



STRATEGIC PLAN

2021-2024

A plan to guide the direction and success
of Economic Development and Tourism in
the Mildura Region





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Acknowledgment of Country

Mildura Regional Development acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land comprising the Mildura Rural City Council area, and those of our neighbouring municipalities. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging, we respect their continuing culture and connection to the land.

Photography Credits

Jacinta Lee Photography, Caroline Forster,
David Sickerdick, Hawkeye Photography.



OUR VISION

Our Vision as an organisation is to bring businesses, educators and communities together to form partnerships that identify opportunities, innovates and finds solutions. We will collaboratively build on our region's strengths and opportunities in the tourism, agribusiness, horticultural and related education and technology sectors.

WE WILL FULFIL THIS VISION BY:

A driven team with a focused goal:

A work culture where tourism and economic development is a passion and people strive to achieve beyond their beliefs.

A collaborative environment

Always being open to new ideas and trends and working amongst our peers to create desirable outcomes.

OUR MISSION

Mildura Regional Development's (MRD) mission is to improve the region's economic position and be thought of as a valued partner that is recognised by council, industry, the community and investors as a knowledgeable, trusted advisor and economic growth leader that is commercially astute, innovative and adds value. Our primary purpose is to support the growth of Mildura's vibrant economy including tourism, in a sustainable, ethical, inclusive, innovative and digital manner.

Our success will be measured by community, industry and stakeholder understandings that tourism and economic development is a prominent driver of the region's economic, social and environmental well-being and, ultimately, by Mildura establishing an undeniable reputation for regional excellence, innovation and sustainability.

OUR OPERATING PRINCIPLES

MILDURA REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPERATES IN LINE WITH THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES:

- A. We provide leadership for the development and marketing of Mildura's regional tourism.
- B. We are an independent voice for the region's small to medium enterprises.
- C. We encourage environmentally sustainable and culturally appropriate practices.
- D. We operate with a high level of accountability and transparency to our industry stakeholders.
- E. We are efficient and cost-effective in the management of our resources.

WHO WE ARE

Mildura Regional Development was formed in 2017 under the auspice of the Mildura Rural City Council. Mildura Regional Development is an independent organisation focused on the regional economic and tourism development of the area within the Mildura Rural City Council.

THE BOARD CONSISTS OF:

Chair

Geoff Thomson

Members

Brett Millington

Judith Damiani

Jodie Madden

Maria Carrazza

Geoff Dea

Jodie Bromley

WHAT WE DO





EXECUTIVE STATEMENT

The Global Pandemic involving the COVID-19 virus has destabilised the world's economy, and since March, provided significant challenges to the way we exist. This plan builds on previous strategic efforts that have aimed to change people's views of the Mildura region.

Mildura Regional Development's objective remains to create networks to connect people and business for greater economic prosperity and to position our region as a modern and vibrant destination that is continually growing, evolving and improving.

This plan recognises that a region with successful economic development and tourism must be continually refreshed and revitalised to maintain existing business, generate new investment and grow regional visitation.

Outcomes from this plan are intended to refine people's views so they instinctively reflect accurate, positive, contemporary and sophisticated understandings that Mildura is much more than an important regional centre – it is an appealing, celebrated and significant inland Australian city. Mildura Regional Development's destination marketing and brand obligation is to strengthen this proposition.

A key objective of this plan remains to increase visitation and resultant business yield, delivering stronger economic benefits, which in turn, can fuel investment in new infrastructure, technologies and tourism products. Regional visitation will provide greater strategic capability to attract new industry and business, along with skilled and professional workforces that growing and buoyant regions require.

This strategic plan underlines the major role of our organisation as a key leader to drive Mildura's economic, social and environmental well-being.

Mildura Regional Development's 2021 – 2024 Strategic Plan is structured around six key focus areas which outline in detail, where achievements are required for this plan to be successful. Those focus areas are Economic Development; Tourism; Marketing; New Technology Future; Education Mildura and Small to Medium Enterprises.

