



SHAPING  
**MURRINDINDI'S**  
FUTURE

# LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

JUNE 2025

The project is funded through the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, and supported by Murrindindi Shire Council and RMIT University





The background of the page is a photograph of a massive, ancient tree trunk. The bark is deeply textured, covered in patches of green moss and lichen. A person is sitting at the base of the tree, looking up towards the sky. The person is wearing a bright pink jacket over a blue sweater and light-colored pants. The scene is set in a forest with some green foliage visible in the lower left corner.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

We proudly acknowledge the Taungurung and Wurundjeri people as the traditional custodians of the land we now call Murrindindi Shire. We pay our respects to First Nations leaders and elders, past present and emerging, who are the keepers of history, traditions, knowledge and culture of this land.

We commit to working in collaboration with traditional owners of this land in a spirit of reconciliation and partnership.

# CONTENTS

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>The Local Development Strategy (LDS) Approach</b>	<b>18</b>
Building the Innovation Ecosystem	18
Roles and responsibilities	20
Process	21
Identified Challenges / Enablers	23
Related Strategies	26
Murrindindi Shire Attributes	27
<b>Innovation Opportunities</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Strategic Directions</b>	<b>33</b>
Farm Forestry	34
Health, Aged Care and Social Assistance	38
Renewable Energy and Circular Economy	41
Tourism	44
Linkages	47
<b>Monitoring and Reporting</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Murrindindi Shire Beyond 2035</b>	<b>49</b>



# Executive Summary

---

**The “Shaping Murrindindi’s future” Local Development Strategy (LDS) charts a bold and strategic path for Murrindindi communities affected by the cessation of native timber harvesting.**

With a focus on economic diversification, job creation, and long-term sustainability, this strategy identifies the strengths of the region and leverages new opportunities to support a resilient and prosperous future.

The LDS has been funded by the State Government and follows a prescribed process in collaboration with RMIT University. Murrindindi is one of eleven districts participating in this initiative, aiming to ensure long-term economic sustainability and local job creation.

Murrindindi Shire Council was contracted by the State Government to lead the development of this strategy, engaging with partners, stakeholders, and the broader community to shape a future that reflects local aspirations and priorities.

To inform “Shaping Murrindindi’s future” a context analysis of the region’s strengths and characteristics was undertaken. The Regional Context Analysis report (RCA) was prepared summarising the evidence and data collected. This was further enriched by community workshops, working groups and industry engagement, ensuring the strategy is evidence-based and locally driven.



# Key Innovation Opportunities

**A thorough context analysis and discovery process, underpinned by extensive community consultation, identified key sectors with potential for growth and innovation. These include:**

Farm Forestry, supporting sustainable plantations and value-added timber products.

---

Sustainable Agriculture Horticulture and Aquaculture, expanding local food production and processing.

---

Advanced Manufacturing, leveraging specialised skills to create a thriving industry cluster.

---

Health, Aged Care and Social Assistance, strengthening local healthcare services and workforce capacity.

---

Renewable Energy and Circular Economy, establishing new models for waste repurposing and energy generation.

---

Tourism, creating a distinct regional identity to drive visitation and investment.

---

Through 18 months of extensive, structured community consultation, the LDS has facilitated the formation of Innovation Working Groups (IWGs) which are leading the development of high-potential projects in these sectors.

These opportunities will deliver outcomes to support the future of Murrindindi Shire as a prosperous community for future generations and provide opportunities for learning, which will contribute to the emerging innovation ecosystem, with long-lasting positive impact for our community and economy. A learning and innovation system approach will foster a community culture to innovate and utilise our local strengths.

The delivery of the identified key innovation opportunities will be led by the Innovation Working Groups. The IWGs will be supported with a Project Officer, academic and expert research. This support is funded by the Forestry Transition Program through the Community Development Fund, continuing the collaborative approach between Council and State Government.

# 1. FARM FORESTRY

---

## Purpose:

To showcase the biodiversity and economic benefits of Farm Forestry and encourage new plantations and industry development. This will be achieved through community education, building a profitable industry, valuing high-quality trees, producing high-quality timber products locally, whilst growing and sharing the knowledge base within the Shire.

## Future Actions/ Next Steps:

- Finalise and endorse a Vision Statement to guide further activities.
- Identify and engage leading experts from industry, research, and government.
- Define long-term governance and ownership models to ensure sustainability.
- Conduct a full farm forestry value chain analysis to ensure successful plantations in Murrindindi, to demonstrate their point of difference with other regions, and to ensure a profitable outcome for the sector
- Develop Business Cases for high-impact projects
- Seek funding to support start-up of 3 interrelated projects
  - a. Feasibility Study – Farm Forestry Incubator – Supporting new plantations and innovative business models.
  - b. The Murrindindi Farm Forestry Interpretative Centre – a knowledge hub and designated location for specialist equipment hire and shared industry resources and expertise
  - c. Hardwood Manufacturing Initiative – Establishing a local hardwood processing facility to generate returns and develop skills.

## Impact:

This initiative will diversify farm income streams, strengthen local supply chains, and contribute to carbon sequestration and sustainability goals.

## 2. RENEWABLE ENERGY AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY

---

### **Purpose:**

To transform agricultural waste into high-value products, reducing environmental impact while creating new revenue streams and employment opportunities. . This provides solutions to businesses and community on efficient and effective waste management and how they can contribute to better circular economy models.

### **Future Actions/ Next Steps:**

- Leverage cutting-edge Victorian research to identify scalable solutions
- Identify opportunities that support dispersed communities and the circular economy
- Quantify available biomass and organic waste resources.
- Collate data on DEECA resources available locally
- Identify repurposing and manufacturing opportunities for organic and woody waste, based on the research and data collected.
- Develop business cases for circular economy initiatives
- Seek funding for prototypes of one or more point of difference waste management initiatives.

### **Impact:**

Establishing Murrindindi as a leader in regional circular economy innovation while reducing reliance on landfill and improving energy

### 3. TOURISM

---

#### **Purpose:**

To develop Murrindindi into a destination of choice through collaborative initiatives, capitalising on its natural assets, to generate new visitor products that enable economic growth. Increase value and yield from the visitor economy through overnight visitation, targeted support of key markets, support products that reflect the strengths of Murrindindi and support year-round economic growth through a member-based entity.

#### **Future Actions/ Next Steps:**

- Undertake participatory research on current Tourism businesses and products, and work closely to encourage more effective collaboration
- Identify our unique strengths and attributes to position the region as a destination of choice.
- Launch an Engagement Plan to align businesses and community stakeholders
- Secure funding for high-impact tourism projects, including:
  - a. Beyond the Black Spur Initiative – Positioning Murrindindi as a cohesive visitor corridor. Support business-to-business collaboration, to diversify and combine expertise to offer new experiences, empowering business and community to unlock and market high-value local resources,
  - b. Triangle Food Network- connecting local food/wine producers with tourism experiences.
  - c. Ride Marysville Expansion – strengthening Murrindindi’s trail-based tourism economy. Create a Trail Bike Destination for the region noting that 48% of the Shire is State Parks, forests and reserves.

#### **Impact:**

Increased visitor spending, length of stay, and business investment, while fostering collaborative tourism development.



## 4. HEALTH, AGED CARE AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

---

### **Purpose:**

To optimise the healthcare services in Murrindindi Shire to improve service delivery, and attract, retain and grow a skilled workforce and specialist practitioners through shared services and meet the needs of its dispersed and ageing population.

### **Future Actions/ Next Steps:**

- Review existing health services delivery model and its effectiveness in improving health outcomes.
- Develop a comprehensive Health & Aged Care Strategy to improve service access and deliver, attract, retain and grow a skilled workforce through shared services that meet the needs of a dispersed and rapidly ageing population.
- Develop business cases for new initiatives based on the findings from research and engagement
- Implement the recommendations from the strategy and deliver the identified business cases
- Continue to source additional funding to continue to deliver outcomes that support the health industry in the Shire
- Improve transport accessibility to health services, addressing critical mobility gaps.

### **Impact:**

Stronger, more connected healthcare services, improving outcomes for Murrindindi's ageing population.

## 5. ADVANCED MANUFACTURING

---

### **Purpose:**

To strengthen Murrindindi's manufacturing sector, fostering industry specialisation and growth.

