

FUTURE OF Yarram



REGIONAL CONTEXT ANALYSIS
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INTRODUCTION



MANAGING TRANSITION

In November 2019, the Victorian Government announced the state would transition away from native timber harvesting. The Victorian Forestry Transition Program supports communities to plan for the future, and diversify their economies building on local strengths and assets.

Drawing on experience with energy transition in the Latrobe Valley, eleven towns across Victoria were identified to benefit from early intervention to facilitate transition. The Latrobe Valley Authority's (LVA) experience with Smart

Specialisation (S3) methodology was seen to be the right approach for developing a roadmap for the future. Yarram was identified as one of those 11 towns, resulting in the creation of the Future of Yarram project.

The Future of Yarram is being supported locally by the Wellington Shire Council as host agency of a grant from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. Partners supplying expertise in the Smart Specialisation Strategy include the LVA and RMIT University.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The first step of the Future of Yarram is to gain an understanding of the district through the creation of a context analysis; a deep dive into Yarram and surrounds.

The context analysis uses demographic and descriptive data to understand the current community, business and population characteristics and activities in Yarram and district.

Interviews with stakeholders from business, education/research, government, and community provide insights into the ways of working in the region, perceived strengths, the relevance to different kinds of supply chains, and possible innovation activities.

This leads to this document which provides:

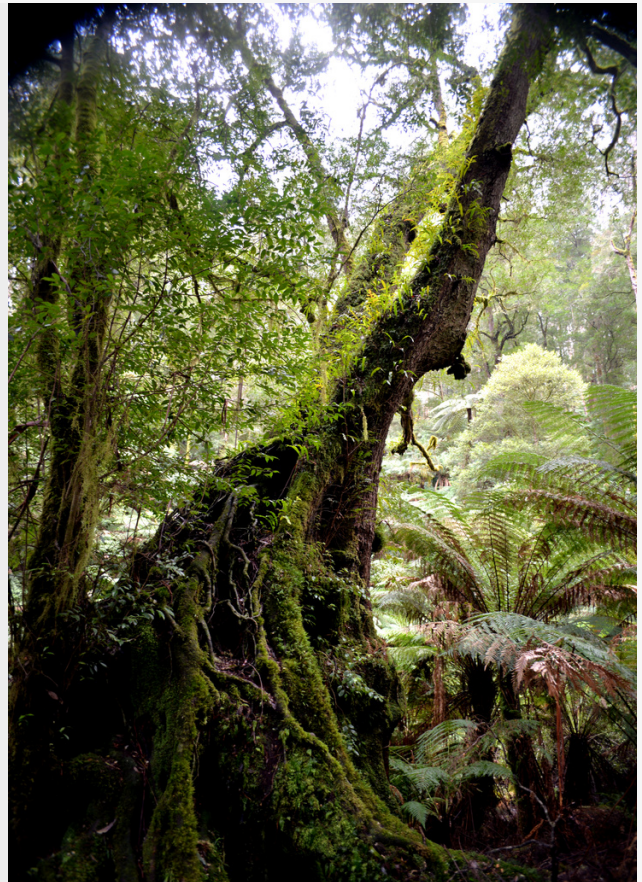
- a review of the geographical, demographic and other data related to Yarram and district (pages 5-10);
- an overview of the insights gathered from the interview data (pages 11- 15);
- a summary of recent planning and survey documents (pages 16-17);
- a list of potential innovation opportunities (pages 18-23).

In 2023, each innovation opportunity will be examined through an Entrepreneurial Discovery Workshop. Subsequently, working groups will be created to develop the opportunities and create project plans for future investment.

A SMART APPROACH

With Smart Specialisation, the starting point for developing a strategic view of the future for the communities in the Yarram district is a close examination of the existing status of economic, social, and environmental characteristics of the district. This regional context analysis includes exploring the assets and resources which are available to support innovation, as well as the regionally relevant key policy initiatives.

This approach draws on experience in the European Union with the implementation of Smart Specialisation Strategies. This builds on evidence which demonstrates that those regions most able to offer prosperous and sustainable futures for their citizens are those that have strong place-based collaborative innovation systems.



THE PLACE

193,186 HECTARES IN SOUTHWEST WELLINGTON SHIRE

DATA

Data for this report is provided by REMPLAN, using census data, tourism reports, and other sources.

OVERVIEW

Yarram, the former centre of Alberton Shire, now sits at Wellington Shire's border with South Gippsland Shire.

It is positioned at the intersection formed by the South Gippsland Highway and Hyland Highway. This means the larger town centres of Sale and Traralgon are a 50-minute drive, and Leongatha is an hour to the west.

Since the mid-1850s, Yarram has acted as a hub for surrounding towns, supporting trade through Port Albert of dairy, beef, gold, and timber. Much of the town's historic architecture dates from when Port Albert was a working port, and goods were moved through the town.

Modern Yarram continues to act as a support centre for farmers and other residents, while embracing tourism focused on Tarra- Bulga National Park, 90 Mile Beach, charming towns, and a burgeoning art scene.

However, Yarram is not a hub for economic activity within the district, or the wider South Gippsland and Central Gippsland area. One potential task for the town is to re-establish itself as a commercial centre for the district, in tandem with new opportunities emerging in the offshore wind industry.

Public transport is limited and will need to be improved to allow residents access to Sale and Traralgon and vice versa.



THE PEOPLE

5586 PEOPLE WITH A MEDIAN AGE OF 53

OVERVIEW

Yarram has a notably higher proportion of its population aged above 50 than both Wellington Shire and the whole of Gippsland. 55% of the residents are aged 50 and above. That same age group makes up 44% of Wellington Shire.