INFLUENTIAL REGION DYNAMICS



1 GLOBAL & DOMESTIC ECONOMIC FACTORS

Regularly changing global and domestic economic factors, including political change, are now an accepted part of life. Economic downturns at any level heighten consumer uncertainty which in turn slows down discretionary within business developments and the visitor economy. Declines in confidence also flow through to areas such as infrastructure and product investment with often negative impacts on business and tourism. Mildura's business & tourism industries will never be immune from constantly changing economic and political factors and operators must work to adapt to fluctuating impacts and influences.

2 ENVIRONMENTAL EVENTS & IMPACTS

Weather events and natural environmental occurrences along with their associated impacts and perceptions can become major issues for the Mildura region, particularly when outcomes affect the Murray River. Incorrect perceptions along with seeds of uncertainty are planted in consumers' minds when media reports of such events focus on the rare rather than the usual. Within the climate change context, our region is predicted to endure extreme heat for longer periods and at higher temperatures in future years. This will impact on summer visitation and has product development implications if the region is to successfully stimulate increased visitor demand during Australia's peak summer months.

Consumers' high awareness of climate change and environmental issues will place pressure on Mildura's industries to adopt more sustainable as well as more consumer and environmentally-friendly business practices.

3 DIGITAL EXCELLENCE & CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPES

It is no longer an option... successful business now hinges on developing and maintaining digital excellence in branding, marketing and communications. The emergence of digital technologies along with the influence of social media have also changed the way consumers research and gather information with resultant adjustments to consumers' travel decision-making and booking processes.

User-generated content that provides far-reaching digital word-of-mouth advocacy has become increasingly important to consumers and investors. Such influence presents both threats and opportunities for the Mildura region. Staying at the forefront of digital excellence and technology will be essential.

4 STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS

Strong and successful stakeholder partnerships are essential for the growth and development of our region.

Stakeholders do not fit into one simple category – they come from the private and public sectors and are those individuals, groups and organisations that could affect, or could be affected by, the well-being of a viable region. Stakeholders play a major role in tourism and business decision making processes and outcomes, particularly when key operations, projects and initiatives are funding-dependent.

Within the Mildura region, local Governments, numerous State Government departments and agencies, large and small businesses, the education, not-for-profit and volunteer sectors, as well as local sporting and community groups are all-important industry stakeholders. Working with these groups significantly increase opportunities for greater mutual benefit. Accessing new ideas; articulating values, strategies and commitments; and building mutually supportive working relationships are among key benefits that flow from committed, two-way stakeholder buy-in or investment.



5 INVESTMENT & NEW PRODUCT ATTRACTION

It is acknowledged that Mildura's existing product strengths are built around the Murray and Darling Rivers, food and wine, arts and cultural diversity, nature-based experiences, sporting activities and a strong calendar of major/tier one events. As is the case with many regions, Mildura has its share of ageing tourism assets, some of which are not meeting changing market demands. To maintain existing, as well as attracting new visitors, destinations need to continually refresh themselves along with their attractions and tourism experiences. New products give consumers new reasons to visit a region. New product development can be expensive and time consuming when starting from scratch, or it can be very cost effective if there is an existing base that facilitates product improvement. The Mildura and Wentworth region has the opportunity to showcase new projects and initiatives, providing the basis to develop products that will strengthen many of the region's distinctive areas of appeal.

On-going analysis of existing tourism products including any gaps that may be apparent will help to identify new opportunities and new consumer segments that could be attracted to the region.

6 SKILLS & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Today's working holiday makers/backpackers are experienced, discerning and sophisticated travellers with high expectations of tourism services and standards. Skilled labour is a critical component of our Agri-business success, as is training and on-going professional development – not only for staff but also for small business owners. Labour shortages, staff recruitment and retention, plus improving skills and service standards are important issues in the Mildura and Wentworth region. Similarly, structured professional development for business operators and managers are highly desirable to ensure that the experiences delivered meet customer expectations.

