

2021

ANNUAL REPORT



WEST VIC BUSINESS
LINKING BUSINESS ACROSS REGIONS

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EXECUTIVE

Paul Atherton

Chairperson

Industry Sector - Retail

Peter McGrath

Vice-Chair

Industry Sector - Professional Services

Catherine Shirrefs

Treasurer/Acting Administration

Industry Sector - Motor Industry

Stacey Taig

Ambassador

Employee

Administrative Assistant

YTBA

Bart Turgoose

Business Support Officer

Employee & Cadet

Andrea Cross

Executive Committee Member

Industry Sector - Building & Construction

Sue Beasely

Executive Committee Member

Industry Sector - Homebased

Jessica Koenig Fisher

Executive Committee Member

Industry Sector - Education

Allison Roberts

Executive Committee Member

Industry Sector - Retail

Josh Sykes

Executive Committee Member

Industry Sector - Advertising & Media

Amy Brooksby

Executive Committee Member

Industry Sector - Homebased & Cadet

Chan Uoy

Executive Committee Member

Shire Business Representative - Hindmarsh

Lachie Doyle

Executive Committee Member

Shire Business Representative - West Wimmera

Yarriambiack & Nth Grampians

Shire Business Representatives YTBA

Annie Mintern

Guest Member

Shire Representative, Horsham Rural City Council

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

In sitting down to write this review of the past year, I was contemplating how do I avoid slipping into the negativity of the Covid 19 pandemic that has been a constant in our lives over the last 12 months. I was also reflecting on how a researcher in 15 to 20 years, wanting to anecdotally examine the impact of Covid 19 on business, might seek this annual report to glean information. The only way to describe the past 12 months is as a roller coaster ride of highs and lows for all in business regardless of their sector.

It is true that some businesses have thrived under the current conditions whilst others, particularly in hospitality, accommodation, events and tourism have suffered incredibly. Those who survived and thrived are almost apologetic and ashamed to say so, and at the other end of the scale, for those who have battled hard, we hold grave concerns for. Who would have thought that under lockdown conditions, we would see issues emerge such as labour, material and goods shortages, in addition to booming house prices, whilst employees are stood down. Our language has also changed. Words and phrases like Zoom, Netflix, revenge spending, check-in and pivoting have become our norm.

We took a very deliberate decision 2 years ago to make Business Horsham, as it was then, a progressive and relevant Chamber of Commerce to assist in achieving greater sustainability of our business community. We continue to focus on the three core pillars of encouraging young entrepreneurs, the successful sale of businesses through closing the gap between seller and buyer, and promoting and encouraging residential living in central business areas. The completion of our Strategic Plan is significant, as it now positions us on a much greater scale, and provides opportunity for increased funding and sponsorship. The uptake of the Shop Local Gift Cards has been, and continues to be increasingly successful, and we are entering a new phase of exploring partnerships with international chambers of commerce, in order to give our members the opportunity to make invaluable connections and take their product or service to the world.

I would like to thank Horsham Rural City Council for their enormous support, encouragement and keeping us accountable. Both council and staff have been fantastic to work with. We look forward to a very successful and ongoing relationship. We are also excited by the welcome we have received from businesses and other shires in the region, and we look forward to what is yet to unfold.

For West Vic Business, as we are now known, it has been an incredibly busy and exciting time. I thank our Ambassador Stacey Taig for the incredible work she has done, and to Bart Turgoose our ever enthusiastic Cadet and Business Support Officer. I also sincerely thank, each and every member of the Executive Committee, who volunteer their time and energy and have provided such inspiring leadership, creating a truly inclusive, vibrant, professional and yet fun environment to work. Finally a big thankyou to our members for maintaining their belief in us, we appreciate each and every one of you.



Chair, West Vic Business

2021 IN RETROSPECT

Businesses across the globe have spent the past 18 months adapting to the new COVID norm, finding new means in which to ensure and support their bottom line.

Daily operations, events and programs have all been heavily impacted by continuous lockdowns and restrictions imposed to limit the spread of the virus. Innovation has been key, and for those with a curious and creative mind, recreating and reimagining their business has been like a reawakening. Unfortunately for some, this has not come as easy. Regardless, change is steadfast and business owners are now seeking inspiration and guidance to see them through.

MESSAGE FROM THE AMBASSADOR

Throughout the past year, I have had the privilege of supporting the truly incredible business owners across our region. It has been a humbling experience, and one which I will remember as both challenging, confronting and inspiring.

