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C32**21.01-1**31/03/2016
C32**MUNICIPAL PROFILE****Settlement and Housing**

The Ararat Rural City Council has an area of approximately 4,230 square kilometres. The municipality is situated about 200 kilometres north-west of Melbourne and is one of the major stopping points between Melbourne and Adelaide. The Melbourne-Adelaide railway and the Western Highway bisect the municipality and converge at Ararat.

Ararat Rural City Council is currently home to 11,321 people (2012 estimate) with the population projected to grow to 13,925 residents over the next 20 years, a growth rate of 0.7% per annum (Victoria in Future 2012). Population growth is expected to be driven by young families, empty nesters and retirees, who are attracted by the high level of amenity, lifestyle and growing employment opportunities. The improvement in road and rail transport infrastructure to Melbourne and Ballarat and services such as high speed internet will enable more people to live in Ararat. Nevertheless, the recent trend of population decline in the rural areas is expected to continue as a result of rural restructuring and people moving from these areas in search of alternative education and employment opportunities.

Changes in the structure of the population are and will continue to be a major issue for the municipality into the foreseeable future. As with most rural areas in Victoria, the population of the municipality is ageing. Contributing factors include the longer life expectancies of the population and the outward migration of some of the municipality's younger residents. Estimates prepared by the state government indicate that the population will continue to age as the percentage of people over 50 years of age continues to grow.

Ararat township has a population of approximately 8000 and is a very important service centre for the surrounding agricultural area. It has a full range of regional shopping, educational and recreational facilities. Lake Bolac (approximately 250 people) is located in the southern area of the municipality, on the fertile western district plains. The lake itself is a popular location for camping, fishing and boating. Willaura is home to around 270 people and plays an important service role to the surrounding smaller settlements and agricultural areas with infrastructure and services in place capable of sustaining a significant population increase.. Streatham is also located in the southern part of the municipality in an area of highly productive and versatile soils which support a wide range of agricultural products. The townships of Moyston and Pomonal (366 people) to the west of Ararat are located at the foothills of the Grampians and and forms part of a key tourism destination and which offers opportunities for a rural residential lifestyle, boutique agriculture and tourism development, and have experienced consistent population growth over the last 10 years. The township of Elmhurst is located to the north-east of Ararat and also attracts people seeking a rural residential lifestyle given its affordable housing prices and short commuting distance from Ararat. Other smaller communities are evident at Wickliffe and Buangor. Only Ararat, Lake Bolac and Willaura presently have reticulated sewerage facilities.

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C23**Environment**

The Ararat Rural City contains many areas which have significant natural landscapes and features of environmental value, including natural wetlands and waterways, archaeological and historic features. There are also significant areas of public land hosting native vegetation and wildlife habitat and small areas such as narrow reserves along streams, roadsides and railways and nature reserves. These retain native vegetation, contribute to nature conservation and are valuable for migratory and nomadic birds and as wildlife corridors for small animals.

The municipality contains a number of places of historic, cultural and aboriginal significance which are important to the community including buildings, bridges, trees, landscapes and environments of national, state and local significance.

After years of traditional farming practices, there is now some evidence of salination and erosion in rural areas. Water is harvested in upper catchment areas to support the needs of the Wimmera and Glenelg-Hopkins catchment areas. Most of the rural city is within the Glenelg-Hopkins Catchment with a small area in the Wimmera Catchment.

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Economic Development

The economy of the municipality is predominantly rural based and supports a diverse range of production. At present, the relative strengths of Ararat lie in Agriculture, Public Administration and Safety, Manufacturing, Construction and Wholesale Trade. Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing' are the largest industry of employment in the municipality, employing 16% of the workforce in 2011; however, and in line with broader regional trends, this has declined from 23% in 2001. Despite this trend, agriculture (particularly broad acre cropping and grazing) continues to underpin the economic base of Ararat Rural City. As such, the rural sector has a major influence on the wellbeing of the whole of the municipality.

Ararat Rural City's economy has traditionally been based on prosperous primary production, its high quality merino wool and employment generating from various government departments and functions. However, the economy is experiencing change. Agriculture is diversifying, government departments and functions have been rationalised and the health care and manufacturing sector is growing. Tourism, industrial development, the diversification of farming and an increasing emphasis on intensive agriculture such as wine production are growing components of the local economy. The introduction of new enterprises based on the principles of value adding to the existing enterprises, such as restaurants/ cafes in wineries are all ways in which expansion and diversification maximise the long term economic and social benefits to the region.