### **Key Opportunities:**

- Leveraging existing expertise in applied engineering and fabrication.
- Developing a business cluster to encourage cross-sector collaboration.
- Expanding high value manufacturing operations, including emerging timber processing technologies.

### **Future Actions/ Next Steps:**

- Establish interested group to form an Innovation Working Group
- Identify unique opportunities and develop a project that will deliver long-term outcomes aligned with those identified in the Shaping Murrindindi's Future process.

### **Impact:**

Increased employment and economic diversification, supporting regional industry resilience.

## 4. AGRICULTURE, AQUACULTURE AND HORTICULTURE

---

**Establish an Innovation Working Group with interested industry leaders to further develop the proposal outlined below.**

### **Purpose:**

To position Murrindindi as a leader in sustainable agriculture aquaculture and horticulture, building on the region's rich natural assets, strong industry foundation and strategic location. With \$413 million in annual economic output, this industry is the largest driver of the shire's economy. With fertile soils, reliable water access, and proximity to Melbourne, the region is well-positioned for expansion into higher-value agricultural enterprises, food processing, and emerging sustainable industries. The strategy will focus on value-added processing, emerging industry trends, climate resilience, and investment attraction.

### **Key components include:**

#### **1. Industry Mapping & Analysis**

- Identifying and map existing agricultural, aquaculture, and horticulture enterprises across the region
- Assess the current value chain to pinpoint opportunities for local processing, market expansion, and high-value product development
- Evaluate key constraints including land availability, soil health, water security, and biosecurity risks, and environmental factors

#### **2. Future Growth & Investment Strategy**

- Conduct a desktop analysis of soil and climate suitability, and biosecurity considerations
- Identifying high-potential emerging crops, industries, and technologies
- Outlining value-added opportunities, including local food processing and supply chain improvements

#### **3. Key Deliverables**

- **Potential outputs from this process may include:**
  - Precinct Master Plan: enhance the Yea Saleyards precinct as a hub for value-adding, employment, and industry expansion, incorporating land use buffers and infrastructure planning.
  - Investment Prospectus: develop a targeted investment strategy to attract businesses and capital into Murrindindi's agriculture, aquaculture and horticulture sectors.
  - Business Case Development: support locally driven value-add industries, preparing funding applications for infrastructure and industry development initiatives.



# Background

---

In 2019, the Victorian Government announced the Victorian Forestry Transition Program, marking a major shift in land use and historic industry across the state. As part of this transition, all native forest harvesting ceased in January 2024.

Recognising the economic and social impact of this decision, the government provided funding for Local Development Strategies (LDS) in eleven affected communities, supporting them in planning for a more diversified and sustainable economic future.

Murrindindi Shire, specifically the communities Alexandra, Taggerty, Buxton, and Marysville, was identified as being significantly impacted by this transition. In response, the Shaping Murrindindi's Future project was established, providing a structured approach to identifying new economic opportunities, fostering innovation, and supporting long-term resilience.

Murrindindi Shire has supported the various state programs delivered to add the transition from native timber harvesting.

This includes taking on the role of lead agencies for the Shaping Murrindindi's Future and the development of the Local Development Strategy, Regional Context Analysis report and supporting the establishment of the Innovation Working Groups.

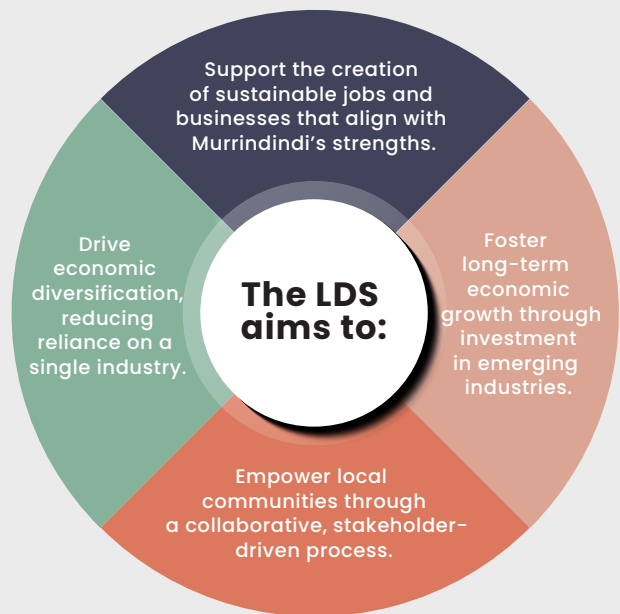
We have also been active advocates for the programs that supported timber workers, impacted businesses and the future of State forests. Our advocacy included recognition of impacted businesses, direct support for individual workers and securing fire management programs to protect our townships.

We have supported businesses in applications for Forestry Transition funding, securing and unlocking development which real result in new jobs and expansion of current industries in the Shire.



## The LDS aims to:

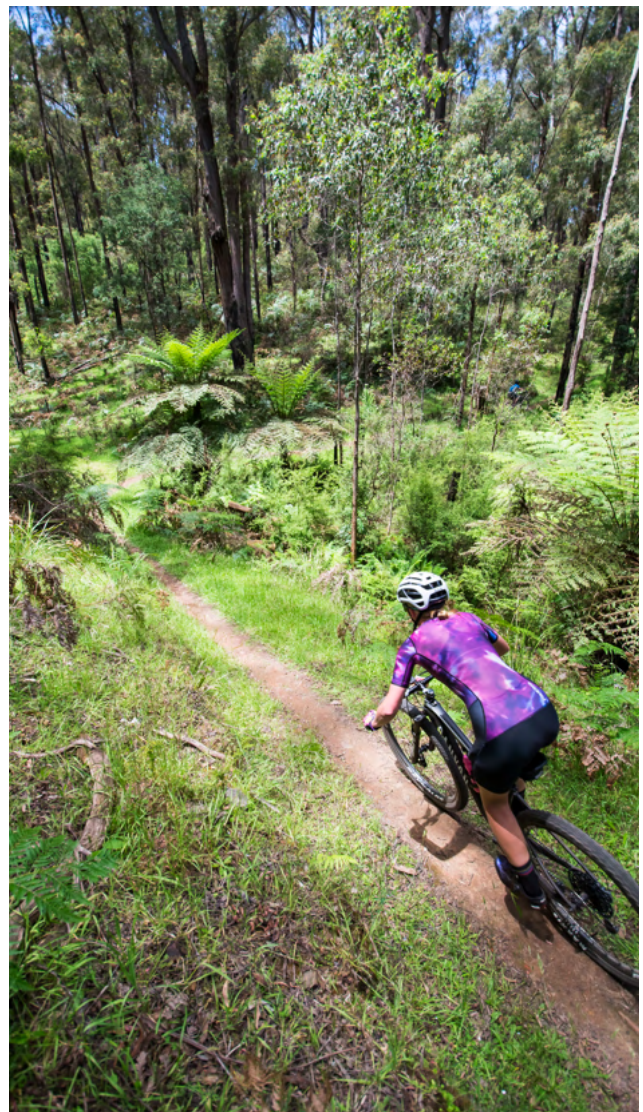
- Drive economic diversification, reducing reliance on a single industry.
- Foster long-term economic growth through investment in emerging industries.
- Support the creation of sustainable jobs and businesses that align with Murrindindi's strengths.
- Empower local communities through a collaborative, stakeholder-driven process.



**The landscape of the Murrindindi Shire is diverse and ecologically significant, with 48% of the Shire consisting of State Forest, Crown land reserve or National Parks.**

Its mountainous terrain, rivers systems, including the Goulburn and the Acheron Rivers and King Parrot Creek, and rich biodiversity have long shaped the local economy and way of life.

Murrindindi was largely founded on native timber harvesting, over time the impacts of fires and changing community aspirations, has seen a dramatic change in the scale and impact on our economy from native timber harvesting. Prior to the announced cessation, the forestry industry played an important role in the Murrindindi Shire economy supporting 45 direct employees with an industry output of \$23 million.



# What is a Local Development Strategy?

The Local Development Strategy (LDS) is more than a document: it is a program to support the communities impacted by the cessation of native timber harvesting under Victorian Government's Forestry Transition Program.

