

21.02 PROFILE OF WEST WIMMERA SHIRE

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21.02-1 Location

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The West Wimmera Shire Council straddles the Western and Wimmera Highways, midway between Melbourne and Adelaide. The Shire extends from the Western District of Victoria, through the Wimmera and into the Mallee Region. It is bordered by the Rural City of Mildura to the north, Glenelg and Southern Grampians Shires to the south, and Hindmarsh Shire and the Rural City of Horsham to the east. The Shire is bounded to the west by the South Australian border for some 180 kilometres. The municipality is located within the Wimmera, Glenelg Hopkins and Mallee Catchment Regions and is affected by the regional natural resource management programs outlined in the Wimmera, Glenelg Hopkins and Mallee Regional Catchment Strategies.

Occupying an area of approximately 9,000 square kilometres, the West Wimmera Shire is one of the largest municipalities in Victoria. Despite its size however, the Shire has a small and decreasing population, 4,614 persons as of the 2006 census, with an estimated 2010 population of 4591 persons, and a projected 2011 population of 4347 persons.

The Shire was formed in January 1995 by the municipal amalgamation of the former Shire of Kaniva, the majority of the Shire of Kowree, a small portion of the Shire of Arapiles and the northern rural area of the Shire of Glenelg. The administrative headquarters are located at Edenhope with a district office based in Kaniva.

Approximately 30% of the Shire is public land. Significant natural features have been recognised through the creation of the Big Desert and Little Desert National Parks, and the Mount Arapiles – Tooan Park. West Wimmera Shire contains over 3000 wetlands, representing 25% of Victoria's wetlands. These wetlands are an important natural asset for the municipality and wider region.

The region

The physical geography of the municipality varies considerably, posing differing opportunities for and constraints to settlement and land management. The Shire incorporates parts of the Mallee, Wimmera and Western District. In the northern part of the Shire are the Murray Basin Plains. The middle of the Shire is characterised by undulating topography with lakes and swamps, including Lake Wallace at Edenhope. The southern part of the Shire is divided by the Glenelg River system and includes the deeply dissected Dundas Tablelands.

North-south physical variations are also reflected in the climate and soils, which has dictated the types of farming carried out in the Shire's districts. The north tends toward a semi-arid climate while the southern areas are more characteristically Mediterranean with some frosts. Average annual rainfall ranges from 400 mm in the north to 700 mm in the south. While soils vary, the prevalence of sand is a common characteristic.

21.02-2 History

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Aboriginal People have occupied parts of the West Wimmera region for at least 11,000 years and probably for more than 60,000 years. Evidence of Aboriginal land use in the region includes scarred trees, stone arrangements, mounds, rock shelters, stone engraving sites, middens, rock paintings, surface scatters, fish traps, burial places, stone house sites, quarries and axe grinding places. Indigenous heritage places are landscapes, sites and areas that are particularly important to indigenous people as part of their customary law, developing traditions, history and current practices. All Indigenous heritage places have associated indigenous heritage values. Maintaining heritage values and places is a vital part of the community's 'sense of place', cultural identity and well being. This is particularly true

for Indigenous Australians, whose heritage creates and maintains links between ancestors, people and the land.

European settlement in western Victoria was rapid following the Henty brothers' landing at Portland in November 1834. By the mid 1800s European settlement was well established in the Shire. Shortly thereafter, Surveyor-General, Major (later Sir) Thomas Mitchell left Sydney to attempt to follow the inland rivers that Sturt has recently discovered. During his journey through the West Wimmera Shire, the flat plains and grassy woodlands that were eminently suitable for grazing impressed him. He noted their rich black clay soils and the useful timbers that grew in the open woodlands. He imagined a settled and prosperous countryside developing quickly in the wake of his explorations.

Mitchell's encouraging observations were rapidly made known through New South Wales and Van Diemens Land and pastoralists moved in with stock to take up runs. By the mid 1800s most of the area had been settled, with the townships of Harrow established in 1842 and Edenhope in 1845.

The impact of European settlement on the Aboriginal population was immediate and great and resulted in a rapid decline of Aborigines throughout western Victoria by the late 1870s.

When the mining boom subsided in the 1860s, the proclamation of the Land Act 1869 allowed settlers of limited means to select and eventually purchase land for farming (largely wheat growing and grazing) within proclaimed areas, provided conditions of residence and improvement were met.

Agriculture expanded and diversified in the late 19th century, despite periodic economic depressions and natural adversities such as floods, drought and disease. Initial activities included growing fine wool from Merino and Merino-cross sheep, cattle for beef in the south, and wheat production, particularly through the central areas of the Shire.

Secondary industries also developed, especially to serve agriculture and mining. They included blacksmiths, quarries, sawmills, tanneries and flour mills. After both world wars, government sponsored 'closer settlement' and 'solider settlement' schemes enabled a large numbers of small farmers to establish themselves on the land. A number of small towns were established throughout the Shire to support the population of pioneering farmers and families.

