

21.01 MUNICIPAL PROFILE

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21.01-1 Context & Settlement

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Indigo Shire covers an area of 2,019 square kilometres and is positioned between the major urban centres of Wangaratta and Albury/Wodonga. It is essentially a rural shire with a population in 2006 of 15,430, 57% living in urban areas and 43% living in rural areas.

The Shire has experienced growth over the last three census periods and this is expected to continue with a predicted population in 2025 of 17,960. The increased population has been accommodated in the townships, and to a lesser, but growing, extent in the rural areas of the Shire and with the exception of Kiewa-Tangambalanga, all of the towns have in excess of 15 years supply of land zoned for residential purposes.

The seven small towns within the Shire provide necessary support services with an enhanced range of services available in nearby major urban centres. The Shire's main towns are Beechworth and Rutherglen together with the smaller townships of Wahgunyah, Yackandandah, Kiewa-Tangambalanga, Chiltern and Barnawartha.

The towns provide commercial and community services to their residents and surrounding areas and are important community focal points.

The towns are expected to grow with the growth underpinned by the Shire's diverse lifestyle opportunities, proximity to services and employment opportunities in Albury/Wodonga and to a lesser extent Wangaratta; the rich natural and built environment, cultural heritage and proximity to the Hume corridor.

Indigo Shire is well serviced with transportation infrastructure which includes the major corridor comprising the Hume Freeway and the Melbourne – Sydney railway line; east west access is via the Murray Valley Highway with the Kiewa Valley Highway providing access to the south.

The Shire borders the Australian Alps and the fertile plains of the Murray. It is located within the Murray-Darling Basin and more particularly the catchments of the Murray, Ovens and Kiewa Rivers.

The economy is primarily based on farming (beef, sheep, dairy, fruit and viticulture), the processing of primary produce, tourism and service provision.

With outstanding historic towns, grape production areas, high altitude fruit growing areas, productive river flats and close proximity to the rapidly growing centre of Albury-Wodonga, the Shire has a rich and diverse combination of land uses, attributes and opportunities.

The Shire is well serviced with road infrastructure with a number of highways and the Hume Freeway being the main transport routes. The main railway line between Melbourne and Sydney also runs through the shire parallel to the Hume Freeway creating a major transport corridor of strategic importance. The scale and significance of the Hume transport corridor dominate the Shire's transport infrastructure. The Murray Valley Highway connects with the Hume Freeway east of Barnawartha and links to Rutherglen and continues west to Echuca and beyond. The Kiewa Valley Highway runs south from Wodonga. Tourist promotion has seen the Wodonga-Yackandandah-Beechworth-Wangaratta Road increasingly used as an alternative route to the Hume Freeway for the Shire's heritage towns.

The Indigo Shire Strategic Map at Clause 21.03 illustrates the key features that influence planning in the Shire.

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The eastern sector of the Shire is within the catchment of the Kiewa River and is characterised by hilly country and highly productive river flats. The western two third's of the Shire (including Beechworth, Chiltern and Rutherglen) is within the Ovens River basin, which includes the sub-catchment of the Black Dog and Indigo Creeks.

Located at the transition between the foothills of the Great Dividing Range and the Western Plains the Shire hosts a particularly diverse flora and fauna with "mountain species" giving way to "plains species". Bordering to the north of much of the Shire is the Murray River and its floodplain, adding to the richness of the environmental setting of the Shire.

The Chiltern - Box-Iron Bark National Park (4,320 ha) is a significant area of public land within the Shire that protects a large number of historic sites associated with early gold mining history and has high conservation values. It contains the largest stand of box-iron bark community within north east Victoria and is of particular importance for its recreational value and provision of habitat for a wide range of rare and threatened flora and fauna.

Wetlands and waterways are also important throughout the municipality because they provide habitat for a range of native and introduced fish species including Murray Cod and Golden Perch, but they have become threatened due to a range of activities relating to urban and agricultural development.

There are numerous sites of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage including isolated artefacts, art sites, rock arrangements, surface scatters, scarred trees and rock wells. The post contact built environment of the Shire is also particularly significant. All the towns contain significant heritage buildings and places, with Beechworth, Rutherglen, Chiltern Yackandandah and Wahgunyah being the most notable.

The cultural value of the landscape within a number of areas of the Shire is high, evidenced by the classification applied to large areas of the Shire by the National Trust (Victoria) and its attractiveness as a residential and tourist environment.

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Economy

The local economy is predominantly based around agriculture which is estimated to have generated around \$141 million worth of produce in 2005/06. The agricultural economy comprises approximately 20% of the Ovens-Murray region's agricultural produce.

The Rutherglen Wine Region is acknowledged for its fine wines and is becoming increasingly important as a tourist destination while the high quality agricultural land of the Kiewa valley is valued for its milk production.

The Stanley area has Victoria's only red soils found at high altitude, contributing to the production of high quality apples, berries and nuts.

Two large food processing industries are located within the Shire, namely Uncle Toby's at Wahgunyah and Murray Goulburn at Tangambalanga. The Shire of Indigo also plays a limited role in providing timber for the north east region, with plantations mainly located around the Stanley/Beechworth area.

Employment within the Shire has increased over the past decade with significant structural change resulting in employment losses in agriculture, manufacturing and construction. Corresponding increases have been experienced in service sector employment such as recreation/tourism, personal service, finance, retail and wholesale. In 2006 manufacturing accounted for 15.4% of employment, health care and social assistance 12.6%, agriculture 10.8% and retail with 10.3%.

Opportunities for work exist both within the Shire and in nearby urban centres. In 2006 44.8% worked within the Shire and 47.9% worked outside with Albury/Wodonga being the main source of external employment.

Historic and attractive townships and Rutherglen's wineries are compelling tourism features and the tourism industry employs over 400 people with a further 1500 indirect but related jobs and the importance of this sector is increasing as more visitors are attracted to the

Shire. The number of persons entering the Visitor Information Centres increased from 140,566 in 2007/08 to 154, 307 in 2008/09.