

# Goulburn Regional Roundtable

Regional Roundtable Playback

4<sup>th</sup> June 2020



# About the roundtable

The COVID-19 Pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for our communities, governments, industries and business.

On 4 June 2020, Goulburn community and industry leaders, government and MPs came together for a roundtable discussion on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Goulburn's rural and regional communities, and opportunities for a strong post pandemic recovery.

This document reflects a summary of the roundtable discussion including opportunities for short, medium and long term action. It is not an exhaustive account or analysis but serves as a record of the roundtable conversation and will inform further discussions by local Goulburn leaders, government executives and regional partnership representatives.

## Questions we asked

1. Where have we felt the impacts of the pandemic most strongly?
2. What immediate action is needed?
3. What does 2025 look like for Goulburn if we have undertaken a smart recovery?
4. What recovery actions will help us get there?

## The Goulburn region at a glance



Regional Population

**167,856**

As at June 2019

Gross Regional Product

**\$7.86 billion**

As at 2019

Annual Tourism  
Expenditure

**\$836 million**

As at 2019

Tourism Operators

**1,642**

As at 2018

# 1. Where have we felt the impacts of the pandemic most strongly?

## Tourism and visitor economy

Communities that have had a strong reliance on the tourism industry, such as Yarrawonga, have been particularly impacted by the pandemic. Business owners are apprehensive about future visitation levels, adapting to changing restrictions as businesses re-open, and the end of JobKeeper payments.

The events sector has come to a standstill and is concerned about the risk of resuming without a coordinated approach to avoid saturation. It is unlikely that large scale events will resume for some time.

Day visitors present opportunities and threats, both in terms of the opportunities to offset international visitation, but also concerns about transmission of the virus to regional and vulnerable communities. Locations within a short distance from Melbourne have experienced a large uptick in metropolitan day visitors in the recent weeks, but it has been a challenge to cater to them due to business operating restrictions. There are also some concerns about a lack of police in regional areas to manage incoming day visitors.

## Health and wellbeing

The pandemic has caused significant social isolation. Sporting, community and arts clubs which are an integral part of the community's social fabric have not been able to operate meaning people are missing important opportunities for connection. This is particularly impacting young people.

Support for acute mental illness has been challenging but has been managed to date. There are continued challenges for 'the missing middle' – people who don't meet criteria for acute mental health support. This cohort needs support particularly given circumstances of increased financial stress. There is a risk of an increased suicide rate if people fall between the gaps of primary intervention services during this period.

Young people are a particularly vulnerable cohort, and their wellbeing and

mental health has deteriorated. This presents broader risks to the community because it can increase risk-taking behaviour and can cause them to become conduits for virus spread.

Asylum-seekers, similarly, are a vulnerable cohort who are disproportionately affected by mental health impacts during the pandemic.

## Industry and business

In addition to tourism, there are also significant impacts on small retailers and the hospitality industries. Businesses operating on the border are experiencing an added level of complexity. There is a lack of suitable data to fully understand the employment impacts.

The agriculture and food manufacturing industries have continued to operate well and they have been able to engage some people from impacted industries. There is a need to continue vigilance about virus spread to avoid future shutdowns and supply disruptions.

## Digital connectivity

The pandemic has highlighted the disadvantages caused by lack of internet connectivity with many students unable to participate fully in remote learning or maintain social connections.

Lack of digital capacity has compounded issue of delivering industry training both in capacity building and also COVID-related protocols

A number of businesses have been creative and intuitive in adapting their business models in response to the crisis and it is encouraging to see how they have supported each other and the vulnerable parts of the community. However many businesses do not have the time or the skills in e-commerce to adapt to these changing circumstances.

*"The local community is petrified that people are coming to the region and bringing the virus so they are locking themselves away. We have loads of people here and we can't leverage them – 3 pubs and cafes aren't open". – Regional Partnership*

## 2. What immediate action is needed?

### Tourism and visitor economy

- Provide funding to support the reopening of businesses so that they can be ready to receive and benefit from the domestic visitor market
- Work with local communities to address fear about reopening for business and welcoming back visitors
- Tourism promotion will be essential, and businesses are seeking ownership of the messages and activities that are rolled out to attract visitors to their region
- Fast track existing tourism priorities across the region.

