

# OPPORTUNITIES

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*PYRENEES, ARARAT & NORTHERN GRAMPIANS*



• A REGIONAL WORKFORCE, MIGRATION, HOUSING & TRANSPORT INITIATIVE •

**PYRENEES**  
SHIRE



Ararat Rural City





The Opportunities Pyrenees, Ararat and Northern Grampians (OPAN) is a joint initiative of these three Councils and has been funded by the Victorian Government.

This document provides an overview of the project to inform stakeholders and the community of the background, direction and upcoming activities of the project.

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Cover photo: Stawell from Big Hill,  
by Jeff McMillan.

This photo: Green Hill Lake, Ararat,  
by Lionel Holt

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# WHAT IS OPAN?

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Opportunities Pyrenees Ararat and Northern Grampians (OPAN) is a 3 year project to directly address the existing and future shortage of skilled and unskilled workers across the Pyrenees, Ararat and Northern Grampians local government areas (LGAs) by focusing on:

- **Workforce Planning**
- **Migration**
- **Housing, and**
- **Transport**



Alexandra Gardens, Ararat

## BACKGROUND

Across the three local government areas (LGA), employers have been struggling to recruit and retain workers. On top of this, the region is expected to experience a construction boom as key projects and business expansions take place, resulting in around 1000 new ongoing jobs over the next 5 years.

A few of the major initiatives include:

- Completion of the ~\$29 million Grampians Peaks Trail in the Grampians National Park due in 2020. By 2025, total expenditures by visitors to the Grampians are expected to reach \$85 million per year. This spending is expected to support an estimated 425 direct full time jobs for people in the Grampians region (Grampians Peaks Trail Master Plan 2014)
- Completion of the Western Highway duplication works from Ballarat to Stawell, with \$672 million invested and a further \$360 million committed by the Australian Government. Works will include adding two lanes in each direction between Buangor to Stawell with a central median to separate traffic and the Beaufort, Ararat and Great Western Bypasses. This will create construction jobs during the project and support economic growth, reduce freight and logistics costs, as well as reduce commuting time and improve road safety in the region once the works are complete.
- East Grampians Rural Pipeline, securing water supply to the agricultural sector with \$62 million committed from the Victorian and Australian Governments, creating an estimated 350 jobs during construction and around 82 ongoing jobs once complete.



Gum San Chinese Heritage Centre, Ararat



Pyrenees Unearthed Wine + Food Festival

- Victorian Renewable Energy Target of 50% by 2030 and the development of Grampians Regional Roadmap to Zero plan, which will drive millions of investment into renewable energy projects in the region and create ongoing technician jobs.
- The Ballarat West Employment Zone (BWEZ) to comprise of over 438 hectares of industrial, wholesale, logistics and other businesses with strong access to road, rail and ports, and will provide job opportunities for residents of the OPAN region.
- Nectar Farms hydroponic glasshouse project at the Bulgana Green Power Hub near Stawell, with over 100 ongoing jobs expected at the completion of the Stage 1, 10 hectare state of the art facility, and a further 30 hectares planned for Stage 2, creating 250 ongoing jobs and 300 construction jobs.
- \$10 million Stawell Underground Physics Lab, creating construction jobs and supporting around 80 ongoing jobs.
- \$1.8 billion investment into a stronger prison system in the 2019/20 Victorian Budget, supporting jobs at the Hopkins Correctional Centre in Ararat and Langi Kal Kal Prison near Beaufort
- \$6 million expansion of AF Gason in Ararat, creating over 15 new jobs
- Reactivation of the Stawell Gold Mine, boosting the local economy



Waubra Wind Farm. Image source: Acciona.com.au

Many baby boomers will also be retiring from the workforce. Based on 2016 ABS Census data, approx. 1300 people, or around 20% of the existing workforce in the 3 LGAs, will reach retirement age (65 year old) in the next 5 years.

There are not enough workers within the region to fill all of these forecasted job vacancies. As at December 2018, the unemployment rate in the 3 LGAs was very low, between 3.89% and 4.2%. This is at the lower end of the unemployment range that some economists describe as 'full employment', where there are a small number of people in between jobs, and where anyone who is able and wants a job will have one at fair wages.