Competition is hotting up amongst Victoria's regions to attract the most talented people, innovators and entrepreneurs. Our region must aim to nurture our own future industry entrepreneurs, as well as establish a competitive position to attract other business trailblazers into the region.

7 CHANGING CONSUMER TRENDS & TRAVEL PATTERNS

Mildura continues to face increasing competition domestically and internationally as destinations become more aggressive and price competitive with their marketing. This activity has also been supported by the on-going competitiveness of air travel. Large volume capital city markets have maintained their preference to travel overseas ahead of regional destinations for an extended holiday. COVID-19 will have an impact on these travel trends and patterns. Domestic travel - usually viewed as the preferred option for short breaks, may change its pattern over the next two years, given peoples insecurities or cautiousness when travelling internationally. Against this backdrop there are encouraging consumer trends that focus on personal and environmental well-being, inspiring visitors to seek out authentic, simpler and back-to-basic experiences overlaid with desires to re-connect with each other, friends, families and communities. For a destination like Mildura and Wentworth this further reflects consumers' willingness to seek out and interact with regional product offerings, particularly where food and wine, arts and cultural, sporting, as well as indigenous and nature-based experiences consistently fit with travellers' personal values and beliefs.

8 MILDURA'S CULTURE & STRONG REGIONAL PERSONALITY

Success of tourism in our region has remained highly dependent on the enthusiasm, acceptance and culture of our local community. Mildura has an exceptionally strong regional personality, heightened in many ways by its isolation and city vibes. Our Community has the ability to face adversity when it arises and to emerge successfully from it. Recognising and adapting efficiently to necessary change remains a challenge for our region. Harnessing the community's many strengths and collective abilities is fundamental to our community's desire to embrace regional growth for economic prosperity while adapting to the constantly changing environment and become proud and knowledgeable ambassadors for the region.

STRATEGIC PLAN COMPONENTS

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

TOURISM

MARKETING

NEW TECHNOLOGY FUTURE

EDUCATION MILDURA

SMALL TO MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SME'S)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Objectives

- Defining our cultural identity for future economic prosperity
- Pursuing the outcomes of the Victorian Skills Commissioner's 2017 report and update 2020 Pulse check for the Mallee Region.
- Facilitating access to Grants and funding opportunities for infrastructure investment, workforce and industry development.
- Provide project support and guidance for significant economic projects in the region.
- Continue to promote the opportunities for economic links to the SuniTAFE Smart Farm.
- Support the recovery of industries significantly disadvantaged by COVID-19, such as the creative industries.

Mildura has an exceptionally strong regional personality, heightened in many ways by its isolation and coupled with its stoic ability to face adversity when it arises and to emerge successfully from it. The region has many natural and man-made assets to build on and understanding the role of these within an economic framework is a key driver in creating a regional connection and maximising potential.

The challenges faced within all regional areas, including higher unemployment, declining traditional industries, mechanisation, lack of economic diversity, and talent loss to urban centres still exist in this Post COVID-19 environment; it is however now a very different context. Regionally specific, innovative economic development, will generate greater economic opportunities, population relocation and a refocus for tourism sustainability nationally.

Business growth and industry attraction broadens academic skill requirements. Matching these needs with appropriate career opportunities diversifies the workforce with improved quality of life and economic sustainability.

Supporting this growth of jobs in the region through a focus on innovation, research and entrepreneurship and providing an environment where start-ups can be nurtured, adds a vital input to the growth of the local economy.

A challenge for the region is securing ongoing work for seasonal employees by managing skillsets and establishing an employee bank in partnership with local businesses. This also provides a mechanism to retain a higher level of skill in the area.

