



**WIMMERA MALLEE**  
**TOURISM**  
2022/27 **STRATEGY**





Lake Lascelles - Hopetoun



# CONTENTS

Foreword	4
----------	---

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview	5
Factors Affecting Strategic Directions	6
2022-27 Strategic Focus Areas & Objectives	6

## INTRODUCTION

Regional Context	8
Progress in Establishing WMT	9

## TOURISM TRENDS & OUTLOOK

Emerging Tourism 2016-19	12
Covid Pandemic Impacts	15
WMT Targets to 2031	15

## TOURISM OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

Strategic Focus Areas	18
Specific Strategies	22

# FOR RE W O R D



Wimmera Mallee region has exciting opportunities to build on its visitor economy. Over more than a decade, Wimmera Mallee Tourism (WMT) has built a solid track record of achievement in advancing these opportunities. The iconic Silo Art Trail has been our flagship visitor attraction over the past few years but there has also been improvement to other nature based, cultural and recreation attractions around the region.

Along the way WMT has produced promotional materials and resources, employed project officers, represented and advocated for the region, and developed and implemented many strategic and other planning resources.

The Wimmera Mallee is different to any other Victorian region and those who spend an extended visit are captivated by the stunning landscapes, welcoming communities, and cultural richness.

This new strategy presents WMT's blueprint for the next five years. Understandably it contains strategies which aim at recovering from the devastating effects of the COVID pandemic, as well as strategies and actions for restructuring the WMT organisation so that there are more formal links to other key local and regional organisations, adopting a greater culture of supporting tourism among our local businesses, adding value to our tourism assets, and stronger marketing and branding.

The WMT Board gratefully acknowledges the Strategy Project Control Group (PCG) members who have overseen the development of this ambitious new strategy: Bernard Young (Chair), Sarah Collins (WMT Project Officer), James Goldsmith (Secretary), Jeff Woodward and Cr Trevor Domaschenz.

I am looking forward to the next chapter in the evolution of Wimmera Mallee Tourism with confidence. Implementation of this strategy should lead to a sustainable future for both our organisation and to substantial growth of the region's visitor economy.

*Graeme Milne*

Cr Graeme Milne

Chair

Wimmera Mallee Tourism Inc.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## OVERVIEW

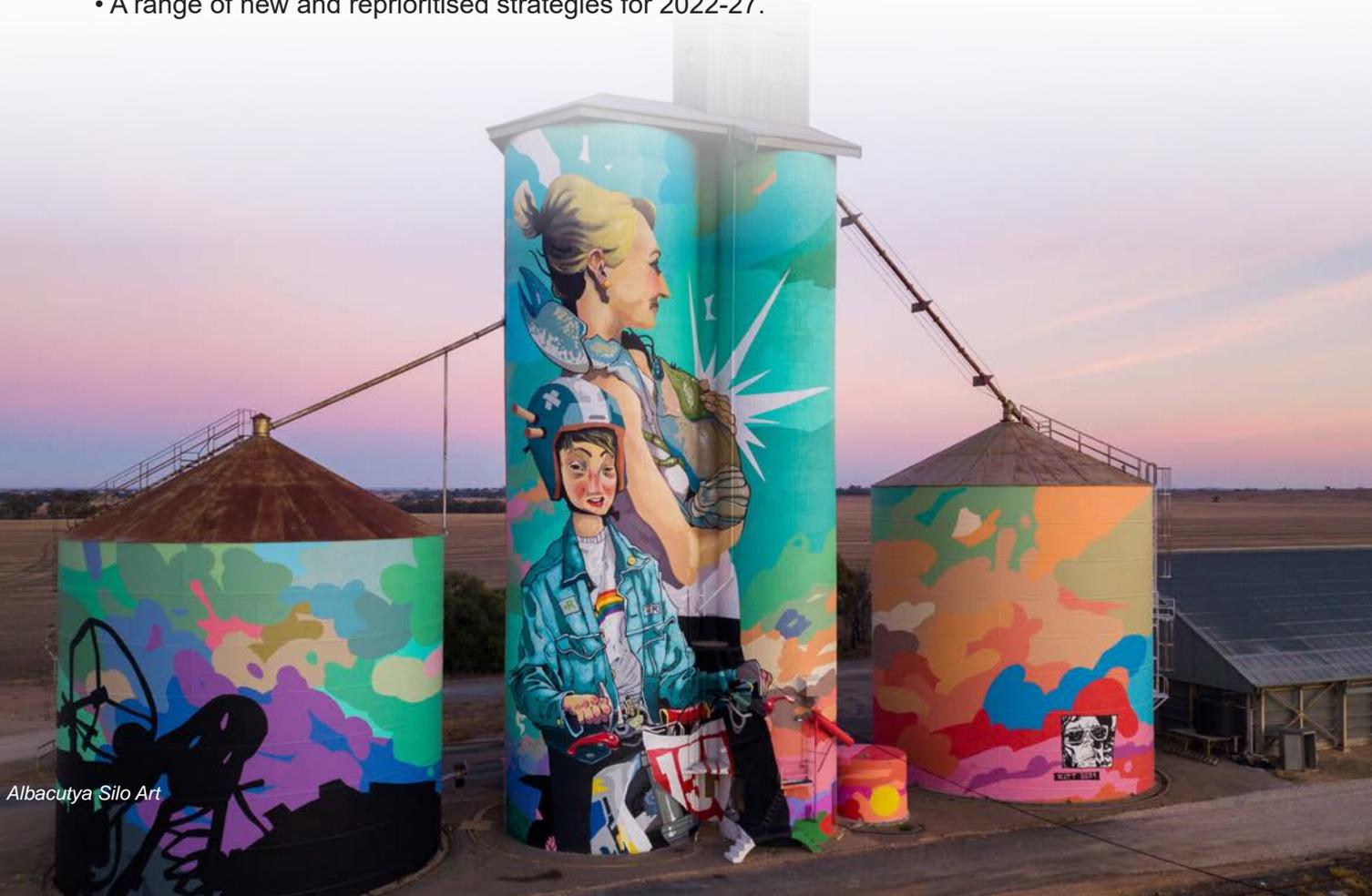
Wimmera Mallee Tourism Incorporated (WMT) was established in 2011 following work of an earlier working group and a 2009 feasibility study. Since inception, WMT has represented the collective tourism industry of Buloke, Hindmarsh, West Wimmera and Yarriambiack Shires. Formation of WMT signalled a new economic development emphasis in a region with a long and proud history as Victoria's broadacre grain heartland. Wimmera Mallee region is encompassed within the Victoria's Grampians Tourism region; one of 12 tourism regions across the state.

The 2009 feasibility suggested that strong tourism groups in each local government area would be important to delivering products at a local level, with the regional organisation being responsible for marketing. This approach is a reflection of the state-wide Regional Tourism Board mandate to be responsible for "bringing people to a region" and not the "development and delivery of tourism products once people have arrived".

After a decade, Wimmera Mallee Tourism now has an impressive track record of achievement which includes marketing and ongoing development of the Silo Art Trail (following its inception by Yarriambiack Shire as the first iconic silo art trail at six sites), development of extensive promotional materials and resources, advocacy and representation of the region, employment of project officers, and development and implementation of many strategic and other planning resources.