Without action to attract and retain a new workforce to the region, we risk missing out on an opportunity to grow our local economies and communities.



Halls Gap from Baroka lookout - Clavan Kruth



*Karl Meyer*  
PHOTOGRAPHY

Stawell Gold Mine

# W O R K F O R C E P L A N N I N G

Each region has specific workforce needs, depending on the existing and emerging industries and communities. Workforce planning is required to identify current and future vacancies, and effectively attract a suitable workforce, match workers and jobs, promote skills development and fully utilise existing skills. While existing and future workforce shortages in some industries are known through the engagement work that Regional Development Victoria and the local councils have undertaken, detailed workforce planning is required to fully understand the issue across all sectors. Therefore, the goal of the OPAN Workforce Planning Strategy is to inform and ensure the Migration, Housing and Transport Strategies achieve meaningful outcomes.

Objective	Issues & Opportunities	Actions
1.1 Identify all current and expected job vacancies out to 5 years	<p>Effective workforce planning is an important element of good business planning, but not all businesses have the capabilities and resources to do a workforce plan. Fortunately, there are a number of free online resources to assist businesses with this task.</p> <p>New technologies and changes in environmental, economic, political and social factors will change how we work and the skills and capabilities needed. Forecasting these workforce needs as best we can will help ensure sustained business success and growth.</p>	1.1.1 Encourage and support local employers to undertake workforce planning by sharing publicly available guides and toolkits.
	<p>There are multiple major projects set to occur in the OPAN region, and many industries undergoing expansions that will result in new non-ongoing and ongoing job opportunities.</p>	1.1.2 Prepare and distribute a survey to gather upcoming job vacancy details across all industries
	<p>A significant portion of the existing workforce is expected to retire within the next few years. This may create a volume of critical job vacancies that could impact the rest of the community if they are unable to be filled.</p>	

Objective	Issues & Opportunities	Actions
1.2 Address workforce gaps	<p>The OPAN Migration, Housing and Transport Strategies provide frameworks for implementing activities to address workforce gaps.</p> <p>There are many different organisations and projects occurring in the region that are keen to collaborate on supporting employers to fill skills shortages from the existing local workforce as well as attracting, developing and retaining a new workforce in this region. These include but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federation University</li> <li>• South West Tafe</li> <li>• Jobs &amp; Training Connection Ararat/Stawell Project</li> <li>• AMES Australia, etc</li> </ul> <p>Regional coordination of workforce attraction and retention will maximise outcomes for individual businesses and for families relocating to this region.</p>	<p>1.2.1 Review and refine OPAN activities to ensure workforce gaps are effectively addressed.</p> <p>1.2.2 Develop and strengthen key partnerships for success</p>

# M I G R A T I O N



The populations of the Ararat and Northern Grampians LGAs were forecast to decline by 2031, with only a modest increase forecasted for the Pyrenees Shire (Victoria in Future 2016). The recent and upcoming economic initiatives provide an opportunity to turn this trend of decline around, but in order for our communities and local economies to grow and thrive, we need to attract and retain workers and their families from elsewhere.

Regional migration results in greater diversity, higher average incomes and economies of scale. Livability of regional areas is comparable to, or in some ways better than, outer suburbs of metropolitan areas. The difference in average incomes of outer metropolitan suburbs and regional cities is small at 10%, but average house prices in regional centres is less than half the cost of homes in the metropolitan suburbs (Regional Population Growth - Are We Ready? 2019). Therefore, the goal of the OPAN Migration Strategy is to increase migration of new residents into the 3 OPAN LGAs.

