

LODDON MALLEE  
**REGIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN**  
2015-18





## THE **LODDON** **MALLEE** REGION

The Loddon Mallee Region encompasses 10 local government areas from central to far north western Victoria.

Visit: [www.loddonmallee.com.au](http://www.loddonmallee.com.au)



### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1

*Foster our comparative advantages in agriculture, food processing and other regionally significant industries*

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2

*Build the connecting infrastructure for our diverse economy*

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3

*Enhance the wellbeing and economic participation of our people*

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4

*Protect and enhance the liveability and appeal of our Region*

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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## ► Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge Aboriginal Traditional Custodians within the Region, their rich culture and spiritual connection to Country. We also recognise and acknowledge the contribution and interest of Indigenous people and organisations in the development of a prosperous Region.

# MESSAGE FROM THE RDA CHAIR

## THE ABILITY OF A REGION TO TALK WITH ONE VOICE IS POWERFUL.

The Loddon Mallee Regional Strategic Plan 2015-18 aims to provide a clear, unchallenged statement of the actions that will transform our Region and find support from our elected representatives and community leaders who can influence our future.

This Plan is a collection of the transformative actions that will make the most difference to the Loddon Mallee Region. The Plan distils our most important needs and conveys consensus for these priorities.

Each of the local governments in the Loddon Mallee Region understands the advantage of collaborative action. Our roads and industries cross municipal boundaries and our people have similar needs. Working together can achieve cost efficiencies; it can help generate best practice, and most importantly it recognises our shared future.

This Plan has been endorsed by the ten councils within our Region. Implementation of the Plan will rely on the Commonwealth and State Governments, our ten local governments and a raft of other regional organisations. As the custodian of the Plan, the Loddon Mallee Regional Development Australia Committee is wholly reliant on these partner organisations.

This Plan replaces our first Regional Strategic Plans published in 2010. Seventy five percent of the initiatives within these plans have been actioned. The recently released [Loddon Mallee North](#) and [South Regional Growth Plans](#) and an [Investment Prospectus](#) published in 2014, acting as the catalyst for a renewed Regional Strategic Plan.

This series of regional planning documents align with each other, and each new publication is the result of extensive consultation. This Plan has benefited from the input of over 200 leaders from a broad cross section of organisations, representing a wide range of interests.

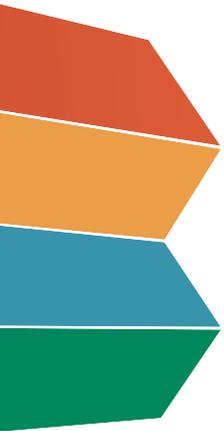


On behalf of the Regional Development Australia Committee, I would like to thank those of you who have helped us shape the Regional Strategic Plan 2015-18.

We now look forward to working with you all in the implementation of the Plan.

**JENNY DAWSON**  
CHAIR

► “Positive change can occur when we recognise that many issues are the responsibility of more than one organisation, community or individual.”



# ABOUT THIS PLAN

## THE LODDON MALLEE REGIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN (RSP) 2015-18 IDENTIFIES THE OPPORTUNITIES AND NEEDS OF THE LODDON MALLEE REGION.

It distils priorities from a multitude of demands, uniting the Region and encouraging investment to be directed where it will have greatest impact on future prosperity.

This Plan outlines *Aspirations* and *Strategic Directions* based on extensive consultation and experience in implementing the last Regional Strategic Plans, and draws on commissioned expert opinion.

*Priority Areas* target activity to leverage our Region's comparative advantages and address the needs of our community. The priority areas are diverse, and address investment requirements to benefit the Region's towns and regional cities, they strengthen and diversify the regional economy and value our natural and cultural heritage.

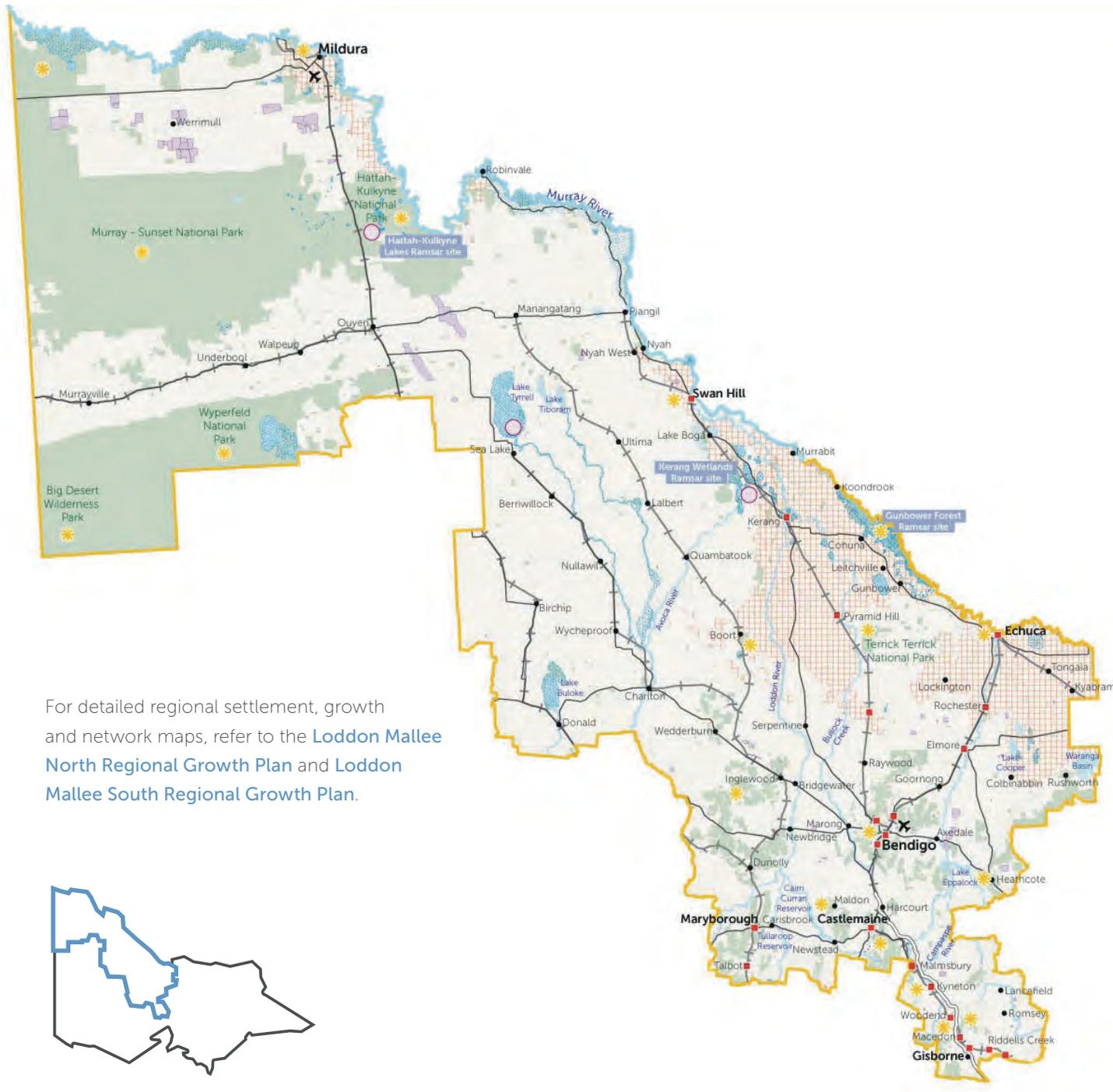
Across our Region, multiple organisations, businesses and community members actively contribute to regional development. Positive contributions to the needs of our regional communities through health care, education, natural resource management, agriculture, tourism, workforce development, and social and cultural activities, demonstrate the breadth of activity that enhance the productivity, liveability and sustainability of the Region.

The Plan aims to distil the complexity of future challenges for our growing Region. The Plan recognises forecast changes for our Region and provides a cohesive set of agreed regional priorities.

Responsibility for overseeing the Plan rests with the Loddon Mallee Regional Development Australia (RDA) Committee. However, the success of the Plan and associated documents has relied, and will continue to rely on the efforts of many organisations including local government, State Government departments and agencies, industry, Murray River Group of Councils, Loddon Campaspe Councils, Loddon Mallee Regional Management Forum (RMF), not-for-profit groups, community organisations, other regional stakeholders and project owners.

The Loddon Mallee Regional Strategic Plan is designed to complement other relevant regional and local plans including the Regional Growth Plans, Council Plans, Regional Change Strategies and plans belonging to other regional stakeholders.

► For further information about the Loddon Mallee Regional Strategic Plan 2015-18 visit [www.loddonmallee.com.au](http://www.loddonmallee.com.au) or contact the Loddon Mallee RDA: ph: (03) 4433 8050 or email: [rda@loddonmallee.rdv.vic.gov.au](mailto:rda@loddonmallee.rdv.vic.gov.au)



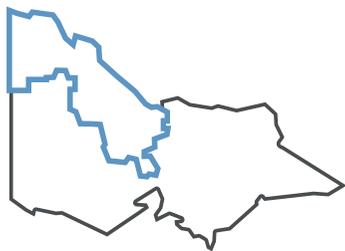
## LODDON MALLEE REGION: STRATEGIC ASSETS

- Settlement
- Agriculture, earth resource and mining**
  - ◉ Salt extraction and processing
  - ◉ Extractive industry
  - ◉ Irrigation district
- Tourism**
  - ✦ Significant tourist area - includes some significant cultural heritage places and landscapes
  - Public land
  - ◉ Regionally significant wetlands\*
  - Lakes
  - Rivers
- Transport**
  - ✈ Airport
  - Freeway
  - Highway
  - + Active rail line
  - Active passenger rail station

\* Legislatively protected wetlands.  
 Source: Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, January 2015. Based on Loddon Mallee North and Loddon Mallee South Regional Growth Plans, May 2014.



For detailed regional settlement, growth and network maps, refer to the [Loddon Mallee North Regional Growth Plan](#) and [Loddon Mallee South Regional Growth Plan](#).



