



# *End of Term Report*

Elected Council: 2021-2024



We acknowledge and respect the traditional custodians  
of the lands where we stand today,  
We acknowledge Elders past and present,  
The pioneers whose toil inspires us still;  
And those who gave their lives, that we may now,  
On this past, a vibrant future build.





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## About this report

This end of term report has been prepared in accordance with **s428(2) of the Local Government Act 1993** for presentation at one of the final meetings of the outgoing council; 2021-2024.

This report provides an overview of council's achievements over the last three years and is linked to the top-level objectives outlined in our Community Strategic Plan.

These objectives include:

- **A place of environmental sensitivity** - Working together as a community to protect and enhance our natural and built environment for the future.
- **A place of progressive leadership** - We will plan and advocate for the changing needs of our community through effective and engaging leadership.
- **A place of liveable communities** - Well-planned, safe and accessible public spaces and facilities built with a strong sense of identity and place.
- **A place of inclusion, culture and wellbeing** - A welcoming, healthy and diverse community that celebrates culture and history and is supported by accessible services.
- **A place of prosperity and resilience** - Champion business, innovation, and technology to stimulate local economic development.
- **Connected communities** - Enable integrated, safe and reliable transport and advocate for communications infrastructure.
- **Tomorrow's technologies** - Ensure the region is well placed to embrace emerging and disruptive technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and Deep Learning.

This end of term report is driven by a combination of snapshots and success stories, highlighting the progress of the outgoing council in relation to the 7 key objective areas.

Our achievements also directly link to actions detailed in our four-year Delivery Program (2022-2026), which we are two-years into implementing.











**Murray River Council has vibrant,  
diverse and cohesive communities.  
We are supported by strong local  
business and primary industries.  
We value our beautiful waterways  
and natural surrounds.**

**Murray River Council Vision**





# Our Councillors; September 2021 - September 2024

Murray River Council sits in the Federal Electorate of Farrer and the State Electorate of Murray.  
Three Councillors are elected from each of the three wards that make up the municipality:

- Moama Ward
- Greater Murray Ward
- Greater Wakool Ward

## Moama Ward



Cr Frank Crawley  
Mayor Sept 23 - Sept 24  
Deputy Mayor May 22 - Sept 23



Cr Nikki Cohen  
Deputy Mayor Sept 21 - May 22



Cr Chris Bilkey  
Mayor Sept 21 - Sept 23  
(resigned from Council Oct 23)

## Greater Murray Ward



Cr Kron Nicholas



Cr Thomas Weyrich



Cr Geoff Wise

## Greater Wakool Ward



Cr Dennis Gleeson



Cr Neil Gorey  
Deputy Mayor Sept 23 - Sept 24



Cr Ann Crowe



# Our Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework

All Councils in NSW are required to deliver their operations based on the Integrated Planning and Reporting framework.

The Integrated Planning and Reporting framework allows Councils to draw their various plans together, understand how they interact and get the maximum leverage from their efforts by planning and taking a big-picture-view of the future.

A quick overview of the various plans our outgoing council have been progressing are detailed below.

## Community Strategic Plan

The Community Strategic Plan is the highest-level plan that a council will prepare. Its purpose is to identify the community's main priorities for the future and to identify the strategies to achieve them.

While council has a custodial role in initiating, preparing and maintaining the Community Strategic Plan, it is not fully responsible for its implementation. Other partners such as government agencies and community organisations are also engaged to help deliver the long-term outcomes.

## Four-Year Delivery Program and Annual Operational Plan

These documents unpack the community's strategic objectives in the Community Strategic Plan and translate them into actions. These actions then become the principal activities to be undertaken by the council, whilst also considering the resources and support available.

The Delivery Program is the single point of reference for all principal activities undertaken by the council during its term of office. All plans, projects, activities and funding allocations must be directly linked to the program.

Supporting the delivery program is the annual Operational Plan. This document details individual projects and activities that will be undertaken each financial year to achieve the commitments made in the Delivery Program.

## Resourcing Strategy

Whilst the Community Strategic Plan provides a vehicle for expressing long-term community aspirations, these will not be achieved without sufficient resources (time, money, assets and people) to actually carry them out.

The Resourcing Strategy identifies who is responsible for addressing the issues identified in the Community Strategic Plan and focuses in detail on matters that are the responsibility of the council.

The resourcing strategy consists of three components:

- workforce planning
- asset management planning
- long term financial planning.

## Annual Report

The Annual Report is one of the key points of accountability between council and its community. The Annual Report focuses on the council's implementation of the delivery program and operational plan.

## End of Term Report

The End of Term report is a report on the progress of the Community Strategic Plan. It is to be presented at the final meeting of the outgoing council prior to the local government election.





**Figure 1:** Snapshot of the Integrated Planning and Reporting framework.











# Our Achievements



# The Awards and Recognitions

Award	Project / Category	Achievement
<b>The Voice Project (Culture)</b> 2021	Change Champion Gold Medal Award	 <b>Winner</b>
<b>Economic Development Australia Awards</b> 2021	Economic Development Initiatives- Regions under 15,000 residents (Moama Lights)	 <b>Winner</b>
<b>NSW Tourism Awards</b> 2021	Festivals and Events (Moama Lights)	 <b>Bronze</b>
<b>National Awards for Local Government</b> 2021	Creativity and Culture – creating vibrant and cohesive communities through the Arts (Moama Lights)	 <b>Honourable Mention</b>
<b>Local Government NSW RH Dougherty Awards</b> 2022	Innovation in Special Events (Moama Lights)	 <b>Winner</b>
<b>Local Government NSW RH Dougherty Awards</b> 2022	Reporting to Your Community (Cemetery digitisation project)	 <b>Winner</b>
<b>Local Government NSW RH Dougherty Awards</b> 2022	Excellence in Communication (Advocacy efforts: 'Turn the border green' campaign.)	 <b>Highly Commended</b>
<b>Statewide Mutual Risk Management Excellence Awards</b> 2022	Strategic/Enterprise Risk Initiative Award for regional councils	 <b>Winner</b>
<b>NSW Top Tourism Towns Awards</b> 2023	Tiny Town (Mathoura)	 <b>Finalist</b>
<b>NSW Top Tourism Towns Awards</b> 2023	Small Town (Barham)	 <b>Finalist</b>



<b>NSW Top Tourism Towns Awards 2023</b>	Large Town (Moama)	 <b>Finalist</b>
<b>NSW Top Tourism Towns Awards 2023</b>	Judges Award- Top Tourism Town Video (Moama)	 <b>Winner</b>
<b>Local Government NSW RH Dougherty Awards 2023</b>	Innovation in Special Events (Moama Lights)	 <b>Highly Commended</b>
<b>Local Government NSW Planning Awards 2023</b>	Culture Change Innovation (Development Services Restructure)	 <b>Highly Commended</b>
<b>Economic Development Australia Awards 2023</b>	Economic Development Initiatives- Regions under 15,000 residents (2022 Australian Darts Open)	 <b>Winner</b>
<b>NSW Tourism Awards 2023</b>	Festivals and Events (Moama Lights)	 <b>Finalist</b>
<b>Australian Event Awards and Symposium 2023</b>	Best Regional Event (Moama Lights)	 <b>Finalist</b>
<b>Local Government NSW RH Dougherty Awards 2024</b>	Excellence in Communication (Meninya Street Concepts Engagement Campaign)	 <b>Finalist</b>
<b>Local Government NSW RH Dougherty Awards 2024</b>	Excellence in Communication (Sustainable MRC project)	 <b>Finalist</b>





## **A PLACE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SENSITIVITY**

Working together as a community to protect and enhance  
our natural and built environment for the future.



# A place of environmental sensitivity

*the highlights*

## We strive to:

- Facilitate circular economy.
- Protect, enhance and sustain the natural environment.
- Plan for the impacts of climate change.
- Increase awareness and education for environmental sustainability.

## Establishment of new Automated Depot in Moama



After two years of planning, Moama's Waste Management Facility will be home to a new automated depot to assist with processing items under the NSW Container Deposit Scheme.

The community identified that they were looking for more options to process bulk quantities of containers through Return and Earn. So, through research and visiting other sites with similar equipment, the Automated Depot project was established to help meet the needs of the community.

The Automated Depot processes bulk amounts of containers, catering to larger users who can tip their bags, bins, or boxes full of containers into the depot's machine rather than individually putting every container into a reverse vending machine.

This diverts any bulk-use customers and allows more of the community to participate and collect a return in an easier fashion.