TOURISM



Objectives

- Raise awareness and improve perceptions of the region as a must visit destination through strong Visit Mildura brand enhancement and promotions.
- Convert intentions to visit into action through attractive product offerings.
- Encourage longer length of stay and expenditure in the region through effective marketing campaigns and communications, which tie in with new product offerings.
- Stimulate the revitalisation of the region's current product offerings to support increased visitation, length of stay and expenditure.
- Forge new relationships and build interest into new product development and tourism investment for the region.

Our existing tourism product strengths built around nature-based experiences, the Murray and Darling rivers, food and wine, arts and cultural diversity, sporting activities and a calendar of premium events can be leveraged with further enhancement of the visitor experience.

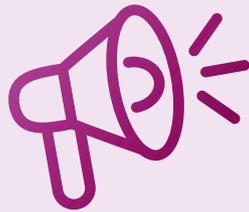
Against the current backdrop post COVID-19 there are encouraging consumer trends that focus on personal and environmental well-being, inspiring visitors to seek out authentic, simpler and back-to-basics experiences overlaid with desires to re-connect with each other, friends, families and communities.

For a destination like Mildura, this further reflects consumers' willingness to seek out and interact with regional product offerings, particularly where food and wine, arts and cultural, sporting, as well as indigenous and nature-based experiences consistently fit with travellers' personal values and beliefs.

In the digital age, successful visitor attraction hinges on developing and maintaining excellence in digital branding, marketing and communications. The emergence of digital technologies, along with the influence of social media, have also changed the way consumers research and gather information with resultant adjustments to consumers' travel decision-making and booking processes.

User-generated content that provides far-reaching digital word-of-mouth advocacy has become increasingly important to consumers, and such influence presents both threats and opportunities for Mildura. Staying at the forefront of digital excellence and technology will be essential.

MARKETING



Our Marketing Mission:

To increase awareness of Mildura as a destination and reposition the region as a vibrant and robust inland regional city. Mildura Regional Development will aim to highlight our stunning landscapes, iconic and historical locations and broad experiences. We will do this through a variety of marketing initiatives and campaigns so that we continue to attract current markets as well as attracting new market segments that meet changing consumer demands.

Specifically, we will:

- Provide consistent and innovative brand messaging and destination marketing of the region.
- Provide leadership and support to the local tourism sector to further grow and market their business.
- Explore and facilitate potential product development and event opportunities.
- Create and continue known partnerships and support proposed investments into the region's visitor economy
- Develop and/or improve relationships with key stakeholders both within and outside the region to better link Mildura to national opportunities and marketing initiatives.

Mildura's greatest strength lies in its location – boasting all the elements required for a river holiday while also having a unique appeal for an outback experience that increasingly attracts interest from both domestic and international travellers.

While these assets may be underutilised by the tourism sector, Mildura also needs to look at establishing a 'key factor or hero product' to attract increased visitation to the region. It is also important to note that while Mildura has an established food and wine industry and reputation, its marketability as a key draw card is somewhat diminished as cuisine is moving from an attraction to an expectation. Operators will need to promote their food and wine offering with a value-add approach, considering experience add-ons such as vineyard tours, 'pick your own' and other like-concepts.

NEW TECHNOLOGY FUTURE



Objectives

- Expand the use of LoRaWAN and other technology for smart and sustainable futures.
- Identify new technology partners, opportunities and investors for ongoing economic diversification.
- Attract regional relocation opportunities for Manufacturing.
- Encourage investment in Mallee Renewable Energy futures – Solar and Hydrogen.
- Fostering a Wine Manufacturing Industry Cluster and technology trials.

Communities are finding success cultivating a competitive advantage by using regionally unique assets to attract new investment and support existing businesses by focusing on technology for process improvement. This place-based approach anticipates and overcomes challenges by building on existing community assets rather than seeking to attract new major employers to replace lost jobs or investments, as would be the more traditional economic growth method.

This approach to improve economic stability where foundations have become threatened due to circumstances, is particularly true for regions built on single-sector economies, utilises technology improvements and market forces acting to grow local workforce employment through increased export capacity.