This new Strategic Plan document, presents a 2022-2027 update with:

- Refreshed objectives.
- Insights on the outlook for sustainable operations including COVID 19 pandemic recovery.
- A range of new and reprioritised strategies for 2022-27.



## FACTORS AFFECTING STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The COVID 19 pandemic has disrupted regional Victorian tourism activities to an unparalleled level throughout 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022. In the period 2016-19, tourism emerged as a significant part of the Wimmera Mallee economy with an average of 515,000 visitors and \$90.3 million in average annual visitor expenditure. However, this has reduced to an estimated 230,000 visitors in 2021 and \$58.5 million in visitor expenditure.

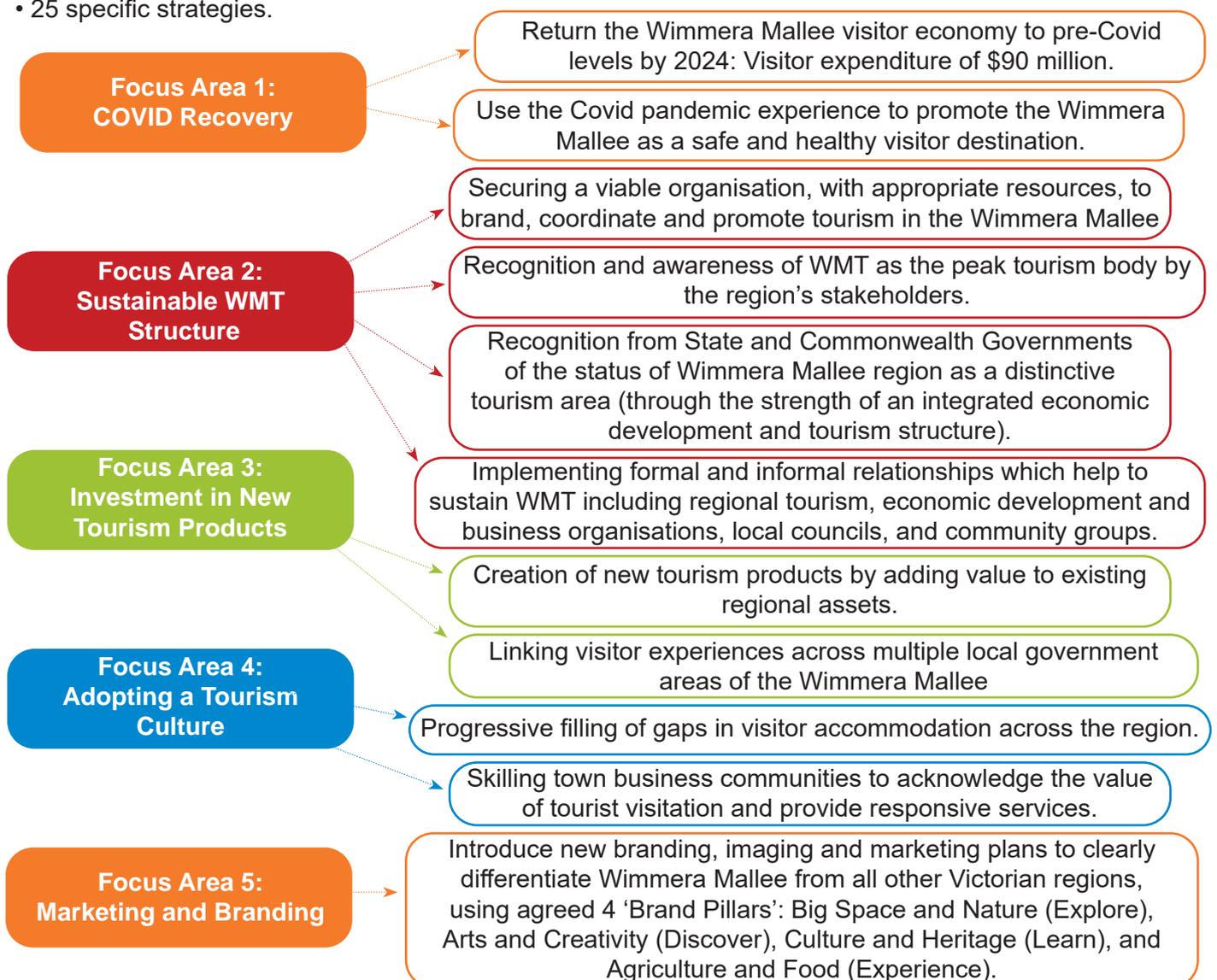
Pandemic disruptions have both negative and potentially positive consequences for the future. Negative consequences include loss of the inertia that had been building in the region, very limited international visitation, and timid and reluctant returns to domestic travel. Positive outcomes might be attraction of a new segment of reluctant travellers to explore a less travelled 'part of their backyard', and promoting the predominant low-density, nature-based attractions of the region which are likely to be popular after two years of restrictions and somewhat entrenched social-distancing behaviour.

Wimmera Mallee Tourism is an evolving organisation still determining its appropriate membership, governance arrangements and local and regional relationships. During the timeframe of this Strategic Plan, WMT needs to confirm that it has a sustainable future as a regional organisation, and to implement formal and informal relationships which will help to secure this future.

## 2022-27 STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS AND OBJECTIVES

### The Strategy incorporates:

- 5 strategic focus areas which define the scope and emphasis of this five-year Strategy.
- 11 objectives to be achieved against these focus areas during the five years.
- 25 specific strategies.



## DELIVERING ON THE STRATEGIES BY 2027

Wimmera Mallee Tourism has set the following targets by the end of the five-year strategy period in 2027.



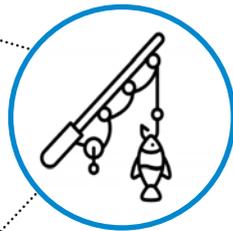
549,400 visit nights:  
17.1% per annum increase 2021-2027



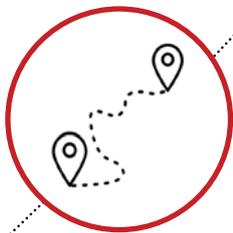
\$158 million total expenditure:  
17.9% per annum increase 2021-2027



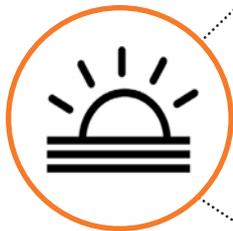
\$518 average per overnight visitor:  
Up from \$417 in 2021



\$132 av per day visitor:  
Up from \$117 in 2021



2.3 days average length of overnight visits:  
Up from 2.02 in 2021



238,870 overnight visitors:  
14.6% per annum increase for 2021-2027



494,330 total visitors:  
13.6% per annum increase 2021-2027



255,460 day visitors:  
12.7% per annum increase 2021-2027



# INTRODUCTION

## REGIONAL CONTEXT

Wimmera Mallee Tourism (WMT) promotes the tourism assets and experiences of the Shires of Buloke, Hindmarsh, West Wimmera and Yarriambiack. The Wimmera Mallee Tourism region covers an area of 32,000 square kilometres, or 14% of all Victoria. With just 0.3% of Victoria's resident population, the Wimmera Mallee is a tourism destination with the lowest population density in the State (0.68 persons per square kilometre): The only region with fewer than 1 person per square kilometre implies that the region is the State's most remote.

