



**Edward
River**
COUNCIL

Advocacy Strategy





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ADVOCACY STRATEGY



› Introduction

Proclaimed on 12 May 2016, Edward River Council provides services and support to a community of approximately 9,000 permanent residents across a region covering 8,881 square kilometres, including the town of Deniliquin and the six rural villages of Blighty, Booroorban, Conargo, Mayrung, Pretty Pine and Wanganella.

Since its establishment in 2016, Council has undertaken significant consultation with our community in developing the suite of Integrated Planning and Reporting documents, including our 10-year Community Strategic Plan, *Edward River 2030*.

Through this consultation, we have developed a shared vision for the Edward River region to work towards over the life of *Edward River 2030*:

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

In developing *Edward River 2030*, Council identified several opportunities and challenges requiring direct involvement from the State and Federal Governments. This includes community priorities in the public policy areas of:

- Economic Development;
- Health;
- Education;
- Water; and
- Telecommunications.

This Advocacy Strategy has been developed to support a whole-of-government response to addressing these challenges and achieving strong outcomes for the Edward River community, as well as the broader Riverina-Murray region.

Council looks forward to partnering with both the State and Federal Governments to realise the Edward River region's potential and achieve our community's vision articulated in *Edward River 2030*.

› Economic Development - Deniliquin Airport Redevelopment

What is Council requesting?

Renew aging infrastructure and funding to support incremental improvement opportunities at the Deniliquin Airport.

Why?

Deniliquin airport has been an operational airport since the 1940s. The existing 1.2-kilometre runway is the original runway and has had limited renewal investment over its lifecycle.

A market analysis commissioned by Council has identified several key opportunities to support the long-term growth of the airport, spanning:

- Flight training;
- Aircraft maintenance;
- Residential airpark facilities;
- Aviation tourism; and
- Non-aeronautical development.

Essential to ongoing use of the airport and future expansion of services would be the reconstruction and upgrading of the existing facility, including the reconstruction of the runway, taxiways and aprons. Additional works are required for lighting and accommodation.

This upgrade would position the Deniliquin Airport to attract additional private sector investment with the attraction of a flight training school a primary focus.

Anticipated cost

The total project cost is anticipated to be \$8 million, this is made up of:

- Runway reconstruction - \$5 million
- Taxiway, Aprons and facilities - \$3 million

Supporting Strategies

Edward River 2030 Community Strategic Plan

Murray Regional Tourism Destination Management Plan

Murray Region Regional Economic Development Strategy

Deniliquin Airport Market Analysis

› Economic Development - Regional Agriculture Strategy

What is Council requesting?

Funding towards the development of a Regional Agriculture Strategy.

Why?

The Riverina and Murray region encompasses an area of approximately 130,000 kilometres and spans 24 local government areas. This region currently produces approximately 9 per cent of Australia's agricultural products.

Primary producers across the region are facing significant challenges including the availability of water, changing weather patterns, access to qualified labour and changing market demands. There are also future opportunities across the Riverina and Murray, such as produce diversification.

Edward River Council is in the unique position to be central to the region and can develop a strategy that will support and guide future opportunities. Council has been working with Murray Irrigation Limited and a number of other local and regional stakeholders already to identify some of the opportunities available.

This strategy will create a 30-year vision for agriculture to future proof the region. A focus for the strategy will be to bring together a scientific approach that identifies areas suitable for specific produce and then link this with the development of business cases for the produce. This evidence-based approach will assist to support existing farmers to transition to new forms of production and also act as an investment prospectus to attract new investment to the region.

Anticipated cost

The cost to develop a Regional Agriculture Strategy is estimated at \$200,000.

Supporting Strategies

Edward River 2030 Community Strategic Plan

McKinna Consulting – Agrifood Situation Analysis

› Health – Retirement Living

What is Council requesting?

Council is seeking funding of \$15 million to facilitate the development of a Retirement Living development in Deniliquin.

Why?

Like most regional towns, Deniliquin has an ageing population. Despite its ageing population, Deniliquin does not currently have accessible retirement living options for seniors living locally.

