly health related, however the region's youth are over-represented in incidence of road trauma, property damage and assaults.

Addressing youth involvement in crime, traffic and public order is a complex issue.

Addressing the disadvantage experienced by many Indigenous people in the region continues to be a focus for government and the community on issues as diverse as maternity and early childhood development, heritage and Native Title, health, welfare, education, training, housing, justice, family violence, and employment.

Flowing from the impacts of recent drought conditions, there is continuing need to strengthen community connectedness and reduce reliance on government assistance.

The changing nature of local communities, brought about in-migration of newcomers to the region, is cause for concern to many existing residents. Maintaining community cohesiveness will be an important challenge to a number of communities.

<sup>30</sup> Community Indicators Victoria, 2009, VicHealth & McCaughey Centre, University of Melbourne

There is a growing demand for improved community service delivery which is being partly addressed through community planning initiatives. However the level of community dissatisfaction with service delivery indicates that much more is needed to be done.

The Department of Human Services, in partnership with local, state and federal partners such as the Wimmera Primary Care Partnership, has been instrumental in developing new models of service delivery such as service hubs where a range of family services, child care, community services and business services are co-located and made accessible within small rural communities.

Climate change impacts will pose various risks for members of the community, eg. elderly people and heat-related problems. Ensuring that people from all socio-economic backgrounds are not disadvantaged or 'left behind' as the region seeks to adapt to climate change will be important.

Volunteerism is a vital part of community-well-being particularly in smaller and

geographically-isolated areas but volunteers are demanding more support to avoid burnout. With an aging demographic, the gap between community expectations for services provision is likely to expand and place greater requirements on volunteers to bridge the gap. The development of sustainable models of volunteering are required. A new model being piloted with Neighborhood Houses in Yarriambiack Shire is an innovative approach that aims to be responsive to limited volunteer resources.

Building leadership capability in the region has been successful through the Wimmera Leadership program. Its continuation is sought to enable more people, especially young people, to be assisted to develop their leadership roles in the region.

The contribution of arts and cultural activities to community well-being and liveability of regions is well-understood, and is reflected in Council plans. Local government is involved in supporting the delivery of arts and cultural programs and services, plus art galleries and performing arts venues.

<b>Areas for Action</b>	<b>Suggested Lead Agency (&amp; collaborating partners)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Review the capacity of volunteers to service community needs and consider additional volunteer support programs. Assess whether reliance on volunteers is sustainable in future and the need for innovative models of volunteering.</li> </ul>	DPCD (Wimmera Volunteers Inc. Local Government)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support the on-going delivery of the Wimmera Community Leadership Program and alumni network to contribute to the region</li> </ul>	RDV (WDA)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community planning and development be undertaken in Wimmera Southern Mallee communities with populations less than 1000 to improve local community outcomes.</li> </ul>	Local governments (DPCD, DHS, DEECD)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Youth issues of crime, road trauma and public order addressed through multi-agency approaches</li> </ul>	DoJ, DHS, Victoria Police (Local Government)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support the continued development of arts and cultural activities throughout the region</li> </ul>	Local Government (Arts Victoria)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop a regional housing strategy to address need for appropriate housing choice, availability and affordability</li> </ul>	Local Government (RDV, DPCD, DHS)

## **STRATEGIC DIRECTION 14:**

### **Health and community services delivery responds to population change.**

Like many parts of rural Victoria, health outcomes in the Wimmera Southern Mallee are below those of metropolitan Melbourne and Victoria as a whole.

Similarly, levels of disability are higher, with more people in all municipalities, except Horsham, reporting that they needed assistance with core activities than those in Melbourne.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, all councils have more people receiving the Disability Support Pension than the Victorian average.

Fewer health services and more difficulty accessing them, increased stress, distance and social isolation and lower access to a healthy diet, healthy environments and exercise programs are all likely to contribute to this.

