

# ADVANCING BAW BAW



**2024-2025  
Financial  
Assistance  
Grants Submission**

# Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of Country throughout Baw Baw Shire; the Gunaikurnai, Bunurong, and Kurnai Nations and recognise their ongoing connection to this land, water and culture.

We pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people their ancestors, Elders, past, present and acknowledge their rich contribution to society and culture and their ongoing role in caring for Country.

We acknowledge that First Peoples self-determination is a human right as enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

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# Introduction

Baw Baw Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to present our feedback for the Grants Commission's consideration for future allocations of the Financial Assistance Grants on behalf of our rapidly growing, diverse communities.

Council would like to begin by acknowledging the valuable contribution Financial Assistance Grants makes in our communities, and the real difference this support makes in the delivery of our services. On behalf of all our community, thank you.

Baw Baw Shire is the largest of Victoria's Peri-Urban councils and is located along the M1 growth corridor on the southeastern fringe of Melbourne. Peri-Urban Councils face a slew of common issues but very often get overlooked when it comes to appropriate levels of funding as we are neither Metropolitan, Interface nor Regional – we are a true mix of all three.

As a Peri Urban Council on the edge of Melbourne's Urban Growth Boundary, we are facing unprecedented population growth and development but do not have access to the rates base of already populous Metro councils or to the funding provided to the interface councils to address the need for community infrastructure. Baw Baw is currently home to more than 60,000 people, and our population is forecast to increase to 87,281 (47%) by 2041.

The pressure of this growth is stretching the capacity of our existing infrastructure and services, and they are not able to keep pace with current and projected growth. Over the past five years, our two largest townships, Warragul and Drouin have seen record growth rates of 11% and 27% respectively, far exceeding the 2.5% state average. Our shire needs critical investment in our road network, community facilities, hospitals and

health services and our sports grounds to service the needs and aspirations of this increasing and diversifying section of our population.

With Council revenue constrained by a comparatively small rates base and the 3.5% rate cap, significantly below the underlying rate of inflation; residential growth in our peri urban communities cannot be sustainably managed without support and investment in infrastructure, community services, economic development, education and our environment.

Support for vital infrastructure, planning and service delivery from Financial Assistance Grants supports Council's ability to address our mounting congestion and transport challenges and will ensure that necessary facilities and services are accessible as our community continues to grow.

**Council would also like to acknowledge and strongly support the advocacy of the Australian Local Government Association to increase the Financial Assistance Grant to 1% of the Federal Budget.**

Baw Baw Shire Council's 2024-2025 Financial Assistance Grants Submission focuses on opportunities to deliver shared priorities, that will help provide vital opportunities and services for our growing community.

# About Baw Baw Shire

Our vision for Baw Baw Shire for the next 20 years and beyond is for every individual, every household and every community throughout the region. It has been created by our community for our community. This is the future our community wants, together we want Baw Baw Shire to be:

## Sustainable

Balancing natural and built environments that protect nature; contribute to a cleaner, healthier environment; and ensures liveable, productive and inspiring landscapes.

## Healthy

Being an inclusive, caring, safe and supportive community, that promotes wellbeing and belonging.

## Thriving

Valuing our heritage, promoting and supporting local, and investing in our future.

### Population Growth



Population 2023

**60,588**

Population 2041

**87,281**

Change 2023-41

**44.06%**



Our population will grow to approximately **87,000 by 2041**



### Location

Located approximately 100 kilometres east of Melbourne in the heart of West Gippsland, and covering over 4034km<sup>2</sup>, Baw Baw Shire is Victoria's largest Peri-Urban Council's and one of it's fastest growing.

The northern half of the shire is heavily forested and lies in the Great Dividing Range and its foothills, including the Mount Baw Baw National Park, while the shire is bounded by the Strzelecki Range to the south.

The 'middle' part of Baw Baw shire is more densely populated, but still retains a rich natural environment and rural character. The shire is experiencing rapid growth particularly in areas close to the Princes Highway and Gippsland rail corridor including the two major population centre's Drouin and Warragul.