With significant irrigation infrastructure and key transport links, the region as a 'powerhouse' in the food and manufacturing sector. Key industries include dryland farming, irrigated horticulture (table grapes, wine grapes, dried grapes, citrus, vegetables and nuts), tourism, food and beverage manufacturing, transport and logistics, retail, health and community services. Technology investigation and investment are helping to increase efficiency and jobs across all of these industries.

Through projects like the Smart Farm and partnerships with local and external businesses, education facilities and investors, Mildura Regional Development is propelling the region towards a future that's bright, prosperous and secure.

EDUCATION MILDURA



Objectives

- Use the Smart Farm to demonstrate new technology and future job opportunities.
- Identify and support pathways for jobs of the future in the region.
- To secure a digital innovation technology college locally
- Promote the establishment of local Apprenticeship and Traineeship opportunities.
- Grow the Tertiary sector and Cadetships, as well as supporting research activities in the region.
- Encourage and support leadership programs locally.
- Promote the use of local content in the school curriculum and short course structures.

Education Mildura is a contemporary education product designed to capitalise on the growth in the education sector locally and develop the skills required for industry. This also provides an opportunity to prevent the loss of talent to larger metropolitan centres, by expanding opportunities for our young people to explore education and employment options in Mildura. Post COVID-19, the return of international education, as a major contributor in terms of export dollars, jobs, and the visitor economy will also remain a priority.

When combined with research, technology development and targeted training to market needs, there is significant potential in terms of investment and jobs creation. Working in partnership with educators, trainers and industry, MRD will look to identify exportable education and training products to grow an international student cohort. The intention is that this will be based on contemporary, as well as targeted and bespoke training/education products with a digital/ IIOT transition focus.

The region hosts multiple educational providers with a number of primary, secondary schooling options along with tertiary institutions. SuniTAFE offer a wide range of vocational courses, while the Mildura Campus of La Trobe University, offer a variety of Bachelor courses including, Nursing, Business and Accounting, Education, Arts and Health. Monash University also has a Rural Health Campus situated next to the Mildura Base Public Hospital providing hands-on clinical experiences to medical students.

In a post COVID-19 environment, the opportunities for the delivery of education may change significantly and MRD will need to review the growth opportunities that have been previously identified in the sector.

SMALL TO MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SME'S)



Objectives

- Continue to support the Economic Recovery of small to medium enterprises post COVID-19 via business advisory.
- Encourage Small to Medium Enterprise development through programs for upskilling and identifying grants/funding support.
- Provide support to start-up ecosystem/accelerator programs and local co-working spaces.
- Re-instate a small business awards program for the region.
- Advocate for, and encourage programs that are focused on the health and wellbeing of small to medium workforces in the region.

Small to medium business plays a significant role in the local and Australian economy, particularly in terms of their contribution to employment and production. They contribute to an increase in the value of goods and services as a result of their business activity, industry value add, and contribute to overall productivity (gross domestic product - GDP) of the region.

While the size of business makes relatively little difference in the level of product innovation (goods and services), the disparity between small and large business is most noticeable in the areas of operational processes (22% vs 44%); organisation and management (29% vs 53%); and marketing methods (26% vs 40%). It is in these areas where support and sharing of information via networking can most benefit and Mildura Regional Development will focus.

The potential of businesses and industries to further drive economic recovery will also be a focus, particularly targeting key economic sectors affected by COVID-19, such as hospitality and tourism. At the same time, supporting and strengthening industries like agriculture and manufacturing, and encouraging new business and industry activity, particularly through value add product development that embraces the regions broad market base, will assist the recovery process.

Regional innovation that can lead to greater productivity will drive business success. SMEs that invest in technology stand a better chance of meeting the challenges of competition, because the ability to innovate can be seen as a clear driver of the success in businesses that prosper at the expense of the ones that do not.

