Connecting communities through spaces

Aspirational Community Hubs Strategy 2019

Baw Baw Shire Council, Version 5, 29 January 2019

Region two – Erica, Rawson, Walhalla and surrounds

Section 3.2

Region two – Erica, Rawson, Walhalla and surrounds

Geographical and social context

Geographical context

Region two is a large and comparatively remote area, containing the Baw Baw National Park and Moondarra State Park within its boundaries. The townships of Rawson and Erica are located at the southern end of the Baw Baw National Park. These towns contain some shops and services and have reasonable car access to larger service centres such as Moe in the Latrobe Valley. The township of Walhalla is set in a valley of the Baw Baw National Park area and as such has poorer access to commercial and service centres. The northern areas of the region are dominated by mountainous parkland and are predominantly uninhabited, except for the township of Tanjil Bren (with a population of 12 people) and Aberfeldy with only one permanent resident.

Demographic snapshot

This region has a combined population of 599 people. The age profile is comparatively older to other regions, with 50 per cent aged between 50 and 69 years. There are comparatively lower rates of labour force participation with 32 per cent not in the labour force. The region has a higher rate of non-family households which make up 16 per cent compared to 12 percent for the Shire. A lower proportion of residents have completed year 12 (26 percent) compared with the Shire (31 percent).

All data presented in this section has been collated from the 2016 Census of Population and Housing unless otherwise stated. See Appendix one for a set of comparative data.

Existing level of provision

This region has numerous facilities, but they are underutilised and single-purpose. Most of the community spaces are in Erica, Rawson and Walhalla.

There is no district service centre in this region. Within the Shire Trafalgar is the closest service centre for this region. However, access to Trafalgar is via Moe and community engagement findings noted that residents are more likely to access Moe for services and employment.

Policy review findings

A review of Council's policies and strategies identified the following important considerations for this region:

- Council's *Community Service Planning Framework* (2013) identified the following key considerations/recommendations:

  - Rawson Primary School caters for residents across this region. Additional opportunities for co-location of facilities and sharing resources should be explored in the future, in addition to increasing the mix of remotely delivered education

  - A preschool and maternal and child health centre is currently provided in Erica, however future consideration may need to be given to a mobile kindergarten and / or partnership opportunity with Rawson Primary School (*Community Service Planning Framework 2013*)

  - This district is currently serviced by the mobile library service which visits Erica and Rawson four hours every fortnight. This arrangement is likely to continue, however other options for the long-term provision of library services should be considered such as use of multi-function spaces, integration with other community facilities, virtual libraries, partnerships with private enterprises and co-location with other services (*Community Service Planning Framework 2013*)

  - Consider the provision of health care services in multiuse facilities that can provide for mobile community services including health and disability services

- Recommendations from the Skate and BMX Strategy at the Rawson Reserve are being implemented by Council (10 Year Infrastructure Plan 2017-2027)

Community plan findings

Two community plans were developed by the community in this region. The community plans were developed with the assistance of Council, however, delivering each plan's projects are the responsibility of the community. The key findings from these plans are detailed below.
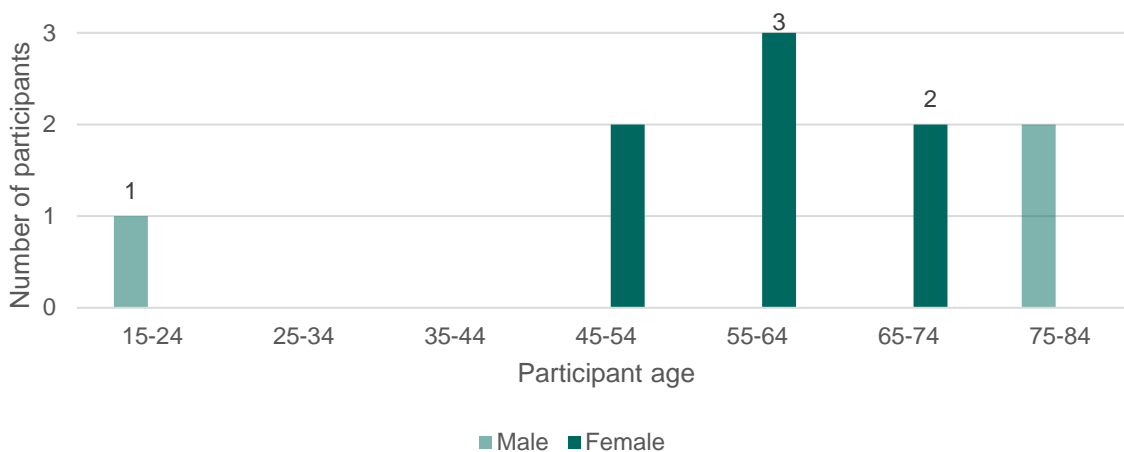
- **Rawson 2008 – 2013 Community Plan**

The vision of the plan was aimed at preserving the natural flora and fauna of the town and becoming a tourist hub. The plan identified significant challenges around cohesiveness and connections. Key projects include running more activities for the town's residents while also improving transport links.

