
EDWARD RIVER COUNCIL

‘Our Region, Your Say’

Community
Consultation Report

September 2021

SEFTONS



SEFTONS



Edward
River
COUNCIL



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Introduction

The 'Our Region, Your Say' community consultation program has resulted in the production of this report which will serve as the primary consultation source for the development of Edward River Council's 10-year Community Strategic Plan.

This report consists of two key parts: **Recommendations and Community Feedback**.

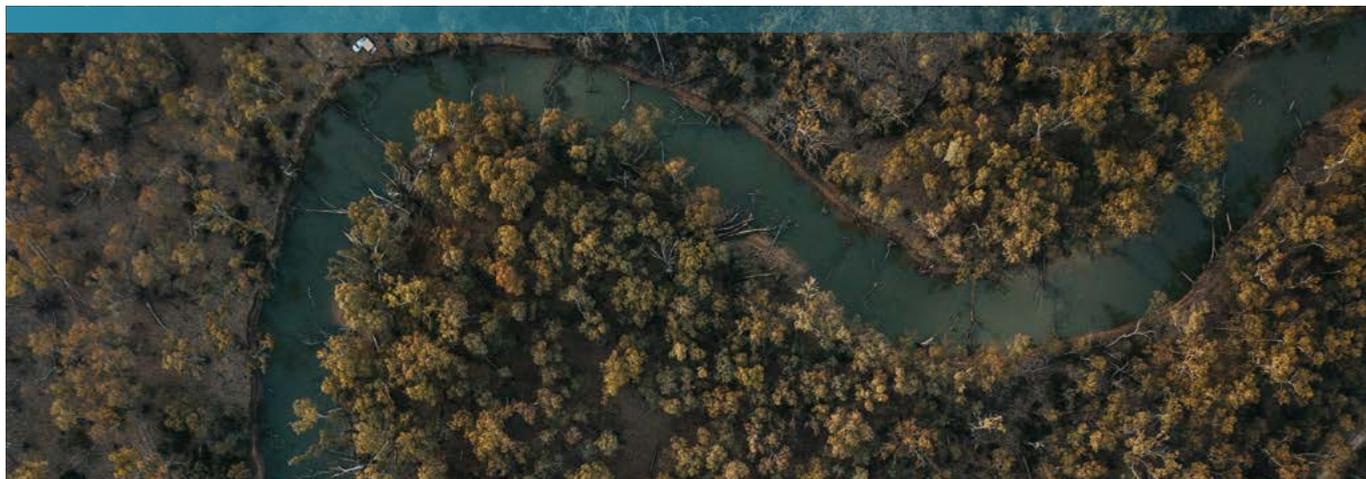
The **Recommendations** are based on the feedback received from the community during the consultation process considered in the light of current political, economic, and social factors. The recommendations form a clear way forward for Edward River Council to consider when developing its new community strategic plan.

The **Community Feedback** includes comments, opinions, suggestions, and ideas proposed by the community during the consultation period. This section of the report provides the details, the context, and the 'colour' to explain the recommendations that have been made. All these comments are based on genuine emotion and personal experience but may not always be factually accurate or balanced. It also includes feedback on issues that matter to the community but may not specifically be included in a broad strategic plan, such as the issue of kerbside recycling.

Acknowledgement of Country

Edward River Council and Seftons acknowledges the Wamba Wamba Perrepa Perrepa people who are the Traditional Custodians of the land and pay respect to Elders both past, present and future.

Edward River supports reconciliation by working consistently in partnership with its local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, always ensuring that the process is based on respect, trust and a spirit of openness.



Foreword: A new approach

As part of the 'Our Region, Your Say' consultation program some 450 people have shared what they value about the Edward River Council region, what they see as a successful community, and have given us their ideas to address challenges now and in the future.

Through the process, we have listened, debated, analysed, and compared. Importantly, we have learnt more about the aspirations, values, and goals of the Edward River Council community.

The consultation showed us that there is great enthusiasm and passion for the area amongst many residents but there is also a degree of frustration and some serious concern for the future amongst many.

There is a complex array of factors contributing to this situation and many of them are well beyond the realm of Edward River Council's responsibility. These include COVID-19 border restrictions, the cancellation of the Deni Ute Muster two years in a row, recent drought, and water access concerns plus ongoing issues with the availability of health services.

However, it was interesting to see frequent comparisons made with towns such as Moama, Echuca and Hay and there was at times, a sense that Deni could be left behind as other towns prosper.

The prospects for the next generation are of great concern to many. There are fears of a dwindling population as people leave town for better health care, better education, and more interesting employment.

The community is calling for courageous leadership and a clear way forward. They want greater involvement in decisions and more information and communication about Council activities and priorities. There needs to be strong and effective working relationships in

place between the Councillors, Council staff, and the community. There was significant praise and positive feedback received in relation to recent Council initiatives to improve the facilities and amenity of the region. The community was quick to acknowledge that Council has made significant improvements to aspects of the region in recent times, but also keen to point out the areas in which Council could do more. Council staff were also acknowledged by the community for their contribution, and some were praised for their commitment and willingness to provide good outcomes for the community.

The critical concerns are health, education, jobs and creating opportunity for business and population growth and development, but the community also have pressing concerns about retail options, kerbside recycling, roads and footpaths, the protection of natural environment and the facilities and services available in the area, particularly for older people, people with disability and young people.

The community is looking to Council to help build cohesive leadership in the region that brings together all the diverse groups of people who care about, and are working towards, achieving a better future for the area.

This report captures what the community told us and includes detailed recommendations and plans for Council to consider. It also asks the community to think about their priorities for the future, and to consider how Council, community, business, and political leaders can work together to ensure the region is a dynamic, prosperous and caring place to live, work and raise a family. Many people generously gave considerable amounts of time to engage with Seftons and share their views. Their feedback was thoughtful, considered and rarely focused on their own self-interest. While they shared opinions based on their personal experience, many people are concerned about others in the community and want to build a better community for everyone.

Ms Robbie Sefton in

Background

Following the Local Government Area elections in 2021, the NSW Local Government Act 1993 requires the newly formed Council to develop and adopt a new 10-year Community Strategic Plan by 1 July 2022. While developed and implemented by Council, this is a document which must be informed by significant community consultation.

To help inform the Community Strategic Plan, Seftons was appointed to undertake a comprehensive consultation program, called 'Our Region, Your Say', which incorporated genuine conversations across the Edward River Council area.

The key objective of this work was the identification, collection, and analysis of the answers to the following questions:

- What does our community value?
- As a community, what are our strengths?
- What could be improved?
- Where does the community see the Edward River region in 10 years?
- What opportunities would the community like to see pursued?
- What does Council do well?
- What could be done better?
- What were the strengths of the Community Strategic Plan 2018-2030?
- What were the weaknesses of the Community Strategic Plan 2018-2030?

The 'Our Region, Your Say' exercise has resulted in the production of this report which will serve as the primary consultation source for Edward River Council's 10-year Community Strategic Plan. The report contains feedback from the community regarding their concerns and their priorities and it includes a myriad of ideas presented by the community ranging from small suggestions to big picture, longer term concepts.

Recommendations

To assist Edward River Council in the development of the 10-year Community Strategic Plan, this report also presents recommendations for Council to consider based on the feedback received. Recommendations for Council to consider are outlined at the beginning of this report. Some of these recommendations are outside the scope of Edward River Council and involve Council taking an advocacy role to obtain support from state and federal governments.

The recommendations highlight the social, economic and political opportunities available to the region that Edward River Council could choose to pursue. These recommendations are based on the issues identified in the community consultation, the ideas articulated by the community plus consideration of the broader state and federal economic and political landscape.

Community Comments

Throughout this report direct quotes from consultation participants have been included. These are anonymous for privacy but are direct quotes taken from interview transcripts or the online survey. These comments are just a snapshot of the views presented but have been selected because they represent the views of many people Seftons spoke with, or because they add a relevant personal perspective to the issue or opportunity being discussed. The community comments are a critical part of this report and are essential reading to understand the views of the community. These comments are often 'spoken from the heart' and it is acknowledged that they may not always be fully factually correct.

Community Strategic Plan 2018 – 2030

The current Edward River Council Community Strategic Plan 2018 – 2030¹ (see Appendix 5) identifies the community's priorities and aspirations for the future, and the strategies that will be implemented to achieve the shared vision for this area:

We are the centre of the Southern Riverina. Home to a connected and engaged community, driven by a diverse economy. We work together to lead our community, achieve our potential and embrace our future.

The plan sits above all other Council plans and policies and is based on the four priority areas of Community, Environment, Economy and Leadership.

The plan states by 2030, the community wants the Edward River region to be:

- A great place to live
- A prosperous and vibrant economy
- A valued and enhanced natural environment
- A region with quality and sustainable infrastructure
- A community working together to achieve its potential.

Based on the consultation conducted in 2021, these goals are still relevant and applicable to the community today. They reflect the priorities and the aspirations of the people who participated in the current community consultation. However, the feedback indicated that the current community strategic plan is not well known or understood by the community, and they cannot always see the steps being taken to achieve this vision.

The issues identified as of most concern to the community in the current consultation are health, education, and employment opportunities. All these challenges are identified in the current strategic plan and acknowledged as issues that Council can 'influence' but not 'control'. Feedback indicates that community concern around these problems is escalating, and the community is increasingly looking to Council to take a stronger and more active role in influencing outcomes that benefit the region. Despite Council having an Advocacy Strategy (see Appendix 4) in place, communication of the advocacy activities and outcomes could be further shared with the community to help build confidence.



As with the Edward River Council Agribusiness Masterplan 2019 - 2024 (see Appendix 6) and the Edward River Council Economic Development Strategy 2018 (see Appendix 8) the work has been done to identify the issues and develop strategies that work towards achieving the overall vision for the community.

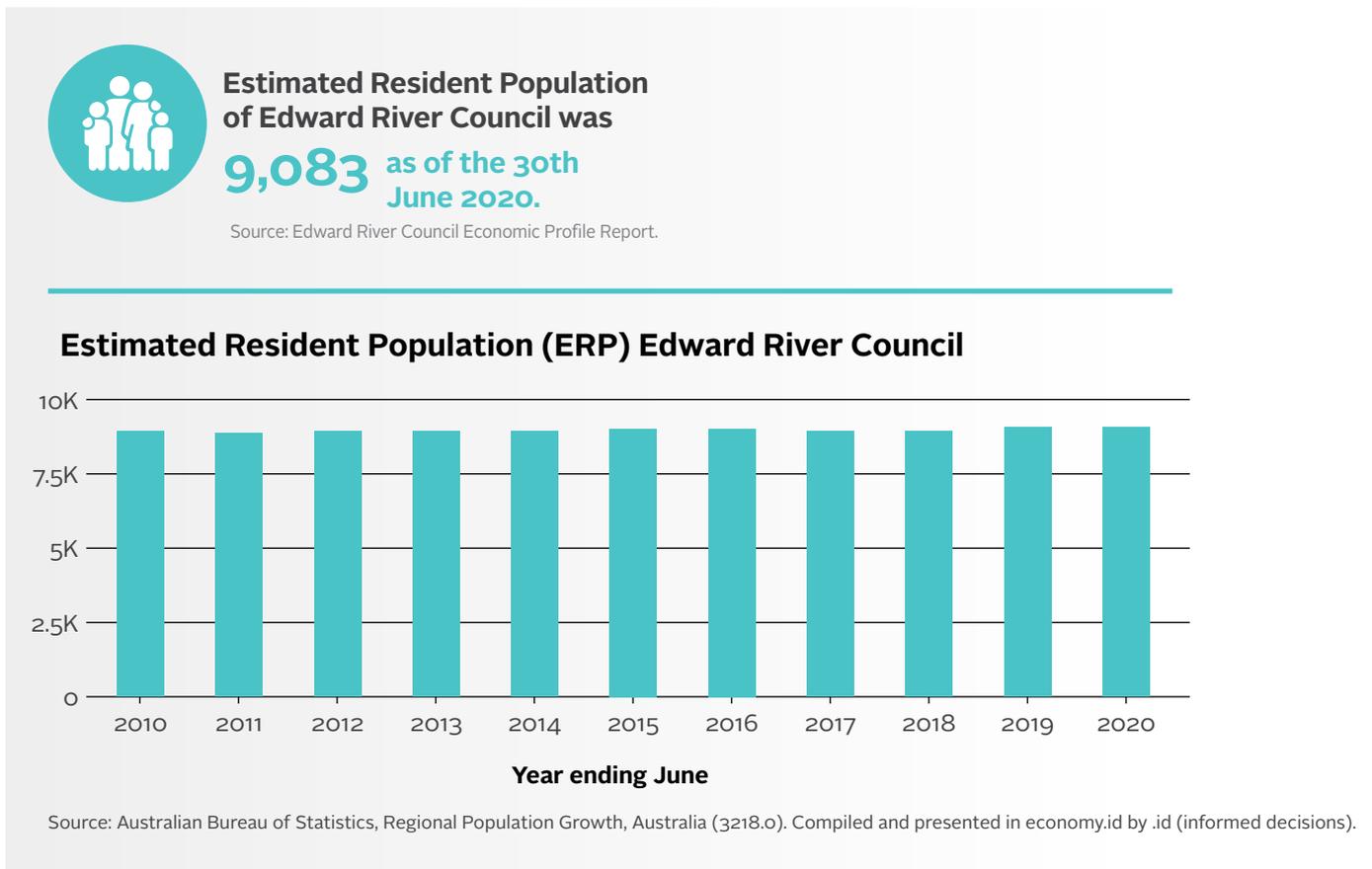
¹ <https://www.edwardriver.nsw.gov.au/Council/Integrated-Planning-and-Reporting/Community-Strategic-Plan>

Demographics and culture

The Edward River Council region has a population of 9,083 as at June 2020 (Bureau of Statistics) and a median age of 45. As at the 2016 census, a high percentage of people in Edward River were born in Australia (82.4%) compared to the NSW average percentage (65.5%). A comparatively high number of people identified themselves as Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islanders (4%) compared to the average for NSW (2.9%).

The population has remained relatively steady over the past 13 years – not declining but also not growing (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Edward River Council area population



Other towns surrounding Deniliquin have experienced greater growth in recent years and, in the consultation process, many residents compared Deniliquin to these towns. Of particular importance is Moama which is a 50-minute drive on the Cobb Highway from Deniliquin.

The key employment industry in the region is agriculture, followed by health services and retail. These industries make up almost half of the jobs in the region. The area has a long and proud history. It was founded in the mid-1800s and has grown based on strong rice, wool, and timber industries.

Demographics and culture - continued

In addition to the specific values, strengths and opportunities for improvement identified in the community consultation process, some strong themes around culture and the need for change underpinned many of the discussions.

Overall, the community was positive about living in the region, the beautiful natural surroundings, the sense of community they experience, and the recent improvements Council has made to the area. However, there is real concern amongst many regarding the key issues of health, education and employment and how the region is going to prosper in the future.

There is a sense that 'something' must be done to ensure the future prosperity of the region but there is frustration about what that 'something' is and how this is going to happen. A number of people expressed concern that the region's 'leaders' – elected state, federal and local leaders as well as 'informal' community leaders – are not sufficiently looking ahead and actively and strategically planning for a brighter future. It was noted that the existing community leaders are getting older, and it is not yet clear who are the new, younger leaders.

During the meetings, in both Deniliquin and at the villages, young community leaders were evident. They are well informed, smart, and connected. They expressed their sincere pride in the community and commitment to the region, but they are yet to have a distinct leadership pathway. Many are busy with very young families and emerging businesses or are involved in the success of their farms. It is recommended that existing leaders in the community identify these young leaders and start to coach and mentor them.

There is a sense amongst some residents and ratepayers that Edward River Council councillors, Council staff, and state and federal government politicians need to "fix" the issues rather than taking accountability and responsibility as a community.

Community comments

"I think there's a real longing for the past and there's a real comfort in standing still." – personal interview

"We have fantastic committees in Deniliquin, but they operate in these tribal arrangements." – personal interview

"I just think Deni needs to look to the future, not the past. I think there's a lot of people here still looking to the past and still angry about water." – personal interview

"Stop longing for the past and focus on the future." – online survey respondent

"We have got good leaders in our community however many of these are getting older now and we need to make way for young people." – personal interview

"How do we as a community work more collaboratively with Council?" – personal interview

"There's a lot of protective mentality here, protecting your own patch, mind your own business. I think we've still got a very traditional English rural way of living and then I think there are a lot of people coming back to the community who are sort of looking around thinking that it's not a safe community to have a voice that's contrary to the status quo." – personal interview

"Young people, people like ourselves, are very excited about trying new things. I don't think the old money in the top end of town are particularly interested in changing anything." – personal interview

"We like living in this community, but we are very upset that we have such poor health services, poor education, no new jobs for young people." – personal interview

"Why don't we have a vibrant restaurant and café scene here on the banks of the Edward River – I want great cafes, good entertainment and a great lifestyle." – personal interview

Demographics and culture - continued

There are some who are fatigued, resigned, or even disinterested and this is partly impacted by broader global issues such as environmental concerns and the impact of COVID-19. There is a deep commitment to the Edward River Council community but the energy, vibrancy, and 'can-do' approach to social and economic growth seems to be waning. There are businesses and community leaders working hard, and some enthusiastic entrepreneurs who want to work together to build their community, however they need a clear path forward.

They are looking to understand what Council's plan is for the future of the region so they can work in conjunction with this to build their own business ideas and implement community initiatives. Many people are looking to Council and other leaders to be more proactive, forward-thinking and to communicate their plans more so that they can have confidence that there is a positive way forward. There is a strong need for leadership and Council could help deliver this through a more focussed, energised and disciplined advocacy approach when working with state and federal governments, as well as with business leaders and corporate enterprises. It is important to note that the community and local businesses need to be part of the solution. They need to work cooperatively with Council as it is up to the community and Council to pave the way forward together.

A strategic and consistent communication approach would assist Council to ensure the community understands why and where Council invests its time and the community's funds and the proposed return on investment for the community. Council has a responsibility to 'bring the community with them' through their communication and actions. Having regular face to face meetings in Deniliquin and the villages to encourage feedback and unity in an open and honest manner will assist the community to understand what Council can and can't influence, and particularly where and how it is advocating for the community with state and federal governments and business. Council has been 'kicking goals', however, the community is not always aware of its successes so more communication and collaboration could be beneficial.



Community comments

"I think in my opinion the more inclusive you are in conversations around community the more empowered people are to have a voice and when people are empowered to have a voice you get a more diverse perspective and when you get a more diverse perspective you get better decisions, and it just opens up the gateway for things to be possible." – personal interview

"I have often thought that Civic Sundays would be great where you all just come in and talk about a topic related to the community." – personal interview

"There is a lot of passion about Deni and its communities which is good. But the opportunities are not being utilised." - personal interview

"So that's a massive cultural shift, a willingness to actually be challenged on whether the past is still applicable. I'm not saying we can't learn from the past." – personal interview

"The Deniliquin community has a habit of internalising – we, as a community, need to encourage others to move to the Deniliquin community with additional skills and leadership capability so they can encourage locals to grow both from a leadership and business and community aspect." – personal interview

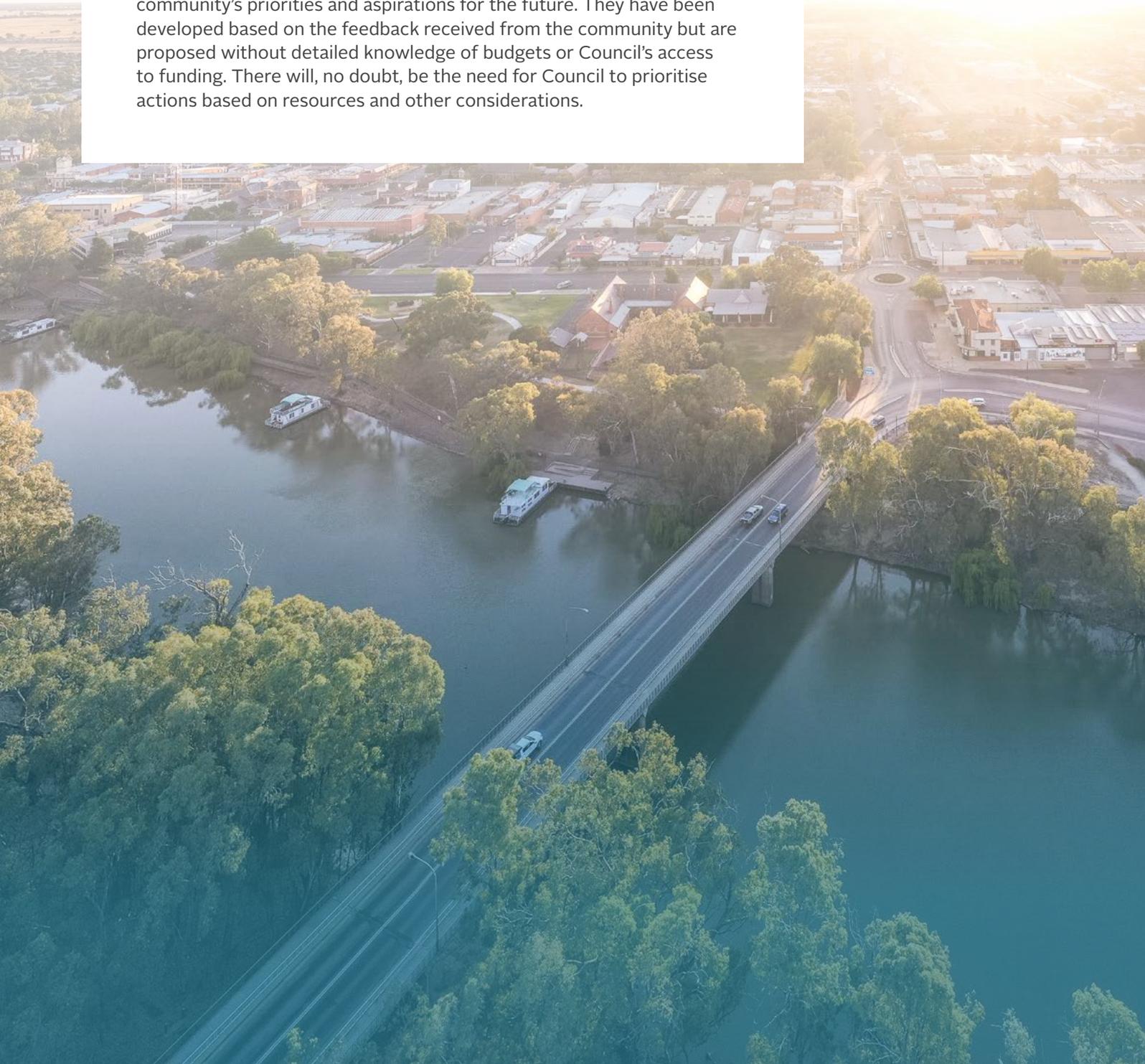
PART 1

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations and actions in this section of the report are based on the feedback received from the community during the consultation process considered in the light of current political, economic and social factors.

The recommendations form a clear way forward for Edward River Council to consider when developing its new community strategic plan.

These recommendations and actions focus on growing an active and open Edward River community that is working together to achieve the community's priorities and aspirations for the future. They have been developed based on the feedback received from the community but are proposed without detailed knowledge of budgets or Council's access to funding. There will, no doubt, be the need for Council to prioritise actions based on resources and other considerations.

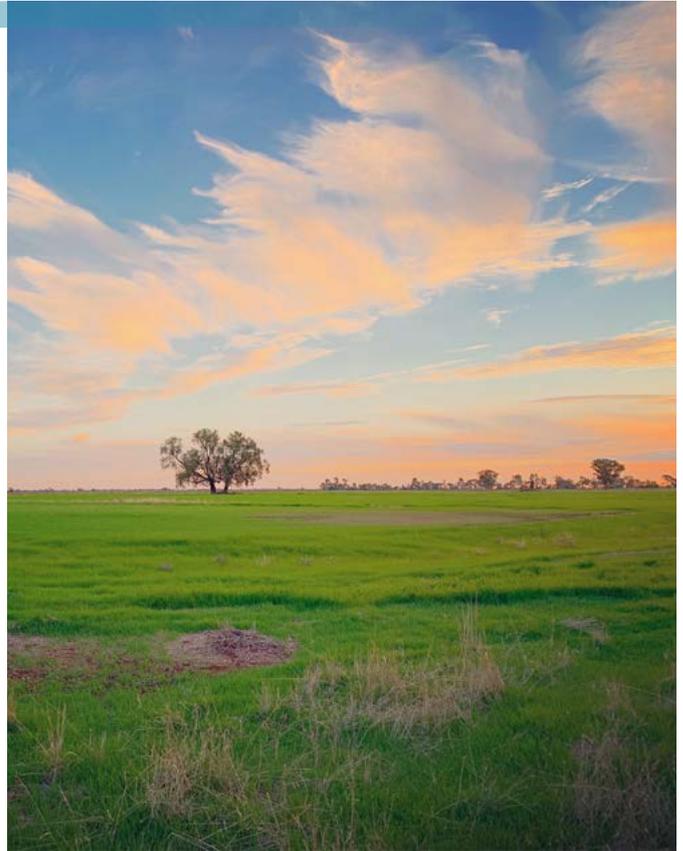


Context

The NSW Government's 20-Year Economic Vision for Regional NSW identifies global scale trends impacting regional NSW:

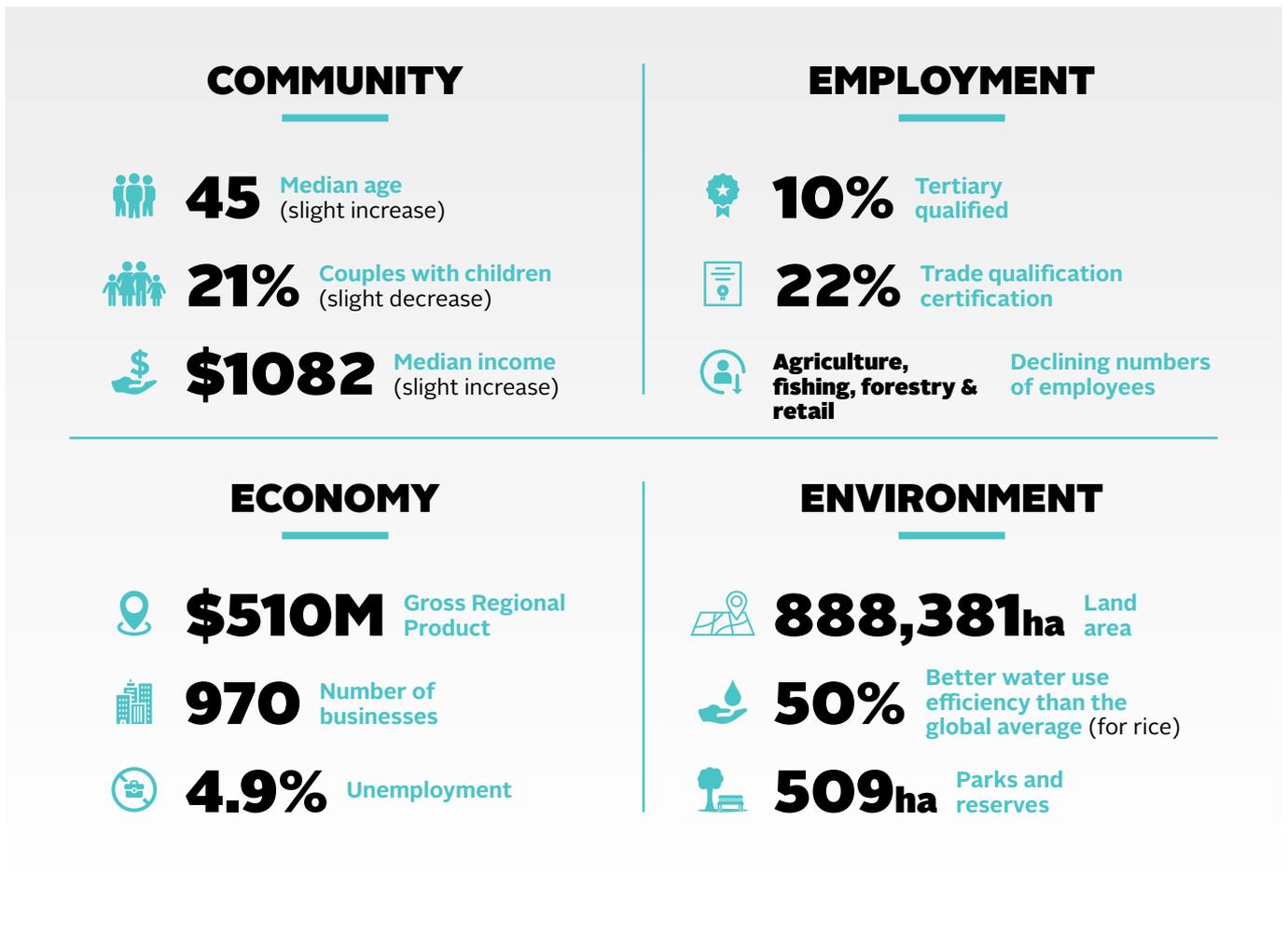
- The rise of Asian markets and economies
- Rapid urbanisation
- Demographic and social change
- Digital disruption and
- A new and influential trend - increasing global uncertainty which includes a changing climate (see Appendix 10 for more detail), rising geopolitical tensions and the unknown long-term impacts of COVID-19.

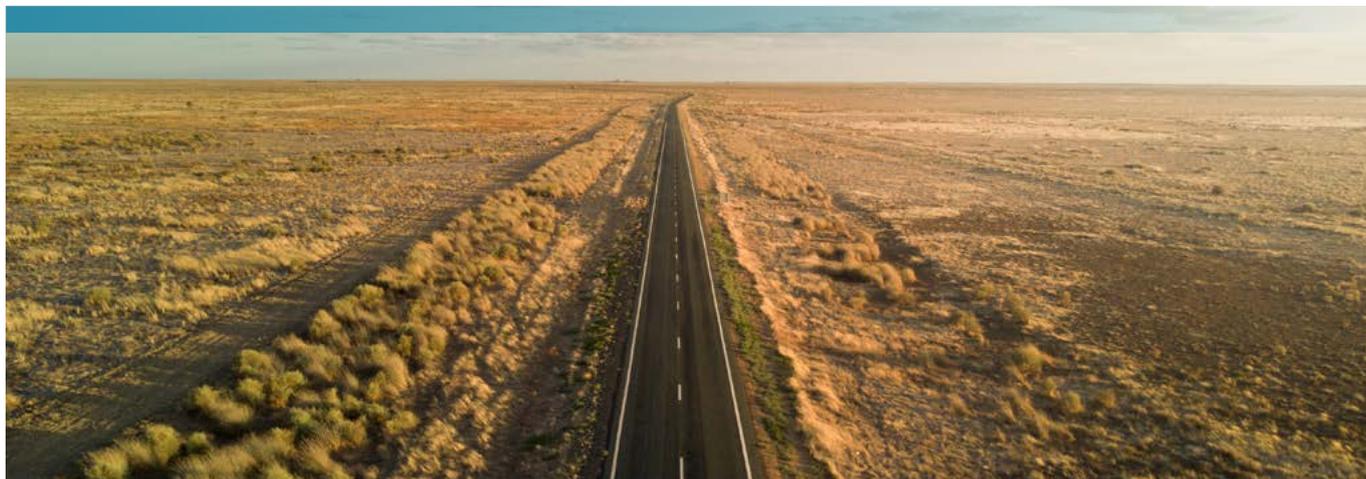
This context has been considered when developing these recommendations and can be used by the Edward River Council region as an opportunity to target deliberate strategies in response to global trends.



Edward River Council snapshot

Figure 2 Edward River Council area key numbers





The region's future and potential for growth

The community consultation conducted highlights first and foremost that it is time for the community to embrace its future – to build on its strengths, actively address needs and gaps and move forward with optimism. There is a consensus that leadership and collaboration can be the catalyst for growth.

The Edward River Council 10-year Community Strategic Plan identifies the community's priorities and aspirations for the future, and strategies that will be implemented to achieve a shared vision for the Edward River Local Government Area. The existing Community Strategic Plan covers key sectors as well as the core business of local government – service provision. The advice in this plan is intended to build on that 10-year plan and look towards 2050.

Growth

The population of the Edward River Council area has remained relatively steady over the previous 20 years. An important question is the region's population trajectory and growth targets.

Does the community want to try and grow its population at a very high rate and focus on bringing in new people through large transformational projects such as downstream processing of agricultural commodities, aged care, education, or services?

Alternatively, does the community want its region to grow more organically, with a focus on improving its current strengths and expanding existing agriculture, services, businesses, and infrastructure to attract new people?

The graph at Figure 3 includes four population pathways for the Edward River Council region.

They are:

- the NSW Government's prediction for the Edward River Council region, this is based on several assumptions³
- the NSW state average⁴
- two potential high growth scenarios - 2.5% and 5%. A growth rate of 2.5% is possible and is predicted for some parts of Sydney, for example the Liverpool region - an expanding community - has a predicted population growth rate of over 2.9%. The 5% target is an extreme example used for indicative purposes.

