

21.01 MUNICIPAL PROFILE

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21.01-1 Introduction

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Loddon Shire is very much a rural municipality. It consists of farm land, forest, native grasslands, lakes, rivers and wetlands interspersed with small townships and hamlets. The Shire is home to a proud, vibrant and self reliant community with an economy centred around a valuable and diverse agricultural industry.

21.01-2 Location

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Loddon Shire is located in north central Victoria, commencing approximately 180 kilometres north west of Melbourne and immediately north west of Bendigo. It has an approximate area of 6700 square kilometres and extends over 100 kilometres north to south and over 80 kilometres east to west.

The Shire is adjoined by the municipalities of Greater Bendigo and Campaspe to the east, Gannawarra to the north, Buloke to the west and Northern Grampians, Central Goldfields and Mount Alexander to the south.

21.01-3 State and Regional Context

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Catchment Management. The Shire is located within the Loddon River and Avoca River catchments, which are part of the Murray Darling Basin. The North Central Catchment Management Authority (NCCMA) is responsible for providing the over-arching strategic direction for natural resource management in the region. NCCMA Regional Catchment Strategy seeks to protect the assets of the region including land, water, biodiversity, climate and people. Loddon Murray Land and Water Management Strategy has been developed to engage the people into enhanced land and water management, improve social capacity and provide future direction for the region

Agriculture. Australia's New Mediterranean is located in North Central Victoria and includes Loddon Shire. The region is known as the New Mediterranean because of its fertile soils, climate and water, which are characteristic of Europe's Mediterranean nations. The New Mediterranean concept is seen as an opportunity to enhance the agricultural base of the region.

Tourism. The Loddon Shire is located within the Goldfields and Murray Outback Tourism Regions of Victoria.

Gold Mining. The southern area of the Shire is part of the Central Victorian Goldfields and contains much of the area recognised as Victoria's "Golden Triangle".

Transportation Corridors. The Loddon Valley Highway and the Calder Highway move people and goods to, from and through the Shire and provide links to Bendigo, Melbourne and the north of the State. Rail links are provided from a number of key towns to other centres and are most significant for their role in grain transportation to Melbourne ports.

Regional Centres. Bendigo, as a key regional centre, offers access to higher order goods and services to the residents of the Shire.

Biodiversity. The Shire covers four bioregions – Victorian Riverina, Murray Mallee, Northern Inland Slopes and Goldfields.

Aboriginal heritage. The Shire recognises the history of the traditional landowners. Some local Aboriginal communities have legislative responsibilities for Aboriginal heritage within the Shire under the Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984 (Bendigo Dja Dja Wrung Aboriginal Association Inc., North West Clans Aboriginal Corporation, Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative and Goolum-goolum Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd.), while the Regional Cultural Heritage programs

(North West Region Aboriginal and Cultural Heritage and the South West and Wimmera Regional Cultural Heritage Program) have regional heritage management functions.

21.01-4 Community and Settlement

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In 2001, the population of Loddon was 8,604 persons. Consistent with Loddon being a rural municipality, more than 50% of Loddon's community resides in the rural areas of the Shire, with the balance living in the townships.

There is no one dominant urban centre of the Shire, rather it has a number of small centres serving the surrounding rural areas. The key service centres of the Shire are Boort, Inglewood, Pyramid Hill and Wedderburn. These townships each have a population of less than 800 people and generally provide retail, health, community and education facilities.

Other important townships of the Shire are Bridgewater, Dingee, Eddington, Jarklin, Korong Vale, Laanecoorie, Mitiamo, Newbridge, Serpentine and Tarnagulla. Although these settlements are small, they each play a vitally important social, service provision, residential and community focus and function in their respective districts.

In the rural areas of the Shire, the majority of residents live on agricultural properties. In the south of the Shire rural residential living is a popular lifestyle option, afforded by the proximity to Bendigo and attractive undulating agricultural and bush settings. Significant areas of rural residential living exist around Inglewood, Bridgewater, Wedderburn, Moliagul, Dunolly, Laanecoorie, Tarnagulla and Newbridge.

21.01-5 Environment

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Loddon Shire crosses the boundary of two distinct land forms.

The southern area of the Shire is part of the Central Highlands, which is located in the Goldfields bioregion, and consists of undulating farmland interspersed with pockets of grassy woodlands and extensive areas of State forest. Natural features, such as Mount Korong, Melville Caves, Mount Kooyoora, the Kingower Ranges, Wychitella Granites and Mount Brenanah, provide important landscape appeal in the south of the Shire.

The northern region of the Shire is generally characterised by sweeping riverine plains that are part of the Victorian Riverina bioregion. Granite outcrops of the Northern Inland Slopes in the north east, the most significant being Pyramid Hill and Mount Hope, provide relief from the surrounding plains. Sandy soils around Boort are the bases for Lunettes (sand hills) that also contribute to the landscape interest of the area. Both the granite outcrops and sandy soils make up part of the Murray Mallee bioregion.

The Loddon Shire contains an extensive system of lakes, rivers and wetlands which contribute to the environment and economy of the Shire through the provision of habitat for flora and fauna and water for farms and towns.

The Avoca River adjoins the south west boundary of the Shire and the Loddon River flows through the Shire from Eddington in the south, north to the Murray River. The Laanecoorie Reservoir, on the Loddon River, is a significant water storage facility in the Shire.

Large expanses of the northern areas of the Shire are flood plains for the Loddon and Avoca Rivers. These floodplains support a significant system of lakes and wetlands. The seasonal flooding of the rivers is important for the filling and flushing of this system. Wetlands make an important contribution to water quality through filtration of floodwaters and absorption of nutrients and assist to mitigate the extent of flooding by providing storage.