The LDS aims to assist by building capability and capacity within the community to diversify and expand sustainable industries that will create new jobs and achieve long-term economic and social benefits. Murrindindi Shire is one of eleven communities identified under the program to receive funding to deliver the LDS.

1

**Stage One** of Shaping Murrindindi's Future Project delivered a Regional Context Analysis was completed in October 2023. The Regional Context Analysis incorporated research data and statistics with local knowledge, to identify and understand the current community and business aspirations and needs, population characteristics, and regional strengths, assets and challenges. Interviews with stakeholders from business, education/research, government, and community sectors provided insights into the region's knowledge base, ways of working, existing connections and networks, perceived strengths, and current innovation activities.

2

**Stage Two** was delivered in February 2024 with five Entrepreneurial Discovery Workshops across Farm Forestry, Health Aged Care and Social Assistance, Tourism, Sustainable Agriculture, and Renewable Energy and Circular Economy.

3

**Stage Three** of the project is still in progress with four Innovation Working Groups formed in Farm Forestry, Health Aged Care and Social Assistance, Tourism, and Renewable Energy and Circular Economy. These groups will continue to meet monthly to deliver on innovative opportunities through the Community Development Fund. A fifth group exploring Agriculture, aquaculture and horticulture is showing positive signs of forming.

4

**Stage Four** is the delivery of the Local Development Strategy, and implement the outcomes that deliver new innovation and funding that will create more employment opportunities in the Shire.



# Strategy Development

**The Local Development Strategy has been prepared to address the direct challenges arising from the Victorian Government's Forestry Transition policy decision.**

Many of the findings from Shaping Murrindindi's Future work has influenced the Murrindindi Shire Economic Development Strategy (EDS). Endorsed in 2024 the outcomes of the EDS have incorporated many elements of the Context Analysis Report.

The Local Development Strategy aims to support key industry sectors to grow and adapt to changing industry trends with the creation of new job opportunities. By strengthening the community's collaborative capacity, it aims to develop innovation ecosystems providing long term economic and social benefits to the area. The LDS will provide a platform that supports innovative action that builds on local assets while mobilising expertise to realise shared initiatives that will have benefits across its local capacity.

## Stakeholders

**Shaping Murrindindi's Future officially launched in May 2023 with two community events facilitated by the Resilience Centre in both Alexandra and Marysville.**

These events welcomed over 90 community members to start thinking about the impacts of the cessation of timber harvesting, and future goals of the community. Since the launch, the project has hosted 12 additional community events including four consultation sessions, two project update events, five EDP workshops, and a celebratory event to start the Innovation Working groups. In addition, the project has hosted two DEECA business information sessions with a direct focus on the Transition Fund and creating new jobs.

Stage One of the project saw one hundred and fifteen one on one interviews from a range of local connections including 39% from community, 41% business, 15% government, and 5% education. In total the project has engaged with over 400 people and currently has 55 people directly involved across the four Innovation Working Groups.

# Governance

The Innovation Working Groups will continue to meet monthly and are responsible for the decisions and delivery on the relevant projects.

While the host agency, Murrindindi Shire will likely auspice the funding for the IWGs in most cases, it remains the responsibility of the IWGs to deliver the projects in accordance with the grant agreement. In most cases, a social enterprise or cooperative may be formed amongst these groups.

The Project Control Group is responsible for continuing to support the IWGs as necessary, and ensure the projects are delivered in accordance with the grant agreement.



# SMART methodology

**Good governance will be critical to the success of a local development strategy, as a community-led process of determining opportunities for economic diversification, growth and job creation.**

The local development strategy will draw on the Smart Specialisation methodology, an evidence-based, inclusive process for identifying and developing regional strengths and assets and opportunities for innovation. First developed in the European Union, Smart Specialisation was adopted by the Latrobe Valley Authority as part of its planning for economic development in Gippsland, after the closure of the Hazelwood power station in 2017. A pilot local development strategy in Orbost has used Smart Specialisation methodology in planning for the Orbost district's future after the end of commercial timber harvesting in public native forests.

At its core, a successful Smart Specialisation strategy depends on effective collaboration between local stakeholders from government, business, community, and the education sector in identifying and pursuing opportunities for innovation and economic development. The governance arrangements are designed to establish the conditions for success, by:

- promoting representation from all relevant stakeholders in the preparation of a local development strategy, bringing in the diverse expertise necessary for successful innovation.
- 
- supporting coherent and credible outcomes from all phases of the process
- 
- ensuring integrity and accountability in project management, decision-making, public communications and the use of grant funds.



# The Local Development Strategy (LDS) Approach

---

## Building the Innovation Ecosystem

The presence and connectivity through participation from key innovation partners – community, research/education, government, and business – have shown promising developments in the region.

There are notable examples of strong partnerships that have changed since the introduction of this project, such as the Innovation Working Groups which have successfully fostered collaboration among the community, within research, government entities, and local businesses. The Local Development Strategy project has made significant headway in bringing these stakeholders together, gradually changing mindsets and fostering these essential connections. Building a cohesive Quadruple Helix network takes time, but the progress made so far is encouraging. The key to ensuring its ongoing success will be building strong partnerships with specific expertise and encouraging and supporting this research into each opportunity and pilot project.

There are no Universities or TAFE providers locally in Murrindindi, with GOTAFE located in Seymour being the largest vocational education provider in regional Victoria. While there are strong network and connections in specific areas of expertise locally, a key attribute to the success

of this project has been maintaining ongoing research support in particular from RMIT University. As a partner in the Smart Specialisation Strategy, RMIT offered educational support, research, and resources to help Murrindindi navigate its transition and foster an innovation-driven economy.

It was identified throughout the early stages of the process that building skills and capacity within the community is an essential part of creating innovation and positive change. This was prioritised by the project utilising Community Development Funding to employ a Capacity Building Officer, who will support a range of training programs and initiatives to help build the local knowledge base and capacity within the community. Project support will continue until June 2026 to help support the capacity of the Innovation Working Groups so they can prepare and develop business case studies for the prioritised projects to access funding.

Several entities have shown interest in upskilling governance and organisational skills, as well as a cohort of primarily agribusiness-based groups looking to explore cooperatives as an organisational model. Other training delivered has focused on specific skills such as grant writing and use of artificial intelligence in business.

There is a significant opportunity to foster specialised manufacturing growth within existing networks and this was identified early in the project. The core proposition is to leverage existing expertise in applied engineering and manufacturing by clustering specialised industries, combining skills and trades, to serve both existing and new potential businesses. These manufacturing businesses are already well established with expertise, capacity and future market to expand and have been able to progress with the support of the Forestry Transition Fund, to create new jobs and support the creation of new industry.

Several businesses have taken advantage of the funding opportunity and managed to secure significant grants to support growth. Helico secured nearly \$900,000 to build three purpose-built hangers as well as office and training facilities. This project was able to be delivered years ahead of schedule and will create 8-10 new jobs in the region.

As the ecosystem develops, Murrindindi will become a dynamic and recognised centre of building on its local assets and delivering novel initiatives that contribute to local economic and social wellbeing.

# Roles and responsibilities

## Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA)

The project is proudly funded by DEECA through the Victorian Forestry Program. DEECA have provided essential guidance on grant requirements and is a key partner in the delivery of this project. DEECA have prescribed the process and partners for this exciting opportunity.

---

## Murrindindi Shire Council

Murrindindi Shire Council has served as the host agency for Shaping Murrindindi's Future having overall responsibility for the delivery of this project under a contract with the State. In this role, Council have provided guidance and support to build collaboration and innovation capacity. Council appointed and supported the Project Manager and Project Officer who oversaw the day-to-day operations of the project delivery, conducted interviews and community engagement, facilitated community presentations and Entrepreneurial Discovery Processes (EDPs), supported the Innovation Working Groups in Farm Forestry, Health and Aged Care, Tourism, Renewable Energy and Circular Economy, and prepared relevant reporting and documentation. The team are also establishing the process for future IWGs to form and deliver.

---

## RMIT University

RMIT University (RMIT) have been a partner to the delivery of this project by providing academic guidance and support throughout the project and assisting in the facilitation of workshops and community engagement events. RMIT have provided expertise in applying Smart Specialisation methodology tailored to fit the small regional and rural towns involved in the project.