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Settlement pattern

The predominant towns in West Wimmera Shire are Apsley, Edenhope, Goroke, Harrow, and Kaniva. There are also a number of smaller townships located throughout the Shire, including Dergholm, Chetwynd and Serviceton.

Edenhope is the major administrative centre for the Shire. The town has a compact commercial area offering convenience and weekly shopping. Industrial activities are concentrated in the east of the town, with some service industries on the southern edge of the commercial area.

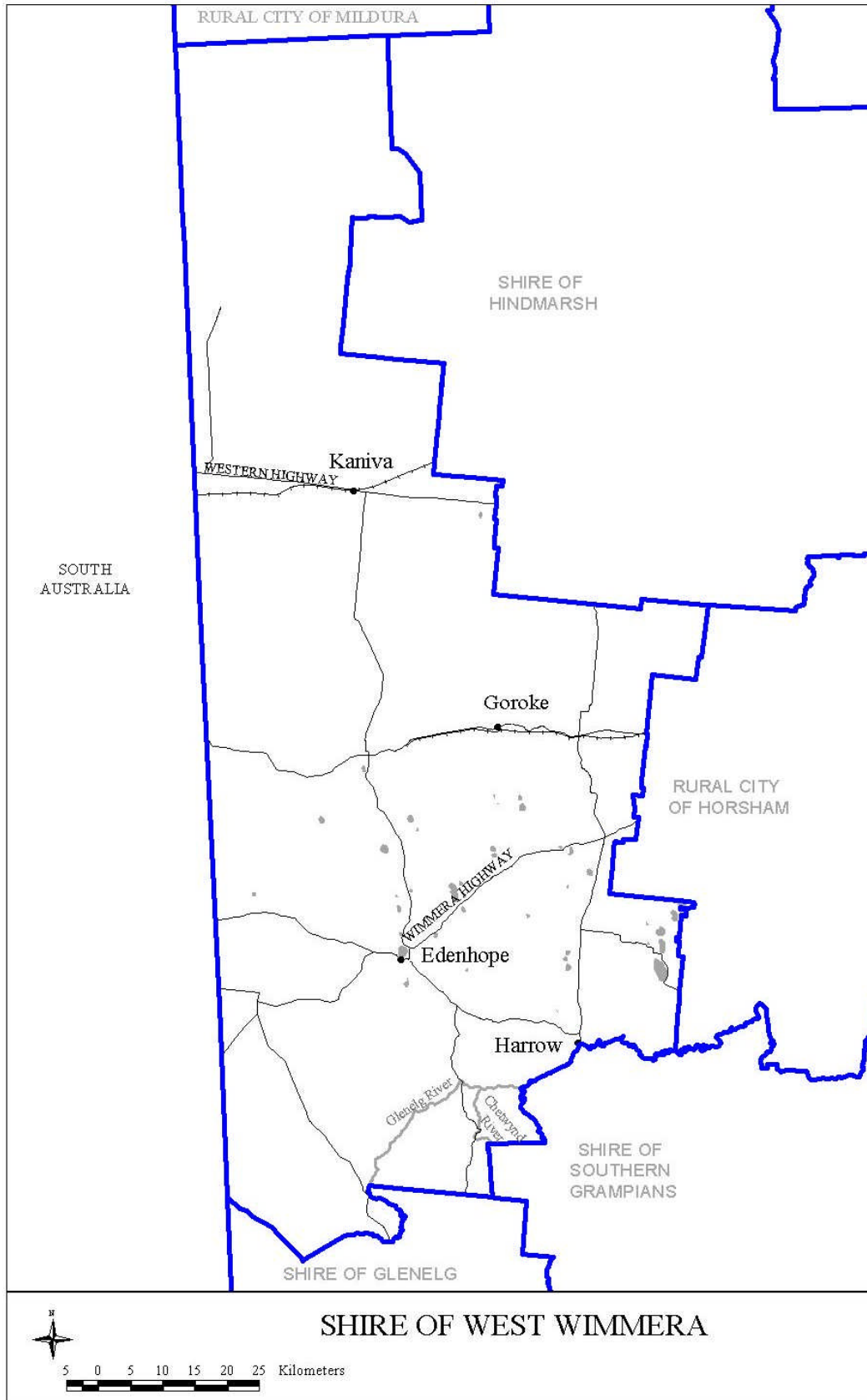
Kaniva functions both as a service centre for the surrounding agricultural area and as a rest stop for travellers on the way to regional destinations and Adelaide. The commercial area is centrally located along the Western Highway.

Goroke is a quiet township located in an area noted for yabbing, fishing, bird and wildlife watching.

Apsley is a small town located approximately ten kilometres east of the South Australian border. The town began as a central point for four sheep stations and continues to provide a local service function.