Tourism has relatively recently become a regional focus although well informed travellers have long appreciated the region's landscapes, national parks, lakes and wetlands, and uniquely Australian flora and fauna.

The relatively new prominence of tourism follows the success of the region's Silo Art Trail (Australia's largest outdoor gallery) which has helped to make the region a genuine destination for domestic travellers on camping and caravanning holidays, international visitors looking to enjoy, and capture on camera, the region's 'big skies' and the ever-changing colours of the Wimmera Mallee country.

Tourist trails in the Wimmera Mallee region generated almost 200,000 day and overnight visits in the 2018 and 2019 years and although this decreased by more than 40% in 2020-21, in the post-COVID 19 recovery period, it is expected that this has will rise substantially. Overall tourism to Wimmera Mallee region was approximately 500,000 day and overnight visits in the pre-pandemic year of 2018-19.

The region's tourist attractions include a range of emerging and further developing products such as:

- Silo Art Trail (initially comprising 6 sites, all in Yarriambiack Shire, but now expanded to 12 sites across all four Wimmera Mallee Shires with an additional silo art site under development in Serviceton). A large number of visitors to the Wimmera Mallee specifically taking the Silo Art tour stay at one or more of the region's camping grounds and caravan parks.
- Recreational Lakes and Weirs. There are 13 recreational lakes and weir pools which have a good level of water security in the Wimmera Mallee, across three of the local government areas (Buloke, Hindmarsh and Yarriambiack) through water pipeline arrangements with GWMWater and some key naturally fed lakes in West Wimmera.
- Heritage and Landscape Trails. The Wimmera Mallee has a rich agricultural and settlement history, as well as an Indigenous history which has not been developed into organised tourism activity to date. Other landscapes are associated with flora, fauna, national parks, desert environments and broadacre farming. The region's strong post-colonial settlement history is especially strong in cropping and other farming practices, and innovations in agricultural machinery and equipment (often preserved at local museums and historic buildings).

## PROGRESS IN ESTABLISHING WIMMERA MALLEE TOURISM

Several tourism strategies and research reports have been completed for the Wimmera Mallee region since the inception of Wimmera Mallee Tourism. The strategies have tended to focus on developing tourism products.

Relevant major regional and local strategies and research projects have been:

- Wimmera Mallee Tourism Strategy 2017-21
- Wimmera Southern Mallee Tourism Collaboration and Destination Management Plan
- Wotjobaluk Country Indigenous Tourism Feasibility
- Wimmera Southern Mallee: Socio-Economic Value of Recreational and Environmental Water 2017-18 to 2020-21
- Lake Tyrrell Master Plan
- Hindmarsh Trail Masterplan Report
- Grampians Region Cycling Masterplan (identifying two trails in Wimmera Mallee: Wimmera River Trail and Yarriambiack Creek Trail)
- Buloke Shire Economic Development and Tourism Strategy
- Yarriambiack Shire Economic Development and Tourism Strategy.
- West Wimmera Recreational Trails Strategy
- Hindmarsh Economic Development Strategy.

Wimmera Mallee Tourism has an impressive track record of achievement which includes:

- Steering the marketing and ongoing development of the Silo Art Trail (following its inception by Yarriambiack Shire as the first iconic silo art trail at six sites).
- Coordination of a significant "Trading off the Trails" package of projects (supported through the Building Better Regions fund) which included masterplans in selected areas and work within the region on improved responses to tourism visitation resulting from the trails.
- Coordination of the Mallee Silos package of projects (supported through Regional Development Victoria), with capital investment activities contracted and delivered directly by each of the four Councils.
- Development and maintenance of a WMT website.
- Production and publishing of caravan and camping brochures.
- Production and publishing of 4WD brochures.
- Banners and a deck for trade show promotions
- A range of strategic and other planning resources (Destination Management Plan, Cycling Masterplan, Indigenous Tourism Feasibility, Strategy Plans and Marketing Plan)

- Employment of a Project Officer to implement WMT initiatives and to promote the region.

This WMT Strategic Plan is a formal document for use by WMT and stakeholders to give strong direction for WMT and gain commitment from stakeholders to the development of tourism, events, and local businesses, and enable WMT to seek future funding opportunities. The strategy also involves a formal agreement between WDA and WMT for auspicing funding and staffing and for WMT to access and use Wimmera Development Association's "Our Communities" engagement software through the WDA website to give WMT an ongoing communications platform to capture and monitor feedback from its stakeholders.

The Strategy development was overseen by a Project Control Group (PCG) comprising:

- Bernard Young (Chair)
- Sarah Collins (WMT Project Officer)
- James Goldsmith (Secretary)
- Jeff Woodward
- Cr Trevor Domaschenz.



24



CALLY ROASTED  
Artisan

# TOURISM TRENDS & OUTLOOK



Rupanyup Silo Art

## EMERGING TOURISM 2016-2019

Prior to the 2010's Wimmera Mallee was often regarded not as a visitor destination but as a region located between recognised tourist destinations (the Grampians Ranges in the south, Central Victorian Goldfields to the south-east, Sunraysia and Murray Valley in the north and South Australia's Limestone Coast in the west). Wimmera-Mallee has been a tourism 'black spot' for visitors to these more developed destinations, providing few reasons for stopovers or extended stays en-route. The first major objective of Wimmera Mallee Tourism was to change the status of the region to become a destination rather than a "coffee stop on the way to somewhere".

The development of Victoria's first Silo Art Trail, initially at five Yarriambiack Shire sites and more recently across the Wimmera Mallee, provided a foundation for the region and its communities to recognise the potential, and the benefits, from creating a genuine tourism industry. In the five years to the last available Population Census (2016) there has been a clear shift in the economy (measured by employment) from 'product' industry sectors to 'service' industry sectors. Industry sectors can be grouped into:

- Primary sectors: Industries with products from the earth (commodities), ie agriculture and mining industries
- Secondary sectors: Industries which transform primary products into value added goods (eg manufacturing and construction)
- Tertiary sectors: Industries which deliver products to consumers (eg transport and retail)
- Quaternary sectors: Industries which provide services predominantly to businesses and other organisations (eg professional, scientific and technical services, finance and insurance services, and administrative services)
- Quinary sectors: Industries which provide services predominantly to individuals (ie personal services such as accommodation and food services, art and recreation, and health and social assistance). Most tourism 'characteristic' employment is in the quinary sectors.

Table 1 reveals that although primary sectors still dominate the Wimmera Mallee region, and will continue to do so indefinitely, it is significant that quaternary and quinary have been the only job growth sectors over

more than a decade, and the quinary sector (which includes the core tourism industries of accommodation and food services and art and recreation services) was the only growth sector between 2011 and 2016. This is even more significant when it is recognised that many of the Wimmera Mallee's tourism enterprises are either run entirely by, or are heavily supported by, volunteer workers.