Objective	Issues & Opportunities	Actions
2.1 Organise and prepare the local community for regional migration	There is strong support from the local councils, employers and community organisations for attracting and retaining migrants to our community, but there is limited support services locally to assist migrants to successfully settle. A steering committee is needed to provide strategic direction, leadership, local expertise and to plan and organise the settlement facilities necessary to support a regional migration program in a way that benefits the local and settler communities.	2.1.1 Establish a Project Steering Committee
	In other parts of Australia, migrants generally remain in regional areas where the communities are welcoming, prepared and ready to embrace newcomers.	2.1.2 Consult with the community and work in partnership with them to help their preparedness to welcome migrants and newcomers.
	Employers and managers may need help to support migrant employees successfully settle into their new workplace, but may not have the capabilities or resources to do so.	2.1.3 Work in partnership with employers to foster a productive and culturally diverse workforce.
2.2 Attract workers who have the right skills and capabilities for the specific workforce shortages occurring in the OPAN region	More than 90 percent of migrants settling in Victoria are doing so in Melbourne. The existing and future job vacancies across the OPAN project area could be well suited to migrant workers, but there is a lack of awareness among migrant communities of these job opportunities.	2.2.1 Work in partnership with AMES Australia and other initiatives that support regional migration to promote employment opportunities and livability gains in the OPAN region, as well as match migrant jobseekers to jobs and support their successful settlement.
	Migrant jobseekers may not have experience working in Australian workplaces and our systems, for example what documents to provide for a job application, superannuation, taxation and industrial relations.	
	The OPAN region has a number of established migrant communities who may want to support their relatives and friends to relocate here for job opportunities.	2.2.2 Reach out to established migrant communities and support their growth.
The OPAN project could assist redundant workers from industry or factory closures in other parts of Victoria by promoting job opportunities in this region.	2.2.3 Engage with companies and affected workers about employment opportunities.	
2.3 Support retention by helping new residents and their families become a part of the community.	The OPAN region has a strong community of volunteers, clubs, groups and societies that can foster community cohesion.	2.3.1 Organise and facilitate opportunities for the community to engage and involve migrants in activities and events.
	Relocating to a regional area can be isolating for partners or other family members, especially if they have limited english and/or caring responsibilities.	
Once successfully settled, migrant communities are keen to give back to their new communities and share their cultures and traditions.	2.3.2 Support and provide opportunities for migrants to contribute to and enrich our communities.	



# H O U S I N G

It is difficult for new residents to relocate here while housing markets across the 3 OPAN LGAs remain very tight. With an average 1.16 workers per household (people in the labour force divided by the total number of private dwellings, ABS Census 2016), there is not enough housing stock to cater for the expected influx of workers and their families that are needed to fill vacancies. Further to the lack of available stock, the quality and variety of housing is limited.

Objective	Issues & Opportunities	Actions
3.1 Unlock potential rental options from the existing housing stock	<p>At the 2016 ABS Census there was 2,158 unoccupied private dwellings in the 3 OPAN LGAs, or 15.6% of total dwellings. This is higher than Victoria (11.7%) and Australia (11.2%). These may provide rental homes that are suitable for families with children.</p>	<p>3.1.1 Implement a 'Rent Your Spare' campaign in partnership with employers and real estate agents to encourage more people to rent out suitable empty homes.</p>
	<p>The proportion of dwellings that are rented in the 3 OPAN LGAs (21%) is also lower than Victoria (28.7%) and Australia (30.9%) (2016 ABS Census)</p>	<p>3.1.2 Encourage property investors to purchase existing homes so they can be rented out.</p>
3.2 Build new rental homes to accommodate the needs of new and existing residents	<p>In regional areas that have experienced multiple major construction projects within a short period, the availability and affordability of rental homes for low income and vulnerable individuals and families became very limited, which increased their risk of homelessness.</p> <p>With an ageing population, the need for homes that are accessible and comply with universal design principles is expected to increase.</p> <p>Many upcoming projects in the OPAN region involve an influx of temporary construction workers who have different housing needs to the permanent workers and their families. This short term housing demand for smaller, low maintenance dwellings could be an opportunity to build homes that meet the future needs of an ageing population and low income or smaller households.</p>	<p>3.2.1 Work with employers, landowners, developers, investors and/or consortia, including not-for-profit housing developers, to find innovative solutions that meet both the short term construction worker needs and long term housing needs of the 3 OPAN LGAs.</p>
	<p>The 'Build-to-Rent' sector is growing in Australia and may be a potential solution to adding quality rentals into the existing range of housing options.</p>	