## Commenced design works on new Moama water treatment plant

Council continues to investigate options to upgrade the Moama Water Filtration Plant and we've completed design specifications to allow for increased water production to meet the growing demand of Moama. We are now at a point where we are actively seeking funding options to cover this significant yet necessary expense.

## Installation of raw water network in Koraleigh



In early 2024 Council celebrated the official opening of the Koraleigh raw water pipeline.

Prior to the installation of the raw water pipeline, all water was treated and distributed for both indoor and outdoor use.

The new pipeline now supplies raw water to the urban households within Koraleigh, reduces reliance on treated water for non-potable purposes, such as garden use and also allows better access to water during emergencies, as hydrants have been relocated from back lanes to front access roads and pressure has been increased.





## Smart water meter finalisation



To help conserve our water resources, Council undertook a council-wide smart water meter installation program; replacing outdated manual-read water meters with new, automatic devices on filtered and raw water services. The project hit finalisation stage in early 2022. This project has made a significant contribution to our water security by reducing water loss caused by leaks and encouraging community awareness around water usage at properties. It is also assisting council in managing our water supplies to meet growing demands now, and into the future.

## Implementation of waste management strategies and education programs



Through the ongoing expansion of the Waste Team, Council has been focused on continuously improving our waste management and resource recovery services.

Council continues to deliver a range of initiatives to reduce waste-to-landfill, including:

- The introduction of Food and Garden Organics (detailed later in this document)
- New and improved kerbside collection contracts
- Programs to target difficult to recycle materials
- Greater community engagement via education programs and initiatives
- Rationalisation of underutilised landfill sites-moving resources to other facilities with more options for recycling and resource recovery
- Ongoing implementation of the Waste Management Strategy

## Water pressure improvements in Barham

Water flow and pressure in Barham was improved thanks to the completion of Council's filtered water pressure improvement project.

This followed the installation of a new booster pump at the filtration plant in early 2024 after 18 months of detailed modelling on usage and flows, along with design and construction work on the pump itself.

The end result has seen water service pressure increase by up to 167% to households and businesses in Barham.

The water pressure had been an ongoing issue for residents, so the project ended up delivering noticeable improvements straight away. A great result.

## Support of National Garage Sale Trail Campaign



Over the past few years, Council has participated in the Garage Sale Trail. The annual festival encourages residents to sell, shop and learn about the 'circular economy' process.

Over two weekends each November, Garage Sales are hosted simultaneously around the nation, giving residents and opportunity to declutter and sell pre-loved goods or shop the trail and snag a guilt-free bargain locally.

The event was a fun way for residents to connect, make some money and stop good items going to landfill or being illegally dumped. The 'circular economy' concept is an extension to the old saying that "one person's trash, is another person's treasure", and also supports keeping waste out of landfill.





## Reviewing and updating Moulamein Flood Study and Management Plan

In early 2024 Council commenced on-the-ground assessments in Moulamein to help inform updates to the local flood study and subsequent mitigation options. The previous Moulamein Flood Study was undertaken in 2019, prior to the 2022 floods.

The 2022 flood is noted as the highest flood on record for the Moulamein area, and we want to ensure the information presented in the updated flood study captures this record flood data. These investigations have also supported upgrade works on the Moulamein Water Treatment Ring Levee, Riverine/Stormwater backflow prevention and upgrades to points of weakness in the levee system.

## Ongoing development of Echuca Moama Flood Study and Management Plan



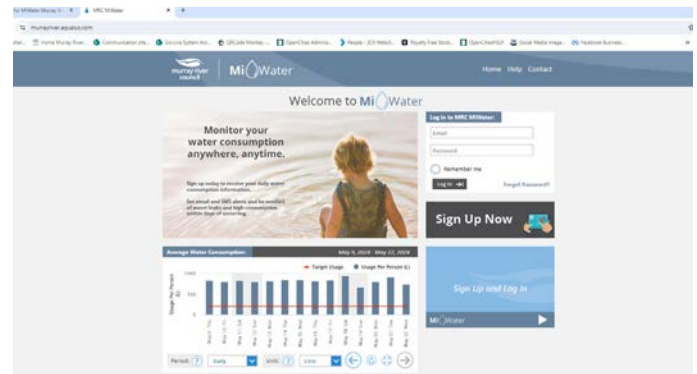
Council endorsed the Echuca Moama Flood Study Report, following more than 5 years of consultation and research.

Commenced in 2018, the project is a partnership between Campaspe Shire Council, Murray River Council, Victorian North Central Catchment Management Authority, Department of Environment Energy and Climate Action, and NSW Department of Planning and Environment. The report is the first part of the Echuca Moama Torrumbarry Flood Study and Risk Management Plan Project.

The report incorporates a summary of all community feedback that was received in 2023/2024 via community consultation.

The next step will be the commencement of the Echuca Moama Flood Risk Management Plan which will investigate a range of flood mitigation options, flood warning systems and information to help manage floods in the future.

## Launch of MiWater platform



With the launch of our MiWater platform – linked to our smart meters - residents can now monitor their water consumption anytime, anywhere, and all for free. MiWater is an online customer portal where you can access all the information about water use at your property.

People can sign up to track daily water usage and keep an eye on how much it's costing. They can also choose water consumption targets and set up alerts to warn them if these targets have been or are likely to be exceeded.

## Development of Southern Riverina Drought Resilience Plan

Murray River Council, along with Berrigan Shire, Edward River and Federation Councils worked in partnership to develop and deliver a Regional Drought Resilience Plan for the Southern Riverina area.

The project was jointly funded by the Australian Government and the NSW Government under the Future Drought Fund.

The objectives of the Plan were to capture relevant information for the region, including how drought events impact the region, and actions that the whole community, including local, state and federal governments, can undertake to improve resilience.

The Plan highlights not only the synergies between our four communities but the fact our Councils are often called upon to assist each other in time of crises. Therefore, the plan has a large focus on collaboration when dealing with any future drought events.





## Development of Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation (RAMJO) Water Position Paper



RAMJO, a cooperation of 11 member Councils in southern NSW, convened a Water Security Sub-Committee of Mayors, General Managers and expert Council staff from across the region, who worked together to develop a series of solutions to water security issues across the region.

The resulted in the production of a “Water Position Paper” which was largely driven and written by former Mayor Chris Bilkey.

The paper outlines options to ease some of the crippling water situations in the region, as well as lay a foundation for a future built on innovation and adaptation.

Council continues to look to the Position Paper and its recommendations to guide the conversation around future water security for the local region.

## Construction of new landfill cell at Moama Waste Facility



After 18 months of design and site works the construction of the new landfill cell in Moama was completed in 2023.

The \$1.9million project included extensive earthworks at the site and construction of the leachate collection component within the cell.

One of Murray River Council's most significant projects at the landfill site in recent years, the new cell – known as 'Cell 5' - provides an airspace capacity of 135,000 cubic meters and has a waste acceptance capacity of 95,000 tonnes.

## MRC Weed Management Program



Council's Biosecurity Team continues to coordinate weed control measures with landholders and develop effective and long-term control programs for the council as a whole.

Over the past few years the team have delivered:

- Landholder education program
- Priority Weed Handbooks
- A weed action plan with agreed targets
- Weed education programs in schools
- Ongoing campaigns targeting seasonal weeds
- A program to target aquatic weeds
- Education days with Local Land Services and other stakeholders
- Day-to-day management of priority weeds

The increased presence of the weeds team has seen an increase in community reporting of weeds. In the long term, this will assist Council in monitoring and managing priority weeds across the region.







## A PLACE OF PROGRESSIVE LEADERSHIP

We will plan and advocate for the changing needs of our community through effective and engaging leadership.



# A place of progressive leadership

*The highlights*

## We strive to:

- Deliver exceptional and consistent service to our internal and external community.
- Continue to be a trusted and ethical leader that leads by example.
- Provide clear, concise and consistent information that is easily accessible to our customers.
- Achieve community driven results through collaboration and engagement (community and stakeholders).

## Ongoing face-to-face engagement with communities



Over the council term, the organisation has continued to increase interaction with local communities via the following means:

- Community Engagement Strategy and Policy revised and adopted by council in 2023.
- Face-to-face session for significant projects including but not limited to flood information sessions, flood recovery sessions, Community Strategic Plan development, Flood Studies, budget development and asset reviews.
- Council meetings are rotating to Moulamein, Barham and Mathoura in addition to Moama.
- Establishment of 'Manager of Local Connections' role to work directly with Section 355 committees.
- Introduction of Community Recovery Officer (funded by NSW Reconstruction Authority) to implement initiatives with flood affected communities.