# ABOUT THIS PLAN

## ASPIRATIONS

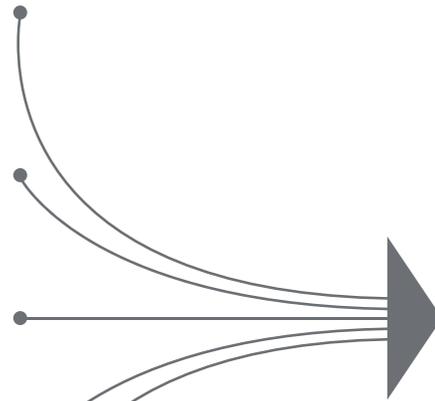
Diverse & robust economy

Thriving & sustainable agriculture

Prosperous, connected & resilient communities

Vibrant regional cities & centres

Enhanced natural/cultural heritage



## STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1

Foster our comparative advantages in agriculture, food processing and other regionally significant industries

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2

Build the connecting infrastructure for our diverse economy

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3

Enhance the wellbeing and economic participation of our people

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4

Protect and enhance the liveability and appeal of our Region

## PRIORITY AREAS

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1

Foster our comparative advantages in agriculture, food processing and other regionally significant industries

- 1-1 Invest in high value agriculture
- 1-2 Increase regional food manufacturing
- 1-3 Improve reach into international markets, especially Asia

- 1-4 Stimulate local industry to maintain and create employment
- 1-5 Develop, maintain and use workforce skills
- 1-6 Increase renewable energy generation and energy efficiency

- 1-7 Improve RD&E to increase capacity of businesses to manage risk and volatility
- 1-8 Invest in tourism product, assets and related infrastructure

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2

Build the connecting infrastructure for our diverse economy

- 2-1 Invest in mobile connectivity and access to high quality broadband
- 2-2 Improve movement of freight
- 2-3 Improve public and private transport connectivity

- 2-4 Supply affordable and reliable energy
- 2-5 Secure investment in regional airport and aerodrome infrastructure

- 2-6 Continue modernising our Region's irrigation system
- 2-7 Encourage innovative ways to attract investment and deliver services

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3

Enhance the wellbeing and economic participation of our people

- 3-1 Further develop and integrate the regional health care system
- 3-2 Improve community health and wellbeing through strategies that promote good health

- 3-3 Improve educational aspirations, attainment, accessibility and quality
- 3-4 Improve level of and appreciation for cultural diversity
- 3-5 Support initiatives that encourage full employment

- 3-6 Address the social and economic causes of disadvantage
- 3-7 Resolve cross-border issues and promote leadership and collaboration across our Region

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4

Protect and enhance the liveability and appeal of our Region

- 4-1 Improve small town liveability, adjustment and access to services
- 4-2 Build on the strengths of regional centres and towns
- 4-3 Enhance Bendigo and Mildura as regional cities

- 4-4 Maintain and build healthy places
- 4-5 Adopt smart solutions to the management of waste and natural resources
- 4-6 Improve the coordination of efforts to protect our Region's rich biodiversity

- 4-7 Efficiently use our water resources to achieve economic, environmental, and lifestyle improvements
- 4-8 Support thriving arts, culture, sports, recreation and major events
- 4-9 Improve our pride in, and protection of, our Aboriginal and historic cultural heritage

# FULFILLING OUR ASPIRATIONS

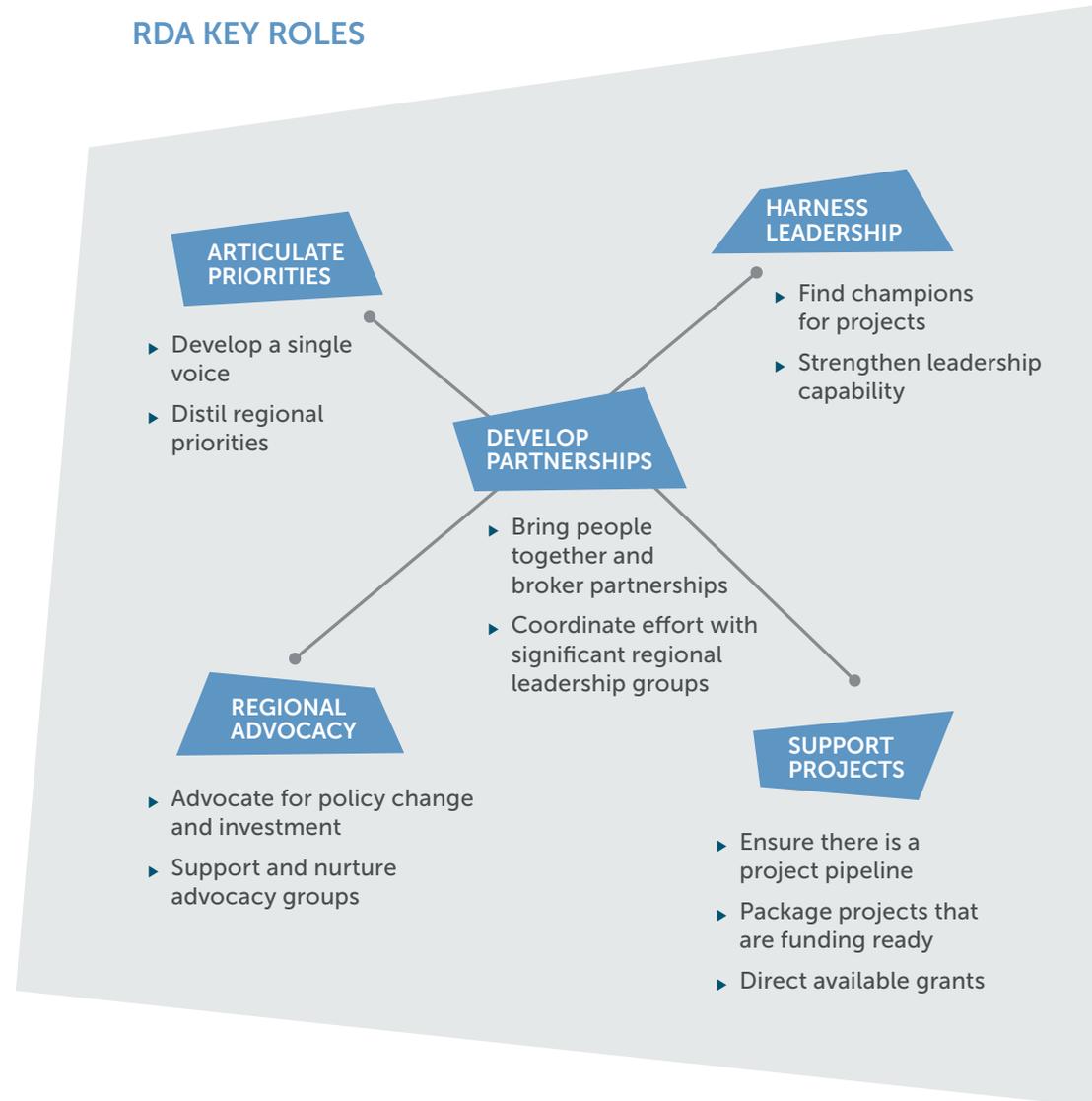
## A FOUR YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN WITH FOUR STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS.

Action Plans that align with each of the Strategic Directions will be created with partner organisations. These Action Plans will detail what can be done over a 12 - 24 month period to make progress on each of the Plan's Priority Areas.

The successful implementation of the Plan relies on the efforts of many organisations including local government, State and Commonwealth Government departments and agencies, industry, Murray River Group of Councils, Loddon Campaspe Councils, Loddon Mallee Regional Management Forum, and other regional stakeholders and project owners.

The Loddon Mallee RDA Committee will have oversight of this Plan, tracking and reporting on implementation. In addition, five key roles that the RDA Committee will continue to perform in support of the Plan are: Articulating regional priorities; Harnessing regional leadership; Developing partnerships; Acting as advocates; and Supporting project delivery.

## RDA KEY ROLES



A scenic landscape at sunrise or sunset. The sky is a warm, golden yellow with soft clouds. In the foreground, there is a grassy field with a wooden fence. A large, dark tree stands on the right side of the frame. In the background, there are rolling hills and a line of trees. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

**ACTION PLANS THAT ALIGN WITH  
EACH OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS  
WILL BE CREATED WITH PARTNER  
ORGANISATIONS**

# THE LODDON MALLEE REGION

## THE REGION

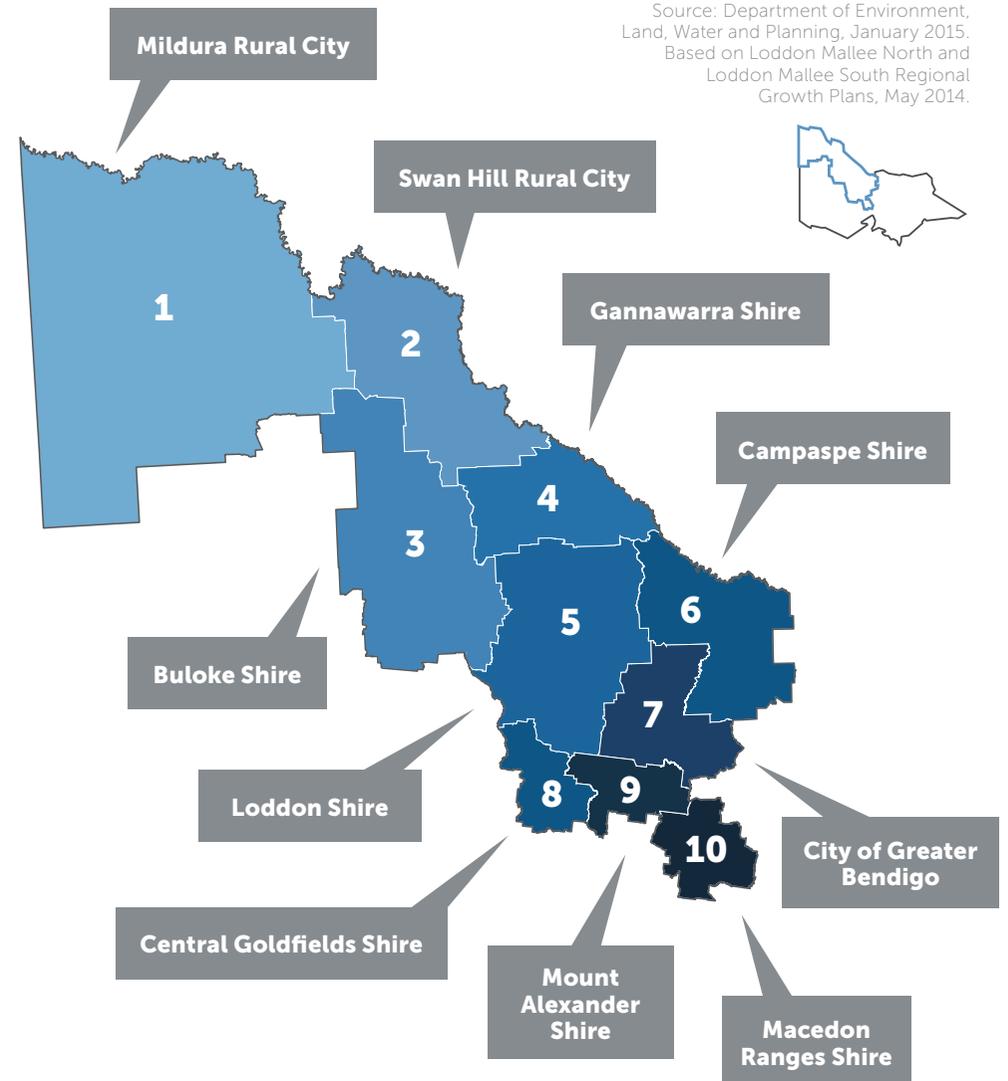
The Loddon Mallee Region encompasses ten local government areas (LGAs) stretching from the outskirts of Melbourne to far north-western Victoria, bordered on the northern edge by the Murray River.

Our Region is home to the prosperous and vibrant regional cities of Bendigo, one of the State's largest and fastest growing regional cities, and Mildura, the major regional city for the north of the Region and the largest urban centre on the edge of the outback. Echuca, Swan Hill, Castlemaine, Gisborne, Kyneton and Maryborough are also important centres, offering employment and lifestyle services.

- ▶ The Loddon Mallee Region is expansive and diverse, spanning just under 59,000 square kilometres - the largest region in Victoria.

## TEN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS

Source: Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, January 2015.  
Based on Loddon Mallee North and Loddon Mallee South Regional Growth Plans, May 2014.