Local hospitals and health care providers report that they experience many of the difficulties experienced in other rural areas in providing their services:

- a difficulty in attract medical practitioners – with small agencies struggling to attract GPs and the larger agencies having difficulty attracting specialist medical staff
- a need to pay premiums to attract these staff placing pressure on budgets
- an inability to fund the infrastructure required for the changing demographics – particularly aged care infrastructure.<sup>32</sup>

This is experienced at a local level by a loss or lack of doctors, mental health counselling services and specialists such as dentists and speech pathologists, the need to travel large distances to reach hospitals and a rarity of visits of maternal and child health nurses that mean some issues go unaddressed.<sup>33</sup>

Where the services do exist, accessing them can be difficult where transport services do

not having enough volunteer drivers or are not coordinated with the medical services and where telecommunications are poor. This is particularly a problem for the elderly and young people and is likely to become increasingly problematic as the Wimmera Southern Mallee's population ages and if a reduction in medical services requires people to travel to the larger centres of Horsham, Edenhope, Nhill and Stawell to access them.

Despite these difficulties, several services and programs are highly valued by the communities that have them and desired by communities that don't. These include:

- Neighbourhood Houses and Men's Sheds
- the district health nurses
- the preventative health activities offered by agencies such as Dunmunkle Health Services and Harrow Bush Nursing Service.

The recent drought and rising fuel prices have also had a deleterious effect on the health of the Wimmera Southern Mallee community. Financial stress on farms increases workloads and creates stress for farmers and their families, puts financial pressure on local businesses and affects the general outlook of the community. Rising fuel costs and financial hardship increase social isolation, especially for people on farms.

The tyranny of distance is similarly evident in access to and ability to use childcare services. Access to childcare services, especially occasional and flexible care, is low in the Wimmera Southern Mallee. Its absence in smaller towns can make it difficult for parents to drop their kids off at childcare and then travel to another town for work. The Take a Break program operating in Warracknabeal, Rupanyup and Murtoa (which provides occasional care so parents could attend to business, appointments or

<sup>31</sup> ABS, *Census of Housing and Population*, 2006.

<sup>32</sup> C. Scott, pers comm. (1 March 2010)

<sup>33</sup> Wimmera Primary Care Partnership, *Evidence to inform planning for our region*, 2009, p.27.

shopping) has been very popular and could be expanded to more towns.<sup>34</sup>

At the other end of the age spectrum, the Wimmera Southern Mallee's ageing population is placing increasing demands on the region's aged care facilities, some of which were built in the 1970s or earlier and are in need of renovation. The ageing population is also changing the housing needs of the region, with a need for smaller houses with less maintenance requirements and good physical access. As the number of people in the over 75 age bracket continues to grow (by an additional 4000 people by 2036 – double current numbers), these demands will similarly continue to grow.

Without a shift in infrastructure and service delivery, it seems unlikely that most rural and remote communities with declining populations will be able to address poor health and meet the needs of their ageing populations. Innovation and collaboration in service delivery is needed to meet the critical challenge of maintaining services and facilities where there are diminishing economies of scale.

The Department of Human Services, in partnership with local, state and federal partners such as the Wimmera Primary Care Partnership, has been instrumental in developing new models of service delivery such as service hubs where a range of health

care, child care, community development and business services are co-located and made accessible within small rural communities.

The Department of Health is undertaking regional planning of health services and infrastructure. The Wimmera Health Services Plan will identify the funding, staffing and infrastructure required to provide the services the community needs and define roles for the different service providers. The plan is expected to be comprehensive, covering the breadth of public health services from acute, subacute and primary care, through ambulatory and aged care.

The impact on the Wimmera Southern Mallee of the Federal Government's intention to create a National Health and Hospitals Network, consisting of Local Hospital Networks paid directly and largely by the Federal Government is unclear at this stage.

#### **INTENDED OUTCOMES**

Finding ways to meet the service needs of small and/or declining communities could have a range of immediate benefits such as improving people's health and wellbeing, and longer term benefits of attracting and retaining people within the small towns of the region.