**Table 1: Wimmera Mallee Employment by Main Industry Sectors**

	JOBS			CHANGE		% PA CHANGE	
	2006	2011	2016	2006-16	2011-16	2006-16	2011-16
Primary	3,668	3,214	2,896	-772	-318	-2.34%	-2.06%
Secondary	1,088	1,050	885	-203	-165	-2.04%	-3.36%
Tertiary	1,835	1,713	1,315	-520	-398	-3.28%	-5.15%
Quaternary	1,656	1,726	1,691	35	-35	0.21%	-0.41%
Quinary	2,153	2,096	2,162	9	66	0.04%	0.62%
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,400</b>	<b>9,799</b>	<b>8,949</b>	<b>-1,451</b>	<b>-850</b>	<b>-1.49%</b>	<b>-1.80%</b>

SOURCE: Australian Bureau of Statistics Censuses of Population and Housing 2006, 2011 and 2016.

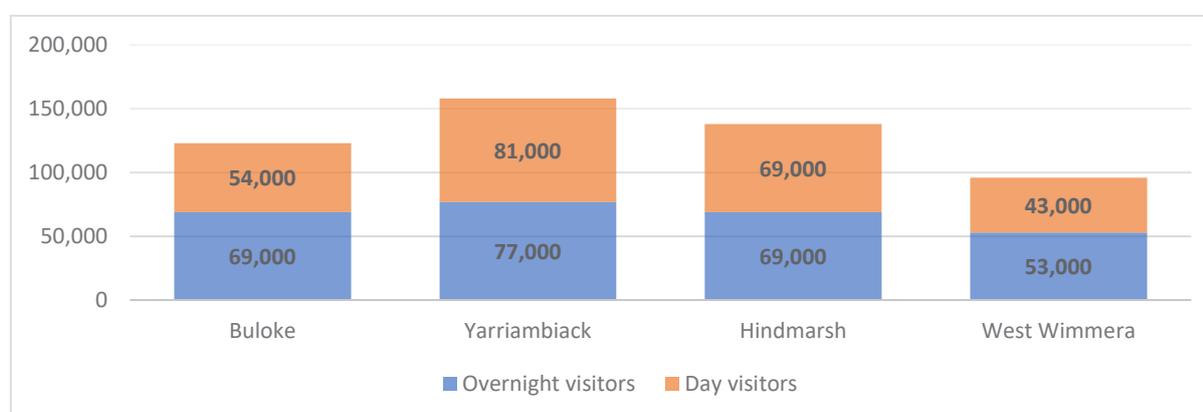
In the period 2016-19, Tourism Research Australia (TRA) records show that tourism has indeed emerged as a significant part of the Wimmera Mallee economy. Average annual visitation was 515,000 and average annual expenditure by day and overnight visitors was \$90.3 million and ranged from \$17.8 million per year in Buloke and Hindmarsh and \$35.7 million per year in Yarriambiack (home to the original silo art trail) as summarised in Table 2. In the final year of the 2016-19 period, also the pre-COVID pandemic year, the total visitor numbers increased to an estimated 600,000 and visitor expenditure increased to an estimated \$150 million.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 2: Wimmera Mallee Tourism Characteristics 2016-2019 Averages**

	Buloke	Yarriambiack	Hindmarsh	West Wimmera	Total
Overnight visitors	69,000	77,000	69,000	53,000	268,000
Day visitors	54,000	81,000	69,000	43,000	247,000
Total visitors	123,000	158,000	138,000	96,000	515,000
Day visitor expenditure (\$)	\$3,800,000	\$5,700,000	\$4,800,000	\$3,000,000	\$17,300,000
Overnight visitor expenditure (\$)	\$14,000,000	\$30,000,000	\$13,000,000	\$16,000,000	\$73,000,000
<b>Total visitor expenditure (\$)</b>	<b>\$17,800,000</b>	<b>\$35,700,000</b>	<b>\$17,800,000</b>	<b>\$19,000,000</b>	<b>\$90,300,000</b>

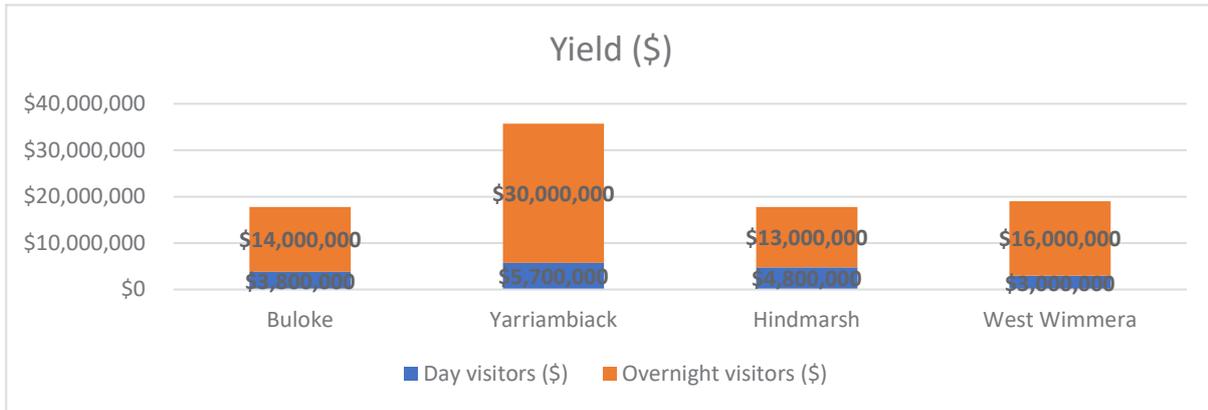
SOURCE: TRA Local Government Area Profiles

