

## **21-01 MUNICIPAL PROFILE**

19/01/2006  
VC37

### **21.01-1 Settlement and Housing**

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#### **Regional Context**

Situated in northern Victoria and sharing borders with New South Wales and South Australia, Mildura Rural City is the largest municipality in Victoria covering an area of some 22,330 sq kms (Refer to Map 1 – State Context). Mildura plays an important regional servicing role for interstate communities, particularly for those within the Shire of Wentworth in New South Wales, such as Wentworth, Dareton, Gol Gol and Buronga.

#### **Townships**

The main urban centre of the municipality is Mildura, surrounded by the satellite townships of Irymple, Red Cliffs, and Merbein. Ouyen is the major settlement in the south of the municipality and there are a number of other smaller settlements throughout the rural areas (Refer to Map 2 – Key Land Use Issues and Map 3 – Sub Regional Context Plan).

#### **Population**

The total resident population in 2003 was approximately 51,300. The municipality experienced strong and sustained population growth for the period 1991 – 2003 (average annual population growth of 1.26%). For the period 1996 – 2003 the average annual rate of growth increased to 1.73% (about 800 persons per year). This rate of growth was higher than that achieved for Victoria as a whole (0.91%) and also substantially higher than that achieved throughout Regional Victoria (0.45%).

In recent years there has been a proportional increase in both the number of persons that are 60+ years and those that are less than 4 years of age. This trend (which reflects national demographic changes) is projected to continue with resultant impacts on a range of community based services and facilities.

Detailed population projection analysis undertaken for the municipality in 2003 (refer *Review of Mildura & Irymple Land Strategies*) indicate that by the year 2030 the municipality's population is likely to grow to between 74,300 to 86,000 people (an increase of 23,000 – 34,700 people). Council believes that it is more prudent to rely on the higher population growth scenario for its land demand projections to ensure that past problems arising from conservative population projections do not reoccur. These problems have included significant shortages in the availability of residential and commercial land, resulting in significant market distortions.

#### **Residential Land Supply**

To accommodate the 2030 growth projections it is estimated that an additional 500 dwellings per annum will be built throughout the municipality. It is anticipated that approximately 85% of these new dwellings will be constructed in the existing and expanded urban areas of Mildura, Mildura South and Irymple. While the townships of Irymple, Merbein, Red Cliffs and Ouyen appear to have the necessary pool of zoned land to accommodate their medium to long term future growth projections, an additional 395 ha of land in and around Mildura and Mildura South will be required to be rezoned and developed for residential purposes to accommodate these forecasts.

## Residential Land Staging

To encourage the orderly and timely release of land Council believes it is necessary that at least one, if not two, additional development fronts be made available in the short term. This will require the provision of adequate stormwater infrastructure at Irymple, Mildura and Mildura South. Until such infrastructure works are completed, development opportunities within these key growth areas of the municipality will be constrained. This is to be contrasted with Council's previous policy of allowing drainage basins on a site-by-site basis.

Due to the cost of such infrastructure provision (which is borne up-front by Council) it is critical that the future development and rezoning of residential land occurs in a staged and co-ordinated manner. It is also imperative that Council recoup its up-front capital outlay in a timely manner so that it can continue to fund the roll out of such infrastructure.

Another key settlement characteristic is the demand for variety in housing opportunities and styles throughout the municipality.

## Development Constraints

Council seeks to ensure that all forms of residential, commercial and industrial development are located and managed to minimise the impacts of potentially conflicting land uses. While some of the municipality's smaller centres are experiencing population decline and resultant loss of community services and amenities, the municipality is generally well served with leisure, health and educational services. Schools and recreation facilities provide a major focus point for the majority of the municipality's communities.

It is also important that new development does not compromise the integrity, function or appearance of historical sites and key natural and built features that provide the municipality with its sense of identity and unique character. Council is also committed to ensure that future urban development does not contribute to, nor is affected by, the negative impacts associated with salinity and rising water tables.

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## Environment

### The Natural Environment

The environmental characteristics of the municipality vary considerably in climate, soil type, ground and surface water, riparian areas, and flora and fauna. Total rainfall is insufficient to sustain horticultural, stock and domestic demand fully and there is high demand on river and stored water to sustain horticulture and domestic needs, particularly in the summer months.

The Murray River is a key economic and social driver of the Rural City. Extensive development along the river has brought with it a series of problems including: increased salinity and nutrient levels; reduced water availability downstream; out breaks of blue green algae; pollution of the river; changes to flood regimes; the threat of flood waters overtopping levees, and the loss of habitats and flora and fauna species.