---

## Project Control Group

Project Control Group (PCG) is made up of representatives of the partner organisations. The role of the PCG is to ensure the project stays on track to meet contractual obligations and provided guidance and support to the delivery of each stage.





# Process

The following section outlines the process for the project, utilising the RMIT smart specialisation process which seeks the innovation and leadership from within the Community.

## Context Analysis

The context analysis sets the foundational understanding of the characteristics of the region, its communities and unique attributes. This was informed by:

- Desktop analysis and stakeholder interviews assessing local strengths and assets commences
- Community feedback forums, events, online participation, surveys and written feedback

A Context Analysis report was completed which includes the collated findings. This report identifies where the innovation opportunities are and what should be defined further as part of the Entrepreneurial Discovery Phase.

## Entrepreneurial Discovery

The Innovation opportunities proceeded to Entrepreneurial Discovery were informed by the Project Control Group, based on evidence presented through the Context Analysis process and community feedback on the draft Context Analysis report.

- The innovation opportunities were further defined and refined, through consultation and the findings in the Context Analysis Report,
- Workshops were held on each of the identified innovation opportunities, determining the viability, the scope, and key partners in project development
  - Consensus at the workshop determines which will proceed to an Innovation Working Group
- Innovation Working Groups are formed to develop each innovation opportunity selected to progress past the Entrepreneurial Discovery Phase.

## Innovation Working Groups

- Project activities and outputs including but not limited to project plans, feasibility studies, business cases and pilots are undertaken/completed, as needed, led by Innovation Working Groups drawn from the Quadruple Helix (community, research/education, government, and business)
- External advice is recruited, as needed

## Local Development Strategy finalised

- Individual project plans are completed for a suite of projects already underway
- The local development strategy document is finalised
- Potential sources of funding and investment have been identified
- Ongoing governance arrangements for completion of local development strategy projects still underway, and new projects, are established.

The Local Development Strategy (LDS) importantly sets the direction for next phase. The purpose of this Strategy is to help guide innovative initiatives that will support identified industries, create new jobs, deliver social and economic outcomes and foster an entrepreneurial mindset.

The delivery and implementation of the LDS is being supported by funding from the Forestry Transition Program through the Community Development Fund. This will provide a Project Support Officer and academic / expert research, furthering the collaborative approach between Council and the State Government.

# Identified Challenges / Enablers

Several key enablers have been clearly identified throughout this process. Although they are not labelled as opportunities it will be important to find innovative ways of addressing these shortcomings to ensure the success of future economic development.

## Future Management of Forest

With 48% of our Shire being forests, National Parks and Reserves, the natural forests and environment have been acknowledged as the greatest asset, with the community often described as living within or surrounded by the forest. The future management of the forest is a contentious topic with strong views and opinion regarding the sustainability of forestry, the future fire mitigation and land management, future uses of the forests, rights for access and the impact this will have on the community. The State Government will make the decision on the future of the forests informed by the Eminent Panel for Community Engagement work.

---

## Aging Population

Having such a large and growing 'Retirement' age cohort will put additional pressure on current Health and Aged Care Services, which will need to be able to expand and grow to accommodate the demand. Over 50% of community interviews recognised the need for better and more efficient health, aged care and mental health services.

---

## Education

A very common theme coming out of community consultation was the lack of education opportunities and young people leaving the area and not returning. Parents have shown concern for future opportunities as their child enters high school. Several families have chosen or will likely choose to send their child outside the region to attend a private high school or a school offering a larger range of elective subjects. Council with the Community, have unsuccessfully applied for a commonwealth funded Regional University Study Hub to address this barrier to participation in tertiary education.

## Staffing

Businesses from all over the Shire have expressed challenges in finding and retaining suitable, or suitably skilled staff. This pressure is being felt throughout all industries across the Shire in hospitality, trades and manufacturing, health and aged care, transport services, farming, and retail services.

Businesses are now seeking to fill positions with international employees as they have been unsuccessful finding or attracting staff locally. This comes with several other challenges including financial costs and finding suitable housing for these families now looking to relocate to Australia.

---

## Housing

Over 70% of interviewees stated there is a housing crisis in the region, and this is having a crippling impact on businesses and the workforce. Employers in the corridor have stated the housing shortage is the number one reason they have been unable to fill staffing positions. Council has successfully secured funding for Key Worker housing in Eildon and is progressing unlocking appropriately zoned land for development.

---

## Public Transport

While only 2.5% of the population stated they did not have a motor vehicle, transport and accessibility have been raised as a big challenge for locals, especially for those requiring access to medical services, or youth needing to travel to TAFE or University that may not own a vehicle or have the capacity to drive. The lack of public transport further impacts the region for tourism and business.

---

## Volunteering

Whilst there is currently a strong volunteer base, it was identified that there are also challenges with volunteer management, succession planning, recruitment and burnout.



## Childcare

Parents wanting to return to the workforce are faced with limited childcare services locally, and although they are ready and willing to return to the workforce, they have been unable to. The State has committed to constructing and operating an integrated childcare and kindergarten in Alexandra opening in 2027. The private sector is also exploring opportunities in this area.

---

## Industrial Land

A key concern for businesses ready to expand is finding suitable and available industrial land in the corridor. There is concern they will be forced to move to other areas that can support their growth if options are not readily available locally. There is appropriately zoned land available in Alexandra and Narbethong, however the potential needs to be unlocked with enabling infrastructure.

**In addition to the above, data indicates Murrindindi has extremely low vacancy rates and rental stock compared to state averages, and the current housing stock is inappropriate to support Key Worker Accommodation.**

There are a broad range of problems that have manifested over years of investment uncertainty and housing inaction. New developments have presented as a 'more of the same' approach to the type of housing stock constructed, with large tracts of land remaining undeveloped. This adversely impacts availability and in particular options for Key Workers. Council has taken proactive steps to create strategies to unlock and activate sites, specifically for Key Worker Housing. There is a need for this action and the continued effort to support Key Industries and deliver Key Worker Accommodation.

Murrindindi Shire is in a unique position as while there is a shortage of suitable developed land for both industrial and housing use there is adequate appropriately zoned land. To enable the activation of this land suitable infrastructure is needed. This includes, sewerage and water, power, road and connections such as NBN. There are several identified sites in key locations throughout the corridor including Marysville, Eildon and Alexandra that could be investment ready quickly. Council has engaged with the landowners for many of these sites.

# Related Strategies

The following strategic documents provided relevant guidance and direction to opportunities and challenges identified in the Regional Context Analysis.

Murrindindi Shire Council Economic Development Strategy 2024- 2029

---

Murrindindi Shire Council Plan 2021-2025

---

Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025

---

Murrindindi Shire Council Tourism and Events Strategy 2019-2025

---

Murrindindi Shire Council Waste and Recovery Strategy 2030

---

Boston Consulting Group – Marysville and Triangle Economic Strategy – 2020

---

Taggerty Urban Design Framework

---

Buxton Urban Design Framework

---

Buxton Progress Association – Buxton Community Vision 2030

---

Marysville Community Plan 2020-2022

---

Goulburn Regional Skills Demand Profile 2023

---

Murrindindi Cycle Club – Trail Master Plan 2022

---

Goulburn Murray Water Strategic Plan- 2017

---

Lake Eildon Masterplan- 2020

---

Housing and settlement strategy

---

Key Worker Housing strategy

---

Hume Regional Economic Development Strategy

---

# Murrindindi Shire Attributes

The Regional Context Analysis completed... identified the following attributes through engagement with over 100 participants.

## The Place

### The Corridor – Alexandra, Taggerty, Buxton, Marysville.

Just a short drive to the northeast of Melbourne, the Shire of Murrindindi in Victoria's High Country is an area of stunning natural beauty – from the Goulburn River flats to the rugged peaks and cool temperate rainforests of the Great Dividing Range.

Alexandra is the largest of the four towns in the corridor within the scope for this strategy. It has traditionally been a service town and is made up of a diverse range of industries and businesses that cater to local needs and tourists. Taggerty and Buxton are smaller in population. There is less commercial infrastructure in these towns. Marysville is a well-known destination town and relies heavily on the visitor economy and tourism.