**Figure 1: Wimmera Mallee Tourism Visitors and Expenditure Yield 2016-2019 Averages**



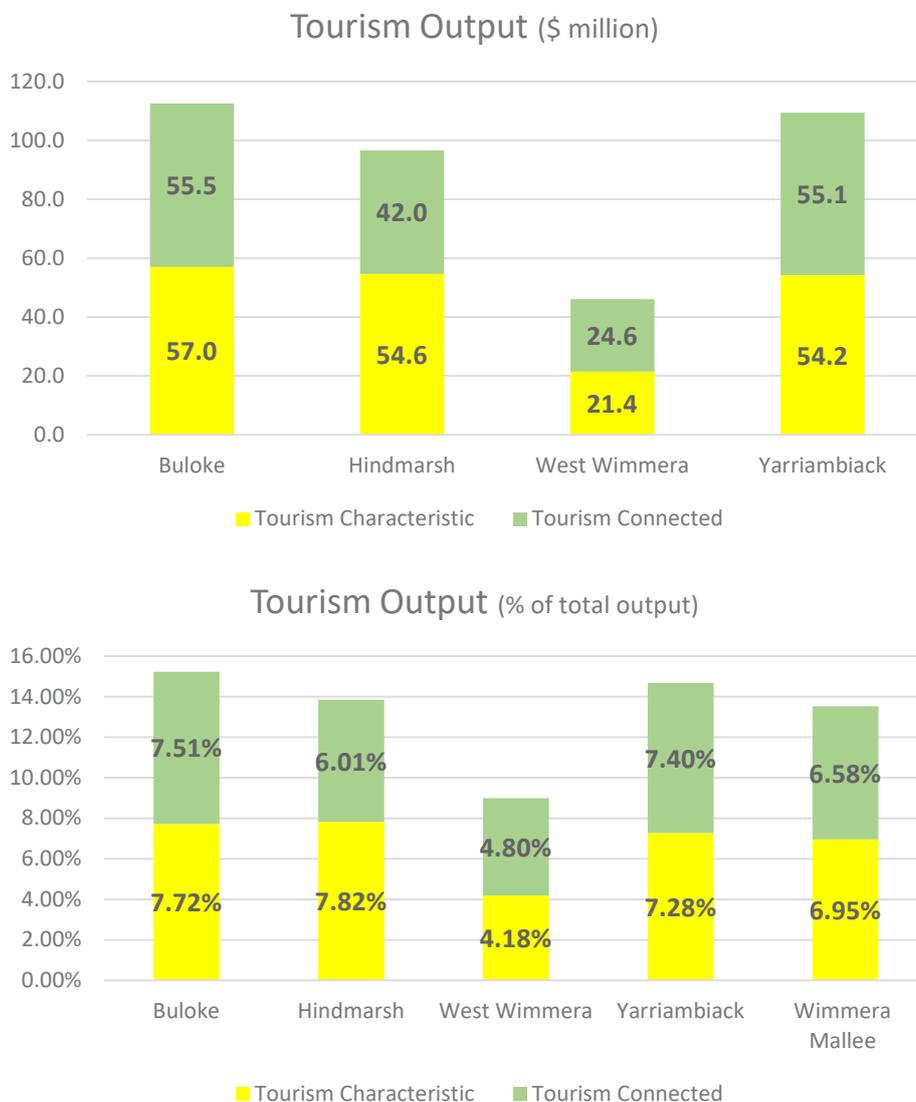
<sup>1</sup>To be further confirmed when the 2021 Census of Population and Housing results are released.

<sup>2</sup>These estimates are based on the TRA region profile for Wimmera for 2019 which includes Buloke, Hindmarsh and Yarriambiack Shires and the northern part of West Wimmera Shire, plus a Street Ryan estimate for the southern section of West Wimmera Shire.



Remplan estimates<sup>3</sup> of total output for Wimmera Mallee’s ‘tourism characteristic’ industries<sup>4</sup> extends the visitor expenditure to \$187.5 million (through supply chain linkages and multiplier effects) in Wimmera Mallee Tourism output. This is 6.95% of the Wimmera Mallee economy’s total output. When ‘tourism characteristic’ and ‘tourism connected’ industries<sup>5</sup> are combined, the output increases to 13.53% of the regional economy as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Tourism Characteristic and Connected Industries Output**



SOURCE: Remplan estimates

<sup>3</sup>REMPPLAN Region Economy Profiles 2022

<sup>4</sup>Tourism characteristic industries are accommodation and food services, art and recreation services, and transport.

<sup>5</sup>Tourism connected industries are retail and education and training. Note that there are significant non-tourism contributions in both the tourism characteristic and connected industries (ie output not generated by tourism)

## COVID PANDEMIC IMPACTS

The COVID pandemic has impacted on the Wimmera Mallee visitor economy and will have ongoing affects for at least the next two years. Disruptions have both negative and potentially positive consequences for the future.

The main negative consequences are:

- Loss of the inertia that Wimmera Mallee was building through the Silo Art Trail, recreational lakes with water security from the Wimmera Mallee pipeline, and new recognition of previously unheralded attractions (eg Lake Tyrrell and the Stick Shed).
- Very limited international visitation. This was a small, but growing, visitor segment for Wimmera Mallee prior to the pandemic.
- Timid and reluctant return to domestic travel by some visitors due to:
  - Continuing presence of the COVID virus
  - Potential exposure to infection risk at events and destinations
  - Fear of travel plans being disrupted.

Positive potential outcomes for Wimmera Mallee during COVID recovery are:

- Attracting a new segment of reluctant travellers to explore a less travelled 'part of their backyard' instead of interstate or overseas trips (while these remain on-hold).
- Promoting the predominant low-density, nature-based attractions of the Wimmera Mallee which are likely to be popular with visitors after two years of restrictions and somewhat entrenched social-distancing behaviour.

## WMT TARGETS TO 2031

Tourist visitation in the Wimmera Mallee region generated over 500,000 day and overnight visits in the 2018 and 2019 years. These numbers have dropped by an estimated 56% during 2020 and 2021 (Tourism Research Australia data) and, in the post-COVID 19 recovery period, it is expected numbers will rise substantially. However, the region's communities and businesses need to be prepared for both the latent and manifest tourism opportunities. Suitable accommodation, responsive food service and retail businesses, and well-targeted marketing initiatives will help to capitalise on the COVID recovery opportunities and longer-term visitation.

Visitation targets have been calculated as part of the strategic plan process to assist in setting strategic objectives and specific strategies to deliver the objectives.

The targets have been calculated with the following assumptions:

- Commencement of modest COVID recovery visitation in 2021-22
- Increases in overnight visitation consistent with the growth trends in Tourism Research Australia's visitation projections for 2022 to 2026<sup>6</sup>.
- A local focus on improved range and choice in accommodation options to enable average overnight length of stay to increase to 2.2 nights in 2024 and 2.6 nights by 2031 (from 2.0 nights in 2019).
- Increases in overnight expenditure as a function of increases in self-contained accommodation occupancy.
- Day visitation returning, and growing, at a relatively slow rate.

---

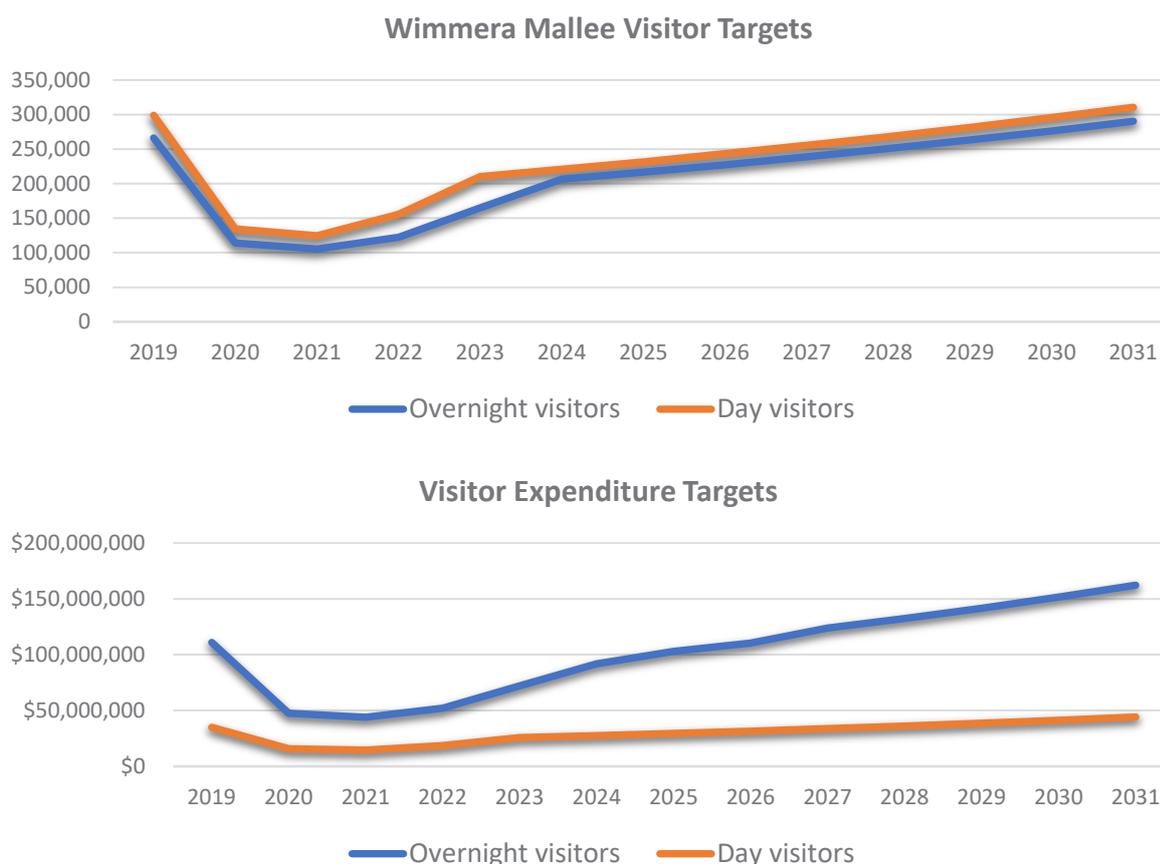
<sup>6</sup> TRA 2022 Domestic visitor nights in Victoria, trends and projections.