- **Erica Community Strategy Plan 2006 – 2011**

The key challenges in the plan were the look and feel of the town not reflecting its small-town charm. No vision was included in the plan.

Community engagement findings

A limitation in this region is that 10 people participated in the community engagement by completing the connecting communities survey either online or at one of the community pop-ups. Lower rates of participation are most likely caused by two factors. First, the region has a low population (599) which is spread out across a large area. Secondly, older population groups may be less inclined to engage through online methods which can be helpful in engaging a dispersed population. Figure 1 provides a summary of the age profile of the community engagement participants from this region.

Figure 1. Region two community engagement participants - age profile

The towns and suburbs represented by participants were:

- Rawson, seven participants.

- Erica, one participant.

- Parkers Corner, one participant.

- one participant did not provide the specific town or suburb they live in.

Community connection

The participants discussed the different ways they connect to their community through organised groups, associations and sport clubs. They also connect through early year services and education, employment, community events and incidental interactions, for example the local shops. Two participants expressed that they do not connect to the community.

The main challenge for community connection recognised by participants was the lack of community cohesion. It was felt that this had been caused by the following:

- Many people who live in the region work and go to school in the Latrobe Valley.

- The community groups and associations appear to be targeted at those who are not currently participating full time in the work-force.

- There is a perception that the local community groups and associations are unwelcoming of newcomers, making it difficult for new residents to meet people.
- Individuals not having the time to connect with others.

Improving public transport options and regularity was identified as an opportunity to improve social connection. Participants commented that older people would benefit most from transport services, as it could connect them better to shops and other places of incidental interaction.

Facilities and spaces

There are a variety of facilities and spaces that are used, according to participant responses, including:

- sporting facilities, specifically the football clubs and the cricket club and pavilion.
- trails and paths, specifically the track around the lake in Rawson.
- community centres and halls, specifically Bells Hall which was noted as being used by the Historical society.
- the Rawson community health centre.
- non-community spaces, such as the local shops and milk bar.
- other community spaces valued by the community more broadly included:
  - the lake and BBQ areas.
  - the swimming pool.
  - the BMX track.

According to participants the following services, programs and spaces could be improved or are missing:

- Community facilities and services such as:
  - medical services, specifically a doctor.
  - improvement of medical facilities.
  - improvement of parks and open spaces, such as BBQ and picnic areas.
  - the trails and paths, specifically a path between Rawson and Erica is missing, and maintenance work to the track around the lake is required.
- Increase the provision of public transport or transport provided by the Shire, for example increase the regularity and soften criteria for use of the community bus.
- Improve the access and use of facilities, including providing parking, extending the opening hours and, decreasing costs of the local swimming pool.
- Offer services for wellbeing and self-esteem building.

Information on hub and service provision

The following suggestions were provided by participants to improve understanding of what is currently available:

- online information via a local website for the community.
- informal communication between people in the community talking to each other.
- Council should lead the access to information by:
  - providing more information, more regularly.
  - providing a continual, monthly newsletter from Council may help.

One participant raised the difficulty of communicating about 'what's on' with people who work in the Latrobe Valley.

Community hub principles

The participants from Region two believe that a community hub includes the following elements and principles:

- It is a meeting space or place.
- It is **inclusive**, meaning it is:
  - a space or place where people are accepted and heard.
  - a place for everyone.
- It is **people-focussed**, fostering a support network in the community.

According to their responses, it should not be:

- Exclusive; it should not be dominated by individual ideas and opinions.
- Exclusive; it should be affordable.

Recommendations

For Region two, Council policy acknowledges the challenges of providing services to a low population in a large geographic area. Policy drivers prioritise co-locating different services in community hubs or providing more mobile services to the community. Engagement findings suggest that the local community has barriers to connecting with each other and accessing services. These barriers include transportation gaps, knowledge of what is available in the region and the lack of provision of certain services.

Accordingly, the recommendations for this region include:

- Consider consolidation of existing community facilities, such as health care services, in Erica to improve multi-use functionality.
- Consideration should be given to co-location with Rawson Primary School where facilities can be shared, such as a static library, meeting spaces, early years programs.
- Consider multi-use functionality of existing facilities to provide for mobile community services and programs to ensure localised access, particularly in areas such as Aberfeldy that are remote from the region's centre.