During this process it has been obvious the natural environment is seen to be a key asset to the region. One of the areas strengths is in Farm Forestry with 17 private plantations and strong connecting network of growers. There is potential for this to contribute positively to the community and improve its economic and biodiversity impact.

Agriculture currently represents 22.4% of the economic output and is a key contributor to the majestic and significant landscapes across the Shire.

Visitors can experience state and national parks, discover waterfalls, scenic lookouts, pristine waterways, historic bridges, fern gullies and magnificent mountain ash and eucalypt forest all within one and a half hours from Melbourne. Top responses for attractions in the area include Lake Eildon, Lake Mountain, Marysville, Rubicon, Snobs Creek, Black Spur, Cathedral Ranges, national horse trail, Great Victorian Rail Trail, and Buxton, Eildon and Cascades MTB trails. These cater for a range of outdoor recreation activities such as walking, cycling, boating, rafting, fishing, snow activities, camping and four-wheel driving.

The natural assets of the region support a range of popular visitor attractions which draw varying levels of visitation across the year, however there is further opportunity to develop opportunities that promote the region's nature based outdoor recreation options such as walking tracks and camping. From a local community perspective, trails are important infrastructure that support active recreational, such as walking, cycling and running. Roofed accommodation and higher value experiences would complement the current offering.

# The People

The median age for this corridor is 53 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2023), which is high compared to the states average of 38 years. Marysville has the highest median age at 59 years, while Alexandra has the lowest at 51 years.

The largest lifestyle age group across the corridor is 'Retirement' (65–79 years) representing 25.2% of the overall population. The single largest age cohort is 70–74 years, with 424 people representing 9.19% of the population.

During the interviews, over 50% identified the community spirit as a key asset of the region. We heard that it is the people who are at the heart of small regional towns making them tick and creating a sense of community. This fosters a strong sense of belonging within these communities. There is a wide variety of community, social, sporting and other interest groups. Along with a varied range of local community led events which adds to the positive community vibrancy within the corridor. As with many small rural towns, there is a high reliance on volunteering, not just for

social and sporting activities and events, but also for emergency services like CFA and SES and the delivery of valued community services like the local UGFM radio.

Interviews have shown that families would support more infrastructure in the corridor to help improve wellbeing, social networking, and connectiveness, and more activities that better support children who are not wanting to participate in sport. The threat of future bush fire and flood has been raised as a major concern for people living in this region. It has been and will continue to be a long road to recovery and rebuilding. The community are quite supportive of growth in tourism and encouraging professionals and families to move to the area, however, still wants to preserve the rural lifestyle and community feel.

There is no training facility in Murrindindi. Education providers such as GOTAFE are working closely with local communities and businesses to offer a range of short courses and subsidised certificate courses to better support job seekers and businesses looking for skilled or qualified staff, but this is insufficient to support the development of the district. Better linkages need to be developed with universities (eg Latrobe), various research centres, and TAFE providers.

Council and a community working group have unsuccessfully applied twice for a Commonwealth funded Regional University Study Hub to address this critical barrier to tertiary studies and a skilled work force.



# Top 3 Industry of Employment By Area

Town	First	Second	Third
Alexandra	Health care and social assistance	Retail trade	Public Administration and Safety
Taggerty	Construction	Accommodation and Food services	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing
Buxton	Accommodation and Food Services	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	Construction
Marysville	Accommodation and Food services	Education and Training	Public Administration and Safety



# The Economy

Construction dominated the area's economic output with 21% contributing over \$128 million.

Of that total, \$61 million is in residential building construction, \$48 million in construction services, and \$15 million in heavy and civil engineering construction. Second is Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing with 11.7% contributing over \$71 million. Of that total \$46 million (7.6%) is in livestock, grains and other agriculture, \$11.8million (2%) in forestry and logging, and \$11.3 million (1.9%) in aquaculture.

Murrindindi Shire and the corridor share a strong history of agriculture and farming, utilising the region's expertise and knowledge in farming, consistent water supply, rainfall, natural landscape, fertile soils, and weather patterns. The bulk of agriculture output is predominantly beef, sheep and grains, with other large enterprises in trout, turf lawns and cherry farming.

Businesses are looking at ways to shift their focus to tourism and diversify their income stream by providing an experience rather than just a product. Some beef and sheep producers are selling 100% of their meat locally despite having high transport costs incurred due to no local processing facilities. This is increasing the price of the product to the consumer and could impact the future market

and demand. Other large farming enterprises that have national and international markets are selling high quality and quantities of beef, turf, and cherries.

A strong and expanding agriculture and horticulture sector also brings its challenges with energy, sewerage, and waste and businesses are looking for innovative sustainable circular economy models to assist.

There are manufacturing businesses ready for expansion of services and staff. These businesses are recognised in the community as being innovative, daring and creative. Their brand and service are highly sought after in both national and international markets. With expansion on the horizon, these businesses are looking for innovative ways to improve their day-to-day operation and ensure they are supporting the economy and employing local. The boat building industry has also expanded in the Shire, with 6 businesses now working out of Eildon. The houseboat industry at Lake Eildon plays a vital role in supporting local jobs and regional economies and has the potential to provide substantial new jobs.

Health services across Murrindindi Shire have been reduced especially following COVID19 with providers wanting to support collaboration and staff shortages to provide more efficient services.

# Innovation Opportunities

---

The data from the desktop analysis, in conjunction with community interview data, identified the following innovation opportunities which have been recommended in the Regional Context Analysis for further investigation.

Six innovation opportunities were reviewed as part of the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP) workshops where the idea was examined, and the initial viability assessed based on evidence.



## Health Aged Care and Social Assistance

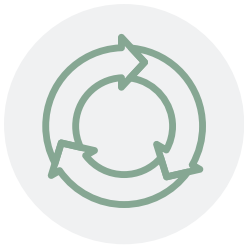
It was identified that a number of Health Care and Aged Care providers in the area had already identified resonating challenges and were working together to seek future grant funding support to deliver projects that will expand capabilities of the Health network in the Shire that would attract and retain skilled staff and ensure the workforce is able to cover the expected growth over the next 10 plus years. A collective focus on new ways to provide health services to dispersed communities will lead to a growth in jobs, service provision and health outcomes. Taking health services to the farmers at the Yea saleyards has been a major success in engaging with this cohort.



## Tourism

It was identified that the Murrindindi Shire community feel they need a clearer and more collaborated identity that separates from both the Yarra Valley and the High Country. The area needs to identify its target market and provide existing and future visitors with a reason to prolong stay, book future stays and recommend the area to friends and family. The region needs to build on the existing visitation of the area while showcasing the landscape, agriculture, history, culture and creativity that exists within the Murrindindi area. To keep these visitors staying and spending within the area, it is important that there is diversity of accommodation, retail and hospitality options. This could also showcase local agriculture, history, creativity, skills and training. Businesses have identified opportunity to expand, however lack of available and suitable key worker accommodation is described as a challenge preventing this.





## Renewable Energy and Circular Economy

Murrindindi Shire has two hydro power stations already established at the Eildon Weir (two turbines) and in Rubicon (AGL). Melbourne University have identified potential sites for pumped hydro, with Buxton rated highest in the State because of the topography and proximity to the three hydro distribution lines. There is interest in the community to explore converting waste into an energy or power supply and supporting further expansion and growth of the region. Private investment in wind and hydro projects is also in the early planning stage, with their impact upon our landscape still unknown. The corridor could position itself as a focus to benefit from new technology, creation of jobs, and a strong circular economy. Small scale renewable energy is being utilised successfully by businesses through financial incentives offered by government agencies such as Sustainability Victoria.

---



## Farm Forestry

Farm Forestry presents a promising opportunity to revitalise the local forestry sector while providing economic, social, and environmental benefits. Small and medium-scale plantations on farming land can diversify income sources for farmers by producing timber, firewood, carbon offset credits, eucalyptus oils, and native foods. There is an opportunity to value add the products locally through manufacturing and specialist equipment

---



## Advanced Manufacturing

There is a significant opportunity to foster specialised manufacturing growth within existing networks. The core proposition is to leverage existing expertise in applied engineering and manufacturing by clustering specialised industries, combining skills and trades to serve both existing and potential businesses. This approach will lead to the emergence of new industries.

