

21 MUNICIPAL STRATEGIC STATEMENT

27/03/2014
C31

21.01 Municipal Profile

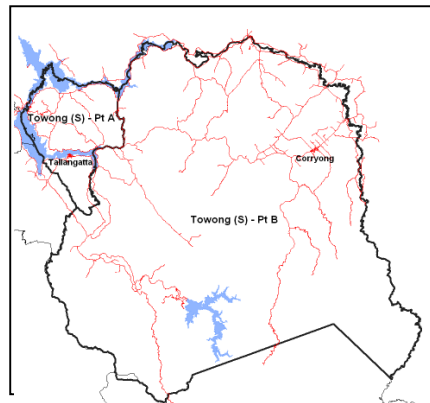
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Location

Towong Shire is located in far north-east Victoria and is bounded by the Murray River to the north and east, the East Gippsland and Alpine Shires to the south, and Indigo Shire and the City of Wodonga to the west. It occupies an area of 6,635 square kilometres.

Statistical Local Areas

Towong Shire is comprised of two Statistical Local Areas (SLAs), Towong SLA Part A and Towong SLA Part B. Part A is located in the north western part of the Shire and contains the towns of Tallangatta, Bellbridge and Bethanga. The larger SLA 'B' comprises the balance of the Shire and includes Corryong, Walwa, Towong, Tintaldra, Cudgewa, Eskdale and Mitta Mitta.



	SLA A	SLA B
Area (Square Kilometres)	582	6091
% Total Shire Area	9%	91%
No. Dwellings (2011)	902	1416
% Total Population (2011)	41%	59%
Population Density (People per square kilometre)	4.3	0.6

Figure 1: Towong Statistical Local Areas

Settlement

European settlement of the area dates back to the 1830s. Growth was minimal until the 1850s with the gold rush prompting the establishment of several small townships. Gradual growth continued in the late 1800s, with the township of Corryong becoming the largest town in the Shire.

The major towns of the Shire, Tallangatta and Corryong are located at either end of the municipality and offer a range of services to the surrounding areas. Both lie on the Murray Valley Highway which traverses the Shire.

The population of Towong Shire began to steadily decline from the early 1970s from about 6,500 in 1991 to 5,891 at the 2011 census. Population decline can be chiefly attributed to losses in the eastern part of the Shire, with the western part of the municipality recording growth in the order of 1.8 % between 2001 and 2011. Around 42 % of the population lives in the three main towns of Corryong, Tallangatta and Bellbridge.

Towong Shire is characterised by having an ageing population with low birth rates and modest inward migration. Progressively less people are participating in the agricultural sector workforce, and as a consequence, the Shire's youth are often forced to seek employment and education opportunities outside the Shire. This trend of outward migration of youth is well established and is expected to continue.

Environment

The Shire's location is significant in terms of being at the headwaters of the Murray River and contains the major water storages of Lake Hume and Dartmouth Dam. These storages supply irrigation water and town water supply for down-stream communities. The Shire catchment supplies high quality water for the Murray River, which supports agriculture, communities and cities elsewhere in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia. The whole of Towong Shire is located within a declared Special Water Supply Catchment and contains significant wetland types and important waterways as identified by the North East Regional River Health Strategy. The purpose of the gazettal in 1984 declaring Towong Shire to be in a Special Water Supply Catchment was to control vegetation removal on steep land.

Around seventy percent (70%) of the Shire is public land including State and National Parks. A proportion of the public land is used for forestry. Major protected areas within the Shire include the Alpine National Park, Burrowa-Pine Mountain National Park, Wabba Wilderness Park, Mount Lawson State Park and Mount Granya State Park. The eastern part of the municipality interfaces with the Kosciuszko National Park.

Economy

Towong has the least diverse economy in the North East region, being heavily dependant on agriculture, however it is one of the most productive agricultural areas within the region generating in the order \$80 million worth of agricultural produce annually. Towong Shire contributes around a quarter of the gross value of agricultural production in the North East region, despite its agricultural sector being much less diverse than elsewhere in the region.

Over time, agriculture in the Towong Shire has become increasingly dependent on beef cattle farming, and this has been chiefly at the expense of dairy cattle farming. In 2011, Towong contained a total of 455 farming enterprises and the total combined area of these represents around 25% of the total land area of the Shire. The number of farms in the Towong Shire has decreased since the late 1990's, despite this, the estimated value of agricultural operations has increased steadily by about 50% over the same period.

The Shire's agricultural production is divided between relatively few large scale farming operations and a large number of small to medium scale grazing enterprises. Trends in the Shire suggest an increase in the proportion of medium-sized operations, whilst the number of economically large enterprises has remained relatively static over the past two decades. Although there has been a trend toward increasing economic scale, both beef and dairy farms in the Towong Shire tend to operate at a smaller economic scale compared to those same types of farming enterprises within the region. The challenge for these producers is the lack of productivity gains which will impact on their ability to maintain real incomes. Although it remains the single largest employment category, employment in agriculture in Towong is decreasing in absolute numbers. This decline is consistent with State and National trends.

Much of the total Towong agricultural output is produced by a small part of the overall rural landscape. It is estimated that around 40% of agricultural output is produced from just 6% of the freehold rural land.

The Shire's tourism sector is centred on key waterways, Victoria's largest National Park, the Alpine National Park, the nearby Kosciusko National Park, a number of State and National Parks, Hume and Dartmouth Dams and the legend of the "Man from Snowy River".

There are approximately 17,000 hectares of timber plantations and 99% of these are softwood, of which, three-quarters were owned by one industrial grower. The plantation estate in the Shire was commenced during the 1960s and continued to expand until the mid-1980s. The plantations within Towong Shire have not been of sufficient scale to support local processing, and all plantation logs are hauled to processing centres in other local government areas in Victoria and New South Wales.

'Peri Urban' Towong

Most of the reduction in total farm holding is taking place within SLA 'A' where there is greatest pressure for genuine land use change. The pace of this change has increased substantially since 2001 and has seen a profound contraction of agriculture from western parts of the Shire.

It is evident that there will remain pressure for land use change of rural lands within the 'peri urban' sphere of Albury/Wodonga, and the higher land values in these areas driven mainly by lifestyle farmers and people paying a higher price for the amenity of the landscape will make increasing operational scale difficult for any remaining farm enterprises. In these highly attractive and scenic areas of the Shire, particularly in the Lake Hume environs close to Albury/Wodonga the market has indicated its strong preference for rural living, restricting the capacity of agricultural businesses to increase scale to maintain competitiveness.

Most of the western Towong Shire where rural residential development has become the dominant land use offers commuting times of less than 40 minutes to Albury and Wodonga. In particular, the Bethanga peninsular is closer to the central business districts of Albury and Wodonga, than established commuter towns of Barnawartha, Chiltern, Howlong, Rutherglen, Yackandandah, Beechworth and Kiewa-Tangambalanga.