³ Demographic assumptions span three domains: fertility, mortality, and migration:

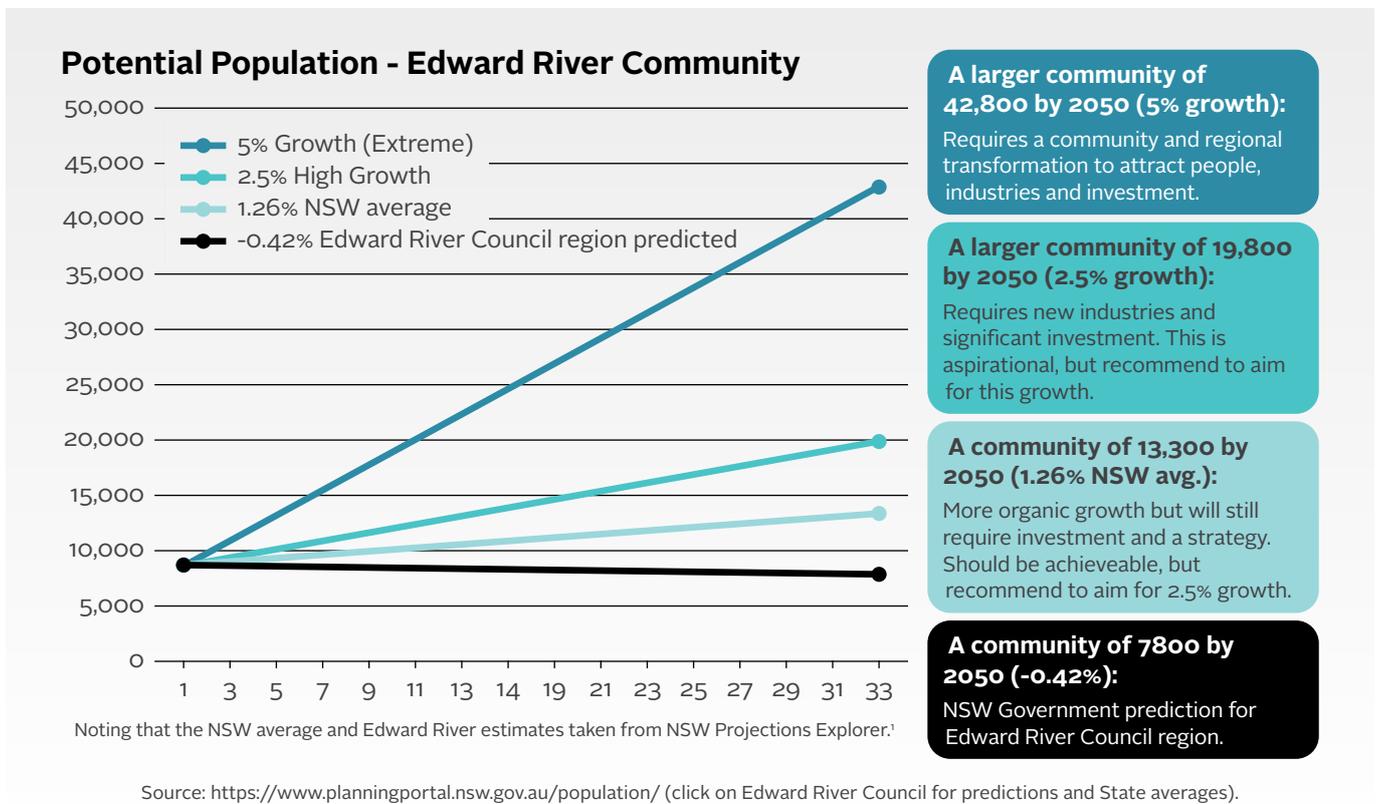
- how many babies are likely to be born (fertility)
- the age at which people are likely to die (mortality)
- how many people will be moving around inside NSW (intra-state migration)
- how many people will be moving in and out of NSW from other states (inter-state migration), and
- how many people will be moving in and out of NSW from overseas (overseas migration).

Source: <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Research-and-Demography/Population-projections/Projections>

⁴ Ibid.

Population pathways for Edward River community

Figure 3 Population pathways



This report presents a series of recommendations that will support the Edward River Council region to buck the expected trend of population decline and grow organically at or above the state average of 1.26%. This would result in the **Edward River region achieving a population of almost 14,000 people by 2050.**

This report also includes recommendations for consideration if the **community would prefer to adopt an aspirational target of 19,800 people which is a 2.5% growth.**

This will not be an easy task and to achieve this the community needs to set the right foundations, build on its competitive advantages and be ready to take on opportunities to stretch itself outside its comfort zone. It also needs to be open to transformational ideas and opportunities which can increase the population to over 25,000 by 2050 - but these should not be the primary focus, they are a bonus rather than the only sign of success.

EDWARD RIVER COUNCIL COMMUNITY

Vision

Vision: Edward River Council Community

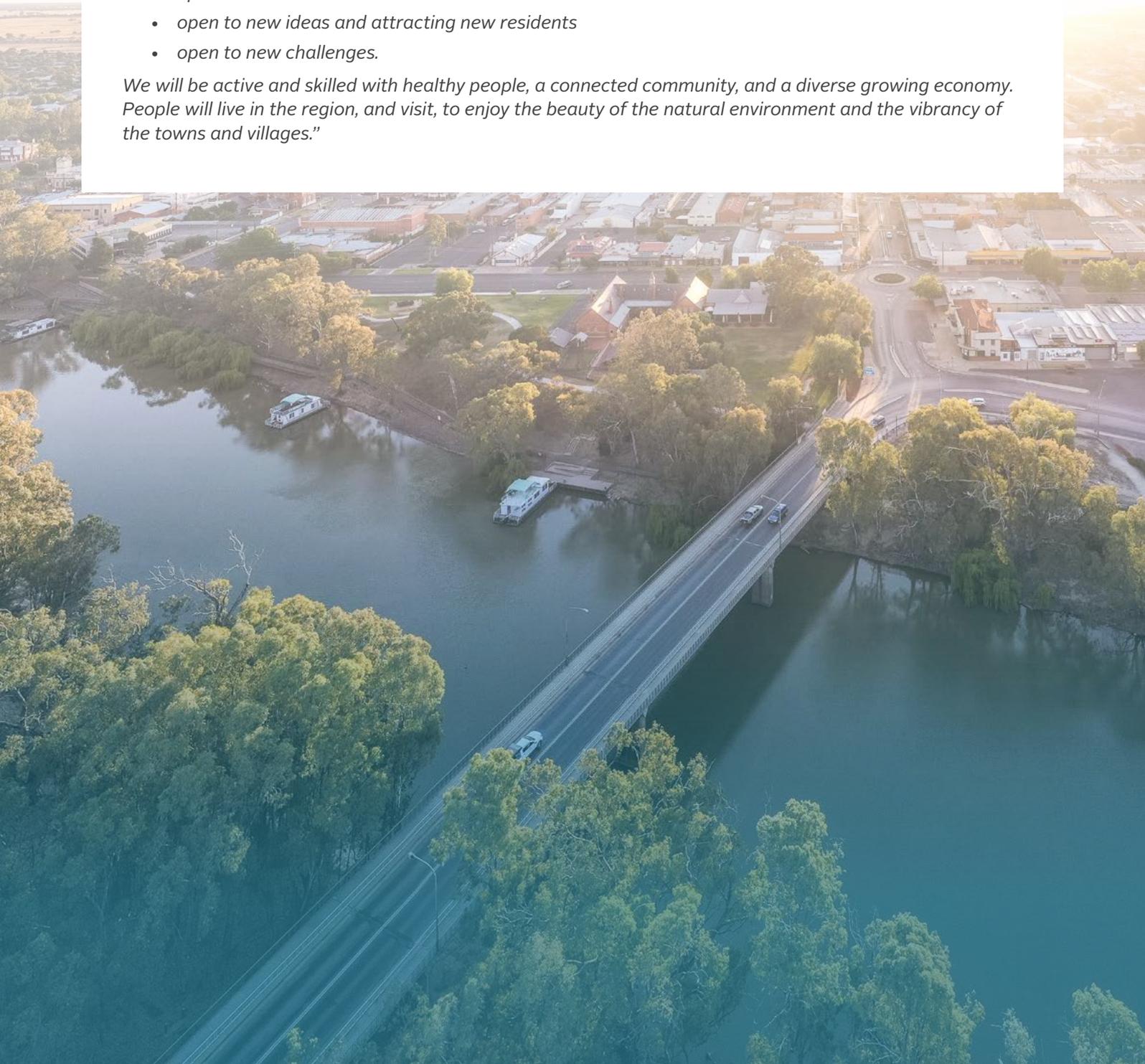
It is proposed that the following concepts could become the new Vision for the Edward River Council Community Strategic Plan. The following ideas add to the existing Vision by focusing more on creating a culture of openness and activity.

OPEN AND ACTIVE

“By 2050, the Edward River region will be bustling:

- *open for business*
- *open to new ideas and attracting new residents*
- *open to new challenges.*

We will be active and skilled with healthy people, a connected community, and a diverse growing economy. People will live in the region, and visit, to enjoy the beauty of the natural environment and the vibrancy of the towns and villages.”



Growth: Enablers and outcomes

The question of growth covers population, economy and the health and vibrancy of the community. These issues are interdependent but the focus or starting point can change how the pathway forward is developed.

It is recommended that Edward River Council focus on key enablers to deliver the vision of an open and active community as outlined in Figure 4.

The proposed enablers are:

- Healthy
- Economically diverse
- Skilled and smart
- Open and connected

Within each of these enabler categories, recommended actions are outlined in this report. These actions are designed to help achieve the following outcomes:

- A healthy, socially connected, and resilient community
- A diverse economy that delivers ongoing benefits
- An active community that takes initiative and is 'heard' by political, business and community authorities
- A community that is connected to the world through technology and transport
- Vibrant and creative towns and villages supported by sustainable, quality infrastructure
- A place to visit for nature, food and fun

These outcomes will only be achieved with a supporting foundation of leadership and collaboration as shown in Figure 4. Recommended actions to build leadership and collaboration in the community are also outlined in this section of the document.

Edward River Council 'Open and Active' enablers and outcomes

Figure 4 Edward River Council 'Open and Active' enablers and outcomes



Enabler 1: Healthy

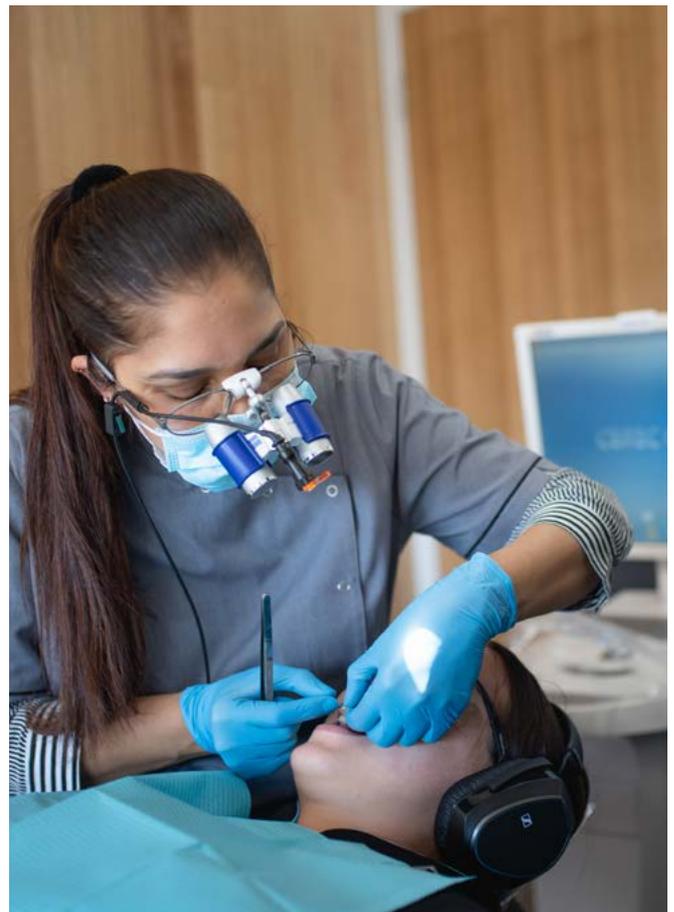
(refer to Edward River Council Open and Active Model on page 15)

Recommendations

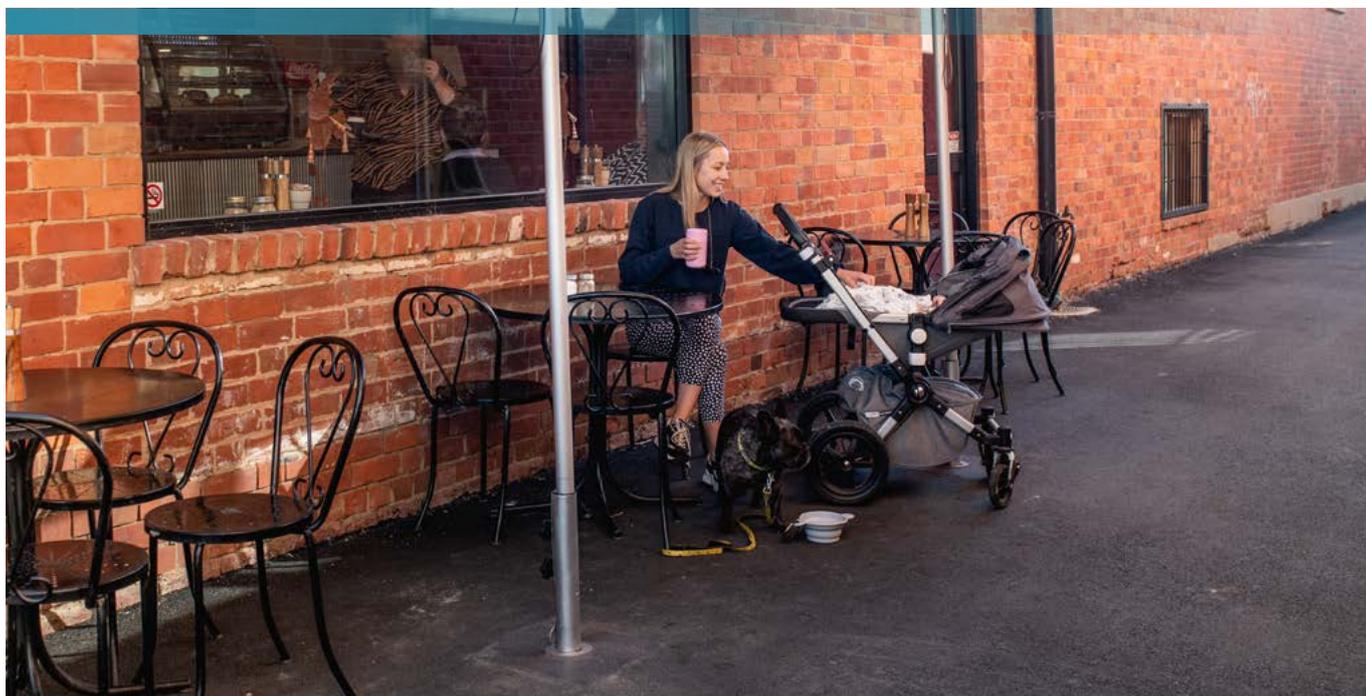
Issues raised in the health sector relate to access, services offered, aged care, mental health and attracting general practitioners. Providing health services is not the responsibility of Council however as outlined in the Community Feedback section of this report, access to health services was identified by the community as a critical issue, and there is an expectation from the community that Council will take a leadership role in addressing the issues. It is also going to be critical to give the community confidence that access to health services will improve by publicly highlighting improvements or positive plans for the future.

Health - Recommendations

1. Edward River Council to advocate to governments for better services including access to more health professionals, and improved services at the hospital including paediatric and aged care specialists, plus allied health providers.
2. Deliver the Deniliquin Seniors' Living Precinct and communicate its benefits in the community and to governments, and expand facilities as opportunities arise.
3. Edward River Council to approach headspace for mental health support for young people and assist in the advocacy for the establishment of a headspace centre in Deniliquin.
4. Edward River Council to work with local organisations and the Rural Doctors Association of Australia and government to develop a general practitioner succession plan and program for the region.
5. Edward River Council to bring together and work with local health organisations to develop a health road map and action plan for the region which supports these recommendations by, identifying:
 - services available in the region
 - how gaps can be filled using telehealth services and other options
 - how Edward River Council will undertake advocacy on key issues and gaps
 - how Edward River Council will be part of the solution to ensure general practitioners are retained and attracted to the area. Edward River Council to develop a communications strategy to ensure the community is aware of the advocacy work being undertaken and publicly celebrates any success.



Delivering these recommendations will mean the Edward River Council region can keep its people healthy and grow health services. The Deniliquin Seniors' Living Precinct is a courageous and potentially transformative project that could be the catalyst for further developments and position the Edward River Council region among its rural and regional counterparts as a case study in a successful model to advocate for the health of its senior citizens. Other opportunities for the community to pursue that are transformative and innovative are below. Some of these could underpin higher population and economic growth targets.



Opportunities for innovation or transformation

As recommendations are delivered, opportunities that can be further explored are:

- Expanding the hospital and including education and training opportunities as part of the proposal in line with the objective of more assertively pursuing growth in health services.
- Investigate ways to revitalise or offer new aged care services in addition to the Seniors' Living Precinct, examples include:
 - 'Dementia Villages' – which offer residents with advanced dementia a sense of autonomy via a setting that emulates a regular community, complete with a supermarket, its own currency and social events like pub bingo.
 - 'Naturally occurring villages' - independent seniors join a 'village' (which is not comprised of any actual property) and pay a yearly fee for staff who help them get the services they need. Council could manage this process for 'villages'.
- Supporting "health coaches" for individuals, emphasising preventative health measures and providing or coordinating necessary care.
- Consider different approaches to attracting staff to the region as per this [ABC article](#) regarding different strategies adopted in Katherine in the Northern Territory.
- Offering staff (students / trainees) the opportunity to live on site for free in exchange for volunteer work.
- Use animals / animal care or partnerships with pre-schools and schools to bring older people out into the community more.
- Expand the work of headspace into other areas.

Enabler 2: Economically Diverse

(refer to Edward River Council Open and Active Model on page 15)

Recommendations

Growth brings secure employment and new jobs as well as investment and economic activity. It traditionally comes from existing businesses or service providers expanding or new businesses being physically established in the region. Growth can also come from people starting a new 'side hustle' in addition to their full-time job or, with the rise of people working from home, it can also come from people relocating to the region when employed by a business outside the area and working from home.

As outlined in the community feedback section of this report, the community raised several areas where opportunities exist for economic diversification and development – business and agribusiness, hospitality, tourism and transport and support services.



Business and Agribusiness - Recommendations

Overarching

1. Edward River Council to actively encourage new businesses to the region by identifying opportunities and gaps and directly approaching those investors with business cases – this should be guided by developing an investment action plan.
2. Edward River Council to obtain funding to employ a business coach / consultant to work with existing businesses and implement the investment action plan and Agribusiness Master Plan.
3. Edward River Council to offer businesses low cost or free advertising using a central marketing tool / their website / newsletter.
4. Edward River Council to continue to conduct Developers' meetings on a quarterly basis and extend the membership to trade, merchandise and agribusiness suppliers to ensure that all key small businesses in the community are encouraged to attend. Council will share recent achievements and action plans for the short and medium term, seeking input from the community. This is a business engagement opportunity to improve two-way communication and entrepreneurial action in the community.
5. Existing leaders in the community are encouraged to identify young leaders and start to coach and mentor them.

Retail and Dining

1. Edward River Council to consider financial incentives to attract new retail outlets to the region and advertise them through media and business networks and via a contemporary communications campaign. Examples of incentives are to delay rate payments until a new business has been in place for three years to give it time to be successful.
2. Edward River Council to work with the Business Chamber to encourage existing retail and dining to focus on customer satisfaction by surveying the community and providing results to those businesses.
3. Edward River Council to celebrate existing businesses by hosting events, awards and competitions to expose the community to the diversity offered, encourage collaboration and skill sharing, attract visitors and generate momentum in the sector.



Business and Agribusiness - Recommendations - continued

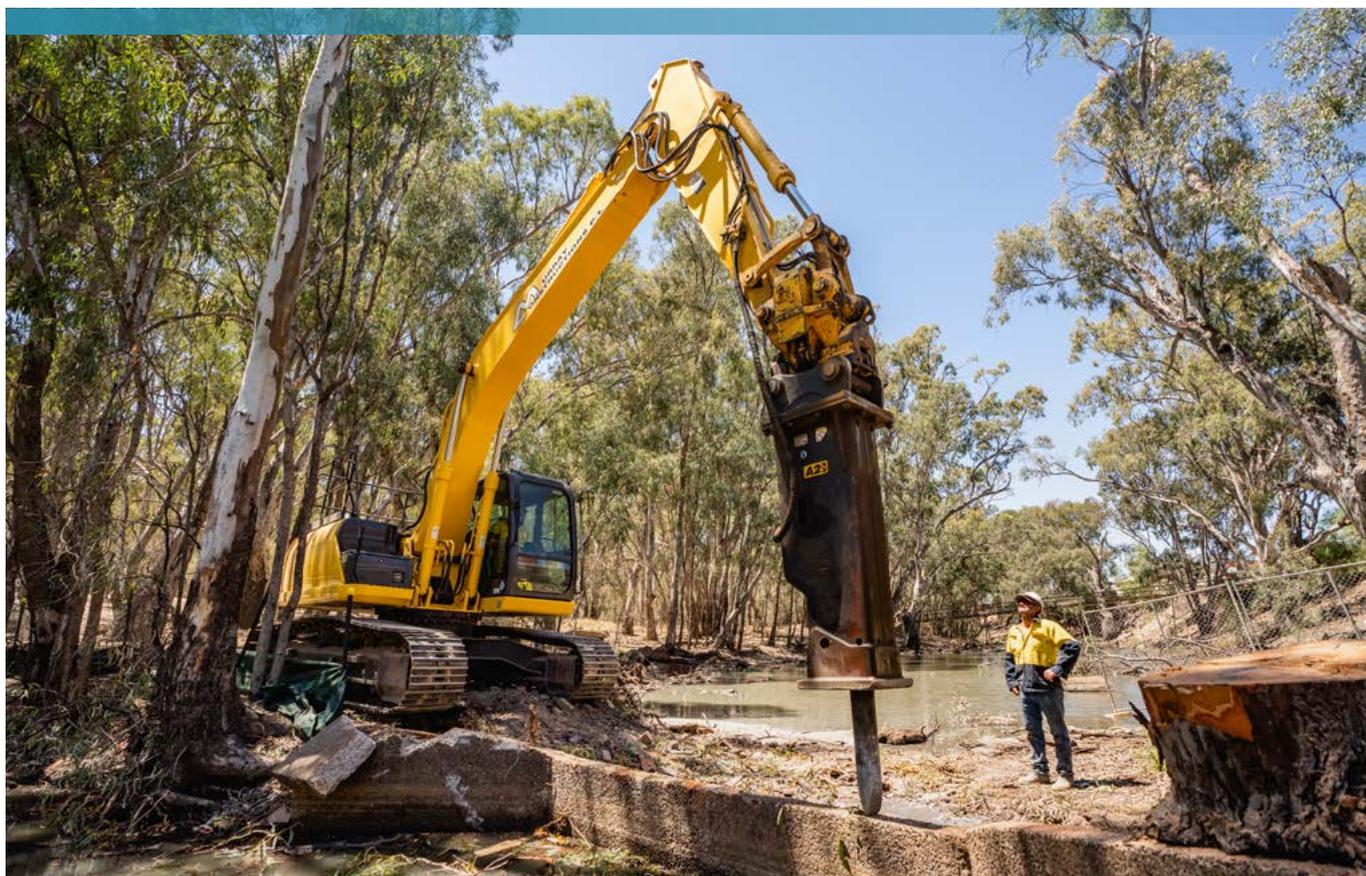
Agriculture

The Edward River Council Agribusiness Master Plan is the Council's agreed pathway forward and should be implemented as a priority. It notes that there are already pockets of innovation in the region and producers broadening the range of products grown in the area, for example, carrots, potatoes for Smiths chips and a growing dairy industry.

1. Edward River Council to implement the Agribusiness Master Plan as a priority:
 - Switch to or adjust enterprises with a higher return per mg of water or less water intensive / reliant enterprises
 - Produce premium, higher value, customised products through genetics, grading, branding, marketing, etc.
 - Adoption of closed-loop and direct-to-customer marketing and value chain models
 - Provide opportunities for value-adding and processing within the region

- Encourage carbon farming or other environmental initiatives
 - Include agritourism ideas in the tourism strategy
 - On-farm value-adding and small-scale farming.
2. Edward River Council to immediately form an agriculture advisory group to assist with the implementation of the Agribusiness Master Plan and advise on other relevant opportunities and issues.
 3. Edward River Council to consider strategic alliance opportunities with existing manufacturers (eg. SunRice) and local freight providers and facilities and establish a freight hub linking it to Melbourne and to Parkes' Inland Rail hub.

Noting that economic diversification and development is related to openness and connectedness - this is discussed below in Open and Connected.



Enabler 2: Economically Diverse - continued

Opportunities for innovation or transformation

The Agribusiness Master Plan includes big ideas for transformative change such as feedlots and switching, or making adjustment, to crops. However, there are opportunities in other sectors that can be further explored which could be part of a step change and included in the review of the current Economic Development Strategy.

- Actively encourage new and non-traditional businesses such as:
 - Call centres – many regional areas have been successful in establishing call centres. The Commonwealth Bank has recently reduced branch opening times in Deniliquin and allocated staff to other tasks. This could be an opportunity to put a CBA call centre in the area.
 - Manufacturing – to support agribusiness or industry in the regions. For example, the Edward River region is rich in cereal and oilseed cropping and has an abundant supply to establish a successful stock feed manufacturer (or manufacturers) to service the proposed growing dairy and feedlot sector.
 - Speciality food and high-end dining – Mildura is an example of a food travel destination and Brae in Victoria is an example of high-end dining and accommodation that Deniliquin could look at as models to adapt. Consider the Farmers Daughter dining experience in Collins St Melbourne where all the food is sourced from Gippsland. The same model could be created for the Edward River Council area with an established innovative food and beverage entrepreneur.
 - Large scale developments – for example Gerry Harvey recently invested in a large, aged care residential tower in Dubbo.
 - Special Activation Precinct (SAP) – the Wagga SAP ‘capitalises on the Inland Rail Project, bringing manufacturing, agribusiness, and freight and logistics to Wagga Wagga’. Edward River Council could look at ways to better connect to this SAP or advocate to be considered as a standalone SAP.

Enabler 2: Economically Diverse - continued

Tourism and Transport – Recommendations

Tourism

1. Building on existing initiatives, Edward River Council to continue to market the region and implement tourism strategies working in conjunction with tourism operators, businesses, and First Nations representatives.
2. Consider seeking external funding to support recovery from the impact of COVID and build tourism promotion in the region.
3. Incorporate eco-tourism and local Indigenous culture as a strong value proposition and market differentiator for the region.



Shop Front Yarkuwa Indigenous Knowledge Centre, Deniliquin.

4. Continue to advocate to address issues associated with NSW Water dropping river heights.
5. Conduct a concise audit of the community's ecological, historical and Indigenous assets including the surrounding state parks. Determine what infrastructure is required and seek State and Federal Government funding. Investment could also be sought from philanthropic or corporate funders.
6. To support the above initiatives, ensure the Edward River Council brand positioning is relevant, contemporary, and fit for purpose.

Revitalising the CBD and Riverfront

1. Edward River Council to consider opportunities for the Deniliquin CBD and river frontage to better facilitate developments to revitalise the CBD and use the river frontage for dining, shopping, accommodation, and tourism.
2. Consider opportunities for higher density residential developments in the CBD area.
3. Edward River Council to encourage building owners to better maintain their buildings, including through incentives (for example, inclusion in publicity materials and Council events being booked in a variety of newly refurbished spaces) and further promotion of the existing Heritage Building grants.



Enabler 2: Economically Diverse - continued

Transport

1. Edward River Council to advocate to government to further upgrade the Deniliquin airport to attract more regional flights and private aviation providers to the region. Consider strategic alliances with Angel Flight, Royal Flying Doctor and other not-for-profit and commercial groups specifically to increase traffic flow and expenditure in the region.
2. Consider bespoke flight training and service opportunities and work with existing local businesses and entrepreneurs to create marketing opportunities.
3. Review opportunities to increase airport usage and create a 'product differentiator' to increase traffic.

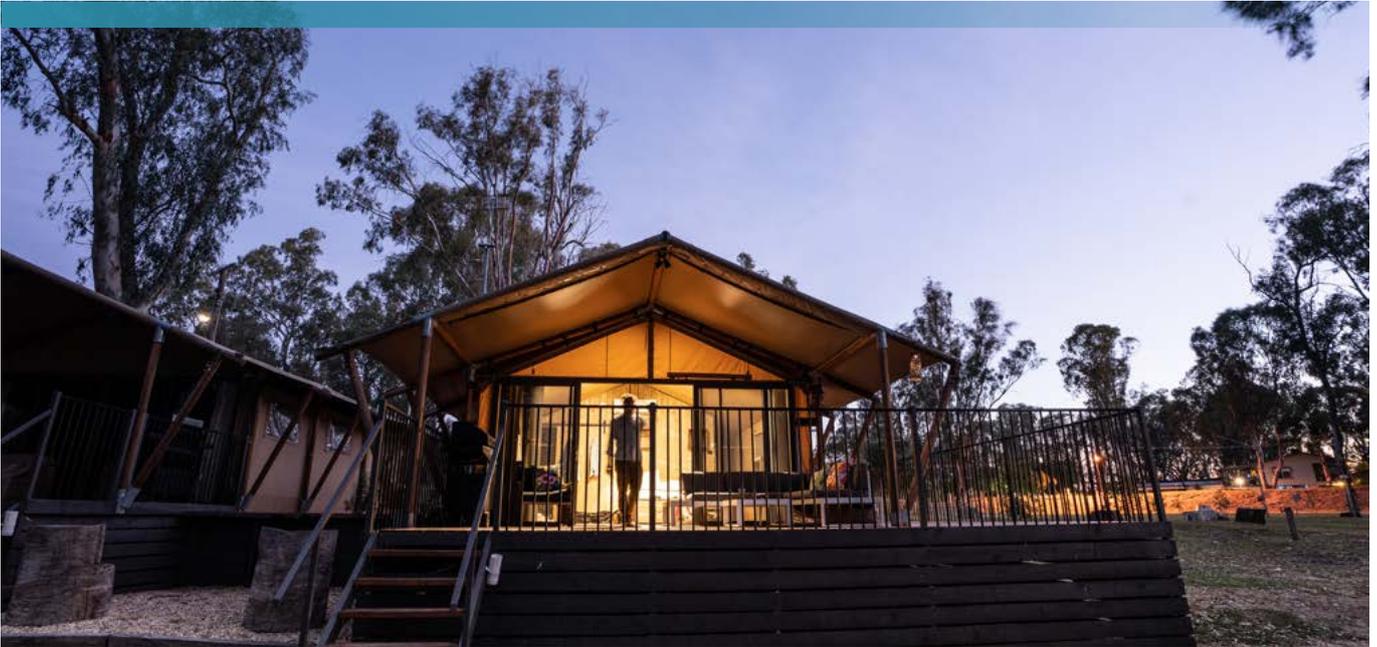


4. Edward River Council to advocate to the State government (Victoria and NSW) to improve rail services.
5. Edward River Council to increase road maintenance infrastructure, fix and expand footpaths and install better street lighting.

Natural Environment

1. Edward River Council to continue to strongly celebrate the natural environment of the area by promoting nature-based activities for residents and tourism.
2. Edward River Council to research opportunities for improved river 'experiences'.
3. Edward River Council to prevent damage to the natural environment caused by weeds and other pests.

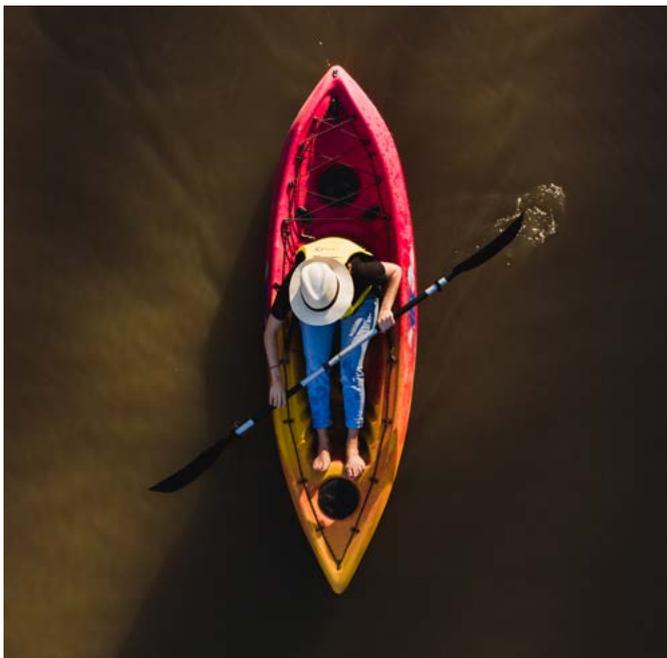




Enabler 2: Economically Diverse - continued

Opportunities for innovation or transformation

Vibrant communities are destinations that people want to visit, however, step changes in tourism are difficult to pursue. There are many examples of success in regional areas, for example the village of Derby in northeast Tasmania has become a 'mountain bike hub' with over 1000 visitors a month breathing life back into the region as well as sparking significant investment in retail, dining, and accommodation options. Read more about this example [here](#).



There are also examples of tourism and growth being driven by new people coming to town with a business idea or enterprise and an entrepreneurial spirit. They not only change their life for the better but also help build a community. A recent example of this can be found in this [ABC news story](#).

As transport improves, Deniliquin can look at options to replicate this kind of success with activities that align with its identity. These include:

- River based activities, kayak trails or a river precinct with a beach and aquatic park.
- Nature based tourism that could also include glamping, volunteer tourists who visit for weed and pest removal, Landcare or river restoration projects and cyclists.
- Agritourism such as farm stays, a 'wool precinct' (visitor centre), school groups and informal training / volunteering. Noting agritourism is discussed in the Agribusiness Master Plan.
- Short term stop-overs by creating more parking close to the CBD for long distance truck drivers and caravans.

In addition, creating more and higher quality accommodation options for visitors was frequently raised as an opportunity to attract more tourists to the area. Likewise, better dining facilities and some unique local food and dining options may appeal.

Enabler 2: Economically Diverse - continued

Supporting services – Recommendations

Housing

Sufficient and appropriate housing options will meet workforce needs but housing development also creates jobs and encourages growth.

Edward River Council to encourage housing development by improving consultation on land releases, making more land available, speeding up approvals and review charges to make land release and approvals cheaper.

Edward River Council to invite the new Regional Housing Taskforce to the region and seek grant funding for critical housing infrastructure for health, education and other essential government services.

Infrastructure and Council Services

Quality infrastructure and reliable Council services that meet the needs of residents underpin the economy.

1. Introduce kerbside recycling if budget allows.
2. Ensure road and footpath maintenance meets community expectations.
3. Continue to invest in the maintenance and improvement of community facilities.

Telecommunications

Telecommunications underpin economic development - simple.

1. Edward River Council to advocate for improved internet services and speeds in the region particularly in the villages and surrounding areas.
2. Edward River Council to seek further investment from State and Federal Governments in addressing mobile blackspots.