The visitation targets are presented in Figure 3 and Table 3.

In summary, they indicate:

- A return of the direct visitor economy (in terms of tourism expenditure) to pre-COVID average levels by 2024 with a target of \$91 million.
- Growth to 227,500 overnight visitors to the region by 2026 and 290,350 by 2031 after falling to an estimated low of 105,400 in 2021. This growth implies a return to pre-COVID levels and further growth of 24,400 visits above the pre-COVID level.
- Growth to 523,250 visit nights by 2026 and to 754,900 by 2031 (an increase of 217,900 nights on pre-COVID levels).
- An increase of \$51.223 million in overnight visitor expenditure, on pre-COVID levels, by 2031.

**Figure 3 Visitor and Visitor Expenditure Targets**



**Table 3 Targeted Visitor Numbers and Visitor Expenditure 2021 to 2031**

**WMT AND WDA TARGETS**

**2019 TRA 2020 ESTIMATE**

	2019 TRA	2020 ESTIMATE	2021 est	2022	2023	2024	2026	2028	2030	2031	Increase 2019-31
		<b>Wimmera Region TRA</b>									
Overnight visitors	266,000	113,960	105,413	122,279	165,077	206,346	227,496	250,815	276,523	290,349	24,349
Day visitors	299,000	134,640	124,542	155,678	210,165	220,673	243,292	268,229	295,723	310,509	11,509
Total visitation	565,000	248,600	229,955	277,957	375,241	427,019	470,788	519,044	572,246	600,858	35,858
Nights	537,000	230,062	212,807	256,786	354,915	453,961	523,242	601,955	691,308	754,909	217,909
Average length of overnight stay	2.02	2.02		2.1	2.15	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.6	
<b>Expenditure</b>											
Overnight visitors (\$ million)	\$111.000	\$47.555	\$43.988	\$52.097	\$72.090	\$91.825	\$110.278	\$132.440	\$151.617	\$162.223	\$51.223
Day visitors (\$ million)	\$35.000	\$15.761	\$14.578	\$18.606	\$25.746	\$27.547	\$31.535	\$36.101	\$41.329	\$44.220	\$9.220
Total expenditure (\$ million)	\$146.000	\$63.315	\$58.566	\$70.704	\$97.836	\$119.372	\$141.814	\$168.542	\$192.946	\$206.443	\$60.443
Average per overnight visitor	\$417.29		\$417.29	\$426.06	\$436.71	\$445.01	\$484.75	\$528.04	\$548.30	\$558.72	
Av per day visitor	\$117.06		\$117.06	\$119.52	\$122.50	\$124.83	\$129.62	\$134.59	\$139.75	\$142.41	



# TOURISM OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

## STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS

### **Focus Area 1: COVID Recovery**

Planning for a rapid recovery from the COVID pandemic by Commonwealth and State Governments began in late 2020, which proved to be well before the height of the pandemic. By mid-2022, although the vast majority of restrictions have been removed on travel and events, the level of coronavirus infections remains high and there is ongoing uncertainty and hesitancy surrounding full-scale resumption of domestic and international travel, migration, and business operations in several sectors. Wimmera Mallee Tourism has two key objectives to be addressed in its COVID Recovery focus area:

- Return the Wimmera Mallee visitor economy to pre-Covid levels by 2024: Visitor expenditure of \$90 million.
- Use the Covid pandemic experience to promote the Wimmera Mallee as a safe and healthy visitor destination (while exploring a lesser-travelled and distinctive part of Victoria).

### **Focus Area 2: Sustainable WMT Structure**

Wimmera Mallee Tourism Inc. is no longer a fledgling organisation. It has a solid track-record in creating new tourism products, liaising within its region to coordinate tourism activities, and delivering on research and planning projects (often in partnership with Wimmera Development Association). However, the region is effectively categorised by State Government as a sub-region within the broader Grampians Tourism region. There is a challenge in proving the sustainability of a tourism organisation in a relatively small and lower profile region. Sustainability needs to be demonstrated by effective partnerships and structured relationships with other organisations (local, regional and inter-regional).

The current WMT structure is somewhat unwieldy and is in need of restructuring. There is a large Board of up to 12, with only a few regular contributors. A smaller, more manageable, Board which offers a combination of local representation and skills would be more appropriate. Whether WMT expands to become an organisation providing services to members (tourism businesses and other stakeholders) should be resolved as part of this restructuring.

Local tourism structures and how two-way advice and support is provided to and from WMT also needs to be further developed. A 2008 feasibility study which ultimately led to the formation of Wimmera Mallee Tourism suggested that there should be strong local (ie local government area level) tourism groups which

would develop local products and would liaise with WMT on marketing and region-wide tourism activities. The result has been varied.

- In Buloke Shire a Tourism Board was established, initially as an advisory body, but subsequently incorporated as an association. This Board is large, with a representative from each of Buloke's 10 towns. It has many achievements since inception such as production of the 'Buloke Country' visitors guide, a photo competition, developing trails within the Shire, and a current project to establish a mounted farm machinery/ tractor trail.

- In Hindmarsh Shire a tourism advisory group commenced in Nhill and expanded to a Shire wide advisory group. It is not currently active. However, Hindmarsh Shire has developed individual town visitor brochures and visitor guides, and a Visit Hindmarsh website which has recently been incorporated into the Shire Council's website.

- In West Wimmera Shire there is a West Wimmera Tourism Advisory Group with 19 members who are representatives of the shire's seven largest towns and two Councillors. This group is quite active and is currently planning on appointing a Tourism Officer on a part-time basis (2 days per week).