## LODDON MALLEE FAST FACTS

	 GRP (\$mil) 2013/14	 No. of businesses 2013/14	 Jobs 2013	 Population 2013	 Population forecast 2031	Labour force participation 2011	% who did not complete year 12 2011	% who are obese BMI ≥ 30 2011/12
<b>1 Mildura Rural City</b>	2,565	5,156	21,531	52,685	63,212			
<b>2 Swan Hill Rural City</b>	1,067	2,514	9,791	20,867	22,936			
<b>3 Buloke Shire</b>	298	1,002	3,179	6,221	6,041			
<b>4 Gannawarra Shire</b>	472	1,389	4,461	10,326	10,280			
<b>5 Loddon Shire</b>	321	1,071	3,623	7,443	7,562			
<b>6 Campaspe Shire</b>	1,752	4,243	15,719	36,919	40,992			
<b>7 City of Greater Bendigo</b>	5,479	7,661	40,958	105,332	146,056			
<b>8 Central Goldfields Shire</b>	475	844	3,956	12,602	13,687			
<b>9 Mount Alexander Shire</b>	755	1,506	6,572	17,994	21,112			
<b>10 Macedon Ranges Shire</b>	1,430	4,487	10,943	44,098	55,908			
<b>LODDON MALLEE</b>	14,614	29,873	120,733	314,487	387,786			
<b>VICTORIA</b>	350,343	2,617,086	544,805	5,739,341	7,699,059			

(REMPPLAN, 2015a)

(RDV, 2014f)

(RDV,  
2014a)

(RDV, 2014b)

(RDV, 2014c)

(RDV, 2014d)

(RDV, 2014e)

(DH, 2014)

# STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1

FOSTER OUR COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES IN AGRICULTURE, FOOD PROCESSING AND OTHER REGIONALLY SIGNIFICANT INDUSTRIES



The Loddon Mallee Region has considerable strengths and opportunities which provide a solid foundation for continued regional prosperity.



## ADDITIONAL **RESOURCES**

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For more information and links  
to related resources scan here.

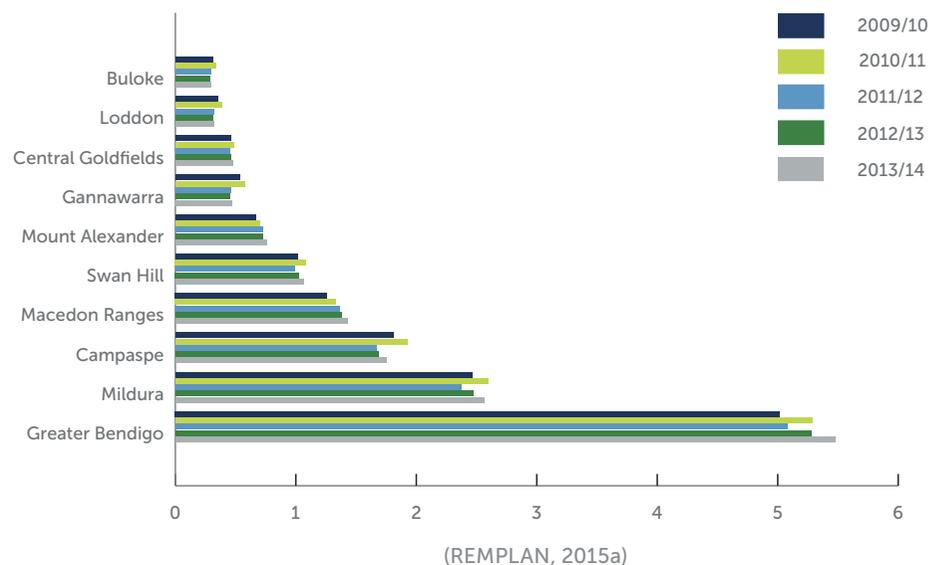
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# 1 FOSTER OUR COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES IN AGRICULTURE, FOOD PROCESSING AND OTHER REGIONALLY SIGNIFICANT INDUSTRIES

## A STRONG AND INCREASINGLY DIVERSE ECONOMY

The Loddon Mallee Region had a Gross Regional Product in the 2013/14 financial year of \$14.6 billion. This is an increase of 22.9% in the eight years since 2005/06. This productivity is concentrated in those areas with higher populations and more diversified economies (REMPPLAN, 2015a).

## GRP GROWTH RATE (\$bil)



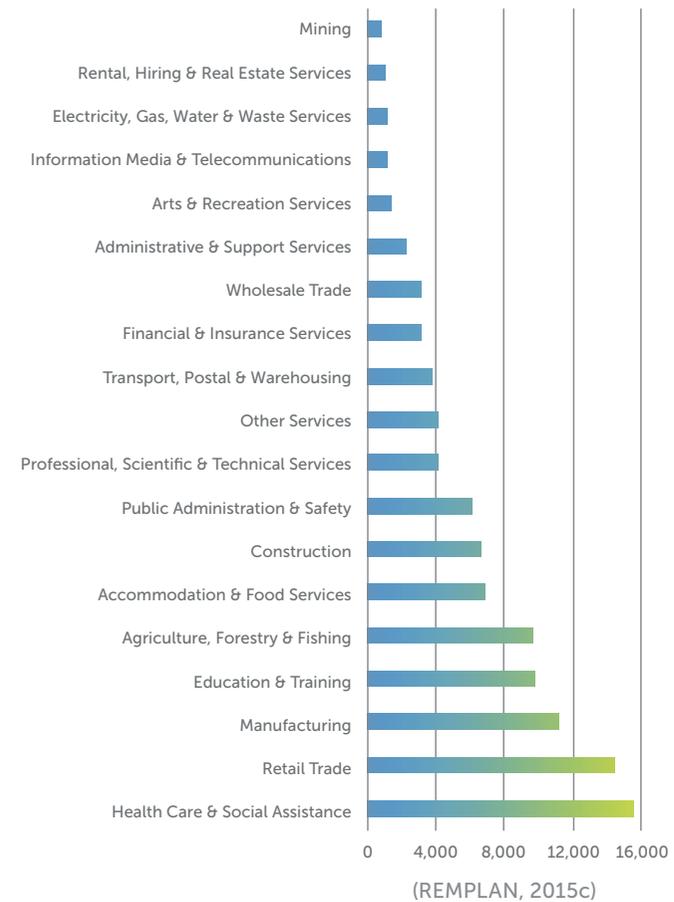
► Our \$1 billion per annum tourism industry is stimulated by 7.7 million visits to the area's rich natural and cultural assets, including our rivers and waterways, forests and parks, food and wine, and our unique heritage attractions (REMPPLAN, 2015b).

Our Region will continue to attract new investment and a diverse range of jobs building on growth areas in health, education, finance, agriculture, manufacturing, retail and tourism.

Opportunities exist for further growth associated with:

- ▶ New tourism investments focused on the Murray River ports of Mildura, Swan Hill, Echuca and Koondrook
- ▶ Electricity production utilising the northern Mallee's high solar exposure of over 21MJ/m<sup>2</sup>/day
- ▶ The new Bendigo Hospital, which will support and stimulate world class health services
- ▶ New prospects in mineral sands production and continued gold production
- ▶ Leverage pre-existing manufacturing strengths including: food processing, veterinarian chemical production and defence
- ▶ Increase in service industries in response to above average population growth in some parts of the Region
- ▶ Strengthened access to Asian markets for agriculture and horticulture in particular

## NUMBER OF JOBS BY INDUSTRY



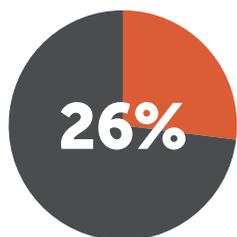
# 1 FOSTER OUR COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES IN AGRICULTURE, FOOD PROCESSING AND OTHER REGIONALLY SIGNIFICANT INDUSTRIES

## THE IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD PRODUCTION

An established food bowl of national significance, the Loddon Mallee Region has the highest agricultural output of Victoria's rural regions, contributing \$2.03 billion or 17% of the State's agricultural output in 2012-2013 (REMPPLAN, 2015d).

Our Region has irrigated dairy and horticulture in the local government areas adjacent to the Murray River as well as large-scale cropping and grazing throughout the Region. Intensive animal husbandry is of growing importance in certain locations in the southern part of the Region. Agriculture and food production play a major role supporting the economy of rural communities, small towns and regional centres.

▶ In recent years, total irrigation water usage across the whole of northern Victoria has ranged from 1,349 gigalitres (GL) to 1,771 GL each year. The introduction of the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) Plan is predicted to reduce this water usage by about 30% due to increased allocations for the environment (DEPI, 2014). We do not expect to see a commensurate fall in production from irrigated agriculture because irrigation is tending to move towards higher value crops, and much of the reduction in water usage by irrigators is being achieved by improving efficiency in irrigation systems.



▶ 26% of all businesses in the Loddon Mallee are agricultural businesses  
(REMPPLAN, 2015e)



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information on agriculture and food production scan here.

For some parts of our Region, agriculture will always dominate the economy. Agriculture related jobs dominate in Loddon Shire (45% of jobs), Buloke Shire (31%), Gannawarra Shire (26%) and Swan Hill Rural City (18%) (REMPAN, 2015c). This Plan has a focus on agriculture and food production because of its importance to our Region.

Although there are difficulties facing smaller agricultural operations, and a lack of competitiveness in some traditional markets, there are opportunities that can be capitalised on such as those discussed in the **Northern Victorian Food Strategy**.

All parts of our Region have good access to markets. Fresh produce from Mildura is able to be transported to Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney markets in a timely manner. Access to the Victorian ports in Melbourne, Geelong and Portland enables export to more distant markets.

Our extensive food processing industry adds value to our agricultural produce within the Region, creating jobs and increasing the economic output from the Region.

Shifting global demand for food, driven by the growing Asian market, provides us with a market opportunity, especially for niche international markets. To succeed in these markets we need to ensure reliability of supply and protection of our reputation as a supplier of safe and sustainably produced food.



# 1 FOSTER OUR COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES IN AGRICULTURE, FOOD PROCESSING AND OTHER REGIONALLY SIGNIFICANT INDUSTRIES

## THE INCREASING COMPLEXITY OF PRODUCING FOOD AND FIBRE

Modern agriculture and food processing businesses will need highly skilled people to manage the complexity, risk and volatility and the opportunities of global markets.

As highlighted in work commissioned by the Loddon Mallee and Hume RDAs that resulted in the **Northern Victorian Food Strategy**, the future brings challenges that will impact the agricultural productivity of our Region. This increasing complexity requires motivated farmers and food processing businesses that action the opportunities presented by a deregulated economy and global markets.

To realise the Region's potential, it is important to confront and plan for the following:

- ▶ Social pressure requiring agribusiness to demonstrate ethical farming practices
- ▶ Projected climatic changes that will result in wider fluctuations in seasonal returns and higher risk
- ▶ Declining viability of traditional, small farms
- ▶ Competition for viable farming land from non-farming uses in areas close to regional centres

The availability of professional services to support farm and food processing businesses is becoming increasingly important.



## DEVELOPING OUR REGION'S WORKFORCE

Our Region has experienced significant economic growth, making it a great place to live, work and invest. Many industries however, report shortages of certain types of workers.

Loddon Mallee has current and projected shortages of professionals (including engineers, teachers, registered nurses, allied health professionals and accountants) and tradespeople (including structural construction, metal fitters and machinists, plumbers, motor mechanics, electricians, structural steel fabricators and welders) (DEEWR, 2013). The challenge of attracting skilled people to agriculture is a constant across Victoria, and more so in the remote parts of our Region, where the working population is in decline.

However, in some areas, particularly along the Calder Corridor, there is a lack of jobs that match locally available skills which requires people to commute out of their local area and sometimes the Region. Stimulating local employment and providing appropriate local jobs is a high priority. Leveraging large scale infrastructure projects, expanding our health, education and professional services sectors and further developing our tourism sector will contribute to more employment options and improved liveability.