Energy

1. Edward River Council to explore renewable energy options including gas and energy from waste and seek advice from government about investment options.



Opportunities for innovation or transformation

The Edward River region experiences long periods of sunshine throughout the year which could make it appealing for solar energy projects – its renewable resources potential for solar is ‘medium’ according to Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO). However, Deniliquin is not on a major transmission line and the economics of solar is based on proximity to transmission lines. If a development is close to a transmission line it is likely to be profitable - as the distance from the line increases, the profitability declines.

Edward River Council could investigate whether decentralised energy opportunities are available that use local networks. A similar approach could be used regarding telecommunications. In some remote areas, small local businesses, with government assistance, have improved internet services and used local councils as anchor tenants. Careful consideration of this option is required as some commentary indicates that electricity, telecommunications and transport marginal costs are going to move towards zero and this could mean a decentralised network is a stranded and expensive asset.

Enabler 3: Skilled and Smart

(refer to Edward River Council Open and Active Model on page 15)

Recommendations

Economic development and diversification increase the need for skilled and qualified workers. Community feedback from businesses in Edward River Council indicates that there is currently a need for more skilled and qualified staff, particularly tradespeople and as growth occurs this need will increase.

Skills and Training – Recommendations

1. Edward River Council, with local businesses, to advocate for and develop a clear rationale for the local TAFE offering more courses that are relevant to the jobs required in the region.
2. Begin discussions to encourage Charles Sturt University to consider developing a campus in Deniliquin with a focus on agriculture.

Opportunities for innovation or transformation

Combining business investment and health services with education and training opportunities has been identified above. One step change opportunity for the region would be a university campus at Deniliquin. This is a long-term aspiration but would make a significant difference to the region if this could be achieved.

Education – Recommendations

High School

1. Edward River Council, with the school community, to develop a proposal for government to invest in the Deniliquin High School to upgrade the science labs, industrial arts/technology centre and hospitality room. Noting this is included in the Edward River Council Advocacy Strategy.
2. Edward River Council to seek advice from the Department of Education about Deniliquin High School being repositioned to a 'six-point school,' a state government classification that would provide further funding opportunities.
3. Edward River Council to develop support programs for staffing and filling staffing gaps for successful programs such as:
 - "Fish Park Project" - cross curricular learning
 - The knowledge-based relationship and learning initiative with the Yarkuwa Indigenous Knowledge Centre

- The Student Support Officer who assists the Indigenous student community and families.
- The Driver's Education Program.

Teachers

Although there are already incentives in place through the Department of Education to attract teachers to rural and remote schools, the community identified a need for further incentive programs.

1. Edward River Council to partner with Latrobe University and Charles Sturt University to develop an incentive program for graduating teachers to teach at the High School. This could include government subsidising university HECS fees in return for a commitment to three years teaching at the High School.

Opportunities for innovation or transformation

Due to the number of students travelling outside the region to school or attending boarding schools the community has raised the idea of a small private, contemporary high school opening in Deniliquin, or the existing Catholic system continuing to Year 12. This school would give parents an alternative option to the High School and attract students from outlying towns. This idea needs to be analysed and, if feasible, consulted on. This can be done by Edward River Council commissioning a business case or needs analysis for the potential for a new school.



Enabler 4: Open And Connected

(refer to Edward River Council Open and Active Model on page 15)

Recommendations

In addition to business connectivity through telecommunications and transport, social connectivity and community attitudes are critical to growth. Social connectivity covers issues such as caring for older people and people with a disability, supporting young people, arts and culture and events. Making the region a great place to live will also attract visitors and new residents which further strengthens growth.

Deniliquin's identity and social connections are founded on its history and heritage. Inevitably this will change, the important thing is that people are open to change and support each other on the way.

Connected – Recommendations

1. Edward River Council to consult more broadly when developing plans, business cases and implementing recommendations to ensure its work supports and assists older people and people with a disability. Noting that policies and frameworks are currently in place.
2. Edward River Council to continue to maintain and upgrade community facilities such as parks.
3. Edward River Council to consult with young people on what services (activities) they would like to see in the community. Consultation will include sporting and cultural pursuits.



Opportunities for innovation or transformation

There are opportunities to include young people in the revitalisation of the CBD and establish a youth centre (or PCYC) in the CBD using an underused or vacant building. This youth centre could be a place for informal use but can also be used for skills training and other programs. Edward River Council should explore grant opportunities for this kind of facility and potential partners.

Creating an open atmosphere that attracts new residents is a question of attitude and perseverance. Edward River Council could look at models such as a welcoming committee for new residents, a 'chief welcoming officer' or a councillor / group of councillors (along with an appointed volunteer group) who are tasked with welcoming new residents to help them settle in but also network them into the existing community and services. Having a dedicated resource for this task would not reduce the welcome that is already provided but it will ensure all information is provided and issues covered. This service is critical for inducting new doctors, health specialists, teachers and professionals, with their families, into the community so they feel welcomed and well supported.

There is also the opportunity for a cultural shift where the community takes responsibility to individually think proactively about what they can do to make the community more liveable, dynamic and more sustainable.

Arts, Culture and Events – Recommendations

1. Edward River Council to provide facilities for art displays and to encourage art classes. Arts meaning painting, music, writing, digital art and video, dance, performance and installations.
2. Edward River Council to work with First Nations peoples and groups in the region to identify the best way to celebrate stories and Culture through events and activities as well as planning and policy.
3. Edward River Council to continue to assist with funding or other support for existing events such as the Deni Ute Muster and movies at the Crossing and look for ways to expand these activities.



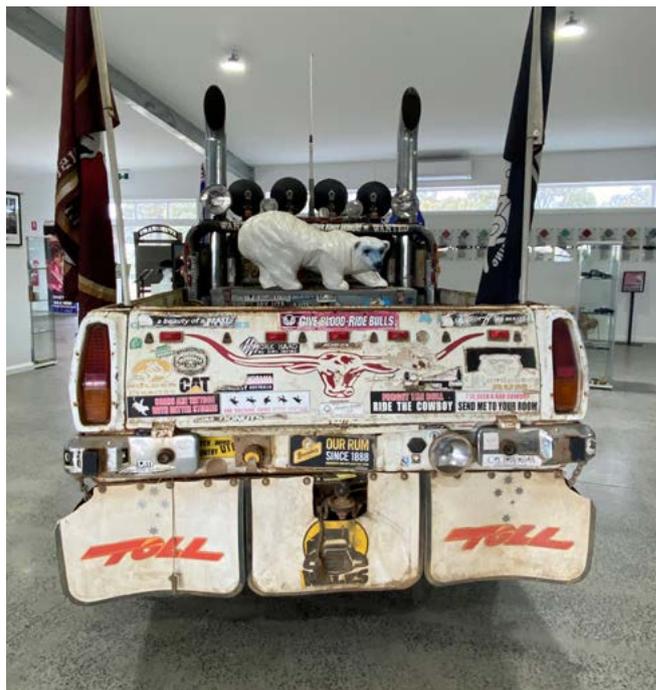
Opportunities for innovation or transformation

Expanding arts and cultural activities in regional areas is often driven by passionate individuals and creating a step change can be a challenge. There are opportunities in the Edward River region to create an art gallery, performance arts centre or museums in places like the Town Hall or churches (eg. Conargo). Edward River Council could consult with Regional Arts Australia and Regional Arts NSW on pathways for innovation in this sector.

In addition to physical spaces there are opportunities to tap into existing knowledge and events. For example, Cultural water and watering is an ancient practice but an emerging water type and management activity that could be a tourism or educational opportunity, or there may be opportunities to ‘export’ famous events like a Deni Ute Muster tour or having a Ute Muster in each state coordinated from Deniliquin.

Open and transparent – Recommendations

1. Implement a strategic and consistent communication approach to ensure the community understands why and where Council invests its time and the community's funds and the proposed return on investment for the community.
2. Regular face to face meetings in Deniliquin and the villages to encourage feedback and unity in an open and honest manner will assist the community to understand what the Council can and can't influence, and particularly where and how it is advocating for the community with state and federal governments and business.
3. Improve communication to ensure clarity in regard to decision making roles with Council to address concerns expressed regarding progress and decisions regarding development.



Leadership and Collaboration

Recommendations

It is critical that Edward River Council lead and collaborate, and that leadership comes from within the community.

This document outlines the vision and enablers of success. It is now time for people and groups to work together, with Edward River Council, to pursue growth and be open to opportunities to expand their level of ambition. Edward River Council should not see the enablers as separate entities, they need to be pursued together so momentum can be created, and success integrated into the existing system. The following model (Figure 5) has been designed exclusively for the Edward River Council community to navigate their leadership journey. It is designed for all aspects of Council's strategic thinking and way forward.

Collaboration

Edward River Council has demonstrated it is committed to actively pursuing strategies for a prosperous future. It has a professional team of staff to achieve this. Council now needs to commit to fostering a culture of collaborative advocacy because the community is telling us the actions of one sub-sector can positively impact the perception of the whole community.

Communication is also critical because without communication, advocacy cannot succeed. Communication will be with government, investors, service providers and potential new residents / groups who are needed in the region. Edward River Council needs to communicate and advocate alongside community leaders, groups and businesses and be united behind the shared long-term vision as well as share it with everyone they talk to.

Leadership and Collaboration Framework designed exclusively for Edward River Council and its community

Figure 5 Leadership and Collaboration Framework designed exclusively for Edward River Council and its community





Leadership. Leadership. Leadership.

The community has called for courageous leadership.

Edward River Council will lead effectively by listening to new ideas, acknowledging there are always improvements that can be made in the way they engage and operate, and share the vision for the future.

As a diverse region with so many businesses, services, organisations and advocates, Edward River Council will bring the community with it by showing how each significant decision relates to the shared strategy and communicate that to all stakeholders.

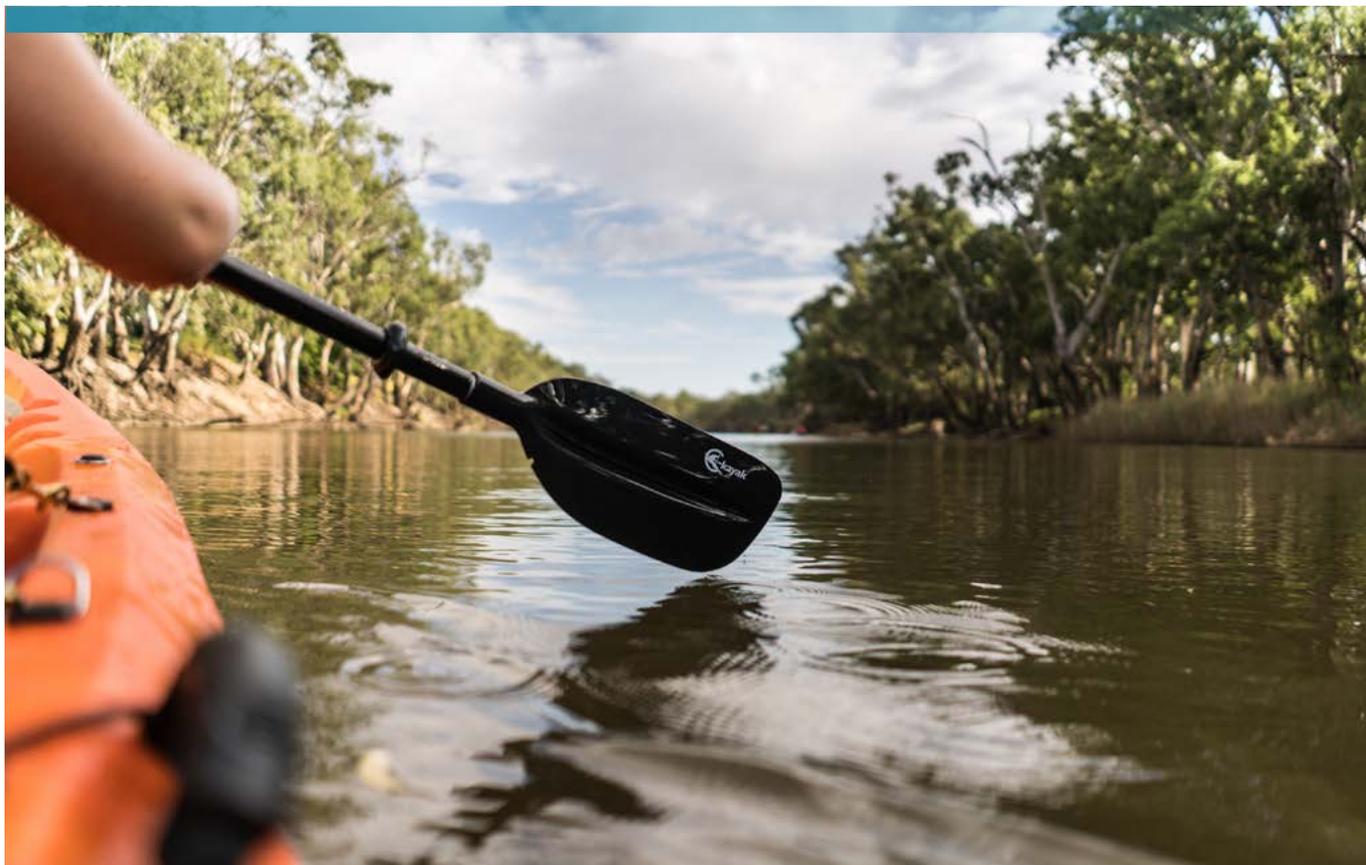
Leadership is important at all levels. There were some business leaders who provided anecdotal feedback stating that doing business with Council was at times difficult, time consuming and at worst, very challenging, which resulted in a negative impact on their business. It was apparent that expectation management, clarity of roles and responsibilities, skills and expertise, capability and capacity, attitude and accountability for outcomes are areas that require attention by Council leaders.

It is also important to note that the community also believes that many Council staff are meeting their expectations and there are staff who are continually identified as being very obliging and highly capable performers in their role, and a pleasure to do business with.

The importance of receiving a fair share of government funding

Edward River Council has recently secured significant state and federal government funding for a wide range of projects in the region. In the last four years more than \$31 million has been obtained for the following projects:

- CBD revitalisation
- Riverfront revitalisation
- Town Hall redevelopment (Regional Performance Space) and civic piazza
- Waring Gardens revitalisation
- Sporting precincts including:
 - Deni Rams – Facility redevelopment, playground
 - Memorial Park upgrades
 - Deni Sports Stadium
 - Blighty Netball & Tennis Clubrooms
 - Deniliquin Netball
 - Deniliquin Golf Club
 - Deniliquin Tennis Club
- Scott's Park Destination Playground
- Aerodrome (runway) upgrade
- Local Roads
- Rural Villages Beautification
- Deniliquin Swim Centre upgrades and new splash park
- Arts and Culture - Water Tower Art and ReUtilise Sculpture
- Wayfinding Signage
- North Deni Rest Stop



Leadership and Collaboration - continued

Continuing to secure both State and Federal Government funding is critical to growth and economic development, not just in terms of money invested but because developing and delivering new projects creates economic and social activity which builds community momentum. Edward River Council councillors will need to collaborate with local members of parliament to advocate for new projects as well as advocate directly to governments themselves and with partners.

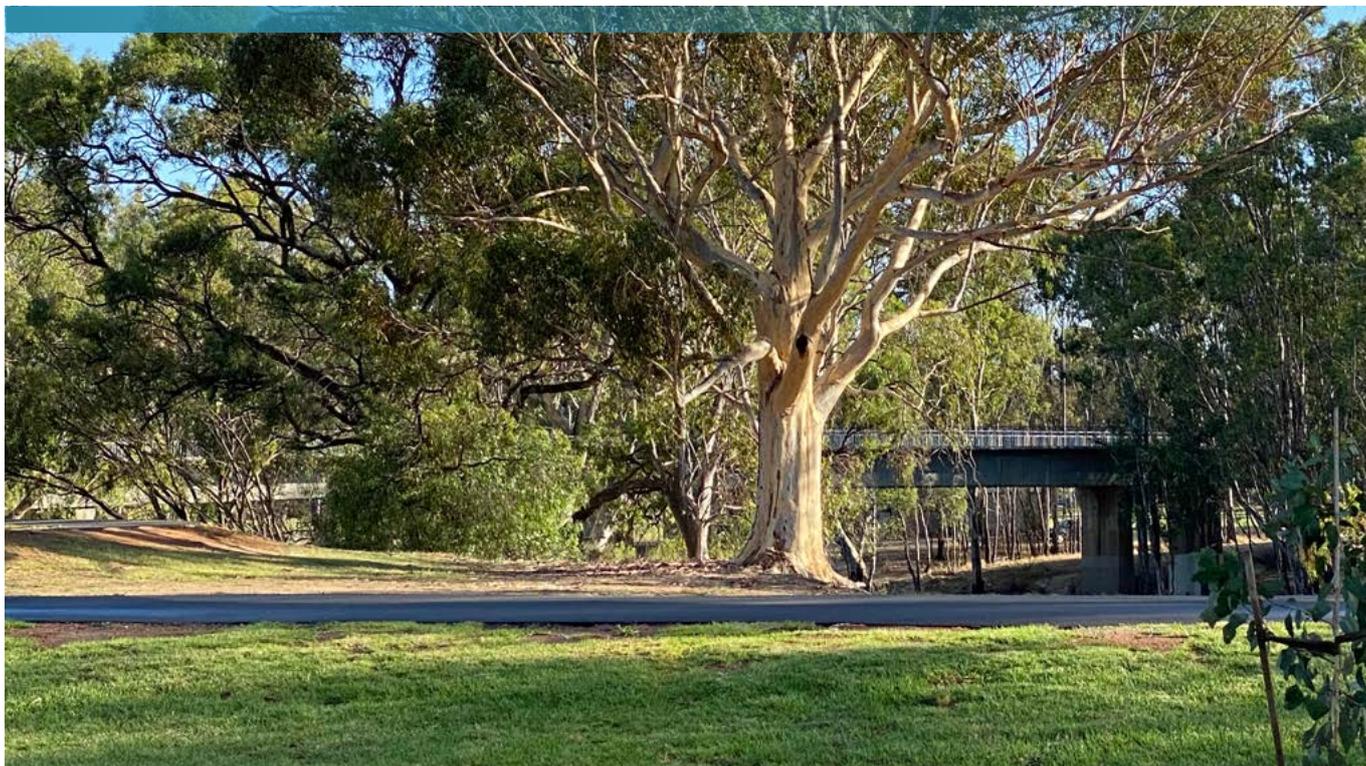
Importantly Edward River Council needs to be open to refining proposals and business cases based on advice from government, to having different scale funding proposals (ie. small, medium, large) and provide opportunities for government to celebrate successful projects with the community and the region.

The NSW Government has a 20-year Economic Vision for Regional NSW and has recently invested an additional \$300 million in the Regional Growth Fund, this fund includes a range of programs such as Stronger Country Communities Fund, Resources for Regions, the Regional Tourism Activation Fund, and the Regional Events Acceleration Fund. These programs and investment should be a priority for Edward River Council business cases and advocacy.

Additionally, Edward River Council should advocate local priorities such as health, education, agriculture, housing, transport and tourism to relevant Ministers and their Departments. Building relationships with these key people means business cases can be refined and ensures that government is aware of opportunities and challenges for the region when they are developing policies and programs.

The Federal Government also has a range of funding opportunities in the key areas of health, education, agriculture, housing, transport and tourism as well as grants programs. Grants programs include the Building Better Regions Fund which has both infrastructure and community investment streams. Wherever possible Edward River Council needs to collaborate with local members of parliament (Members and Senators) to make sure their voice is heard, and their priorities are understood. They also need to directly engage with relevant Ministers and decision makers to establish a case for investment in the Edward River Council region.

It is recommended that Edward River Council updates its Advocacy Strategy with an action plan that includes collaborating with local parliamentarians, government officials, partners and community leaders. The action plan should identify priority business cases and funding proposals at a range of scales (small, medium and large) across all priority areas.



Leadership and Collaboration - continued

Operational approach

As the Edward River Council moves towards a more dynamic, economically driven community with the goal of some 14,000 to 20,000 people by 2050, strong leadership will be required to manage the process and meet the goals. Figure 6 outlines an operational approach that will ensure that the overall strategy is supported by an appropriate resource strategy, operational plan and delivery program that are regularly reviewed.

It is recommended that the existing range of Council plans be consolidated into one overarching 'Open for Business' framework and plan which will have five-year and ten-year targets leading up to 2050, with specific milestones and budget allocations. Sourcing ongoing State and Federal Government grants will be critical to assist Council to fulfil its vision and goals. Tight fiscal management with a consolidation of expenditure will also be required to ensure all expenditure is directed towards achieving the overarching strategy.

A key to success will be ongoing and meaningful engagement with the community. Keeping the community informed, collaborating with the community, and drawing on the skills and expertise of key residents will benefit everyone.

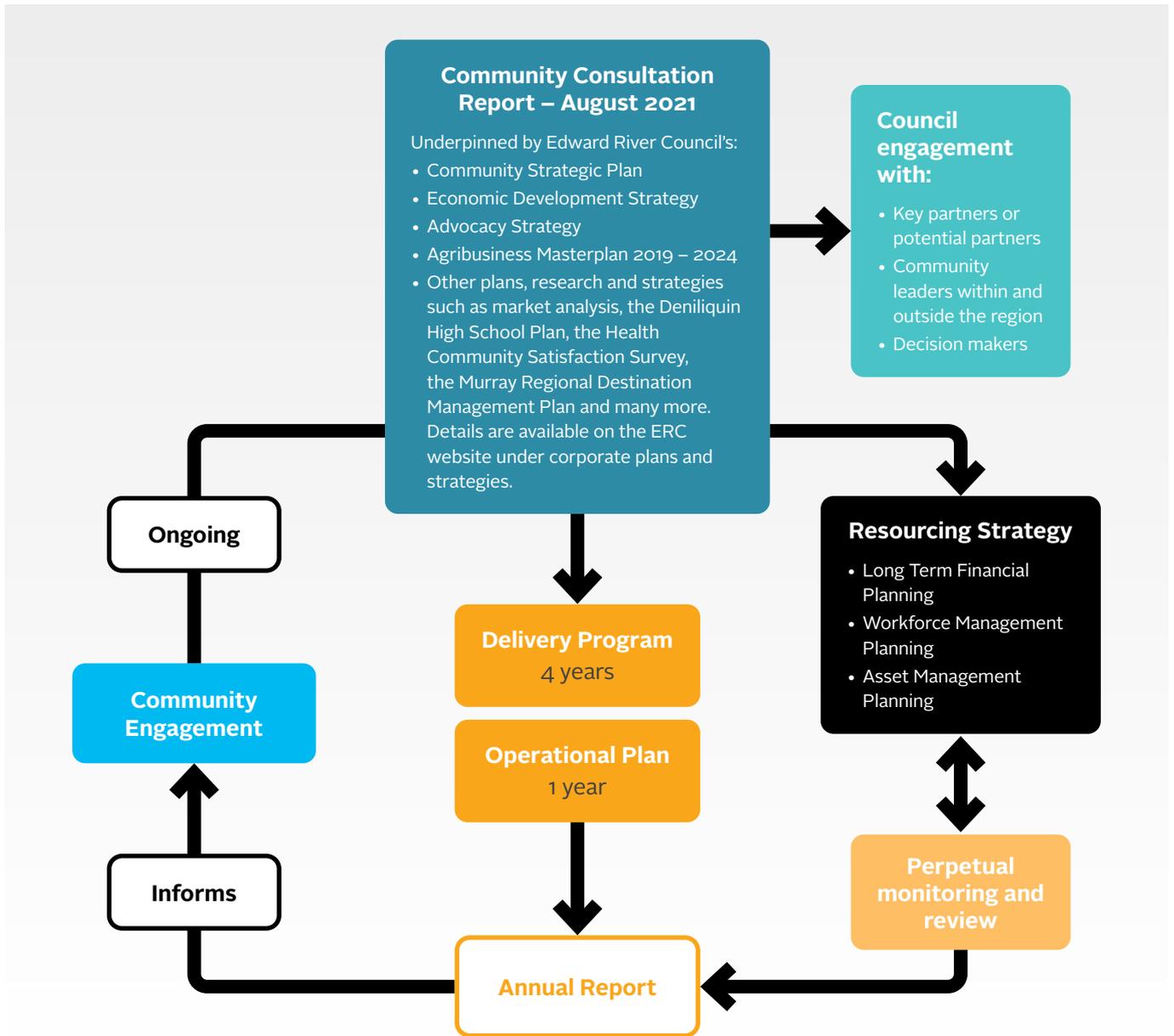
It will bring the community together working towards, and contributing to, a shared, long-term vision.

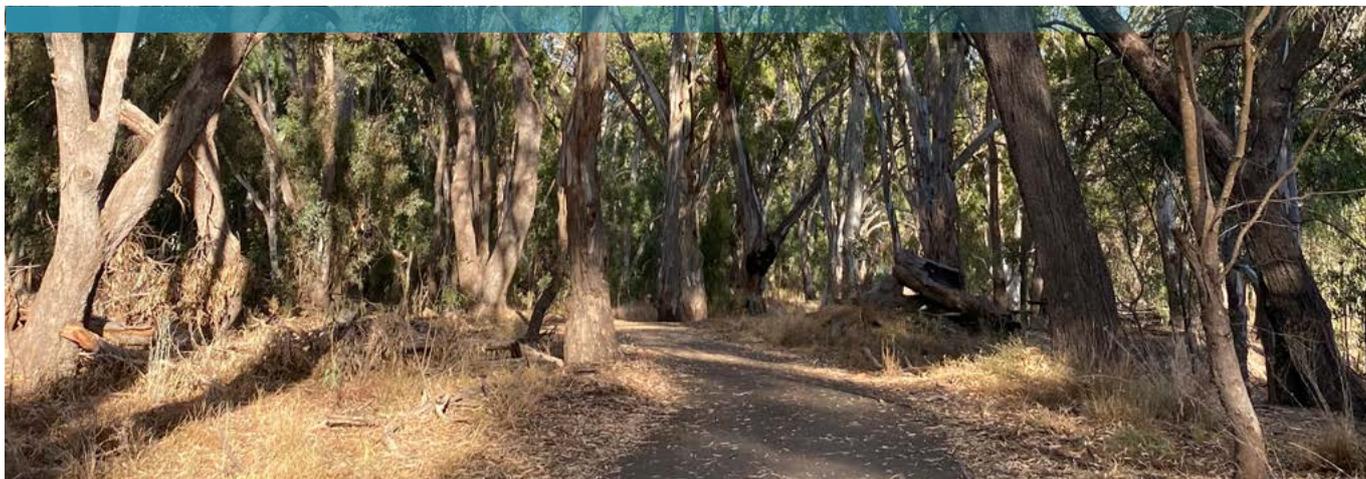
Leadership and Collaboration – Recommendations

1. Consolidate Council plans into one overarching 'Open for Business' plan which will have five-year and ten-year targets leading up to 2050, with specific milestones and budget allocations
2. Demonstrate and communicate a focussed, energised and disciplined advocacy approach when working with state and federal governments as well as with business leaders and corporate enterprises.
3. Unite the community by engaging further with key community leaders and people with relevant expertise to.
4. Update existing Advocacy Strategy with an Action Plan which prioritises business cases and finding opportunities.

Edward River Council's New Open for Business Framework and Plan

Figure 6 Edward River Council's New Open for Business Framework and Plan





Summary of key insights

This consultation process was also designed to answer the following questions. These questions have been addressed throughout this report and this section provides a concise summary of the answers from the community.

What does our community value?

The Edward River Council community values its people and its natural environment – rivers, creeks and national parks as well as the parks, playgrounds and open spaces. The community also values the lifestyle and life / work balance they enjoy in the region and appreciate the sense of community. Many residents believe they are fortunate to live in the area and many are loyal and committed to their town or village. The community values its history and achievements and takes pride in its agribusiness sector and entrepreneurial spirit. It values its resilience, integrity and the ‘way of life’ that the community has enjoyed for many years.

As a community, what are our strengths?

Many people in the region are actively involved in the community, are long-term residents and care about the future of the area. There is a sense of history, pride in the agricultural success in the region and there is an interest in, and appreciation of, the culture and the history of the traditional Indigenous owners of the land.

There is also a strong team of volunteers in the community who make things happen by running the many community sporting clubs, cultural groups, natural resource management groups, health advocacy organisations and more.

There is a strong emotional and financial investment in the community from many rate payers and residents and importantly many people in the community are thinking about the region's future and are ready to move forward. There is a consensus that leadership and collaboration can be the foundation for growth.

What could be improved?

Access to better health services is the critical issue that would improve life in the region for many residents, encourage them to stay and attract others. There is also room for improvement in the educational options offered at a secondary and tertiary level, and there is a significant opportunity to improve retail and dining options and attract other new and diverse entrepreneurs and businesses to the region. There is a strong emphasis on capitalising on agriculture culture i.e., value adding on the products grown in the region, as well as encouraging industrial business and manufacturing to the region. There are many concerns and frustrations that the community wanted to express during this consultation, but the most significant opportunity is to unify the community behind a strong vision for the future and effective leadership.

Summary of key insights - continued

Where does the community see the Edward River region in 10 years?

The community feedback demonstrated an understanding that there are changes needed to ensure a prosperous future for the region. There is a concern that without a concerted effort to improve access to health and education, and to create business, manufacturing and employment opportunities, the population of the region may decline, and this will impact on its future. The community wants a prosperous economy and a thriving community with the facilities and services in place that will encourage people of all ages to stay in the area, and others to move to the region. The community wants to maintain and improve their 'way of life' and be able to offer locals and visitors interesting employment, contemporary retail and dining options and access to well-maintained parks, cultural and arts activities, recreational facilities and natural spaces.

What opportunities would the community like to see pursued?

Feedback from the community highlighted the importance of access to quality health care and education and the community wants Council to continue to advocate to improve these services. The community would also like to see thriving businesses, more diversity in retail and dining and a strong growing agribusiness sector. The community would like to see Council encourage and facilitate business growth, the development of more housing and the creation of additional facilities for young people, people with disability and older people. Good telecommunications throughout the whole region is also critical. The community would like to see capable, committed forward Councillors in place and nimble, accountable, and proactive Council staff.

What does Council do well?

Edward River Council's work to build and maintain new facilities and upgrade existing facilities such as the parks, recreational grounds, streetscape, and walking paths are acknowledged and appreciated by much of the community. There have been many significant projects undertaken in recent years and this is viewed very positively by the community. The community is particularly happy with the parks and outdoor facilities offered by Council in the region.

The library services are well received by the community and most residents feel Council provides good customer service and maintains community facilities well.

Positive feedback was also received in relation to Council staff and specific Council initiatives and events.

What could be done better?

The community is calling on Council to take a stronger, more effective leadership role to advocate for the services and facilities needed to enable it to grow. It is looking to Council to proactively facilitate development and new business opportunities in the region. In essence, the community wants to see Council be a strong leader.

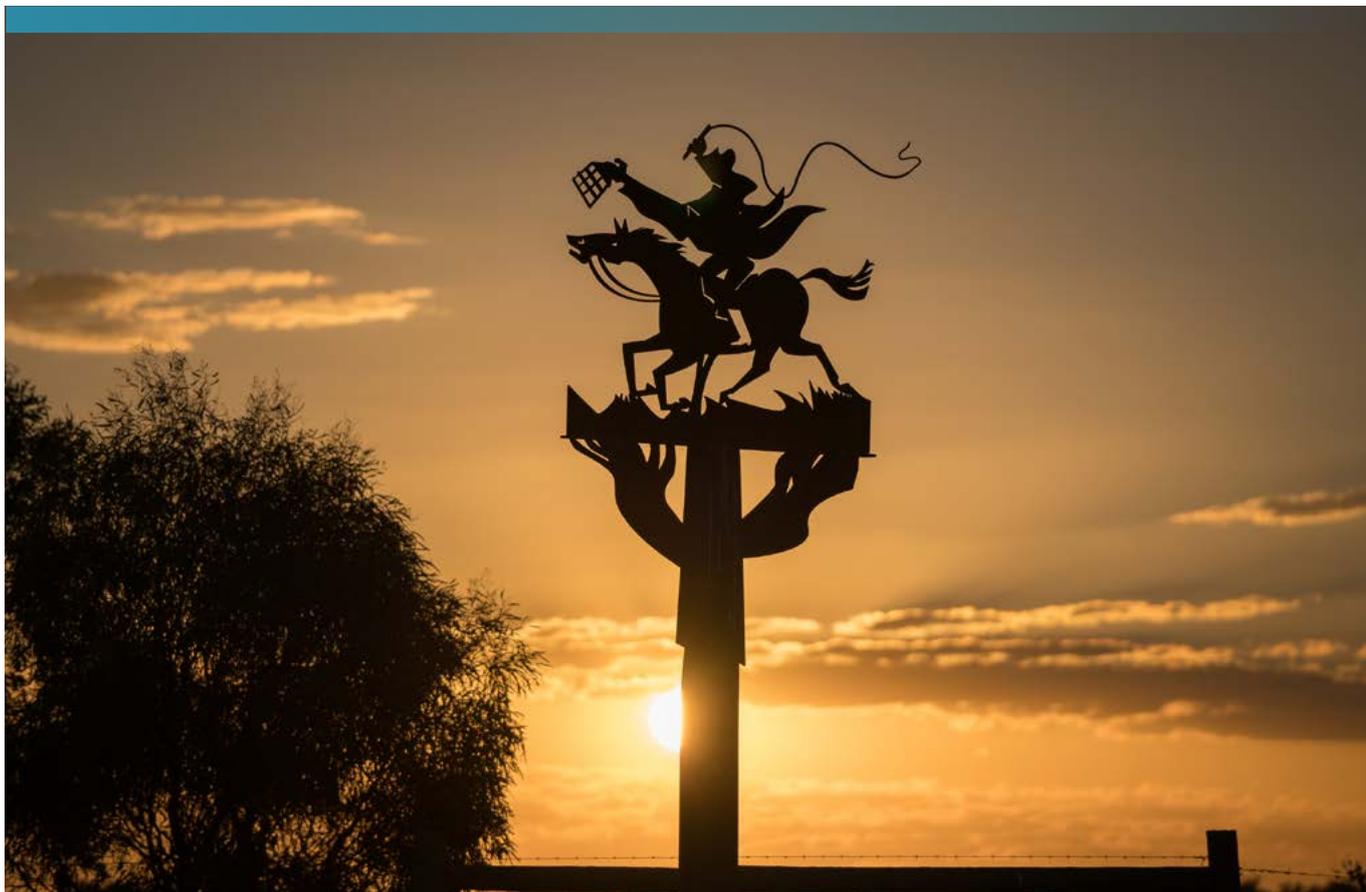
Kerbside recycling, the maintenance of roads, the protection of the natural environment, and the provision of facilities for older people, people with disability and young people are all topical issues that the community would like to see Council act on.