15% of people are living in rented accommodation. 50% of rent is between \$225 and \$350 per week. 74% are living in a home owned outright or with a mortgage.

Of youth aged between 15 and 25, 1 in 7 is disengaged from work and study.

Nearly 9% of the population has need for assistance with core activities.

The SEIFA (Socio Economic Indexes for Areas) index of disadvantage score for Yarram is 945 (compared to Wellington's 973 and Gippsland's 972). A higher score is better. A score of 945 means 20% of Australian towns are more disadvantaged than Yarram.

EDUCATION

One third of the population has completed Year 12, with a further 40% completing Year 10 or 11. Wellington sees 38% completing Year 12, while Gippsland tops 40%.

Of those possessing qualifications, 44% listed Certificate level, 13% a Bachelor level degree, and 14% an advanced Diploma or Diploma level.

Students engaged in further study were most likely to be in Engineering (18%), Society & Culture (10%), Management & Commerce (10%), Education (9%), and Health (9%).

EMPLOYMENT

The median weekly income for residents of Yarram and surrounds \$545, compared with Wellington's \$658.

Just over 49% of Yarram's population is engaged in the workforce, while Wellington and Gippsland see 53% engagement.

Of those employed, 22% are Managers, followed by Labourers (15%), Technicians or Trades (13%), Professionals (12%), and Service Workers (12%).

Of the entire workforce, 70% are employees, 14% own a business without employees, and 8% own a business with employees.

Over 19% of residents do some volunteer work.

THE ECONOMY

GROSS REGIONAL PRODUCT OF \$280.808 MILLION
(OUT OF \$3,911.929 FOR WELLINGTON AND \$20,074.515 FOR GIPPSLAND)

OUTPUT

In 2021, Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing dwarfed other sectors with 33.4% of the total output. The majority of that output (26.5% of the total regional output) was from Agriculture - grains, livestock, etc. Forestry and Fishing made up 4.7% of the total.

Manufacturing accounted for 12.9% of the total, with around 60% of that from Saw Mill, Wood & Paper Products.

Construction contributed 11.4% with Real Estate, Rentals, and Hiring close behind on 10.2%.

EMPLOYMENT

24.2% of all employment in the region is in found in Agriculture, 2.6% in Forestry and Fishing, and a further 2.4% in servicing those areas.

Health Care made up 14.7% of jobs, including both Health Services and Residential Care & Social Assistance Services.

Education & Training provided 8.4% of all jobs. Retail accounted for 148 jobs (7.9% of the total). Construction and Food & Manufacturing made up around 7% each. Accommodation provided 5.8%.

In regard to wages and salaries, Health Care and Education & Training both contribute much higher percentages than their rankings for individuals employed.

VALUE-ADDED

Value-Added can be calculated by subtracting local expenditure and expenditure on regional imports from the output generated by an industry sector, or alternatively, by adding the Wages & Salaries paid to local employees, the gross operating surplus and taxes on products and production.

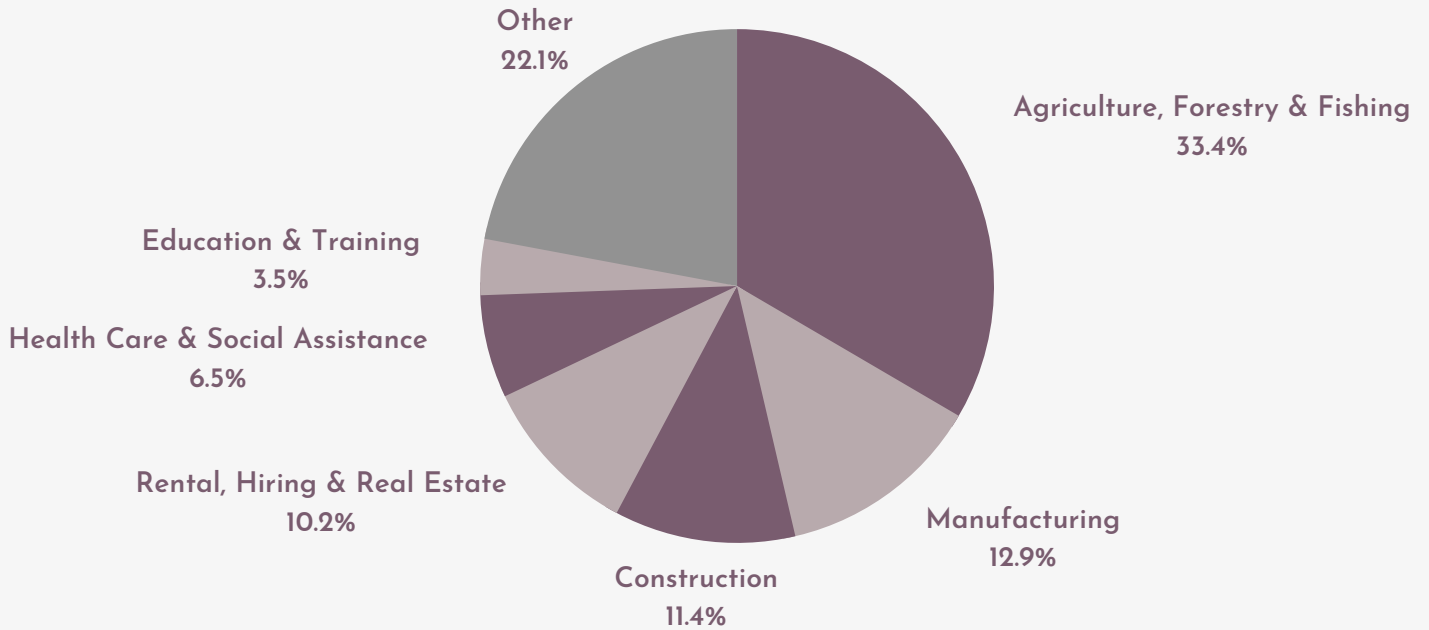
The total value-added for Yarram is \$255.763 million. Wellington's total is \$3,703.852 and Gippsland comes in at \$18,706.

The Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing sector contributes \$73 million (28.8%) of total value-added.

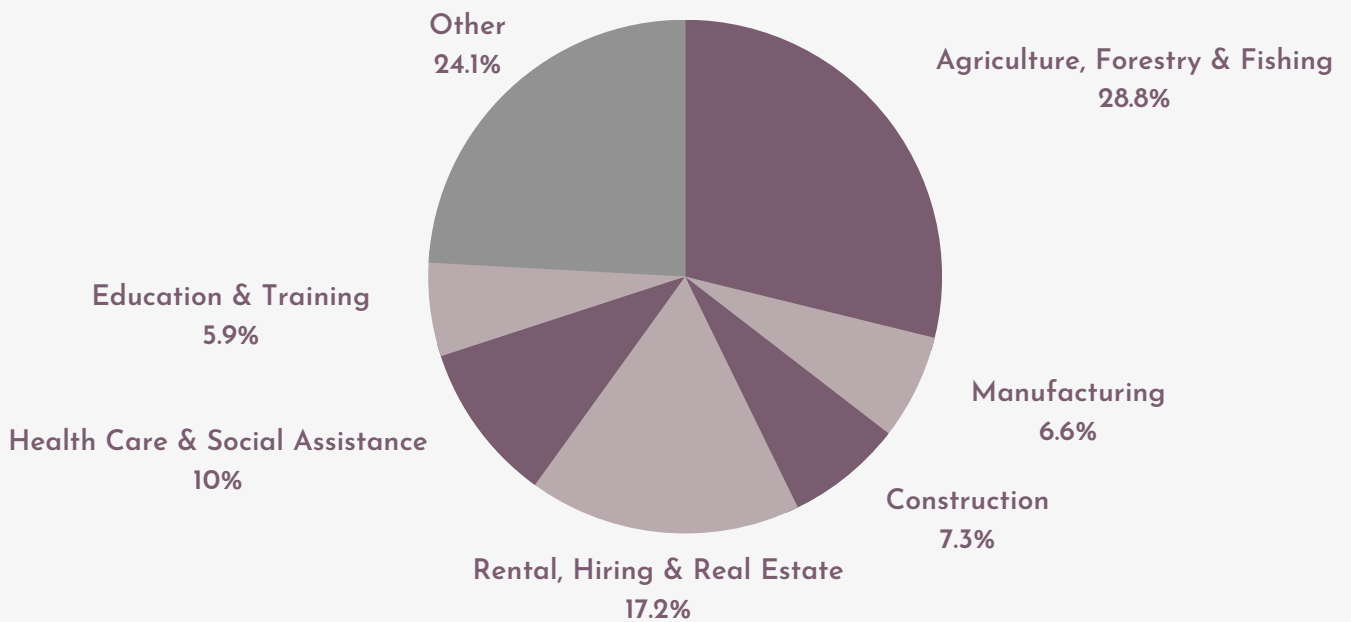
The Rental, Hiring & Real Estate Services sector contributes 17.2%, Health Care 10%, Construction 7.3%, and Manufacturing 6.6%. Education & Training round out the top six with 5.9%.