The community as a whole has moved through the various stages of grief with this pandemic... denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. For most, we are thankfully moving towards the later. However our business owners are continuing to face ongoing stresses with the introduction of the varying regulations imposed to take us through to 'business as usual'. My hope is that support continues at all level of government, as the lingering effects of this crisis will be felt for a long time to come. In the meantime, I offer my support, guidance and shoulder to those who need it, and I do so with pride of who we are and where we live.

Stacey Taig

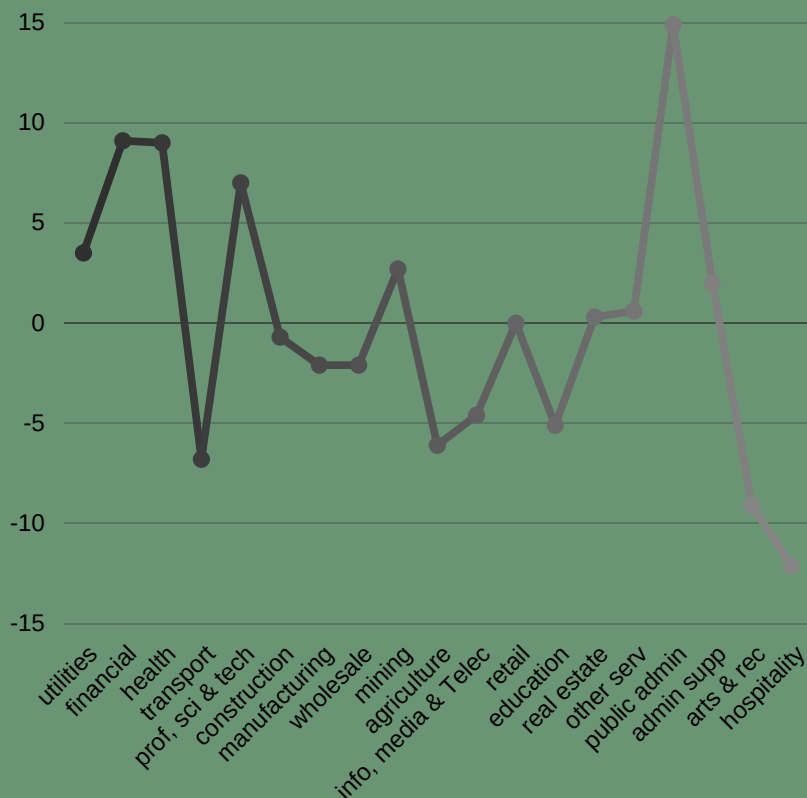
Ambassador, West Vic Business

GLOBAL REVIEW



There is a synchronicity and correlation between the performance of countries at present due to our unprecedented events.

Strongest Performing Job Markets in Regional Victoria as of July 2021



The expectation for global economic growth fell short of the 5.8% increase this year, a rapid upward swing from the December 2020 projections. The rollout of vaccines in many of the advanced economies has been propelling the improvement, as has the substantial fiscal stimulus by the United States

Victoria has been one of the hardest hit in Australia in terms of the economic downturn throughout the pandemic, however it has displayed impressive recovery, being the second fastest growing State in March of this year. As suspected the hospitality, arts and recreation sectors have taken the biggest loss. Regional Victoria is experiencing a slower recovery than the metropolitan areas, however we remain confident that will shift once the State opens.



REPOSITIONING

After a request in October of 2020 by Mainstreet Australia, Business Horsham reached out to the surrounding shires to offer support for the rollout of the State Government's COVID Support Package, specifically targeting business groups and chambers of commerce.

This identified a long standing issue with the ongoing sustainability of smaller business, action and progress groups, due largely to the logistical and financial implications required of them.

Ensuring continued engagement and commitment has been a challenge, with many groups across the state and nation folding. Driven almost solely by volunteer hours in many instances, it is a difficult, almost impossible structure to maintain and foster on a smaller scale.

With this in mind, Business Horsham executive agreed that they would extend their serviceable area to include the shires of Hindmarsh, West Wimmera, Yarriambiack and Northern Grampians, in addition to the current membership base of the municipality of Horsham.

The development of chapters within these shires will ensure that the business communities across the region are supported equally, and that existing groups are provided the opportunity to retain independence without the burden of the formalities behind such structures.

REBRANDING

The decision to rebrand was a natural one, with the consideration of the expansion and changing face of Business Horsham. A measured and reflective process was undertaken when discussing and reaching a final decision upon the the new name of 'West Vic Business'. The name not only reflects the new membership base, but also permits further expansion and additional chapters.