What were the strengths and weaknesses of the Community Strategic Plan 2018-2030?

The existing Community Strategic Plan is still relevant to the community. Many of the opportunities and challenges have not changed but there is an increased sense of urgency in relation to the delivery of many elements of this Plan. There is also a need to recognise that without strategic action the population of the region is expected to decline over the next 25 years. To drive a vibrant and prosperous future for the region there is the need for the Community Plan to focus more on the opportunities that will help it maintain and build its population and economy.

The Community Strategic Plan needs a clear operation plan and progress on the plan needs to be shared more fully with the community.

The Plan's weakness potentially lies in the challenges of delivering the outcomes within the existing Council resources. For this reason, drawing further on the expertise and skills within the community, particularly those with specialist areas of interest, could assist in the successful delivery of the Community Plan as could engaging staff members and Councillors further in advocacy projects, grant-writing and political lobbying.



Next steps

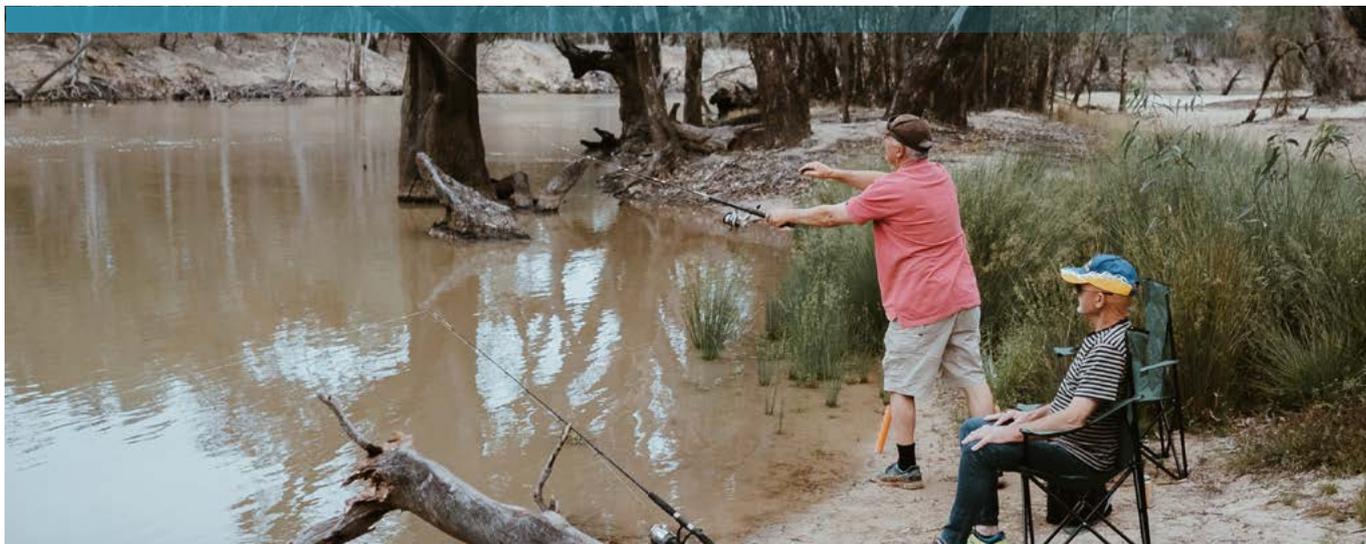
This report outlines extensive feedback from the community on an enormous range of issues. It also includes recommendations for Council to consider in the development of its next Community Strategic Plan. These recommendations primarily focus on addressing the issue of growth, development, and community confidence in the future.

Some of the issues raised in this report such as health and education are the responsibility of state and federal governments and Council cannot be responsible for solving these issues on its own, however the community is looking to Council to be a catalyst to engage other levels of government in the issues. Council can't solve the problems but does need to demonstrate leadership to bring the community together and unite them behind a common vision.

Other concerns raised are direct Council responsibilities and it is important for Council to act and demonstrate that it has listened to the community feedback received. There are some actions that can be considered and addressed in the short term even before the next Community Strategic Plan is prepared.

Over-consultation and failure to act on the feedback received is often a frustration amongst rural communities. It is critical that when the next Community Strategic Plan is developed it is communicated effectively and broadly across the region and the community is brought 'on the journey' and feels some ownership of the plan.

As discussed at the beginning of this report, the population of the Edward River Council area has remained relatively steady over the previous 20 years. An important question is the region's population trajectory and growth targets. This question must be answered as Council plans for the next 10 years and beyond. It will determine the focus of the strategy and help direct and clarify the planning process.



Next steps - continued

It is also important for Council to consider the broader global context in the planning process. Amongst others, the global scale trends that will impact the local planning process include:

- The rise of Asian markets and economies which will influence the region's agribusiness opportunities
- Demographic and social change which highlights the importance of improved social infrastructure – housing, health, education
- Digital disruption which means ensuring effective internet in villages so that the whole of Edward River Council region is connected
- Climate change which clearly impacts the agribusiness sector.

This report includes key themes, and these themes can be used to help determine and structure Council's planning priorities.

These themes include the key enablers identified in the recommendations:

- Economically Diverse - the community raised several areas where opportunities exist for economic diversification and development including business and agribusiness, hospitality, tourism and transport and support services. This diversity will build jobs and business opportunities.
- Skilled and Smart - economic development and diversification increases the need for skilled and qualified workers, and therefore better education and training opportunities in the region.

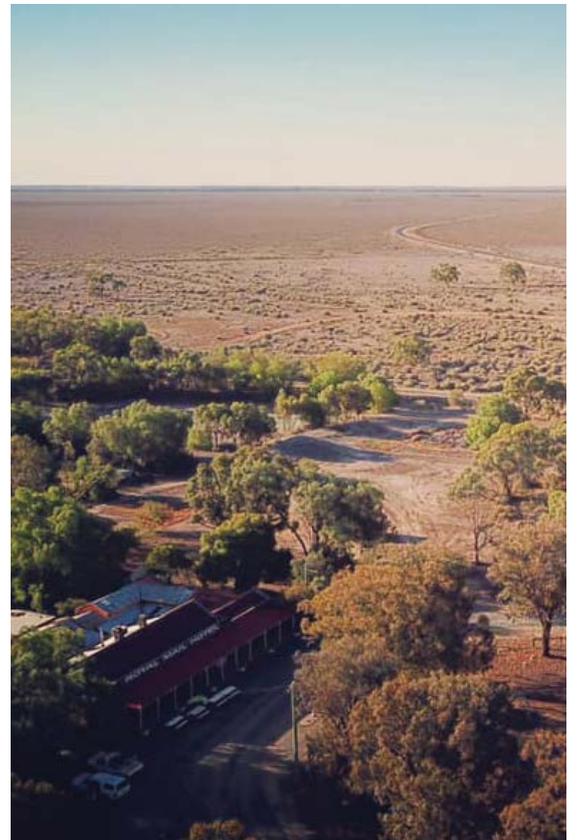
- Open and Connected - in addition to business connectivity through telecommunications and transport, social connectivity and community attitudes are critical to growth. Social connectivity covers issues such as caring for older people and people with a disability, supporting young people, arts and culture and events. Making the region a great place to live will also attract visitors and new residents which further strengthens growth.
- Healthy – delivering recommendations in this space will mean the Edward River Council region can keep its people healthy, grow health services and encourage people of all ages to stay in the region.

These enablers are supported by leadership and collaboration which is critical to success and equally important is a focus on achieving a fair share of government funding.

The community consultation process showed that the community is ready to embrace its future – to build on its strengths, actively address needs and gaps and move forward with optimism.

With effective leadership and collaboration, there are a host of opportunities that the Edward River Council can take advantage of and develop to make the region an even better place to live, work and play.

Edward River Council Villages



PART 2

COMMUNITY

FEEDBACK

The community consultation section of this report includes comments, opinions, suggestions, and ideas proposed by the community during the consultation period. This section of the report provides the details, the context and the 'colour' to explain the recommendations that have been made, plus it provides details on community perceptions and opinions on a broad range of issues.

Direct quotes from consultation participants have been included. These are anonymous for privacy but are quotes taken from interview transcripts or the online survey.

These comments are a snapshot of the views presented but have been selected because they represent the views of many people Seftons spoke with, or because they add a relevant personal perspective to the issue being discussed.

The community comments are a critical part of this report and are essential reading to understand the views of the community. These comments are often 'spoken from the heart' and it is acknowledged that they may not always be fully factually correct.

Some of these issues raised by the community have not been incorporated into the long-term planning outlined in the Recommendations section of the report. This could be because the activity is already underway or because it was not considered to be a pressing priority.



Consultation strategy

APPROACH

The Seftons community engagement approach was aligned with the Edward River Council’s Community Engagement Policy.

The policy recognises that community engagement and participation processes are a vital part of local democracy. It aims to strengthen trust between Council and the community and build confidence in Council’s ability to plan and make decisions that will respond to the present and future needs of the community.

Effective community engagement seeks to involve the community in decisions which affect them. It is critical in the successful development and implementation of acceptable policies, decisions, and strategic planning. It enables Council to improve its services by being responsive to the needs of the community.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MATRIX

The Seftons community engagement approach mirrors the five levels of public participation outlined in Edward River Council’s Community Engagement Matrix, as follows:

 INFORM	 CONSULT	 INVOLVE	 COLLABORATIVE	 EMPOWER
<p>Public Participation Goal:</p> <p>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.</p>	<p>Public Participation Goal:</p> <p>To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.</p>	<p>Public Participation Goal:</p> <p>To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.</p>	<p>Public Participation Goal:</p> <p>To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.</p>	<p>Public Participation Goal:</p> <p>To place final decision making in the hands of the public.</p>

PROMOTION

The consultation process was well publicised to ensure maximum participation within the timeframe. The theme of the consultation was ‘Our Region, Your Say’ and Seftons provided artwork to ensure a consistent look for all invitations, advertising, and other collateral material (see Appendices 1, 2 and 3 for examples of promotional materials).

In addition to advertising and direct communication, the Edward River Council Facebook page was used to promote the events, and media releases were prepared for key local media outlets.

Consultation methodology

The consultation period ran for six weeks from 21 June to 30 July 2021. The focus of the consultation period was the two weeks that the consultation facilitator, Robbie Sefton, spent in the local government area. Being present in the community for two full weeks allowed time for a significant amount of in-person consultation both in a group environment and individually. Additional consultation was conducted online and via phone and details are outlined below.

ONLINE SURVEY

An online survey hosted by Survey Monkey and available via the Edward River Council website was open from Wednesday 23 June until Monday 19 July. Paper copies of the survey were made available via meetings and the drop-in centre so that people who were more comfortable completing the survey on paper were able to participate. These hard-copy survey responses were entered into Survey Monkey so that the Survey Monkey results reflect all responses received to the survey.

In total, 161 survey responses were received. 78% of the online survey respondents were from Deniliquin with small numbers of people identifying themselves as coming from each of the villages in the region.

DROP-IN SESSIONS

Five days of drop-in sessions were held at a key location in Deniliquin across two weeks of the consultation period. Robbie Sefton was based at Project HQ in Napier St Deniliquin for the two weeks. For three hours per day on five days of the two weeks, residents were encouraged to drop in without an appointment to share their views.

Over the five days, some 25 people dropped into Project HQ to participate in the consultation process. Robbie was based at Project HQ for much of the time she was in the area and many planned interviews were also held at this location.

Residents were informed about the opportunity to 'drop in' via:

- Direct email sent by Seftons to 201 people on a Council database (Appendix 1)
- Messages on Council's social media platform
- A sign located outside Project HQ (Appendix 2)
- A full-page advertisement in the Pastoral Times (Appendix 3)
- Regular mentions on the local radio station.

ONE ON ONE MEETINGS

Key community and business leaders were identified and personally emailed invitations to participate in the consultation process.

As a response to personal invitations 34 people met in person with Robbie Sefton over the two-week period.

Not everyone was available to meet in person during those two weeks. A further six telephone interviews were conducted during the consultation period. This included telephone meetings with state and federal government members.

COMMUNITY MEETINGS

To maximise the number of people in the community reached in person, Robbie Sefton presented at several business and community meetings held in the two-week period. Some of the meetings were organised specifically for the purpose of the consultation and others were existing meetings that Robbie attended. These meetings provided an opportunity to promote the consultation program but also to receive feedback and input directly.

The following meetings were convened for the purpose of the consultation:

- Outdoor Council staff on Monday 21 June (approx. 40 attendees)
- Indoor Council staff on Wednesday 7 July (approx. 15 attendees)
- Councillors on Thursday 8 July
- Dairy farmers meet-up on Thursday 8 July (8 attendees).

The following meetings were already planned, and the consultation formed part of the meeting agenda:

- Deniliquin Business Chamber on Tuesday 22 June (approx. 30 attendees)
- Deniliquin Developers' Forum on Wednesday 23 June (43 attendees).

VILLAGE MEETINGS

Community meetings were held in the evenings in the following villages in the district:

- Pretty Pine
- Booroorban
- Conargo
- Blighty (including representatives from Mayrung)
- Wanganella.

These meetings were all held at the local community hall, pub or café and organised in conjunction with the local venue owner. In Conargo, a key community leader also obtained written feedback from the community at an event being held at the local hall prior to the community meeting. Five people provided feedback via this event.

The following numbers of people attended these village sessions:

- Pretty Pine – 25
- Booroorban – 13
- Conargo – 9
- Blighty – 7
- Wanganella - 13

Close to 450 people participated in the consultation process via the various meetings, drop-in sessions, and the online survey. The male / female split of the participants was even and there was reasonable diversity in the range of age groups participating. The one age group that is not as well represented as others is the 18 to 30-year-olds, despite specific efforts to engage with this group.

Community feedback

Community priorities

Overall, based on the consultation conducted, health, education and employment were clearly identified as the key critical issues that are important to the Edward River Council area community. This was evident in the online survey results (see Figure 7) but was also reflected in the feedback provided in the personal interviews and meetings.

Access to quality **health care, education and employment** options were repeatedly highlighted by interviewees as key priorities. However, health was the clear first priority with 52% of respondents in the online survey ranking this as their number one priority, compared to the second highest response with 20% ranking employment opportunities as their first priority. Issues with access to health care were also regularly raised in personal interviews and often evoked an emotional response.

Health and education are the responsibility of state government and Council cannot be responsible for solving these issues on its own, however the community is looking to Council to be a catalyst to engage other levels of government in the issue. Council can't solve the problems but does need to demonstrate leadership to bring the community together and unite them behind a common vision.

Other more immediate and specific concerns that the community has highlighted are **road maintenance, the need for kerbside recycling and the importance of attracting businesses and visitors** to the area.

Respondents to the online survey made it clear that the lifestyle offered in the region, the natural environment, and the sense of community, along with proximity to family and friends, are key elements of life in the region that they value and appreciate (see Figure 8).

There is a sense of pride in the natural environment and beautiful surroundings, and a feeling that these could be better utilised to improve the lifestyle in the region and attract more visitors.

Very few people believed that a lower cost of living or more affordable housing was a benefit of living in the area.

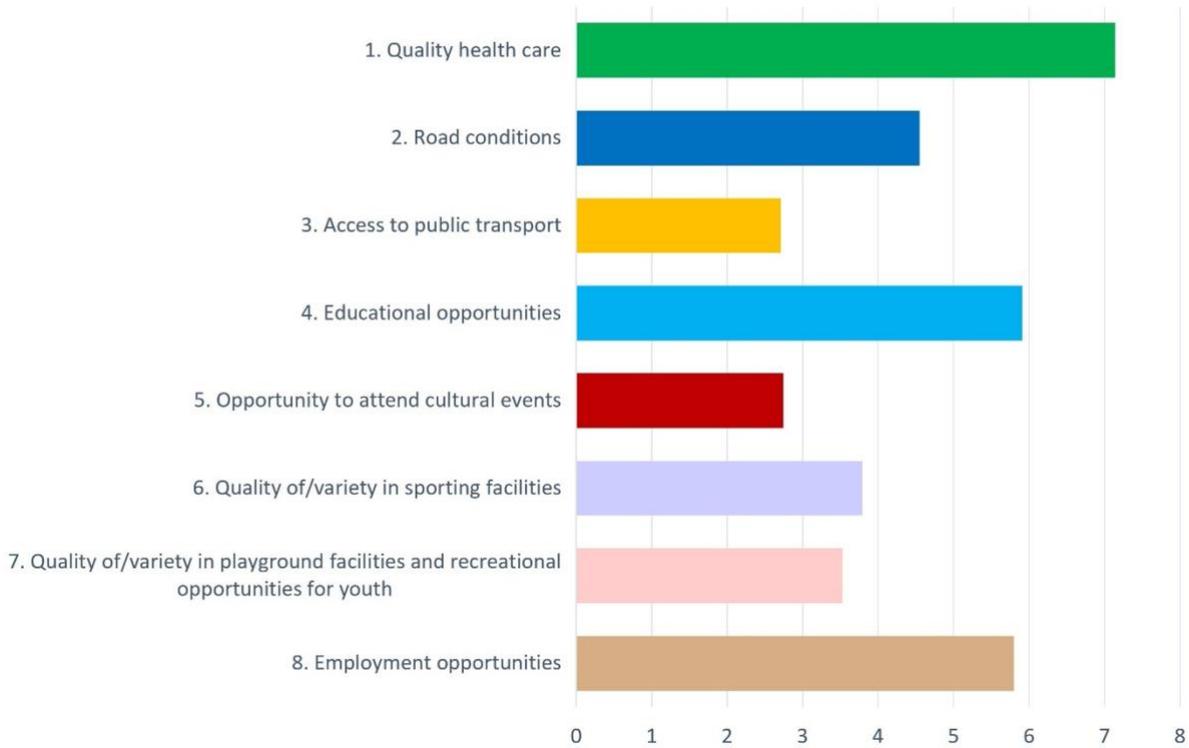
Community comments

- *“But they’re building this senior centre. No one is going to move in there if you can’t get into a doctor. And then no one is going to come and fill the houses they vacate with families if they’re not happy with the education they’re going to get.” – personal interview*
- *“I would like to see a commitment – to me, health and education are too important to be put into the political cycle. I think that there needs to be a standalone body with continuity that runs the infrastructure for medicine and education, and that sets the standards and oversees the management of health and education.” – personal interview*
- *“I want opportunities for my kids so they don't have to leave, or they can come back and be whatever they want to be ie. a plumber, a dietitian or whatever skill that is relevant for this community. We need to offer opportunities for kids.” – personal interview*
- *“We need to capitalise on our natural resources and beautiful surroundings.”- personal interview*

Figure 7

Q2 Rank in order of importance to you.

Answered: 157 Skipped: 4



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	TOTAL	SCORE
1. Quality health care	57.79% 89	21.43% 33	11.04% 17	3.25% 5	2.60% 4	1.30% 2	1.95% 3	0.65% 1	154	7.14
2. Road conditions	5.26% 8	19.08% 29	11.18% 17	15.13% 23	15.13% 23	13.82% 21	14.47% 22	5.92% 9	152	4.55
3. Access to public transport	1.35% 2	1.35% 2	6.08% 9	10.81% 16	10.81% 16	12.84% 19	21.62% 32	35.14% 52	148	2.71
4. Educational opportunities	12.50% 19	26.97% 41	24.34% 37	21.05% 32	7.89% 12	5.26% 8	1.32% 2	0.66% 1	152	5.91
5. Opportunity to attend cultural events	1.32% 2	1.97% 3	6.58% 10	9.21% 14	9.21% 14	17.76% 27	19.74% 30	34.21% 52	152	2.74
6. Quality of/variety in sporting facilities	2.60% 4	5.19% 8	7.79% 12	16.23% 25	20.78% 32	24.03% 37	14.94% 23	8.44% 13	154	3.79
7. Quality of/variety in playground facilities and recreational opportunities for youth	0.00% 0	2.68% 4	10.74% 16	12.75% 19	25.50% 38	16.78% 25	22.15% 33	9.40% 14	149	3.53
8. Employment opportunities	20.92% 32	21.57% 33	23.53% 36	11.76% 18	7.19% 11	7.19% 11	3.27% 5	4.58% 7	153	5.80

Community strengths

The people, the lifestyle, the sense of community and the beauty of the natural environment (see Figure 8) were repeatedly highlighted as benefits of living in the Edward River Council region.

There is a strong sense of history and there is pride in the journey the community has taken to bring it to where it is today. There is acknowledgment of the rich history that comes from the Indigenous traditional owners of the land and the early white settlers of the region and its ongoing agricultural success.

This history of the region has helped create a strong, resilient and entrepreneurial community who have a powerful sense of 'who they are' and a deep integrity. The people care about each other and their way of life.

Some families have lived in the region for generations and have made a significant investment in the community. They are often financially and emotionally invested in the Edward River Council region and feel a great commitment to their community.

For a community with a population under 10,000 there are an extensive range of active clubs and groups that people can join. These provide options for entertainment and building friendship networks and they encourage a sense of community. They also rely on committed volunteers to function effectively.

Almost two thirds of the respondents to the on-line survey stated that they belonged to at least one club or group in the local area. Most of those people listed several clubs to which they belong.

The range of clubs was extensive from the very popular football, netball and basketball clubs to arts groups such as Sing Australia and Edward River Art Society plus the RSL Club, Bowling Club and tennis club along with Landcare groups and the Health Action Group. There were almost 40 different groups listed in the online survey. In addition, many of the people who 'dropped in' to the face-to-face consultation sessions represented community groups or referred to the community groups in which they are involved in their discussions.

The strength of the social networks and the number of people who are community minded and willing to contribute to the community is evident in the numbers of active clubs and groups operating in the region.

For many people the relationships they have with others in the region are critically important to them and it is these relationships that are a key strength of the community.

If newcomers are made to feel welcome and encouraged to join these community groups, there is a vibrant and active social, sporting and cultural life on offer for them in the region.

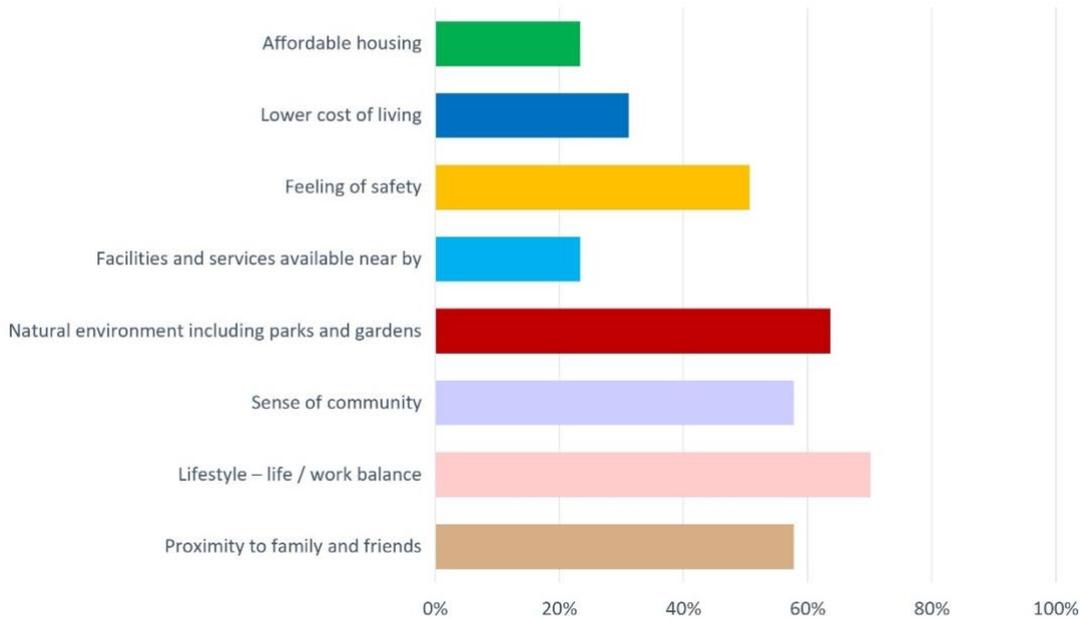
Community comments

- *"I love Deni – it took me a long time to say that. Hard to get it going for me when I arrived but now... it is the people and the community. I love it." – phone interview*
- *"The areas that really make a difference are - Southwest Arts, the unique Ute muster, other opportunities that kids had – playing at Ute Muster in Bands. Reciting Bush Poetry at Ute muster for kids. Muso nights..." – personal interview*
- *"People make it friendly. Lots of things for older people to do, health and wellbeing, coffee mornings, art, Sing Australia, so many things to do... love it! - personal interview*
- *"The Edward River Council area has so much untapped potential and is devastatingly undersold to outsiders." – personal interview*
- *"The things that I love about it are how friendly the people are, and its natural beauty is absolutely outstanding." – personal interview*

Figure 8

Q1 What do you enjoy about living in the region? (Tick all that apply).

Answered: 154 Skipped: 7



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Proximity to family and friends	57.79%	89
Lifestyle – life / work balance	70.13%	108
Sense of community	57.79%	89
Natural environment including parks and gardens	63.64%	98
Facilities and services available near by	23.38%	36
Feeling of safety	50.65%	78
Lower cost of living	31.17%	48
Affordable housing	23.38%	36
Total Respondents: 154		

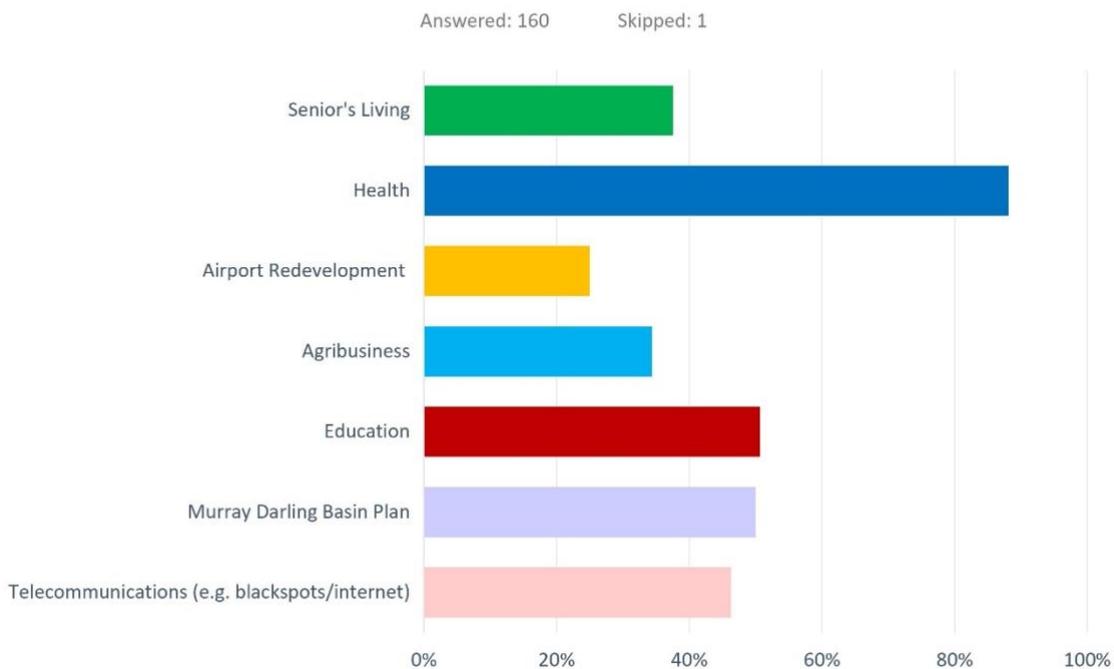
Health

Accessing quality health care is a major concern for many Edward River region residents. This is a key issue for many residents and presents as one of the major challenges for the region as identified by the community. More than 88% of respondents in the online survey listed 'health' as an area in which Council should focus its advocacy efforts (see Figure 9). In addition, health was raised regularly and with great concern by many people in face-to-face consultation sessions.

As summarised in this comment from one interviewee, access to quality health care is critical: "You can have good footpaths and a nice main street but without health you have nothing!"

Figure 9

Q7 Where do you think Council should focus its advocacy efforts over the next 10 years? Please select your top three.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Seniors' Living	37.50%	60
Health	88.13%	141
Airport Redevelopment	25.00%	40
Agribusiness	34.38%	55
Education	50.63%	81
Murray Darling Basin Plan	50.00%	80
Telecommunications (e.g. blackspots/internet)	46.25%	74
Total Respondents: 160		

Access to health care is an issue for the population as it ages but also several residents expressed concern about paediatric care, availability of specialists for more serious illnesses, the standard of the hospital (both infrastructure and availability of services), access to mental health services and the need for more general practitioners. In addition to concerns about insufficient medical options there was also frustration with a lack of information about what medical options are available locally, and concern about what can, or is being done to solve the problem.

Community comments

- *“The health system is challenging, and we don’t know how bad it has become. When we had our own hospital board, we were able to have a say and now we don’t have this, we feel isolated and not able to have an effective voice.” – personal interview*
- *“Getting to health appointments in NSW is a major problem.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Enticing quality health care professions (Doctors and Specialists) should be a priority.” – online survey respondent*
- *“So, what I think, they should do this fabulous thing for this retirement village that they’re going to do. I’ve seen quite a few of them now, they’ve actually got a medical facility in them where they have visiting doctors and visiting podiatrists and everything. That’s what’s got to happen.” – personal interviewee*
- *“We’ve now got good old doctors, they’re all going to retire at some stage, and why is there so little paediatric capability at the Deniliquin Hospital.” – personal interview*
- *“There are people that will leave the district because of their assumptions that the healthcare is not adequate.” – personal interview*
- *“Attract more doctors and health professionals to the region. We need more and we need to retain the ones we’ve got. We risk losing the ones we’ve got.” - Outdoor Council staff meeting*
- *“We’ve got lots of children around here now but if you can’t see a doctor, they’re not going to bring their families here.” – community meeting participant*
- *“People will leave Deni to go to Moama and Echuca where the health care is better – these people want to stay in their communities, but they can’t.” – personal interview*

BACKGROUND

Edward River Council is part of the Murrumbidgee Local Health District (MLHD) which spans 126,000 square kilometres across southern New South Wales, stretching from the Snowy Mountains in the east to the plains of Hillston in the northwest and along the Victorian border. MLHD is the largest employer in the region, with more than 5,000 healthcare staff working across 33 hospitals and 12 primary health care centres.

Deniliquin Hospital is a hub site for surrounding smaller communities and provides a range of community, allied health and mental health / drug and alcohol outreach services. Deniliquin Hospital’s facilities currently include:

- Emergency Department: 3 beds + 1 resuscitation room
- Acute Medical Inpatient Service: 26 acute beds
- Maternity: 4 beds (include 2 birthing suites)
- Day Surgery: 9 beds

It is important to note the new service of tele-stroke which is run through the Emergency Department. Deniliquin is one of three hospitals within the LHD who now provide this life-saving service.

The hospital also has a newly built nine chair Renal Unit and this service is being extended to meet community demand.

NSW PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO REGIONAL HEALTH OUTCOMES

A range of serious concerns were raised about access to health and hospital services in Deniliquin as part of the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry earlier this year. Stakeholders presented at the regional hearing in Deniliquin on April 29 and described health services in the town as sub-standard.

There were several calls for a new Deniliquin Hospital and concerns raised that local mental health services, particularly for young people, were inadequate. The Inquiry heard that Deniliquin residents are heavily reliant on superior health services in nearby Victoria for everything from broken bones to specialist health care. Furthermore, a lack of paediatric services available at Deniliquin Hospital was repeatedly criticised. The hearing was told that all 11 local doctors were threatening to resign en-masse due to overwork. Serious difficulties in attracting and retaining doctors to the town were also raised. Finally, the Inquiry heard that the downgrading of health services in the region over the past 20 years has adversely impacted the life expectancy of residents.

The key issues raised both by participants in the Inquiry, and in the consultation process, were:

- Deniliquin health services are sub-standard, and patients generally must travel for hours to other towns to receive appropriate care
- Calls for a new or upgraded Deniliquin District Hospital
- Concern that mental health services, particularly for young people, are inadequate in Deniliquin
- Deniliquin doctors so stretched they are threatening to resign
- Locals are reliant on superior health services in Victoria
- Attracting and retaining doctors to Deniliquin is extremely challenging
- Downgrading of health services in the region over past two decades has impacted life expectancy of locals.

It is not surprising that health care rated as such an issue of concern in the community consultation as many people will have needed health care, or know someone who has needed health care, and then discovered that the specific service was not available locally.

AGED CARE

The population in the region is ageing and the proportion of residents aged 60 years and over (and particularly those aged 75 years and over) continues to grow⁵. Edward River Council has obtained funding via the Murray Darling Basin Economic Development Program to build a seniors' living precinct in Deniliquin. Several people commented positively on this development in the consultation process.

However, there is concern that without access to appropriate, consistent, and sustainable medical care, older people who want to stay in the region may be forced to leave. As the population continues to age the need for general practitioners and other medical services for older people will become increasingly important. See page 79 for more comments from the community in relation to service and facilities needed for older people in the region.

⁵ Edward River Council Local Strategic Planning Statement February 2020

Community comments

- *“So, when they do this retirement village which is going to be staged and it’s going to be good. It will be good because it’s in the centre of town. People have got to be able to walk, they can’t be out of town. So, they’ve got to be able to walk to the library, to the shops and also for social interaction, just a little walk down the street is what they need to do, that’s important.” – personal interview*
- *“Gated community for retirees is going to be a benefit for the community.” – personal interview*
- *“The retirement village – the tourism industry knows that you get visiting friends and relatives – great idea but you need to get it going. It will change things immediately. Relatives will come and stay with us immediately.” – personal interview*

MENTAL HEALTH

Like most places in Australia, mental health issues are increasingly of concern. The difference in the Edward River Council region is that mental health services particularly for young people are not adequate. Feedback on this issue was provided to Seftons from a variety of different people from young people themselves to the local police, health workers and teachers. These are the people who have experience with this issue, and they provided credible views on the need for better services.