THE ECONOMY

OUTPUT: GROSS REVENUE GENERATED

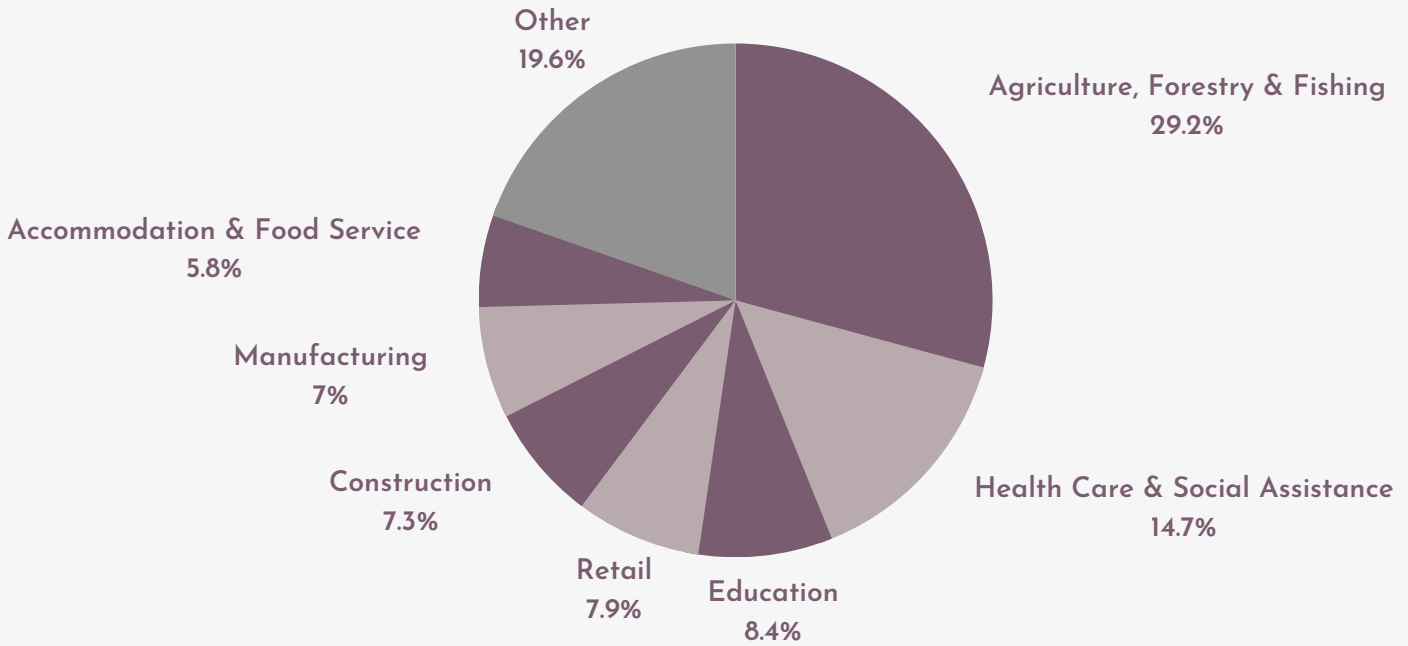


VALUE ADDED: BY INDUSTRY

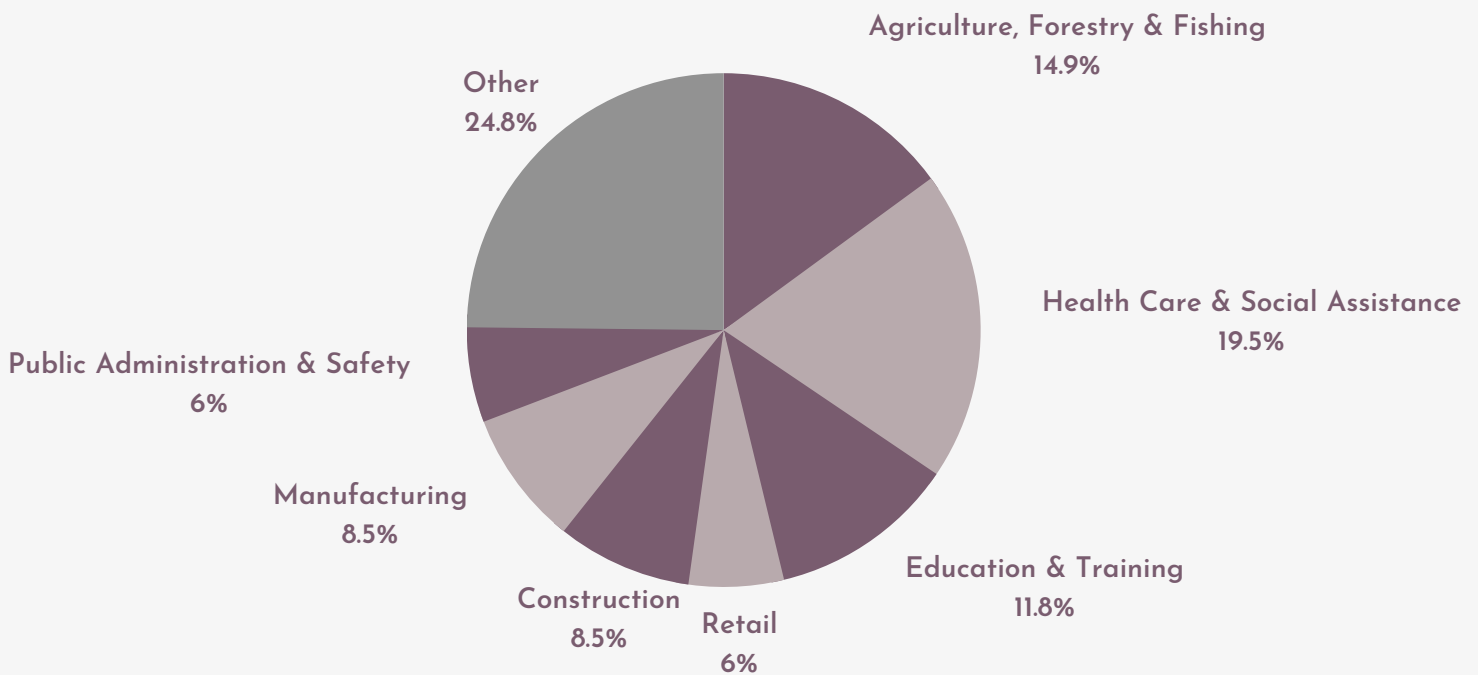


THE ECONOMY

EMPLOYMENT: NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES



WAGES & SALARIES: EMPLOYED IN YARRAM





KEY PROPULSIVE SECTORS

REMPLAN has ranked the top 5 (of 45 sectors) contributors to economic activity in the Yarram Region in relation to backward linkages, exports, employment, and value-added.

Value-Added - represents the marginal economic value that is added by each industry sector in a defined region. Value-Added is calculated by subtracting local expenditure and expenditure on regional imports from the output generated by an industry sector. Value-Added by industry sector is the major element in the calculation of Gross Regional Product.

Employment - the key social outcome of economy development; employment data represents the number of people employed by businesses / organisations in each of the industry sectors in the Yarram Region.

Regional Exports - represents the value of goods and services exported outside of the Yarram Region that have been generated by local businesses / organisations. Another way of defining exports is as an inflow of money into the region, i.e. Motels have an inflow of money from people who live outside the region's boundaries thus they are earning export equivalent dollars.

Backward Linkages - details the industry sectors which spend the most on locally sourced intermediate goods and services per dollar of output. These industry sectors may not necessarily make the largest contributions to the Region's economy at present however due to well developed local supply chains these sectors have a significant capacity to deliver broad based economic benefits for the region.