- In Yarriambiack Shire there is a Yarriambiack Tourism advisory committee to Council. This committee has 16 community representative members (representing the Shire's 10 main towns), meets bi-monthly, and works on town brochures and updates, information sharing, developing signage, networking and other marketing activities. In addition, the 'town forums' in Yarriambiack's towns also embrace tourism initiatives as part of their broader town development mandate.

Wimmera Mallee Tourism has four key objectives to be addressed in its Sustainable Structure focus area:

- Securing a viable organisation, with appropriate resources, to brand, coordinate and promote tourism in the Wimmera Mallee.

- Recognition and awareness of WMT as the peak tourism body by the region's stakeholders.

- Implement formal and informal relationships which help to sustain WMT including related regional tourism organisations, economic development and business organisations, local councils, and community groups.

- Specifically develop inter-regional partnerships which contribute to visitor experiences in parts, or all, of the Wimmera Mallee with Grampians Tourism, Bendigo Tourism, Murray Mallee Tourism and Limestone Coast Tourism).

- Recognition from State and Commonwealth Governments of the status of Wimmera Mallee region as a distinctive tourism area (through the strength of an integrated economic development and tourism structure).



### ***Focus Area 3: Investment in New Tourism Products***

The Wimmera Mallee is distinctive: With the major exception of the Silo Art Trail, its features are subtle and take time to absorb. It does not have the striking visual variation of coast, mountains or valleys that are central to Victoria's and Australia's highest profile tourist regions, including the broader Grampians region. Its tourism attractions are all based on, or are linked to, either:

- Nature and eco-tourism: Semi-desert environs, broadacre landscapes, national parks, reserves, waterbodies, wetlands and stars/night skies
- Agriculture: Production systems, farm operations, and food and beverage products
- Culture: Existing and latent Indigenous sites, stories and interpretation, silo art, museums, historic buildings, and German migration heritage.
- Recreational facilities: Lakes and weir pools, parks and sportsgrounds.

These tourism assets offer considerable opportunities for further development and value adding, and this will be at the core of new product investment over the next five years. Priority projects which are under way or are subject to current funding applications include:

- Building on the extended regional silo art trail and associated infrastructure.
- Creating recreational lakes trails across the region's Wimmera Mallee Pipeline filled lakes and weir pools and a few catchment-supplied lakes (particularly Lakes Charlegrark, Wallace and Ratzcastle).
- New food and beverage visitor experiences (in partnership with WDA) by ensuring tourism trails of the region have links to regional food and beverage producers so that eating or buying regional food becomes part of the tourist visit wherever possible (including potential farm stays and/or tours).

Wimmera Mallee Tourism has two key objectives to be addressed in its Investment in New Tourism Products focus area:

- Creation of new tourism products by adding value to existing regional assets.
- Linking visitor experiences across multiple local government areas of the Wimmera Mallee.



*Sheep Hills Silo Art*

#### ***Focus Area 4: Adopting a Tourism Culture***

The central activity areas of main towns in the Wimmera Mallee have been unprepared for significant visitor numbers and most lack a tourism culture. Improvement is needed for these CAAs to look attractive, offer products and services that are responsive to day and overnight visitor needs, and that add value to trail experiences.

In the tourism 'characteristic' industry sectors, Wimmera Mallee region's level of under-representation is stark. Nationally, tourism characteristic industry sectors accommodate 13.2% of all jobs and have been increasing at an average of 2.3% per annum. In the Wimmera Mallee these sectors make up just 8.7% of jobs and have been decreasing at 2.0% per annum.

Improving the region's range, spread and quality of accommodation is a major component in the tourism culture development. Camping and caravanning options are relatively well supplied, but initiatives are proposed to address self-contained cabin accommodation at a range of sites and other forms of accommodation, including an eclectic accommodation project to utilise unused existing buildings.

Many regions around Australia have become food and beverage destinations, around local products and specialties with a range of artisanal producers. The Wimmera Mallee has been slow in branding with food and beverage themes, and its relatively small towns have been late in adopting contemporary 'café culture' business enterprises. However, this is now emerging, with the majority of towns now offering cafés and bakeries comparable with those in metropolitan and provincial city locations. There are some good cafés, takeaways, restaurants and niche food producers in the WM, but they are often part time, or Monday-Friday operations. They do not necessarily need to become 7 day per week businesses but there needs to be collaboration, coordination and referrals across the region for them to service the needs of the tourist trails market.

Wimmera Mallee Tourism has two key objectives to be addressed in its Adopting a Tourism Culture focus area:

- Progressive filling of gaps in visitor accommodation across the region.
- Skilling town business communities to acknowledge the value of tourist visitation and provide responsive services (such as coordination, referrals, complementary opening hours).



## Focus Area 5: Marketing and Branding

What distinguishes Wimmera Mallee from other Victorian regions is that its features are subtle and take time to absorb. It does not have the striking visual variation of coast, mountains or valleys that are central to Victoria's and Australia's highest profile tourist regions. It might be possible to take in the memorable scenes in a few hours or a day-trip to destinations like Phillip Island, Blue Mountains or Great Ocean Road however it takes longer to fully appreciate the serenity and gentle variations of Wimmera Mallee. Rather than other Victorian regions, Wimmera Mallee perhaps shares closest physical characteristics with the Orana/Far West region of New South Wales, Queensland's south-west and Western Australia's wheatbelt, but with a major difference that Wimmera Mallee is more closely settled due to its legacy of small towns typically separated by distances of 25-30 kilometres and rarely more than 40 kilometres.

The tourism sector was woken by the 'discovery' of landscapes and photographic artistry at Lake Tyrrell by Chinese tourists just 2 years prior to the COVID pandemic. Other significant landscapes include the Little Desert (which is largely covered with a wide variety of native vegetation and has no fewer than 670 native plant species. It also is inhabited by 220 bird species and 60 species of mammals and reptiles and is the location of Victoria's first Indigenous Land Use Agreement), the Big Desert Wilderness Park, Wyperfeld National Park, Lake Albacutya Park, Lake Hindmarsh, and the diverse ecosystems of West Wimmera's extensive wetlands.

The existing history and heritage attractions focus on post-colonial settlement history (concentrating on agricultural practices, farm machinery and equipment, transport, immigration and buildings). Indigenous heritage is almost non-existent (the Johnny Mullagh Interpretive Centre within the Harrow Discovery Centre being the only real exception (and even this relates to post-colonial settlement Indigenous history – the Indigenous Australian Cricket Team's tour to England). Barengi Gadjin Land Council, representing the traditional owners of Wimmera Mallee region (Wotjaboluk Country) is ready to move into tourism enterprises, but has insufficient personnel and tourism services resources to begin working in this area without support. Indigenous experiences might encompass:

- Camps at Mt Arapiles-Tooan State Park.
- Cultural Tours and Ceremonial Experiences on Wotjaboluk Country.
- Little Desert National Park: nature-based, Indigenous cultural tours and nocturnal experience
- Lake Tyrrell/Boorong Night Sky Tours
- Interpretive tours of West Wimmera wetlands and post-colonial stories.

Wimmera Mallee Tourism has one (broad) key objective to be addressed in its Marketing and Branding focus area, which stems from the new WMT Marketing Strategy:

- To introduce new branding, imaging and marketing plans to clearly differentiate Wimmera Mallee from all other Victorian regions, using the agreed 4 'Brand Pillars': Big Space and Nature (Explore), Arts and Creativity (Discover), Culture and Heritage (Learn), and Agriculture and Food (Experience).

