

## PROFILE OF THE MORNINGTON PENINSULA

### Introduction

The Mornington Peninsula is a special place, with a special relationship to the rest of Melbourne. The Shire is located between Port Phillip Bay and Western Port Bay, approximately 50 kilometres south-east of central Melbourne. It contains Victoria's first European settlement site (at Sorrento) and is Victoria's most visited destination for informal recreation.

The Shire has a total area of more than 720 square kilometres, with rural areas of above average productivity, scenic landscapes of State significance and a coastline extending for more than 190 kilometres. Substantial areas of the Shire, including the Western Port coast and the Mornington Peninsula National Park, are of high conservation value and support sites of national and international significance. Western Port also contains Victoria's largest bulk liquid cargo port.

The Peninsula's settlement pattern consists of more than 20 townships, ranging from relatively large centres such as Mornington, Somerville Hastings, Dromana and Rosebud, through to small towns and coastal villages such as Red Hill, Flinders and Merricks Beach. This settlement pattern and the relationship between the townships, the coast and the rural landscape contribute to the Peninsula's distinctive "sense of place".

### People

The Mornington Peninsula Shire has a permanent population of approximately 120,000 people (1999). This increases to over 180,000 people during the summer peak period. The current rate of population growth is approximately 1.06 per cent per year, compared with the average for Melbourne of 0.8 per cent.

The Peninsula population is made up of approximately 48,900 households, with an average household size of 2.45 persons. Fifty five percent of the Peninsula's households consist of one or two persons compared with 49 per cent in metropolitan Melbourne. Ninety three percent of the Peninsula's population are from English speaking backgrounds compared with 75 per cent across metropolitan Melbourne.

If the current rate of growth continues, the resident population is projected to reach 127,000 by 2006 and over 146,000 by 2021. This anticipates a decline in the rate of growth (to 0.56 per cent) after 2011, as the population moves towards the peak capacity of the identified township growth areas.

The characteristics of the resident population vary considerably between different parts of the Shire, with many younger families in growing areas such as Mornington and Hastings. However, people aged 65 and over make up 21 per cent of the Shire's population, compared with the Melbourne average of 15 per cent. Within the southern sector of the Shire (south of Rosebud) people aged 65 and over constitute approximately 26 per cent of the resident population.

Projections indicate a continuing increase in the number of persons aged 50 years or older during the period to 2021, consistent with general population trends for metropolitan Melbourne. This is accompanied by a decreasing number of persons per household.

Figures from the 1991 Census suggest that average household incomes are skewed towards \$25,000 or less (48 per cent of households, compared with 38 per cent over the metropolitan region), and a higher than average proportion of households receive government support.

The rate of car ownership amongst households on the Peninsula is 93 per cent (compared with the Melbourne average of 87 per cent) indicating a relatively high level of car ownership, consistent with the relative lack of public transport facilities.

### Settlement pattern and housing

The Mornington Peninsula is a “fringe municipality”, in that Melbourne’s metropolitan area extends through to the adjoining municipalities of Frankston and Casey. Casey also contains part of the “SEGA” or South Eastern Growth Area, which is intended to accommodate substantial future growth.

The Peninsula has also experienced strong population growth over the past twenty years, increasing substantially from the 1981 population of approximately 74,000. However, it has been State government policy since the early 1970’s to limit the expansion of Melbourne to designated growth corridors, such as the SEGA, and more recently to encourage urban consolidation as a means of managing the pressure for fringe development.

One of the objectives shaping these policies has been to avoid the spread of urban development onto the Peninsula. In this context, the Baxter – Mt Eliza escarpment has been identified as a visual and physical boundary between the Peninsula and metropolitan Melbourne. This policy was reinforced by the definition of the Peninsula’s new municipal boundary as part of the process of Local Government amalgamation in 1994.

The Mornington Peninsula is not a designated urban growth area and the limitation of urban development on the Peninsula is consistent with State policies for the Peninsula that have emphasised environmental and landscape conservation, the role of the Peninsula as a recreational area and the potential of Western Port for deep water port activities. These priorities continue to be emphasised in the State Planning Policy Framework. In this context the Peninsula has a different but complementary role to other parts of Melbourne in meeting the overall needs of the community.

However, within the established boundaries of townships on the Peninsula there are still substantial areas set aside for further residential development. Approximately 7,190 vacant residential lots are already available, and another 11,590 could potentially be created. This represents more than 20 years’ supply at current rates of development, without including vacant lots in rural area, the possible conversion of holiday homes to permanent occupancy or the trend towards medium density housing.

Separate dwellings dominate the Peninsula’s current housing stock, comprising 92 per cent of all dwellings, compared with metropolitan average of 77 per cent.

The Peninsula is also characterised by a very high vacancy rate. Thirty-five per cent of all dwellings were vacant at the time of the 1996 Census, compared with a metropolitan average of 8 per cent, reflecting the large number of dwellings on the Peninsula that are used as holiday homes. Vacancy rates in the major townships are comparable with the Melbourne average, but the coastal villages have very high vacancy rates (up to 90 per cent during the off-season).