Across these measures of economic activity the key propulsive drivers of the Yarram Region's economy, in descending order from most significant, are:

Livestock, Grains & Other Agriculture - 3

Health Care Services - 2

Education & Training - 2

Forestry, Fishing & Hunting - 2

Saw Mill, Wood & Paper Product Manufacturing - 2

Construction - 2

No other industry scored more than one point.

INTERVIEWS SUMMARY

90+ INTERVIEWS WERE CONDUCTED WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM GOVERNMENT (14%), BUSINESS (38%), COMMUNITY (36%), AND RESEARCH/EDUCATION (12%).

THE ECONOMY

The bulk of agricultural output is dairy-based with some farming focused on beef, sheep, and crops. The climate and land are ideal for farming. Water supply, nutrient-rich soil, and mild weather all contribute to this. There is a long tradition of dairy production with some generational farms still operating. There is a feeling amongst many that practices will need to change with impending climate change. Water availability and prices may make horticulture a more sensible use of the land.

There has been some work and study done on seagrass in Corner Inlet with potential to expand to Nooramunga. There is a potential to build an industry around these crops and the University of Western Australia has been supporting the work with an eye to carbon sequestration.

Youth engagement in the town is low. The library offers a space with internet but is used sparingly. The Hive Community Collective has emerged in recent years to fill the hole, but so far is mostly used by primary school students. This is part of a pattern in the town. The community, businesses, and individuals are disconnected from one another and see limited opportunities for participation and collaboration in community and economic development.

Several organisations exist to support local participation in the community; however their resources are limited and they lack capability – for example, the Yarram & District Traders & Tourism Association and a number of committees of management. There are several businesses working closely together, but this cooperation is often due to personal connections between the owners.

Businesses seeking highly skilled employees, particularly in health care and education, report difficulties in attracting staff from outside of the district due in part to critical housing shortages and very limited childcare options. The Yarram Early Learning Centre is expanding to add spaces, but it is expected they will be taken quickly.

"RETAIL HABITS CHANGED DRAMATICALLY TWENTY YEARS AGO. MUCH OF THE SHOPPING NOW HAPPENS IN SALE OR THE VALLEY. SEVEN GENERAL SHOPS CLOSED IN ONE WEEK. NOW THE BANKS HAVE ALL LEFT. SERVICE CENTRES, OP SHOPS, AND CAFE CULTURE HAVE STEPPED IN. THE ISOLATION HAS HELPED INSULATE THE TOWN FROM EROSION."
(GOVERNMENT)

INTERVIEWS CONTINUED

THE ECONOMY CONTINUED

Emerging new energy projects across the region could have significant benefits for Yarram, depending on how the community positions what it can offer, its needs, and how government and commercial partners respond.

Radial Timber is partnering with Spiegel Energy to establish a pyrolysis unit (thermal decomposition of wood waste), solar photovoltaic system (PV), and battery storage at its mill in Yarram. This is the first phase of a planned 'Renewable Energy Park' that would provide more security of supply to the town, community benefit-sharing from the sale of power, and development of co-products from the pyrolysis unit (combustible synthesis gas, biochar, and wood vinegar), and training and research opportunities around the new technology.

In mid-2022, the Commonwealth Government announced the Bass Strait off Gippsland as the first area to be formally assessed under its new Offshore Electricity Infrastructure framework. Yarram is centrally located in relation to the positioning of the most advanced wind energy project proposed by Star of the South.

"WE MOVED HERE TO RAISE OUR KIDS BUT NOW WE CAN'T WAIT TO BE GRANDPARENTS AND STAY HERE FOREVER."
(BUSINESS)

Many interviewees expressed positive hopes for the impending wind energy industry. Expectations vary from increased job opportunities and spending in the region to an expansion of housing and upgrade of services. At this stage in early 2023, no licenses have been granted, so companies such as Star of the South are unable to predict the effects on Yarram and surrounds. However, Star of the South is engaging with the community and aware of the potential for the community to benefit from the project, from funds for community activities, through to training for the future workforce and construction of new housing. TAFE and Federation University are addressing training needs with new centres and courses in Gippsland and other places in Victoria. The closest training to the proposed projects is in Morwell, perhaps offering an opportunity for Yarram.

Most trades businesses are in high demand with the consensus that there is a waitlist for even routine service and repair. Those business owners report difficulty in finding staff and apprentices and some are content with the status quo.

"THERE IS LOTS OF FOOD BEING GROWN HERE, BUT NONE OF US CAN BUY IT. WHERE IS THE MARKET? WHY ISN'T SOMEONE MAKING BUTTER (OR CHEESE) IN THE BUTTER FACTORY?"
(COMMUNITY)

INTERVIEWS CONTINUED

THE ECONOMY CONTINUED

The tourist economy is strong during holiday seasons. Many people come to the area for relaxation, fishing, and sightseeing. Port Albert, Tarra-Bulga, and 90 Mile Beach are well known across the state. Accommodation spots regularly service visitors to Wilson's Promontory as well with closer options being booked well in advance. A lack of food options and higher end accommodation make it difficult to attract some city-based tourists.

Yarram has a long-standing music eisteddfod, dance eisteddfod, and art gallery. Recently, 25 murals were created by Melbourne artist, Heesco. They were well-marketed across Australia and continue to bring tourists. Since then, other events have sprung up, including a chalk art festival. A number of artists with international reputations reside in the area. There is, however, a dearth of professional expertise in arts administration in the existing governance groups for the key institutions and activities, and these groups are largely run on a volunteer basis, with limited capacity to develop the arts and entertainment sector.