Skills disparities are a significant threat to the Region's economy and to individual communities; impacting upon service delivery and access, liveability of towns and the capacity of many businesses to survive or grow. Our tertiary institutions are strongly placed to align education and training offerings with industry demand for current and future workforce needs.

Research has shown that the major issues impeding development of our workforce include lack of quality childcare, insufficient participation in education and training and pockets of complex disadvantage (DEEWR, 2013).



# 1 FOSTER OUR COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES IN AGRICULTURE, FOOD PROCESSING AND OTHER REGIONALLY SIGNIFICANT INDUSTRIES

## PRIORITY AREAS

### 1-1 Invest in high value agriculture

Initiatives that invest in high value agriculture production. This will include initiatives that leverage the Region's strengths of irrigation infrastructure, productive soils, efficient flexible farming systems and broadacre farming. These initiatives will help improve economic prosperity for rural communities, increase the prosperity and diversity of our agricultural sector, create jobs, reduce waste and improve resource efficiency, in turn supporting the prosperity of our Region's communities that have agriculture-dominant local economies.

### 1-2 Increase regional food manufacturing

Initiatives that will assist food-manufacturing businesses to produce value-added products ready for export, beyond the export of raw products. This will include initiatives that capitalise on expanded infrastructure such as the provision of compressed natural gas to Kerang, Swan Hill and Robinvale, and improvements to road networks. These initiatives will create jobs, help increase the diversity of our economy and increase the contribution of food processing to our economy.

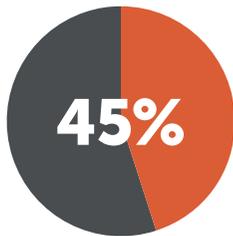


## 1-3 Improve reach into international markets, especially Asia

Initiatives that help businesses adapt to suit the needs and preferences of international markets, especially the growing Asian market. This will include initiatives to support and promote opportunities for capable businesses to become export ready, such as facilitation of links, championing of our safe and sustainable production methods, and investment in and encouragement of value adding in our food supply chains. These initiatives will help improve the economic contribution of significant industries, particularly manufacturing and food processing, to our Region.

## 1-4 Stimulate local industry to maintain and create employment

Initiatives that support and develop the growth of existing businesses as well as providing a climate that attracts and nurtures new industry and increasing export capacity. This will include initiatives to improve leadership and business skills, create freight and business hubs, address factors limiting industry growth, provide support for small and medium enterprises, stimulate and enable entrepreneurship and attract government agencies to relocate to our Region. These initiatives will help create local jobs and support a strong and diverse economy.



▶ Food and beverage manufacturing constitutes 45% of all manufacturing in Loddon Mallee (REMPPLAN, 2015d).

## **PRIORITY AREAS**

### **1-5 Develop, maintain and use workforce skills**

Initiatives that help develop, maintain and fully utilise the skills needed for our Region's industries to thrive, particularly in areas of projected shortages: professionals, tradespeople and skilled labourers. This will include initiatives to improve childcare; identify gaps; improve research and workforce collaboration; capitalise on existing education and training partnerships; initiate new partnerships; and attract skilled workers to meet regional needs and improve work readiness. These initiatives will help deliver a skilled workforce to support our economy.

### **1-6 Increase renewable energy generation and energy efficiency**

Initiatives that develop local renewable energy production and energy efficiency to improve our Region's energy resilience and economic diversity. This will include initiatives to support local distributed and large-scale solar power generation projects that take advantage of our competitive advantages in solar; conduct strategic analysis of regional energy needs and renewable energy options; advocacy for policy that supports investment in innovation initiatives to help existing industries and communities to improve efficiency and retrofit their infrastructure; as well as wind and biomass projects. These initiatives will help support business prosperity, create employment and diversify and strengthen our economy.

## 1-7 Improve RD&E to increase capacity of businesses to manage risk and volatility

Initiatives that improve research, development and education (RD&E) that assist agriculture and other regionally significant industries manage risk in the face of changing conditions. This will include initiatives to find ways to improve resource efficiency; workplace safety and worker satisfaction; combat agricultural weeds and pests; and adapt to changing climatic and economic conditions. It will also include initiatives to support regional industries to build cross collaboration networks, adapt to changing climatic and water policy, and take advantage of new opportunities. These initiatives will help improve efficiency and sustainability, increase productivity and industry resilience and support agricultural industries in particular to innovate and advance competitiveness through periods of volatility and change.

## 1-8 Invest in tourism product, assets and related infrastructure

Initiatives that lead to planning and development of tourism infrastructure and services that increase visitation and spend across the Region and attract investment. This will include initiatives that increase opportunities for Aboriginal people through cultural tourism in areas such as Gunbower Forest; as well as other initiatives that leverage projects already undertaken to improve tourism in the Region, such as the **Ports of the Murray River** strategy; our arts, cultural and recreational precincts; and other iconic natural and cultural heritage assets such as our significant Goldfields heritage. These initiatives will help improve the quality of assets and customer satisfaction thereby leading to increased tourism, more jobs and, ultimately, protection of our culture, heritage and natural assets.



# STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2

BUILD THE CONNECTING  
INFRASTRUCTURE FOR OUR  
DIVERSE ECONOMY





Connecting infrastructure underpins industry growth and efficiency, increases access to employment and education, improves road safety and strengthens our regional economy.



## ADDITIONAL **RESOURCES**

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For more information and links to related resources scan here.

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## MOBILE AND BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY

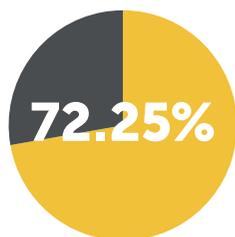
Continuous mobile phone and device connectivity and access to high quality broadband is critical to the Region, particularly for our small communities. Connectivity underpins resilience and growth by delivering critical health and education services, greater productivity and competitiveness for businesses, social connection, and efficient emergency management in our communities.

The rapid development of new technologies and faster connection options has resulted in regional and rural areas of Australia being on the wrong side of the 'Digital Divide'. The **Bridging the Digital Divide report** provides a roadmap to strengthen access to health, education and employment opportunities arising from enhanced digital infrastructure.

The Region has advocated strongly for improved coverage and increased broadband speed and rollout. Good mobile and broadband connectivity is necessary for managing the Region in times of disaster or emergency, providing a positive experience for visitors and delivering greater productivity for business.

The Region's focus on digital infrastructure has included the development of the **Mobile Phone and Device Blackspots Connectivity Assessment**, which provided the 10 LGAs with evidence to advocate for improved connectivity. It will also strengthen the Region's position to negotiate with major mobile telecommunication companies to increase the number of mobile towers, which will strengthen the regional economy.

In the Loddon Mallee Region, access to the internet delivers services and opportunities that are retracting to larger population centres.



▶ The Loddon Mallee Region has the lowest percentage of internet connected households in Victoria (72.25%) compared with the highest in Melbourne East Region (84.3%).  
(RDV, 2014g)  
(Note: this does not reflect the quality of the connection, some connections still rely on dial up service)



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To download a copy of the 'Bridging the Digital Divide Report' and 'Mobile Phone and Device Blackspots Connectivity Assessment', scan here or visit [www.loddonmallee.com.au/resources](http://www.loddonmallee.com.au/resources)



THE REGION HAS ADVOCATED STRONGLY FOR IMPROVED COVERAGE AND INCREASED BROADBAND SPEED AND ROLLOUT

## MOVING OUR FREIGHT

The Loddon Mallee Region is located along strategically important intrastate and interstate transport routes. Roads connect the northern Loddon Mallee to major markets and population centres of southern Victoria, Adelaide, Sydney and regional southern NSW, and in the south provide for the increased flow of traffic between Bendigo and Melbourne. The Calder Freeway that connects Bendigo and Melbourne has been duplicated and smaller towns have been bypassed to improve the flow of traffic, including freight.

Highway and main road connections are a challenge to keep in safe and reasonable condition to meet current and future freight demand. Priorities for attention include Murray River bridges at Echuca, Swan Hill, and Tooleybuc. Continued planning and investment in highways and local roads is required to ensure freight demand can be met. This includes attention and investment for major east-west road links in the Region's northwest, the Calder Highway north of Bendigo and local routes used by national road freight.

▶ “The single biggest thing government can do to support the agrifood sector is to invest in infrastructure.” (McKinna, 2014)

Currently there are many tonnes of grains and mineral sands being transported by road to the ports of Melbourne, Geelong and Portland. This results in road damage and increased maintenance costs which are often borne by local governments with small rate bases.

Our Region is advocating for an increased proportion of bulk freight to port to be transported by rail. Rail standardisation and upgrade of the rail lines to carry increased axle loads leads to significant efficiency gains and a choice of ports. This results in reduced supply chain costs to industry and supports economic growth and sustainability of jobs.

Achieving standardisation of freight rail lines between Mildura and Geelong would then raise the longer-term prospect of a connection into the transcontinental rail network that includes linkages to Darwin and Perth.

▶ Rail and road freight is vital to the \$6.9 billion exports from the Loddon Mallee Region (REMPPLAN, 2015g).

## MOVING OUR PEOPLE

The vast majority of trips by people within and from the Loddon Mallee Region are made by car, and this presents particular challenges for ageing and disadvantaged groups in more rural areas.

Public transport options decrease the further you are from Melbourne. Currently only the Bendigo-Swan Hill, Bendigo-Echuca and Ballarat-Maryborough train lines carry passenger services, with a mix of private and community bus services providing links between larger centres and connecting smaller towns and regional centres.

The Region is advocating for increased passenger rail services and improving the user experience along stations between Bendigo and Melbourne in acknowledgement of the broader Region's need to access education, employment, health and cultural activities consolidated in and between these key centres.

More frequent passenger rail services will have a major positive impact on personal mobility. There is strong demand for increased frequency and capacity of services on both the Bendigo-Swan Hill and Bendigo-Echuca train lines.

Although attention has been given to moving people within our Region, and between our Region and Melbourne, it is worth noting that our interstate connections remain important. All of the Murray River towns help provide services into New South Wales, and people from Mildura can get to Adelaide in as much time as it takes to get to Bendigo.

► Mildura is the only regional city in the State that is not serviced by passenger rail.



### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more details about the Region's aspirations for improved connecting infrastructure scan here.

