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VC37**MUNICIPAL OVERVIEW**

Moira Shire is located on the southern banks of the Murray River, bordering New South Wales. The Shire covers an area of over 4000 square kilometres and includes the major towns of Cobram, Numurkah, Yarrawonga and Nathalia and a host of smaller towns which are supported by a diverse agricultural base heavily reliant on irrigation farming for the production and processing of a range of agricultural products. (Refer Map 1 - Physical Framework Plan). The Shire is located within the broader Shepparton Irrigation Region in the heart of the Goulburn and Murray Valleys, which is one of the most important dairy and fruit production areas in Australia.

Environment

The Shire is located on the alluvial floodplains of the Murray, Goulburn and Ovens Rivers. The natural systems of these rivers are the core natural assets of the Shire providing fertile farming land, a desirable tourist attraction and important habitat for native species and ecosystem services. The use of these assets has been developed in a variety of ways across the Shire responding to a mix of historical, cultural and physical conditions. In the west, a strong Koori community exists based around the Barmah Forest. Areas in the south and east have been developed for intensive and extensive grazing. In particularly fertile irrigated areas, (eg. Cobram) market gardens have developed. Consequently, while the community of Moira is unified in its dependence on natural assets, it is economically, socially and culturally diverse.

Settlement

The population of Moira is currently estimated at being 26,440 and it is projected to rise to 29,000 by 2011. The population of the Shire is aging. In 1976 approximately 12% of the population was aged over 60. By 1996 this had increased to approximately 21.8% and is projected to be 28.3% by 2011. This trend is likely to lead to an increasing demand for the provision of a range of housing and community services. In particular, greater diversity in housing choices will be needed as the population ages and alternatives to traditional family housing will be required, especially medium density housing.

Economic Development

The economic strengths of the Moira Shire include intensive irrigated agricultural production, associated food processing industries and tourism. The Shire is home to a variety of agricultural industries including horticulture, cereal, oilseed, livestock and dairy production. Agricultural land use accounts for approximately 71 per cent of the total land area, divided equally between irrigated and dryland production. The value of agricultural production alone is estimated at approximately \$300 million and employs 28.7 per cent of the population. The farms in the Shire provide a cost efficient source of fresh produce and raw materials for the supply of value-added products to rapidly expanding export markets around the world. Local producers and processors play a significant role in the food industry of the local, regional, state and national economy.

The horticultural industries of the Shire are an especially important component of the economy through their production of high value fresh and processed foods including peaches, pears, viticulture crops, tomatoes and vegetables. These industries are recognised as key elements for the long-term prosperity in the irrigation region; they provide high returns per unit of applied water; and are well suited to the climate and topography of the region. 60% of the national canned peach crop is grown around Cobram.

The dairy industry is also a major contributor to the economy of the Shire and the broader region. The Northern Irrigation Region of Victoria generates some \$1,225 million in output, provides 16,300 jobs as well as \$390 million in income. Dairying utilises 490,000 ha of irrigated land in the region and produces about 25% of Australia's milk. The "value adding"

manufacturing industry and the tourism industry are increasingly important activities based on the local strengths of climate, water and the river.

The tourism industry is a growing contributor to the Shire's economy. The industry is based on the natural features of the Shire, particularly the Murray, Goulburn Rivers and Ovens Rivers and the Barmah Forest.