### Health and wellbeing

- Investment in mental health services is required to address the 'missing middle' so that people who don't meet the criteria for acute mental health services may access appropriate support and services
- Investment is needed to make the most of shifts in human habits and behaviour already underway - cycling, walking, working from home.

### Industry and business

- Consider the immediate needs of the agriculture sector in rolling out infrastructure programs (e.g. on-farm investment to continue to support adaptation and transformation)
- Directly fund business groups to support business networks, identify local needs and provide place-based responses (e.g. training, financial advice, activation)
- Support businesses to identify and service new domestic markets.

### Support vulnerable cohorts

- Acknowledge and address the root issues of vulnerability in the community as part of a more immediate pandemic response
- Develop an affordable housing scheme as part of a much-needed social health response, whilst also supporting the construction industry
- Address barriers to participation such as transport and housing
- Maintain effective protections for the community to stay safe from COVID-19.

### Digital connectivity

- Provide support and resources for small to medium size business to better leverage online and digital platforms, particularly for e-commerce.

### Working with government

- Explore further opportunities to waive state taxes and levies for impacted sectors
- Support stronger collaboration between and with all local governments
- Review governance and decision-making processes to improve responsiveness so that investment in the region can be expediated and aligned with known priorities/gaps
- Explore potential for collaborative regional recovery approach.

*"The businesses want ownership of the promotion of their tourism activities that are rolled out".*  
– Go Nagambie

*"GSCC offered grants to 60 businesses to go online, \$3k each, very popular and this needs to continue".* – Regional Partnership

*"Poor public transport is a major contributor to social isolation. You cannot get from Mooroopna to Kialla on the weekend and it can take two hours weekdays".* – Shepparton Response

### 3. What does 2025 look like for Goulburn if we have undertaken a smart recovery?

Our local university sector is vibrant and supports existing and emerging skills our businesses need.

Our businesses harness innovation and technology.

Our communities are connected – digitally and personally.

Young people are happy, healthy, resilient and adaptive.

Our management of water and the environment supports the resilience of ecosystems, industry and the community.

No one is left behind in our economic and social recovery.

As a whole community, we open up our region to significant tourism opportunities.

Our region's unique strengths attract new people and skillsets, particularly from metropolitan areas.

Opportunities through the Lake Eildon masterplan are realised, further unlocking the area for visitors and tourists.

Businesses are keen to invest in regional areas because it's easy and quick to do so.

Local government is empowered to procure locally and flexibly to support the region, ensuring that processes are achievable for smaller businesses.

Our region has made a significant transition towards a circular economy.

Our goods and services have many international markets and our businesses are resilient to changes in the global economy.

Our healthcare system is reinvigorated, supported by improved infrastructure and strong links to the university sector.

*"Smart recovery = looking at what worked & didn't before COVID-19 and ensuring we adapt and do better in the future". – Regional Partnership*

*"Idea of new future should be embraced, clear understanding of what we want the region to look like is co-created and embraced by all areas of the community". – Murray River Tourism*

*"The virus has created a desire for Metro people to access the benefits of regional areas and we want to maximise the opportunities around this". – Regional Partnership*

## 4. What recovery actions will help us get there?

### Tourism and visitor economy

- Establish a single authority to oversee the promotion and visitor assets for Lake Eildon
- Provide investment in Indigenous tourism product, rail and connections, and nature-based tourism products
- Complete the Murray River Adventure Trail and linkages to various track and trails to encourage more walking, cycling and paddling for locals and visitors.

### Digital connectivity

- Progress the recommendations of the Goulburn Regional Digital Plan (addressing coverage gaps, encouraging digital uptake and building digital capability and skills).

### Industry and employment

- Update planning schemes to address red tape restriction on investment and development particularly with regards to agriculture and farming zones
- Address the existing Partnership priorities and shovel ready projects with strong existing community buy-in to support recovery (e.g. Seymour Revitalisation, GMID Resilience Strategy and Lake Eildon Master Plan)
- Seize the opportunity to respond to both climate change and COVID-19 through increased investment in clean energy, transport infrastructure, communications infrastructure, charging networks for electric vehicles, 5G networks, upgraded transmission, hydrogen infrastructure etc.

