

## **21.01 MUNICIPAL PROFILE**

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### **21.01-1 Regional Context**

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The Golden Plains Shire is located immediately south of the major urban areas of Ballarat, immediately west of Geelong, north-east of Colac and at its closest point is approximately 70 kilometres south-west of Melbourne. The shire covers 2706 square kilometres. The Golden Plains Shire shares a boundary with the shires of Colac Otway, Corangamite, Pyrenees, Moorabool and Surf Coast and the Cities of Ballarat and Geelong. These municipalities form a region with many common environmental, economic and cultural linkages.

The shire straddles the Barwon and Central Highlands regions of Victoria and is on the eastern edge of the Western District.

The shire sits within the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority Region. The shire is characterised by agricultural land used predominantly for grazing and cropping, a large number of small townships, natural forested areas and riverine gorges.

Parts of the north west and east of the shire act as extended commuter areas for Ballarat and Geelong respectively.

### **21.01-2 Population and housing**

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Based on 1996 census data:

- The shire had a population of 14,790.
- The Department of Infrastructure projected the shire's population would increase by approximately 4,500 persons over the next fifteen years.
- Victoria In Future (Department of Infrastructure 1996) projected that the shire's population will increase by 4,541 persons by the year 2011 and continue to grow to a total population of 21,879 persons by the year 2021.
- The anticipated growth to the year 2011 will be accommodated by the need for approximately 1,819 new households.
- The shire has a high proportion of young people (24.1% aged 5 to 17 years) and middle aged people (26.4% aged 35 to 49 years).
- Growth in the 5-17 and 35-54 age groups reflected the continuing attraction of the shire for young families.
- While the shire was 'rural' the increasing numbers of persons in 18-24 indicates the commuter role of parts of the shire.
- The shire had a relatively small but growing proportion of population in older aged groups.
- Only about 18% of the population lived in urban centres with populations of over 200. All of the urban centres experienced growth during the period 1981 to 1996.

### **21.01-3 Settlement**

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Bannockburn was the largest urban centre in the shire with a population of 873 in 1996 (calculated on a Census Collection District basis) and more than doubled its population since 1981. Other urban centres, small towns and communities which have grown include Haddon, Inverleigh, Lethbridge, Linton, Meredith, Ross Creek, Scarsdale and Smythesdale. These settlements perform important living, retail, service and community roles to residents and the rural community.

The settlement pattern is based on historic rural service centres and nineteenth century mining towns, however, over time the role of many towns has been changing to one of commuting areas to the regional centres of Ballarat, Colac and Geelong.

Future use and development of urban centres and small towns will largely centre on the traditional character and form of these towns.

During the period 1993-1996, 398 dwellings were built in the shire, with 231 of these dwellings being constructed in the 'traditional' towns. The Department of Infrastructure estimated that over the period 1996-2011 there will be an increase of 1819 dwellings.

The main use of land in the shire is for primary production including grazing and broad acre cropping.

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**Economy**

There are over 5,218 persons in the workforce in the Golden Plains Shire. The main occupation of residents in the Golden Plains Shire is as managers and administrators (which includes farmers).

Agricultural industries in the shire generate approximately \$44 million worth of product and 14% of the workforce is employed in primary industry.

Agriculture and rural employment is gradually declining in common with Statewide trends in the restructuring of these industries. The requirements of traditional agriculture are rapidly changing with practices such as high input farming techniques and improved stock through genetic enhancement.

Employment opportunities are limited within the shire and many of the residents travel to work outside the shire, mainly to Ballarat and Geelong.

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**Environment**

**Biodiversity**

There are areas of native forest in the Enfield State Park and the Brisbane Ranges National Park. Other areas of conservation significance are recognised in other public reserves. On a State-wide scale the extent of woodlands is limited, fragmented and extremely depleted. Perennial native grassland communities are extremely limited resulting in a major decline in bio-diversity. Many remaining stands of native vegetation exist on roadsides. The dramatic loss of vegetation cover in the area is reflected in the significant number of very rare or threatened species.

There are about 2300 ha of pine plantations and about 280 ha of hardwood plantations in the shire.

**Geomorphology**

Geomorphically, the shire can be divided into two areas, the Western District Basalt Plains and the Midlands - two very distinct land units.

The economy of the Golden Plains Shire is primarily built on the agricultural sector. Primary industry is the largest single industry in the Golden Plains Shire.

On a Statewide scale the shire contains only moderate quality agricultural land.

Soil conditions in many parts of the shire are not conducive to the effective disposal of treated septic tank effluent.

Areas of the shire are also affected by occurrences of salinity, which can impact on developments, associated infrastructure and the quality of soil and water resources.

Development and land use can also aggravate areas of existing salinity or impact on the potential for salinity to occur elsewhere in the catchment. In these areas, particular attention will have to be given to this aspect in the planning and zoning of any future subdivisions and other large scale developments.

### **Water catchments**

The Golden Plains Shire has three water supply catchment basins including Lake Corangamite and the Barwon and the Moorabool Rivers. All catchments have headwaters north of the Shire of Golden Plains, therefore quality of the water ways entering the shire is dependent on other users. Most of the catchments in the shire have been significantly modified by agriculture and forestry operations.

Catchment management solutions are required to address important issues such as water quality, salinity, flooding, erosion, fire risk, pests (plant - gorse and serrated tussock and animals) flooding and flora and fauna conservation.