## Submission to Federal Government Inquiry into the sustainability of local government - April 2024

Murray River Council made an in-depth submission to a Federal Government Inquiry into the sustainability of local government.

Through the Inquiry, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Development, Infrastructure and Transport were looking to examine financial sustainability and funding frameworks of local governments, alongside changing infrastructure requirements and service delivery obligations.

CEO Terry Dodds PSM authored the piece on behalf of council, addressing the broken finance model in Local Government, cost shifting, increased service delivery pressures with no additional income, asset depreciation, issues around employment and retention, budgeting, and the inability to forward-plan.

Council's submission was recognised at the NSW Country Mayor's Association meeting and various other industry meetings and groups.

## New website

In November 2021, council launched a new and updated corporate website.

Content for the new website was totally re-written to ensure accuracy and a fresh approach and the design offered a more user-friendly experience with improved navigation and functionality.

Created with the user experience in mind, our site introduced updated features to ensure customers can find the information they need.

There is also built-in functionality to link in our online services when these continue to be implemented via TechOne.

We launched a review and subsequent content update to the site in 2024.





## Development Services restructure



Not unlike other NSW councils, Murray River Council has struggled to attract qualified town planning and building surveying staff due to the short supply of expertise and the high demand seen within the industry. This has not only put pressure on our ability to manage high-level strategic planning matters but has put large pressure on the processing times of the 550+ development applications submitted to council each year.

So, council looked to review the department structure as a first step to address the problem, with a focus on improved and increased administration functions to better support local approval processes and enquiries that had been tying up the certified staff from processing applications.

It was from here that the merger of the 'Building' and 'Planning' teams into one Development Services Team was inspired, and the new roles of a Local Approvals Officer and Parra Town Planner was born. These roles help manage more generalised approvals, like some section 68 applications, so that lower risk approvals are processed faster and our technical staff can then focus on the more complex approvals.

The merger of the two teams also sought to reduced inconsistencies and promote communication by establishing common processes and procedures, as a lot of the approvals for housing is completed jointly between planners and building surveyors.

The changes have strengthened council's capacities and performance within the Development Services area and will help the organisation to better meet community expectations. The development services team is committed to continuing its momentum and monitoring its progress, identifying any barriers, and adjusting as needed.

-This project also received a Highly Commended Award at the 2023 Local Government NSW Awards in the 'Planning Awards' category.

## Joint meeting with Swan Hill Rural City

Councillors and management met with their counterparts at Swan Hill Rural City Council to discuss issues of common interest and to further strengthen the working relationship between the organisations.

The Councils discussed a range of topics including the collective concern regarding cross border anomalies and the Swan Hill Bridge development.

The joint meeting highlighted the genuine commitment of both councils to form a relationship that is focused on outcomes.

The meeting further renewed the commitment of both councils to see the Swan Hill Bridge project to fruition.

## Mobile Library and Service Centre



Council established its own mobile library and service centre, which was delivered at the end of 2021.

Council was awarded funding under the 2019/2020 Public Library Infrastructure Program to invest in a mobile library truck, which offers access to services for residents in our remote communities.

Over the past few years the centre has been very well received by our communities.

The mobile library offers:

- Library services
- Access to council services and information
- Access to online government portals
- Community information.

The mobile library visits the communities of Murray Downs, Wakool and Tooleybuc on a fortnightly basis.





## New CSP development- community engagement



In February 2022, we spent a week travelling the Council area holding consultation sessions with the community to capture ideas and feedback to help us develop our new Community Strategic Plan.

We also opened a range of online tools and feedback methods so that our residents could share their projects and suggestions.

We had over 200 people turn up to the face-to-face sessions and collected 1017 ideas. This ranged from the very easily addressed to the big picture suggestions.

The new ten-year plan was developed on the back of this consultation and was adopted in April 2022.

All ideas submitted were also collated to form projects and programs of works in the 4-year Delivery Program and yearly Operational Plans.

## Building and Development Checklists

The Development Services Team produced a suite of development and building checklists to guide the community through the application process on the NSW Planning Portal.

The comprehensive checklists and supporting information sheets were developed to assist the applicant through all the steps and necessary information needed when lodging applications online.

Online lodgement became mandatory in all NSW councils from July 1, 2021.

Staff developed the tools to not only ensure customers know what to prepare and the steps involved, but to also help alleviate delays in the overall process.

## Renewed Memorandum of Understanding with Campaspe Shire Council

An updated Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Campaspe Shire Council was endorsed this term.

The updated MoU reconfirmed the ongoing working relationship between the Councils, whilst revising key focus areas for cross-border collaboration to reflect current issues including flood recovery, workforce shortages, economic development and tourism. The renewed agreement highlights the genuine commitment of both councils to continue a relationship that is focused on outcomes. The organisations will continue to work together to reduce costs for ratepayers by avoiding the duplication of services whilst maximising service delivery opportunities that meet a common community need.

## Swan Hill bridge advocacy



The single lane bridge at Swan Hill/Murray Downs is long past its effective use-by date, and urgently needs replacement. It is a major impediment to local businesses, residents and the agricultural industry. Development of commercial and residential projects in Murray Downs is particularly affected.

Council has continued to advocate for a new border crossing at Swan Hill to improve these cross-border connections. Via ongoing discussion and consultation, there is now an agreed alignment.

There are still some ambiguities regarding the heritage overlay on the bridge and what this means for the various options put forward, so Council have agreed to liaise directly with Heritage NSW to address these concerns and commit to ongoing advocacy to keep the project moving.





## Community connectedness and the 2022 flood event



When we mention 'October 2022', we collectively remember an event that impacts most.

Some got their toes wet. Some lost their homes. Some lost businesses. Some waited in fear of what was to come. Some lost crops. Some were trapped in towns. Some watched the water make it to their front door but not quite inside.

But almost all came together to help as our region endured one of its worst flood disasters on record.

Whilst we looked to our incredible community leaders and emergency service personnel for guidance to prepare and manage the floods, our community members also dropped everything to help sandbag, donate machinery, feed the 'troops', provide information to residents and offer expertise. Not just in their own communities but across the whole Murray River Council area.

It really was a full cross-community approach.

During this period we are proud to say that we also had staff step out of their 'usual' roles, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with our community to do what needed to be done.



We had Officers, Managers, Directors and a CEO on rotating shifts for 24-hour levee monitoring.

We had people from our parks and garden crews driving roads just to monitor conditions and alert our works crews to hazardous areas.

Our tourism, environmental health and compliance team members also helped staff the Emergency Operation Centre in Deniliquin, feeding in information from MRC for the coordinated response across the region.

And of course our works crews rotated through 24-hour shifts to monitor roads, sandbags and levees and were a reliable go-to for both our community and emergency services agencies. (The sourcing of extra 'road closed' or 'hazard' signs alone turned into a full-time job!)

We also had our water and sewer team working around the clock to ensure our essential services were maintained. Not to mention managing the after-effects of the flood waters on the systems too!

Across the 2 flood events - Murray River and Edward River/Billabong - we had approximately 150 staff work directly on floods at some point over the 3-month period.

Through the recovery, we are reminded of the value of community as people share their experiences, expertise or local knowledge.

This is not to detract from the devastation and loss across many towns and its deep impacts felt by individuals, communities and businesses. But it is worth noting that together, we have not only weathered the crazy disruptions of the last few years with a flood and a pandemic, but we've also had the capacity to support each other along the way.

So many people contributed, and we thank all our residents, staff and volunteer agencies for working alongside us during this time.







## Advocacy for flood recovery support



Throughout 2023, Council advocated strongly for urgent support for businesses who found themselves in a perilous situation following the October 2022 flood event.

Correspondence was sent to the Prime Minister, Premier of NSW, Minister for Emergency Services and NSW Reconstruction Authority, among others. Face-to-face meetings with the Premier and media outlets were also held.

Despite the damage bill for Murray River Council being the second highest in NSW (second only to Moree) there was little support for businesses that had fallen into the funding gaps. Many businesses were still attempting to recover from pandemic closures, then they were hit by the flood event and subsequent high river levels that shut down much of the tourism trade.

Many businesses - including houseboat and paddle steamer operators and businesses reliant upon the river - were cut off and isolated for many months, unable to trade. Whilst council was not directly responsible for recovery funding, it acted as a conduit for information, application assistance and advocacy in the first instance to help businesses and primary producers who were managing a whole range of issues to do with flood recovery.

## Voice of Customer program launch

Council launched a new customer call-back program to gain further feedback on customer service levels right across the organisation.

As part of the program, Council staff started touching base with a random selection of customers who made an enquiry or request to gather feedback on their interaction with Council. The new call-back program is helping Council assess the performance of customer service across a range of departments.

