

## 21.01 BULOKE SHIRE KEY ISSUES AND STRATEGIC VISION

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### 21.01-1 Snapshot of Buloke Shire

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Buloke Shire is a rural municipality located in north-west Victoria. The municipality has an area of approximately 8,000km<sup>2</sup> and its economy is largely based on broadacre, dryland agricultural production. In 2012 the ABS estimated the municipality had a total population of 6,364 people.

Buloke Shire is located in the riverine plains and Murray-Mallee region of Victoria, approximately 300km north-west of Melbourne and approximately 180km south-east of Mildura. The municipality is characterised by vast agricultural plains extending from the sedimentary hills south of Charlton, north to the Mallee dunes and into the Wimmera region, interspersed by small settlements acting as service centres to the surrounding farming districts.

Buloke Shire plays a valuable role in the production of the State's agricultural output. The gross value of agricultural production according to the 2012 ABS data was \$225 million.

The municipality contains five main townships and five smaller hamlets. The largest town is Donald, with a population of over 1,300 people. Approximately 64% of the municipality's population live in the urban centres, with the remainder mostly residing on farms throughout the rural areas. The main urban centres of the municipality and their populations in 2011 were as follows: Birchip (662), Charlton (968), Donald (1,355), Sea Lake (615) and Wycheproof (628). Other smaller settlements include Berriwillock, Culgoa, Nandaly, Nullawil, and Watchem, which range in population from 50 to 140 people.

The main population centres of Buloke Shire provide an important retail and industrial function, with a range of shopping, medical and educational services and recreational facilities. While the main towns in the municipality each have a strong and unique identity, a number of features characterise them all. These include: the strong focus on the core commercial area; the role of major highways in shaping settlement patterns and commercial development; the existence of an industrial precinct; and the strong delineation between urban and non-urban land use, defined by historic patterns of zoning and servicing.

Another feature of Buloke Shire's (and the region's) towns is the way in which sympathetic rural, urban commercial and industrial land uses are interspersed. While the main towns do have distinct commercial and industrial areas, historic patterns of development have created urban areas with mixed land uses.

The municipality has seen structural demographic change for several decades, including a changing age profile. In comparison to regional Victoria as a whole, the municipality has less representation in the younger age groups, particularly between 18 and 35, and a relatively high representation in the age groups over 50, which is also reflected in the relatively high proportion of single person households.

### 21.01-2 Key influences

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The key influences in relation to the municipality are:

- An ageing population.
- Population decline.
- The viability, character and heritage of existing rural townships.
- Community participation.
- Environmentally significant areas.

- Environmental risk, including salinity, flooding and climate change.
- Management of natural resources.
- The protection and sustainable use of agricultural land.
- Encouraging economic activity.
- Financial viability of service infrastructure provision.
- Transport connectivity within and beyond the municipality.

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**Key issues**

The key issues facing Buloke are focused around five strategic themes:

**Natural Environment**

- The protection of biodiversity, native vegetation and natural landscape values.
- The minimisation of environmental risk, including salinity and floodplain management.
- The need to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

**Natural Resource Management**

- The sustainable management of natural resources.
- The sustainable use of agricultural land.
- The preservation and protection of valuable agricultural land from inappropriate settlement.

**Built Environment**

- The need to ensure the availability of a diverse range of high quality housing stock.
- The preservation and utilisation of the heritage values of the municipality to enhance the built environment.

**Social and Economic Development**

- The provision of accommodation and services for older residents.
- The need to mitigate and / or adapt to population decline.
- The importance of enhancing the viability of townships by encouraging appropriate development and maintaining and / or improving urban character, amenity and services.
- The need to encourage economic activity in the municipality that increases incomes and opportunities for residents.

**Infrastructure**

- The financially sustainable provision and management of service infrastructure, including telecommunications, electricity, sewerage and water, to meet present and future needs.
- The provision of transport infrastructure to maintain and enhance connectivity and minimise travel times within the municipality and externally.

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The Council's vision for the Buloke municipality is as follows:

“A sustainable community where everyone is actively encouraged to participate in community life to enrich the cultural, social and economic viability of our Shire and to care for our most important asset, the natural environment.”

The Council Plan 2013-2017 also set key objectives and strategies for the Buloke Shire Council revolving around the strategic areas of community, local economy, built environment, natural environment, and people and organisation. The strategic objectives of the Council Plan may be summarised as:

- Including, supporting, servicing and connecting a diverse community.
- Recognising and supporting agriculture and business in the local economy; encouraging employment and investment.
- Supporting current and long term sustainable agriculture.
- Providing facilities and infrastructure that contribute to the well being of the community.
- Working with the community to protect and enhance the municipality's natural environment.
- Responding to the evolving needs of the community; managing risk and developing its people.

The strategic review *Buloke 2015: A Partnership in Progress* (2006) also identified priority actions including:

- Facilitating new housing opportunities within existing township boundary areas.
- Encouraging the development of independent living opportunities for older people.
- Protecting and enhancing the environmental value of remnant vegetation and habitat.
- Working with local farming and agricultural groups to encourage sustainable farming practices.

Among the priority projects committed to by Council that are of direct relevance to the planning scheme are:

- Promoting the Shire as a location for renewable energy production.
- Developing township structure plans.
- Implementing strategies to improve stormwater quality and enhance natural waterways.

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The Buloke Shire Settlement Structure Plan (Figure 1) sets out the general pattern for land use and development to respond to the key influences and issues to achieve the strategic vision for the municipality.

The framework plan identifies:

- Major landscape features, including:
  - Richardson River
  - Avoca River
  - Lake Buloke
  - Lake Tyrrell

- The Mallee Plain
- The Wimmera Flats
- Major transport links, including:
  - Sunraysia Highway
  - Calder Highway
  - Mildura-Ballarat railway line
  - Swan Hill-Bendigo railway line
- Townships and hamlets
- Major community assets and infrastructure
- Recreational lakes

Figure 1: Buloke Shire Settlement Structure Plan