Feedback indicated that Council advocacy for improved mental health services needs to be a priority, and this is not currently included in the Edward River Council Advocacy Strategy.

Council could consider working with the Local Health Advisory Committee (LHAC), Deni Health Action Group (DHAG) or Intereach to approach headspace for support and assist in the establishment of a headspace centre in Deniliquin. Griffith, Wagga Wagga, Echuca and Swan Hill have headspace centres, but these are too far for Edward River youth to travel and there is a need in Deniliquin for its community and surrounding villages.

Community comments

- *“I guess what we’re seeing now, which will be a problem into the future is mental health. There’s been a big increase recently. A lot of our jobs now and a lot of our challenges are around mental health. What we do, we don’t have a lot of services here obviously for mental health so the challenge with services and getting the people the help they need doesn’t come locally very easy and I can’t see that there’s going to be significant population growth here.” – personal interview*
- *“Deniliquin needs headspace, and more resources to re-weave a supportive social fabric.” – personal interview*
- *“There are more serious cases in the high school of children requiring physical protection from family members before DOCs arrives to collect them than ever before.” – personal interview*
- *“For youth not to be sent to Box Hill or Nolan House – we need beds for at risk mental health patients closer to home.” – personal interview*

GENERAL PRACTITIONERS

Being able to see a general practitioner (GP) close to home is very important to most people. Many people expressed the fear that when the current GPs retire, they will not be replaced. Other said that already they needed to travel considerable distances to see a GP.

This situation is not unique to Edward River Council, but it is certainly of concern to many residents. There was a fear expressed that the situation regarding accessing GPs is going to get worse rather than improve.

A survey conducted by the Deniliquin Health Action Group in 2019 (see appendix 9) also highlights the importance of general practitioners to the community. This was provided to Seftons during the consultation process.

A submission from Council to the current federal government inquiry⁶ into the provision of general practitioner and related primary health services to outer metropolitan, rural, and regional Australians would be relevant and valuable.

Community comments

- *“I really believe we’ve got to keep pushing the Federal Government and the State Government to incentive doctors to come to the country. So, if we can incentivise doctors to come here, like with a house or a car, or rent for a year or whatever or we talk to the AMA again and try and get them to relax their HECS fees for the first five years and they take a country seat, anything.” – personal interview*

COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS OF COUNCIL

The community perceived that Edward River Council should be seen to be taking a leadership role in advocating for better health services for the region. Advocating for funding to develop a retirement living development in Deniliquin and significant investment to redevelop or rebuild the Deniliquin Hospital are the priorities listed in the Edward River Council Advocacy Strategy.

The community is pleased that the funding for the Deniliquin Seniors’ Living Precinct (now called Edward River Village) was received, and the project is underway. However, community feedback indicated much more still needs to be done and that funding to re-develop the hospital is just one of many issues and is not necessarily the most immediately important. Access to sufficient general practitioners and specialist doctors and having skilled medical staff in Deniliquin to avoid significant travel for relatively common-place illnesses and accidents seems to be the community’s greatest concern.

A key issue raised in the consultation process was a lack of unity between the many groups and individuals who are focused on health care in the region.

There is the opportunity for Council to consider engaging a skilled employee in an advocacy role to take responsibility for health and wellbeing in the region and work as a central point to link all the various groups together. There is a view that the local approach to health care is very fragmented with many people who are deeply committed to improving health outcomes, getting good results and making a difference but they’re all operating in silos. Additional funding would be needed for this role – potentially the same person could work on other funding and advocacy projects.

A coordinated approach to advocacy and developing an agreed road map for the health care in the region would help all the people currently engaged in the system have confidence that work is being done to improve access to

⁶ https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/PrimaryHealthServices

quality health care. Whilst health is not directly Council's responsibility, feedback indicated that the community is looking to Council to take a lead role.

Community comments

- *"The main issues are there's a lack of communication of what we can and can't offer here at our health facilities." – personal interview*
- *"What services does Deniliquin hospital offer its children? It is very unclear, and people don't know, and then often either very disappointed with having to go outside town or make assumptions that sometimes are not correct or valid." – personal interview*
- *"They have an economy person and a tourist person, and a businessperson, and nobody takes ownership of health and wellbeing in this community." – personal interview*

Education

Education is valued by the community and there was much mixed feedback received regarding the quality of education available within the region, and the issues associated with children travelling to other towns for school. This was an issue that arose regularly, was unprompted but also revealed very mixed opinions.

Underlying all the different feedback however was a shared view that quality education is important for the community and that there are opportunities to improve the education offering and this will result in more options for young people to get a good education, and for those who choose to, to stay in town, and also attract youth from outlying areas to travel to Deniliquin for their education.

Across all the different views and opinions expressed, there is a strong desire to provide opportunities for the young people in the region and enable them to have creative and fulfilling careers while continuing to live in the region.

Community comments

- *“I’m just saying that there’s also the opportunity to open our kids’ eyes to the world of possibilities and if they want to stay in this community that there is so much that they could do outside of those professions. There’s more professions than the ones that they can see in front of them, and I think you can’t be what you can’t see so there needs to be a willingness and an appetite to show that there’s something else that’s possible.” – personal interview*

HIGH SCHOOL

As with all high schools, there are mixed opinions about the quality of education provided at Deniliquin High School – some students thrive but others do not have a successful experience at the school. The perception of the performance of the high school is also an issue.

The primary school options or quality of education provided at these stages were generally not raised in discussion which seems to indicate adequate levels of satisfaction with the services on offer. Feedback provided about the pre-school and early childhood services was positive with people commenting that it is well run, is nimble and responsive to the communities needs and has good leadership and management.

There are approximately 120 students leaving Deniliquin to travel daily to nearby private schools, primarily Moama Grammar and others attending boarding school in Melbourne, Albury, or Sydney. This means that many high achieving students are leaving the area and building connections and networks outside Deniliquin. Some community members expressed great concern about students leaving the area for school, but others feel that having options is important.

Feedback indicated that the high school is ageing and does require investment in the buildings and facilities. It specifically needs upgraded or new science labs plus upgrades are required on the kitchens as this area does not comply with industry standards.

There is the opportunity for Council to be an advocate to support this upgrade from the Department of Education and this is already acknowledged in the Edward River Council Advocacy Strategy. There was no community feedback received to indicate whether any advocacy in this space has been successful.

Deniliquin is considered a four-point school, and Barham (nearby) is considered a six-point school. This means that Deniliquin is considered less isolated than Barham by the NSW Department of Education. It is perceived that this results in a lack of focus from the Department and additional funding is not available to the Deniliquin High

School. Some community members perceived that if Deniliquin High School could be repositioned to a six-point school it would provide further funding opportunities.

They are some very good initiatives that have been developed at the school. These include:

- Work with the Edward River Council regarding the “Fish Park Project” involving the lagoon areas in and adjacent to the Waring gardens. This project has the support of the Edward River Council, Dr John Conallin, Troy Bright, and Ian Fisher. This is part of the Cross Curricular Learning and school-based training initiative. It has allowed the students that participate in this project to learn skills in a different manner, gain confidence and get good outcomes. This ongoing project is well regarded. There is the opportunity for Council to determine how the Cross Curricular Learning program can be extended to other Edward River Council initiatives.
- Deniliquin High School has a knowledge-based relationship and learning initiative with the Yarkuwa Indigenous Knowledge Centre⁷. Over 100 students are participating in these initiatives and positive outcomes are being achieved for both organisations, particularly the students. A Student Support Officer has just been appointed at the High School to assist the Indigenous student community and families. Part of their role will be to contact Indigenous parents and families seeking key information to enable the High School to deliver relevant and timely information to teachers and students to value add the existing curriculum.
- The Driver’s Education Program that is founded and led by local community leader Jenny Fellows and is highly regarded by participants and the community.

It is important that these initiatives are continued, and promoted, however staffing is an issue.

Attracting good teachers and staff to the high school is an ongoing issue. This is not unique to Deniliquin and is an issue faced by rural, remote and regional schools all across NSW.

Some of the reasons that it is difficult to attract teachers to the regions includes accessing quality rental accommodation, ensuring employment opportunities for partners and access to quality health care. There are incentives in place via the Department of Education to attract teachers to rural and remote schools, but several community members proposed developing further incentive programs such as working with Latrobe University and Charles Sturt University to develop an incentive program for teaching at the High School when they graduate and looking at subsidising university HECS fees if teachers elect to come to Deniliquin when they graduate.

Several people suggested that Council should encourage a small private high school to open in Deniliquin which would provide parents with choice but may also attract students from outlying towns. This idea has apparently been previously discussed by the community and there are mixed views on the issue however most people who raised the issue in consultation were supportive of the idea and believed that it would add to the region rather than detract from the current high school.

⁷ <http://www.yarkuwa.org.au/>

Community comments

- *“Attract a private secondary school to bring more teachers & students to town who would otherwise go away to private school. Note: this shouldn't be interpreted that Deni High is bad, but more of an opportunity to attract surrounding students eg. Finley/Hay, that would likely have left the district to go to private school.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Attract additional education providers eg. high school and small university campus.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Education, an alternative high school option is needed. It does not need to be huge. This will enable choice for parents and attract people to relocate to the town.” – Developers’ forum*
- *“I am concerned about kids leaving the high school and going to Moama Grammar.” – Outdoor Council staff meeting participant*
- *“What is the community doing about kids leaving the high school and going to other schools it jeopardises sporting opportunities, which may lead to a lack of use of our sporting and recreation facilities.” – Outdoor Council staff meeting participant*

TERTIARY EDUCATION AND ENTRY LEVEL EMPLOYMENT

The community expressed significant concern about the options available to young people when they finish high school. This includes tertiary education at university and TAFE but also employment, apprenticeships and other on the job training.

A recurring theme was the need to have the local TAFE offer more courses that are relevant to the jobs required in the region. Suggestions from the community include a stronger focus on agribusiness and project management skills, plus more courses in skilled trades such as electrical, plumbing and more. There is a view that there are businesses and farmers willing to employ apprentices / trainees but that there needs to be more courses available for them at the local TAFE.

Some of the community has a perception that the TAFE does not offer a wide range of relevant courses and that there needs to be greater collaboration between the TAFE, the high school and local business.

There is great enthusiasm for a university campus at Deniliquin. Many survey participants believed that a Charles Sturt University campus in Deniliquin with a focus on agriculture would be an enormous benefit to the region. It would encourage students to come to the town, it would provide options for young people who want to stay and help businesses attract trained staff.

It was clearly communicated that young people do want to work but many need pathways and assistance to help transition from school to further study or employment.

Business and property owners clearly communicated that they would like to employ trained young people or take on apprentices, but that more creative thinking is required to ensure appropriate training opportunities are available locally.

Community comments

- *“Need to implement initiatives for year 12 graduates to stay in the community.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Consider what it would take to get a branch of Charles Sturt University to the region. It would be really good if we could have young people being able to study after they finish high school. And this would be a good place so that we could retain young people. Plus others can get further education.” – Outdoor Council staff meeting participant*
- *“What can we do to create some more after school jobs for kids so that they are better trained to go into the workforce and may even be able to work for the employer that gives them a job after school – possibly as an apprentice.” – Outdoor Council staff meeting participant*
- *“The kids in the country have the same aspirations as the kids in the city but for some reason people don’t think that that’s real. This whole idea of the creative industry stuff is that it’s not just about the digital platforms or whatever it’s also about learning things like the governance behind it or writing policies and procedures and how do you run a business and how do you run a radio station so they get involved in all of that sort of stuff so getting that kind of experience but it’s also about what do they want and can we help provide that and obviously the link between arts, culture, food go hand in hand so there’s a great opportunity there.” – personal interview*
- *“Deni has got a TAFE facility, but they don’t offer a huge array of courses and Hay has got Hay Inc which is brilliant but it’s not enough.” – community meeting participant*
- *It would be great to have an arm of the University out here, an agricultural arm. If you look at Albury and Wodonga which both have universities, I know they’re a lot bigger, but they’ve got such a young population and some never leave. Especially if it had an ag focus because I think there’s such a future for ag.”- community meeting participant*
- *“TAFE should be linked to jobs here – trade courses are important.” – community meeting participant*
- *“So, we could offer them the employment on the property and two or three nights a week they would go to TAFE at six at night and they would enhance their skills.” – community meeting participant*
- *“They’re encouraging everybody to think outside of the box, especially partnerships, bigger partnership with any agricultural enterprise around this whole area would be in for it. You could have agricultural apprentices as well which are free at the moment. So, they just need to open their minds a bit.” – community meeting participant*

YOUNG PEOPLE

Consultation was conducted with young people in the region to ensure they had a voice in the future of the region. There was a small group meeting held with young people, several participated in the online survey and a small number of people aged under 21 attended the community meetings.

Consultation has demonstrated that there are few activities for young people (aged 14-22) out of school hours. Feedback from parents seems to indicate that younger children are better catered for, but it is harder to find stimulating activities for older teens and young adults.

Some residents positively acknowledged the Youth Festival at the Boat Club and indicated that it was disappointing to note that attendance was low, particularly as significant effort was exerted by Council staff and community members. It seems that some teenagers and young adults have found it difficult to step out of their 'comfort zone' and participate in something new and different such as the planned Youth Festival, despite extensive marketing and communication and the implementation of a well-planned and appropriate event.

Consultation has also indicated that young people would like additional facilities in the community. Some of the suggestions include ten pin bowling, climbing walls, indoor trampolines, a cinema (which will be coming as part of the Town Hall redevelopment), and an indoor aquatic centre. Additionally, river focused activities such as floating jumping castles and activities, plus outdoor sporting facilities including volleyball courts, more basketball courts plus an upgrade to the skate park which includes facilities for rollerblade riders were listed.

There was also feedback received to indicate that activities for youth seem to be too focused on sport and more creative and cultural pursuits would be appreciated. Some suggestions included a recording studio with musical instruments available to share or borrow, workshops in activities like writing, art and flower arranging, support for community theatre, dance studios and dance workshops. A youth community centre was also proposed.

There is a strong message that "the kids need more than hanging around at Maccas".

It was positive to see young people contributing with ideas to improve their community. Some of the older 'young people' also acknowledged the importance of youth in the region taking initiative, showing leadership and being a 'driving force' in implementing change.

Community comments

- *"Speak with young people and see that there is a lack of vision and opportunities in small towns for the non-sports population!!!" – online survey respondent*
- *"There is very little for youth to do in Deniliquin. This results in bored young people, then turn to crime and making their own fun with drugs, theft and property damage." – online survey respondent*
- *"Have more events in town for older teens/young adults eg. food festivals, small local talent concerts, skate competitions used to bring a huge crowd." – online survey respondent*
- *"The younger generation want to see a commitment from the top end of town to improving the town, not just making money off it." – personal interview*
- *"As young members of the community, we all need to be more accountable for what's happening in the community, we can't just have our blinkers on and just focus on what we're doing and hope that around us everything will work out." – personal interview*

Economic development

GROWTH

As the population ages, some of the community is concerned about the future viability of the region and specifically Deniliquin. A significant number of people expressed serious fears for the future if the population in the region does not grow. Many community members also expressed a view that some sectors in the community are not interested in planned, strategic, and continual growth or are focused on their personal interests to the detriment of the overall economic growth of the region.

There were many positive opinions expressed about Council and Council has a Business Attraction, Expansion and Retention Policy and a robust Economic Development Strategy (due for renewal) in place. However, amongst some business leaders there is a perception that Council does not sufficiently support new business ideas or strategically plan to ensure for growth by being an 'enabler or facilitator' to encourage existing businesses to grow.

While health and education are significantly impacted by state funding and policy decisions, economic growth in the region was perceived by the community as one of the direct and key responsibilities of Council. Feedback from the community indicated an expectation that Council could take a proactive approach in attracting business and people to the region and create an environment which encourages growth and business development. It is important to note that the existing business community has a role to play in collaborating with Council to ensure businesses grow and prosper- a partnership framework should be encouraged.

Community comments

- *"You need population and so you can't keep this nice little comfy environment and yet not have growth. It comes hand in hand, and I think there's a little of that in Deni, that a lot of people just like it how it is where you can still park outside the post office." – personal interview*
- *"We need to grow this community. The community needs to be more progressive, and we need to bring people into this community." – online survey*
- *"The council is there to help businesses from outside come to this community and to assist existing businesses to grow. The Council could create support for these businesses – provide business opportunities, reduce fees and charges, look at how Council could reduce rates (for new businesses) and see the opportunity of bringing businesses into the community for the long term." – personal interview*
- *"I've always noticed when you look around most small cities it seems to be the critical point before you start to really move forward, you have to be 10,000. Anything below that you find that all it does it just linger on. Once you crack the 10,000, it is different. Echuca was the same. It wasn't much bigger than Deni, and suddenly it took off. That's what happened; they hit about 10,000 sometime in the early '90s and it just took off. Now it's really starting to fly." – personal interview*
- *"Council focus is currently on refurbishment, not growth. Growth requires a layer that sits above all that is happening now." – personal interview*
- *"Moama has exploded and Deni's not that far up the road, but it's just not happening. I'm not saying it's Council's fault; I think it's a real psychological thing." – community meeting participant*
- *"I think it's too easy for some people to sit and be comfortable and that's it. You know, it works but we will be left behind." – personal interview*

On numerous occasions people shared a view that newcomers to the region don't always feel 'embraced' by the community. It is recommended that a group be formed and run by volunteers that has a 12-month 'Welcome to the Edward River Region' program where a welcome kit of key information, key community groups, contact people and local 'guides' who provide provenance, lifestyle, education, health, recreation, arts, culture and sporting information is formed. A monthly evening session and morning teas could be hosted with interesting themes which would appeal to many interests. Leaders from all the groups featured above would be invited. A takeaway kit with information compiled by Edward River Council and distributed by the volunteer group could be provided.

Ensuring newcomers are welcomed is an important part of a strategy to retain key professionals such as doctors and teachers in the region and is important to population growth in the region.

JOBS

Generating the employment opportunities that the community wants requires economic growth. Many people in the community believe that the future of the region relies on having appealing jobs available to encourage people to stay in the area or move to the area. There is a real concern that too many people leave the region looking for employment opportunities.

This need for growth and job creation was strongly articulated by many in the community. However, there were also business operators who said they found it difficult to attract staff. They need more good quality employees, but it is difficult to find them locally or attract them to the area. There is also the view that local employment is not as critical as it has been previously because more people are able to work from home for businesses all over the world.

Community comments

- *“And it’s also across the country, we’ve just hit 5.1 percent unemployment and when it hits 4 percent that’s considered full employment and already now, we’re seeing it is difficult to find people across the board, particularly in this area not to mention those that they can attract to come here they haven’t got anywhere to stay, they can’t find a house. So, it is a big issue.” – community meeting participant*
- *“It all pivots on jobs. We will stay here if we have jobs for the next generation. More than ago – we need other jobs and industries here too – if someone comes here then their partners need jobs too.” – personal interview*
- *“Council could consider having a bank of jobs here, so people know what is on offer.” – community meeting participant*
- *“The rice mill is great and an important asset, but it is not stable enough as many employees feel that every 12 months or so they could be made redundant. More of a job than a career.” – personal interview*
- *“I left Deni High in 2009. There were 148 that graduated, now there are only nine left in the town.” – personal interview*
- *“There aren’t enough opportunities to keep young people gainfully employed. There just isn’t the breadth of employment to get good jobs and careers. Those that have stayed here are in trades.” – personal interview*
- *“Under 40 age group, we don’t have a need for tertiary jobs here so not willing to come back.” – personal interview*
- *“We can’t get the core contractors to do building developments. Need to look outside Deni to get enough trade to do building. Maybe set up satellite business from Echuca and look at encouraging people from there to work here, soon they may live here.” – personal interview*
- *“If building surveyors can’t work in NSW due to border issues – so maybe work with Murray Shire to help break down barriers – we need to collaborate more.” – personal interview*

RETAIL AND DINING

Losing the Target store from Deniliquin has been a significant blow to the community and diminished the retail options in town. It was raised, unprompted, by many online survey respondents as well as in meetings and one-on-one interviews. The closure of Target and lack of retail options for basic household goods and staple clothes attracted strong commentary.

The community also believes that losing Target will mean that shoppers from smaller towns nearby will no longer choose to visit Deniliquin for their shopping.

The number of empty shop fronts in the town was also raised regularly by people across all consultation platforms. The feedback indicated that many community members strongly believe that one of Council’s priorities should be to attract more retailers to the town.

Most online survey respondents do their food (91%) and liquor shopping (85%) in Deniliquin but in areas such as clothing (33%), homewares (47%) and entertainment (36%) less people shop locally. Most people choose local venues for dining (84%).

The feedback from some of the community suggests that residents believe that the building owners may be charging too much rent and making it difficult for retail outlets to be successful. Some community members believe that Council could subsidise the rents for a period of time for new retail arrivals, and others believed the issue should be addressed with the building owners.

There is an opportunity for Council to consider incentives to attract new retail outlets to the region. A suggestion from the community was to delay rate payments until a new business has been in place for three years to give it time to be successful. Others believed that Council needs to focus on this as a priority and provide additional incentives to the right retailers to come to town. An award program for retailers could also be implemented to encourage and reward good service and this could be run in conjunction with the Deniliquin Business Chamber.

Seftons did meet with several people who have exciting ideas and plans for new businesses and building re-development in the town centre. These people showed great initiative and enthusiasm for the region and were keen to bring life and new enterprises to the town.

Community comments

- *“Petition stores such as Best and Less or Kmart to have a store in Deni.” - online survey respondent*
- *“Filling empty retail shops to cater for basic needs that were lost with the closure of Target.” – online survey respondent*
- *“We need to be able to encourage further shopping opportunities for people. That could mean trying to attract a franchise. Losing Target was a huge hit to many locals including our elderly and families and out of town people that use Deni as their hub for shopping and banking. I know for one my family used to come here from Ivanhoe but are now choosing to go elsewhere because they cannot access Target.” - online survey respondent*
- *“Better shopping opportunities for people so they do not have to go out of town.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Shops too expensive to rent, no one will stay, and Deni will die if something doesn't change.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Encourage empty shop owners to display visual arts in the windows. It appears shops are empty because the rent is too high, or the shop is in poor condition? Conversation with shop owners needs to happen to address this.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Take action to fill the empty stores. Even just the windows with advertising for other business in town. Or even signage somewhere pointing to where the main street is or Coles Plaza.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Encourage more diverse shops for Main Street, too many empty shops.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Bring bigger clothing stores here and increase community markets.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Council should subsidise rent for shop owners.” – online survey respondent*
- *“We need a mini supermarket/grocer over on the north side.” – personal interview*

There was also some criticism from the community regarding the quality of some of the ‘outdated’ dining options in town, irregular opening hours and the service provided by some of the retailers and restaurants / cafes. There was disappointment expressed about opening hours of some of the cafes and shops on weekends and on Mondays (particularly during long weekends when visitors are in town), and a view that some of the pubs close early even on Saturday night. There is a perception amongst some that activity in the town has diminished in recent years. There is also a view that some of the retailers need to focus more on providing quality service and products and meeting the customers’ needs, remembering that the customers are more than locals – they are also visitors and tourists.

There were also concerns raised about local business being reluctant to see competitor businesses come to town which then detracts from the options available to customers and prevents potential growth.

Community comments

- *“There are a lot of businesses in town that are happy doing what they are doing – I feel like a pest not a customer. For us, we look at attracting people to come into our business and make them feel happy and make them want to come back.” – personal interview*
- *“Motivated people coming into town to set up a business or get involved in an existing one - they make a difference as they want to be a member of the community – I think they try hard to fit in.” – personal interview*
- *“We need to create the desire to grow and develop in Deni.” – personal interview*
- *“Access to good staff and suitable staff is important – having a mentor available to assist those with the will and means to next step. Passing on knowledge and helping other develop and expand.” – personal interview*
- *“Retailers need to understand consumer habits are changing, particularly visitors and tourists. They want shops and cafes open on weekends and public holidays – that will help get rid of reputation that nothing is ever open....” – personal interview*
- *“Weekend closure misses two busy trading days of the week.” – personal interview*
- *“Some people (retailers) are tired - they either need to do the renewal of their business or retire.” – personal interview*
- *“Customer service training is important – it would be good to workshop ideas – bring in a champion who has done something who can help foster and develop better ways of running a customer focussed business.” – personal interview*
- *“You can’t get a coffee in Deni on a weekend either because everything is shut. Tourism operators don’t open on Saturday afternoon and Sundays which to me, take Monday or Tuesday off and be open on the weekend.” – community meeting participant*
- *“If you want people to invest in town then we need to provide good places to eat and visit.” – personal interview*
- *“Pubs on Friday and Saturday night –closed by 9pm...! The way the whole town has gone downhill.” – personal interview*

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD PROCESSING

Agriculture is key to the economic success of the region. Agriculture in the region is a significant employer, income producer and has a world class reputation. There are several successful corporate and family operated businesses achieving amazing results in the region in sometimes challenging circumstances.

Community comments

- *“I’m very passionate about agriculture because Deni survives on agriculture, but I don’t think there’s enough people that are giving it the accolade it deserves. I don’t think we’re actually promoting it enough.” – personal interview*
- *“The Deni region has come from ag background and ag is still the industry that underwrites Deni and always will be. There has been an understanding that it can’t be just ag. The drought made us look at other income sources such as tourism and value adding to ag is important, but we don’t seem to capitalise on ag and value adding.” – personal interview*

As stated in the Edward River Council Agribusiness Masterplan 2019 – 2024⁸ (see summary at Appendix 6), “... the prosperity, mood and liveability of the Edward River region is reliant on the performance of its agribusinesses.”

As identified in the Agribusiness Masterplan the outlook for the Edward River agribusiness sector has several challenges but the fundamentals of Australian agribusiness are still positive, and there are opportunities to grow the regional economy, leveraging areas of competitive advantage.

The Agribusiness Masterplan already identifies many of the priorities and ideas that were outlined by the community during the consultation. The seven focus areas identified in the Agribusiness Masterplan reflect many of the issues that arose in consultation:

- Foster a culture that embraces new ideas
- Extract more value from our outputs
- Equip our people for a new normal
- Maximise our water assets
- Attract the capital vital for growth
- Support business transition
- Inspire confidence in our future

As identified in the strategy, there is an urgent need to prepare primary producers in the region for the ‘new normal’ and it is imperative that the Agribusiness Masterplan is implemented.

There are already pockets of innovation in the region and producers broadening the range of products grown in the area eg. carrots, potatoes for Smiths chips, a small but highly successful dairy industry and much more.

The soils around Deniliquin, Edward River Council, are good for growing cereals, but not great for some horticulture, however, the agriculture vision for the Council area could extend beyond our boundaries towards the Berrigan Shire area and beyond where sandy loamy soils, with sandy ridges where different horticulture crops could thrive. The small but highly professional, innovative and dynamic dairy sector in the Council region near Blighty and Mayrung complements horticulture, as does the beef and lamb industries.

There was discussion amongst quite a few well-informed agriculture stakeholders that a good value add for agribusiness in the Edward River region was livestock feed lotting – based on the access to grain in the region and access to markets. Ideas for value-adding were also proposed by many experts in the consultation and there was discussion around developing a broader range of crops, but specifically ensuring that the correct crops are considered based on the region’s soil type. There was mixed discussion around the positives and negatives of cotton production with some producers believing that cotton and rice production can work together and a few others disagreeing with this view.

Much of the strategic thinking around agribusiness in the region has already been undertaken as per the Agribusiness Masterplan. It is critical that funding is obtained so that this plan can be implemented.

In addition to the recommendations outlined in the Agribusiness Masterplan, other ideas that arose from the community consultation include a focus on promoting the produce from the region as an overarching marketing story. There could be a business case for the region to become the hub of Riverina produce with a strong providence branding campaign and linkages to food and beverage entrepreneurs from Melbourne, and a connection directly with the consumer. A very successful example of this is the [Gippsland Farmers Daughter, based in Collins Street, Melbourne.](#)

⁸ <https://www.edwardriver.nsw.gov.au/Council/Council-Information/Corporate-Plans-and-Strategies>

Many of the very important ingredients that are prerequisites for fine dining or the best menus in Melbourne are all grown in the Edward River Council region. This brings with it the opportunity to start thinking about the overarching dining experience, not just single commodities that are seasonal and end their story at the farm gate.

The Council region is one of the few areas that has the established, high quality food industries in its own backyard - Edward River could become the new contemporary branded agribusiness food region.

Working with adjoining council areas, Edward River Council could be the enabler for bringing many different types of commodities together for downstream manufacturing and processing in Deniliquin from stock feed pellets to high quality food produce. An alliance with SunRice could be considered to share existing infrastructure, along with using the existing rail link to Melbourne, and connecting to the freight hub in the industrial area nearby.

A successful example of an agriculture hub formed as recently as 2019 is [Food and Fibre Gippsland](#). It is a collaborative powerhouse with a mission to lead capacity building, innovation, and knowledge sharing for the greater good of the sector across the whole of Gippsland.

Community comments

- *"I think processing, even just small niche processing could be an opportunity. Because where I am I see every farmers' market where I am down south and Barham's really doing a lot of work in this area like Berkshire Pork, but I'm not sure how they've gone. But if we had an abattoir open here I'd be doing it for small specialist breeds only." – personal interview*
- *"The town's got a very large, extremely reliable urban water license with Australia's largest irrigation canal going straight through the centre of it. We need to start looking at industries that use water and attract them to this town. So, if you've got industries outside Milawa or other areas that are being given grief about their water usage, I think we need to look at attracting them here eg. manufacturing industries." – personal interview*
- *"So, some ideas, I'm a big believer in doing what we already do good, and what we already do good is we grow annual crops eg. rice, we grow wheat, barley, oats, pasture hay, etc. We're proud of that. What we need to be doing in my opinion is doing that better and value-adding." – personal interview*
- *"I think I'd like to see more food promotion from the tourism side of things. I know when I was away there's the olives and the wine in Mildura, but we do grow dairy and rice and bread, and one thing if Council would talk to SunRice is about really promoting this whole value-adding of rice and having it almost as a regular feature to show people the journey of how we grow and process rice, and let them taste rice products and things." – personal interview*
- *"Council should be proactive in talking to dairy farmers. Planning process is blocking growth and development." – community meeting participant*
- *"Dairy can provide economic driver for region." - community meeting participant*
- *"Intensive animal ag/business operations are an incredible opportunity for the region. It is the key to growth. Intensive agriculture has to keep going." – community meeting participant*
- *"Take advantage of cotton industry and have a cotton gin in area." - community meeting participant*
- *"We shouldn't be saying rice; we should be saying rice and irrigated agriculture." – Councillors' meeting participant*

BUSINESS AND INDUSTRIAL

There are many options for business and industrial development in the region that are not retail outlets or related to agriculture. Due to the uncertainty about the ongoing access to the same availability of water and other constraints on agriculture, it is recommended that the economy of the region diversifies so that it does not rely so much on agriculture. This was the view of many residents during the consultation process.

Some suggestions provided by residents included:

- Call centres
- Manufacturing
- Transport / freight hubs
- Speciality foods

The community is looking to Council to target industries, provide incentives and actively encourage businesses to set up in the region. They expect Council to be proactive in planning for and securing new business for the region. The community also seem to be looking to Council for confidence in the future. If Council is seen to be positively planning ahead and bringing new business into the area, this gives residents and local business operators confidence and reassurance.

It is understood from discussions held with some successful existing manufacturing and specialist downstream agribusinesses that effective communication and clarity on how Council's economic development, infrastructure and property development processes work and decisions are made is essential.

It was heard that there is confusion about who within Council has decision-making roles when internal departments are involved. Communication to ensure clarity in regard to decision making roles could be effective to address this issue.

A focus on the existing Council industrial land precincts, particularly the Deniliquin Airport is required to enable further development. An overarching whole of region Council plan for business and industrial development is required, drawing from existing plans, and to ensure milestones and budgets are established.

There are also existing businesses in the region that are ready to expand and have opportunities to grow.

To enable future business and manufacturing growth, Council could identify key existing businesses that are demonstrating ongoing growth but may need some additional business knowledge and information to enable them to grow in a sustainable and professional manner. Council could seek funding to enable them to provide 'business growth and capacity building' grants. Edward River Council could then assist by co-funding a business coach / consultant to work with existing businesses to help them develop business plans, obtain funding, and guide them in the growth of their business.

Healthy, growing businesses in the region is a positive for the whole community.

Community comments

- *“The town needs to diversify and aggressively pursue some big industry to town. Relying on agriculture and tourism isn't enough to achieve the target of a greater and more vibrant town.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Risk adverse Council. Restrictions on country roads is incredible. Limits on trucks on roads. If vehicle is legal on Newell, it should be legal on Edward River Council country roads – blockage is road limits and spec of roads. Permits through RMS.” – community meeting participant*
- *“Diversify our key industries so we are not one-trick ponies.” – personal interview*
- *“Large Call Centre could be an avenue for employment.” – personal interview*
- *“Co-working space opportunity for expansion. This is currently driven privately and could potentially be managed by Council or Deniliquin Business Chamber.” – Developers’ forum attendee*
- *“The town has always relied on the wool industry 30-40 years ago and the only other industry is tourism, but it needs something else. Something else besides that.” - community meeting participant*
- *“Competition is what the problem is, because all those businesses now want Council to say no, we don’t want it here for x, y, z. But it’s a business, it’s more jobs, it’s more people. If we can’t encourage those businesses here because the local businesses go no, no, no, people will just say it’s too hard.” – indoor council staff meeting*
- *“Bring industry to towns. Consider what industries could be brought here. We need a new type of industry. More than agriculture.” – personal interview*
- *“I’ve told quite a number of people that as far as I’m concerned, getting back to that population thing, you also find that any town that’s got a population that goes over 10,000 and starts to go well, they’ve all got manufacturing. That’s the thing we don’t have a lot of here. You really need that manufacturing base to get it to grow. Up till now we’ve just purely relied on agriculture in the town.” – personal interview*
- *“There’s been so many attempts at trying to get big business here and none of them have gone through. Council has spent huge amounts of money trying to look after trying to get supposed big business here and it’s never eventuated.” – personal interview*
- *“I was trying to run the business and do this, and on to go it alone. That government funding application took a huge amount of effort for me to do all the paperwork and the applications and all that. We had a lot of help from some people from Business Enterprise Centre; I couldn’t have done it without the excellent person involved. But she’s left there now and moved on. I need someone who can do all the negotiating, because that’s the bit I get really frustrated about.” –personal interview*
- *“I am keen to see manufacturing attracted to the area – like a plant that is operating in the city that is running out of space or where land is just too expensive to operate from” I am sure there are many that we can consider – we need to do proper thinking about this and then get it in the plan and go out and get these businesses to relocate – either all of their business or some of it. We need to make it attractive for them to come and stay. Give them subsidies, help find jobs for their partners, get them into Dr’s and introduce them to the locals – it’s a whole package.” –personal interview*
- *“Longer you leave things the harder it is to do things (for businesses already here and for attracting new businesses).” – personal interview*

Land use, residential development and housing

Significant concerns were raised across all the consultation platforms regarding the release of land, zoning issues and access to affordable housing in the region.