## AIRPORTS

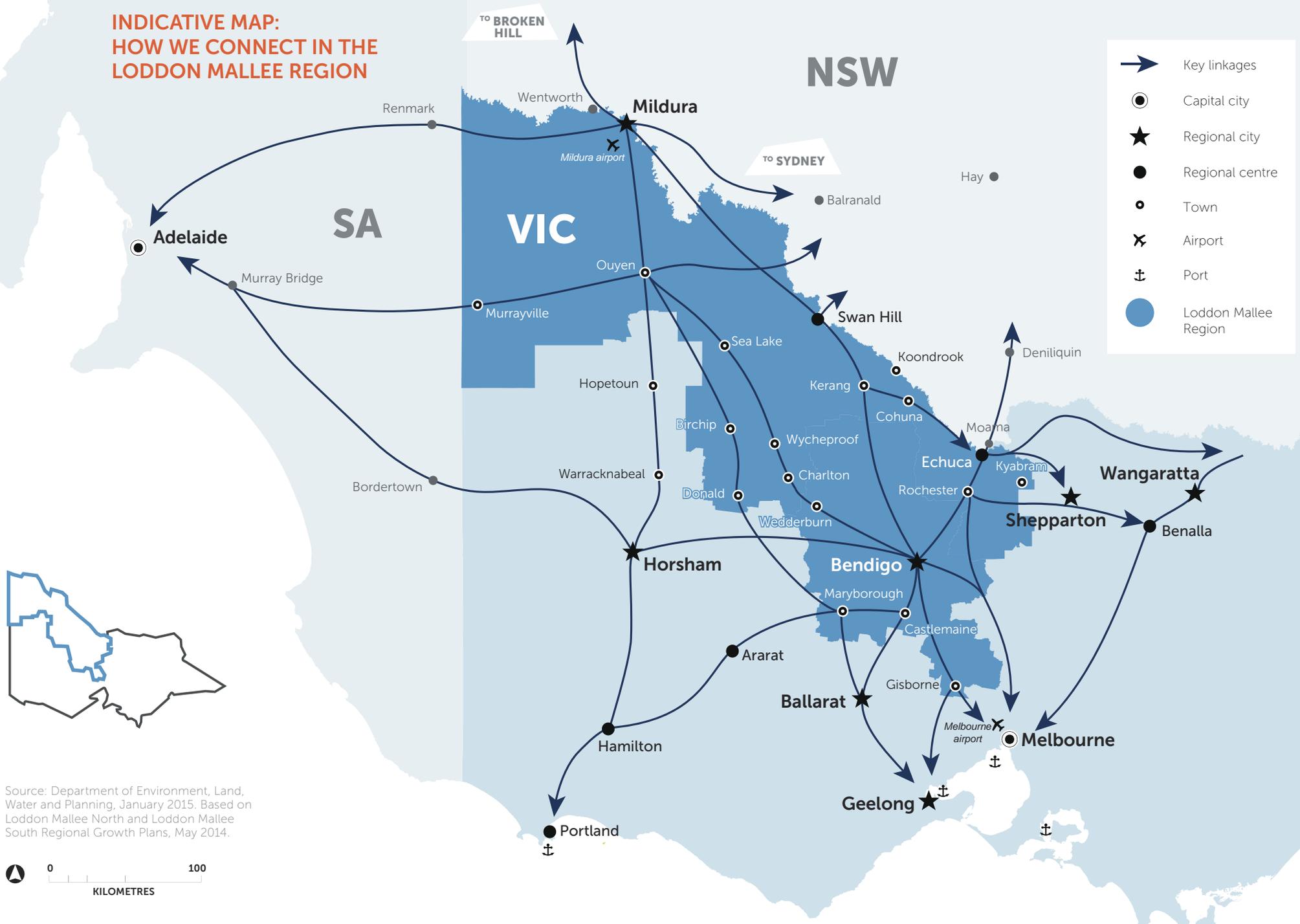
When measured by repeat traffic movement Mildura Airport is Victoria's second largest airport, and the busiest regional airport in Victoria. It offers daily services to Sydney, Adelaide and Broken Hill, as well as eight daily return services to Melbourne. Commercial passenger air services do not operate in any of the other regional centres. With a growth rate of around eight per cent per year, there is a clear need to invest in Mildura Airport as outlined in its Master Plan (Mildura Airport Pty Ltd, 2010).

The current runway at Bendigo Airport has severely deteriorated and can only cater for light planes. A major renewal of the Bendigo Airport is needed to service existing industry, attract new businesses, maintain emergency services, expand aircraft operations and support the distribution of specialty health services across the Region.

Across the Region, coordinated investment is required for a range of our smaller airfields such as Swan Hill aerodrome, to enable delivery of specialised health, freight and emergency services.



**INDICATIVE MAP:  
HOW WE CONNECT IN THE  
LODDON MALLEE REGION**



Source: Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, January 2015. Based on Loddon Mallee North and Loddon Mallee South Regional Growth Plans, May 2014.

### ENERGY

Access to natural gas has historically been viewed as a major decision factor in the location of new industries, especially those that fit with the Region's natural advantages in food production and processing. Securing investment for the provision of natural gas to Murray River communities is important to the future development of the Region.

Almost all of the electricity for residential and commercial use is generated outside of the Region and is largely sourced from emissions intensive sources, such as coal-fired power stations.

All parts of the Loddon Mallee are suited to the creation of solar power, and there is good potential for biomass projects and some potential for wind power across the Region (Ernst and Young, 2012). In addition energy savings can be made through innovative efficiency practices.

Globally, there are strong indications that the energy distribution systems of the future will be based upon distributed local energy generation supported by modernised power grids (International Energy Agency, 2011). Innovation in the provision of alternative power supplies for remote areas is becoming a reality now (SA Power Networks, 2013).

Given these factors, our Region has the opportunity to generate and distribute a great deal of its own power.



#### ► Solar power adds up for the Loddon Mallee Region:

- Receiving more energy from the sun than the rest of Victoria
- Proximity to the electricity distribution network
- A willing and skilled workforce



SOLAR POWER ADDS UP FOR THE  
LODDON MALLEE REGION

## PRIORITY AREAS

### **2-1** Invest in mobile connectivity and access to high quality broadband

Initiatives that improve mobile connectivity and access to high quality broadband throughout the Region, particularly in areas of socio-economic disadvantage and areas with high economic growth potential. This will include initiatives that build on current regional initiatives like those undertaken by iLoddon Mallee. These initiatives will foster a strong and diverse economy, support emergency and health services and help reduce social and economic disadvantage across our Region.

### **2-2** Improve movement of freight

Initiatives that improve regional road and rail infrastructure and increase the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of freight traffic as it moves through the Region to the ports of Melbourne, Geelong and Portland, and in the future to Darwin and Perth. This will include advocacy for standardisation of the freight rail linkages between Mildura and Victoria's ports and replacement of key bridges. These initiatives will improve freight transport and help resolve infrastructure gaps that hamper the competitiveness of regional industry.



## 2-3 Improve public and private transport connectivity

Initiatives that strengthen public and private transport connections between regional centres, small towns, and Melbourne, including connections to adjacent regions. This will include initiatives in line with the Railing Ahead Coordination Group's advocacy to improve passenger train frequency and timing along the Region's rail corridors; as well as initiatives that address transport related disadvantage. These initiatives will improve access to employment, health, education, social and recreational services for people in rural areas, small towns and regional centres and cities.

## 2-4 Supply affordable and reliable energy

Initiatives that extend the supply of affordable and reliable energy to locations that facilitate industry development and enhance the liveability of townships. This will include renewable energy initiatives that build on previous projects to supply natural gas to regional and rural Victoria, and continued advocacy for appropriate policies that support investment in solar. These initiatives will support industry expansion, increase jobs, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve the sustainability of our economy.

- 
- ▶ Moving people and goods around Victoria's largest geographic region, which covers more than 25% of the State, is expensive and a challenge for business.

## PRIORITY AREAS

### **2-5** Secure investment in regional airport and aerodrome infrastructure

Initiatives that secure investment in infrastructure at Mildura and Bendigo and other regional airports to strengthen their emergency management, training capacity and value to the Region. This will include initiatives to improve emergency accessibility, increase passenger flights and ensure that the current and future operation of our Region's airports is not adversely affected by urban development in adjacent areas. These initiatives will help provide passenger, freight and emergency access services across the Region.

### **2-6** Continue modernising our Region's irrigation system

Initiatives that ensure we continue modernising our irrigation system to world-class standards. This will include initiatives to modernise out-dated irrigation systems and maintain water management infrastructure including on-farm and district systems. These initiatives will help maintain the competitiveness of regional irrigation industries, increasing jobs and the sector's contribution to our regional economy.

- ▶ The GMW Connections Program (\$2 billion) and the Sunraysia Modernisation Project (\$200 million) are providing a once-in-a-century improvement to the water delivery infrastructure within our irrigation districts.



## 2-7 Encourage innovative ways to attract investment and deliver services

Initiatives that use new approaches for how we attract funding for new infrastructure, increase economic activity, and deliver services. This will include initiatives that encourage non-traditional investment into the Region to develop new infrastructure and increase economic activity, as has been done through projects such as the Echuca BUPA aged care facility, and the investment of superannuation funds from VicSuper into Kilter Rural. This will also include initiatives that achieve the best possible service delivery with available funds through cooperative service delivery and other innovative delivery models. These initiatives will increase the quality of services provided to our citizens and strengthen our economy.



# STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3

## ENHANCE THE WELLBEING AND ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION OF OUR PEOPLE





Enhancing the wellbeing and economic participation of our people will create healthier, better connected and skilled communities and deliver significant social and economic benefits to the Region.



ADDITIONAL  
**RESOURCES**

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For more information and links to related resources scan here.

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### CARING FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- ▶ Health and wellbeing are the fundamental elements of strong, active, resilient and engaged communities.

Health and wellbeing are not just the responsibility of health services and professionals – but rather are everyone’s business – individuals, communities and all levels of government.

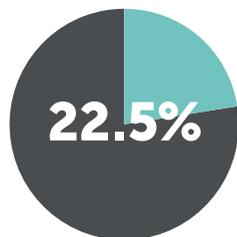
The social determinants of health are the economic and social conditions that influence health status. Factors that determine physical and mental health status include socio-economic status, gender, disability, race, employment, education, early development, social support, social exclusion, and access to food, housing and health services (VHA, 2013).

Our Region has higher rates than the Victorian average of obesity, chronic disease, disability and high-risk health behaviours such as smoking.

The Region has 17 hospitals, five stand-alone community health services, and a network of other health and community service providers.

There has been significant capital investment in new or upgraded health services at Mildura (hospital and Sunraysia Community Health), Kerang, Charlton, Sea Lake, Kyabram, Echuca, Rochester, Swan Hill, Castlemaine, Boort, Kyneton, and Heathcote. The New Bendigo Hospital is a project of unprecedented scale and complexity for our Region and will culminate in Victoria’s largest regional hospital, and the development of a state-of-the-art facility that provides high quality acute and specialised healthcare to Bendigo and the wider Region.

However, demand for health and aged care services will continue to rise as the population ages, and if current trends in relation to obesity and the incidence of preventable chronic disease continue. The aim is to link up and integrate our varied and high quality health services to provide improved access and quality of care for all of our communities.



- ▶ The Loddon Mallee Region has the highest rate of obesity in Victoria which at 22.5% is significantly higher than the Victorian average (17.3%) (DH, 2014).

In addition, we need to concentrate our resources on creating a culture committed to health-promoting behaviours and the prevention of factors which lead to chronic disease.

Preventing chronic disease is a complex challenge that requires a comprehensive package of interventions and a sustained effort over the longer-term. We need to take a 'complex systems approach' to reducing population level chronic disease risk. This approach aims for large-scale reach across the Region by creating health-promoting environments in the places where people spend their time – including in childcare centres, schools, workplaces, shops, food outlets and sporting clubs.

The community health and welfare sector, through a range of funding structures, provides critical services to communities across our Region, delivering a range of services to strengthen health and wellbeing.

- ▶ Three of the ten Victorian LGAs with the highest rate of family violence are in the Loddon Mallee Region - Mildura, Swan Hill and Central Goldfields (CSA, 2015).

- ▶ 5 million Australians are overweight and 1.3 million are obese. We lose 4 million days of productivity from our workplaces each year attributed to overweight and obesity. The total direct financial cost was estimated to be \$8.3 billion in 2008, with lost productivity estimated to be \$3.6 billion (VicHealth, 2012).

Health and wellbeing will be increased through collaboration and locally-based programs that address the underlying causes of ill-health. This will be achieved through a robust and responsive health and community service system that provides people across the Region with equitable access to primary, community and acute health services using a 'systems approach' and innovative use of technology - leveraging the recent improvements to regional health infrastructure.