Through community consultation, Council has identified a need to develop a Retirement Living Village in Deniliquin. To facilitate this, Council worked with the State Government for a number of years to secure two parcels of land suitable for this development. Funding was secured, and initial works were completed to service the site and provide access. An Expression of Interest process was completed; however, the preferred operator has withdrawn.

Council is investigating all avenues to progress the project, including an option to complete the development of the facility and partnering with a service provider to manage the services.

Anticipated cost

Council has commissioned a consultant to continue work to investigate all service delivery options. It is anticipated to cost approximately \$15 million to construct and develop an Retirement Living development to provide this essential service for the community.

Supporting Strategies

Edward River 2030 Community Strategic Plan

Retirement Consultancy - Phase One Report - Market Analysis

› Health – Investment in Deniliquin Hospital

What is Council requesting?

Significant investment to redevelop or rebuild the Deniliquin Hospital. This is required to ensure it is a contemporary, well-equipped facility that meets the health service needs of the Murrumbidgee Local Health District well into the future.

Why?

Through the development of *Edward River 2030*, the importance of effective health services was identified as a key community priority.

The Deniliquin Hospital is a facility that is appreciated by the local community and is well utilised. In addition to servicing Deniliquin and the Edward River region, the hospital is a hub for surrounding smaller communities and provide a range of community, allied health and mental health/drug and alcohol outreach services to a broader catchment area of between 20,000 and 30,000 people.

With the State Government having committed funding to improving hospitals in other Riverina and Murray centres such as Griffith and Wagga Wagga; upgrades to the Deniliquin Hospital should now be prioritised given its location at the centre of the southern Riverina and the size of the patient catchment area it services.

Council acknowledges and appreciates the State Government's recent commitment of \$3.2 million to delivering improvements to the hospital's entrance area and relocation of the emergency entrance to a new location.

However, further investment is needed to ensure the Deniliquin Hospital is a contemporary facility that meets the health service needs of the Edward River region.

Additionally, given the critical shortage of General Practitioners in Deniliquin, the Murrumbidgee Local Health District could potentially directly provide medical services through an expanded hospital, relieving the current pressure on local General Practitioners to attend the hospital and deliver these services.

Options and Anticipated cost

Step 1: Planning and assessment of existing site

- Estimated cost - \$500,000

Step 2: Redevelopment of existing site or relocation to new site

- Estimated cost - \$40 million-\$60 million

Regional Benefits

The Deniliquin Hospital services Deniliquin and the Edward River local government area, as well as a broader catchment area of between 20,000 and 30,000 people. The need to ensure that patients being transported to the hospital, particularly those in emergency situations, are able to access the services required promptly and privately is of critical importance. This proposed upgrade will ensure that the hospital meets this requirement and continues to service and support the community for many years to come.

Supporting Strategies

Edward River 2030 Community Strategic Plan

› Education – Deniliquin High School Upgrades

What is Council requesting?

Investment in the Deniliquin High School to upgrade the science labs, industrial arts/technology centre and hospitality room.

Why?

The Deniliquin High School is a great asset to Deniliquin and the broader Edward River region. It currently has over 500 students enrolled and achieves strong academic results.

Unfortunately, the school has received limited capital investment over the past 20 years and as a result the school infrastructure isn't competitive against more modern schools located in Moama, Echuca and Ballarat. This has resulted in the number of students attending the high school decreasing from 700 to approximately 510 in recent years. This outflow of students to other schools and locations directly impacts on the local Deniliquin economy and community. There have been numerous examples of families leaving the region to take their children to more modern school facilities.

The facilities most in need of upgrade at the Deniliquin High School are the science labs, industrial arts/technology centre and hospitality room. Without significant investment, then the ability for the school to comply with regulations required for delivering science and industrial arts will be unlikely.

The ability for the school to teach these courses is critical as so many local employment opportunities within Deniliquin and the broader region are related to agriculture, science and manufacturing trades, such as welding and metal fabrication. The inability to undertake these classes at the Deniliquin High School restricts students from pursuing studies that most directly relate to their ability to secure a job in the local workforce.

The flow-on effects from young people having to leave the region to secure employment are significant, both on the local community and economy.