Access to rental housing for staff such as nurses, doctors, allied health professionals, schoolteachers and people working for large businesses in the area was raised as a significant issue for Deniliquin.

Like many other country towns there are few quality houses available for rent and those on the market are often expensive or not meeting the needs of the potential resident (i.e., older people requiring a scaled down housing solution such as a two-bedroom flat near the CBD and health facilities).

This is an opportunity for Edward River Council to be on the front foot, invite the new [Regional Housing Taskforce](#) to town and seek grant funding for critical housing infrastructure for health, education and other essential government services.

There is a view by some that much of the land in the area is not being efficiently or effectively utilised for a variety of reasons.

There is a perception by some that Council charges landowners too much when they want to subdivide their land. This is seen by some as a disincentive and makes the land too expensive when released.

The number of new dwellings approved in the Council region in the last financial year was only 12.

We were told many times that much smaller communities such as Jerilderie and Tocumwal were winning the 'come and live here' message. The perception is that these councils are wanting to attract new residents and are 'open for business'.

Murrumbidgee Shire Council has attracted new homeowners in their new Council owned residential development. This is evident when driving through Jerilderie and the new land releases and housing developments can be seen.

Amongst many in the community there was great enthusiasm for the opportunities that would be generated if more new houses were built in Deniliquin. Despite that there was feedback from a smaller number of people in relation to zoning decisions, sub-divisions and concerns about possible housing being built on land previously designated for other use. This was a concern expressed by a small number of residents near the southern entrance to Deniliquin who have been encouraged to liaise directly with Council.

Community comments

- *“Say if we had 200 houses built in Deni in a year, think of the opportunity that it would create! Then it will warrant starting new restaurants and the Boat Club being done up. This is achievable!” – personal interview*
- *“For us to attract good staff you need good education, good health because that’s massive obviously and I tell you what we also need now is some better housing options” – personal interview*
- *“Every council is doing land releases except us.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Need to reduce subdivision costs.” – online survey respondent*
- *“There is a real lack of housing in Deni and this is stopping progress. We can’t get people with the right qualifications and service. I have five or six of our staff living in Echuca or Moama.” – personal interview*
- *“Some businesses have bought houses in town, so they have housing for staff.”*
- *“Maybe they (the Council) have to develop land – Murray Council have done the same.” – personal interview*
- *“Now is the opportunity to attract people. Cheaper houses for generation to come back. Deposit for a house in Melbourne is equivalent to paying for half a house in Deni. With the lower cost of living.” – personal interview*
- *“Deni is getting recognised. Some houses being bought as holiday houses – we need to capitalise on this recognition and encourage more people to invest here – they will eventually move here.” – personal interview*
- *“Defer the Council costs till the blocks are sold to help with cashflow. Reduce the cost or spread the costs.” – personal interview*
- *“Murrumbidgee Shire have released land and are selling residential properties.” personal interview*
- *“There is a shortage of aged accommodation, good to see what Council is doing now but we need more of this development.” – personal interview*
- *“Council has to lead the development of the land. They also need to help to stimulate the demand.” – personal interview*
- *“Mathoura is now attractive – Picnic Point has been discovered. Mathoura is now ticking along.” – personal interview*
- *“I thought Council’s job was rates and rubbish, and since when is it supposed to solve a housing crisis brought on by the pandemic because people are getting out of the cities and moving to the regional areas, and why pick a public gazetted reserve.” – personal interview*

CBD ZONING

Zoning was raised as an opportunity by several people. It is perceived that having more residential opportunities in the CBD could be a positive. This comment was raised by people from all ages and backgrounds who would like this option seriously considered by existing owners of property and Council.

Further exploring opportunities for residential living in the CBD may attract new residents (from overcrowded cities) plus will open new options for local retirees. Many of these comments came from farming families who are considering where they will retire to – they do not want to leave the community that they love and have invested in for many years, and they do want to live in the community amongst their friends and family. A CBD residence

with little infrastructure upkeep plus being close to the river, retail outlets and health facilities is very appealing to many.

Many people also expressed concern about the state of some of the buildings in town that need to be upgraded or urgently restored. This is the responsibility of the building owners, not Council, but the community is calling out for Council to take some action to 'strongly encourage' building owners to maintain buildings. Council has already invested in CBD building beautification works and an annual Heritage Grants program is in place and is to be acknowledged for this initiative.

Community comments

- *"All council land sales should be done at public auction." - online survey respondent*
- *"Establish more aged-living facilities." – online survey respondent*
- *"Why would families move here??? Over-priced real estate and no business opportunities!" – online survey respondent*
- *"Need to be more strategic in what we use this land for in the future." – Developers' Forum attendee*
- *"Speed up building approval. Process and encourage developments and developers." – online survey respondent*
- *"Rezoning of CBD to be dual purpose. One of the most valuable potential residential assets in Deniliquin is the one that the community has the least access to – the old Water Resources building (Water NSW)." – Developers' forum and from many interviewees*
- *"It is an expensive thing to develop land, and particularly for the value of land in Deni. You know, block value is comparatively low so it can be cost-prohibitive for developers at this point in the market to develop." – indoor council staff meeting*
- *"There's people around town who have been sitting on blocks of land for probably 20 and 30 years and done nothing with them. There are so many people with this strange mentality that they think they can just make a fortune out of selling land, but if the town's not going ahead, you're not going to make any money. It's just a noose around your neck paying the rates." – personal interview*
- *"Upgrades / new VRA Rescue building. It is an outdated building not fit for purpose and not maintained. It is placed on prime land and is an eye sore that everyone passing through is seeing." – online survey respondent*
- *"Measures that could be taken to smooth the path to speed up the process for new developments in the area." – online survey respondent*
- *"CBD change to residential as well as commercial is a great idea. I like what was shared at the recent Developers meeting, I have been thinking about it a lot and it makes real sense. It would solve the problem of empty shops. Retail in Deni may never go back to what it was." – personal interview*
- *"The main street is an asset going to waste. There is prime real estate going to waste in main part of town." – personal interview*
- *"The perception of living in the main street is now changing – becoming popular. The main street is a game changer." – personal interview*
- *"Farmers are wanting to retire in town. There is nowhere or them to move into town. Farmers are cashed up, want to stay here for family and friends." – personal interview*

RIVER FRONT USAGE AND DEVELOPMENT

A significant number of people, unprompted, raised the use of the river and river frontage land as a big opportunity for Deniliquin. Better use of the river and the land on the river is seen as a tourism opportunity as well as improving the lifestyle for residents. This was a constant theme of the discussions and came through in all consultation platforms.

Maximising the use of the riverfront is seen as a key Council responsibility, and there was some disappointment expressed that prime river-front land has been used for public service building rather than dining, shopping or other facilities that enhance the use of the river.

The proposed Deni Boat Club development may meet some of the needs being expressed by the community for river front entertainment. As Council is aware this project requires a joint funding program to build a new boat house and food and beverage outlet.

This project appears to be a positive opportunity as it would attract both out of town visitors and locals and is located near existing tourists staying at the Big4 Holiday Park.

Community comments

- *“The river should be the front door of the community. The river is what you should be working with – all the plans say this. Follow your own plans.” – personal interview*
- *“I don’t think we utilise the river here enough. You’ve got the police station and the hospital, and you can’t really do much about where they are, but it’s prime real estate. – indoor Council staff meeting participant*
- *“People from the cities expect this – food and drink – on the river.” – personal interview*
- *“There isn’t one place in Deni where you can take someone and have a drink over the river! There is nowhere to take people to have a coffee or a beer over the river.” – community meeting participant*
- *“Use the river more in Deni – hospitality on prime land but nowhere to build this – Dr practice should never have been built on the edge of the river in prime land.” – community meeting participant*
- *“A marina would be great. It is hard to park a houseboat unless you have river frontage with a mooring.” – community meeting participant*
- *“What about a pontoon or similar.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Near McLean Beach, where the old Wenburn Lodge Motel was, that would make a great location for food and beverage.” – community meeting participant*
- *“The Edward River Oval location has amazing river frontage, but it has no facilities. There no bins, no docks for fishing boats or platforms all for people to fish from the river (ie pontoons) etc. If there were facilities like this, it would assist for disability access as well as being a standout location for the community and visitors – a tourism asset and business asset for the Council.” – personal interview*

Tourism

The community presented a myriad of ideas to attract visitors, and to encourage people to spend longer in the region. Feedback indicates that the community sees attracting tourists and promoting the region to be an important role for Council. More than 78% of respondents in the online survey said that they are aware of Council's tourism brand, Visit Deni.

The community also indicated the importance of Council working cooperatively with other Councils in the region to promote the broader area as a destination. It was also understood that Council should invest more funding in these strategic partnerships as the current contribution is too insignificant to make a difference.

There was some frustration expressed that Council has previously been more active in tourism promotion, but that budgets have decreased in recent times and there is less marketing activity underway currently even though the Council staff working in this sector are dedicated and are committed to getting good outcomes. Less budgets available means that Council is currently maximising the spend on tourism marketing with carefully planned and measured activity in the best way possible, but it seems that increased budgets are required.

Some of the suggestions proposed by the community include:

- Extend bike path to the sunset viewing platform
- Bike path around the billabong
- More glamping tents
- Upgrade church in Conargo for museum / art space
- Turn the Peppin Heritage Centre into a wool precinct. This facility needs to be upgraded and could be an Info Centre presented more professionally. Our area is famous for wool/ sheep and kelpie dog so present the story well and educationally. Consider a replica or change of location of the Wanganella Merino Ram to being positioned at the Peppin Heritage Centre.
- Kayak trails
- Signposted walking trails
- More ongoing maintenance in the Pretty Pine area, particularly around the Hotel precinct (truck stop, roadside near the hotel etc)
- Facilities, including adequate parking, for truck drivers travelling though the region particularly to have access to food stops and bathrooms
- Divert caravans so they visit main centre of the CBD and provide parking for them.

In addition, creating more and higher quality accommodation options for visitors was frequently raised as an opportunity to attract more tourists to the area. Likewise, many respondents perceived that additional quality dining facilities and some unique local food and dining options would appeal to tourists (and locals too).

Highlighting the Indigenous cultural heritage in the area was also seen as an important tourism opportunity.

Community comments

- *“Boutique accommodation. There is a clear need for more high-end accommodation options.” – Developers’ forum participant*
- *“I’d love to see a nice flash truck stop/rest area where truckies can swing over their road trains, unhook, have a shower, have food and whatever else. I think one of the things we’ve overlooked is the volume of big truckers that come through town and ideally, building a Deni Depot at the old Council Depot site.” – personal interview*
- *“Petrol must be sold in the villages.” – online survey respondent*
- *“The Federal Hotel is a nice building. We should look at it as a place for a night club or accommodation.” – participant in outdoor council staff meeting*
- *“Having a high-quality boating and leisure facility on the river is key to our tourism industry and I believe that our overnight visitation through our peak periods is bringing the town to capacity in terms of the accommodation. But our off peak, there is plenty of opportunity.” – personal interview*

Natural environment

As recognised in the Edward River Council Community Strategic Plan 2018 – 2030, the community values and appreciates the natural environment in the Edward River region. However, some of the community believes that the area's natural assets are not always fully appreciated by Council, tourists and even other residents.

Further recognition, enhancement and promotion of the beauty of the natural environment in the area was recommended by several interviewees and survey respondents. This was seen as an opportunity for economic growth via tourism and also as an opportunity to enhance the experience of living in the region.

There is particular interest in maximising the enjoyment of the river for both residents and visitors. This feedback came through strongly via all consultation platforms and links to the call for a better developed riverfront.

Community comments

- *"It's got a nice river. It's got plenty of good recreational facilities. All the sporting facilities you want. You can drive 10 minutes and you can't see any sign of human intervention whatsoever." – personal interview*
- *"We need to look at more activities to capitalise on our natural environmental assets such as the Edward River. So, things like I think there's a beach-to-beach walk; wouldn't it be amazing if there was a beach-to-beach loop where you could cross over a rope bridge or suspension bridge. You could ride your bikes around and do different legs and loops; 5km, 10km, etc." – personal interviewee*
- *"We are failing to recognise the natural resources we have." – personal interview*
- *"There is just no acknowledgement in the town that you've got these fantastic national parks just on the outskirts. You go to Balranald and Moulamein and Yanga National Park, everything in the town wants you there, or up to the national park north. Now Deni is a logical floodplain – you could sell it as the floodplain capital national park because we're right on the river. We've got a beautiful river. Go upstream and you end up in the national park, and we just do not capitalise on it at all." – personal interview*
- *"Things happen slowly, right, but we need to utilise the river, do it properly and it's not just about skis it's about people coming and spending time and staying and camping." – personal interview*
- *"Marina development and moorings along the Edward River in the centre of town. This will enable people to park boats and access CBD." – Developers' Forum participant*
- *"One of the prime things is the sunsets and the open skies and whatever so we thought about maybe building—have telescopes available so people can go out in the evening and watch the stars and whatever and have open pit barbeques. That's just something that we thought of using the natural qualities that we've got." – community meeting participant*

There was also some concern raised both in the online survey and in personal interviews that Council is not taking sufficient action to prevent damage to the natural environment caused by weeds and other pests in some locations in the region. The Edward River Council Community Strategic Plan 2018 – 2030 acknowledged the need for invasive weed management programs with a focus on protecting the area's agricultural lands, its water ways and parks, as well as maintaining the native vegetation. The community sees the protection of the natural environment as a key Council responsibility and in addition to agricultural lands, many comments from the community referred to the importance of removing weeds and pests from the environment close to towns and villages that Council has responsibility for, particularly the Waring Gardens and surrounding lagoons. There was also some concern expressed by a few people about the impact of the unpredictable decisions and timing of the decisions that the State Government makes on the river water heights - this impacts the environment and tourism.

Community comments

- *“Please look after the river walk as the hundreds of palms will soon take over the natural habitat.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Remove any trees on nature strips with invasive roots such as Claret Ash. Remove trees from the river and riverbanks that would otherwise have been removed by fire from lightning strikes but are now left sitting and clogging up the river. Do more to remove carp or petition to have carp removed from the river system.” - online survey respondent*
- *“The weeds in the lagoon in the CBD area need to be addressed -they could be a danger to young children thinking it is safe to ‘walk on’ when in fact they are covering a big water mass.” – personal interview*
- *“Brick Kiln Creek (at north area where the bridge is on Davidson St) should be cleaned and deepened to prepare for future floods. This is long overdue.” - personal interview*
- *“Council needs to liaise with the lagoons group and actually come up with a plant management plan for the lagoon That looks to replace the noxious weeds with native plants. Now there is a biological agent that work is being undertaken on to control sagittaria.” – personal interview*
- *“The river heights – there is no management plan when it comes to the river particularly water heights– they treat it like a channel – overnight it can drop a metre, then up and down again. This effects tourism immensely – particularly houseboats. No one tells anyone but they do it so often they couldn’t communicate. Must be doing immense damage to the riverbanks. A week prior to Easter they dropped the river by over a metre – then many people said it is like a mud hole – what about tourism!” – personal interview*

Infrastructure and community facilities

PARKS AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

More than 80% of the respondents in the online survey indicated that they are 'Satisfied' or 'Very Satisfied' with the parks, reserves and open spaces in the community (see Figure 10). This is a strong response and reflects positively on some of the recent projects undertaken by Council such as Scott's Park (Rocket Park) Destination Playground, the Waring Gardens upgrade and the Lagoon to River Walk development. Council is to be acknowledged for these upgrades.

There was some feedback that tree work and weeding is still needed in Waring Gardens, and there were several comments about the need for improvements to the public toilet facilities in Waring Gardens and more broadly across Deniliquin.

Community comments

- *"Waring Gardens still needs to address the health of the existing trees. Some need removing and or need replacing. This also applies to many street trees ie. silky oaks near town hall. The Waring Gardens look fabulous." – online survey respondent*
- *"Weeding in Waring Gardens needs to be a priority." – online survey respondent*
- *"Baby change facilities needed in accessible places, eg Peppin Heritage Centre/ Crossing Café." - online survey respondent*
- *"The toilets in the Waring Gardens, in fact the public toilets are a disgrace and poorly maintained." – online survey respondent*
- *"Maclean Beach – the old toilet blocks need to be upgraded and the general area surrounding them needs to be more inviting." – participant in outdoor Council staff meeting*

Feedback indicated that well maintained recreational facilities are important to the community. There was feedback from young people asking for the skate park to be maintained and "fixed", plus requests for more public basketball courts and some volleyball courts.

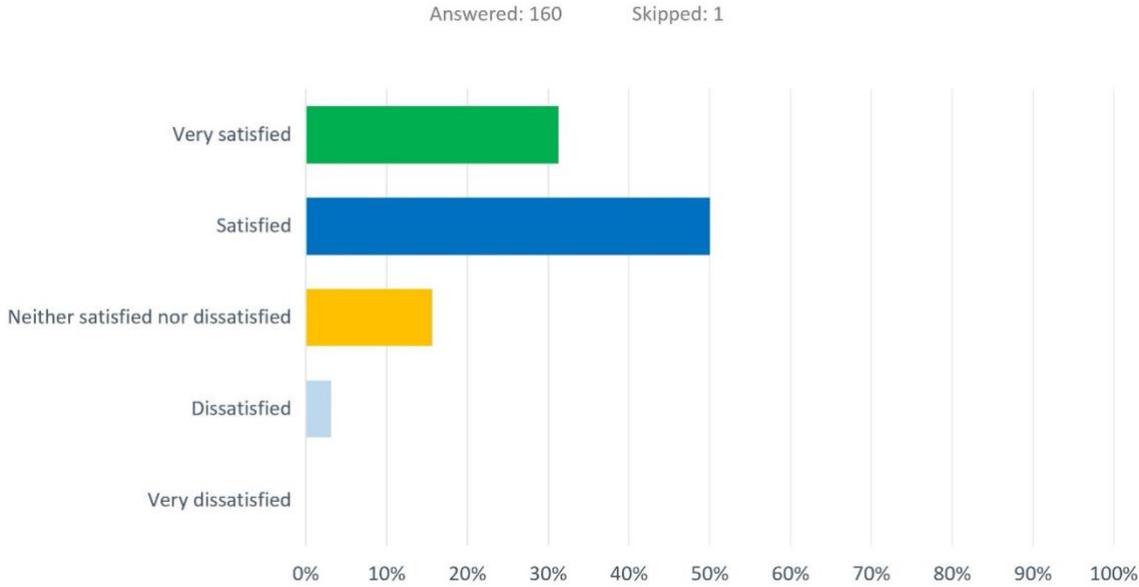
There were many unprompted comments made about the need for a dog park and for dog waste bag stations, although there was also some criticism of investment in the proposed dog park. Council has advised that the dog park project is already underway.

Community comments

- *"Providing bags for dog poo at various points along the river walk and in Waring Gardens would help keep the environment cleaner." – online survey respondent*
- *"Dog waste bag stations have been requested by the public, yet no progress has been made." – online survey respondent*
- *"Need a fenced dog park asap. Need clearly defined rules that dogs must be registered and vaccinated." – online survey respondent*
- *"I think they need a leash-free area; people need them. But people need to keep their dogs on a leash in other areas. And its locals that let their dogs off, it's not the visitors." – personal interview*
- *"But they do need some bins with signs, and the plastic bags. A few of those on the edge of the boardwalk and places like that. Just a street sign then, reminding people about them being on a leash because they'll argue it. They don't have to go on a leash." – personal interview*

Figure 10

Q4 How satisfied are you with our parks, reserves and open spaces?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Very satisfied	31.25% 50
Satisfied	50.00% 80
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	15.63% 25
Dissatisfied	3.13% 5
Very dissatisfied	0.00% 0
TOTAL	160

TRANSPORT

There were very mixed views in relation to public transport and a great number of people who do not use, and do not have a view on, public transport. Public transport was ranked the lowest when online survey respondents were asked what issues were important to them (see Figure 2). Almost half of the respondents to the online survey said public transport was not applicable to them (see Figure 11) and the remaining respondents were split with 46 people saying the public transport options do meet their needs and 37 saying that the options do not meet their needs.

There were mixed views about the bus service available within town with some considering it to be useful, and others saying the timetable was not communicated well and the stops and routes were not helpful.

However, there was clear messaging from the community about the need for better rail, bus and air services to transport people in and out of Deniliquin.

Community feedback indicated that improved frequency and timing on the bus services to Echuca and Albury would be helpful.

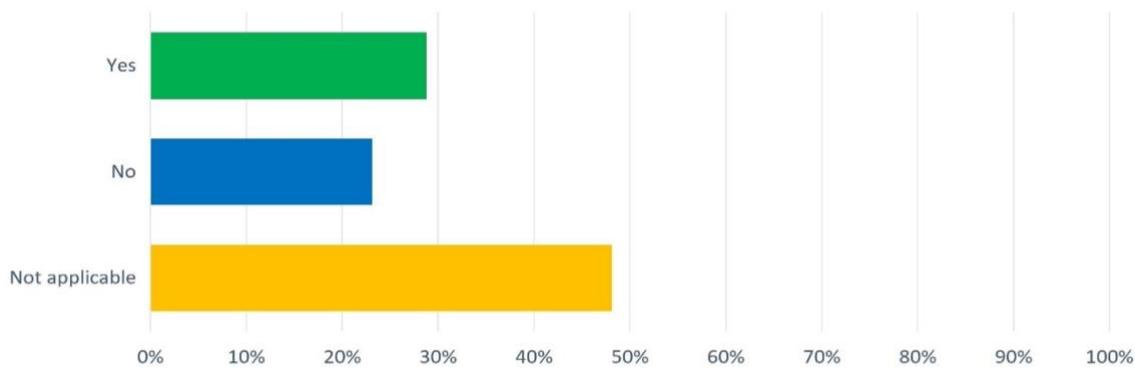
However, in the longer term, the community also said that a passenger rail service to Melbourne would make Deniliquin much more accessible and, therefore, a more attractive place to live. Likewise, an airport with direct

flights to Sydney would also open significant opportunities for commuting and business and would be well received by the community.

Figure 11

Q5 Do the public transport options available to you meet your needs?

Answered: 160 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	28.75%	46
No	23.13%	37
Not applicable	48.13%	77
TOTAL		160

Community comments

- *“It’s fantastic. A lot of people use the bus. There’s a timetable, it’s brilliant. But there is not a stop at the hospital.” – personal interview*
- *“I think to have a regular rail service – I think Echuca leaves at 7am, but I think if Deni left at 6am on a daily basis and got back at, say, 6pm in the evening, that would be a gamechanger for the town.” – personal interview*
- *“Public transport link back to Echuca. A couple times a day to line up with Echuca train departure.” – Developers’ forum participant*
- *“Rail upgrade – why can’t we upgrade the rail so that we can connect to Victoria better and include passenger services.” – Edward River Council outdoor staff meeting participant*
- *“Increase bus services to and from Echuca to suit people working in Echuca but living in Deni. Also, to suit people who want to access health care in Echuca. Bus service to and from Albury timing is appalling especially to be able to access health care appt.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Public transport link back to Echuca. A couple times a day to line up with Echuca train departure.” – Developers’ forum*
- *“Train services to Melbourne would make Deni more accessible.” – online survey*
- *“Need to create infrastructure for road trains. Use the land near the saleyards for drivers but people believe it is too far – we need a place so they can stop, eat and rest.” – personal interview*

AIRPORT AND AIRPORT PRECINCT

There was significant discussion and speculation about the plans for the airport development, and interest in the benefits this would bring to the region. However, the airport development was considered as the least important issue for Council to focus its advocacy efforts on in the online survey (see Figure 8, page 36).

Feedback suggests that the community sees that timing for the redevelopment of the airport and airport land for business development has been slow and there is confusion in regard to the plans.

In March 2019 Council issued a media release stating it had endorsed a new strategic approach for developing the Deniliquin Airport, focussing on increasing usage of the facility through undertaking alternative land uses for undeveloped land, non-aeronautical development projects and small-scale aviation tourism, flight training, land and hanger property development.

Discussions with some community members has indicated that existing and interested businesses, manufacturers, land and property owners and developers seem to be at odds with each other, and with local aviators, specialist interest and user groups. There is not a shared understanding of what Council's intentions are for the use of airport land. Mixed messages from these stakeholders and from Council cause confusion and frustration, and we heard that this has resulted in potential commercial business opportunities not being pursued.

It is understood additional airport funding from the NSW State Government is still being pursued, however, the community is looking for a clear vision and a plan for the proposed use of airport land, its infrastructure, and facilities. Feedback indicated that it is important that a stakeholder analysis is conducted to include business, manufacturers, property developers, plus local aviators, specialist interest and user groups. A shared vision from stakeholders and Council is required for both the airport and the surrounding land.

Community comments

- *"It'd be amazing if we had an airport. I don't think we need a massive airport, but an airport facility like REX, if you could somehow start some flights to Sydney or something like that."* – personal interview
- *"Make the airport a useful facility and a hub for commuters and business."* – online survey
- *"Upgrading the airport is a positive and must be done – it gives the opportunity to allow people to come in, and cold stores to store products. Echuca is too small re no land left but Deni has abundance of area. Deni is best."* – personal interview
- *"Link to airport for transport and road trains is important."* – personal interview
- *"Perception is that the subdivision costs are too high for airport area – if so, sell message that they are not or if they are high, manage this."* – personal interview

ROADS AND FOOTPATHS

The maintenance of roads was not a question specifically asked in the online survey however it is an issue that was raised unprompted by many respondents and some interviewees. More than a quarter of online survey respondents raised issues with roads and footpaths when asked what Council could do better in the open-ended survey question.

The feedback was much the same from all residents and primarily related to sealing roads that are currently unsealed, better maintaining the sealed roads in town and criticism of the work done recently to maintain the roads. There was also feedback about the need for more footpaths and better street lighting.

Community comments

- *“Roads need better maintenance. Mayrung road needs to be widened.” - Blighty community meeting attendee*
- *“Maintenance of unsealed roads needs to be a priority.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Roads is a big issue.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Fix the roads, not just recover with loose stones and hot tar.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Complete road projects in quicker time, not leave half-complete roads idle for weeks.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Roads that have been upgraded are substandard and have been poorly finished.” – online survey respondent*
- *“We also need footpaths in all areas, especially in the east where you have to walk your dog or pram on the median strip or road.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Please clean the footpaths in the CBD – it’s great that they are new, but they are very dirty, and Council should clean them properly quarterly.” - personal interview*
- *“Better streetlighting. The reflectors on the road are fantastic when you're in a car. But when you're walking the street at night, even as early as 6pm, it would be handy to be able to see where I'm going, especially on the many blocks where there are no footpaths.” – online survey respondent*

WASTE AND RECYCLING

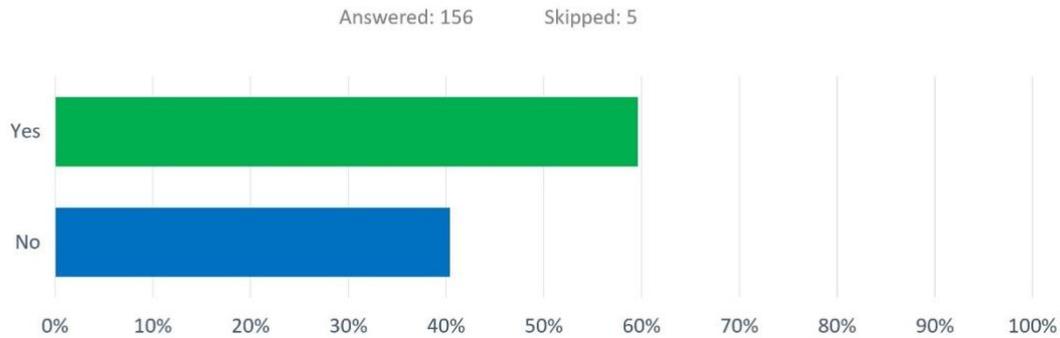
The lack of kerbside recycling is a significant concern in the community. This question attracted the most emotional and the most negative responses in the online survey.

The survey asked the question: Would you support an increase in service fees to enable the implementation of roadside recycling and green waste?

The response was split with almost 60% of respondents saying ‘yes’ and just over 40% saying ‘no’ (see figure 12). However, it was clear many of the people who responded ‘no’ do want kerbside recycling but don’t want to have to pay more for this service.

Figure 12

Q8 Would you support an increase in service fees to enable the implementation of roadside recycling and green waste?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	59.62%	93
No	40.38%	63
TOTAL		156

The comments on this issue were strongly worded and several respondents indicated that Council rates are already too high. The need for kerbside recycling was the most popular response to the open-ended question regarding what Council could do better with almost a third of people who answered this question listing 'kerbside recycling' as a priority for Council.

It should be noted that this may have been influenced by the recycling question asked earlier in the survey which meant this issue was 'top of mind'. However, the emotion in the comments regarding recycling was more intense and the issue was more frequently raised than any other one issue.

Community comments

- *Why don't we have three bins like people in Moama??? They pay lower rates and have better services!!! This issue should be addressed!! – online survey respondent*
- *"Waste collection is a problem as the recycling and green waste are not catered for, but I don't want to pay more than what I already consider to be excessive rates." – online survey respondent*
- *"Recycling needs to occur in the Deniliquin area. Most councils, many smaller than Deni, have recycling, and it is an embarrassment that we do not." – online survey respondent*
- *"With the rates we pay, there should be no need for an increase to reinstate recycling." – online survey respondent*
- *"It amazes me that in 2021 Deniliquin does not have a road-side recycling service. Mathoura has this, which is ridiculous Deniliquin does not." – online survey respondent*
- *"Kerbside waste collection is only general garbage; many councils have moved to 4 bins, most 3, and we are well and truly lagging behind. A service fee increase is not ideal when we already have some of the highest rates in NSW and the area is quite low socio-economically." – online survey*
- *"Advocate for 6-mthly roadside pickup for free of large RUBBISH items etc. Not everyone (pensioners, unemployed) can or able to transport goods to tip...i.e., Ute, truck, physical ability." – online survey respondent*
- *"More needs to be done to reduce the burden of waste. I know that it is a cost to implement the three-bin system, and that might not be supported by residents as they will bear the cost of it. But Council needs to take a leadership stance and begin to change the behaviour and perceptions about waste. Look at what other innovative Councils are doing to support changes in waste reduction to reduce the impact on the landfill. I've taken cardboard out to the tip before and been told that the cardboard section is full, just throw it in the hole. Granted this only occurred once, but it's reflective of the general attitude towards waste and consumption." – online survey respondent*
- *"No recycling and no green waste collection - both very disappointing considering the rates we pay. Council do a wonderful job in many areas; kerbside waste is not one of them." – online survey respondent*

There was one sole respondent to the survey who made the point that, in their opinion, the environmental and fiscal costs of recycling in Deni, and transporting that recycling to be processed, would outweigh the benefit of recycling for the environment.

FACILITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY AND OLDER RESIDENTS

Simple measures can mean the difference between older people and people with disability leaving their homes and enjoying the company of others and contributing to their community or staying at home being fearful of their wellbeing. Facilities such as disabled access, car parking and seating so they can feel safe, secure and in control of managing their transportation and safety needs.

Community representatives provided feedback that the needs of older people and people with disability are not always sufficiently considered when Council is upgrading or developing facilities and services. Older people and people with disability want to remain living in their community but they can only do so if their needs are properly considered. Advocates asked Council to ensure that they consult more broadly to ensure their work supports and assists this segment of the population.

Community comments

- *“We need more disability car parking. There should be two additional car spaces placed immediately outside the community hall in the main street (Cressy) where many voluntary groups meet and conduct their activities – i.e., patchworking. Please place one on each side of the new walkway (near the pedestrian crossing).” – personal interview*
- *“Please can seating be placed at this hall location just near the additional car spaces so people can sit and wait for the Intereach Bus. There is a strong need for this as older people can’t stand for long periods of time.” – personal interview*
- *“As an example, in Deni, ie. Scott’s Park - it is great – but how can our people access this piece of equipment? This is the park that you want all people to go to. People with disabilities need to be included – how would they be included?” – personal interview*
- *“Scott’s Park is beautiful; however, we weren’t consulted in its upgrade / development stage. Simple things about the footpath to swings so people have access to it.” – personal interview*
- *“Are the toilets accessible for wheelchairs (grab bars in the right place)? Did an OT visit so it is relevant for all? When it comes to planning for people with barriers – it is like a second thought that just doesn’t happen well enough.” – personal interview*
- *“I don’t think we need transport around town, I think we kind of need car transport to take people to appointments outside Deni and bring them back.” – personal interview*

AGRICULTURAL FACILITIES

With agribusiness such an important part of the region’s economy, there was frustration expressed about the failure to maintain the local saleyards and a perceived lack of commitment to some agricultural facilities in the area ranging from showgrounds to freight facilities.

There was disappointment expressed that cattle and sheep saleyards in Deniliquin were perceived as not properly maintained and have not been properly considered in Council planning. The state of the saleyards prompted many emotional comments in the online survey and there is significant concern that providing the facilities needed to maintain and grow the agribusiness sector in the region is not being prioritised by Council.