## People

**30%** Aged 24 years old and younger

**29%** Aged 25 and 49 years old

**41%** Aged 50 years old and above

- **The median age is 41 years old compared to 38 for Victoria**
- **There will be a 68% increase in 3-4 year olds living in Baw Baw Shire by 2036\***
- **28.2% of the population is over 60, compared to 22.4 % for Victoria**

## Education

- Almost 24% of children in the Shire are vulnerable in one or more childhood development domain compared to 19.9% for Victoria.
- Only 16.8% of residents aged 15+ hold educational qualifications at bachelor level or above – compared to 29.2% for Victoria.
- 25.4% of residents aged 15+ hold vocational qualifications (certificate, diploma or advanced diploma) compared to 16.7% for Victoria.

## Socioeconomic

Baw Baw Shire ranks in the 41st percentile on the Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) compared to:

- Victoria - 65th percentile
- Gippsland - 26th percentile

There are pockets of higher disadvantage concentrated in:

- Longwarry - 23rd percentile
- Drouin South - 26th percentile

## Communities

61% of Baw Baw Shire's Population live within its 2 major localities within only 2.67% of its total land area.

- Warragul - 19,856 (34.45%)
- Drouin - 15,287 (26.53%)

Significant communities also exist in Trafalgar (4,349), Longwarry (2,380), Yarragon (1,893), Neerim South (1,599), Darnum (759), Willow Grove (654), Jindivick (584), Buln Buln, (550) and Thorpdale (474).



**19 babies** are born in Baw Baw each week



**30-34 years**

**cohort has** recorded the largest change since 2016, increasing 36.7%



**24.4% households** are low income (<\$800 per week)



**12% of population** born overseas



37% of people live with **one or more long term health conditions** compared to 31.4% for Victoria

## Employment

#	Industry Sector	Employed	%
1	Health Care & Social Assistance	3,903	14.7
2	Construction	3,371	12.7
3	Education and Training	2,576	9.7
4	Retail Trade	2,272	8.5
5	Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	2,106	7.9
6	Manufacturing	1,797	6.8

In 2021, 59.3% of Baw Baw residents were in the labour force compared to 62.4% in Victoria.

Of the 26,603 employed people in Baw Baw

- 54.4% worked full time compared to 56.2% for Victoria
- 34.4% worked part time compared to 32.2% for Victoria
- **3.8% of the total labour force was unemployed**

## Tourism

- In 2021 Baw Baw Shire's Tourism Output was estimated at \$126 million dollars.
- In the year ending June 2023 Baw Baw Shire was host to 1,156,000 visitors
- On average, domestic visitors stayed an average of 2 nights and international visitors stayed 17 nights.
- The average visitor spend per night is \$138 per night domestic and \$48 per night international - compared to \$226 and \$99 respectively for Victoria.



**23% of Baw Baw Shire's labour force travel > 50km to work** compared to 6.33% for Victoria

## Economy



**\$6.3 billion** economic output.  
**\$3.31 billion** gross regional product



**\$1.2 billion** Construction Sector output 2022 = 19.17% total output.



**80,000 tonnes of vegetables** produced each year = 10% of Victorian supply

## Development



**2400ha** of land rezoned to Urban Growth Zone



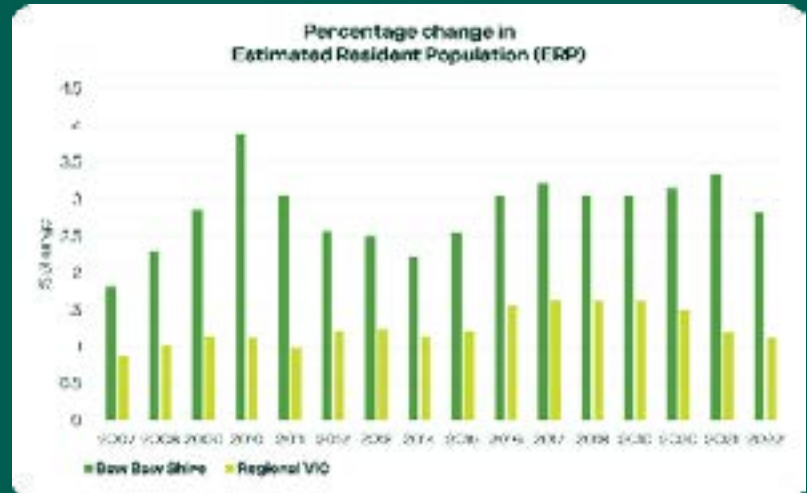
**19,992 proposed housing lots** across Drouin and Warragul

Since 2012 the shire has added an average of 1450 new residents per annum. Over the next 20 years Baw Baw Shire's population is expected to grow by nearly 50%.