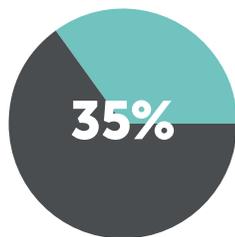
### WORK READINESS AND EDUCATION ATTAINMENT

It is recognised that employment leads not only to improved incomes for the individual, family and communities, but also to enhanced self-esteem, increased opportunities for self-development and reduced social isolation. People and communities should have the opportunity to benefit from the mainstream economy – real jobs, business opportunities, economic independence and wealth creation. It is widely acknowledged that high and/or persistent unemployment increases the risk of poverty and contributes to disadvantage.

Quality education, training and pathways to employment will benefit our Region by tackling one of the root causes of disadvantage, addressing skill shortages and improving the perceived liveability of our cities and towns.

Participating in meaningful employment is an important aspect of preventing disadvantage, as it helps people participate more fully in the social and economic life of their community.

There is a need to reduce barriers to employment by improving access to childcare and provision of tailored support services for young people and people with a disability.



▶ Year 12 completion in the Loddon Mallee Region is approximately 35% compared with approximately 50% for Victoria (RDV, 2014e).

▶ Preventative healthcare is a first order economic issue. It creates a long-term positive impact on workforce participation, productivity growth and the overall health budget (AIHW, 2008).

Our Region's rates of school completion fall short of Victorian rates. Year 12 completion is approximately 35% compared with approximately 50% for Victoria. However, the rates vary across the Region and are as low as 24% in rural Gannawarra Shire and as high as 46% in Macedon Ranges Shire (RDV, 2014e).

Improving school completion rates, vocational training rates and higher education rates that exceed the Victorian targets is an important aspiration for our Region.

- ▶ Employment in the health care and social assistance sector accounts for 14.6% of employment in our Region. The services delivered by this sector are vital to health and wellbeing and building stronger communities (REMPAN, 2015c).

Our Region is fortunate to have several key tertiary institutions that provide access to learning and pathways to further education, strengthening our workforce and supporting a culture of learning. However, some of our school infrastructure requires upgrading to provide appropriate learning environments that will cater for current and future student needs.



## CULTURAL DIVERSITY

In 2011, 9.4% of our Region's population was born outside Australia with almost 5% speaking a language other than English at home (RDV, 2014h). Our Region is home to both migrants and refugees from many places. Refugees from Afghanistan, Burma, Burundi, Iraq, Sudan and other emerging refugee communities and migrant populations are resettling in regional communities such as Bendigo, Swan Hill, Mildura and Castlemaine.

Cultural diversity is an asset for our Region, providing different perspectives, new skills and innovation, resilience and an appreciation for the value of contributing to and building community. There are however some barriers or challenges to full participation in our communities including securing employment. It is important that people are able to access culturally appropriate services and support and have opportunities to participate fully in community life.

- ▶ The Great Stupa of Universal Compassion will be the largest Buddhist Stupa in the western world.

Bendigo is to become a centre for faith based tourism with the proposed Aspire faith based precinct associated with Bendigo's Sacred Heart Cathedral, and the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion currently being built.

Increased cultural diversity including improved appreciation for diversity will strengthen our communities.



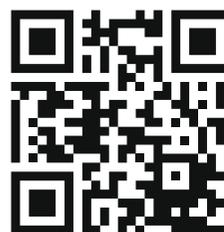


IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS, THE LEADERS  
IN THE REGION HAVE EMBARKED ON  
A SERIES OF COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES  
TO ADDRESS DISADVANTAGE

## SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE

Despite the economic growth of our Region, there are many people in our communities who face disadvantage. Across our Region, leaders acknowledge that we will only reach our full potential when we address and ultimately reduce disadvantage. Areas with high levels of disadvantage present challenges such as increased pressure on health and community services, reduced labour force participation and lower capacity to adapt to a range of environmental and economic pressures.

In the last five years, the leaders in the Region have embarked on a series of collaborative initiatives to address disadvantage. Initiatives such as *Go Goldfields* aims to get people in the sector working together in response to complex and long-term social issues. The **Transitioning Towns Toolbox** helps communities to generate new ideas and actions to strengthen social inclusion and capacity and to build their own futures.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

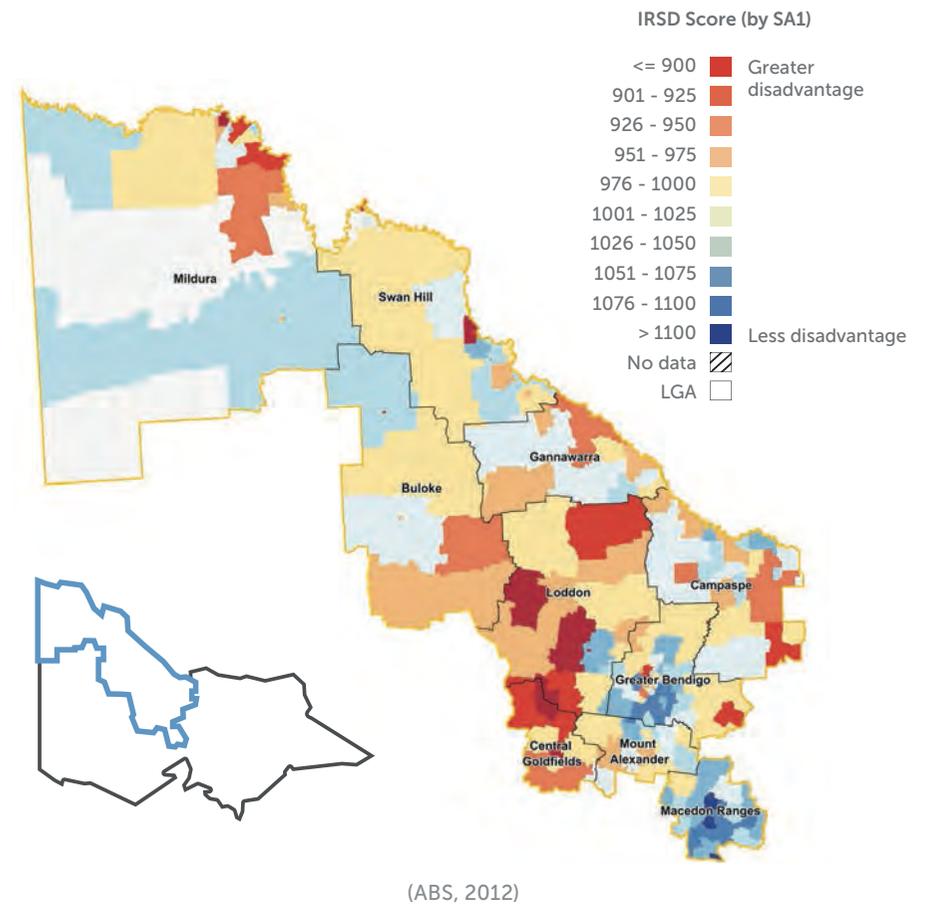
To download a copy of the Transitioning Towns Toolbox scan here, or visit:  
[www.loddonmallee.com.au/downloads](http://www.loddonmallee.com.au/downloads)

Overcoming disadvantage requires further investment in infrastructure and programs that respond to the underlying causes of long-term disadvantage, including internet access, job opportunities, and improving work readiness through participation in learning and employment. Addressing socio-economic disadvantage in our Region will support improved health and wellbeing and learning outcomes in our communities and underpin economic growth.

Our Region aims for a reduction in social and economic disadvantage by improving the safety, health and wellbeing of vulnerable communities including people with a disability, vulnerable youth, people experiencing homelessness, and the aged. Our Region will focus on the prevention of family violence in our communities.

► An indicator of community strength - more than 45% of people in Buloke work for volunteer organisations or groups, compared with the Victorian average (26%) (RDV, 2014i).

## RELATIVE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE 2011



## PRIORITY AREAS

### **3-1** Further develop and integrate the regional health care system

Initiatives that further develop and integrate health care and build on existing regional health strengths and partnerships and optimise the benefit that will flow from the new Bendigo Hospital. This will include initiatives to increase recruitment and retention of the health workforce and to form new alliances with other sectors which bring together the social determinants of health, such as the work of the Children and Youth Area Partnerships. These initiatives will improve the health outcomes for people across our Region.

### **3-2** Improve community health and wellbeing through strategies that promote good health

Initiatives that build on the existing strengths and utilise our community health and welfare services and networks to promote good health and prevent obesity and chronic disease and improve the communities' physical and mental health and wellbeing. This will include initiatives to coordinate the implementation of Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans; increase health innovation and research; transform the delivery of primary and community care to remote communities; deliver local programs that promote nutrition and physical activity and sexual health education and support; deliver drug and alcohol programs and services; and programs to prevent violence. These initiatives will strengthen our communities and reduce the burden on our health services, improve productivity, and reduce disadvantage.



### **3-3** Improve educational aspirations, attainment, accessibility and quality

Initiatives that improve the educational outcomes for everyone in the Region, ensuring that people living in rural areas have equitable access to quality education. This will include projects to improve early childhood education, provide education and training to remote areas, provide positive role models, support people with disabilities or specific needs, and improve delivery of education and training and improved pathways. These initiatives will help young people to study locally, improve educational attainment rates, stimulate innovation and entrepreneurship, reduce disadvantage and address skills shortages.

### **3-4** Improve level of and appreciation for cultural diversity

Initiatives that improve understanding of cultural diversity and increase the value that the Region's people place on cultural diversity. This will include projects that address cultural diversity issues and opportunities, celebrate the cultural diversity of the Region, and foster social connections and communication between diverse cultural groups. These initiatives will help our communities celebrate the cultural diversity of the Region and foster social cohesion.

- 
- ▶ Tertiary and secondary educational opportunities within our Region strengthen our communities, business and industry. Of particular importance to the Region is La Trobe University, which has campuses in both Mildura and Bendigo.

## PRIORITY AREAS

### **3-5** Support initiatives that encourage full employment

Initiatives that support all groups to participate in the workforce. This will include initiatives that provide new support services, and support people to take part in existing jobs programs including affordable and quality childcare, family violence prevention services, disability access services and youth employment services. These initiatives will reduce barriers to participation through improving access to programs that provide for the needs of a diverse workforce.

### **3-6** Address the social and economic causes of disadvantage

Initiatives that combat the fundamental causes of disadvantage, particularly for people with a higher likelihood of negative outcomes including people with disabilities, vulnerable youth, the elderly and those in remote communities. This will include initiatives that build on the *Go Goldfields* model, which recognises the long-term and complex nature of disadvantage, focussing on prevention and early intervention in literacy and connectedness for children and youth. This also includes initiatives to increase job opportunities, to improve the availability of affordable housing where it is needed and improve delivery of essential services in disadvantaged communities. These initiatives will support improved health and wellbeing outcomes in our communities and underpin economic growth.

- ▶ Focused and concerted efforts to address complex, long-term social issues can succeed. The *Go Goldfields* initiative in Central Goldfields Shire has achieved a 31% increase in the number of Preps achieving level 5 reading when compared to 2011, and a 72% reduction in absenteeism for school in year 5 and 6 students (CVPCP, 2014).