---



## Sustainable Agriculture, Horticulture and Aquaculture

This industry has significant potential for growth and innovation. Initiatives focusing on farm-to-plate and buy-local, utilising our rich soils and climate to its potential, local product utilisation, value adding locally and environmental sustainability are gaining traction.





# Strategic Directions

The primary purpose of an Innovation Working Group (IWG) is to develop innovation opportunities that will support sustainable economic development, job creation and social and economic prosperity in Murrindindi Shire Council with the long-term aim of fostering a thriving, collaborative innovation system for the community. The IWG's core role is to develop, test, refine and define the relevant proposal(s) for the innovation.

The IWG's initial term will be twelve (12) months, or until the conclusion of its primary project, whichever is shorter. After this period, a review of membership and purpose will be undertaken. Membership is comprised of representation of the quadruple helix– community, industry, research and government. Facilitation support is provided by the Murrindindi Shire Council Local Development Strategy (LDS) Project Manager. The IWGs are supported by the Leadership Group, who will endorse applications to the Community Development Fund funding and assist in decision making when outside the IWG scope. The following four areas were progressed to Innovation Working Groups.

# Farm Forestry



The Farm Forestry Working Group has been meeting monthly since July 2024. The focus of this group is to create a viably economic industry around existing and new plantations that provide multiple biodiversity benefits to growers and farmers.

## Project Definition

To showcase the biodiversity and economic benefits of Farm Forestry and encourage new plantations and industry development. This will be achieved by educating the community, building a profitable industry, valuing high quality trees, producing high-quality timber products, and growing and sharing the knowledge base within the Shire.

## July 2024

The group started discussions on setting up a training hub like one already in the Otway's. Could Murrindindi develop and sustain one locally and how could they create activities, education and events regularly? The benefits of an education hub initially would be to build the local knowledge base, grow the networks and offer support, research what is happening currently and what are the future markets. The group also discussed the incentives of carbon credits, biochar, funding streams for new plantations, seed bank and markets for future products, biodiversity for farmers, and nursery options. The future market needs to be established early to determine what project would be best suited to the region.

---

## August 2024

Researcher Fabiano Ximenes presented to the IWG and answered questions on this research and how it could relate to Murrindindi. There was a presentation on Biochar and how this facility could support new and existing plantations financially. The group discussed the creation of a Centre of Excellence and providing information and education to the community hosting regular field days.

## September 2024

DEECA presented to the group on current farm forestry happening in Gippsland. The group were hesitant on selecting a specific project as the previous challenges and learnings had to be captured first. The timelines of the project were raised as a challenge along with who would be delivering this. More work is needed to bring members into the IWG that can provide longevity to this work.

---

## October/November 2024

The IWG have commenced work on the creation of a clear vision statement aimed at maintaining longevity and sustainability. Engagement of agroforestry knowledge is needed, and it may be necessary to bring in a suitable consultancy that works in with community and IWG. It will be important this knowledge is captured and shared with the community to help build capacity. Specific expertise is needed to assess various projects and as there are 5 overall project areas, there may be a need to engage more than 1 consultant. The consultant would provide expert advice and feasibility of each concept that could be pursued locally and provide longevity.

Feasibility is needed for both short term and long-term solutions. This would form part of the Farm Forestry Incubator- with support for new industry and new plantations. The group discussed the governance structure of this group and what this could look like, who will do the work and how to encourage further community involvement.

The IWG is looking into opportunities to start smaller scale pilot projects now and whether there is an opportunity in the manufacturing of hardwood timber stakes/pegs as these are difficult products to buy and are in high demand. With so much local hardwood available now – can this be used in unique construction by bringing in architects/designers? There is opportunity to better engage with this industry about potential end markets. For new plantations, what is the motivation to plant? Is there a need for a solid education piece surrounding that? The group agree that it is important to diversify the outcome to more than just timber, as growers will want various biodiversity benefits to suit their farming practises. Establish the end goal and market – is it for a high value tree or a high value product?

## December 2024

The group is preparing an Expression of Interest for Community Development Funding. The funding will be used to support expert consultancy on potential economic benefits for plantation growers in Biochar, sawn timber products, peeled veneers, on farm benefits, and landscape/habitat growing. The funding will be used to support the three pilot projects including the Murrindindi Farm Forestry Incubator, supporting the startup costs for the manufacturing of hardwood stakes and pegs, and a Farm Forestry Interpretive Centre (site location yet to be determined).

**This will commence with the next steps which will be delivered by the IWG.**

### Strategic Actions / Next Steps

- Finalise and endorse a Vision Statement to guide further activities.
- Identify and engage leading experts from industry, research, and government.
- Define long-term governance and ownership models to ensure sustainability.
- Conduct a full farm forestry value chain analysis to ensure successful plantations in Murrindindi, to demonstrate their point of difference with other regions, and to ensure a profitable outcome for the sector
- Develop Business Cases for high-impact projects
- Seek funding to support start-up of 3 interrelated projects
  - a. Feasibility Study – Farm Forestry Incubator – Supporting new plantations and innovative business models.
  - b. The Murrindindi Farm Forestry Interpretative Centre – a knowledge hub and designated location for specialist equipment hire and shared industry resources and expertise
  - c. Hardwood Manufacturing Initiative – Establishing a local hardwood processing facility to generate returns and develop skills.



Collectively, these initiatives aim to encourage a greater uptake of farm forestry in the region that will:

1

Enable the community to understand what wood products it can feasibly generate for economic development, including to the burgeoning circular economy (Feasibility Study – The Murrindindi Farm Forestry Incubator)

2

Provide avenues for learning and best-practice in farm forestry in the community via a farm forestry education hub (Farm Forestry interpretive centre)

3

Provide proof-of-concept for economic diversification via farm forestry in the Shire via the development of a small-scale wood processing facility for plantation sourced wood, which will also generate greater social cohesion and processor/grower collaboration (Wood Processing Facility)

By utilising existing farm forestry resources and knowledge in the Shire and incentivising a critical mass of new wood production from private landowners, these initiatives are expected to create the conditions necessary for medium-scale development of a wood products industry, which in the longer-term will support economic development, job opportunities, greater social connection, and more carbon reduction in the Murrindindi Shire.



# Health, Aged Care and Social Assistance



The Health and Aged Care Working Group has been meeting since July 2024 and while the proposal has slightly altered during that time, the goal of connecting all Health services across Murrindindi has not.

## Project Definition

Comprehensive review of the current health related service delivery and workforce landscape, identify and evaluate alternative service models, and create a shared vision for the future of health services.

How can the Murrindindi region optimise its healthcare services to improve service delivery, and attract, retain and grow a skilled workforce and specialist skills through shared services, to meet the needs of its dispersed and ageing population?

## July 2024

The working group commenced discussions on the challenges of transport for medical appointments and the impact this has on patients' ability to access services. The group collated current transport services available, restrictions, and collated existing data (what was available) on the demand there is currently from some of these providers.

---

## August 2024

Discussions moved toward providing a stronger telehealth service and what a mobile service could look like rather than focusing solely on transport solutions. Would this bring enough impact to the community by not having the challenge of travel? Being able to provide tech support would be important and needs to be incorporated to assist users.

## September 2024

With guidance from Council and the Health Network, discussions encouraged vision of a broader plan that could incorporate a number of longer-term projects that address all of the above. Utilising Community Development Funding to audit the entire Shire Health Services could be a viable option to help providers align costs and provide more accurate and effective services Shire wide.

---

## October 2024

The application for grant funding commenced. A draft version of the Project Management Plan and proposed application was created by the Health Network, Murrindindi Shire Council and DEECA.

---

## November 2024

CDF Application for funding was lodged by Murrindindi Shire Council who will auspice the grant.

---

## December 2024

DEECA panel assessed the application and have progressed to Ministerial approval.