Between 2021 - 2022

- Drouin's population grew by 4.11%
- Warragul's population grew by 2.69%

In the same period Regional Victoria grew by only 1.07%



## Our Council



**Over 760 hectares** of public open space to maintain



**1,770km local roads** to maintain



**\$9 of assets** under management for every \$1 revenue



**524.2 kilometres** of Council owned paths and trails



### Sources:

Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2016 and 2021. Compiled and presented by .id (informed decision)

Australian Early Development Census, 2021, Data Explorer, Department of Education

Baw Baw Shire Council Annual Report 2021- 2022, Baw Baw Shire Council

Baw Baw Shire Growth Dashboard, Warragul & Drouin Precinct Structure Plans



# Submission Summary

## # Priority Recommendation

## Outcome

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- |                                       |   |  |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>1</b> A Growing, Diverse Region    | Acknowledge the unique challenges of peri-urban regions and apply the appropriate level of funding to regions that experience rapid urban growth, while managing the complex challenges of delivering services in regional and rural communities. | A region that welcomes new residents and provides adequate infrastructure and services that meet the needs of a growing community.   |
| <b>2</b> Recreation and Culture       | Increase weighting for population growth to assist Peri Urban Councils who experience high percentage growth in concentrated areas. Apply a cost adjustor for percentage changes in population diversity.   | Support Council to overcome local boundaries to participation in local sport by providing inclusive, accessible multi-purpose facilities and playing fields.   |
| <b>3</b> Aged and Disability Services | Support the necessary exit of Councils from aged care services while still ensuring the ongoing support of our most vulnerable community members.   | Councils have long histories of providing services to our vulnerable community members and do this work well. With assistance from Financial Assistance Grants, Council could provide potential solutions to some of these issues. |
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# Budget Submission Summary

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## 4 Waste Management

Increase funding in waste management to support Local Government's transition to a circular economy.

A proactive approach is required to ensure the financial sustainability and long-term waste management planning and services to support the Federal Government's goal of Net Zero by 2050.

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## 5 Local Roads and Infrastructure

Increase the weighting for environment risk in regional and rural communities, as emergency events and the impacts of climate change (such as increasing rainfall) are deteriorating infrastructure at an increasingly rapid pace. Work with Local Government to establish a "road purpose" hierarchy of local roads.

A safer and more efficient network for Baw Baw and Gippsland which improves connectivity and meets the needs of a rapidly growing and diverse population.

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# Budget Submission Summary

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**6** Early Learning

Provide commensurate funding and resources to respond to recent Victorian State Government early childhood reforms which place increased financial pressure and additional burden on high growth Councils.

All families, regardless of postcode, are well supported and can equitably access safe, fit-for-purpose early years facilities which strengthen learning opportunities for children.

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**7** Tourism

Work with all Local Government Agencies to identify more accurate reporting models for tourism statistics.

Enable Council to provide the necessary resources to ensure the economic future of rural communities.

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# Priority 1:

## A Growing, Diverse Region



### The Challenge

Peri-Urban Councils face a slew of common issues but very often get overlooked when it comes to appropriate levels of funding as we are neither Metropolitan, Interface nor Regional – we are a true mix of all three.

### Local Context

In Victoria in 2016 the Andrews State Government introduced the Fair Go Rates System for Victorian Local Government. This introduced what is more commonly known as 'the rate cap'. While this system provides cost benefits to ratepayers, it has a significant impact on our service delivery and our ability to provide for our community.

The State Government have communicated that they believe Councils across the State are in a sound operating position financially (ESC, 2023 Rate Capping Webinar) and despite significant advocacy across the State, this position ignores the sustainability and needs of a region like Baw Baw Shire.

This challenge has been further exacerbated by the State Government setting the 2023/24 rate cap at 3.5% - which was well below inflation at the time. The December 2022 CPI was at 8.0% when the rate cap was announced.

Council offers a vast array of services whether that is maintenance & construction, infrastructure, public utilities, health, community services, economic development, and education - all of which

have attracted inflationary cost rises well in excess of general CPI. Construction and material/product supply alone have seen cost increases in the order of 20% (Source: Currie & Brown Quantity Surveyors, 2022).

### Our Ask

Acknowledge the unique challenges of peri-urban regions and apply the appropriate level of funding to regions that experience rapid urban growth, while managing the complex challenges of delivering services in regional and rural communities.