Harrow is set on the lush banks of the Glenelg River and is fortunate to have several heritage buildings that have survived from the mid-19th century. Its community supports festivals and other forms of tourism.

The following map of the West Wimmera Shire shows the settlement pattern of the municipality in its regional context.



21.02-4 Population20/06/2013
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The West Wimmera Shire had an estimated resident population of 4383 people at the 2006 census, which is slight decline in population from the previous census.

Edenhope, Kaniva, Goroke, Apsley and Harrow are the major towns within the Shire.

The estimated populations of the townships throughout the municipality are detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Township	2006 Census Population
Edenhope	733
Kaniva	738
Goroke	263
Apsley	156
Harrow	92
Rural balance	2401
TOTAL	4383

Source: Department of Planning and Community Development

Population Trends

The population trends for the municipality show a declining population as well as an aging population. These trends are also evident for individual towns, except Harrow, which has a relatively stable population. Population projects indicate this trend is likely to continue.

Community Wellbeing

The 2006 Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) provides a socio-economic snap-shot of geographical areas. SEIFA 2006 consists of four separate indexes that each concentrate on a different aspect of social and economic conditions of an area. The index is a continuum of advantage to disadvantage and is based upon social and economic information from the 2006 Census. Low values indicate areas of disadvantage and high values indicate areas of advantage. It takes into account variables such as the proportion of families with high incomes, people with a tertiary education and employees in skilled occupations.

The West Wimmera Shire is ranked 11th in Victoria in terms of relative disadvantage by the 2006 SEIFA index (Census of Population and Housing: Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas, ABS 2006).

21.02-5 Economic development20/06/2013
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West Wimmera Shire is one of Victoria's most diverse and productive agricultural areas. As such the local economy is directly affected by the fortunes of the rural industry. The effects of the 1982 and 1994 droughts and the poor wool prices since 1991 have had a negative impact on farm incomes. Producer margins for farmers have been generally decreasing since 1982. Farms are getting bigger to become more viable, which has led to less demand on the small rural towns that service them.

While the traditional agricultural pursuits such as cropping, grazing, wool and beef have formed the basis of the economy of West Wimmera, diversity in production is being

pursued. Taking advantage of the Shire's natural resource attributes has enabled new investment in production as diverse as legumes, oilseeds, flowers, potatoes and other emerging horticultural products. Further diversity in the economic base, employment and business opportunities is also being pursued through the establishment of new agriculturally linked value added industries together with the continuing expansion of tourism, recreation and leisure opportunities provided in the Shire.

Industrial and commercial development in the Shire is largely limited to small-scale activities related to the servicing of the rural and agricultural sector.

Local tourism organisations throughout the Shire are generally in the early stages of development and links between voluntary associations, tourism operators and the local and regional marketing organisations are being established. The municipality possesses a number of natural tourist attractions and features together with a number of recreation and leisure facilities and attractions in townships. Accommodation, catering and camping facilities are also available throughout the Shire.

21.02-6 Environment

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The West Wimmera Shire contains many areas which have significant natural landscapes and features of environmental value and include the numerous natural wetlands and waterways in the south and the Little Desert in the north. There are also small areas such as narrow reserves along streams, roadsides and railways and nature reserves which retain native vegetation, contribute to nature conservation and are valuable for migratory and nomadic birds and are valuable for flora and fauna habitat and as wildlife corridors for fauna. Approximately 30% of the Shire is Crown land hosting native vegetation and wildlife habitat.

Catchment management is a growing issue within West Wimmera Shire. The municipality is largely within the Wimmera River catchment but the southernmost part of the municipality drains into the Glenelg River system.

Soil erosion and salinity are other key land management issues. Erosion can be severe when hot, dry winds remove topsoil from fallow or overgrazed land. The extent and distribution of salinity is not yet known, but it continues to be a concern for future agricultural production.

Although the majority of public land holdings comprise national and state parks, there are smaller parcels of forested and cleared land, lakes, wetlands and reservoirs, and linear roadside reserves. Public land is used for recreation and some grazing and also supports important localised, remnant ecosystems.

The private land in the Shire has been substantially altered during the past 150 years but still contains small pockets of remnant habitat, wetlands and other original features. These areas have become increasingly important with the realisation that only 3% of the original vegetation remains intact. Floodplain management and stormwater management are critical factors affecting the development potential of private land.

Key environmental management issues in the Shire include control of soil erosion and salinity, loss of native vegetation and habitat, pollution of the water catchment and changes to drainage patterns resulting from development of land. Private land holdings can make a substantial contribution to managing these problems.

21.02-7 Infrastructure

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Infrastructure services are important in providing transport and protecting environmental and community health and should be provided in a cost effective manner. There is increasing pressure on the existing infrastructure services and on Council for the provision and maintenance of these infrastructure services, particularly on funding for increased road maintenance. However, Council is unable to fund the level of infrastructure service which the community expects, owing to the competing demands for other services.