Community comments

- *“Invest in the cattle yards, we need all avenues for business not just throwing everything at one option eg. sheep.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Repair and refurbish the cattle saleyards - support and encourage farmers and associated businesses.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Retain and redevelop the saleyard precinct.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Disappointing to see no maintenance at all on saleyards and associated infrastructure.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Fix the sheepparks; add a few more rails to make them useable for cattle so they can be used for recreational purposes too” – personal interview*
- *“Consider repairing some of the cattle saleyards and conduct store sales there – sales like this attract people to town who spend money on food and beverages.” – personal interview*
- *“Consider a bigger freight hub and warehousing opportunity for Deniliquin.” – personal interview*

Community comments - continued

- *“Establish transport hub for freight with amenities.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Move the show and pony club to racecourse/rodeo to make one precinct.” – online survey respondent*
- *“I would like to see us have world class facilities here and I think we're capable of it. You've only got to look at the fact that Henty and Elmore and all those field days and events are a subsidiary. They're an idea that's come from a show and promoting agriculture, and promoting people to shop locally, promoting people to come back to the town.” – personal interview*

Water

The Edward River Council area is part of the Murray Darling Basin. The area is significantly exposed to water availability and policy decisions. Water supply needs to be stable, reliable and affordable to enable the region and its agricultural industries to prosper. The Agribusiness Masterplan highlights that a strategic and cohesive approach to water advocacy is needed.

Respondents to the online survey told us that Council advocacy in relation to the Murray Darling Basin Plan was equally as important as advocating for improved education and more important than advocating for better telecommunications or for the airport redevelopment.

The Edward River Council Advocacy Strategy acknowledges the importance of advocacy in relation to water and states that:

Under the Murray–Darling Basin Plan, Council is advocating for:

- *No further productive water acquisition through buy-backs from the Southern Basin*
- *Greater detail on the benefits, uses, and regulation of environmental water*
- *All basin regions to have the same standard of compliance, metering and measurement as the Murray system*
- *No further water removed, because water is the key economic driver of the region and a significant contribution to water recovery has already been made*

Access to water is a very serious threat to the region which is well understood by many of the key people involved in this consultation process. However, interestingly many participants in the consultation did not raise water issues at all – perhaps because many of them live in town and are not directly impacted by the issue, or perhaps because they don't believe it is a key issue for Council. This could also indicate the complexity of the issues around water which means many people – even those living in the Basin – do not always have a good grasp of the risks, policies and actions on-ground due to the complexity of the issue.

In the consultation, agribusiness leaders stated that another drought will have serious ramifications for the viability of the rice mill and many farmers whose business models are based on irrigation will be significantly impacted.

Community comments

- *“Another one we’re working on is a SIDLAM alternative. That’s a big threat to our region from a water perspective, but it’s also one of the biggest opportunities we have as a region, in my opinion.” – personal interview*
- *“We’re an agricultural area and the only way to maintain agriculture is they need water and they need it at an affordable price.” – personal interview*
- *“I just thought there’s a lack of empathy or understanding. I think when talking about water people are switching off now. It needs a whole new tone or something.” – in person interview*
- *“The northern basin is very different to the southern basin and this needs to be understood.” – online survey respondent*
- *“So, that’s a challenge for us, the water allocations. So, announcements in choosing what crop to grow, and there’s a market water price impact from all that stuff, so what we always need is a better understanding of the situation, and we also need significant improvements in water market modelling; you know what it is, what its price is and where it can go tomorrow or in three or six months. No ifs or buts; we need all the information sitting there.” – personal interview*
- *“There is this big water literacy issue. Because of that, then people make assumptions or operate out of what someone else has said or hearsay, and then people get very concerned or upset or angry, or whatever, and then things happen.” – personal interview*

Telecommunications and energy options

Several community members, particularly those living in or near the villages, expressed concern about internet access, reliability and speeds in the region and mobile phone coverage. They believe that Council should be strongly advocating for improvement on behalf of the community. Amongst other benefits, this would enable more people to be able to work from home across the region and encourage people to remain living in the area.

Edward River Council’s current advocacy strategy has identified that advocating for further investment from state and federal governments to address mobile blackspots across regional NSW is one of the five priorities in the plan. The feedback from the community indicates that this continues to be a concern and needs further action. There was frustration amongst some community members because there seems to have been no improvement despite lobbying and frequent communication regarding concerns.

Community comments

- *“Very poor internet at North Deniliquin. People have very little service and working from home is near impossible.” – online survey*
- *“Council needs to improve GIS data.” – online survey*
- *“Upgrade the telecommunications access. We don’t seem to have good public access to the Internet.” – Outdoor Council Staff meeting attendee*
- *“Telecommunications internet advocacy should be a Council priority.” - online survey respondent*
- *“I think the internet infrastructure here needs improvement. I think this could keep more people here while still being able to work – we don’t always have the employment here but if they could work from home with decent internet all the way out, not just in Deni but all the way out, that’s something we lack, particularly giving people the opportunity to work from around here.” – Council staff meeting*
- *“We want better communication out here we have dreadful phone service – we had a petition, and nothing happened.” – Pretty Pine community meeting attendee*
- *“They’re real limitations for us. So, there’s so much more we could do on farm with technology if we had connectivity.” – community meeting participant*
- *“Telecommunications, Wi-Fi and mobile phone service need improvement. All the money is spent in town; the facilities out of town aren't maintained.”- online survey respondent*
- *“Being able to just see a doctor and just do it via Telehealth and you can’t because you don’t have the internet. It is frustrating.” – personal interview*
- *“I can’t work from home. There’s no internet. I travel to Hay or for a while when everyone was a bit stressed, I was working from Booroorban Hall during the day. So at least I have phone reception here so I could hotspot.” – Booroorban community meeting participant*
- *“Connectivity is a big issue. Where you’ve got high density cropping or irrigated agriculture they’ve got far better connectivity than the dryland grazing country. They’re using GPS, they’re using satellites. They’ve got mobile phone service and we don’t have that. The Council assisted in getting towers put in at Wanganella and Booroorban over the last ten years but that doesn’t help us.” – community meeting participant*

Power availability was also raised as an issue with several residents expressing concern about insufficient power and proposing that alternate energy supplies are needed.

Residents urged Council to explore ways to make the community more effective users of renewable energy and less reliant on outside sources of energy. Various options were proposed by the community include natural gas and solar. The possibility of becoming a hub for large scale solar or other renewable energy was raised as an option for consideration. The dry heat in summer and long periods of sunshine throughout the year could make the region an appealing prospect for solar energy projects.

Community comments

- *“Council should investigate the possibility of getting gas connected to Deni.” – online survey*
- *“Solar projects where Council put solar panels on vacant land and sell back to the local community.” – online survey*
- *“Advocate for Rail Services & Natural Gas and or large scale solar/renewables.” – online survey*
- *“We need to consider natural gas or an alternative energy source as I know there are employers and businesses in town that cannot get enough electricity.”- outdoor council staff meeting attendee*
- *“We are interested in green energy – that is solar charging for vehicles.” – personal interview*
- *“For us the issue is power. We have power outages all the time and we can’t tap into all that power that is going straight past us.” – community meeting participant*
- *“Energy Natural Gas is important – or alternative energy.” – personal interview*
- *“Once the Airport runway has been done, natural gas is the next important priority – for industrial or commercial basis.” – personal interview*
- *“The gas line was meant to be linked to Moama.” – personal interview*

Arts, culture, and events

Several people expressed interest in a greater focus being placed on art and cultural activities in the region. There is a view that there has been significant improvement in the approach taken by Councils everywhere to arts and culture and there is recognition of the importance that it can play in terms of social and economic outcomes for a region. Arts and Culture is a key theme in the current Edward River Council Economic Development Strategy and many arts projects and organisations have been supported over the past four years.

Community feedback indicated that it is imperative that a commitment to arts and culture should be included in any future plan for the community.

There was strong support for investment in facilities for art displays and art classes. Displays of art, history and the culture of the region were considered to be good for tourism as well as for local residents. The community are proud of the Peppin Heritage Centre and the Crossing Cafe, and the care taken by Council in further developing and maintaining it. The community also acknowledged the Council staff and local volunteers for their commitment and tireless energy in sharing the property’s attributes and attractions to locals and visitors.

There was discussion of the plan to make the Town Hall a performing arts centre. It was suggested that this could also serve as an excellent training ground for young people looking to develop skills in the creative industries which includes performance but also the ‘behind the scenes’ elements of work in the industry.

Community comments

- *“Don't forget Arts and Culture impacts on economic and social wellbeing.”- online survey respondent*
- *“When you visit small towns in NSW many of them have art galleries/cafes to attract the tourists and give them a chance to observe the culture and talents of the people who live here.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Most other towns have something that promote the local arts and culture. There's nowhere in Deniliquin where you can come along and buy a painting of a river red gum or photograph.” – personal interview*
- *“Council should support and assist the provision of an art and cultural gallery.” – online survey respondent*
- *“We should have a permanent art display including photography.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Permanent building for art and craft classes.” – online respondent*
- *“The library could be reinvented and shared with an art/cultural facility. Visual arts has no outlet to present local productivity. A shared arts/cultural facility would support our local tourism. Sharing with the library (extending the facility) would be a step forward.” – online survey respondent*
- *“We need a person employed for ALL heritage of town to a dedicated, fully informed, knowledgeable of heritage laws and Deniliquin heritage listed buildings, items etc. A complete file for future mayors and council to access.”- online survey*

RECOGNITION OF INDIGENOUS CULTURE AND HERITAGE

The original inhabitants of the Edward River Council area were the Wamba Wamba Perrepa Perrepa Aboriginal people.

As at the 2016 Census, four per cent of the population in the area identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. However, information provided in the consultation process indicates that 12 per cent of the current Year 7 at Deniliquin High School are Indigenous.

There appears to be significant opportunity for the Edward River community to further acknowledge and embrace its Indigenous culture and history.

This will provide benefits for the whole community as well as for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Respecting, acknowledging, and raising awareness of the importance of the Indigenous history and culture in the area will help build relationships in the community between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people, and assist with community unity. Some people also indicated that it could create further tourism opportunities in the area. This was not raised frequently in the consultation but those people who did bring up the opportunity showed an interest in, and appreciation of, the culture and the landmarks of the traditional Indigenous owners of the land and believed the tourists to the area would also appreciate the opportunity to learn more.

Community comments

- *“I think we actually need some real understanding of what makes up this community because if you don’t know that - I don’t think the community plan does that. I think looking at what the current investments have been shown that, because what they’ve done down at Waring Gardens could be any place. It could be any town.” – personal interview*
- *“Whole town needs to understand restorative practices – this program is underway at the high school but would benefit the whole town.” – personal interview*

EVENTS

Community events are critical for building social networks and developing and maintaining the sense of community.

The communities in the villages spoke enthusiastically about the events that they hold and encouraged Council to continue to assist with funding or other support for these events.

Events such as the recent movie on the lawns adjacent to the Peppin Heritage Centre and Crossing Cafe were highlighted as an example of a positive and Council was urged to consider holding more events such as movie nights, concerts and markets.

The Deni Ute Muster was also frequently acknowledged as a great success story and the new museum at the Muster site provides an excellent tourism ‘hook’ that could be further promoted.

Community comments

- *“The pop-up cinema at The Crossing was great.” – community meeting participant*
- *“What is council policy re POP UP wine bars – heard that this got blocked due to local competition.” – community meeting participant*
- *“And the food vans, down at Memorial Park. They were great.” – internal Council staff meeting*
- *“People just want to get out and do things and that’s what we don’t have enough of on a regular basis.” – community meeting participant*
- *“Conargo Shire gave us some wonderful opportunities here and we didn’t want them to be taken over but that’s beside the point, but they gave us a beautiful hall with all the facilities. We’ve got two beautiful tennis courts out there with lights and we should be making a tennis competition.” – community meeting participant*

Council performance

OVERVIEW

Generally, the community believes that Council is delivering the following services effectively to the community (see Figure 13):

- Customer service (78% positive response)
- Maintenance of community facilities (76% positive response)
- Library services (93% positive response)
- Kerbside waste collection (61% positive response).

Council is to be acknowledged for these positive responses from the community survey. The respondents who were not happy with the services provided by Council were the respondents most likely to make additional comments on this question. The criticisms of the kerbside waste collection primarily centred around the lack of recycling. There was some feedback that it is hard to receive a timely response from Council staff and there was also significant frustration expressed regarding the high cost of Council rates (this was also expressed in the 2019 Community Satisfaction Survey).

However, it is important to note that responses to the specific questions asked in the online survey were generally positive in relation to Council performance and the delivery of the services that Council is expected to provide. There is also widespread appreciation of the recent investment in community facilities in the region (see Figure 14). The recent work on the River to Lagoon Walk, CBD streetscapes, Scott's Park playground and Waring Gardens has been particularly well received by the community. Council is to be congratulated for their contribution and quality outcomes.

However, there was frustration with Council expressed on a broader level and across a variety of the consultation platforms. This primarily centred around a view that Council could be more progressive in its approach to attracting business in the region and take a larger leadership role in relation to some of the issues facing the region.

There were several unprompted comments about the opportunity to improve Council communication and engagement with the community. There was also some frustration about hurdles created by Council expressed by people who are trying to innovate or bring new business or other ideas to the area. Some not-for-profit groups are also looking for more consistent engagement and support from Council.

Council was urged to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of planning including taking an 'open for business' attitude with a long term, visionary approach.

Council was also encouraged to lead the consolidation of various groups and facilities as some community members believe that the time is fast approaching where the region can no longer afford multiple sporting clubs and /or many other facilities.

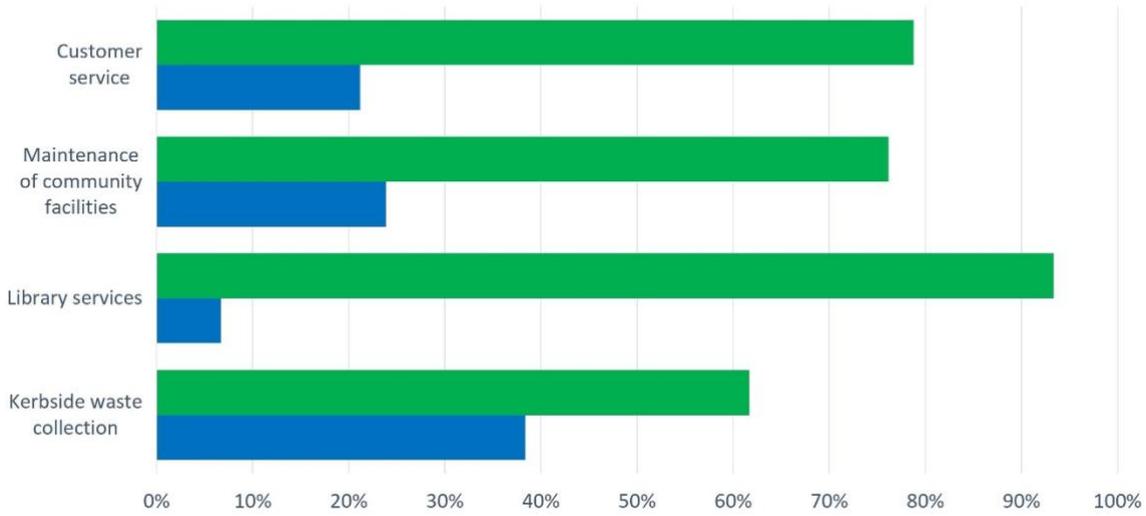
There is also a view from some village residents that Council is too focused on Deniliquin and is not sufficiently servicing rural communities and villages.

Overall, the community is looking to Edward River Council for a clear path forward, to create more economic growth, ensure social needs such as health and education are being advocated for, and generally to be more proactive in demonstrating outcomes for the region.

Figure 13

Q10 Do you believe Council is delivering the following services to residents effectively?

Answered: 156 Skipped: 5



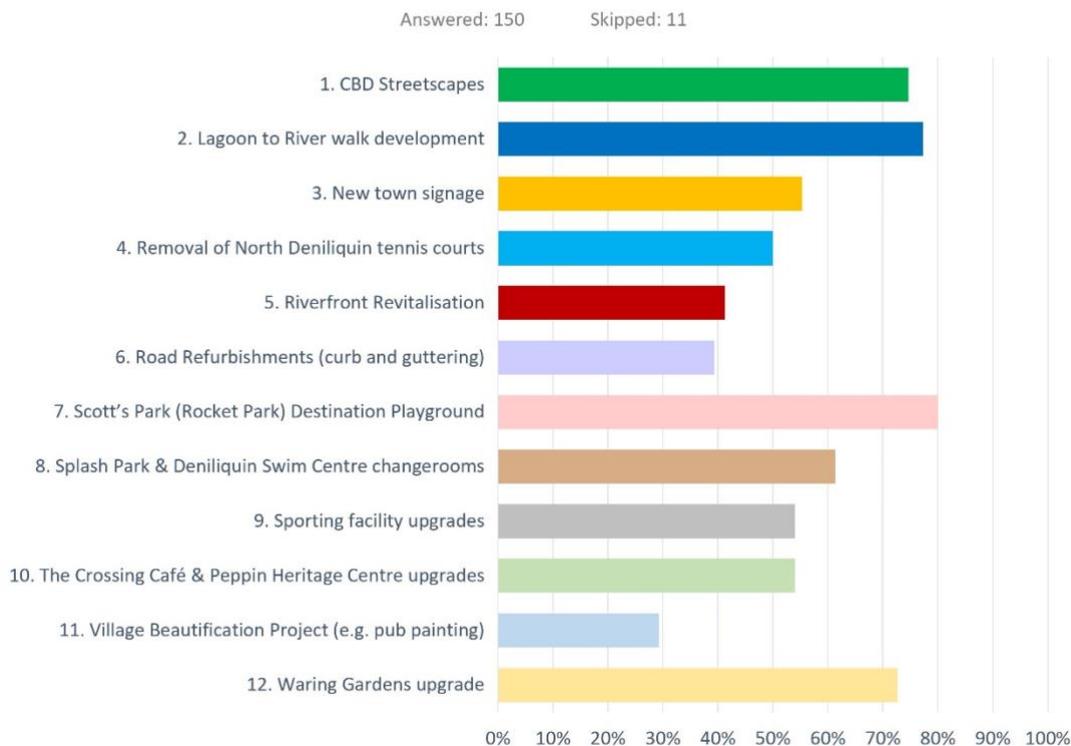
	YES	NO	TOTAL
Customer service	78.81% 119	21.19% 32	151
Maintenance of community facilities	76.16% 115	23.84% 36	151
Library services	93.33% 140	6.67% 10	150
Kerbside waste collection	61.64% 90	38.36% 56	146

Community comments

- *“Our rates are so high for such little return - poor footpaths, roads and no recycling.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Council works department not servicing rural communities. Edward River Council only servicing Deniliquin. Villagers for themselves.” – community meeting participant*
- *“The contractors who are used for the works done in town are poor quality.” - online survey respondent*
- *“Sometimes the council is reactive and doesn’t seem like it has a plan in getting things done. We need to consider if it’s getting things done on time and on budget.”- personal interview*
- *“Council is trying to be more positive, and this isn’t getting enough traction. Don’t celebrate successes well enough.” – telephone interview*
- *“General Manager must make his team accountable. Doesn’t matter how good the Councillors are, if the General Manager doesn’t drive the team, then you are stuffed! Then you get nowhere.” – personal interview*
- *“It would be good to understand what the incentive is for council and its staff? Do they have coaching and training? How fast are they acting on requests that are made of them? There seems to be a lot of room for improvement.” – personal interview*

Figure 14

Q11 Which projects do you believe Edward River Council has successfully delivered over the last four years?



COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION

The community indicated in interviews, meetings and the online survey that they would appreciate more engagement with Edward River Council. It seems that more communication and consequent awareness of Council activity would assuage many of the fears and concerns expressed by residents.

The community wants more information about the plans for the area and what Council is doing to implement these plans. There was little awareness of the plans already in place but even less awareness of how these plans are being actioned and the status of the activity. With further awareness of the activity underway, there would be greater confidence in the community.

There were suggestions that steering committees or advisory groups could be useful to bring together all the different groups and people in the region who currently want to contribute or are working in advocacy in various fields. Steering committees in key areas such as agribusiness, the environment, tourism, arts and business development were proposed by some in the community.

The need for more Council engagement and consultation either with topic specialists, with community groups or with the villages was raised time and time again.

Community comments

- *“Have more local input when making changes. A lot of things that have been done are great, but a lot of people think that the money and resources used on some projects could've been used more constructively elsewhere.” – online survey respondent*
- *“More consultation prior to decisions being made.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Work together with groups / users.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Listen to rate payers concerns and experience.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Need bigger and specific detailed info of future projects. Add to plans what changes will mean.ie removal or relocation of trees, walls buildings etc to enable plans to be acquired. A regular location of display and info of plans that WILL be seen by all age groups ie a sign board in the CBD.” – online survey respondent*
- *“So, one of the things I've seen in recent years has been less engagement with the community rather than more. I think it came a bit about with the amalgamation because when we had the amalgamation of Conargo and Edward there was a lot of money, and I don't think we got the best bang for that money.” – personal interview*
- *“Council are shocking at replying to emails. And I'm bitterly disappointed with the neglect of the cattle yards and the waste of money on unfinished projects.” – online survey respondent*

DEVELOPMENT

Confidence in the new General Manager is high and expectations on the General Manager are also high. There is also the expectation that Council staff will have the skills, experience, and expertise to guide a development or an initiative through Council processes in a way that is effective and is focused on achieving a result in as short a timeframe as possible. There is a perception that Council staff are not always committed to operating as efficiently and effectively as some of the community would expect. However, there were many occasions when some community members acknowledged Council staff for their work and contribution to the community.

Some dissatisfaction was expressed with Council's planning processes and approval timeframes. This was seen to be an impediment to progress in the region however some of these concerns are potentially historic and there is acknowledgement that there have been improvements in recent times.

The feedback indicates that there is the opportunity for Edward River Council to review management reporting roles and conduct a concise internal effectiveness and efficiency review.

The review would also include interviews with external stakeholders, which includes those who have recently completed or have demonstrated an interest but not further progressed property development in the Council region. Residential as well as industrial property developers and associated stakeholders would be included.

Community comments

- *“Don’t want restrictions that are placed on me by Edward River Council – business goes to other councils. The historical actions that have not encouraged industries to come here.” – community meeting attendee*
- *“Years ago, governments provided dollars to create infrastructure. Not now.” – community meeting attendee*
- *“How many of these ideas are held up or stopped by red tape??? If it is too hard it won’t be done!” – community meeting attendee*
- *“Council needs to be more nimble to assist with business development.” – personal interview*
- *“I have only been here six years and only hear how bad council is in stopping things. We are young we need good businesses here – we want a great life her for generations.” – community meeting participant*
- *“The council doesn’t seem to be the push – I don’t see it anywhere at all.” - personal interview*
- *“I have given up. Every time it is a talk fest. I look at strategic plan and nothing happens.”- personal interview*
- *“There is an issue with the time lag in Council. The wheels of local government move very slowly and when we decide we want to do something we want to do it yesterday and then when you get Council involved you know it’s going to be next year and that’s very frustrating.” – personal interview*
- *“I think there’s an opportunity for Council in their economic development role to have someone who comes in and says I want to do this development, it’s very wide ranging, it could be anything, you need someone there that understands what they want to do and then knows the course through the local government to get through to the other end and help them get there as quickly as possible because at the moment there’s not really someone.” – personal interview*
- *“I think we now have a very good General Manager in that if you’re having issues in that space, if you go direct to Phil and if you think you’re not getting things progressed as quick as possible ring him. I think that’s a good attitude because he will then look into it and do something about it.” – personal interview*
- *“I like the current General Manager – he seems to be really having a go. I’ve had a couple of meetings with Phil and he’s been really keen to get things going. Unfortunately, you have to jump through all the Council’s hoops and that’s really the bit that’s holding everything up.” – personal interview*
- *“Council is working harder on getting the development application and processes better, but still a lot of improvement required. Phil Stone, new GM is breath of fresh air.” – personal interview*
- *“For my business property development which took quite a while, we have had four different building inspectors from Council. There was very poor record keeping from all four of them, so each time one left, we had to ‘retrain them’ and had to resend all emails to them to get next steps.” – personal interview*
- *“We’ve had a lot of people who have had different goes at trying to get things done in the Council, but they’ve never looked at it as a grand plan, where are we going, you know? Like for industrial development, there was quite a number of people in the Council I dealt with who were really good. A few that weren’t, and they caused problems based with really poor work and communication both internally and with me. This caused big delays and a lot of pressure on me.” – personal interview*

ENGAGEMENT WITH VILLAGES

Many of the residents of the villages that make up the Edward River Council area were keen to share their views and actively participate in the community consultation. As a percentage of the population, more of them turned up to the community meetings than the Deniliquin residents.

There was enthusiasm to share ideas and many young and positive people attended these meetings.

Not surprisingly, these residents were very keen to ensure that they are not forgotten by Council and are calling for more engagement with Councillors and Council staff in their regions.

Community comments

- *“Improve village communication both ways.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Council should continue to support (actively) events in villages so not only Deni – centric.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Deniliquin didn’t have a clue about Wanganella or Blighty or Pretty Pine because they were all the Deniliquin Council staff and they didn’t even consider anything outside of Deniliquin. Hence we have a Visit Deni campaign rather than visit the whole region.” – community meeting participant*
- *“The fear that we have going on is loss of services. We don’t call on Council very much at all, but our rates have gone up because of disharmony but we’ll lose—the focus will continue to become Deni centric.” – community meeting participant*
- *“There was a Master Plan for Pretty Pine but where is it? Why hasn’t it been done? Conargo has one and so much happens there, but we get more traffic going past Pretty Pine.” – community meeting participant*
- *“We would like to see the Councillors and General Manager come to our villages and outer communities and meet with us like you are tonight and let us know what they are doing, plus we can share our feedback with them.” – community meeting participant*
- *“Since I am much closer to Finley than I am to Deniliquin, Finley is where I do my shopping and attend most appointments. I rarely visit Deniliquin and I’m not very interested in Deniliquin. At present people in my area of the shire seem to be completely forgotten.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Maintain our rural communities and rural roads, sheep yards.” – online survey respondent*
- *“Maintenance at Booroorban Hall happens but seems to take a lot of nagging.” - online survey respondent*
- *All the money is spent in town; the facilities out of town aren't maintained.” – online survey respondent*

IMPLEMENTATION

The Edward River Council has several significant plans in place for the region which generally reflect the feedback received from the community and address the needs the community has prioritised.

The implementation of these plans, with clear progress updates to the community, is critical so that the community is informed about outcomes and can better understand the work Council is doing, particularly the advocacy it is undertaking on the community's behalf. This work is being done but it seems that awareness is sometimes low. There seems to be the opportunity to share Council success and achievements more with the community.

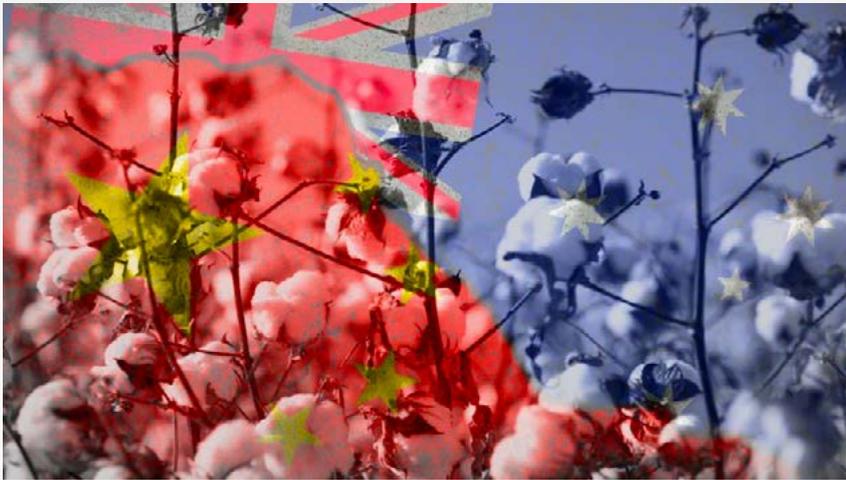
Drawing on the skills, expertise and talents of the local community is also strongly recommended. Whether this involves informal discussions and ongoing consultation with key business leaders, advisory panels with a selection of informed individuals or a more formal group structure this interaction with the community will benefit Council and assist it to deliver on its goals. There are highly successful entrepreneurs, knowledgeable and experienced agribusiness experts and informed health and environment specialists living in the region. Drawing on the expertise and knowledge of key people in the community will only benefit the outcomes for the region.

CASE STUDIES



China's trade sanctions on Australian agriculture force farmers to find new markets

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-02-14/farmers-find-new-markets-after-china-trade-spat/13148704>



ABC Rural

By national rural reporter Kath Sullivan

Posted Sun 14 Feb 2021 at 7:47am

Farmers who fell victim to the multi-billion-dollar China-Australia trade spat are seeing signs for optimism as they find new customers for their produce.

Barley growers say they are getting good prices from markets in the Middle East and Asia, while wool, wheat and dairy are largely unaffected by the trade bans and, despite impacts on some abattoirs, red meat sales to China remain high.

Cotton growers are also making some inroads in markets including Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and Bangladesh and the wine industry has been active in finding new markets.

But the lobster industry has struggled to fill the gap caused by the loss of the China market.

Key points:

- Farmers caught out in Australia's trade dispute with China are finding new markets for their produce
- The cost of tariffs and the unofficial trade bans is unclear
- Cotton, barley diversify, lobster exporters still face an uncertain future

Caution with comments on China

The Department of Agriculture will not say what the cost to farmers has been of higher tariffs and unofficial customs bans across a range of commodities, including barley, beef, wine and cotton.

"China has not imposed sanctions on Australian agriculture, fisheries and forestry products," a spokesman said.

It is also careful about how it refers to the row:

"Australian agricultural, fisheries and forestry exports faced a number of challenges, including drought, bushfires, COVID-19 and disruptions to regular trade flows for some commodities into the China market."

The National Farmers' Federation has speculated farmers could lose more than \$35 billion over the next decade because of the trade fallout, although it is unclear how the lobby group arrived at the figure.

Signs of recovery for barley exports

Eight months after China introduced hefty tariffs on barley, Australia's largest grain handler, CBH Group, says growers are being paid similar prices to when its most valuable customer was buying.

"For the Australian barley industry, yes it has been a tough 2020, but we're certainly recovering here and prices have recovered to basically the same levels as pre the anti-dumping tariffs," CBH Group chief marketing and trading officer Jason Craig said.

Mr Craig estimated a bumper 13 million tonnes of barley had been harvested across Australia this summer.

He said strong demand from feed markets in the Middle East and Asia and an Australian-first trial to sell premium malting barley to brewers in Mexico had helped to replace lost trade to China.

"Currently it's one shipment of 35,000 tonnes that's worth more than \$10 million, so it's an important trial," he said.

Red meat still selling into China

Australia continues to sell a lot of farm produce into China.

Exports including, wool, wheat and dairy are so far largely unaffected by the trade spat and, despite some abattoirs being restricted, sales of red meat to China remain high.

In 2020, six Australian abattoirs were suspended from the trade over labelling issues and claims of meat contamination.

A further two meat plants in Victoria are also waiting to resume selling beef and lamb to China after staff were infected with COVID-19, but prices for Australian cattle are at record highs.

Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) managing director Jason Strong said the impact of the tariffs across exports had been minimal.

"Yes, there was disruption, but the material impact on overall exports wasn't that great," Mr Strong said.

Australia's recovery from drought has seen the price of cattle soar to record levels, and Mr Strong said, "finding a home for beef not going to China isn't a major challenge".

China was Australia's third most valuable market for red meat last year.

"We sent them 197,000 tonnes of beef, so that was the second biggest year by quite a bit that we've sent to China and they were only number three by about 25,000 tonnes less than the US," Mr Strong said.

Cotton spreads risk, returns still high

Cotton growers are also expected to receive high returns for their produce in 2021, as the industry expands into markets across Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Bangladesh.

Australian growers and shippers claim Chinese spinning mills were told last October to stop buying Australian grown cotton, and the billion-dollar a year trade essentially stopped.

Toowoomba-based cotton trader and industry analyst Pete Johnson estimated growers would lose a \$10-\$20 a bale premium without China in the market, but that returns to growers this year were expected to be "historically high".

"Would we prefer the Chinese were there to take our cotton? Absolutely, but [we are] spreading our risk into a range of other markets throughout the subcontinent and Asia," Mr Johnson said.

"Spreading that risk is ultimately not a bad thing for the industry.

"While the price is good for the growers, and we're able to spread our risk further. It's not all bad news and its not all doom and gloom," he said.

Winemakers look to new markets

In the two months since China introduced tariffs on Australian wine, the value of exports fell by \$250 million when compared to the same time last year.

The loss of such a lucrative market is disappointing for New South Wales winemaker Bruce Tyrrell, who spent much of last year looking for new customers.

"We're opening markets in the 'Stans'— in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan," Mr Tyrrell said.

"They're not going to be massive, but they're good markets — wealthy countries building their level of sophistication, so as that happens, wine drinking goes with it," he said.

The Australian wine industry will also look to other Asian countries, into parts of Africa and the US.

Mr Tyrrell said 60 per cent of Australian wine is exported, and while it might be nice to think the domestic market could absorb some of the loss, it was unlikely.

"We can drink it all, but I don't think anyone will get much work done, because we'll all be legless."

Path to recovery not clear for lobster industry

For the Australian seafood industry, which sent almost 95 per cent of rock lobster exports to China, the market is harder to replace.

Louise Hart, who owns a family fishing business on Tasmania's West Coast, says she's been operating at a loss since China stopped buying up last November.

"We're not pinning our hopes on China coming back at all — no," Ms Hart said.

Ms Hart is uncertain about her industry's future when the new year quote begins next month.

"We don't know if we go out fishing. Are the buyers going to be able to sell them at any price at all, or are they just going to sit in their freezers or their tanks. We really don't know," Ms Hart said.

"There are a lot of industries in Australia like us, that have been solely reliant on China. It is a big warning to all of those too, find some other markets now," she said.

Government looks to EU, UK

Trade Minister Dan Tehan said he hoped new trade agreements with the UK and EU, expected to be established this year, would help exporters no longer trading into China.

"What those free trade agreements will do is provide us with access to another 500 million consumers at cheaper rates for our exporters," Mr Tehan said.

Watch this story on ABC TV's Landline at 12:30pm on Sunday, or on iView.

The future of Chinese agricultural policy

<https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/research-topics/trade/future-chinese-agricultural-policy>



Opportunities and challenges for Australian grains, beef and dairy exports

Author: James Fell

Urbanisation, food safety and product quality shape a key part of the future of Chinese agricultural policy and opportunities for Australian beef, dairy and grains exporters.