Include the consideration of rate-capping in Victoria in cost adjustors as a significant factor that limits Councils capacity to generate revenue.

Increase weighting for population growth by percentage annually for Peri Urban Councils to who experience high growth in concentrated areas.

# Priority 2:

## Recreation & Culture

### How can you support our community?

The rapidly growing population in high growth, Peri Urban Regions such as Baw Baw is creating and ever-increasing demand for new infrastructure, but particularly for recreation facilities.

### Local Context

Over the past five years, our two largest townships, Warragul and Drouin have seen record growth rates of 11% and 27% respectively, far exceeding the Victoria State average of 2.5%. This growth has resulted in significant pressure on our existing infrastructure and the demand for new infrastructure.

With growing constraints on Council's budget, investing in new infrastructure has become more challenging as we aim to balance the delivery of services with cost of building and maintaining new infrastructure.

Our growing communities' needs are far outweighing Council's ability to deliver services. There is a significant shortfall in the funding currently available to Council for the construction and maintenance of recreation infrastructure to meet our current and future needs. Financial Assistance Grants have become imperative to our operations, and any increase would enable Council to proactively manage the challenges we face.



In the current Financial Assistance Grants model, recreation and culture are a combined service. Council would seek to see these two vastly different areas reflected separately.

The delivery of culture services is one of the most important, and often overlooked role Local Government provides. Traditionally Baw Baw Shire has seen limited diversity in its population, from ethnicity to religion. However, in recent census data and through delivery of services, Council is continuing to see an increase in diversity across our growing community.

When providing cultural services, this work creates genuine and meaningful connection for communities through services such as arts, community engagement and economic development. The delivery of these services supports new residents, or new migrants to Australia to actively participate, engage and find their place in community. Connected communities thrive, and Local Government

is central to the services and infrastructure that facilitate these connections.

Council's First Nations population has also increased by 1%, which in our communities is a significant number and demonstrates the importance of Councils role in supporting self-determination in Australia.

As a Local Government, Council is also required to address and resolve any gender inequality in its services. This inequality can be compounded by other forms of disadvantage or discrimination that a person may experience due to other characteristics, such as:

- Race
- Aboriginality
- Religion
- Ethnicity
- Disability
- Age
- sexual orientation
- gender identity

Local Government is required to provide its services so they are accessible to the whole community and, as our community diversifies, so to must the investment in our community to ensure all our services provide equity for the whole community.

## Our Ask

Increase weighting for population growth to assist Peri Urban Councils who experience high percentage growth in concentrated areas.

Split Recreation and Culture into two separate categories.

Apply a cost adjustor for percentage changes in population diversity.



# Priority 3:

## Aged & Disability Services

### How can you support our growing community?

With the exit from Aged and Disability Services, there has been a change in Councils services. However, there are still significant gaps in the current aged and disability service model. Councils have long histories of providing services to our vulnerable community members and do this work well. With assistance from Financial Assistance Grants, Council could provide potential solutions to some of these issues, connecting community with local services.

### Local Context

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has released a final report which laid out several recommendations to restructure Australia's aged care system. This report highlighted the significant challenges of the current system and limited ability for the system to provide a people-centric service.

In the report, there were several accounts during the hearings that raised the issues of limited information of local services and support. These finding also reflects the much of the feedback received by Council's from our communities in relation to the lack of local, independent support to connect them with services.

In regional communities, elderly residents are particularly reliant on Council as their first point of call when looking to understand and access a wide range of services. Despite the transition that Council has needed to make away from delivering these types of



services, many of our community members continue to seek support to locate and navigate the aged and disability services.

In Baw Baw Shire, over 28% of our population are aged over 60. For many residents their goal is to remain at home and maintain the quality of life for as long possible. Council's role is to support our community and ensure that the most vulnerable members of our community are healthy and thriving. The Financial Assistance Grants will provide Council with the means to ensure the continued changes to the aged and disability services will not be at the cost of the safety and wellbeing of our residents.

### Our Ask

Support the necessary exit of Councils from age care services while still ensuring the ongoing support of our most vulnerable community members, by providing a lower but continued rate contribution for aged and disability services that will allow Council to provide connective services where possibly for vulnerable members of the community requiring support.