### Health and wellbeing

- Enable decentralisation encouraging people to move to and live in the Goulburn region taking advantage of its liveability and leveraging the flexibility of remote working that COVID-19 has facilitated
- Develop place-based solutions delivering the right healthcare for the community
- Provide funding support for the local arts and entertainment industries as central components of the community's social and economic recovery

- Build on existing initiatives (including in suicide prevention and response) that ensure that services are coordinated and linked in
- Adopt a no wrong door approach (a strong example from Christchurch post-earthquakes) to provide seamless access to services.

### Skills and education

- Support regional tertiary providers to ensure their offering doesn't decline during this period and better align their offering with local industry needs
- Proactively address the predicted health care skills shortage by promoting healthcare as a local career opportunity linking local training opportunities with local employment, overcoming administrative barriers and nursing caps and partnering with local universities
- Provide a coordinated approach and funding to support skills development and attraction of suitable workforce for industries such as food manufacturing, and agriculture and enable them to progress innovation and technological advancements.

### A partnership approach across government and industry to regional investment

- Ensure a coordinated approach to the delivery of the range of initiatives under consideration, to protect against having over-served and under-served cohorts
- Link up potential investors with relevant areas of government to support a joint approach to investment facilitation
- Make efficient use of, and empower the Regional Partnerships as the key connection point to the region
- Ensure locally relevant and timely data is available regionally to inform and monitor recovery planning and progress.

*"Need for very localised, live data on unemployment, JobKeeper uptake etc. to guide our planning and decision making". – Regional Partnership*

*"Take an asset-based community development approach. Focus on what's strong - not what's wrong". – Shepparton Response*



# Thank you

## Our contributors and attendees

David McKenzie, Regional Partnership Chair

Paul Briggs, Regional Partnership

Elaine Mallows, Regional Partnership

Peter Hall, Regional Partnership

Jamie Lea, Regional Partnership

Amanda McCulloch, Regional Partnership

Stuart Locke, Regional Partnership

Peter Harriott, Regional Partnership

Mary Agostino, Regional Partnership

Mark Henderson, Regional Partnership

Craig Lloyd, Regional Partnership

Julie Saloman, Regional Partnership

Robyn Seymour, DOT

Amanda McClaren, RDA Chair

Mark Francis, Murray River Tourism

Joshua Freeman, GV Health

Jenny Wilson, Murray Dairy

Helen Reynolds, Goulburn Broken Catchment  
Management Authority

Adam Furphy, La Trobe University

Rob Giles, SPC

Terry Quehl, Saputo

Lesley Hart, Committee for Greater Shepparton

Stephanie Swift, Euroa Chamber of Commerce

Daniel Irwin, Goulburn Murray Water

Lisa McKenzie, Shepparton Response

Sarah Thompson, GV Water

Mike Dalmau, Lake Eildon Houseboat Industry  
Association

Tim Goodacre, GoNagambie

Danielle Green MP Parliamentary Secretary for  
Regional Victoria

Matt Nelson, Regional Director - Hume, RDV

Luke Wilson, Cross Border Commissioner

Maxine Loynd, Head of Rural and Regional Policy and  
Strategy, RRV

Our Regional Roundtable was  
facilitated by: Ben Schramm,  
Managing Partner Cube Group



# Next steps

Some of the next steps we will be exploring include:

- Deepening our understanding of COVID-19 impacts and consequences across regions (through further engagement as well as deeper differentiated modelling)
- Continuing to work collaboratively with regional leaders and key stakeholders on place-based recovery
- Identifying ongoing opportunities and challenges for recovery at a regional level
- Designing and implementing a place-based approach to recovery in collaboration with community.

## Goulburn Regional Partnership Contacts

Anita Smith Regional Partnership Manager	<a href="mailto:anita.smith@rdv.vic.gov.au">anita.smith@rdv.vic.gov.au</a>
David McKenzie Regional Partnership Chair	<a href="mailto:goulburn.partnership@rdv.vic.gov.au">goulburn.partnership@rdv.vic.gov.au</a>
Tim Russell Regional Partnership Coordinator	<a href="mailto:tim.russell@rdv.vic.gov.au">tim.russell@rdv.vic.gov.au</a>