### **3-7** Resolve cross-border issues and promote leadership and collaboration across our Region

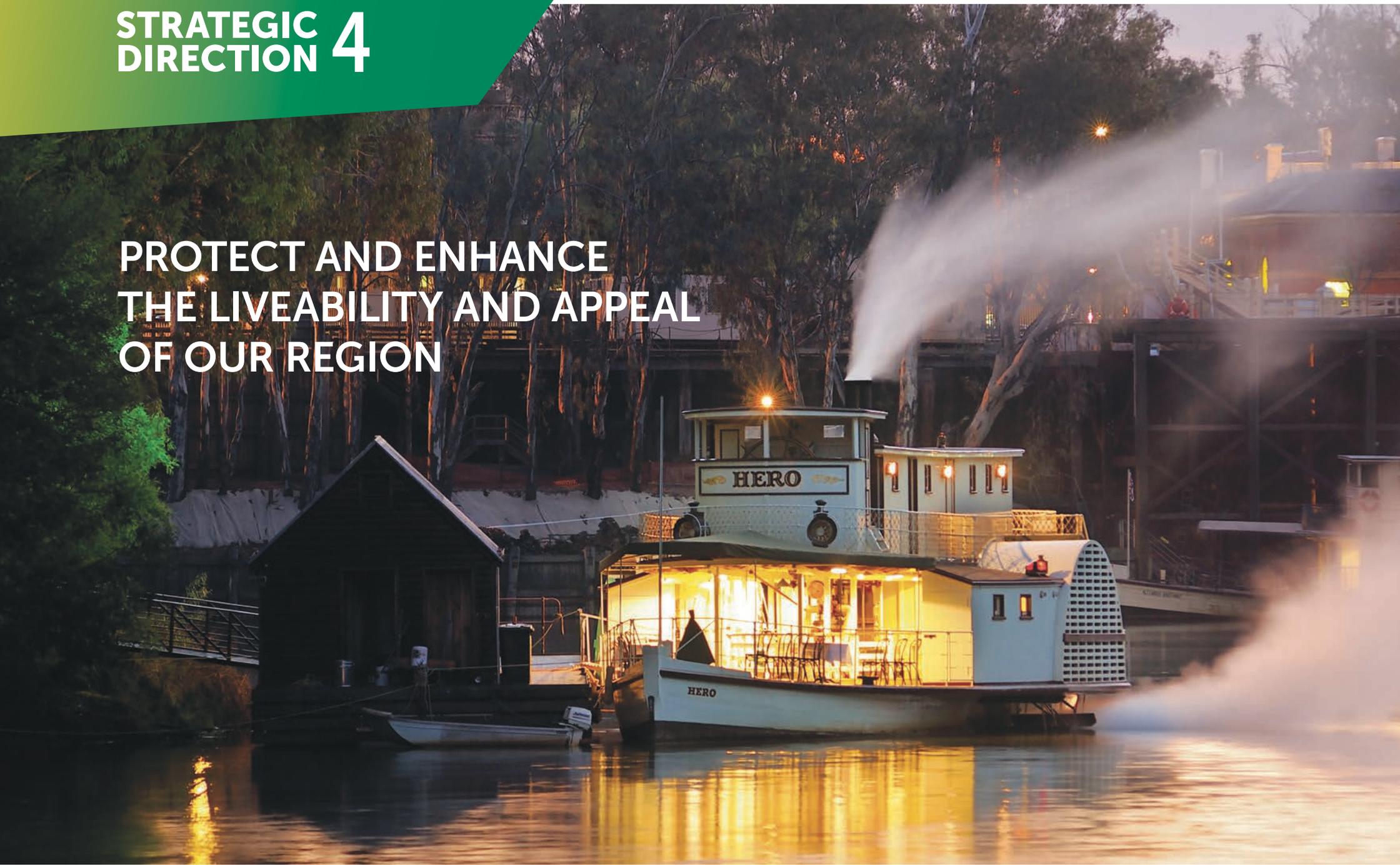
Initiatives that support organisations to work together with a common purpose. This includes working with our inter-state and inter-regional partners with the purpose of minimising the impact of cross-border issues. This will also include initiatives that encourage our institutions to work together towards region-wide outcomes, invest in our future leadership and develop productive partnerships. These initiatives will ensure that the Loddon Mallee Region becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

- ▶ Connections across our borders are important - all our Murray River towns have catchment areas into NSW. Town pairings like Echuca Moama act as single communities. Mildura residents are more likely to travel to Adelaide than they are to Bendigo.



# STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4

## PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE LIVEABILITY AND APPEAL OF OUR REGION





The liveability and appeal of our Region is anchored in our high value natural assets and landscapes, the vibrancy of our heritage towns and centres, and our growing and dynamic regional cities.

Protecting and enhancing our quality of life, cultural heritage and environments will support existing populations and continue to attract new residents, visitors and investment.



#### ADDITIONAL **RESOURCES**

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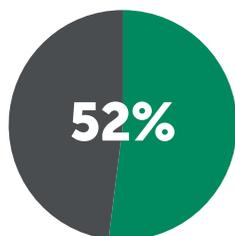
For more information and links to related resources scan here.

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## SETTLEMENTS AND LIFESTYLE

- ▶ Our regional cities, centres and towns are networked across ten local governments and support regional growth by providing access to services, facilities, economic and social networks.

The Region faces a number of challenges and opportunities that will impact the future of our economy, environment and communities. This includes economic growth in our towns and centres, the need to enhance community infrastructure and provide a range of housing options that reflect the Region's changing demographic profile. Much of the projected population growth will occur in and around Bendigo and Mildura, along the Calder Highway corridor and in the major Murray River centres of Echuca and Swan Hill.



- ▶ 52% of the Region's jobs are in Bendigo and Mildura (REMPPLAN, 2015c).

Initiatives that strategically direct growth to communities, consistent with the Regional Growth Plans (RGP), are a priority. These will include initiatives to direct growth to communities with existing infrastructure or infrastructure with the capacity for enhancement. Such initiatives will give Loddon Mallee a more cost-effective approach to growth, one that improves the quality of life in our centres and small towns by encouraging development of existing communities.

The Region has uneven population distribution with over 50% of the population living in and around Mildura and Bendigo. Our regional cities play a significant role in the Region's economy and provide diverse services and facilities, and offer major health facilities including the \$630 million new Bendigo Hospital, as well as world class arts, cultural and recreation facilities that are vital to attractive liveability and visitation.

- ▶ Regional Growth Plans define settlement networks and direct our growth potential. RGPs stemmed from our original Regional Strategic Plans (2010) and are reflected in this Plan.

All of our Victorian Murray River towns have hinterlands that extend into New South Wales. Town pairings like Echuca Moama and Robinvale Euston create larger service centres that attract a broader range of services that are used irrespective of which side of the River people live.

Our regional centres provide important services and facilities including health, education, retail, and recreation to surrounding populations. Small towns play a particularly important role in the Region offering housing, employment and lifestyle opportunities. To realise further opportunities to sustain small towns we must address challenges which include decreasing and ageing populations.

This is particularly the case for Shires with a small rate base that face ongoing challenges to fund service delivery and infrastructure upgrades. Creative solutions will need to be employed to generate new opportunities and to deliver services differently. Potential exists to provide some educational and health services through our digital infrastructure.

The delivery of appropriate services can also be an issue for peri-urban locations where town growth is very rapid. Maintaining minimum and appropriate service levels is essential to maintaining liveability.

Recreation facilities are vital to our small towns and regional centres providing sporting and leisure options and encouraging visitation and expenditure across the Region. Our towns and centres also host many vibrant festivals and events such as concerts at Hanging Rock, Mildura Arts Festival, Castlemaine State Festival, Swan Hill Food and Wine Festival, Southern 80 and Bendigo Easter Festival. These types of events contribute to the local economy and are critical to health and wellbeing, encouraging social connection and activity, artistic expression and fostering innovation.

The built environment of our towns, centres and cities is an important influence on health and wellbeing, social inclusion, liveability and tourism. Infrastructure that encourages active and healthy lifestyles and supports sustainable living is important to the future development of the Region.

Investing in our towns, centres and cities strengthens communities and protects and enhances the liveability and appeal of settlements across the Region.

► Loss of population in smaller centres can lead to withdrawal of services, reduced labour force participation and can also affect community resilience.

## A RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE

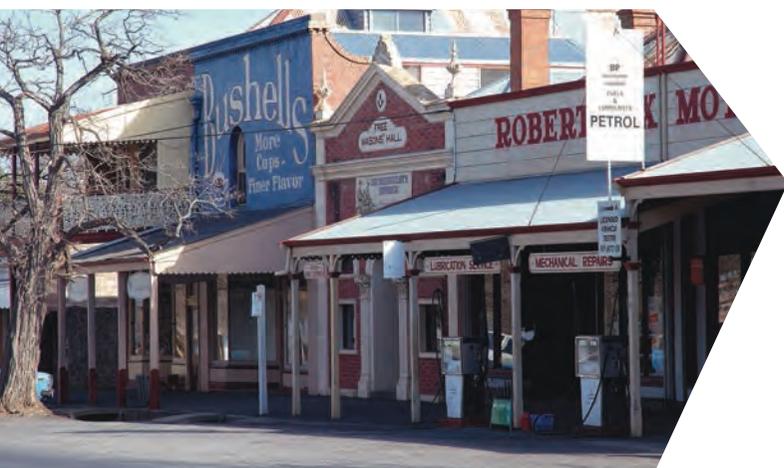
► Our Region has significant Aboriginal cultural heritage; part of a rich living history that is important for regional identity.

Just over 5,400 people in our Region identified themselves as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders at the 2011 Census (REMPAN, 2015f). Over 8,000 Aboriginal places of cultural significance have been identified in the Region (OAAV, 2015). Aboriginal cultural heritage could generate employment and business opportunities for Aboriginal communities and rich Australian Aboriginal cultural tourism experiences that expand knowledge of Aboriginal culture and heritage. Strengthening Aboriginal cultural tourism will build sustainable and empowering employment opportunities, raise awareness of and appreciation for Aboriginal culture and add to the Region's tourism offerings.

The legacy of the gold rush is evident in the landscapes, the grand heritage buildings and the large number of historic townships throughout much of the southern parts of the Region in particular. These heritage environments appeal to both visitors and residents and offer a rich backdrop to continued development to support population and economic growth. Protecting and promoting cultural heritage will have lasting impacts for our current and future populations.

The Murray River is a national icon and has given life and livelihood to our Aboriginal and settler communities from ancient times to the present day. In 2012, the Murray Region attracted over 4.9 million visitors (MRTB, 2013). New tourism product development along the Murray will strengthen culture and heritage experiences by embracing the unique story of each settlement along the river.

Significant investment has been made in tourism product including the Heartbeat of the Murray and Swan Hill Riverfront, Port of Echuca revitalisation, Koondrook Wharf construction, and the major Mildura Riverfront redevelopment currently underway. Further investment in quality tourism experiences in the Region will drive increased visitation and strengthen the liveability and appeal of our Region.



A group of Aboriginal men and children are shown in a traditional ceremony. They are wearing yellow headbands and have white body paint applied to their faces and chests. The men are clapping their hands, and the children are also clapping. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting.