Next followed the development of a new logo depicting our region and the intertwining nature of our communities. After an open call across the shires, this task was awarded to Yarriambiack based design company Aubrey & Areegra. The inspiration for the now entitled 'infinity sphere' was drawn from the expansive skies, open plains and waters that are representative of our way of life in north west Victoria. The three dimensional, interlocking and linking image echoes the connection and network between industry groups across the shires.



EVENTS

Garnering statewide media attention, our Business Reimagined Event - Series 1, featuring guest speakers including the then Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack and Chair of the Victorian State Government's Small Business Ministerial Council Stuart Benjamin and Marc Sleeman, CEO of Grampians Tourism, was an incredible success. With over 100 attendees and a long waiting list, this event proved West Vic Business's ability to deliver on large scale events and projects. Thanks are extended to the Victorian State Government for funding via the COVID Business Support program..

The Victorian Small Business Commissioner's breakfast in March, celebrating the Small Business Friendly Charter, was coordinated and facilitated by West Vic Business, once again attracting large numbers and a full listing, making it one of the most successful events of it's kind for the VSBC office.



PROJECT

BUSINESS SUCCESSION

The implementation of the pilot program for the Business Succession component of the Business Reimagined Project, saw a core group of local business owners from across sectors and shires, discussing and evaluating the salability of their business, utilising tools such as the value adder questionnaire.

Participants in this ongoing program were afforded the ability to debrief and discuss personal situations in a non-threatening, confidential and supportive environment.

This thought provoking process allowed those involved to take a deeper look at their business, and take on other's opinions and perceptions about possible improvements and/or shifts in direction, to improve the overall appeal of their business to potential buyers.

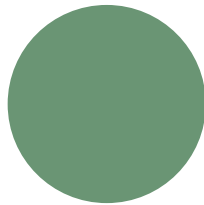
West Vic Business plans to continue to build on this program to provide essential links between the buyer and seller, also utilising the Young Entrepreneurs Program to identify and develop a network of prospective future business owners seeking opportunities within the region.

The potential development of local case studies and architectural design imaging, is an additional arm to this project, developed to provide vision to those that are unable to see the potential in businesses that have been for sale long term. Helping ensure the ongoing sustainability of our business communities is key to our future prosperity.



Telesis Consultant, Peter Morris

PROJECT YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS



The Young Entrepreneurs Program is proving to be one of the most successful and exciting projects West Vic Business has undertaken in its 16 years.

Identifying the need to open up and develop opportunities for young people seeking to stay within our region, rather than embark upon tertiary studies at universities elsewhere, West Vic Business created the Cadet Program. The outline was to support fledgling businesses under two years in operation, linking them with business sponsors who meet regularly and provide guidance and the financial support of membership with WVB.

Relationships with local secondary education providers has commenced, and it is hoped that this will deliver strong results for both the succession of businesses and retention of youth across our region.

Future development of a training program preparing young entrepreneurs for business management and ownership, is the next stage and development phase of this project. Utilising existing partnerships, discussions have already commenced to lay the foundation and build upon the program's current cadetship.

PROJECT URBAN LIVING

'Look up for opportunities' has become the mantra for the West Vic Business Urban Living Program. Working in conjunction with local shire projects of a similar vein, the need to seek 'atop a shop' residential options to cater to the current and impending need for increased housing, is now becoming a crucial part of the overall solution.

The vast open landscape of the second story of Firebrace Street, Horsham exhibits the potential for growth and the revitalisation of our struggling central business areas.

Once again providing vision to those who can seek to benefit from these developments is key, and working with local government to ensure planning requirements are considered and worked through, will be a challenge, but one which is worth the rewards.



PROJECT SHOP HORSHAM GIFT CARD

The Shop Horsham Gift Card has seen incredible growth over the past 12 months, with bulk purchases from larger organisations such as the Victoria Police Force, Wimmera Health Care Group and businesses wanting to support their community contributing to sales of \$42,000. Staff Christmas gifts and reward programs, have all assisted in increasing awareness of the Shop Horsham Gift Card, and encouraging spending not just in retail, but across all sectors. In order to assist in injecting much needed funds into our local businesses, West Vic Business expanded its support to the wider community, donating Shop Horsham Gift Cards to serviceable organisations throughout the year.