We are continuing to use this program to gain feedback on our customer service levels, track our progress on requests and consider opportunities for future improvement.

## Finalisation of Accountabilities Framework and organisational restructure

In 2021/2022 Council started working in accordance with the continual management of change framework.

This encompassed the introduction of an accountabilities framework, revised structures to create stronger customer focus, and the introduction of Monthly Operating Reports.

This was further reviewed in November 2023, with an organisational restructure aimed at placing managers in more of a 'planning' role, with superintendents on board to manage day-to-day operations.

This is all in the aim of achieving efficiencies over the longer-term and meeting our goals of Purpose, Alignment, Clarity, Trust (empowerment), Measure, Manage, Improve and Celebrate.

-This project also received an Award at the 2022 Statewide Mutual Risk Management Excellence Awards: 'Winner, Strategic Enterprise Risk Initiative' category.

## Commenced development of Customer Experience Strategy/ Customer Service Charter



Council commenced the development of a Customer Experience Strategy that will address key issues and challenges regarding customer service delivery. This strategy will provide a clear roadmap that supports improved customer experience across all areas of the business and meets the community's needs now and into the future. The strategy will review our current customer experience and provide an action plan for improvements.

So far, council has undertaken interviews with various community members, staff and contractors to begin creating a baseline and forward-plan for the development of the Customer Experience Strategy. Alongside the development of the Strategy, we will be creating a Customer Charter and Service Levels document, ensuring strategic direction aligns with the on-ground customer experience.





## Policy updates and implementation

Since September 2021, Council have implemented or significantly updated a number of policies via our Governance portfolio. Policies underpin our day-to-day activities and decision-making to ensure we operate in an open, effective and transparent manner.

The following policies were adopted between September 2021 and June 2024:

- Community Engagement Policy
- Child Safe Policy
- Companion Animal Breeding Policy
- Cemeteries Policy
- Section 355 Committees
- Asset Capitalisation Policy
- Investment Policy
- Risk Management
- Signage & Advertising Structures Policy
- Code of Conduct (Councillors) Policy
- Code of Conduct (Employees) Policy
- Code of Conduct (Committees) Policy
- Code of Meeting Practice Policy
- Councillors Expenses and Facilities Policy
- Cyber Security Policy
- Delegations of Authority (Mayor And CEO) Policy
- Disability Inclusion Action Plan
- Information & Records Management Policy
- Flood Recovery Management Policy - Moveable Dwellings, relocatable Homes and their Ancillary Structures
- Work Health & Safety Policy
- Liquid Trade Waste Policy
- Land Acquisition and Disposal Policy
- Community Engagement
- Asbestos Policy
- Revenue Policy
- Related Party Disclosures Policy

- Media Policy
- Contaminated Land Policy
- Budget Policy
- Borrowing Policy
- Councillors & Employees Interaction Policy
- Road & Place Name Policy
- Economic Development Assistance Policy
- Economic Development & Tourism Strategy
- ARIC Framework, Charter and Terms of Reference
- Leasing and Licencing of Land Policy
- Revenue Policy

## Advocacy for tighter regulations surrounding breeding facilities

Council undertook advocacy efforts in relation to 'puppy farms' this term in response to the growing number of applications for animal breeding facilities in the region.

As an initial step, Council adopted a new Animal Breeding Policy to provide consistency and transparency to the assessment of development applications associated with breeding establishments. The policy was developed with input from animal welfare organisations and the local community.

Whilst Council is limited in terms of what it can legally consider in determining any development application, this Policy helps us monitor and enforce relevant consent conditions for such facilities.

Whilst the Policy is of use to council, it is not a solution to the ongoing issues surrounding applications for animal breeding facilities, so council called on the NSW State Government for urgent review into the growing issue.

Specifically, we called on the State Government to align their legislation with that of the strict laws now imposed in Victoria to stop establishments simply moving across the border.

Border councils such as ours need to have a more stringent regulatory environment provided by the Government for the approval and operation of animal breeding facilities.





## Launch of 'Sustainable MRC' project

Like all Councils, we are funded through the rates we collect, but with little means to create additional income beyond this, the pressure to maintain our steadily expanding service list is becoming too expensive for us to continue to wear.

So, during this council term we've been looking at ways to improve the financial sustainability of the council: this project is called "Sustainable MRC".

Firstly, we looked internally at our own practises: looking at what can we resource, undertake and complete internally verses having to outsource to a contractor or consultant. We've also looked at what additional skills some of our staff have and how we can better utilise them, increasing utilisation of our yellow fleet and looking for efficiencies with our power consumption across our sites.

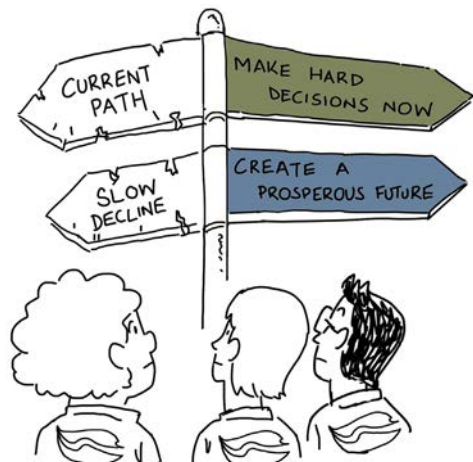
This was about keeping operational costs as lean as possible without compromising services. We were able to save around \$100,000 per month through this review. But we needed to do more. So, we looked at further ways to contain expenses, like selling underutilised buildings and land to reduce the financial impact of our large asset base.

At the end of this term, the organisation is still undertaking asset rationalisation; streamlining what assets we are 'investing' in so we are financially sustainable into the future. This means maintenance level reductions for some services, the sale of unused buildings and land, reclassifying land to open it up for operational use and other service reviews.

There has been a lot of planning, conversations, community feedback and fact checking undertaken to make sure these decisions and their outcomes have the best outcomes for our entire community.

To help the community understand the journey of the Sustainable MRC project, we produced a video explaining the current situation and the tough choices that needed to be made.

The video can be viewed on council's Your say platform: [yoursay.murrayriver.nsw.gov.au](https://yoursay.murrayriver.nsw.gov.au) or via the QR code below.







## Submitted response to the Productivity Commission's Local Water Utilities Issue Paper

In 2024, Council submitted a response to the Issues Paper released by the Productivity Commission that considers challenges around funding for local water utilities (LWUs).

The submission aimed to draw attention to the risks associated with the adoption of certain practices as evidenced by previous government initiatives. Specifically, over recent decades there has been a trend among State Governments to adopt a model aimed at leveraging public assets for provision of dividends to the shareholder (governments) and coercing one entity to borrow money to buy another for assets already owned (paid for by tariff payers). There are potential risks and pitfalls associated with this model, and Council's fear is that regional water utilities may follow the same path.

The submission addressed concerns around the Formation of 'Corporations' (GBEs), Dividend Extractions, Off-Balance Sheet Transactions and the amalgamation of GBEs, among other things.

If instruments, such as the aforementioned, are executed without understanding the wider ramifications we will inevitably find ourselves in a cycle of short-term gains at the expense of long-term infrastructure sustainability and social cohesion.

## Advocacy for improvements to the e-Planning Portal

While the concept of a central depository for lodging and accessing planning information still holds some promise, the implementation of the e-Planning Portal and ongoing support for councils has been plagued with numerous issues.

So Council has continued to advocate for improvements to the e-Planning Portal during this term, including making representation to the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces. MRC continues to work with RAMJO to offer input and advice into redevelopment of the portal to better suit regional councils. We want to see key issues addressed; such as the absence of mandatory documents, increased administrative burdens, red tape, and lengthy processes for regional councils, among other things.

## Investigation of 'shared service' arrangements

Over the past few years our Administration has commenced investigating options around shared services with surround municipalities.

'Shared services' in this context is generally defined as two or more local government authorities jointly planning, employing staff, undertaking management, business and/or regulatory activities, delivering and/or maintaining infrastructure, or providing services to their communities.

In a climate where we are more-and-more stretched for resources, both in regard to finances and staff, sharing service arrangements can see savings from economies of scale, support enhanced regional collaboration, reduce some operational costs and build on strategic partnerships.

With a view to further improve our long-term sustainability, Council will continue the investigation into a shared service model with other surrounding municipalities.