<b>Areas for Action</b>	<b>Suggested Lead Agency (&amp; collaborating partners)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Engage in the development of the Wimmera Health Services Plan to ensure local community issues and needs are communicated effectively.</li> </ul>	Department of Health (Health sector, Local governments)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Expand the DHS service hubs program to identified priority towns</li> </ul>	DHS (other government agencies)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community planning and development be undertaken in Wimmera Southern Mallee communities with populations less than 1000 to improve local community outcomes.</li> </ul>	Local governments (DPCD, DHS, DEECD)

<sup>34</sup> Wimmera Primary Care Partnership, *Evidence to inform planning for our region*, 2009, p.28.

## 8 Regional Settlements and Land Use Planning

### 8.1 ROLE, FUNCTION AND RELATIONSHIPS OF TOWNS

The regional map (Fig 8-1) shows that Horsham is the main regional centre servicing the rural hinterland. Horsham is the only town predicted to experience growth over the next 20 years. Outside the Wimmera Southern Mallee, Ballarat and Bendigo are the nearest Provincial Centres.

The roles and functions of towns also requires an understanding of the relationships between towns related to place of work, sporting districts, location of health services, education facilities and amenity etc.

#### **St Arnaud, Donald Charlton community of common interest**

- St Arnaud, Charlton and Donald form a triangle with each town around 40km from each other. St Arnaud and Donald are around 100km from Horsham and Charlton 132 km. St Arnaud and Charlton are 100km from Bendigo and Donald is 145 Km.
- There is significant movement between the towns related to education (North Central Schools Cluster) and place of employment;

#### **Stawell, Ararat, Halls Gap community of common interest**

- Stawell, Ararat and Halls Gap form a triangle with each around 30km from each other. Stawell is 64km and Ararat, 95 km along the Western Highway from Horsham.
- Stawell and Halls Gap are within Northern Grampians and Ararat is in Ararat City, part of the Central Highlands region;
- Stawell is the largest town (population of 5,700) apart from Horsham in Wimmera Southern Mallee and Ararat has a population of over 7,000. Combined they have a population close to that of Horsham.

- There is significant movement between the towns particularly related to location of employment.
- Halls Gap is a focus for tourism associated with the Grampians and provides employment to residents in Stawell and Ararat. These towns also act as gateways to the Grampians.

Discussion with stakeholders suggested that there were a number of other groups of towns that have the potential to work together as communities of common interest. These would provide a basis for settlement planning to address future aspirations of residents, liveability and community belonging and service provision and sharing. These communities of common interest are shown in Fig 8-1.

#### **Nhill, Kaniva community of common interest**

- Nhill and Kaniva are approximately 40 km apart on the Western Highway, 76 km and 116km from Horsham respectively
- They are located in the corridor between the Big Desert and Wyperfeld National Parks to the north and the Little Desert National Park to the south
- They are in separate municipalities yet Nhill is a key service centre for Kaniva and the wider rural community in regard to retail, health and education;
- Kaniva has community relationships into South Australia e.g. local football and netball teams compete in a SA based association
- Nhill has a population around three times that of Kaniva.
- Nhill has the main Hindmarsh Shire Council office while Kaniva has a service centre for the West Wimmera Shire Council.

*Issues*

- *Lack of good quality housing in Hindmarsh Shire*
- *There is a need for housing more suited to an ageing population*

**Edenhope community of common interest**

- Edenhope is located 99km south west of Horsham on the Wimmera Highway;
- It has a population of 733 which has shown some modest growth associated with employment opportunities in Naracoorte;
- It provides a service role for the wider rural community;
- While there is a strong employment link in to South Australia, residents do travel to Horsham or Hamilton for more significant retail expenditure and local sporting football and netball teams compete in the Horsham Association

*Issues*

- *More rental accommodation is required*

**Warracknabeal community of common interest**

- Warracknabeal is located 56km north of Horsham on the Henty Highway and has a population of 2,421
- It provides services to the wider community including the towns of Minyip, Hopetoun, Birchip, Jeparit and Rainbow. Some of the more northern towns also draw on Swan Hill to some extent.
- Horsham is the main centre for services not provided by Warracknabeal
- New migrants from Melbourne are reported to be moving to Warracknabeal partly attracted by low house prices