These included the encouragement of Student of the Year Awards across primary and secondary schools within the municipality of Horsham in December of 2020. This was done in acknowledgement of the impact of the pandemic upon our youth, and the level of resilience and adaptability that they have shown throughout. Special mention goes to Horsham West & Haven Primary School. Encouraging their school leadership team to review the West Vic Business 'Shop Horsham Gift Card Participating Business' list, select a purchase, and then donate the gift to charity, rather than award a single student. A great initiative and lesson in paying it forward..

Gift Cards totaling \$700 were donated to struggling event organisations including the Horsham Fishing Competition, Horsham Agricultural Society Sheep Show, Wartook Garden Show and the local Wimmera Veterans Centre in support of their activities.

In addition, \$1000 worth of cards were gifted to the Centre for Participation, to be included in their care packages for seniors that had been identified as being at risk throughout the last lockdown period. As this program moves from strength to strength, greater development of its use, purpose and application will be made, along with complimentary technological support mechanisms and platforms. Driving and encouraging economic recovery is at the core of the West Vic Business purpose, and the Shop Horsham Gift Card is a vehicle to assist in the organisation achieving tangible results.



Photo courtesy of Amanda Wilson

MEMBERSHIP

West Vic Business membership has remained static throughout the pandemic. With the loss of one member, another is gained, which demonstrates the need for business groups and chambers, especially throughout times of crisis such as we have faced.

Whilst membership is key to the survival of groups such as West Vic Business, the importance and focus is on the member, not the membership.

During the strategic planning process undertaken in early 2021, the Executive Committee was unanimous and resolute in their decision to forgo membership payments in instances of hardship, and have withheld payment requests until late 2021, early 2022.

Membership drives will not occur until such a time that our business communities are in recovery.



SHIRES



Shire tours commenced in the later half of 2021, with the townships of Dimboola in the Hindmarsh Shire, and Warracknabeal in the Yarriambiack shire first to be visited.

West Vic Business staff and executive met with shire representatives and toured the local central business districts, meeting business owners and staff, listening to the backgrounds and stories behind the business. Staff were keen to seek feedback and input from business owners regarding future project development to enable proposals to be based on the needs and wants of the business community, rather than on assumptions.

Creating essential links and building relationships on the ground has been the success of West Vic Business, and is what staff and executive agree, is the most imperative part of the future success of the organisation. Historically, participation rates of West Vic Business events and programs surpass that of any other like organisation, and this is due largely to these personal connections and networks.

The authenticity of the West Vic Business team is also key to its relationship building across the region. It is not just a job, not just a position upon a board, it is a passion for each and every member of the team, and it shows. West Vic Business recruits current and former business owners, and industry sector specialists to ensure they deliver an informed and educated opinion based decision making process. Moving forward, this will be a key aspect in the growth and development of the organisation.

COLLABORATE

VRCA

West Vic Business are an integral member of the Victorian Regional Chamber Alliance, which encompasses approximately 90% of business communities across the state of Victoria. Meeting fortnightly, the alliance supports, guides and share, to improve individual performance and delivery. In addition and as a collective, they advocate on behalf of their members at a local, state and federal government level.

MAINSTREET AUSTRALIA

A member of Mainstreet Australia, West Vic Business continues to learn and develop essential links across Australia through this invaluable body. Mainstreet Australia develop programs to support central districts and advocates for business groups and chambers with state and federal government to encourage their ongoing success. West Vic Business are finalist in three categories of the Mainstreet Australia Awards: Outstanding Management Committee/Business Association, Program Initiative Activity or Event under \$50,000, and Best Regional Main Street. Stay posted!

AMCHAM

A new partnership and membership with the American Chamber of Commerce is an exciting development that West Vic Business members will benefit directly from. Opening up exporting opportunities and developing international networks at a personal level, is an opportunity not offered through other channels.

LEADERSHIP MANAGEMENT AUST.

Leadership Management Australia is another new partner that will be offering programs to the business community and members focussing on our industry, manufacturing and agriculture sectors.

FINANCIALS

For a copy of the 2020-2021 audited financial report, please email info@westvicbusiness.com.au

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Federal Government Australia
Dr Anne Webster MP, Member for Mallee

Victorian State Government
Ms Emma Kealy MP, Member for Lowan
Business Victoria
Department of Jobs, Precincts & Regions

Horsham Rural City Council

Hindmarsh Shire Council

West Wimmera Shire Council

Yarriambiack Shire Council

Northern Grampians Shire Council
Stawell Biz Inc.

Ararat Rural City Council
Greater Ararat Business Network

Mainstreet Australia

Victorian Regional Chamber Alliance
Commerce Ballarat