OVER 8,000 ABORIGINAL PLACES  
OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE  
HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED ACROSS  
THE LODDON MALLEE

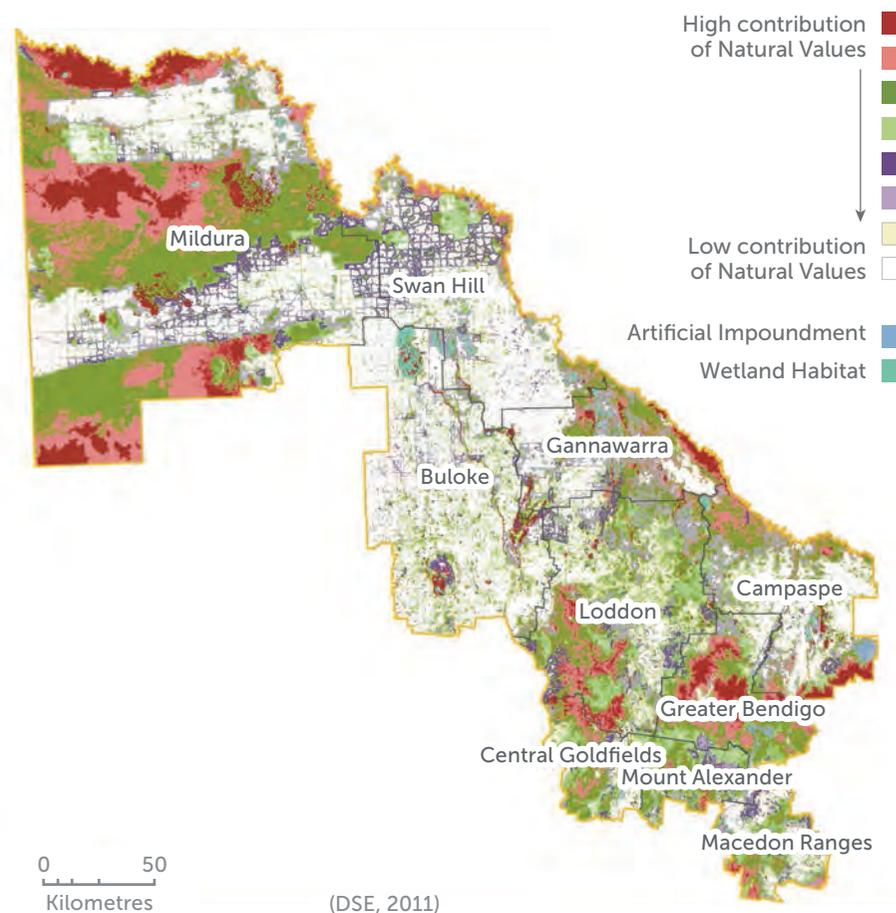
## OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The Murray River system, including its tributaries, wetlands and lakes, is the environmental, cultural and economic lifeblood of much of the north of the Region. The northern part of the Region boasts important riverine and wetland ecosystems along the major rivers and their floodplains. A number of these wetlands are listed on international migratory bird and wetland conservation agreements.

In the south, the upper and middle reaches of the Campaspe, Coliban and Loddon Rivers are important catchment areas and help to provide water for our urban populations, our riverine and wetland habitats and for dryland and irrigated agriculture. The major water storages on these rivers such as; Eppalock; Cairn Curran and Laanecoorie are also important recreational assets.

Both the State and Commonwealth governments have secured environmental water for these priority wetlands and floodplain areas. Murray Darling Basin Plan (MDBA, 2012) provides a guide to how the limited water in the Murray River and its tributaries is to be shared between competing uses including; irrigation, amenity and environmental water needs. The implementation of the MDBP is likely to result in a reduction in the amount of Victorian irrigation compared to the present day, the impact having been minimised by a suite of projects that have created water savings.

## NATUREPRINT: STRATEGIC NATURAL VALUES



Our Region is home to a diversity of natural landscapes that range from mallee wilderness, to the native grasslands of our riverine plains and the forested slopes of the Great Dividing Range. These landscapes are appreciated as the backdrop to our lives, as potential tourism drawcards, but also as the home to a wide variety of plant and animal species.

The Natureprint map (previous page) provides an indication of the relative importance of the different parts of our Region to the preservation of our biodiversity. We want to put most effort into preserving and enhancing those areas that contribute most to protecting the largest range of different plant and animal species (the red and pink areas on this map).

A regionally coordinated program of planning and implementation is needed to protect and manage priority remnants and restore landscape connectivity where it has been lost.

Environmental markets, which generate value for landowners when they improve environmental management outcomes, provide the opportunity for private landholders to actively participate and derive benefit from the protection of native vegetation and ecosystems. Pre-existing programs such as 'Bushtender', that promote the benefits of protecting the natural environment that so strongly characterises this Region, should be strongly supported.

Our Region also has active Conservation Management Networks (CMN) and Landcare groups that continue to work to promote innovative farming and good natural resource management. Many landholders are contributing to the preservation of natural values by placing covenants on their land, this work is aided by Trust for Nature and Bush Heritage.

Looking to the future, our environment is going to be subjected to a changing climate which will result in warmer and drier conditions causing reduced stream flows, more severe droughts, extreme weather events and increased bushfire risk.



## PRIORITY AREAS

### **4-1** Improve small town liveability, adjustment and access to services

Initiatives that enhance the liveability of small towns and their ability to adjust positively to change. This will include initiatives to use the Transitioning Towns Toolbox, deliver community leadership programs, facilitation of place-based community planning initiatives, and improve transport connections to regional service centres including regular transport access to health services and emergency transportation to and from small towns and rural communities, particularly in small towns struggling with declining populations and lower rate bases. These initiatives will help improve the capacity of small towns to adjust positively to demographic change including peri-urban growth and maintain the diverse range of living options in our Region.

### **4-2** Build on the strengths of regional centres and towns

Initiatives that build upon the strengths of regional centres like Swan Hill, Echuca, Maryborough and Gisborne and the role that they play in the delivery of services, such as health, recreation and transport to local and surrounding communities. This will include initiatives consistent with the Regional Growth Plans that improve local infrastructure, improve transport connections, and improve access to quality health, emergency, recreation and education services. It will also include initiatives that preserve and positively develop the character of our towns and Region, and improve community leadership capacity. These initiatives will help improve quality of life in these and surrounding towns and maintain the diverse range of living options in the Loddon Mallee Region.



## 4-3 Enhance Bendigo and Mildura as regional cities

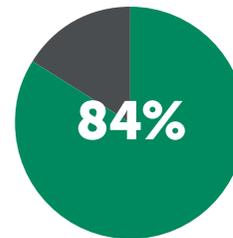
Initiatives that further develop Bendigo and Mildura as major regional cities with benefits for small towns, rural communities and regional centres. This will include application of the land use directions from our Regional Growth Plans and initiatives that improve health, community leadership, emergency management and social, cultural, recreational and education services and facilities in these cities. These initiatives will help improve regional opportunities and maintain the diverse range of living options in the Loddon Mallee Region.

- ▶ The population of our Region in 2013 was 314,487: approximately 22% of regional Victoria's population. It is forecast to increase to 387,786 people by 2031 (RDV, 2014b,c).



## 4-4 Maintain and build healthy places

Initiatives that maintain and build the infrastructure and programs that create healthy places. This will include initiatives to improve public transport infrastructure to remote communities, make safe and child friendly spaces, improve walking and cycling infrastructure, increase access to natural places, and forested urban areas. These initiatives, in combination with improved primary care systems and health programs, will help people to be healthier, with major economic and social benefits.



- ▶ **84% of towns** in our Region have a population of less than 3,000 people (McKinna, 2013).

## PRIORITY AREAS

### **4-5** Adopt smart solutions to the management of waste and natural resources

Initiatives that identify regional solutions to waste management and ensure the sustainable use of our land and water resources. This will include projects that help mitigate the increasingly expensive cost of waste disposal through the Loddon Mallee Waste and Resource Recovery Group; initiatives that manage the disposal of waste water; and ensure that land is managed according to its capability, including appropriate management of pest, plant and animal problems and other biosecurity risks. These initiatives will protect our natural resource base and ensure future productivity.

- ▶ Engineering works to enable water to reach into the Murray River wetlands at Lindsay-Wallpolla Islands, Hattah Lakes and Gunbower Creek are amongst the biggest environmental restoration works occurring in Australia. Work which was started under the *Living Murray Initiative* is hoped to continue to improve the delivery of water to other Murray River wetlands in our Region through projects sponsored through the Murray Darling Basin Plan (MDBA, 2012).

### **4-6** Improve the coordination of efforts to protect our Region's rich biodiversity

Initiatives that help coordinate efforts to protect our environment, underpinned by good science and tenure-blind regional planning that identifies our most important environmental assets. This will include initiatives that encourage increased understanding of what is required to preserve our threatened plant and animal species and ensure adequate support for the public and private land managers, Trust for Nature, Bush Heritage, and the large volunteer effort supporting nature conservation in our Region. These initiatives will improve biodiversity and protect the natural assets that are so critical to our Region's attractiveness, liveability and economy.

Photography: Major Mitchell Cockatoos – Brady Childs; River System – Olivia Reid



## 4-7 Efficiently use our water resources to achieve economic, environmental and lifestyle improvements

Initiatives that will help balance the utilisation of our limited water resources between irrigation, urban, industrial, recreational and environmental uses. This will include initiatives that continue to promote the security of supply, and efficiency of use of irrigation water within the Region, and initiatives that maximise the benefit of environmental-watering programs on the Murray, Coliban, Loddon, Campaspe and Avoca rivers and associated wetland systems. This will also include projects to improve the recreational amenity of water bodies like Lake Boga, Lake Eppalock and Lake Meran. These initiatives will protect natural assets to ensure that they remain the environmental, cultural and economic lifeblood of the Loddon Mallee.



## **4-8** Support thriving arts, culture, sports, recreation and major events

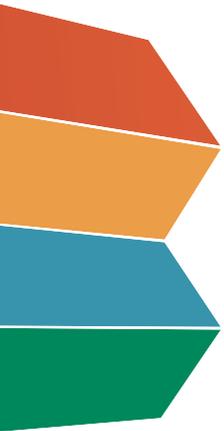
Initiatives that build on the strong sport and recreation, major events and arts culture in many towns and cities across the Region. This will include initiatives to develop and improve participation in high calibre arts, culture, sport and recreational programs, development of facilities, and major events that contribute significant economic and social benefits to our communities, such as Southern 80 at Echuca Moama and the Castlemaine State Festival. These initiatives will improve the quality of life for existing residents and improve the attractiveness of our Region to new residents and visitors.

## **4-9** Improve our pride in, and protection of, our Aboriginal and historic cultural heritage

Initiatives that increase protection, promotion and community appreciation of our Aboriginal, gold-mining, immigration, farming and river heritage. This will include initiatives developed with Traditional Owner groups and Aboriginal communities to create culturally informative tours, and continued efforts to improve the protection and promotion of important aspects of our history such as the work to support a UNESCO World Heritage listing for the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park. These initiatives will help improve awareness and protection of our Aboriginal and historic cultural heritage.

THESE INITIATIVES WILL IMPROVE  
THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR EXISTING  
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ATTRACTIVENESS OF OUR REGION  
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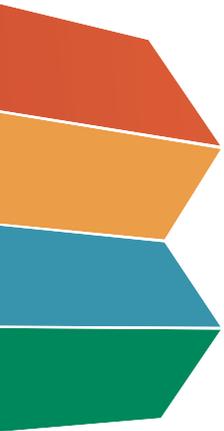




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  - d) Labour Force Participation.
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  - b) Output Attributable to Tourism
  - c) Employment by Industry Sector
  - d) Output by Industry Sector
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# GLOSSARY

TERM	DEFINITION
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics.
BMI	Body Mass Index (kilograms) divided by height squared (metres).
LGAs	Local Government Areas.
MDBA	Murray Darling Basin Authority.
RDA	Regional Development Australia, specifically the Loddon Mallee RDA committee.
RDV	Regional Development Victoria.
RGP	Regional Growth Plan.
RMF	Regional Management Forum.
SEIFA index	Index of relative socio-economic advantage/disadvantages, covering unemployment, education and income.



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DEVELOPMENT AUSTRALIA

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