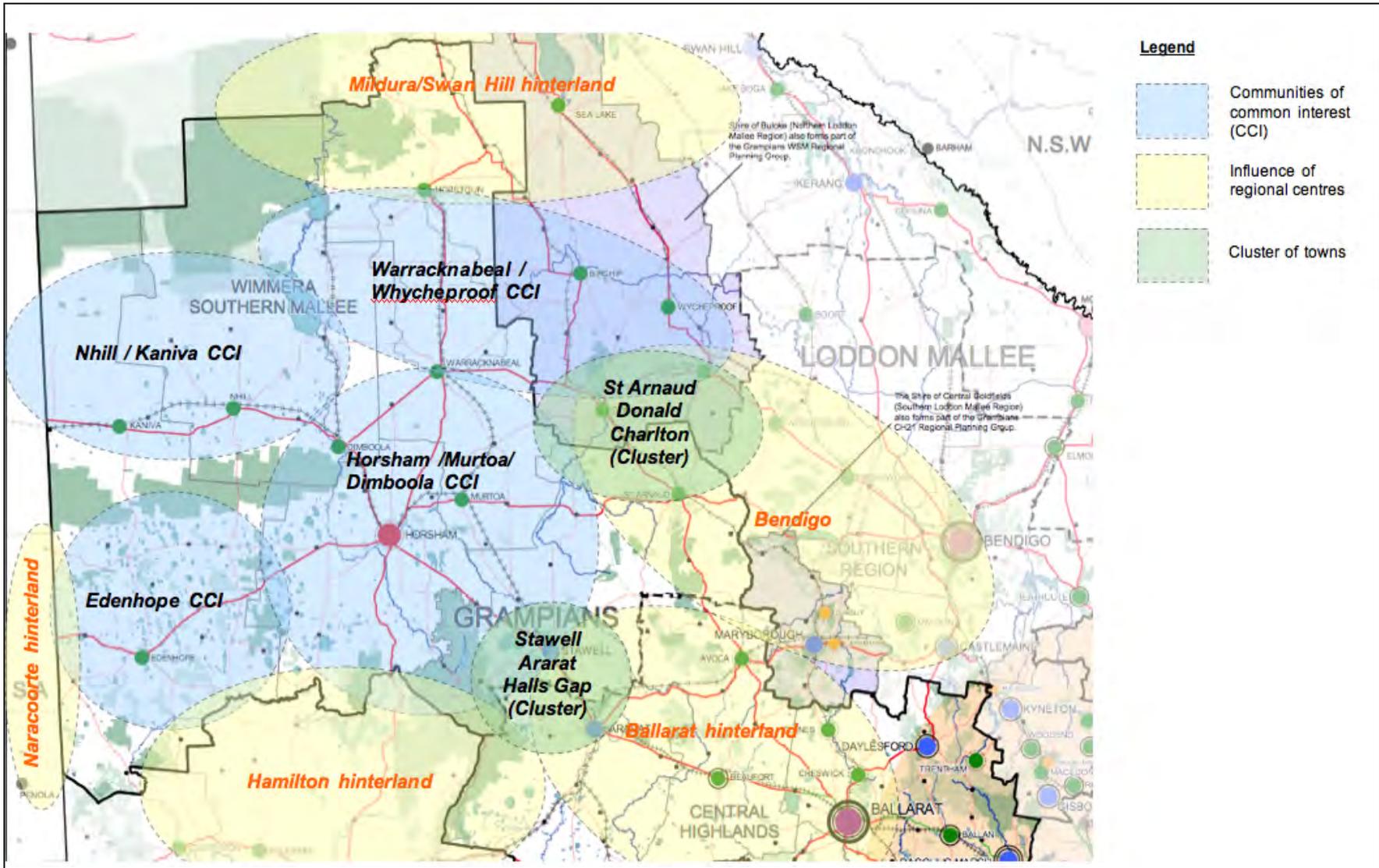
*Issues*

- *Integration of new migrants into the community*
- *Meeting service needs of new migrants and existing community*