Anticipated cost

The expected costs are:

- Science Lab - \$1 million
- Industrial arts/technology centre - \$1 million
- Hospitality room - \$1 million

This \$3 million investment will ensure that the school's poorest facilities are improved and the classes that most align with local job opportunities and industry needs will be maintained and improved. Improving the facilities at the school will support the school's ability to increase enrolments and ensure local students are getting a local education.

Supporting Strategies

Edward River 2030 Community Strategic Plan

Deniliquin High School - School Plan

Department of Education Strategic Plan 2018-2022

› Water – Murray Darling Basin Plan

What is Council requesting?

Council are advocating for:

- No further productive water acquisition through buy-backs from the Southern Basin, as the impacts on our communities are far too great.
- Greater detail on the benefits, uses, and regulation of environmental water.
- All regions across the Murray Darling Basin to have the same standard of compliance, metering, and measurement as the systems currently implemented in the Murray system.
- Water is the key economic driver of our region and we have already made a significant contribution to water recovery, we believe no further water should be removed

Why?

In February 2018, the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) released the Southern Basin Community profiles. Within the Edward River local government area, a community profile was completed for Deniliquin. This report found that between 2001 and 2016 the following has occurred:

- Population decreased by 12.2%
- Total workforce decreased by 26.4% (747 FTE)
- Agricultural workforce decreased by 73.1% (791 FTE)
- Agricultural manufacturing workforce increased by 74.7% (70 FTE)
- Non-agricultural private workforce decreased by 16.7% (624 FTE)
- Government services workforces increased by 18.5% (94 FTE)

(Deniliquin Township Community Profile, 2018)

Similar numbers to the Deniliquin Township community profile are seen right across the Southern Basin and Murray-Riverina region. Council acknowledges that across the period of 2001 to 2016 there have been many significant changes to the economic structure of rural and regional

communities. In particular, the significant changes being seen in the agriculture sector and the restructuring of this workforce contribute to the reduction in population and workforce.

The impacts not just on the agricultural sector, but the flow-on impacts to all other sectors have been significant and the current approach to assessing and understanding these impacts has been poor. This must be improved so that the triple bottom line outcomes originally envisaged can be achieved.

Regardless of these broader impacts, any further reduction in productive water from our region will have significant negative impacts on our entire community. Council does not support any further reduction in productive water.

Supporting Strategies

Edward River 2030 Community Strategic Plan

MDBA Community Profiles - Deniliquin Township Community Profile

Basin Plan Socio-economic impacts – Murray Valley – RMCG for the Murray Group

› Telecommunications – Mobile Blackspot Improvements

What is Council requesting?

Further investment from the State and Federal Governments in addressing mobile blackspots across regional NSW.

Why?

The Edward River region's agriculture sector produces in excess of \$250 million worth of regional exports annually. This is a significant contributor to the local, regional, state and national economies. To support the continued growth of agriculture, it is critical that mobile coverage is across the Edward River local government area and the broader Riverina and Murray region is improved.

Due to the growing role of technology in the agriculture sector and its impact on farming operations, the ability to connect to mobile networks is essential. Reliable telecommunications infrastructure and mobile services will improve efficiency and effectiveness of farming operations, ensuring our agriculture sector remains well-positioned to continue contributing to the NSW economy.

Without investment in this critical infrastructure it is likely that the NSW agriculture sector could become inefficient and uncompetitive against other states and countries which enjoy access to improved mobile networks.

Improved telecommunications infrastructure will allow mobile blackspots to be addressed, enhancing efficiency and increasing the competitiveness of the NSW agriculture sector.

Anticipated cost

Council is seeking the State Government to establish a suitable funding program for enhancing mobile communications across regional NSW. While the State Government has introduced the Regional Growth Fund, which includes a Connecting Country Communities funding program; to date there has been no progress on delivering this funding program. Council is requesting that the State Government provide suitable funding to this program and enable councils across regional NSW to obtain funding under this program.

Supporting Strategies

Edward River 2030 Community Strategic Plan

Edward River Economic Development Strategy

Murray Region Regional Economic Development Strategy





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