## Winner of the Change Champion Gold Medal from The Voice Project for staff culture.



'The Voice Project's' change champion awards recognises organisations that have achieved the greatest measurable change in work practices and outcomes in between engagement surveys. An organisation's initial survey results provide a good baseline measure, but what matters most is how much positive change is achieved over time. Murray River Council had a significant improvement in under a year due the introduction of staff-led change initiatives. The organisation was recognised for its efforts by being awarded the 2021 Change Champion Award.





## **A PLACE OF LIVEABLE COMMUNITIES**

Well-planned, safe and accessible public spaces and facilities built with a strong sense of identity and place.



# A place of liveable communities

*the highlights*

## We strive to:

- Create and maintain safe and accessible community spaces that enhance healthy living and promote active lifestyles.
- Enable development of sustainable liveable communities.
- Deliver best practise and compliant waste and recycling service and infrastructure that meets community needs.
- Strategic planning which produces consistent, strategic, and transparent outcomes.
- Update and review our open spaces to reflect community wants and needs.

## Scores on Doors program



Council commenced participation in the 'Scores on Doors' program in 2022.

The State Government initiative is aimed at letting residents and diners see how well local food businesses are complying with food hygiene and safety requirements. The rating system of Excellent (5 stars), Very Good (4 stars) and Good (3 stars), all represent various levels of compliance with the Food Standards Code.

And many of our business owners have been busy putting up their very own five-star rating certificates!

Our Environmental Health Coordinator inspects businesses and rates their hygiene and food safety standards, taking into account things such as food temperature control, food prepared in advance of service, food handler hygiene, cleaning and pest control.

The introduction of the Scores on Doors program has highlighted the many businesses within the municipality that are doing the right thing by their customers and operating in a clean and hygienic manner and keeping food safe.

## Moulamein Lake Reserve enhancements



Works were completed at Lake Moulamein, with enhancements taking shape around the shared spaces within the reserve.

Staff delivered new concrete footpaths and completed the concreting of 3 shelters. Solar lighting and furniture was installed around the lake and the shelters now have new picnic tables. The southern shelter was also fitted with a new electric BBQ and there's a new water station on site too.

Landscaping, fencing and additional bins also formed part of the project.

## Mensforth Park updates

This term we completed stage-two works at Tooleybuc's Mensforth Park. This included a new 40m flying fox, footpaths, a "hang out space" and landscaping. The improvements further compliment the extensive upgrades already undertaken to Tooleybuc's riverfront area, with the whole space now looking fresh and inviting!





## Needs and demands assessment



As part of our assets and service-delivery planning, Council undertook a detailed 'Needs and Demands' analysis of its sports and recreation asset. The project looked to identify all land that council owns or maintains and get a solid understand of its use within the community. This included buildings, facilities, recreational and open spaces as well as general land.

We had direct engagement with users, clubs and groups along with survey-based feedback from users of our park and building spaces. This was no mean feat, with over 700 open spaces and buildings assessed on their own.

The surveys attracted over 1000 responses from locals and visitors who scanned signs in local parks and buildings to let us know what they loved about the space they were using or suggested improvements. We took a 'needs and demands' approach to better understand the usage requirements of every single one of our assets.

What we discovered is that there are a number of assets within Council's portfolio that may not be providing value to the community like they once did. In short: we are over-investing in some areas and under investing in others.

The final report from this project (Needs and Demand Assessment for Sport and Recreation Facilities 2021) clearly identified the high number of assets council owns and its inability to maintain them all at current standards.

These outcomes then initiated the delivery of the Open Spaces and Buildings strategies which will help guide the maintenance and delivery schedules of our assets over the next 20 years.

It also directly feeds into Council's 'Sustainable MRC' project.

## Adoption and ongoing delivery of Parks and Open Spaces Strategy

The Murray River Council Parks and Open Space Strategy 2024-2034 was developed to guide how we sustainably manage, protect and invest in the open space network across Murray River Council.

It covers management of council-owned parks, open spaces, sportsgrounds, cemeteries, drainage reserves and road reserves.

The Strategy outlines different categories of open space, along with the corresponding hierarchies and inclusions. It provides a framework for the ongoing monitoring and management of existing spaces, as well as clear guidance for future open space development within the resource and financial capacity of council.

## Adoption and ongoing delivery of Buildings Strategy



The Murray River Council Buildings Strategy 2024-2034 was developed in response to the need to plan for the provision and maintenance of buildings right across our region.

It assesses how well our existing buildings will meet the needs of the future Murray River Council population, covering facilities such as public halls, offices, libraries, public toilets and sports pavilions.

This Strategy takes a long-term strategic view and recognises that decisions made today about facility provision have significant and enduring management and operational implications.

It also seeks to plan for the delivery of new facilities, and identifies which facilities are to be retained, replaced and consolidated or rationalised over the next 20 years.



## Local Housing Strategy

Council adopted its new Local Housing Strategy at the end of 2023.

The two-part strategy outlines the key factors affecting housing supply and demand within Murray River Council and offers an implementation plan for land activation and housing delivery on a town-by-town basis over the next 20-years.

To aid its development, an initial round of consultation with the community sought feedback about the issues affecting local housing supply, with further input provided when the draft strategy was on display earlier this year. This has also been collated with census data and stakeholder input to inform the development of the final Strategy in consultation with the NSW Department Planning and Environment.

This is a key document for our planning team and will become even more crucial as the Murray River Council area continues to grow.

## Water mains cleaning program



Council implemented a more rigorous water mains cleaning program, which saw many of our townships benefit from improved water quality.

Mains flushing occurred in Moama and Mathoura, with mains cleaning by air scouring in Barham, Moulamein, Tooleybuc and Murray Downs. Both types of cleaning are designed to wash out any accumulated natural sediments or other deposits that may be sitting in the water mains. This was particularly timely following the impact the flood waters had on our water supply network.

The program was hugely successful with works being completed to schedule, with minimal disruption and minimal water wastage. Approximately 5000 homes have benefited from the cleaning program with many residents stopping to chat with our crews on site and learn more about the flushing program.

## Completion of recreation reserve lighting upgrades



A number of recreation reserves are now shining brighter thanks to funding received to undertake LED lighting updates this term.

LED lights have been retrofitted to existing towers and power supplies at the main football oval and netball courts in Barham. Mathoura's tennis courts, netball court and the football oval will have new lights retrofitted at its facilities.

Both Moulamein and Tooleybuc had major upgrades with new towers, light controls and connectors installed at the ovals along with new lights at the netball courts. And tennis courts at Koraleigh and Bunnaloo also received an update.

All these ongoing improvements will ensure our local recreation reserves remain an integral part of sport and community development in our local area for years to come.

## Murray Downs boat ramp

In some great news for our Murray Downs residents, we are now a step closer to delivering the new Murray Downs boat ramp.

This project was on the cards for a while but was delayed by the 2022 floods, however in 2024 we were able to kick-off with the works.

The current scope of works includes a dual lane concrete boat ramp and manoeuvring area; and associated retaining walls with a sleeper look concrete panel façade, rock scour protection and handrails.





## Finalisation of FOGO



During this council term, the new FOGO (Food Organics Garden Organics) service was implemented right across the municipality.

The 3-bin Food Organics Garden Organics system was introduced to provide residents with more options for separating their waste, with the aim of improving recovery rates, increasing organic material diversion from landfill and reducing processing costs.

As well as a new green bin and kitchen benchtop caddy, residents received some household information materials so they know what to put in each bin and how the collection service will work.

The Waste Team dedicated a large amount of time and resources to ensure the program was ready to launch with successful uptake of the program.

Council has more recently opened up options for businesses to opt-in to the FOGO collection service too; offering more options for separating waste and helping to keep food scraps out of landfill.

## Picnic Point Improvements



A new beach zone at Picnic Point was opened during this council term, which was a welcome addition over the busy summer periods.

The project included the creation of a new sand beach north of the new boat ramp. The new beach has ensured the influx of tourists is met with attractive surrounds, whilst also ensuring our local residents have facilities they can be proud of!

## Adoption of new Disability Inclusion Action Plan

Council adopted its updated Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP); a guide to improving access and inclusion for people with disabilities.

This updated plan covers a four-year period 2022-2026) and was developed through discussions with reference groups and a good cross-section of the local community.

The plan itself explains the steps that Council, in conjunction with our broader community, will take to ensure everyone has access to services, facilities, events and information.

All NSW councils are required to develop a Disability Inclusion Plan, with updates every four years.

## Moama soundshell playground



This term we completed stage-one works at the new playground behind Moama's Skate Park. This space has replaced the outdated equipment that was formerly behind the soundshell.