Figure 4 Strategic Focus Areas



## SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

The specific strategies, by focus area, are summarised in Table 4.

**Table 4 Strategies for 2022-27**

Focus Area	Objectives	Specific Strategies
<p><b>Covid Recovery</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Return the Wimmera Mallee visitor economy to pre-Covid levels by 2024: Visitor expenditure of \$90 million.</li> <li>• Use the Covid pandemic experience to promote the Wimmera Mallee as a safe and healthy visitor destination.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sustainable WMT Structure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Securing a viable organisation, with appropriate resources, to brand, coordinate and promote tourism in the Wimmera Mallee.</li> <li>• Recognition and awareness of WMT as the peak tourism body by the region's stakeholders.</li> <li>• Implement formal and informal relationships which help to sustain WMT including related regional tourism organisations, economic development and business organisations, local councils, and community groups.</li> <li>• Recognition from State and Commonwealth Governments of the status of Wimmera Mallee region as a distinctive tourism area (through the strength of an integrated economic development and tourism structure).</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Resumption of all tourism attraction access, support services and recurring/regular events.</li> <li>2. Re-energise the region's long-standing events. For example: Fishing competitions (Jeparit, Edenhope), Y-Fest, Murtoa Big Weekend, Barley Ball, Charlegrark Music Festival, Goroke Rodeo, rowing, skiing and other sporting carnivals/competitions. Promote/support newer events such as the Steampunk Festival and Esoteric Festival.</li> <li>3. Develop new events which add value to the region's key tourism assets, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Performances at silo art installations</li> <li>- Festivals of night skies</li> <li>- Competitions at multiple lakes and weir pools.</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Formalise the relationship between WMT and WDA to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Undertake joint projects with both economic development and tourism objectives</li> <li>- Provide an auspicing, project management and employing vehicle for WMT.</li> </ul> </li> <li>5. Agree on a single local, agreed, tourism group/organisation in each LGA. Develop clear lines of responsibility/authority and clarity on processes for local consultations and contributions to WMT</li> <li>6. Establish an online stakeholder communication platform through WDA's "My Communities" section of its website.</li> </ol>
		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Develop a quarterly newsletter for tourism industry stakeholders, to be available on the WDA/WMT 'my communities' platform.</li> <li>8. Restructure WMT from an incorporated association with a Board of 6-8 Directors, and 8 member organisations: the 4 local tourism groups (1 from each local government area.</li> <li>9. Decide on the inter-regional partnerships which contribute to visitor experiences in parts, or all, of the Wimmera Mallee (Grampians Tourism, Bendigo Tourism, Bendigo Region of Gastronomy, Limestone Coast Tourism, and Murray Mallee Tourism)</li> <li>10. Deliver projects under the "Supporting Regional Tourism" in 2023 and achieve the visitor numbers and visitor economy targets over the next 5 years.</li> <li>11. Employment, by WDA of a WMT Executive Officer and Project Officer to drive the 2022-23 work program and to secure support for the 2024-27 work program and an ongoing financially viable operation.</li> </ol>

<b>Focus Area</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Specific Strategies</b>
Investment in New Tourism Products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of new tourism products by adding value to existing regional assets.</li> <li>• Linking visitor experiences across multiple local government areas of the Wimmera Mallee</li> </ul>	<p>12. Completion of the region's silo art installations with a series of tour route options, also showing other nearby attractions and services.</p> <p>13. Recreational Lakes Trails Design. This will use the WM lakes and weir pools network as a visitation and recreational base to formalise links, create new visitor experience themes, and cross-promote the lakes with other natural and cultural attractions in the region, increasing visitation and economic yield, and entrenching the waterbodies as an important part of the WM's tourism product range.</p>
Adopting a tourism culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progressive filling of gaps in visitor accommodation across the region.</li> <li>• Skilling town business communities to acknowledge the value of tourist visitation and provide responsive services.</li> </ul>	<p>14. Artisanal Food and Beverage Visitor Experiences (in support of WDA). The project will improve, or build on, the visitor experience to Wimmera Southern Mallee through local food and beverages by ensuring the existing tourism trail products of the region have links to regional food and beverage producers so that eating or buying regional food becomes part of the tourist visit wherever possible. It will also create new markets for the region's small producers. Agritourism could be an extension, or further stage, to this project.</p> <p>15. Refreshing the existing cultural heritage offer. The history and heritage tourism sector is somewhat tired and in need of invigoration. There is generational change in the management of the available facilities. The attractions are often run by community-based committees, reliant on volunteers, and they are not particularly responsive to the variable demands of visitors.</p>
		<p>16. Encourage and support traditional owner groups to participate in new visitor economy business enterprises.</p>
		<p>17. Feasibility assessment of Eclectic Accommodation. The activity will determine the feasibility of a project to complement and diversify current regional accommodation options by assessing the feasibility of offering eclectic accommodation facilities using existing unused, vacant, and significant buildings.</p>
		<p>18. Communicate the annual value of the visitor economy in WM towns on a regular basis. The interest in Wimmera Mallee visitor experiences in recent years has been overwhelming for local communities and they have been unprepared to take advantage of the commercial opportunities from the unprecedented number of visitors. There are several areas requiring improved leadership and capability development. Use this evidence to 'sign-up' businesses to WMT as either members or informal participants (perhaps using the ATDW or other database).</p>
		<p>19. Encourage retail and food service businesses to consider visitor trends and needs in setting opening/trading hours.</p>
		<p>20. Increase the range and number of food service businesses in the region to approach the Victorian average. Employment in food services in WM is just 2.95% of all jobs while the Victorian average is more than double (at 6.05%).</p>

Focus Area	Objectives	Specific Strategies
		<p>21. Creating enhanced visitor experiences from the new self-contained cabins at caravan parks across the region.</p> <p>22. Theming all Wimmera Mallee products around the distinguishing features of the region (with associated branding and imaging): Broadacre grains, semi-desert environs, night skies, freshwater lakes and wetlands, history (particularly agricultural machinery and systems), culture (Indigenous stories, sites and interpretation)</p> <p>23. Use augmented reality/visual reality systems to enhance visitor experiences and enable more insightful self-guided tours of the region.</p>
Marketing and branding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce new branding, imaging and marketing plans to clearly differentiate Wimmera Mallee from all other Victorian regions, using the agreed 4 'Brand Pillars': Big Space and Nature (Explore), Arts and Creativity (Discover), Culture and Heritage (Learn), and Agriculture and Food (Experience).</li> </ul>	<p>24. Promotion of the region's remote landscapes. There is a large area classified as 'Remote Australia' in the Australian Bureau of Statistics "remoteness structure" (with a section of Far East Gippsland known as the wilderness coast, being the only other remote part of Victoria). The landscapes and desert flora and fauna in this region are distinctive. This is not well promoted by local businesses, nor is it linked to the region's trails.</p>
		<p>25. Confirm the 4 'Brand Pillars' developed in the WMT Marketing strategy and implement the associated range of marketing actions (detailed in the WMT Strategic Marketing Plan 2022-23)</p>