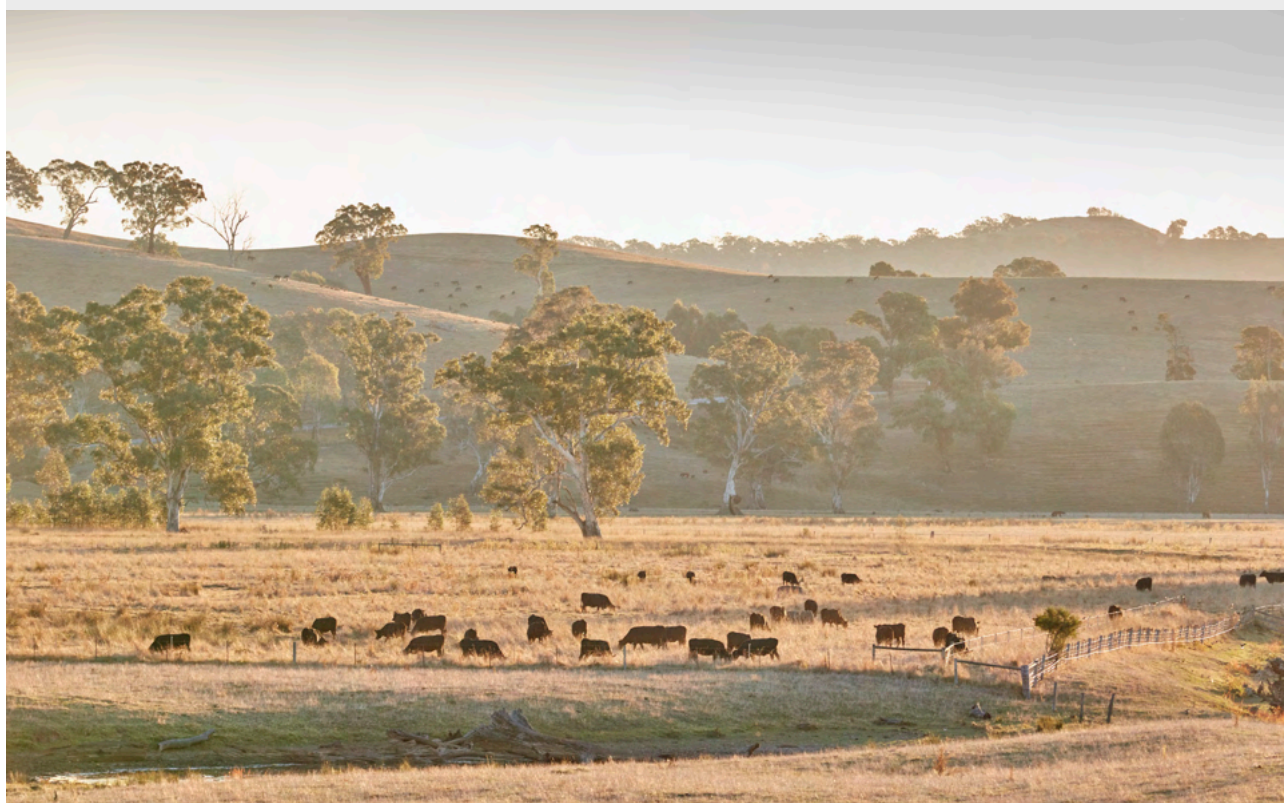




This will commence with the next steps which will be delivered by the IWG.

## Strategic Actions / Next Steps

- Review existing health services delivery model and its effectiveness in improving health outcomes.
- Develop a comprehensive Health & Aged Care Strategy to improve service access and deliver, attract, retain and grow a skilled workforce through shared services that meet the needs of a dispersed and rapidly ageing population.
- Develop business cases for new initiatives based on the findings from research and engagement
- Implement the recommendations from the strategy and deliver the identified business cases
- Continue to source additional funding to continue to deliver outcomes that support the health industry in the Shire
- Improve transport accessibility to health services, addressing critical mobility gaps.





# Renewable Energy and Circular Economy



The Renewable Energy and Circular Economy Working group have been meeting monthly since July 2024. While discussions around a specific project have not yet been clearly identified, the group see benefit in working to address and repurpose waste of many types within the Shire.

## Project Definition

To reduce food, woody, and agriculture waste in the Shire by providing a facility to convert this waste into a high value compost/biochar product that can be sold at market. Educating community on waste management, and how they can contribute to effective waste reduction.

## July 2024

The group commenced discussing pumped hydro with advice from Corryong on costings and scale of projects. It was quickly ruled out as being too big a project for this working group. Other discussions included micro hydro projects, a centre of excellence, demonstration sites, off grid solutions/neighbourhood batteries and circular economy projects. The group voted on Biochar/ circular economy, neighbourhood battery, and Centre of Excellence as being the top priorities.

## August 2024

Information on neighbourhood batteries was presented to the group and how this could work in the community. Discussions and information on current circular economy projects happening around Victoria were also presented. The group recognised a need for training and educating the community on what is waste/recyclable, and this may be of importance for positive future outcomes. The group assessed the benefits these projects could provide to the community, and what are they wanting to achieve. Is the end goal battery energy storage or to put back into the grid? Is it for daily use or for emergency backup? If the project is focused on circular economy – is it for energy storage or waste reduction? What resources have we got locally and what work has been done already? Follow up with DEECA will be undertaken on current biomass feedstock – could this go to biochar rather than burnt on site?

## September/October 2024

Brief introduction to a local compost facility utilising organic material to improve soil condition and PH level. The group agreed to focus on waste to energy projects and determine what we are wanting to achieve/what is the product. The group introduced a waste to compost concept and discussions ensued on how to make this a profitable product. Would businesses want to provide their waste for a higher valued product and how would this be spread? How does this compare to products already on the market in fertiliser/soil conditioner?

Could this be on a scale that would be beneficial for farmers and community? The Group has decided a business list and survey is required to gain an idea on waste quantities and its current output. A percentage of businesses could be surveyed as a sample – this may need marketing to help gain momentum and participation. Site selection etc can't be discussed until a clear project is identified. An education piece for community is important as this project cannot convert contaminated waste.

---

## November 2024

Meeting commenced with an introduction to local circular economy compost project using composter/mulcher/heater with organic product for fertiliser. The product would need to be added with bacteria. There are facilities on site including sink, water, garden beds and dehydrator (funded through Sustainability Victoria). This unit is no longer in use but there is potential to start up with proper planning. The group is waiting on feedback from progress report for end of grant milestone reporting.

This project ceased when businesses could not collect waste efficiently, and there was no way of delivering this to the facility. Biochar was raised as a potential to boost this system. Conversations with Earth systems need to be established. They have produced one mobile unit, however, not being economically viable, they are no longer making these mobile units. Plan A for this project would be to incorporate multiple waste reduction techniques including pyrolysis, industrial composting, dehydrator unit, and worm farm. An assessment is needed to establish what quantity is needed, at what cost, and what is the end market. What are EPA requirements? Plan B if inadequate feedstock or quality of feedstock can't be sourced, would need to be determined. Could this incorporate local businesses to help them find sustainable ways to reduce waste? The group will be looking to pilot a project in the shorter term for testing. Could this be done using the equipment we already have access to – both dehydrator and worm farm? Biochar needs to be included in this process. What will drawdown strategy be?

## December 2024

The group will be looking to access Community Development Funding to bring research and resources in to make initial assessment on business waste production, quantity and quality of biomass available, and determine suitable and viable projects.

**This will commence with the next steps which will be delivered by the IWG.**

### Strategic Actions / Next Steps

- Leverage cutting-edge Victorian research to identify scalable solutions
- Identify opportunities that support dispersed communities and the circular economy
- Quantify available biomass and organic waste resources.
- Collate data on DEECA resources available locally
- Identify repurposing and manufacturing opportunities for organic and woody waste, based on the research and data collected.
- Develop business cases for circular economy initiatives
- Seek funding for prototypes of one or more point of difference waste management initiatives.



# Tourism



The Tourism/Visitor Economy Working Group has been meeting since July 2024 and while the proposal has slightly altered during that time, the goal of creating a unique Tourism identity for Murrindindi has not.

## Project Definition

Creating a recognised visitor destination through collaborative activity that draws creatively on our expertise, landscapes and natural assets to generate new products and processes that enable economic growth and innovative partnerships. Increase value of the visitor economy through overnight visitation, targeted support of key markets, support products that reflect the strengths of Murrindindi and support year-round economic growth through a member-based entity.