Water quality is important for urban and rural communities alike and consideration of downstream effects is essential.

The Corangamite Catchment Management Board has identified high priority issues in the catchment as being:

- Water erosion
- Changed land use
- Eutrophication
- Groundwater quality
- Pest plants
- Pest animals
- Fire
- Conservation

The Catchment Management Strategy sets out five (5) programs:

- Sustainable Production – to support and enhance economic and social development in the region by protecting and improving the long term productive capacity of the natural resources.
- Water Management – to manage the quality and quantity of surface water, groundwater and wetlands to ensure that the requirements of ecological, domestic and industrial systems are balanced.
- Biodiversity Conservation – to protect and enhance indigenous ecosystems and species.
- Catchment Amenity – to ensure a clean, healthy and unique environment that supports individual lifestyle aspirations and community well-being.
- Monitoring and Evaluation – support on-going monitoring and evaluation of all research and remedial projects and establish a methodology for assessing regional catchment health indicators and issues.

## **21.01-6**

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### **Infrastructure**

All of the towns in the shire have reticulated water supplies provided either by Central Highlands Water or Barwon Water. Both authorities have programs to improve water quality. Central Highlands Water, which has its involvement in the northern part of the shire, believes it can service most of the anticipated growth within its area.

The exception is the higher land southeast of Scarsdale extending to the area south of Ross Creek. Barwon Water believes that the existing supply systems, with minor augmentation works, are adequate to cater for the existing populations and anticipated growth in the immediate future.

The extent of sewerage systems in the shire is limited to Woodlands Estate (near Enfield) and Bannockburn. Reticulated sewerage is planned for Smythesdale. Scarsdale and Linton will be seweraged by the Central Highlands Water Authority when the towns achieve population thresholds.

**21.01-7**04/12/2014  
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The major issues relate to:

- Managing residential growth.
- Enhancing economic growth.
- Maintaining and encouraging viable agricultural industries.
- Protecting and enhancing the natural and built environment.

**Managing Residential Growth**

The Golden Plains Shire contains a relatively large number of small townships. Council seeks to focus residential development within the boundaries of these townships. There is pressure for subdivision and development outside these townships particularly for subdivision and hobby farm development close to Geelong and Ballarat. The urban-rural interface needs to be managed appropriately. Lack of reticulated sewerage systems and, in some places, poor soil conditions for disposal of septic tank effluent provide constraints to development.

Past decisions have seen a proliferation of subdivisions and subsequent rural residential developments in the northwest corner of the shire.

There is also a need to take greater care for managing urban development within township areas that may be affected by flooding, salinity or wildfire.

Future residential use and development also needs to be considered in a regional level context in terms of settlement strategies for Ballarat and Geelong in particular.

The north-west area, bordering the City of Ballarat, is recognised as an area that reflects a rural residential character, centred on communities of interest. There is a large proportion of existing small lots, which include old crown titles, particularly in the north-west of the shire. Many of these lots in the north west area have been developed for rural residential purposes and distinct communities have developed in these areas. This is distinct from other residential areas of the shire where urban type development is focussed around townships.

The area is subject to growth pressure from a commuting base seeking to locate within travelling distance to Ballarat. Ballarat has identified the area on the opposite side of the border as a preferred area for future urban growth in the short to long term.

**Economic Growth**

The shire is well located to export and transport facilities, and this represents a competitive advantage.

The shire currently relies on the strength of its grazing and cropping industries as its economic base.

There is currently a limited range of employment opportunities within the shire. It does not have large economic and service industries, and many of its residents derive their income

from employment outside the shire. The strength of the economy in adjoining municipalities is therefore important for the shire's residents.

The shire has recognised the potential for growth in the intensive agricultural industries and in timber production. The issue for the shire will be how to accommodate growth in these industries while protecting the other values that are seen as important in the shire.

### **Viable Agriculture**

The major land use in the shire is for agriculture, and particularly for extensive grazing and cropping. These industries have been under economic pressure in recent years and there has been a tendency for farm size to increase to counteract economic pressures. This has generally happened away from areas of population growth where there has been less small-lot subdivision.

Compared with some municipalities, the Golden Plains Shire does not have a substantial amount of high quality agricultural land. However, there has been a growth of intensive agriculture, particularly in the wine and specialist livestock industries.

Timber production is an important industry in the shire. Production at this stage comes mainly from pine plantations, but there is a growing demand for land for hardwood plantations. Any expansion of plantations will be on to land which is already cleared and which is currently used for grazing or cropping.

### **Natural and Built Environment**

Apart from the Brisbane Ranges National Park and the Enfield State Forest, most of the shire has been cleared of native vegetation. There are, however, areas of remnant native vegetation which occur throughout the shire and which require protection.

The Planning Scheme should contribute to the management of water catchments including the protection and enhancement of streams and the catchment in general.

Protection of heritage values, both man-made and natural, has been recognised as an issue to be dealt with by the Planning Scheme.

Salinity has been identified as an increasing problem and one which has implications for both agriculture and development for residential purposes. There is a need to ensure that appropriate risk assessment and management measures are implemented to avoid or minimise damage to buildings in areas which are currently affected by salinity. Conversely, it is important that the impacts of development are considered and addressed with regards to the potential to aggravate existing areas impacted by salinity, on sites of primary salinity including lakes and wetlands or that can generate new salinity impacts.