# Priority 4:

## Waste Management

### How can you support our growing community?

Councils' ability to continue to provide waste management is significantly at risk due to policy and legislation changes. A proactive approach is required to ensure the financial sustainability and long-term waste management planning and services to support the Federal Government's goal of Net Zero by 2050.



### Local Context

In 2021 the Victorian Government introduced the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021 (Circular Economy Act) as the foundation for Victoria's transition to a sustainable and thriving circular economy, to minimise waste and landfill, and significantly increase the reuse and recycling of our precious resources.

This Act places additional requirements on Councils to transition the waste services provides to their communities. Some examples of areas impacted by this legislative change include:

- Implementation of the four-stream waste and recycling system
- Increase in reporting and the associated administrative support required to provide this reporting
- Changes to the way Councils procure good and services
- Changes to the sorting of waste and recyclable materials

Recently, the State Government Minister for Local Government issued the Local Government Services and Rates Charges - Minister's Good Practice Guidelines. The guidelines state that the following are examples of services should be funded by the council through revenue sources other than a Service Rate or Charge:

- Litter and waste collection from public spaces and the provision of public bins,
- Street, footpath and drain cleaning,
- Graffiti removal,
- Municipal tree planting and maintenance,
- General and/or municipal environmental activities such as park maintenance, public education and advocacy.

By removing Council's ability to fund the above services through a Service Rate or Charge, these guidelines have added



additional financial stress on Councils budgets that are already facing the significant challenges of rate capping in Victoria. This means that Council will be faced with incredibly challenging decisions of potentially reducing services in order to manage their financial future.

With greater emphasis being placed on Council to provide better waste management to tackle the effects of Climate Change, more funding is required. However, the Victorian State Government has removed Council's ability to recover these costs from the community which leaves Council in the position of needing to reduce these services rather than improving them.

### **Our Ask**

Increase funding in waste management to support Local Government's transition to a circular economy.

Include a cost adjustor for Local Government's disadvantaged through rate capping, and restricted ability to create revenue through service charges.

Consider splitting Waste Management and Circular Economy in the Financial Assistance Grant reporting to enable a greater transparency and understanding of the models, funding and how cost adjustors may apply.



# Priority 5:

## Local Roads and Infrastructure

### How can you support our growing community?

Road infrastructure is the most important of all public assets. Particularly for regional and rural communities who are almost totally reliant on the road network, appropriate investment for regional and rural roads is essential in order to support sustainable, thriving and healthy, communities and economies.

### Local Context

Our road networks provide access to employment, social, health and education services and is fundamental to communities. For many communities in Baw Baw, public transport networks are underdeveloped, and active transport can be unfeasible due to the distances involved and challenges with topography. The road network is therefore crucial for the access of services, stimulating economic growth and encouraging social development.

As a peri urban region, Baw Baw is experiencing high urban growth in the corridor along the Princes Hwy, while also having a large regional and rural road network to manage outside of these urban areas. This presents a unique set of challenges for our roads and infrastructure network.

Our urban areas are rapidly growing, and the 100-year-old network is struggling to cope with the increased usage. Traffic congestion is escalating and the cost of maintaining



the network is growing, not to mention the investment needed to expand and improve the network to accommodate the rapid population growth.

The northern half of the shire is heavily forested and lies in the Great Dividing Range and its foothills, including the Mount Baw Baw National Park, while the shire is bounded by the Strzelecki Range to the south. Similar to other regional and rural areas, we are facing the significant challenges that these environments present. Some of these challenges include:

- Increased service delivery costs, not only from a procurement perspective but in labour and travel when servicing rural roads and infrastructure,
- Faster rates of deterioration of infrastructure and roads caused by underlying geology and topography, and
- The ongoing impacts of climate change leading to a significant increase in unplanned works as a result of disaster events as well as contributing to the increased rate of asset deterioration.

Council would strongly support a move to a “road purpose” hierarchy of local roads, as traffic volume is not the most reliable data to inform the delivery of road services or provide the best understanding of the maintenance required.

Baw Baw Shire and the broader Gippsland region is a significant contributor to Victoria and Australia’s future food supply. Gippsland is a dairy powerhouse producing 22% of Australia’s dairy. The region also produces 25% of the Victoria’s beef (much of it for export), wool and prime lamb as well as 27% of Victoria’s vegetables.