**Horsham, Dimboola, Murtoa community of common interest**

- Dimboola and Murtoa are just over 30km and Natimuk 25km from Horsham and these towns while being communities in their own right, also to some extent act as dormitory suburbs of Horsham;
- The Wimmera River flows through Dimboola and along with its proximity to Horsham, makes it attractive for rural residential development;

Figure 8-1: Wimmera Southern Mallee



## 8.2 REGIONAL SETTLEMENT PLANNING PRINCIPLES

An assessment of settlement and land use planning issues was undertaken against the Draft Regional Settlement Planning Principles.

### **Principle 1 – Support a network of integrated and prosperous regional settlements.**

The focus of this principle is to encourage growth and development across a network of inter-related settlements with sufficient capacity to share economic prosperity and growth demands across a region.

#### *Issues and Opportunities*

- Horsham Rural City is the only municipality predicted to experience significant population growth over the next 20 years. Most of this is likely to be concentrated in the town of Horsham itself. There have been some towns where small levels of growth have been experienced such as in Warracknabeal, Halls Gap, and in Edenhope associated with employment opportunities in Naracoorte in South Australia. Elsewhere, population is expected to remain steady or decline and have an increasing proportion of aged people.
- The housing stock in towns across the Wimmera Southern Mallee is typified by separate multi-bedroom dwellings on a quarter acre allotment. Municipalities report though that the demand is for affordable, alternative housing in appropriate locations for an older demographic and for quality rental accommodation for professional workers.
- Vacant shops and shop tops, particularly in smaller towns where retail has relocated to larger centres, provides an opportunity for alternative accommodation that is central and has the potential to be refitted to provide a range of residential options. Current planning policy restricts Council capacity to facilitate this transition.
- House prices are generally lower in regional areas and significantly lower in more remote towns. House owners

looking to downsize or relocate, such as the elderly, are 'trapped' in their housing because the value of the house is less than the replacement value of an appropriate alternative<sup>35</sup>

- In this context of declining and ageing population and low property values, there is market failure in the Wimmera Southern Mallee. The driver of settlement diversity is community need.
- The map of communities of common interest highlights that these are not confined by municipal boundaries. Settlement planning should be based on communities of common concern that reflects community aspirations and facilitates discussion around resource sharing, location of services, infrastructure investment, economic development initiatives that maximise efficiency and outcomes for each community;
- Municipalities in the Wimmera Southern Mallee, apart from Horsham Rural City, do not have the resources to undertake preparation of a housing and settlement strategy.

### **Principle 2 – Maintain and provide for the enhancement of environmental health and productivity within rural and hinterland landscapes.**

The focus of this principle is to ensure that the impacts of settlement growth and development on the productivity, ecological value and biodiversity of adjacent rural land and hinterland and landscapes is understood, managed and protected.

#### *Issues and Opportunities*

- Sustainability of agriculture is critical for prosperity of the region and its contribution to a more sustainable region.

<sup>35</sup> SGS Economic and Planning (2009) Housing supply issues in regional areas. A survey of possible solutions

**Principle 3 – Maintain and enhance regional Victoria’s competitive advantages.**

This principle seeks to ensure that the growth and development of settlements is conducted in an orderly manner, and linked with existing or proposed investments in infrastructure and services to maximise return and encourage ongoing efficiencies.

