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C32**Profile of the Baw Baw Shire**

The Baw Baw Shire Council was created on December 2, 1994 from the former Shires of Buln Buln, Narracan and Warragul and part of the Upper Yarra Shire. With an area of 3,855 square kilometres, the Shire is located in West Gippsland in south-east Victoria between Melbourne's south eastern growth corridor and the Latrobe Valley. The Shire is a municipality of great natural beauty and is bordered by the Great Dividing Range to the north and the Strzelecki Ranges to the south. It has some of Australia's finest agricultural land at its heart.

The population of the Baw Baw Shire in 2001 was 34,737 people, of which 21,149 resided in the nine largest towns. The two main towns, being Warragul and Drouin, had a combined population of 16,212. The projected population for the Shire to the year 2031 is estimated to be about 47,928, of which an estimated 28,200 will be located in Warragul and Drouin. In common with State trends, the older age groups (particularly 50-64 years) are projected to increase at a greater rate than younger age groups.

The Shire has a number of key attributes that are the focus of this Strategy:

- Highly productive agricultural land and an extensive agricultural infrastructure and investment which produces about \$180m worth of agricultural product or over 3% of Victoria's total agricultural output.
- The Shire is strategically positioned at the gateway to Gippsland and within one and a half hour drive of central Melbourne and 30 minutes from the Latrobe Valley towns. This location provides substantial advantages in terms of developing partnerships within the region and beyond in value-added industry, transport, employment, tourism and marketing.
- A great capacity to support tourism given the Shire's proximity to Melbourne and its natural advantages (ski fields, parks, lakes, mountains, historic towns and local produce).
- An attractive lifestyle choice in urban or rural settings close to Melbourne and the Latrobe Valley.

Population growth has centred on the two largest towns, Warragul and Drouin which are within five kilometres of each other and they are developing complementary roles and twin towns. As well as their residential and service roles these towns have developed a strong industrial base. Trafalgar, Yarragon, Neerim South and Longwarry also have strong local service roles. The Shire is characterised by a large number of small local service centres reflecting the intensive nature of much of the agricultural activities and industries such as timber production and processing. The development of Warragul as the major urban centre serving West Gippsland has seen it take on regional service roles in activities such as education, health and medical services and agricultural research. With continuing growth at particularly Warragul and Drouin there has been strong pressure to use high quality agricultural land for residential purposes. The northern areas of the Shire are dominated by the mountains of the Great Dividing Range and development of alpine recreational pursuits, particularly skiing has seen a major growing tourist role for the Shire. This has strengthened tourism which has had a strong focus on the landscape, the produce of the area and the historic gold mining settlement at Walhalla.