In regional and rural communities, unsealed roads can have limited traffic volume however may be the only transport route for agricultural producers to access their properties. The condition of these roads is therefore key to ensuring the productivity of the agricultural sector and the broader regional economy.

Due to environmental factors, Council is seeing that these rural roads are deteriorating at a significantly faster rate than previously recorded. The growing need for unplanned works as a result of natural disasters and significant weather events is exacerbating this situation Council is needing to devote more resources towards the maintenance of these important rural roads that ensure the safe and continued access to Australia’s food supply.

## **Our Ask**

Increase the weighting for environment risk in regional and rural communities, as emergency events and the impacts of climate change (such as increasing rainfall) are deteriorating infrastructure at an increasingly rapid pace.

Work with Local Government to establish a “road purpose” hierarchy of local roads.



# Priority 6:

## Early Learning Education

### How can you support our growing community?

Provide commensurate funding and resources to respond to recent Victorian State Government early childhood reforms which place increased financial pressure and additional burden on high growth Councils.



### Local Context

Recently, the Victorian Government outlined their vision for Early Childhood Reform to deliver systemic change, targeted at supporting the children who need it most.

We know quality early years education is proven to provide children the foundation for educational achievement, productivity, responsible citizenship, good health and, community connection. This is particularly true of vulnerable children.

Baw Baw Shire attracts large numbers of young families. Our overall forecast population growth is significant, with an expected increase of 44% by 2041. Council recently commissioned a report to predict upcoming demand for early years services. The report identified the following growth projections for the 0–4-year age bracket between the years 2021-2041:

- Warragul: 80.2% growth
- Drouin: 80.1% growth
- Yarragon/Nilma/Darnum: 104.8% growth
- Baw Baw Shire: 67% growth

This exceptionally high growth in the 0-4 years age bracket will compound Council's challenge in keeping pace with the early years services and infrastructure that our community needs. While census data has indicative numbers to determine trends, in high growth areas we have found that these numbers are not reflective of the level of service and enrollments Council is receiving through our services. This discrepancy is having a negative impact on Council receiving adequate funding for the delivery of these services.

Council has also been required to increase our investment into the administration and delivery of Early Years Education to meet the State reforms. This has included accelerated project planning, significant investment into understanding demands, identifying locations for new or upgraded infrastructure and to support families with accessing services.

Early childhood education shapes who children will become and what kind of life they will lead. During these early years, as a

child's brain is developing, the foundations are laid for their cognitive, speech, language, social and emotional skills and long-term development. Young children do not spend their days in a classroom, but they are always learning - as they explore their world, as they interact with adults and other children, and as they play. Council is committed to supporting Early Years Education as a crucial and fundamental service for our community. Financial Assistance Grants are critical in enabling Councils ability to deliver adequate and equitable early years services for our rapidly growing community.

## **Our Ask**

Consider alternative data sources to support the enrollment and capacity numbers for Early Learning Services, for example, data from Council's kindergarten central registration system and the Early Childhood Education (ECE) report issued annually by the Department of Education.

Provide additional funding for Early Years Services to address the shortfall in Councils budget created by the Victorian State Governments Early Childhood Reform.



# Priority 7:

## Tourism

### How can you support our growing community?

Limited data sources disadvantage smaller regional and rural communities to receive appropriate funding support for tourism.

### Local Context

Baw Baw Shire has a number of smaller tourism towns that are almost solely reliant on the visitor economy. This reliance on tourism has seen these communities and their residents face significant challenges from bushfires, floods, pandemic, storms and cost of living.

Walhalla is a town in Baw Baw Shire that was founded as a gold-mining community in late 1862. At its peak, it was home to around 4,000 residents. Today its home to 20 residents. While its population is small, it welcomes over 160,000 visitors annually and is a major drawcard to the region. With this small population base, the town is reliant on Local Government to support grow its tourism offerings that will enable it to thrive into the future.

Currently, Financial Assistance Grants utilise Tourism Research Australia Data to inform the distribution of funding. However, in smaller regions the sample size used often does not register figures for these small, rural communities.

Under the budgetary constraints that Local Governments operate under, the support that Councils can offer for economic

development and tourism is limited by the amount of funding available. Increased and appropriate support received through these Financial Assistance Grants will enable Council to provide the necessary resources to ensure the economic future of rural communities.

### Our Ask

Work with all Local Government Agencies to identify more accurate reporting models for tourism statistics.





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