Boort Lakes, Lake Lyndger, Lake Yando, Lake Marmal and Tang Tang Swamp are some of the more significant wetlands of the Shire. The nationally significant wetland of Kow

Swamp adjoins the north east boundary of the Shire. Tang Tang and Woolshed swamps are also nationally significant wetlands.

Consistent with the change in land form across the Shire is a general change in vegetation and habitat type.

Box Ironbark is the predominant vegetation community in the south of the Shire. Box Ironbark communities include species such as Ironbark, Red, Grey and Yellow Box, Blue Mallee and Red Gum, as well understorey species such as lilies and orchids. Remnant native vegetation in the south of the Shire is represented in pockets on private land and on Crown land, such as, road reserves, and in the State Forests, Reserves and Parks including the Kingower State Forest, the Tarnagulla State Forest and the Kooyoora State Park. These areas provide habitat for endangered fauna such as the Brush-tailed Phascogale, Squirrel Glider and Tree Goanna.

The Wychitella Flora and Fauna Reserve, to the north of Wedderburn, is important for the preservation of the excellent representation of the Whipstick Mallee Scrub and the habitat of the Malleefowl. Areas managed for the harvesting of mallee leaf for eucalyptus oil extraction are also located close to the town.

The riverine plains of the north offer remnants of native grasslands, Red Gum forests, Blackbox and Lignum wetlands and grassy woodlands with such trees as Yellow Gum, Grey Box and Buloke. The grasslands support rare and threatened species such as Red Swainson Pea, Basalt Plain Leek Orchid and Plains Rice-flower. The most extensive areas of grasslands exist to the east of Pyramid Hill, although there are other significant areas around Borung, Mysia and Mitiamo. Leaghur State Park and Terrick Terrick National Park are significant environmental assets in the north of the Shire.

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Economy

The economy of the Shire is based on agriculture, but other industries such as retailing, manufacturing and tourism also make an important contributions to the generation of wealth in the Shire.

Agriculture

Agriculture is the economic foundation of the Shire. It is the main employer and main income generator. The Shire has significant areas of high quality agriculture land, quality affordable water supplies and a climate conducive to high agricultural productivity.

Generally, the more productive soils of the Shire are located along the Loddon and Avoca riverine plains, between Lake Marmal and Boort and north to Leaghur, and south west of Pyramid Hill to Bridgewater.

The southern area of the Shire predominantly consists of dry land broad acre agricultural enterprises, such as prime lambs, fine wool and cereal cropping. Around Bridgewater there are areas of high value horticulture, (largely tomatoes), based on the fertile riverine soils and water from the Loddon River.

The south of the Shire, especially around Kingower, is home to a number of wineries, some of them well known such as Passing Clouds at Kingower and Water Wheel at Bridgewater. The granite sand soils and the climate of the area are well suited to viticulture. A recent extensive winery development at Terrapee has highlighted that there are areas in the north of the Shire also well suited to viticulture.

Cereal cropping, fine wool and prime lamb production are also extensively conducted across the north of the Shire, but access to irrigation water via the Waranga Channel also provides the opportunity for horticulture and dairying. Around Boort, horticulture in the form of tomatoes is a high value and expanding industry. Boort is also the centre of export hay production, with large areas of lucerne and oats being grown for processing in the two

mills in the town, Hycube and Johnson Asahi. Dingee and Calivil are the centre of the dairy industry of Loddon.

The Shire contains a number of intensive animal enterprises, with poultry farms and piggeries capitalising on the relatively low population densities of the Shire. The largest piggery is owned by Castle Bacon and is located at Bears Lagoon. Poultry is an expanding industry in the region, with Hazeldene's Chicken Farms and Loddon Valley Eggs located in the Shire.

Olive growing has emerged as a significant enterprise in the Shire, based upon the access to water, suitable soils and Mediterranean climate. The Timbercorp development west of Boort is one of the world's largest olive plantations.

Agricultural water supplies are sourced from the Warranga Channel, Loddon River and the Loddon Deep Lead. The Warranga Channel supplies a significant proportion of the north of the Shire, properties along the Loddon River have access to river water via pumping rights and ground water from the Loddon Deep Lead is of suitable quality for agriculture on the east side of the Loddon River and up through Serpentine.

Tourism

The Shire contains an enviable range of tourism assets, both man made and natural. Attractions of the Shire include wineries at Kingower and Bridgewater, National and State Parks and Forests such as Kooyoora State Park which includes Melvilles Caves and Terrick Terrick National Park, heritage buildings, Loddon River and Boort Lakes for water-skiing, swimming, fishing and camping, gold detecting and fossicking and many local community festivals.

Gold Mining

Gold mining is a tradition of the south of the Shire. It is considered that there may still be significant gold resources here and exploration and mining is being conducted throughout the State forest and some freehold areas around Wedderburn, Inglewood, Tarnagulla, Kingower and Rheola. At present, the majority of mining operations are small leases, of less than 5ha, which are being worked by open cut methods. Areas of State Park and National Park are generally not available for mining.

Other Industries

A number of the towns within the Shire support valuable local industries that contribute to the provision of local employment and wealth generation. Examples of these include Johnson Asahi and Hycube at Boort (lucerne and oaten hay mills), Australian Specialty Pet Foods at Pyramid Hill, Pyramid Hill Abattoir, Bears Lagoon Piggery, Laucke Flour Mill and Water Wheel Winery at Bridgewater, Freemantle Stockfeeds at Eddington and Turf Engineering at Wedderburn. These industries provide vital employment options outside traditional agriculture and in many cases a market for and the opportunity to value add local product. State and Local Government organisations also make an important contribution to local employment.