'Health Care and Social Assistance' now forms the second largest industry in the municipality at 14%, followed by 'Manufacturing' at 13% and 'Retail Trade' and 'Public Administration and Safety' both employing 10% of the workforce in 2011. 'Public Administration and Safety' is much higher in the municipality compared with Regional Victoria (6%). The sector has grown from 7% in 2001, reflecting the strong presence of public sector organisations including the prison and other correctional facilities in the municipality.

The Ararat Rural City has a temperate climate and suitable soil structure for grape growing and as such is emerging as an area for quality wines. Such growth in horticulture has seen a change in the municipality's upper catchment areas from being solely a source of water to being a new commercial user of water.

While landholders have commenced diversifying their operations and broadening the agricultural base, there are opportunities for further agricultural development and diversification within the municipality.

Ararat is the gateway to the Grampians and Pyrenees Ranges. The municipality has a number of natural tourist features and attractions, together with extensive recreation and leisure facilities in the towns. There are many tourism businesses ranging from wineries to heritage and environmental attractions.

Ararat Rural City hosts a wind farm at Challicum Hills and is committed to pursuing further wind energy and related industry opportunities.

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Infrastructure

The provision of infrastructure, particularly reticulated sewerage, and land capability are the most significant constraints on urban development in Ararat Rural City. The majority of the towns in the municipality are serviced by Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water. Domestic water is sourced from nearby rivers and creeks and reticulated for most towns. The reticulated water supplies to the towns are considered adequate to meet future demand. The smaller townships have private

water supplies. The key concerns are to maintain the quality of the water in the catchments, the need to control effluent and pesticide flows in the waterways, levels of colour and turbidity and the need for effective disinfection.

The only towns in the municipality that have reticulated sewerage systems are Ararat, Willaura and Lake Bolac. The reticulated sewerage systems have the capacity to service projected industrial, commercial and residential demand. The other smaller townships are generally not large enough to make reticulated sewerage economically viable. Rainfall, soil type and the topography contribute to some drainage problems throughout the municipality. While most of the larger towns have reticulated drainage systems, low lying, flood prone and poorly drained areas around the towns pose some constraints to further development. In rural areas the drainage of agricultural land can significantly affect natural drainage patterns which can cause the loss of wetland habitats with impacts on flora and fauna.

The municipality is heavily dependent on road transport as its primary means of transport and travel. The Western Highway through Ararat is a principal road, linking state capital cities and the Pyrenees Highway, also a principal road, links smaller settlements to Ararat and beyond. Land use planning should take full account of these Highways and consider the important role that secondary major local roads play in connecting Ararat's settlements when development occurs in its vicinity. The major future road issue is the potential for a bypass at Ararat and the consequent effects. Air services in the municipality are available at the Ararat Aerodrome, which is located 5 kilometres east of Ararat. The main rail line between Melbourne and Adelaide runs through Ararat and fast train services are available to Melbourne. A rail freight network to the south of Ararat, particularly to Willaura, Maroona, Westemere and Tatyoon is important in supporting agriculture in these areas.

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Community Development

Ararat Rural City has a number of cultural, recreation and sporting facilities, and associated clubs, unique to the region. Examples include the Ararat Regional Art Gallery, Alexandra Oval and Gardens, horse and harness racing, an indoor pool, lawn bowls, croquet lawns, several sporting fields and various shooting clubs.

Ararat is also well served by a full complement of state-of-the-art medical facilities, including a birthing suite and labour delivery room, accident and emergency, dialysis treatment facilities, operating theatre, day procedure centre and palliative care services. This is alongside local health services such as general practitioners, dentists and various support services, as well as aged-care facilities which not only play an important role in the local community but likely to support a significant proportion of the projected population.

In terms of education, several pre and primary school options exist across the municipality. Furthermore excellent secondary school options exist in Ararat, reducing the need for local residents to seek education outside of the municipal boundary. Tertiary education opportunities within Ararat Rural City are limited. The Melbourne Polytechnic Ararat Training Centre and Federation University currently offer very limited courses. Melbourne Polytechnic Ararat Training Centre however, has an operating vineyard and winery and there is potential to capitalise on this and the historic values of the Aradale site. The proximity of Ballarat means a number of additional secondary and tertiary opportunities are available to residents of Ararat Rural City, however the further need for local training and development of tertiary education in rural locations is important to note.