*Issues and Opportunities*

- There is potential for significant development and land use change associated with the completion of the Wimmera Mallee pipeline. A number of studies have investigated opportunities for industry development associated with the pipeline, which included intensive animal husbandry and horticulture.
- Intensive agricultural industries should be located to minimise offsite impacts as well as having proximity to skilled labour and infrastructure such as roads. None of the municipalities has a rural strategy to provide guidance on appropriate locations for intensive agriculture.
- The Wimmera Southern Mallee is attracting new industries to the region, particularly small businesses looking for affordable land and proximity to services. The cost and lengthy time to receive a planning permit means that opportunities for a small business to relocate to a small town are often lost. These small businesses are extremely important in the local context bringing another family to town, employment opportunities as well as increased local expenditure.
- Slow or no development of land earmarked for industrial use is reducing the capacity of towns to attract new industry;
- The inter-modal freight hub at Doon provides opportunity for new business and industry;

**Principle 4 – Respond to the impacts of climate change and natural hazards and promote community safety.**

The focus of this principle is to reduce the unnecessary effects and unmanaged risks of climate change and natural hazards on the existing and future growth and development of settlements and communities

*Issues and Opportunities*

- Climate change and associated impacts, such as a whole range of issues such as increased risk of wild fire, higher incidence of hot days, etc. will need to be factored into planning and development decisions

**Principle 5 – Support the growth and development of distinct and diverse regional settlements.**

The aim of this principle is to ensure the growth and development of existing settlements respects and enhances each settlement’s unique character and identity.

*Issues and Opportunities*

- Need to foster a sense of community and belonging that reflects long established communities with strong identity, that can be inclusive of new migrants and attract and secure young professionals
- The Skilled Migration program does focus on making the whole family welcome.
- Volunteers have a big role in the region however there are limits to how much they can or should be reasonable expected to do

**Principle 6 – Promote liveable regional settlements and healthy communities.**

The focus of this principle is to ensure that the future growth and development of settlements enhances their liveability and supports social equity and the changing needs of communities.

*Issues and Opportunities*

- Achieving this principles will require innovation and adaptation to fit the Wimmera Southern Mallee and its unique needs/circumstances
- A strong driver should be optimising use of available infrastructure and resources
- Expect that some small towns will become more commuter towns as employment reduces in those towns and employment opportunities are either outside the town or in adjoining regions
- Public transport in the region is generally poor and is a source of discontent.
- Provision, access and maintenance of recreation and leisure facilities is critical to the liveability of rural towns but an increasing cost burden on municipalities with population spread across a number of small towns

**Principle 7 – Encourage regional integration and implementation of policy and regional strategies.**

This principle aims to encourage planning for growth and development for each region at a regional rather than local level to ensure efficiencies, coordination of investment and operational activity

*Issues*

- This is a critical issue for the Wimmera Southern Mallee, though the driver is not growth pressures but the challenges of declining and ageing population and ensuring that future investment maximises the wider region.
- The resources required to review and change planning schemes are significant and beyond the capacity of many smaller rural Councils. This is exacerbated when the planning issues in these Councils do not warrant such significant planning effort (ie. there is not the level of competing demand for land as occurs in regions with high growth and land use change).

<b>Areas for Action</b>	<b>Suggested Lead Agency (&amp; collaborating partners)</b>
▪ Develop a regional settlement strategy based on communities of common interest to articulate community aspirations and address liveability, community identity and belonging.	DPCD Local government
▪ Develop a regional housing strategy that addresses market failure and changing community needs and reflects direction of the overarching settlement strategy	DPCD Local government
▪ Develop a regional industrial land strategy that addresses traditional models of industrial land but also planning policy to facilitate small scale industry and reflects the direction of the overarching settlement strategy	DPCD Local government
▪ Develop a regional rural land strategy that amongst other rural issues considers new intensive agriculture opportunities from the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline and impacts of climate change on agriculture	DPCD Local government
▪ Investigate and implement alternative models for delivery of planning services in the region to address the long term shortfall in capacity	DPCD Local government

## 9 Plan Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

### 9.1 OBJECTIVES

Effective implementation and governance arrangements for the regional plan will require enhanced collaboration and coordination between all levels of government and related advisory bodies

These arrangements will be guided by the following objectives.

#### Clear roles

The regional plan contains a range of areas for action over the life of the plan (~ five years). Responsibility for the areas for action lies with numerous government agencies and other organizations, none of whom however have sole responsibility for the overall implementation of the plan.

Consequently, a governance arrangement is required to ensure that the roles of the various levels of government and other organisations in implementation, monitoring and review of the plan are clearly understood.