The Peninsula retains a distinctive settlement pattern based on separate townships, with relatively clear boundaries. This pattern has been shaped by a variety of historic, locational and environmental factors. There is also a reasonably clear hierarchy among the townships, ranging from the major centres to the rural/coastal towns and villages. A centre’s position in the hierarchy is generally related to the range of commercial and community functions that it supports and the level of services available—both of which tend to depend on the size of its permanent population and the extent of its economic catchment area.

While the townships along the Port Phillip coastline may appear to form part of a single linear development, each still retains its own local history, individual character, functions, and activities, particularly linked with foreshore features. These in turn contribute to each township’s sense of place and community identity.

This sense of place is reinforced by the distinctive built form and character of many of the Peninsula’s townships, and of precincts within these townships. This distinctiveness often arises from:

- The relationship between the settlement and its environmental setting—be it a rural landscape, a tract of bushland, a hillside or clifftop area or a coastline.

- The balance between natural features and built form — in many areas natural features, such as vegetation cover or dune patterns, rather than buildings, are the dominant visual elements. Areas of public open space and reserves contribute to this feature.
- The influence of heritage sites, gardens and precincts.
- Well-established subdivision and development patterns — with characteristic townscapes and streetscapes.
- The lower intensity of activity and traffic movements in some areas, such as the coastal villages, that contributes to the relaxed atmosphere.

### **Economic development**

The Peninsula's economy is very diverse and total employment amounts to approximately 23,100 jobs, compared with an estimated workforce of 31,000 people (ABS 1998). Between 1991 and 1996 there was a growth in jobs on the Peninsula of 1.8 per cent per year. Forty per cent of the Peninsula's workforce works outside the Shire, with 13 per cent employed in Frankston but with less than 4 per cent in any other centre.

The Shire's unemployment rate has historically been slightly higher than the Victorian average. Unemployment currently stands at approximately 9.6 per cent compared with a Victorian average of 9.4 per cent.

Employment on the Peninsula is based on a few large employers, and many small ones. Most jobs are generated by town-based activities such as retailing, construction, business services, health, education and community services. These categories account for over 52 per cent of total employment, emphasising the importance of the major towns as employment and activity centres. Township employment is supported by both the demands of local residents and the additional trade generated by visitors, which has been estimated to account for up to 23 per cent of turnover in tourism focussed centres.

Manufacturing is also important, employing 28 per cent of the workforce. Many of the Shire's industrial areas display a mix of service industry and sales/supply yards, indicating a local trade base. Extractive industries, including the Pioneer and Hillside quarries in Dromana, employ less than 1 per cent of the workforce but remain important resources.

### **Agriculture**

Agricultural activities and primary industry occupy the majority of Peninsula's land area and employ approximately 3 per cent of the Shire's workforce, which is well above the Victorian average.

Horticulture, market gardening and poultry farming are significant rural industries on the Peninsula. At present there are over 100 poultry farms (producing eggs and chickens), with a gross value of annual production over \$90 million per year (equal to 30 per cent of the Victorian total). The Peninsula also produces almost \$18 million worth of fruit and vegetables each year. The Peninsula forms part of the Port Phillip Region, which achieves the highest returns per hectare in Victoria. The Peninsula's average return per hectare is also rated as above average by the Department of Agriculture, with high to very high productivity potential across the whole Peninsula (State of the Environment Report, 1991).

Vineyards are an increasingly important industry on the Peninsula. The Peninsula's 40-plus wineries attract more than 150,000 visitors a year and the continued growth of this industry contributes to marketing of the region as a recreation destination with a range of all-season attractions.

### **Port development**

The Port of Hastings is Victoria's largest bulk liquid cargo port, accounting for 57 per cent of the State's bulk liquid trade.

The port channel is Victoria's deepest, with a guaranteed minimum depth of 14.3 metres.

The Port of Hastings is served by four jetty complexes, — the Crib Point Oil Terminal Jetty, Long Island Point Pier, the BHP Steel Industries Roll On-Roll Off Wharf and the Stony Point Port Services Complex.

The Western Port-Altona-Gippsland (WAG) pipeline links the gas fields in Bass Strait, the port facilities at Western Port and the processing plants at Altona; integrating Western Port with the State economy.

The port facilities at Hastings have attracted three major industries:

- BHP's Western Port Steelworks,
- The Esso-BHP Gas Fractionation Plant and
- The Whitemark Petrol Storage and Distribution facility

These plants directly employ over 1,600 people.

In addition there are a number of smaller operations that are either engaged in port-related activities themselves, or are dedicated to servicing other port industries.