The space has been designed to be completed in three stages with the first stage including an all-access luna carousel, swing set with seat swing and toddler swing, rocker, drinking fountain, accessible picnic table, shelter, art installations, native garden areas, bins, seating, concrete all access path, rubber ground cover near and around the play equipment and some log steppers.





## Revitalisation of Meninya Street Precinct

Council formally launched Moama's Meninya Street Precinct redevelopment at the start of their council term in late 2021.

Since then, the project has continued with much momentum including the development and public display of the concept designs for the precinct.

The Meninya Street Precinct Project is one of Council's largest projects that aims to transform the heart of Moama into a vibrant hub of social and economic activity.

Delivered in a staged approach, the multi-year project will enhance not only Meninya Street but compliment the surrounding points of interest including the Horseshoe Lagoon, Moama Beach and the local bush area.

Before commencing the formal civil design of the streetscape, the project team and the advisory committee opted to develop a 3D Video Animation, which included community feedback to-date to provide the community with an enhanced experience that replicates what the project could look like once completed.

Residents and businesses were invited to offer feedback on the video. 4300+ users viewed the video on YouTube, 238 comments were provided via Facebook, along with 44 formal submissions.

The video animation gave a new perspective on the proposed road, shared pathway, dedicated bike lane, median strip and landscaping designs, as well as street furniture and potential parking arrangements within the road reserve.

It also included possible building opportunities including multi-storey shop-top examples and other exciting retail or commercial development opportunities ready for investors, such as rooftop bars and eateries.

Focusing on increasing pedestrian activity and economic development within Moama, the project also aims to improve safety, accessibility and visual appearance of the streetscape.

The project will be delivered as external funding opportunities arise.



## Moama Botanic Gardens improvements

The development of the Moama Botanic Gardens has continued with our Parks and Gardens Team completing 'Stage Five' of the project.

The works included the placement of large landscaping rocks, installation of paths, irrigation and new garden beds. The design of the gardens has been developed by the Friends of Moama Botanic Gardens in partnership with Council to ensure sustainable and aesthetically pleasing outcomes have been achieved.

## Horseshoe Lagoon improvements



Works to footbridges, internal walkways and general surrounds at Moama's Horseshoe Lagoon have been completed this term. The works have offered significant improvement to the functionality and amenity of one of our most utilised passive recreation areas.







## **A PLACE OF INCLUSION, CULTURE & WELLBEING**

A welcoming, healthy and diverse community that celebrates culture and history and is supported by accessible services.



# A place of inclusion, culture & wellbeing

*the highlights*

## We strive to:

- Develop community led strategy with a focus on social connections, social fabric and a sense of belonging.
- Foster and develop strategy to recognise and celebrate our rich heritage and indigenous culture (in partnership with community).
- Actively promote and resource educational pathways into (working with) Council (retain and attract new people).
- Support existing and new art projects and diverse community events.
- Facilitate and advocate for accessible health and wellbeing services based on local community needs.



## Development of Arts and Culture Strategy

Council developed an Arts and Culture Strategy to guide our involvement and investment in arts and cultural activities, festivals and events.

The strategy was developed with input from 171 local community members.

Objectives of the strategy include determining current expenditure and community satisfaction with Council's involvement in arts, culture, and heritage, identifying appropriate services and defining their contribution to the local economy.

It also prioritises community involvement while providing a clear action plan, including a public art policy addendum.

## Initiated the River Country Art Trail

Murray River Council will soon be home to an outdoor Art Trail with large-scale art installations set to be painted on some local water towers.

Spread out across various locations - Barham, Mathoura, Moulamein, Tooleybuc and Moama - the sites will collectively make up what will be known as the River Country Art Trail.

The project scope will include use of Council-owned water towers in Barham, Mathoura, Moulamein and Moama, plus the introduction of the large-scale art piece in Tooleybuc's Mensforth Park.

Planning with local steering groups commenced in 2023 with appointment of suitably experienced artists set for late 2024. This project was highlighted by the community as a priority during our Community Strategic Plan consultation.

## Commencement of School-Based Apprenticeship program



In 2024, Council commenced involvement in the School-Based Apprenticeship program.

Two school-based apprentices were welcomed into Murray River Council's workforce, undertaking qualifications in Heavy Diesel Mechanics.

Whilst Council has employed locals in trainee positions previously, this is the first time the organisation has joined the School-Based Apprenticeship program.

Council was approached by the schools requesting them to consider participation in the program initially, with the organisation now hoping it can continue to take on new students under the program annually.

A school-based apprenticeship combines paid work and training with school studies. As well as an industry recognised national qualification, students also gain credit towards their Higher School Certificate.





## Delivery of new Moama Preschool



Moama's new preschool is now complete with construction works finalised at the end of 2023 on the \$5.9million project.

The new preschool further compliments the growing Moama Education Precinct and has been constructed as a purpose-built early education centre servicing Moama and surrounds.

The scope of works included construction of the preschool building, carpark and fencing. This was then complimented with a new play space, landscaping, sheds, and associated works.

The relocation and development of a new Moama Preschool building became a priority several years ago to ensure continued, expanded and improved early childhood learning opportunities for the growing population.

## International Women's Day events



During this council term, Council hosted either a 'long lunch' or 'picnic in the park' in Barham to celebrate International Women's Day in March.

Hosted in Riverside Park, the events featured remarkable stories from guest speakers and local identities.

Always a sell-out event, the event offers a great opportunity for local community members to come together, meet new people, be inspired by stories of leadership and mark the achievements of the remarkable women in their lives.

## Delivery of Community Grants Program

Council has been delivering a Community Grants program that offers financial support for various projects, equipment, events, exhibitions and performances which contribute positively to the Murray River Council community.

This funding program runs twice per year, with applicants able to apply for grants of up to \$3,000 via the program.

The program is a great way to support local projects and committees, with almost \$200,000 in community grants awarded during this council term.

## Culture and Capability Project: Mathoura and Wakool



In 2023, Council engaged South West Arts to run NAIDOC workshops at the local primary schools in Wakool and Mathoura. Hosted by Wamba Wamba Artist, Deb Flower, the workshops showcased the ancient tradition of string making and weaving.

Students discovered how the techniques were used by the First Nations communities around the region and how the practice is used today. Deb also talked about the use of natural materials including animal pelts and bird feathers and their cultural importance to First Nations communities in everyday living and trade.

The workshops were very well received by all involved and we look forward to bringing more of these to our local schools in the future.





## Implemented a new Community Financial Assistance Program

In 2023, Council adopted its updated Community Financial Assistance Program Framework.

The framework outlines Council's allocation of funds to the community and the guiding principles behind these contributions.

The newly adopted framework covers Council's annual financial support programs including the Community Grants Fund, Quick Response Grants and the Local Heritage Fund Program.

It also includes a comprehensive list of eligible recipients who can seek funding under an 'annual allocation'. The annual allocation stream offers contributions towards nominated annual celebrations, events and programs that support community-strengthening initiatives across our area. This approach eliminates the need for individual reports to be submitted to the council each time a community group requests financial assistance. By streamlining the process, the council can efficiently allocate funds to community groups in a timely manner.

## Development of our Youth Engagement Program



Our Youth Engagement Program (YEP) has further developed over this council term, with our 'Y Hub' in Moulamein now well supported by the local community. Registered participants meet every Friday afternoon to socialise and play games at the local community space. The Y Hub participants have also organised a number of events over the past twelve months aimed at new experiences and increased social interaction.

The biggest events under the program are our Youth Week Skate workshops in April where local youth get the chance to tidy up their skateboarding skills at workshops in Barham, Mathoura or Moama.

## Expansion of Library Services



Our library services continued to expand right across the council, cementing themselves as an important area of service to the community.

In 2022 all library services came under membership of the Swan Hill Regional Library network which offers an extensive catalogue of books and services free of charge to its members. Library members have 24/7 access to the library catalogue, along with a range of resources both online and in our libraries, including books, audio-books, dvds, games, magazines, information, computer access and free wifi.

Whilst the Moulamein and Barham Libraries already sat under this network, the Mathoura and Mobile Library have been able to offer more to customers under this move.

Our libraries also offer more than just words on the page: there's plenty of social activities that staff run on a weekly and monthly basis too.







## A PLACE OF PROSPERITY AND RESILIENCE

Champion business, innovation, and technology to stimulate local economic development.



# A place of prosperity and resilience

*the highlights*

## We strive to:

- Encourage and support economic development across the region.
- Continue to develop strong and resilient communities.
- Promote and grow tourism across the region.
- Partner with industry, community, and government organisations to promote and nurture innovation.

## Delivery of Moama Lights event

Council has continued to deliver the Moama Lights event over this council term, with continued success.

