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**CONTEXT**

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Proposed C139bawb

Baw Baw Shire is a peri-urban municipality of over 4,000 square kilometres. The Shire is located in south-east Victoria between Melbourne’s south eastern growth corridor and the Latrobe Valley. The Shire is bordered by the Great Dividing Range to the north and the Strzelecki Ranges to the south.

The Shire had an estimated resident population of about 52,000 in 2018, which is expected to grow to about 75,800 people by 2036 (Victoria in Future, 2019). The majority of this future growth is expected to occur within the townships of Warragul and Drouin.

Baw Baw residents value and enjoy the lifestyle provided in the rural and urban areas with access to community services, proximity to recreational areas (mountains and the coast) and rural landscapes.

Baw Baw shares boundaries with Latrobe City and Wellington Shire to the east, Yarra Ranges Shire and Cardinia Shire to the west, Mansfield Shire to the north and South Gippsland Shire to the south. Baw Baw forms parts of the Latrobe Economic Growth Sub-region (‘EGS’) comprising of itself, Latrobe and Wellington.

Baw Baw’s natural environment contains high value habitat areas, high quality water catchments, and extensive areas for ecologically sustainable timber production. The remainder of the Shire’s environments comprise highly valued landscapes, some of which have been modified for urban and agricultural development.

The Shire has highly productive agricultural land and extensive agricultural infrastructure and investment. It comprises some of Australia’s most fertile and productive rural land and there is potential for agribusiness to leverage off this asset. With continuing growth, particularly in Warragul and Drouin, there has been strong pressure to use this high quality agricultural land for residential purposes.

The location and resources of the region provide a range of employment opportunities within the Shire in agriculture and horticulture and increasingly in the agribusiness, service industries, administration, education and health industries. Baw Baw also has a great capacity to support tourism given its proximity to Melbourne and its natural advantages including ski fields, parks, lakes, mountains, historic towns, nature-based activities, the landscape, rural ambience, local produce of the area and the heritage gold mining settlement at Walhalla.

The Shire is well served with regional transport and infrastructure links including a high quality highway system, accessible telecommunications infrastructure, efficient railway links and direct access to Melbourne’s ports.

The shared economic strengths between Baw Baw, City of Latrobe and Wellington Shire Councils include dairy, horticulture, timber production, electricity generation, oil and gas, sand, stone and material extraction, manufacturing, defence and aviation, nature-based tourism and population services. ‘EGS’ is a Government initiative to diversify the Latrobe Valley economy, to provide support to local businesses, to attract new investment and to facilitate job creation.