"THERE DOES SEEM TO BE AN ART HUB POTENTIAL. LOTS OF ARTISTS AROUND AND LOTS MORE WHO WANT TO LEARN. WE'RE LACKING SUPPLY AND ORGANIZATION."
(BUSINESS)

Large numbers of seasonal workers are employed in Yarram-region jobs (upward of 100 at the start of the season in 2023). Many of them are employed in the forest plantations sector and agricultural enterprises. The nature of plantations work, which is less labour-intensive than some other forms of agricultural labour, and the professionalism of employers makes this an attractive option for seasonal workers.

However, lack of adequate housing for the agricultural workforce means that Yarram may struggle to attract workers in an increasingly competitive labour market. Many workers are currently housed in farmhouses on the outskirts of the town, where they may experience social isolation and may lead to concerns about their safety. The town, moreover, is not well-positioned to benefit from seasonal workers' participation in the community and economy. Better, appropriate housing for seasonal workers closer to town, and more recreational opportunities in the town itself, will help.

"PEOPLE STAY IN THEIR HOUSES, WHICH IS A HUGE DETRIMENT. LOTS OF PEOPLE WHO WOULD BE GOING OUT TO EAT AND HANG OUT DON'T BECAUSE THERE SIMPLY IS NO OPTION."
(COMMUNITY)

INTERVIEWS CONTINUED

THE PLACE

As the geographic centre for a population of approximately 6000 people located directly on the South Gippsland Highway, Yarram is the logical centre for commercial activity and services in south-central Gippsland. The local disability services provider, Mirridong, is highly regarded and conducts in-house training. Interviewees praised Yarram's accessibility and the safety of the town.

Newcomers to town reflected that they are socially isolated, without many opportunities to meet others. Without significant civic space, entertainment and dining venues in the town centre, people's participation in the community is limited and likely inhibits spending at local businesses. Establishing such "third spaces" would have potential commercial, social and wellbeing benefits for the Yarram community.

In earlier generations, residents of the district could do most of their shopping in town. Today, many bundle their shopping and tasks for trips to Sale, Latrobe Valley, Foster, or Leongatha, because some goods and services are not available locally. Residents also felt disconnected from Wellington Shire Council services with many feeling that Yarram missed out on opportunities, support, and funding that goes to Sale and the surrounding towns.

Yarram has a strong history of volunteer-led associations, clubs, and organizations. Many of those groups are currently struggling for members. That struggle places extra stress on the time and energy of the volunteers.

Yarram is well-known in the region for its attractive streetscape. The town has three historic buildings with significant potential for development: the Union Club Hotel, Regent Theatre, and old Butter Factory.

The Club Hotel is listed for sale and has been very poorly cared for. Flooding, squatters, and neglect make it a very large project for development. Many people are concerned about losing it and its history. The Regent Theatre is owned by Wellington Shire Council and managed by a volunteer Committee of Management. Many interviewees felt it was underutilized, relative to its capacity and its potential to host cultural and community events. The Butter Factory is owned by Saputo, and not currently used.

"WE REALLY NEED A PLACE THAT'S AVAILABLE WITHOUT HAVING TO MAKE A PURCHASE OR BOOKING. GROUPS LIKE THE TRADERS AND GUMBOOT COLLECTIVE COULD BE IN A PHYSICAL PLACE THAT ALLOWS IMPROMPTU GATHERINGS." (EDUCATION)

"A FREE PLACE TO GATHER AND WORK WOULD BE IDEAL FOR IDEA TRANSMISSION, NETWORKING, SUPPORT." (BUSINESS)

INTERVIEWS CONTINUED

THE PLACE

By far, the most common response to the question of Yarram's assets was the natural environment which provides the district with top-class attractions such as Tarra-Bulga National Park, 90 Mile Beach, and Port Albert. In addition, the presence of the genetically unique Strzelecki Koala and many bird-watching spots such as Hedley, Woodside Beach, and Tarra-Bulga present opportunities for tourism and research.

Several biking enthusiasts believe the surrounding area is ripe for development as a mountain biking destination, particularly for families. Destination Gippsland has a plan for promoting a series of biking tracks across Gippsland, but nothing south of the ranges. There is a rail trail from Yarram to Port Albert, which is in the process of being connected to the Great Southern Rail Trail. That will connect Yarram with Leongatha, with Yarram being a terminus point - a sure-fire development opportunity.

Post-secondary education is broadly considered something that is done elsewhere. Many interviewees told the same story of growing up in Yarram, leaving for training or further education, and returning once they'd started a family in order to provide a "country upbringing" for their children. With very limited public transport, attending TAFE or Federation University can be an odyssey for young people without cars.



"THE GREAT SOUTHERN RAIL TRAIL IS A BIG OPPORTUNITY. IT'S A CHANCE TO BUILD UP SERVICES AT THE PARK. WE NEED THE MAIN STREET TO BE OPEN ON WEEKENDS THOUGH." (GOVERNMENT)

SUMMARY OF REPORTS

THIS SECTION INCLUDES A SELECTION OF REPORTS CONCERNING YARRAM FROM RECENT YEARS



The "Wellington Renewable Energy Impact and Readiness Study" report is a stocktake of planned renewable energy investment in the Wellington Shire (and broader Gippsland area) and to provide an analysis of labour demand, supply chain considerations, infrastructure needs and residential and industrial land needs (with a focus on land use implications for Yarram and surrounds).

The Study highlights the State and National significance of planned renewable energy investment which will require a coordinated Government response.

The Study identifies that the main 'levers' for Council to influence the transition to renewable energy are via advocacy to other levels of Government; regional partnerships and coordination including with other Local Government authorities/agencies; planning actions at the local level (particularly in terms of residential and industrial land supply in

Yarram and Sale); economic development actions; and supporting community.

