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VISION

Corporate Vision

The *Planning and Environment Act 1987* requires that a Municipal Strategic Statement is consistent with the current corporate plan of Council. The main focus for Council is developing strategies which will promote economic and population growth which can in turn contribute to the long term sustainability of the municipality.

The 2013-2017 Council Plan contains the following strategic objectives:

Organisational improvement

Embed organisational excellence into our governance and management processes in order to deliver the best possible outcomes for our residents and ratepayers.

Community wellbeing

Assist Towong Shire residents in the attainment of a high level of health and safety, resilience and connectedness to their communities.

Asset management

Maintain and improve our Shire's infrastructure to meet agreed levels of service.

Land-use planning

Develop a strategic and sustainable long-term land-use direction for the Shire based on an integrated approach to the natural and built environment.

Environmental sustainability

Integrate sustainable natural resource management into all of our business activities.

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Economy

Economies with a narrow base such as Towong Shire, are particularly vulnerable to external forces such changes in terms of trade, fluctuations in commodity prices, seasonal variations, climate change and increasing transport costs. The vulnerability of the narrowly based Towong Shire economy and need for a broader range of employment opportunities within the Shire is central to the vision for greater economic diversification.

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Environment

The vision for Towong Shire is one that Towong seeks to maintain, protect and enhance key natural assets, in particular:

- Waterways and wetlands;
- Important landscapes;
- Steep land;
- Biodiversity;
- Cultural heritage; and
- High quality agricultural land.

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C31**Settlement:**

The vision for Towong seeks to encourage different settlement outcomes in a variety of locations across the Shire that can contribute to the environmental, social and economic wellbeing of the Shire. It seeks to offer land use planning recommendations that build on the specific character and desired future profile of each town, with a view of establishing a network of settlements that support each other in their service base and offer a variety and choice of lifestyle opportunities.

The vision for future settlement with Towong Shire is one that:

- caters for future growth of townships and settlements in an orderly manner;
- gives preference to the residential development of land without environmental constraints;
- takes advantage of existing infrastructure and promotes infrastructure efficiencies;
- employs sustainable development principles;
- ensures protection of high quality agricultural land;
- locates future development having regard to:
 - identified market preferences;
 - access to physical and social services;
- Provides additional rural living opportunities, particularly on the Bethanga Peninsular, Lake Hume environs around Tallangatta and adjacent to existing settlements.

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The rural land use planning vision for Towong Shire is one that facilitates and promotes rural land use diversity. The imperative for Towong Shire to diversify its economy is apparent and the Planning Scheme should not impede efforts to achieve this pursuit of economic diversification. Rural land use planning decisions can influence the economic well-being of the Shire and Towong seeks to deploy an approach to rural land use planning that is capable of recognising and fostering rural diversity.

The rural land use planning vision is one that:

- Maximises inherent rural land use planning discretion;
- Employs a spatially differential approach to rural zoning;
- Caters better for localised landscape and land use differences;
- Allows for diverse merits based outcomes; and
- Enables farm enterprises to adjust to changing circumstances such as the need for increased operational scale or farm succession.

This vision means that apart from single focus on a perceived need to protect rural areas from unplanned loss of productive agricultural land, planning policy should aim to provide for the equally valuable economic and social contribution of vibrant agricultural communities. This requires the emphasis of a proactive approach which is more focused on merits based outcomes, rural diversity and support for a wider cross section of the farming sector, including small farms.

The land use planning vision recognises and responds to the multifunctional nature of the Towong rural landscape so as to cater for differing rural land use planning outcomes across the Shire. This approach recognises three main spatial rural planning policy units:

1. **Production Towong** – this includes areas of farmland of strategic significance containing high quality agricultural land where agriculture and food production has primacy and where protection of agricultural land is paramount;
2. **Transitional Towong** - being agricultural land of low to moderate quality where diverse land use planning outcomes are encouraged; and

TOWONG PLANNING SCHEME

3. **'Peri Urban' Towong** - being land essentially located within the 40min travel / commute contour of nearby Albury – Wodonga where rural residential development is to be encouraged.

The benefits of this approach are clear – the Planning Scheme can articulate the importance of those parts of the rural landscape that contribute most to the overall Shire 'farm gate' output, and in these areas agriculture and food production has primacy. However, it also allows flexibility and discretion in those parts of the rural landscape that are substantially less economically important from a rural production perspective, thereby assisting in the aspirations of increased economic diversity and population growth.

It is a premise of the vision for Towong that with careful and consistent planning decision making, changing land use patterns in themselves do not necessarily pose difficulties for agriculture, particularly if pressure for change is not affecting higher quality lands which might otherwise be expected to contribute significantly to agricultural production. An equitable approach to rural land use planning is one that places a greater emphasis on production rather than land use and embraces a performance based approach which allows matters to be considered on the basis of merit.

The Towong rural land use planning vision is one where the historic use of land for a particular purpose should not be a justification for its continuing use for the same purpose at the exclusion of all other land use options, especially in circumstances where an alternative land use might actually increase the net benefit to the broader community, both now and into the future. In this way a merits based approach might also support a paradigm where rural does not necessarily always mean agricultural. The Towong Planning Scheme needs to make provision for other land uses in locations where there is capacity to encourage different outcomes that can contribute to the social, environmental and economic wellbeing of the Shire.

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Towong Shire Strategic Framework Plan