An immersive sound and light trail showcasing local stories, Moama Lights features light installations and projections including theatrical fog, strobe and cutting edge moving light technology.

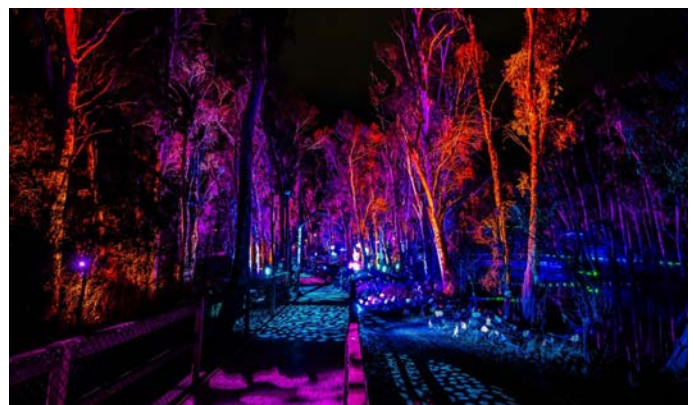
Now in its fourth year, the light and sound show runs during the month of July with roughly 25,000 visitors passing through the gates.

The event offers an enormous amount of economic value, with over \$11 million put back into the local community each year. This is spread between overnight stays, dining, shopping and other local experiences.

People come from far and wide to experience Echuca Moama, cementing the event as a permanent fixture on the local calendar. One that generates significant economic benefits and increased destination awareness.

Award recognitions include:

- Winner of the 'Economic Development Initiatives - Regions Under 15,000 Residents' category at the Economic Development Awards for Excellence.
- 'Highly Commended' at National Awards for Local Government 2021.
- Finalist in the 2022 National Economic Development Awards for Excellence.
- Bronze award and Finalist in the 'Festival and Events' category of the NSW Tourism Awards.
- Winner of the 'Innovation and Special Events' award category at the 2022 Local Government Awards.
- 'Highly Commended' in the 'Innovation and Special Events' award category at the 2023 Local Government Awards.







## Commenced Employment Lands Strategy

During this council term, Council commenced the development of an Employment Lands Strategy in consultation with the local community and businesses. The Strategy will offer a summary of the issues and opportunities associated with 'employment land' (areas that are generally zoned for industrial or commercial purposes) in the Murray River Council local government area.

It will identify strategies and actions to ensure a range of developable employment lands is available to meet projected demand and provide for future local jobs. It will also review current employment land-use and provide recommendations for future decision-making on such land across the council area.

In delivering the Strategy we will continue to work with our primary business sectors to explore the current issues relating to employment land availability, affordability and diversity across the area.

## Campaspe Murray Business Awards 2022 and 2024



In partnership with Campaspe Shire Council, Council delivered the Campaspe Murray Business Awards in 2022 and 2024.

The awards showcased businesses from the tourism, retail, trades, agriculture and many other sectors.

Over the last few years, our business community has been through an exceedingly challenging time with both the pandemic and then the flood event.

These awards exemplified the strength, resilience and resolution of businesses on both sides of the river and offered a platform to showcase their achievements.

## New Economic Development and Tourism Strategy



Council created a new Economic Development and Tourism Strategy for our region.

The Strategy identifies opportunities and potential projects that will support continued economic growth, foster local employment opportunities and position Murray River Council as a leader in tourism.

We have also looked to identify barriers to business growth and capture ideas around industry retention and attraction, production and manufacturing, agriculture, hospitality and events, and a skilled workforce.

The final Strategy is supported by an annual action plan. This document is separate to the strategy so that it can evolve over time or adapt to issues that arise suddenly (such as COVID-19 and the 2022 flood). In such a way, the strategy provides for long-term direction towards goals while providing flexibility and adaptability to the ever-changing environment that we live in.

## Industrial expansions

During this term, council commenced the preparation of a business case relating to the expansion of industrial land and business parks in the council.

A consultant was appointed in 2023 with key stakeholders engaged to drive its ongoing development.

Findings are due to be reported at the end of 2024.





## Launch of Backroads Trail Podcast



Council, in partnership with the Backroads Trail Committee, launched the new Backroads Trail podcast, offering locals and visitors an opportunity to delve deeper into the Backroads Trail journey.

Featuring 22 attractions across the local landscape, the Trail extends from Echuca-Moama, Womboota, Bunnaloo, Barham Koondrook, Caldwell, Deniliquin and Mathoura.

The six-part podcast series offers another layer to the experience, with stories from people along the trail including business owners, farmers, artists and community members.

## Approval of almond hulling facility in Murray Downs

In early 2023, Council approved an application for the construction of an almond hulling and shelling facility on Swan Hill Road at Murray Downs.

'Murray Downs Processing' will be delivered in stages over the next few years by Australian Farming Services; the management company managing Cadell, Canally and Augusta orchards.

The orchards operate across multiple farm enterprises in the Sunraysia/Riverina area and is one of the largest, connected, horticultural aggregations in Australia.

The project has been a great boost for the Murray Downs area and strengthens council's commitment to expand the commercial potential of the north-western area of the council.

The facility itself has created 60-plus full-time jobs, creating growth for both the company and our local communities.

The almond industry has undergone rapid expansion in recent years and faces a significant shortage in almond processing capacity, so this new facility will position our area well to further support the demand for almonds both domestically and abroad.

## "Live, Work, Invest" commenced

A project to develop a 'Live, Work, Invest' platform (website) commenced in 2024. The platform will provide a hub for information on living, working and investing in the Murray River region.

The information will build off what is already on Council's website to provide more in-depth information for residents, investors and those looking to relocate.

Content will include, but is not limited to, the below types of information:

- Information about lifestyle and work-life balance
- Information about childcare, education & training
- Health and wellbeing services
- Community Groups and Services
- Information on relocating
- Information on retiring
- Working in River Country
- Industries and investing
- Major projects
- Community directory
- Plus more...

## Delivery of River Country Marketing collateral



During this council term, our Economic Development and Tourism Team delivered and managed marketing activities relating to council's tourism brand 'River Country'. This included:

- Walking trails brochure
- Regional touring map
- Birds of River Country brochure
- Produce Trails brochure
- Updated visitor guide
- Social media presence on Facebook and Instagram
- River Country website
- Along with other marketing activities in partnership with external event committees and agencies.



## New destination and direction signage



In 2023, the Economic Development and Tourism Team developed a 'tourism and direction signage style guide' which will be implemented across Council in 2024.

The new signage style guide, covering all types of tourism signage, will ensure efficiency and uniformity across Council.

A number of signs have already been installed, most notably the River Country branded town entry signs.

## Sale of Industrial Land, Moama



An economic milestone was reached in 2024 through the sale of land to a multinational company, set to commence operations in Moama in the coming years.

This project will offer a large amount of economic input into the area both through the supply of jobs and local spend.

## Working towards establishing a Country Universities Centre



In partnership with other councils, MRC have looked to develop a Country Universities Centre (CUC) in the Southern Riverina region, encompassing the towns of Finley, Deniliquin, Hay, and Moama. This is a significant project that holds the promise of transforming the landscape of education and opportunity in our local communities.

Should it eventuate, the CUC Southern Riverina will offer facilities locally where students can obtain their qualifications without leaving their local communities. It's a tried and tested model showing a high success rate. Importantly, it has demonstrated that young people who would otherwise have to study elsewhere have jumped at the chance to pursue their educational dreams close to home.

Local communities are also aware of the project and are prepared to support it through scholarships, placements, and employment opportunities for those attending each of the proposed campuses. The potential for educational growth and development in our region is immense.

In progressing this project, the CUC Southern Riverina applied for the first round of funding made available under the Australian Government's Regional University Centres' Funding Program.





## **CONNECTED COMMUNITIES**

Enable integrated, safe and reliable transport  
and advocate for communications infrastructure.

# Connected Communities

*The highlights*

## We strive to:

- Develop strategies to deliver road and shared pathway infrastructure that is accessible to all.
- Advocate for and facilitate reliable communications infrastructure.
- Advocate for improved public transport.
- Enable commercial transport and connection opportunities.