### **Environmental and cultural significance**

The Mornington Peninsula is an area of great diversity and owes its special conservation value to a number of factors including:

- The acknowledged regional, national and international significance of natural areas and habitats located on the Peninsula and adjoining marine areas. This includes the parks and coastal reserves on Western Port and Port Phillip Bay, the Mornington Peninsula National Park, Arthur's Seat State Park and Highfield/ Greens Bush Reserve. Commonwealth lands at HMAS Cerberus and Point Nepean also act as significant natural reserves.  
Western Port is a fragile ecosystem and most of the Bay is nominated under international treaties for the protection of migratory bird habitats (the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the JAMBA and CAMBA treaties) with extensive areas of zoological, botanical or geomorphological significance.  
The Peninsula is, therefore, a critical area for achieving State environmental and biodiversity objectives.
- The complex interrelationship between land use and development on the Peninsula and the foreshores, coastlines and marine environments of Port Phillip Bay, Western Port Bay and Bass Strait. The stream catchments of the Peninsula are relatively small, increasing their vulnerability and emphasising the need for whole of catchment management. This includes recognition of the value and importance of the groundwater resources of the Nepean Peninsula. Habitat linkages along streamlines, road reserves and the coastal fringe are also of strategic importance.
- The landscapes of the Peninsula, which involve a combination of natural and cultural elements, are a major recreational resource. Both local native vegetation and introduced species contribute to the visual diversity and cultural significance of the landscape. It is not only the specific landscape areas that are of value but also the proximity and contrasts of many different landscape types in a relatively small area.
- The cultural significance of heritage places, heritage buildings, structures and gardens located on the Peninsula, including places, sites and objects of Aboriginal cultural significance.

### **Recreation and tourism**

The Mornington Peninsula is a key recreation area, and is often described as Melbourne's playground, meeting both local and metropolitan needs. It is the most popular informal recreational area in Victoria.

In 1996, the Mornington Peninsula National Park attracted a total of 2.5 million visitors, making it the most visited National Park in Victoria. Other attractions include Arthur's Seat National Park (82,500 visitors in 1996), safe bayside beaches, ocean surf beaches, golf courses, boating facilities,

bushwalking and horse riding trails, weekend markets and historic sites, including the homestead and nature reserve at Coolart in Somers and the Briars property between Mornington and Mt Martha.

The Peninsula boasts some of Victoria's greatest natural and cultural assets, and these form the basis of a sustainable tourism industry.

### **Infrastructure**

The Mornington Peninsula is connected to Melbourne by a network of major roads and freeways, including the Nepean Highway, Moorooduc Road and the Mornington Peninsula Freeway, the Western Port Highway, Coolart Road and Frankston-Flinders Road. In addition to these north-south linkages, there is also a network of cross-Peninsula roads, including Bungower Road and Mornington-Tyabb Road. These roads combine to form the primary movement system on the Peninsula, which will continue to rely heavily on private transport into foreseeable future.

A secondary network of roads serves the Peninsula hinterland and acts as an important recreation resource. These links, which include the Bittern Dromana Road, Red Hill-Shoreham Road, Mornington Flinders Road, Boneo Road, Browns Road and Old Melbourne Road, are used by cross Peninsula traffic, by local people accessing their properties, and by recreational travellers engaged in sightseeing and other leisure pursuits. A number of pedestrian and bicycle paths have also been developed which provide recreational opportunities and support movement within local areas.

The Mornington Peninsula's passenger and commercial rail system is now limited to one non-electrified line between Frankston and Stony Point. It carries a passenger shuttle service along with considerable freight traffic associated with BHP's Western Port Steelworks.

Buses are the principal mode of public transport serving Peninsula residents. These operate primarily on north south routes, connecting to Frankston. Subsidised school and community bus services operate throughout the Shire; however, the relatively low intensity and dispersed pattern of development (compounded by low permanent occupancy rates in some townships) militates against the establishment of a more extensive bus service.

In addition to the major deep water port facilities on Western Port there are a numerous local boating facilities including major facilities at Mornington, Hastings, Sorrento, and Crib Point. Vehicle and passenger ferry services operate between Sorrento, Portsea and Queenscliffe on Port Phillip and passenger services operate between Crib Point, French Island and Phillip Island on Western Port.

The Tyabb airfield has operated for many years and in addition to recreational flying provides a connection for some forms of commercial air transport to larger airports, including Moorabbin and Melbourne (Tullamarine) Airport.

The Peninsula receives water supply from the Cardinia reservoir but also contains a number of small service reservoirs and the major Devil Bend reservoir, which incorporates conservation and recreation functions as well as providing water storage. These areas require protection from air and waterborne pollution to maintain the quality of drinking water.

The Mornington Peninsula also faces a number of key challenges in relation to sewerage and drainage infrastructure.

Development in unsewered areas has previously been approved on the basis of satisfactory on-site wastewater treatment and disposal facilities. Recent investigations, however, have raised concerns that unsewered development is contributing to the pollution of inland surface waters, beaches and groundwater, particularly on the Nepean Peninsula.

Equally, although the drainage systems in more recent development areas have been designed with adequate capacity, many parts of the Shire have local capacity limits. Major regional drainage systems depend on natural watercourses and streamlines, with subsequent pressure on their environmental values.