Other Study findings and recommended actions apply to a broad range of other stakeholders, such as training and education providers.

It is noted that the Study provides a general summary and analysis of planned renewable energy investment based on information available in 2022.

It is also important to recognise that individual renewable energy projects remain subject to relevant consultation and Government approval processes, whereby specific project impacts will need to be further assessed on a 'case by case' basis in accordance with statutory requirements.

LINK:
wellington.vic.gov.au/development/renewable-energy-planning

SUMMARY OF REPORTS

The "Yarram, Maffra and Stratford Industrial Land Strategy" report provides an analysis of the industrial land supply and demand in the Yarram, Maffra, and Stratford region, with a focus on Yarram. The report found that the demand for industrial land in the Yarram area is relatively low, with a limited number of businesses seeking to locate or expand in the area.

The report identified several challenges to industrial development in the Yarram area, including limited access to transport infrastructure, low population and business density, and a limited range of available services and facilities. The report also noted the importance of preserving agricultural land in the area, given its importance to the local economy and community.

To address these challenges, the report recommends a range of strategies, including improving transport infrastructure and connectivity, promoting the area's unique features and strengths to potential investors, and developing a diversified industrial base that leverages the region's natural resources and tourism potential. The report also recommends improving the availability and affordability of serviced industrial land, and working with local businesses and stakeholders to support their growth and expansion.

LINK
global-uploads.webflow.com/6021ed7c89cc1c1c01fccf29/6021ed7c89cc1c17fafcd741_Yarram-Maffra-and-Stratford-Industrial-Land-Strategy.pdf

The "Wellington Community Infrastructure Plan - Background Report" gives a snapshot of the current and projected community profile of the Wellington community to support the Wellington Shire Community Infrastructure Plan. This includes a section on Yarram.

The report notes an aging population, pointing out an expected growth of the over 70 group by 2033. There is also a significant drop projected in residents aged between 20 and 29 of between 35% and 39%. That aged population translates into higher rates of zero-children homes and lone-person homes.

Finally, it notes that the district has a Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) score that is lower than Wellington as a whole. This means the Yarram district is considered very disadvantaged. Of note are the low levels of access to internet at home and the high proportions of people who need assistance on a daily basis.

LINK:
ehq-production-australia.s3.amazonaws.com/50361f7a8b2a9423282cb2832a7ee864c1cod672/original/1630981840/bb5999ceaec09dbe57056a882c3f254f_Wellington_CIP_-_Attachment_A_-_Background_Report_-_4_March_2021.pdf

INNOVATION OPPORTUNITIES

5 TOPICS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Members of community who were interviewed had many ideas for helping the region develop and prosper. Some can be executed immediately (and some already are). Others fit the goals of the Future of Yarram project - innovation and collaboration building on assets.

This context analysis has revealed a number of distinct innovation opportunities that warrant scrutiny through an Entrepreneurial Discovery Process.

This report suggests 5 topics which could be the focus of Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP) workshops. These EDP workshops provide a means of undertaking an intensive initial review of innovation possibilities and determining whether or not they warrant further investigation by an Innovation Working Group (which will work through and develop the opportunity).



OUTDOOR RECREATION



STRZELECKI KOALA REFUGE



CREATIVE YARRAM



BACKPACKER DESTINATION



NEW ENERGY

OUTDOOR RECREATION

Basic Proposition:

The surrounding natural environment is regularly mentioned as a prime asset for Yarram. However, many interviewees expressed surprise at the lack of outdoor activities available in the region. Specifically named activities included mountain bike trails, zip lines, and horse riding. An effort dedicated to a broad range of activities with particular focus on providing for all members of a family would bring visitors from hours away. People on nature-based holidays are assumed to enjoy adventure activities. Currently Yarram has none.

Key Assets:

The Great Southern Rail Trail and proposed Gippsland Odyssey trail system are expected to continue to attract tourists from around the world. Positioning optional recreation options close to the trail would enable capturing those existing riders.

The Yarram area also hosts hills, views of Wilson's Promontory, forests, and the ocean. Any or all of those could host adventure activities.

Strategic Competitive Advantages:

Currently, residents of Yarram reported travelling many hours to participate in these kinds of activities. The wide circumference of the area around Yarram without such activity options places Yarram in a position of opportunity. Many tourists coming to Yarram are assuming such options will be available, asking accommodation and hospitality businesses for advice once they arrive. Those visiting Wilson's Promontory could also be attracted to high class options in Yarram.

Finally, an outdoor recreation activity could be built with disability access in mind. Mirridong Services, a highly rated disability service, regularly travel for accessible opportunities and groups outside of Yarram could be convinced to visit this kind of centre.

Key Challenges:

Land use is a challenge for any recreation programme. Access would need to be found through long-term leasing, purchasing, or donation. It is not clear that, for example, a mountain bike track would be different enough to attract riders who already use the numerous sites in Gippsland. The long-term sustainability needs to be carefully considered to avoid a quick burnout of use as often seen with skate parks and the like.

Design Principles/Workshop Takeaways:

Important questions would revolve around making sure any project matches the values of the community, which project would make most sense, and what kinds of facilities can be built onto one of the existing natural assets as identified in the analysis. Finally, considering what the facility-use looks like in ten years would inform any decision.





STRZELECKI KOALA REFUGE & RESEARCH

Basic Proposition:

The Strzelecki koala, also known as the Victorian Koala, is a unique and genetically distinct subspecies of the koala. This subspecies is only found in a small area of eastern Victoria, including the Yarram area, and is known for its unusual genetic makeup.

Conservation efforts are being made to protect the Strzelecki koala, as its small population size and unique genetics make it vulnerable to environmental and genetic threats. The Strzelecki koala's genetic makeup may also have important implications for conservation efforts as a breeding stock and for insights into genetics.