## July 2024

The group began by wanting to explore key worker housing options as this was raised as a blocker for many businesses ready or wanting to expand. What types of housing were currently available to rent, buy, Airbnb, what houses are left vacant and what impact was this having on local businesses? Data needs to be gathered from various sources including Council, Remplan and Census. Council Key worker strategy is in progress for funding- what could this achieve and does this group need to double up?

---

## August 2024

The group gathered data on current housing availability across the Shire. What was available, what sort of housing was it – holiday/rental/farming etc? The group also identified the work Council had been doing in the Key Worker Housing Strategy. The group discussed the work doubling up with Council's goals of providing key worker housing, and started to reassess how we can attract people to the area and showcase our assets. The group identified the strengths of the region, and how this could be built upon.

## September 2024

Given the broad number of ideas on projects there was opportunity to present a power pitch of a project each (of their choice) and allow the group to decide on priorities which they would want to see progressed as part of this working group. We had presentations in

1. Ride Marysville
2. Building Event Capacity
3. Regenerative Tourism Destination
4. Tourism Activation
5. Beyond the Black Spur campaign

---

## October/November 2024

Discussions around previous months power pitches gave the group the chance to question the proposal and possible outcomes. Questions around what is working well currently in nature tourism. What isn't working? How do we define Murrindindi – do we need to? Do we need an identity? What is next for Tourism – visitor destination and what can we do? There is a need for a dedicated platform to support business – The Beyond the Black Spur Collective would build on from a chamber of commerce, and facilitate networking, provide resources for business development, and advocate for the needs of local businesses to government bodies. There is a need for skilled workers and to build on existing assets and tourism assets to bring people to the region. It was unanimously agreed to pursue the Beyond the Black Spur Collective strategy as this could incorporate a bigger picture longer term plan. As part of this, the group could implement several projects that benefit tourism, businesses and local community.

There is opportunity to create experiences linked with local businesses, and this could form part of the collective. The concept would be to promote the lifestyle, and this needs more work. Melbourne people want to experience the country lifestyle- plant a tree, pick their own vegetables, buy local products, or be involved in nature. The middle corridor is well defined as a place but what is missing? The group keep coming back to highlighting what the region has- consolidate those and help create a future direction. Might be more meaningful than branding. Make things easy for new business- work done in the background to help people start up and step in to get started. Be known for an easy place to work and own a business- how to make it simple. Council business support that looks after start to finish steps. Develop experience and identity – connecting community into this. Expand on trails, and connect this across the entire Shire- road, gravel and mountain.

Infrastructure piece- what can we do around the short stay accommodation? Businesses large and small being accommodated- a place of stability for workers and business. How do we attract business investment? Opportunity for experience – lot of moving parts and might be challenging in the shorter term. Calendar of events – 5 years that showcase the strengths. Bringing people in regularly – focus on keeping numbers coming in. Link them together. Marketed well if well organised. Needs to be self-sustainable to work for the longer term.



This will be achieved through the next steps which will be delivered by the IWG.

## Strategic Actions / Next Steps

- Undertake participatory research on current Tourism businesses and products, and work closely to encourage more effective collaboration
- Identify our unique strengths and attributes to position the region as a destination of choice.
- Launch an Engagement Plan to align businesses and community stakeholders
- Secure funding for high-impact tourism projects, including:
  - a. Beyond the Black Spur Initiative – Positioning Murrindindi as a cohesive visitor corridor. Support business-to-business collaboration, to diversify and combine expertise to offer new experiences, empowering business and community to unlock and market high-value local resources,
  - b. Triangle Food Network- connecting local food/wine producers with tourism experiences.
  - c. Ride Marysville Expansion – strengthening Murrindindi's trail-based tourism economy. Create a Trail Bike Destination for the region noting that 48% of the Shire is State Parks, forests and reserves.

**Collectively, these projects aim to encourage economic growth and longer stay visitation and support existing businesses to diversify through:**

1

Research and development that support businesses to collaborate, diversify and combine expertise to offer new experiences, educating business and community to unlock and market high value local resources,

2

Demonstrating potential revenue options initially via Triangle Food Network- producing and marketing of local resources and collaborating with agriculture and food/wine businesses, and

3

Progressing work that supports the expansion of trail networks particularly through Ride Marysville to help create a Trail Bike Destination for the region.

# Linkages

---

Each of the working groups in Murrindindi have their own individual opportunity, however there are some linkages between each of them.

## **Renewable Energy <> Farm Forestry**

Both concepts focus on the idea of biochar – both for woody waste reduction and as a potential income source for current/future farm forestry plantations.

## **Tourism <> Sustainable Agriculture**

The Tourism group has been looking into on farm food experiences and increasing access to local food sources for the community – land share/ food share programs. Although Sustainable Agriculture working group did not have member support to commence, these concepts were also raised in the EDP workshop. Both concepts have the goal of showcasing Murrindindi food and wine businesses to the community and visitors to encourage them to spend more money on locally made or grown products while in the region.

## **Renewable Energy <> Health and Aged Care**

The Health and Aged Care group has been looking into transport issues and how this impacts residents' ability to attend specialist and medical appointments within and outside the Shire. The renewables group is looking into ways to convert energy into projects that would benefit the community and one of these concepts included battery operated community buses. Both ideas have the goal of improving transport across the Shire and making it more accessible to everyone.

## **Advanced Manufacturing <-> Sustainable Agriculture**

Advanced Manufacturing can propel Sustainable Agriculture by offering specialised engineering and manufacturing capabilities for local value-addition to agricultural, horticultural, and aquaculture products. This approach directly supports farm-to-plate initiatives, local product utilisation, and innovation in agricultural processing, potentially creating new industries and strengthening the local economy.



## Next Steps

---

**The Forestry Transition fund provides a unique opportunity for the Shire, its communities and businesses to reimagine a future sustainable and thriving local economy, from concept to outcomes.**

Council and the State with the IWGs will continue to collaborate and determine the best processes for wider community and business to access the Forestry Transition Program. This being a way to deliver outcomes and support the community in gaining as much long term benefit as possible from this program.

Currently there are no Innovation Working Groups exploring Advanced Manufacturing, with a group starting to form for Sustainable Agriculture, Horticulture and Aquaculture. Interest has been made from some in these sectors and Council with DEECA support, will continue to explore the opportunity to form new Innovation Working Groups that align with these sectors, to further enhance the opportunities for Murrindindi Shire.

## Monitoring and Reporting

---

**The grant agreement between DEECA and Murrindindi Shire Council outlines the necessary Milestone reporting throughout the life of the project.**

It is the responsibility of all stakeholders to ensure the next steps are delivered on time within scope and budget. Murrindindi Shire Council as host agency has prepared a Program Road Map outlining Project Management Plan, Communications Plan, Budget, and anticipated outcomes which have been accepted and approved by DEECA as part of the grant agreement. The Project Control Group is responsible for ensuring the successful delivery of the project.

# Murrindindi Shire Beyond 2035

**LDS innovation initiatives will have developed the capability necessary for building collaboration and recognising the diverse expertise necessary to deliver innovative outcomes and establish a point of difference.**

This capability will be institutionalised in an entity which links together key partners from business, research, government and community. The entity will deliver a strategic approach to delivering on innovation opportunities to continuing to build local capability.

The LDS IWGs will have contributed to this bigger picture by delivering of specific innovative projects, but also by developing the understanding and skills necessary to support ongoing innovation. Their contribution will be complemented by input from the Transition fund to create new job opportunities for skilled staff.

Murrindindi Shire Council and DEECA both play a pivotal role in the future success of these opportunities by continuing to support the community and IWGs to collaborate and build partnerships with various stakeholders. The key to ensuring ongoing success will be continuing to foster partnerships with specific expertise by encouraging and supporting research and specialist input through each stage of the process. A project Officer will be engaged to provide ongoing support to the IWGs through meetings, helping draft grant funding EOI and applications, and the delivery of these projects until June 2026. The Community Capacity Building role will also continue through until June 2026 to continue training and skills support for the IWGs and community groups to help build the local knowledge base. Initiatives supported by this role include grant applications, cooperative and social enterprise working models, new business start-up support, leadership, and support for volunteer groups to help recruit and retain members. These initiatives will ensure the region is well equipped with the tools, expertise, and innovative capacity to continue the delivery of new projects beyond the life of the project.







SHAPING  
**MURRINDINDI'S**  
FUTURE