Objective	Issues & Opportunities	Actions
3.3 Provide land and housing development opportunities to meet demand	<p>New residents, once settled into the region, and existing residents may want to build their own homes but are uncertain of what is involved.</p>	<p>3.3.1 Work with Councils, builders and landowners to support new and existing residents to build their own homes through community information sessions and publicly available resources.</p>
	<p>The 3 OPAN Councils have recently completed or are in the process of identifying suitable areas for new housing developments.</p> <p>The Ararat Sustainable Growth Future (2014) targeted the following towns: Ararat, Lake Bolac, Willaura, Pomonal, Moyston, Elmhurst and Buangor. Further work is being undertaken by the Ararat Rural City Council to progress the development of suitable land parcels.</p>	<p>3.3.2 Support a healthy residential land supply pipeline by working with Council Planners and landowners to encourage and facilitate subdivisions where appropriate.</p>
	<p>The Northern Grampians Housing Needs and Residential Land Supply Assessment (2018) identified residential lot capacity in Stawell, Great Western, Halls Gap and St Arnaud, with reasonable but smaller capacities in Glenorchy, Marnoo, and Navarre. The upcoming Stawell 2030 Structural Plan will provide an integrated land use strategy to cater to and manage the future growth and development of Stawell.</p>	
	<p>Pyrenees Futures is currently underway and will result in township framework plans for Beaufort, Avoca, Lexton, Snake Valley, Waubra, Moonambel, Amphitheatre and Landsborough. These plans will provide certainty and direction for development in the Pyrenees Shire.</p>	
	<p>The vast majority of existing dwellings has 3 or more bedrooms (2016 ABS Census). Consistent with REMPLAN analysis, the number of single (or lone) person households (3835) greatly outweighs the number of 1 and 2 bedroom dwellings (2430 combined). Some of these occupants may wish to downsize but the supply of smaller homes is relatively limited. If these occupants were able to live in smaller homes that better met their needs, this may make their existing larger homes available to new families.</p>	<p>3.3.3 Work with Council Planners to identify suitable areas for smaller homes such as townhouses and/or apartments and support their development where appropriate.</p>



# T R A N S P O R T

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Existing public transport services (bus and rail) does not support potential workers from neighboring regional centres such as Ballarat, Maryborough and Horsham to work within this region. Further to that, the location of some employment sites are not serviced at all by public transport services, making it difficult for potential employees without a car or drivers licence to access these job opportunities. The overall limited public transport availability and connectivity within the region is generally a disincentive to people considering relocating to the area. Therefore, the goal of the OPAN Transport Strategy is to improve livability by increasing transport connectivity across the region

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Issues &amp; Opportunities</b>	<b>Actions</b>
4.1 Support community led local transport initiatives	<p>Lack of public transport connectivity to some employment sites means potential workers could struggle or be unable to access these job opportunities.</p> <p>For households with one vehicle, the employed household member/s are likely to use the car during the day to get to work. Without a public transport option, the non-working household member/s would be unable to access goods and services, and may experience increased social isolation as a result.</p> <p>There are opportunities for community-led local transport solutions, such as carpooling, volunteering to drive new residents to work, shopping or appointments, or helping others to learn to drive. People may also be willing to provide or share second hand bikes.</p>	4.1.1 Facilitate and support innovative and community led local transport solutions.
4.2 Enhance the public transport network to better meet the needs of the OPAN region	<p>There is a larger workforce pool in Ballarat, Maryborough and Horsham that may be interested in working within the Pyrenees, Ararat and Northern Grampians LGAs. However, current public transport options are limited and retaining workers who commute by car from these regional centres has been difficult for employers.</p> <p>Efforts to attract new residents to the OPAN region and the resulting growth in population and jobs will drive the need for government to invest in infrastructure and services to move people and goods on our roads, freight and public transport network.</p> <p>Increasing transport networks is consistent with regional and state strategic plans, such as the Central Highlands and Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Growth Plans (2014), Plan Melbourne 2017-2050, and Infrastructure Victoria's 'Growing Victoria's Potential' (2019).</p>	4.2.1 Work in partnership with the Victorian Department of Transport to develop, advocate for and implement a plan to grow transport connectivity in the region.