International, National, State, Regional and Local initiatives have been established in the past to address these issues. Council recognises the importance of managing the Murray River and is committed to working with other authorities, agencies and organisations to develop and implement appropriate policy and management controls. There are significant amounts of riparian land within the municipality which have environmental, ecological and economic importance. Past development however has damaged or altered these areas. For environmental reasons, it is now widely recognised that native vegetation removal, stock grazing and urban development should be discouraged in riparian areas.

One of the major environmental issues facing the municipality and the surrounding region is the displacement of highly saline regional groundwater to the Murray River by

infiltration from the surface. Recharge to the regional groundwater and local perched water tables occurs throughout the cleared dryland area and the irrigated zone. The high salinity and nutrient levels within the Murray River are exacerbated by saline water discharges, drainage from irrigated and urban areas. Accordingly, the key solution in arresting rising salinity and nutrient levels in the river is to control the water table and the drainage of saline and nutrient rich water from the irrigation and urban areas. The Mallee CMA is continuing to develop strategies and plans in response to this and other environmental protection and enhancement issues.

The land to the north and south of the Murray-Sunset National Park requires appropriate management because of the high erosion hazard of disturbed sandy loam and reddish-yellow sands. These soils are subject to wind erosion when ground cover is removed.

Most of the large areas of remaining native vegetation are on public land. Due to the extent of agricultural clearing and development over the past 150 years, much of the municipality's and surrounding region's remnant vegetation is in severe decline or threatened with further degradation. The conservation of the remaining Mallee flora and fauna is, therefore, a high priority. A multitude of scattered remnant vegetation pockets exist on freehold land, roadsides and numerous smaller conservation reserves. Roadsides, Bushland, Flora and Fauna and other reserves contain a significant proportion of remnant vegetation, particularly understorey and ground flora. Roadside vegetation often forms linear corridors that act as important biolinks between more substantial areas of vegetation between the river and inland environs. It is therefore a priority to maintain and restore connectivity to the fragmented landscape to provide for the long term survival of many species.

### **Public Land**

The municipality hosts approximately 40% of the total area of the Victorian Parks system. The major parks include the Hattah-Kulkyne, Murray-Sunset and Wyperfield National Parks, Big Desert Wilderness Park and the Murray-Kulkyne Park. All of these parks are subject of an overall management plan and contain highly significant landscape, flora, fauna and cultural values. They represent the least disturbed Mallee ecosystems in Australia. The qualities of the parks include:

- a large diversity of biota;
- a diverse range of ecosystems and landscapes unique in Victoria;
- large areas of essentially undisturbed vegetation including 1,000 species of native plants;
- over 300 species of birds;
- a greater diversity of reptiles than any where else in Victoria;
- over 3,800 sites on the Aboriginal Affairs Victoria Register and many significant European historic sites;
- opportunities for recreational activities including solitude and self reliant recreation and motorised recreation; and
- seven wilderness zones.

In addition to the Mallee Parks there are considerable areas within the municipality of riverine and dryland State Forests. Abutting the riverine State Forests is the Murray River Reserve, which includes a 60 metre wide permanent public purposes reserve running along the southern bank of the river.

In addition to these major parks and forests, there are hundreds of smaller conservation and other publicly owned reserves scattered across the Mallee that are vitally important in conserving biodiversity, the largest of these being the Annuello and Bronzewing Flora and Fauna Reserves. It is also recognised that public land cannot, on its own, achieve full conservation of biodiversity in the Mallee; freehold remnants are a vital adjunct.

## Heritage

The municipality and the region has in excess of 3,800 aboriginal sites of historical and cultural significance dating well back to before the first European pioneers arrived in the region at Wentworth in the 1840's. The arrival of the Chaffey brothers and the development of irrigation infrastructure provided the impetus for growth in Mildura and the broader region. Many of the original buildings and irrigation infrastructure of the main settlement period of the 1880's still exist today and continue to have practical application and historical interest.

Three specific precincts of *special heritage significance* have been identified by previous investigations in addition to over 100 individual buildings, sites, natural features or other precincts. The importance of preserving the municipality's heritage is recognised by the Council and residents.

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## Economic Development

The municipality's economy is largely reliant on the horticultural and agricultural activity that characterise the region. While the agricultural and horticultural sector is by far the largest element of the economy, the tourism, retail/commercial and industrial sectors are also significant in the municipality.

### Agriculture and Horticulture

Mildura Rural City is nationally and internationally significant in terms of its horticultural output. The local economy is mainly driven by horticultural industries and their value added activities, such as packaging and processing. Dryland farming provides economic diversity and important regional income. Agriculture, Forests and Fisheries is the major employment industry in the municipality providing 49.1% of the workforce with employment compared with 11.2% for Regional Victoria.