#### Build on existing structures

Secondly, a governance arrangement is required that, ideally, builds on an existing structure(s) in the region that has a track record of facilitating a collaborative and coordinated approach to regional and/or cross-sectoral issues. Note: A new structure may be established if existing structures are unsuitable.

#### Shared voice

Finally, it is recognized there is a need for a shared voice across government, community and industry to enhance the region's prosperity, community well-being and sustainability. This requires a governance arrangement that engages the key stakeholders of the region to:

- collectively understand issues impacting on the region, and
- cooperatively develop the most appropriate responses.

### 9.2 STAKEHOLDERS IN REGIONAL PLANS

The roles of the major stakeholders are described as follows (and shown in Fig 9-1):

#### Grampians Regional Development Australia (RDA) Committee

Grampians RDA will use the Wimmera Southern Mallee and Central Highlands regional plans as a framework for providing advice to the State and Federal Governments on the Grampians region's priorities for regional development. The committee will support implementation of the regional plan where appropriate.

The committee will participate in the processes for monitoring and review of the regional plan.

Grampians RDA will have membership of the Wimmera Southern Mallee *Regional Planning Committee*.

#### Grampians Regional Management Forum (RMF)

The Grampians Regional Management Forum will support the implementation of the Wimmera Southern Mallee (and Central Highlands) regional plan through its role in linking regional and state planning activities.

More specifically, the RMF will monitor the implementation of the State Government endorsed priorities within the plan.

Through membership of the Wimmera Southern Mallee *Regional Planning Committee*, the RMF will participate in the on-going monitoring and review of the regional plan.

#### Regional Planning Committee (RPC)

A Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Planning Committee (RPC) is proposed to succeed the existing Project Leadership Group once the plan has been endorsed and the implementation phase commences.

The Committee will act on behalf of the Wimmera Southern Mallee to promote and monitor the implementation of the regional plan. It will assist the plan partners (ie. those with direct responsibility for implementation) to align their activities with the regional plan, where appropriate.

### Local Government

The Councils of the Wimmera Southern Mallee will have a key role in implementation, monitoring and review of the plan through membership and/or participation on the RDA, RMF and Regional Planning Committee.

It is expected that Councils will consider the regional plan to inform the development of Council plans in future.

### Other Stakeholders

There are numerous state agencies, regional and sub-regional bodies, networks and coordination groups within the Wimmera Southern Mallee that will have roles in different aspects of the regional plan.

Some of these players are currently actively involved in the development of the regional plan, such as:

- Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water
- Wimmera Development Association
- Wimmera Mallee Sustainability Alliance

There are many others that have important roles in the region but are not closely connected to the current governance of the plan. These include (list is not meant to be exhaustive):

- Wimmera Uniting Care
- Wimmera Southern Mallee Health Alliance
- Grampians Health Alliance
- Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly
- Wimmera Volunteers Inc
- Wimmera Catchment Management Authority
- Birchip Cropping Group

- Wimmera Transport Connections
- Grampians Community Health
- Wimmera Primary Care Partnership
- Wimmera Southern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network
- Wimmera Grains Cluster
- Wimmera Manufacturers Network

## 9.3 REGIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

The regional plan is a new and bold initiative for the Wimmera Southern Mallee. It has a broad scope covering economic development, environmental sustainability and community well-being that requires coordinated action to be effective.

A Regional Planning Committee is proposed to take the lead role within the region for promoting implementation of the plan – similar to the role of the Project Control Group which has taken responsibility for developing the plan on behalf of the region.

Criteria to guide the establishment of a Regional Planning Committee are proposed as:

- Represents all of the local government areas of the WSM region
- Strong links with and involvement of state government
- Focus on productivity, sustainability and liveability of the region
- Strong leadership
- Able to create and maintain partnerships with government, industry and community groups
- Resource capability to undertake relevant administrative functions
- Is a sustainable and on-going structure.

### Interim Arrangement

An assessment by the Project Control Group has concluded that further time is required to

determine the most appropriate arrangement for the formation of the Regional Planning Committee.