Yarram could be home to a centre dedicated to research and care for these koalas with consideration also given to the tourism implications.

Key Assets:

Yarram is home to individuals involved in the Strzelecki Koala Action Team and Friends of the Strzelecki Koala. These groups are at the forefront of efforts to help the koala population.

Key habitats are also in the Yarram area. The Mullungdung State Forest, Alberton West State Forest, and Tarra Bulga National Park are noted as Strzelecki koala hotspots.

Strategic Competitive Advantages:

District residents are connected to networks around the country including academic research, conservation, and tourism. These existing local efforts put Yarram in prime position to lead the state-wide movement to preserve this special koala population. Work is already being done by the "Friends of the Strzelecki Koala" and the "Strzelecki Koala Action Team" among others.

Yarram already has tourism infrastructure, so will be in a superior position to take advantage of a koala-focused increase in tourist interest.

Key Challenges:

Yarram's competitive advantages will need to be confirmed, particularly in terms of geographic location. Acquiring land will also be key, whether that is through ownership or access. There is also concern with staffing a proposed centre as location and housing availability are already affecting many professional fields in the area.

Design Principles/Workshop Takeaways:

An EDP workshop would start with an overview of existing research and refuge options in the broader area as well as tourism and capacity for expansion. It will also likely involve analyses of other towns in the broader Strzelecki habitat region.

CREATIVE YARRAM

Basic Proposition:

Build on the existing arts scene with increased infrastructure and a central support system. A thriving arts scene has been shown to bring people to the town, improve quality of life, and offer career options for people in towns around the world.

Key Assets:

Yarram has long hosted eisteddfods for dance and music and a booked-out gallery housed in the old courthouse. Recently, Melbourne-based artist, Heesco, painted 24 murals around the town. The project has gained national attention and brings visitors year-round. The region has talented artists in various disciplines, such as painting, music, chalk, murals, and photography. In the last two years, The Gumboot Collective has been running events and workshops.

Strategic Competitive Advantages:

Yarram has an existing support base and appreciation for the arts in the community. There is a concentration of artists in Yarram and opportunities for collaboration on projects, large and small. There is the possibility of offering certifications through local courses, attracting both locals and out of towners.

Key Challenges:

It's possible that the local talent does not want to or is not able to teach. As with other industries, housing for artists would be an issue if the project was looking to attract artists to relocate. Is Yarram really blessed with a high concentration of artists, or is there a local bias?

Design Principles/Workshop Takeaways:

The workshop would need to identify what opportunities exist in surrounding areas and what courses are available at TAFE and Federation University - or what could be developed. The type of infrastructure and support processes would need to be identified, both from a need basis and an examination of what already exists.





BACKPACKER DESTINATION

Basic Proposition:

Yarram is home to a large backpacker economy, both for work and tourism. Many professionals from South America and Europe take breaks from their careers to work and travel in Australia before settling down. In this region, most of those jobs are in the plantation industry, especially with HVP and Drakeford Silviculture.

Working backpackers choose their location based on the quality of jobs, housing, and local amenities. Yarram could make itself a destination of choice by providing high levels of each.

Key Assets:

It is reported by backpackers that Yarram is already at the top of job quality for both pay and conditions. There is already a cohort in the area, which allows for communication of the opportunity to prospective visitors. Access to beaches and nature, along with a low cost of living are also assets.

Strategic Competitive Advantages:

The reliable, well-paying jobs with good work environments are relatively rare. The townscape is considered safe and friendly, despite the rarity of opportunities to spend in hospitality and activities. There is existing traffic of backpackers working on farms and in forestry as well as tourist trail backpackers coming from Sydney to Melbourne.

Key Challenges:

Backpackers are known to spend their money on social outlets, so Yarram would need to increase the level of choices available. Challenging business owners to cater to the audience or new businesses to fill gaps would be vital. Providing housing would require land, permits, and the housing itself. Finally, limited transport options can hamper the other efforts.

Design Principles/Workshop Takeaways:

The workshop would need to examine who the backpackers are; their characteristics, why they are there, what they're looking for. Also important would be a clear list of employers and their approximate needs both now and in the future and the interest in providing opportunities by the local hospitality businesses.

NEW ENERGY

Basic Proposition:

New energy is coming to the region in form of wind and solar, and, in some ways is already present at Radial Timber. Yarram can position itself as a focus to benefit from the influx of people, jobs, and attention.

Key Assets:

The Commonwealth Government has chosen the Bass Strait off Gippsland as the first area to be formally assessed under its new Offshore Electricity Infrastructure framework. Radial Timber has begun work on an energy park to focus on generating energy onsite.

Strategic Competitive Advantages:

Yarram enjoys a position as one of the largest towns in the wind corridor with infrastructure and proximity key advantages. Star of the South, Australia's most advanced offshore wind project, is already in town with an office and years of community engagement. TAFE and Federation University are addressing training needs with new centres and courses in Gippsland and other places in Victoria. The closest training to the proposed projects is in Morwell, perhaps offering an opportunity for Yarram to offer project-specific training.

Key Challenges:

It is not clear where the expertise, materials, sites, and manufacturing will be coming from or being located. There are currently some hints, but it won't be for some time. Are the skills and workers available in Yarram and if not, can they be taught or brought in? A large concern for Yarram, Wellington Shire, and the new energy companies is the availability of housing.

Design Principles/Workshop Takeaways:

An EDP workshop would need to investigate the capability of Yarram in numerous areas to attract workers, manufacturing, and support in the form of housing and services. It will be important to discover whether existing trade businesses are interested in and able to upscale and upskill.





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