There are two broad agricultural areas in the Municipality. They are:

- Horticultural Areas - in the northern irrigated areas consisting mainly of dried vine fruit, wine grapes, table grapes, citrus and vegetable production.
- Dryland Agricultural Areas - located to the south and north of the Murray Sunset National Park, consisting mainly of mixed cereal, sheep, some grain and pasture legumes, wool and beef production.

The total value of production from agricultural areas in the municipality in 2000 – 2001 was approximately \$525 million. There is potential for a significant expansion of the horticultural industry in the municipality and surrounding region. In recent years the wine industry has experienced significant boosts from the export market, resulting in a swing toward production of wine grapes. This increase has come from both an increase in wine grape plantings and also a redirection of multi-purpose grapes from drying to wine production.

## Tourism

Mildura is a key attraction in the Mallee tourism sub-region, and is described as 'a riverside oasis in the outback'. Located on the Murray River, Mildura has built upon the natural assets of Murray-Darling river system, which is one of the world's largest river systems. Indigenous tourism, special events, arts-related industries and wineries are among the city's key tourism assets.

The Mildura CBD (formerly known as Mildura City Heart) is a draw-card for visitors to the Mallee sub-region. The CBD offers extensive facilities and services for all types of visitors, ranging from accommodation to shopping and restaurants, cafés and bars, as well as easy access to attractions such as golfing, houseboats and galleries; and it is also the

main focus for business and civic functions. The major tourist attractions and assets of the Region include significant national and state parks; Murray and neighbouring Darling Rivers; rich Aboriginal and cultural heritage; climate; high quality recreation features; extensive accommodation opportunities; wineries and the horticultural industry in general; and major events and festivals.

## Industry

While most towns in the municipality contain some industrial activity it is generally of a local service nature. The two major concentrations of industrial activity are located at the Mildura industrial estate and the Irymple industrial area.

Much of the land within the Mildura industrial estate has been developed, although a number of small sites still exist. Approximately 14 hectares of vacant industrial land exists at Irymple with further expansion opportunities existing to the west along Koorlong Avenue.

The Mildura Industrial Land Use Strategy (2003) identified a need to reserve land for large site industrial activity requiring buffers to residential areas, access to services and to transport routes, and free from potential contamination from chemical sprays. A large site to the south west of Irymple ("Block H") has been identified for industrial use while industrial activity within the Mildura Airport precinct and at Thurla is also identified.

## Retail/Commercial

Residents and visitors are served by three existing major retail concentrations, namely the Mildura CBD, Mildura Centre Plaza Precinct and the Fifteenth Street Precinct.

In addition to these major retail concentrations, retailing needs of the population are served by small town centres at Irymple, Merbein, Red Cliffs, Ouyen and a range of small neighbourhood centres and local shops.

Within the Mildura urban area there is a total of approximately 130 hectares of land commercially zoned which can accommodate retail activity (48 ha zoned Business 1, 45 ha zoned Business 4, 25 ha zoned Business 2 and 12 ha zoned Business 5).

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## Infrastructure

The municipality and surrounding region are served with a range of transport infrastructure including:

- State Highways (Calder, Sunraysia, Mallee, Murray Valley, Sturt and Silver City)
- Railways (Yelta, Murrayville and Kulwin)
- Airports (Mildura, Wentworth, Ouyen, Pooncarie, and numerous airstrips on grazing properties)
- Public Transport (coach services from Mildura to Melbourne, Broken Hill and Wentworth, numerous bus routes radiating from Mildura town centre and servicing the township and immediate vicinity, numerous school bus services, local taxi service, and airline services to Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney).

Recent studies have indicated a need to address issues such as car parking provision and location; traffic flow for domestic and commercial traffic; bicycle links; extension, re-definition and upgrade of several major transport arteries; establishment of a bypass of Mildura; relocation of railway infrastructure such as the Freight Gate; development of freight intermodal terminals, business development opportunities associated with Mildura Airport and the establishment of a transport corridor. The majority of these issues have significant implications for the future land use and development pattern of the municipality.

The authorities that control and operate water and sewerage services in the municipality are currently capable of, and committed to, effectively servicing local demand. In order to do this they require to be notified of relevant development applications. Due to urban expansion and improved irrigation practices, some of the agencies are not utilising their annual water allocations. This has resulted in current investigations for the potential to develop new irrigation areas to increase their customer base.

Power and communication agencies have indicated that they can generally serve new development in the municipality, while piped natural gas has recently been made available.