It is therefore proposed that the Project Control Group remains in place, as an interim measure, until an agreed governance arrangement is in place (timeframe 6 months).

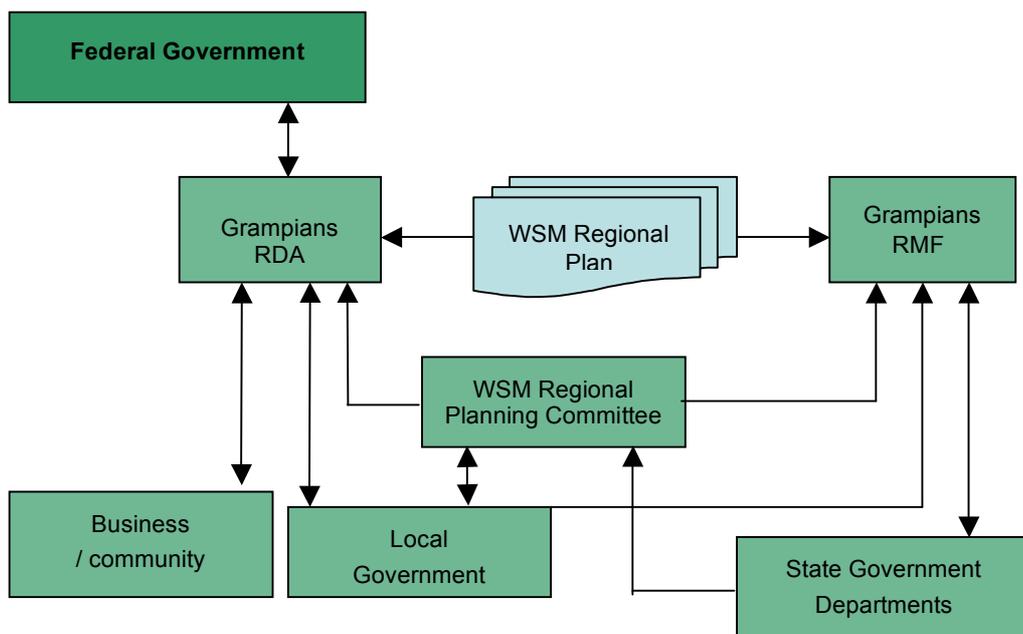
It is also proposed that the current membership of the Project Control Group be reviewed to ensure it can effectively fulfill its role in the interim period.

## 9.4 REGIONAL PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The rate of progress against the regional plan (Strategic Directions and Areas for Action) will be assessed after 12 months of implementation to identify opportunities for improvement.

The review will also consider the role of the key stakeholders in implementation.

**Fig 9-1 Stakeholder relationships in regional planning**



## List of Acronyms

ACE - Adult Continuing Education	VCE - Victorian Certificate of Education
BCG - Birchip Cropping Group	VET - Vocational Education and Training
CGLLEN - Central Grampians Local Learning and Employment Network	VETiS - Vocational Education and Training in Schools
DEECD - Department of Education and Early Childhood Development	WCMA - Wimmera Catchment Management Authority
DHS - Department of Human Services	WDA - Wimmera Development Association
DoH - Department of Health	WMSA - Wimmera Mallee Sustainability Alliance
DOJ - Department of Justice	WSM - Wimmera Southern Mallee
DPCD - Department of Planning and Community Development	WSWS - Western Region Sustainable Water Strategy
DPI - Department of Primary Industries	WTTC - Wimmera Trade Training Centre
DSE - Department of Sustainability and Environment	
GMA - Groundwater Management Area	
GWM Water - Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water	
LLEN - Local Learning and Employment Network	
PCG - Project Control Group	
RDA - Regional Development Australia	
RDV - Regional Development Victoria	
RMF - Regional Management Forum	
SBNA - School Based New Apprenticeship	
TAFE - Technical and Further Education	
UB - University of Ballarat	
VCAL - Victorian Certificate of Applied Education	