Executive summary

China announced major changes in its direction of agricultural policy.

Each year China sets out policies in its No. 1 Document. The 2017 No. 1 Document was unique because it marked a clear directional change for Chinese agricultural policy. The emphasis of the new policy direction is on supply side reform. The longevity of the reforms in the 2017 No. 1 Document was unclear, but the 2018 No. 1 Document and Rural Revitalisation Strategic Plan 2018–2022 confirmed a continuation of the 2017 reform direction, with an emphasis on the revitalisation of rural areas. This report provides a qualitative assessment of the reforms, focussing on the 2017 announcements.

The changes feature principally supply-side structural reform of Chinese agriculture.

Broadly speaking, the reforms described in the 2017 No. 1 Document include industrialising agriculture, increasing the size of farms, identifying regions for production specialisation, broadening the range and quality of crops, improving the

quality of livestock products and using international markets to complement domestic supply. Commodity-specific policies include reducing corn production and stockpiles, continuing the market pricing of corn, maintaining current production levels of pork, rice and wheat, and raising sheep, goat and beef production.

Reforms are also regulatory, with a major focus on food quality and safety rules.

Food safety and quality are a major focus of the new policies. Other institutional policy adjustments include strengthening international agricultural cooperation and strengthening scientific research.

The outlook for Australia's grain exports to China is mixed.

Moves to improve production specialisation and grain quality are expected to make Chinese grain more price-competitive and could soften demand growth for Australian grain for milling purposes. On the other hand, livestock sector developments should increase demand for imported feed wheat and barley once China's corn stocks have fallen from elevated levels.

The changes present new opportunities for Australian livestock product exporters.

Overall the picture appears positive for livestock exporters. Demand for Australian milk powders is expected to be boosted by China's dairy product production goal, which would likely require higher powder

imports. The improvement of food safety standards is expected to boost import demand for meat from countries like Australia that can readily comply with higher standards. The industrialisation of China's livestock industries is expected to result in higher demand for Australian live feeder cattle.

Other countries are already exploiting the demand for improved livestock genetics.

The Chinese Government's direction for genetic improvements in dairy and beef cattle provides Australia with opportunities to increase breeder cattle and bovine semen exports. Despite concerns that selling Australia's genetic stock reduces demand for Australian livestock products in the long term, if Australia doesn't export high quality genetic material then other countries will do it and take advantage of short term demand. Australia would forgo an opportunity. Australia is currently a minor exporter of genetic material to China where the market is dominated by Canada and the United States.

Strong income growth is likely to offset the effects of policy changes.

The growing demand from China for agricultural products is expected to remain a major influence on Australian agriculture regardless of policy changes. However, an understanding of the changing policy environment will be important for Australia's agriculture industry if it is to maximise gains into the future.

The policy reforms present mutually beneficial cooperation opportunities.

Based on the direction of China's agricultural policies and Australia's growth in trade with China, there are potential areas for greater focus to achieve outcomes that are in the interest of both countries. At present, agricultural cooperation in the areas of biosecurity, genetics, food safety and policy development appear the most promising.

Agribusiness to China - Trends and opportunities

<https://www.austrade.gov.au/australian/export/export-markets/countries/china/industries/agribusiness>



The market

China is one of the world's top producers of livestock, grains, rice and other agricultural goods. It is the world's 2nd largest agricultural goods importer and 7th largest exporter.

China continues to place strong importance on its agricultural sector. As outlined in the 13th 5 Year-Plan and in President Xi Jinping's report to the recent 19th CPC National Congress, China plans to develop a modern agricultural system, new agribusiness organisations and improve agricultural services.

China's strategy and overall focus on developing modern agriculture: China agriculture sustainable development plan 2015-2030 (Chinese).

The industry benefits from strong government support, continued investment and farm consolidation. Securing food supply, boosting farm productivity and increasing product diversity are high priorities for the government.

Demand growth is expected to remain high, particularly for value-added products such as meat and milk. Challenges for the sector include meeting growth objectives with limited new arable land, land degradation and environmental protection.

For Australian businesses, there are opportunities to develop long-term supply agreements and build relationships with Chinese enterprises along the entire agribusiness and food-value chain, including services, education and training.

Opportunities

For Australian businesses, areas of opportunity include:

- animal feed and nutrition, particularly oat hay, barley and sorghum
- supply of genetic material and breeding cattle for dairy and beef as well as sheep and goat meat
- dairy industry equipment, technology and services
- environmental management and sustainable agriculture systems
- agricultural and veterinary chemical management
- by-product utilisation and disposal
- veterinary and biosecurity services
- tracking, traceability and risk management
- aquaculture technologies and services
- dry land cropping efficiency
- post-harvest treatment technology
- supply-chain development and management
- cooperation on innovative technology solutions and smart agriculture including agtech startups

Competitive environment

China's market for commodities and agricultural inputs is dominated by state-owned enterprises, particularly in staple foods. There are however opportunities for firms to supply inputs along the entire value chain including final products.

Australia has a strong reputation for quality and safety and Australian businesses are well placed to capitalise on this. There is strong competition from North and South American and European countries with similar credentials, both in commodities and in value-add areas such as genetics and breeding, feed and machinery. Exporters without strong supply partnerships remain vulnerable to changes in buyer demand, price and currency.

The Australian Government continues to work closely with Chinese authorities to negotiate more favorable market access and reduce non-tariff barriers. Market access challenges for Australian businesses include contamination issues, uncertainty regarding customs trials and approvals, and regulatory changes.

National, provincial and local governments have a strong interest in the sector and may offer favorable conditions to foreign firms. Some projects may have strong government support but an unclear commercial basis.

Investment

Chinese investment in Australia's agribusiness sector is expected to drive further growth in production and exports. Australia is

seen as an attractive investment destination, particularly in the dairy, meat, seafood, grains, wine, sugar and food processing sectors.

China is Australia's 2nd largest foreign investor in agricultural land after the UK. In 2016, there were 12 major deals worth a total of A\$1.2 billion, a three-fold increase in value compared to 2015.

These investments support long term export opportunities and innovation in Australia's agribusiness sector. Investors in Australian agriculture include major importers with an interest in securing supply to meet Chinese domestic market demand, strengthening their research and development capabilities, and gaining access to new markets.

Chinese agri-food investors are moving to a more sophisticated and cooperative investment model. Project selection, planning and due diligence are more valued while agritech and R&D are emerging as attractive investment opportunities.

Major Chinese companies with trade and investment interests in Australia's agriculture sector include Beidahuang Group, COFCO, New Hope Group, Bright Food, Shanghai Zhongfu, Shandong Ruyi Group, and Luzhou Laojiao.

Tariffs, regulations and customs

Since its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, China has made significant progress in liberalising agricultural trade.

The China Australia Free Trade Agreement (ChAFTA) came into force on 20 December 2015, and is reducing and eliminating tariffs on Australia's agricultural exports. Fact sheets and the full text of the agreement can be found on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website, and a Free Trade Agreement Portal allows companies to search for products by name of Harmonized System (HS) code to determine the preferential tariff rate.

A Value Added Tax (VAT) of 17 per cent is applied to all imports, except to those specifically used in manufacturing for re-export. Low tariff rates are applied to certain products in sectors where the government encourages development.

Australian exporters to China still face non-tariff barriers including quarantine challenges, quota restrictions and some complex administrative procedures.

Basic import procedures

China adopts the practice of 'quarantine inspection before customs declaration' in customs clearance.

Import Goods Clearance Slips and Export Goods Clearance Slips stamped with the special seal of inspection and quarantine authorities are issued for goods subject to entry-exit inspection and quarantine.

Customs will examine and release the goods against the Import Goods Clearance Slip or Export Goods Clearance Slip issued by the entry-exit inspection and quarantine authorities at the place of customs declaration.

Customs is the authority that interprets the customs tariff to decide tariff classifications and to assess the dutiable values of goods entering the customs border.

The dutiable value of an imported good is its cost, insurance and freight (CIF) value, which includes the normal transaction price of goods, plus the cost of packing, freight, insurance and commission.

Most imported agricultural products enjoy a lower VAT rate of 13 per cent compared to many agricultural commodities including wheat, corn, rice, soybean oil, canola oil, palm oil, sugar, cotton, wool and fertiliser that are imported under Tariff-Rate Quota (TRQ) arrangements, largely by state-owned trading enterprises.

China maintains strict documentation requirements for imported agricultural products, especially in relation to quality, quarantine and origin and import control. Exporters should pay attention to applicable tariffs and quarantine measures.

The marketing of feed, additives and medicines for animal use is subject to permits, licenses and registrations. Advice should be sought from specialised agents or distributors familiar with these

requirements.

Exporters intending to take advantage of ChAFTA tariff rates are advised to check on any additional documentation required.

Further information

Detailed information on China's quarantine requirements is available in the Department of Agriculture's Manual of Importing Country Requirements.

Exporters can also refer to the China Inspection and Quarantine Services' Regulations on Implementation of Law on Entry and Exit Animal & Plant Quarantine (S.C. Decree No. 206).

Marketing your products and services

Market entry

Australian businesses are advised to take time to understand the China market including customer decision drivers, price influencers, the role of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and government and regional differences.

There are a large number of potential end-users of agribusiness services and technologies, with different levels of sophistication. Businesses are also advised to take their time and be selective in forming partnerships, and seek legal advice before commencing and concluding commercial negotiations.

Tips for success:

- Early protection of intellectual property rights is vital
- Develop your company profiles and product information in Chinese
- Identify the right partners to ensure your business interests and success in China
- Appoint agents or distributors or have your own marketing staff in China
- Have regular contact with relevant government, industry bodies and customers
- Have a presence at local industry trade shows to raise an awareness and get to know industry and business contacts
- Pay attention to regional, provincial, and local differences – China is more than one market
- Have a basic understanding of import regulations and procedures
- Conduct due diligence of your customers.

Beware of:

- scams or unqualified leads
- due diligence and non-payment issues, for example letters of credit
- intellectual-property issues, for example in genetics and technology transfers.
- Austrade can provide practical advice and support, as well as referrals to specialised service providers.

Trade events

Selected major China agriculture-related trade events include:

Dairy

China Dairy Exhibition, organised by the peak industry body China Dairy Industry Association, normally held in June in different cities each year. The expo includes dairy farming technologies and services, dairy products processing and other supply chain elements.

International Dairy Expo and Summit, held in Heilongjiang, an important region for dairy production, in the provincial capital Harbin. Hosted by China Dairy Association.

Grains and Feed

JCI China hold a conference on the Chinese feed raw materials market twice annually in September and March. Attended by importers and end users.

Bakery China is an annual Shanghai event covering the entire value chain for the bakery and confectionery market annually. It is attended by major Chinese flour mills. Attendees are also interested in dairy ingredients, so is also of interest to the dairy sector.

China International Cereals and Oils Industry Summit, an annual event attended by importers and end users.

Horticulture

Asia Fruit Logistica (Hong Kong) is an annual international horticulture event featuring international fresh fruit and vegetable supply chains attended by international buyers all over the world including from mainland China.

China International Tree Nut Conference is held annually in China. The Conference is aimed at improving exchanges between domestic and international enterprises to promote development of the nut industry.

Meat and Livestock

China Animal Husbandry Expo, held in May in different cities each year, covers livestock including cattle, sheep and goats, and pork, as well as genetics, feed, machinery and equipment, services and technology, etc. Organised by the China Animal Agriculture Association.

China Cattle Conference, an influential national cattle industry conference held annually in a different city each year. In 2016 it was held in Sichuan in September and Guizhou in 2017. Organised by the China Animal Agriculture Association.

Seafood

China Fisheries & Seafood Expo, in Qingdao, is a large international seafood show. Privately organised, it has been running for over 20 years.

Blocks of land running low in Echuca-Moama

<https://www.sheppnews.com.au/echuca-news/2020/06/23/1246229/blocks-of-land-running-low-in-echuca-moama>



THE 'sold' sign has gone up on Echuca-Moama, as soaring demand has snapped up every available block of land on both sides of the river.

Author: Brayden May

Real estate agents and land developers are under siege from people looking to get into the housing market — or expand their portfolios.

The Federal Government's \$25,000 homebuilder package and the Victorian Government's decision to extend the first home owner's grant in regional areas until mid-2021 are driving the market, according to Echuca agents.

Charles L King First National director Troy O'Brien said the packages had a greater impact than the industry expected.

"I've never seen anything like it in my 22 years in real estate," Mr O'Brien said.

"We've sold more than 30 blocks across Echuca-Moama since the Queen's Birthday long weekend. With the government funding that's available, some people are being given a \$45,000 head start, which is a terrific advantage.

"We're finding most buyers are buying land between \$150,000 and \$200,000.

"In the Murray Gardens estate, there are no blocks left in the stage five development. It is at a point where they are going to release stage six soon, which they weren't expecting to do until the end of the year."

Mr O'Brien said the demand from people to own their own home would have a flow-on effect.

"There is going to be massive pressure on contractors to get their jobs done," he said.

"Under the Federal Government's package, works have to start within three months of the housing contract being established.

"It comes at a good time for the construction industry."

Elders Real Estate principal Dean Costello said the lack of available land was also seeing buyers move towards ready-built homes.

"The average blocks of 700m² to 800m² aren't available right across the board at the moment," Mr Costello said.

"In February we broke our sales record by 30 per cent and our sales have been just as strong in the past five weeks.

"There was a lot of doom and gloom when COVID arrived but the market has gone in the opposite direction.

"Houses which have been advertised at a decent price are being sold within three to four days."

And Mr Costello believes the trend will continue for several months.

"I think the situation the world finds itself in has made a lot of people think about their lifestyle," he said.

"We've always had a solid market in Echuca-Moama and I can't see that dropping away.

"In the coming months, I think we will see a lot more people showing interest in moving to regional areas."

Parks View Estate property developer Simon Eishold said sales had increased dramatically in recent weeks.

"We only have five blocks left," Mr Eishold said.

"I've never seen this type of demand. I'm at a point where I've got potential buyers on a waiting list for specific blocks.

"I doubt it will slow down anytime soon with everything that is available to those looking to enter the market."

Ray White Echuca principal Stephen Morgan said the demand was clearly noticeable in the yet-to-be-built Echuca Fields estate, located just off the Northern Hwy.

"Out of the 28 blocks we've got in stage one, 25 of those are on hold and they haven't even turned the dirt," Mr Morgan said.

"And then there is about seven people on hold for stage two. The interest has exceeded our expectations.

"People are looking to take advantage of government packages.

"It is a good time to build if you are in a financial position to do so."

Murray River Council economic development and tourism manager John Harvie agreed land sales in Moama appeared to be booming.

"This is evidenced by the continued release of new stages in various residential developments, council's recent approval of a new 368 lot subdivision on Beer Rd and the fact that applications for development consent show no sign of slowing down," he said.

"It is not only residential land that is in demand. Recent sales of industrial land have been on the increase, with only a few lots remaining in the Moama Business Park on Cobb Hwy."

'Much needed' Echuca West land release to give twin towns housing relief

<https://www.sheppnews.com.au/echuca-news/2020/06/23/1246229/blocks-of-land-running-low-in-echuca-moama>



The release of more than 600 hectares of land for development over the next four decades is a much-needed boost for Echuca and will help relieve pressure on housing in the twin towns.

Author: Max Stainkaph

Committee for Echuca Moama chief executive officer Deanne Armstrong said the release, announced by Campaspe Shire Council last week, was a "really positive outcome" for Echuca.

"Currently we don't have enough land available," Ms Armstrong said.

"It'll give the whole town more options for housing. We've been waiting for it for three years and there's a definite need for more housing."

Ms Armstrong said while there would need to be a plan around infrastructure, which she said council was "no doubt"

working through, there wasn't a concern about services, such as a lack of schools.

St Joseph's College is setting up a new campus in Echuca West for years 7 to 9, while a new school in Moama is also in the pipeline.

Ms Armstrong said the growth would be a great provider of long-term jobs for the region, and help businesses who couldn't find workers because prospective employees couldn't find accommodation.

First National Real Estate Charles L King and Co director Troy O'Brien said the demand for properties in Echuca-Moama was as high as he'd ever seen.

He said 52 house and land packages were sold in just 90 minutes at a recent open day at The Range estate in Moama, showing how strong the demand was.

Mr O'Brien said he'd never seen anything like it.

He said while house prices wouldn't see any deviation until new estates in west Echuca hit the market, which could be up to 12 months away, when they did it would "massively" help the lack of supply.

"It'll be six months before developers can apply for a permit and then three or four before we can take it to market," he said.

Mr O'Brien said the majority of people buying house and land packages in estates were Echuca and Moama locals, with Melburnians migrating out of metropolitan regions more likely to buy established homes in town.

Some Melburnians were also buying blocks in estates.

Mr O'Brien said it would eventually help prices settle "a little bit" for local buyers.

Mr O'Brien also said the release of land would be a boon to builders and those in the construction industry, especially those who only had licenses to operate in Victoria and not in NSW.

Century 21 Echuca sales consultant Beau Lyon said the release of land would be "amazing" for the town.

"We could have unbelievable growth in the towns of Echuca and Moama," he said.

"West Echuca seems like a natural growth area."

He said the property market had been "crazy" since the coronavirus pandemic hit, and the new land would help ease some of the demand pressure.

NT town of Katherine hopes shared workforce model offers solution for GP shortage

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-09-13/nt-katherine-family-medical-practice-local-gp-shortage/100454626>



Over the past year, getting a doctor's appointment has been a "horrifying" journey for residents in the Northern Territory town of Katherine.

The town's only doctor's surgery for non-Indigenous patients closed in October 2020, after struggles long before the pandemic.

Melanie Usher and other local business owners feared the town could not survive without a clinic, so they banded together to open a new one.

"Three hours away was the nearest doctor which was in Darwin and our emergency department and our hospital was being overrun," Ms Usher, who manages the Katherine Family Medical Practice, said.

"We thought we'd give it a go and here we are."



In a separate effort, another clinic, Bauhinia Health, opened earlier this year.

But like many locations across Australia, the two clinics have faced extreme challenges in recruiting GPs.

Across the two practices there are three full-time GPs: a figure much lower than hoped for a town of more than 10,000 people.

Katherine Family Medical Practice has even turned to amateur videos to persuade doctors to head north.

"There just aren't enough GPs, everyone is crying out for them," said Ms Usher.

"So for us, it's about trying to sell Katherine and the community and what a wonderful place it is."

New model to attract GPs

The two clinics hope a different employment plan could help Katherine stand out to doctors and possibly convince them to stay.

NT Primary Health Network chief executive Gill Yearsley said under the draft plan, GPs would have a single employer and they would rotate between the town's hospital and local GP practices.

"This will allow GPs to experience the benefits of both types of practice and is intended to attract more GPs to the region and provide workforce support to the GP practices," she said.



A boosted GP workforce would also benefit Aboriginal health organisations in the region, according to Bauhinia Health owner and practice manager Anjali Palmer.

She said the experience the model offers would be a drawcard particularly for young doctors.

"It's an opportunity you don't get anywhere else and it's really imperative that we get that model happening sooner rather than later," she said.

NT Health said it was collecting feedback from stakeholders on the model, with an aim to implement it in the first half of next year.



Hal Rikard-Bell, past president of the Rural Doctors Association of NSW who spent time in the town as a locum, said Katherine was no different to other towns in its recruitment struggles, with multiple factors at play.

But he believed this plan could ease the shortage.

"I think it's really got a good chance of working and if I was setting up a general practice system, I would always have the GPs in the town doing sessions in ED," he said.

APPENDIX



1. Community email invitation

OUR REGION, YOUR SAY

COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN MEETING



You are invited to have your say in the future of our region. We are developing a new community strategic plan for our Edward River Council area, and we would value your input.

The Council is seeking to better understand your priorities and ensure everyone's views are reflected in the roadmap that will determine the future of our region.

A series of drop-in sessions will be held in June and July providing you with a chance to voice your ideas, opinions and suggestions.

There are several opportunities for you to contribute your views.

Please visit our Deniliquin drop-in sessions at Project HQ in Napier Street on the days and times listed below. There is no need to RSVP – please drop in at a time that suits you.

- **Monday 21, Wednesday 23 and Friday 25 June from 10.00am to 11.30am and 2.30pm to 4.00pm**
- **Tuesday 6 and Thursday 8 July from 10.00am to 11:30am and 2:30pm to 4:00pm**

We are also inviting the community to contribute via an online survey which will be available on the Council website soon.

We encourage you to be a part of this community conversation. Please share your views and help us develop a dynamic, innovative, and progressive vision for the future.

We look forward to seeing you there. Details regarding additional drop-in sessions in surrounding areas will be available soon.

If you have any queries please contact admin@seftons.com.au. Sefton & Associates has been contracted by Edward River Council to undertake this consultation.

| 02 6766 5222 | admin@seftons.com.au | 21 Bourke Street | PO Box 1715 Tamworth NSW 2340 | w.seftons.com.au |

2. Signage outside Project HQ



OUR REGION, YOUR SAY

Shape the future direction of the Edward River region. **Drop in to share your ideas and vision to make our region an even better place to live.**

Project HQ at 42 Napier St drop in sessions:

Monday 21, Wednesday 23 and Friday 25 June

Morning sessions: 10.00am – 11.30am

Afternoon sessions: 2.30pm – 4.00pm

Tuesday 6 and Thursday 8 July

Morning sessions: 10.00am – 11.30am

Afternoon sessions: 2.30pm – 4.00pm



**Edward
River**
COUNCIL

3. Newspaper advertisement



OUR REGION, YOUR SAY

Shape the future direction of the Edward River region. **Drop in to share your ideas and vision to make our region an even better place to live.**

Project HQ at 42 Napier Street drop in sessions:

Monday 21, Wednesday 23 and Friday 25 June

Morning sessions: 10.00am – 11.30am

Afternoon sessions: 2.30pm – 4.00pm

Rural drop in sessions:

Pretty Pine Hotel: 5pm – 7pm Thursday 24 June

Conargo Hall: 7pm Wednesday 7 July

Blighty Hotel: 6pm – 8pm Thursday 8 July

Booroorban Royal Mail Hotel: TBC



**Edward
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4. Summary of Edward River Council Advocacy Strategy

Edward River Council – Advocacy Strategy

In developing its 10-year Community Strategic Plan, *Edward River 2030*, Council identified opportunities and challenges requiring State and Federal Government support.

Council's Advocacy Strategy outlines requests for support in five public policy areas:

Economic Development

- funding to renew aging infrastructure and improve Deniliquin airport
- funding to develop a Regional Agriculture Strategy

Health

- funding to develop a retirement living development in Deniliquin
- significant investment to redevelop or rebuild the Deniliquin Hospital

Education – investment in the Deniliquin High School to upgrade the science labs, industrial Arts/technology centre and hospitality room

Water – under the Murray–Darling Basin Plan, Council is advocating for:

- no further productive water acquisition through buy-backs from the Southern Basin
- greater detail on the benefits, uses, and regulation of environmental water
- all basin regions to have the same standard of compliance, metering and measurement as the Murray system
- no further water removed, because water is the key economic driver of the region and a significant contribution to water recovery has already been made

Telecommunications – further investment from State and Federal Governments in addressing mobile blackspots across regional NSW.

<https://www.edwardriver.nsw.gov.au/Council/Council-Information/Corporate-Plans-and-Strategies>

5. Summary of the Edward River Council Community Strategic Plan 2018 - 2030

Edward River Council – *Community Strategic Plan 2018 - 2030*

The Edward River Council Community Strategic Plan identifies the community's priorities and aspirations for the future, and strategies that will be implemented to achieve a shared vision for the Edward River Local Government Area:

We are the centre of the Southern Riverina. Home to a connected and engaged community, driven by a diverse economy. We work together to lead our community, achieve our potential and embrace our future.

The plan sits above all other Council plans and policies and is based on the four priority areas of Community, Environment, Economy and Leadership.

Five strategic outcomes underpin the vision:

- a great place to live
- a prosperous and vibrant economy
- a valued and enhanced natural environment
- a quality and sustainable infrastructure
- a community working together to achieve its potential.

The plan identifies three targets to support each outcome. Council and community roles and partners are detailed for each outcome, along with indicators to measure progress.

A range of strategic documents produced by Council were considered in developing the plan. Council also ensured the plan aligns with the NSW Premier's Priorities and the Riverina Murray Regional Plan 2036.

<https://www.edwardriver.nsw.gov.au/Council/Council-Information/Corporate-Plans-and-Strategies>

6. Summary of the Edward River Council Agribusiness Masterplan 2019 – 2024

Edward River Council – *Prospering in the new normal*: Agribusiness Masterplan 2019–2024

Although agriculture is characteristically cyclical, a long-term shift is occurring in the region’s agribusiness operating environment. The Agribusiness Masterplan provides a vision to position the Edward River economy for sustainable prosperity in this ‘new normal’.

The outlook for the Edward River agribusiness sector has several challenges. But the fundamentals of Australian agribusiness are still positive, and there are opportunities to grow the regional economy, leveraging areas of competitive advantage. The masterplan also identifies burning issues and strategic imperatives.

The masterplan identifies seven strategy platforms, each with programs and indicative projects:

1. Foster a culture that embraces new ideas
2. Extract more value from our outputs
3. Equip our people for a new normal
4. Maximise our water assets
5. Attract the capital vital for growth
6. Support business transition
7. Inspire confidence in our future

The document also discusses management and governance of the masterplan, resourcing and linkages.

<https://www.edwardriver.nsw.gov.au/Council/Council-Information/Corporate-Plans-and-Strategies>

7. Summary of Edward River Council Community Satisfaction Survey 2019

Edward River Council – Community satisfaction survey

The 2019 community satisfaction survey compares Edward River Council performance with baseline data from 2016. Council can use the data to inform priority areas for the next 12 months.

Overall, Council's performance significantly improved in almost all service areas since 2016. The top three performing areas were:

1. appearance of public areas (index score of 75)
2. emergency and disaster management (75)
3. recreation facilities (73).

The most improved measure was being a well-run and managed council (rising 13 points from 50 in 2016 to 63 in 2019).

The lowest performing measures were:

1. providing value for money for rates
2. condition of local streets and footpaths
3. condition of sealed local roads
4. maintenance of unsealed roads
5. business development.

The report suggests Council should focus on maintaining and improving performance in the individual service areas that most influence perception of overall performance:

1. being a well-run and managed council
2. community consultation
3. providing value for money for rates
4. working with State and Federal governments to deliver local priorities and services.

8. Summary of Edward River Council Economic Development Strategy

Edward River Council – Economic Development Strategy

The Edward River Economic Development Strategy provides an economic framework to enhance the prosperity of Edward River, drawing on extensive consultation with business and industry, community and government. It outlines the economic drivers, population and employment statistics, strengths, key projects, aspirations for economic growth, and strategies for population growth in the Edward River region.

The strategy identifies five economic drivers as ‘priority areas’:

1. agriculture
2. food production and value-adding
3. freight and logistics (road, rail and air)
4. arts, culture and creative economy
5. population and visitor growth.

Recognising the private sector’s role in driving economic development, the strategy identified six key themes to support implementation:

1. attract new business investment
2. support existing businesses to grow
3. infrastructure provision
4. innovation, education and skills development
5. revitalise and activate the CBD
6. market the region.

The strategy details an action plan, outlining the relationship between the strategic objectives, the 5 key economic drivers and Council’s function. The action plan also includes timeframes and quantitative measures to assess the level of success in achieving strategic objectives.

9. Deniliquin Health Action Group Community Survey Results

DENILIQUIN HEALTH ACTION GROUP

Community Opinion Survey 2019

The survey consisted of two questions:

1. What is important to you about health?
2. What else could happen to improve health?

The questionnaire was distributed in paper format at public events in Deniliquin, through a stall in Cressy St Deniliquin and through various businesses and community groups.

An online survey of the questions was performed through Survey Monkey.

The questionnaire was distributed during October and November 2019.

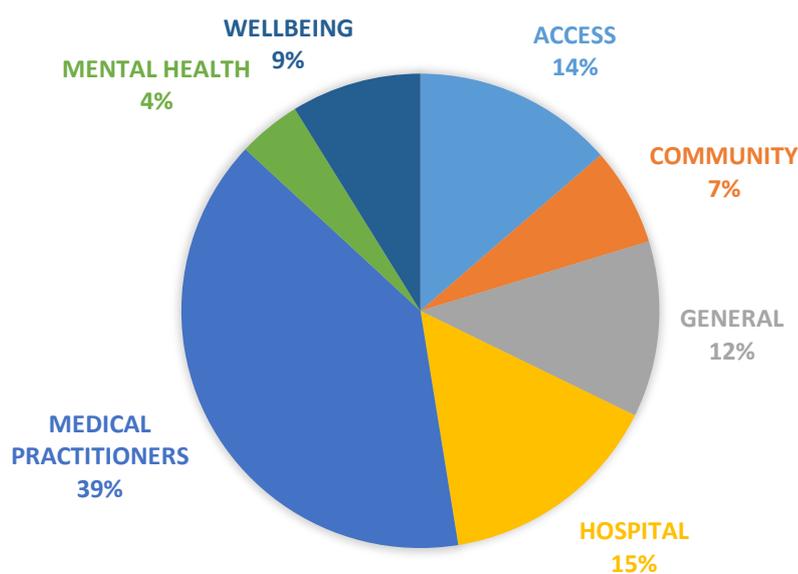
247 paper responses and 43 Survey Monkey responses were received.

A total of 364 points were raised in response to question 1 (opinions) and 381 points in response to question 2 (recommendations).

The points were subjectively classified into various themes by two of the group members (Shirlee Burge and Dan Salmon). The themes were then classified into groups that reflected the general nature of the themes.

QUESTION 1: What is important to you about health?

GROUP	THEME	RESPONSES	GROUP TOTAL
ACCESS	Access	35	51
	Travel issues	16	
COMMUNITY	Aged care	4	25
	Allied services	18	
	Koori health	1	
	Women's health	2	
GENERAL	Alternative health	11	45
	Information	3	
	Statement	31	
HOSPITAL	A & E	7	57
	Equipment	1	
	Maternity	7	
	New or updated facility	24	
	Oncology	2	
	Staffing	15	
	Surgery	1	
MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS	General practitioners	112	148
	Paediatrics	11	
	Specialists	25	
MENTAL HEALTH	Mental health	16	16
WELLBEING	Lifestyle statement	17	33
	Preventive health	2	



QUESTION 2: What else could happen to improve health?

GROUP	THEME	REPOSSES	GROUP TOTAL
ACCESS	Access	12	34
	Call centre	4	
	Travel issues	18	
COMMUNITY	Aged care	4	29
	Allied services	15	
	Koori health	1	
	Preventive	2	
	Rehabilitation	3	
	Women's health	4	
DENTAL	Dental	2	2
GENERAL	Information	17	58
	Planning	2	
	Statement	39	
HOSPITAL	A & E	14	94
	Equipment	3	
	Hospital	4	
	Maternity	10	
	New/updated facility	45	
	Oncology	1	
	Staffing	17	
MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS	General practitioners	90	122
	Ochre	1	
	Paediatrics	12	
	Specialists	19	
MENTAL HEALTH	Mental health	17	17
WELLBEING	Alternative lifestyle services	7	23
	Alternative lifestyle statement	16	

10. The impact of climate change



Sustainability - climate change

Climate change is significantly increasing uncertainty in the region. While the extent of change is continually being updated, the work of BoM and the CSIRO shows that the climate in the Murray Darling Basin and places like Edward River is getting hotter and drier, particularly in the winter months.



For the environment

more difficult for ecological communities to thrive and recover, reduced species and intra-species diversity, species and ecosystems are forced to function outside their optimal conditions + impacts of high impact extreme events.



For First Nations

less water and/or significant changes to the land and water is likely to impact Culturally significant sites and ecosystem services. Changes and pressures across the Basin will also impact First Nations communities and will likely require increased policy and planning engagement.



For communities

worse droughts, more frequent bush fires, more intense wet periods and flooding, more days where water quality in rivers and lakes is poor which will affect recreational activities and associated tourism.



For dryland farmers

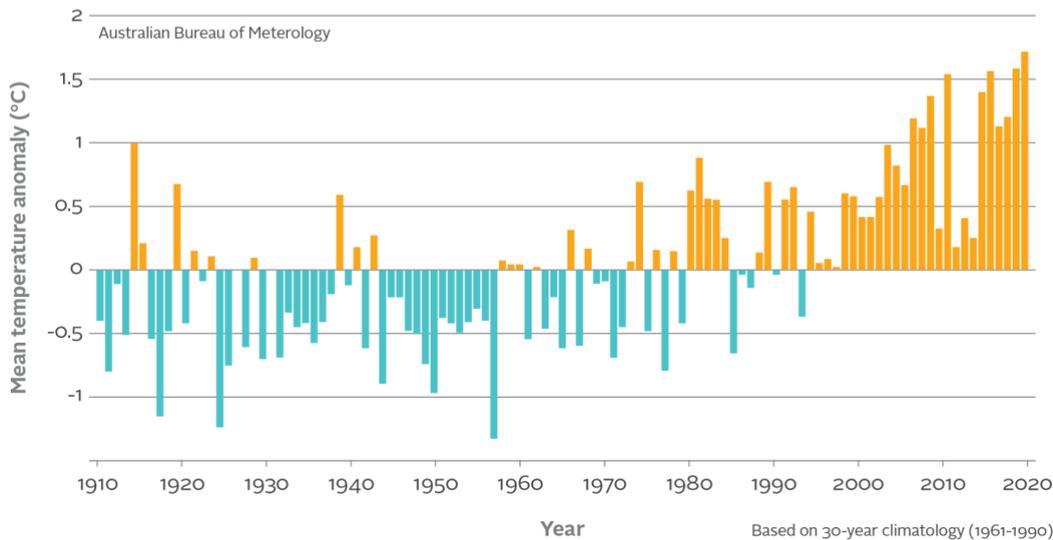
less water and drier soils, different rainfall patterns with less winter rain



For irrigators

less water, more demand for water, higher water prices, different rainfall patterns & less winter rain, reduced soil moisture & increased evapotranspiration = more water may be required to irrigate effectively.

Annual mean temperature anomaly Murray Darling Basin (1910 to 2019)



Source: <https://www.mdba.gov.au/sites/default/files/pubs/bp-eval-2020-BOM-trends-and-historical-conditions-report.pdf>

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