## Road widening, reconstruction, rehabilitation and general works

During this council term, our Transport Team have commenced and/or delivered a number of major projects on our transport network under various funding programs, including but not limited to:

- Speewa Road widening & reconstruction
- Hollins Lane widening & reconstruction (Burraboi)
- Bunnaloo Road widening & reconstruction (Mathoura)
- Centre Road Reconstruction (Moama)
- Resheeting of Lower Thule Road
- North Barham Road widening & reconstruction
- Wakool Street & Chester Street intersection traffic calming (Barham)
- Rural Roads Gravel resheet & formation improvements
- Gilmour Rd sealing (Moama)
- Centre Road sealing (Moama)
- Various reseals
- Pothole repairs
- Perricoota Road works (Bunnaloo)
- Kyalite road widening
- Sealing of Boundary Road (Moama)
- Regional Road reseals
- Urban Street reseals
- Deni/Barham Road rehabilitation & widening
- Barmah Road rehabilitation & widening
- Thyra Road railway crossing removal



Barham/Deni Road



Bunnaloo Road



Wakool Road





## Post- flood road restoration works



Despite also being one of our biggest challenges, one of our more notable achievements this term has been the progress our Infrastructure Team has made on post-2022-flood road restorations.

Emergency works, executed promptly in the initial recovery response, contributed to Council's workload as the teams undertook emergency repairs to restore access on critical road routes.

Then, following a period of extensive assessments, our team identified over 200 individual stretches of sealed and unsealed roads requiring repair.

This in turn required a number of submissions to Transport for NSW for review and approval in order to secure funding for the comprehensive repair works.

And while restoration works remained a priority, our team also had to balance other works projects with external funding deadlines that had been delayed because of the floods.

They worked tirelessly to accommodate these delayed works while simultaneously striving to restore community access on the flood-damaged roads. It was definitely a challenge, but we are proud of the consolidated efforts of our dedicated works team.

Pictured: Balpool Rd before and after

## Advocacy for broadband improvements in North-Western areas

Murray River Council, NBN Co and the NSW and Victorian Governments partnered to agree to a multi-million-dollar upgrade to the region's broadband network.

Residents in Tooleybuc, Koraleigh, Murray Downs and surrounds will benefit from three new towers to be constructed in Piangil, Nyah and Swan Hill North.

The new towers will see the current satellite service replaced with a fixed, wireless network for the region.

Council has been working hard behind the scenes to bring the proposal to life, engaging with NBN Co to work towards improved digital connectivity and broadband services for our north-western communities.

## Community Transport program



During this term, council's Community Services department has continued to offer a range of community transport options for local residents.

The service offers transport for frail older persons meeting the My Aged Care eligibility criteria. We also offer transport for people of any age who are isolated or live remotely.

Over 10,000 community transport trips have been made each year!



## Improved connectivity for some of our smaller towns

Residents in Moulamein, Wakool and Picnic Point will benefit from communications upgrades thanks to funding awarded under the Australian Government's Regional Connectivity Program.

This is another project council advocated for during this council term.

Moulamein and Wakool residents are set to gain faster internet connectivity with NBN Co providing fixed wireless broadband services to the towns.

And the Picnic Point community will benefit from more reliable mobile phone and data coverage with Telstra Limited providing a new macro mobile site to the area.

These projects are a big win for these communities who will now be better supported to access the basic modern connection services that people in larger areas take for granted.

## Perricoota Road resheeting



Council secured \$1,398,477 of funding to reshape and gravel resheet 14.3kms of the unsealed section of Perricoota Road.

This was completed in 2024.

To facilitate the works, council staff met with the local community to discuss the impending works before commencement. This gave us an opportunity to touch base with residents to provide a general update on the project and to ensure any additional concerns were captured. The community session ended up raising additional ideas to help gain some efficiencies in delivering the project. A great outcome from community consultation.

## Finalisation of Timber Bridge replacement



In exciting news for those that regularly utilise our transport routes, the 2022 year saw council award the contract for the replacement of all remaining timber bridges in the municipality.

This was a great achievement after years of gradual replacement thanks to behind-the-scenes planning and grant applications from our Infrastructure Team.

Pictured: Fountains Road/Merran Creek Bridge before and after.

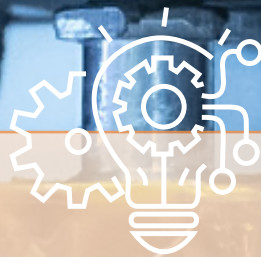
## Municipal Works Field Day



Murray River Council was one of the driving forces behind the organisation of the 'Municipal Work Australia Field Day' held in Moama in June 2024. The event saw over 32 exhibitors, with over 400 local government works staff from around 20 Councils in Victoria and NSW.







## **TOMORROW'S TECHNOLOGIES**

Ensure the region is well placed to embrace emerging and disruptive technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and Deep Learning.

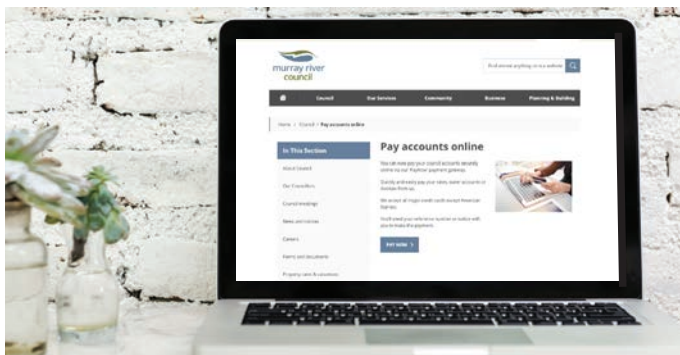
# Tomorrow's Technologies

*the highlights*

## We strive to:

- Embed a geospatial driven system into Council processes, including public interface.
- Explore technologies to forecast possible future opportunities.
- To encourage, educate and enable environmentally sustainable approaches to energy management.
- Monitor and assess emerging global technology trends.

## Technology One implementation



One of Council's most important internal projects has been the ongoing implementation of the new TechONE Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system.

Stage-one saw the implementation of a single, integrated software approach to manage day-to-day business activities, such as accounting, procurement, order management, inventory management, labour, work schedules and payroll.

Stage-two saw the introduction of property and rates modules. Whilst this was a challenge for our Finance Team it also opened up more opportunities for customers to start paying accounts online.

Both of these modules was a big step for the organisation as TechONE has tied together various business processes and enabled the flow of data between them.

The organisation now continues to work towards online applications, which will go a long way to improving the online experience for customers.

## New electric vehicle



During this term, we added a new electric vehicle (EV) to our fleet which is powered by the charging station installed at our Moama office. The electric vehicle is used by Council staff needing to travel between our offices and is a positive way we can help reduce emissions in the transport space. We're also continuing to explore opportunities to encourage greater electric vehicle take-up in the local community via development of an 'EV Strategy' and are working with industry partners to undertake joint advocacy to help facilitate the installation of more charging stations across the council area.

## Improvements to bulk import of spatial details for developer contributed assets

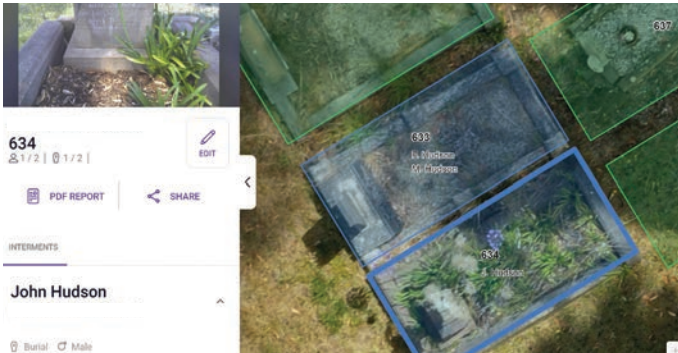
Using Feature Manipulation Engine (FME), our Assets Team has developed a process for the bulk import of spatial details for 'developer contributed infrastructure assets' (provided via Works as Executed Drawings) into Council's GIS. This will enable faster processing of the spatial details for each subdivision stage, with a reduction of process duplication and staff workload.

Further processes are being explored to use FME to import the associated asset details/attributes of each gifted asset directly into the asset management system. Again, this seeks to reduce the internal workload when bringing these assets to account.





## Introduction of online cemetery records



In 2022 Council launched its new digital platform for the management of cemetery data, with a view to increasing the service levels to the community and creating internal administration efficiencies.

The project saw the implementation of digital cemetery records for all 6 operational cemeteries including Barham, Mathoura Lawn, Mathoura Pioneer, Moama, Moulamein and Tooleybuc. This includes drone aerial surveying to create high resolution images, along with ground surveying to capture GPS co-ordinates and information relating to each known grave.

With the ability to visit the Murray River Council cemetery map online, it's no problem for visitors to find graves themselves by accessing the database, easily, from anywhere and at any time. Where previously, families and other visitors to the cemeteries were not able to see plots they may have been interested in over a phone call, they're now able to access a highly accurate map that offers a stunning visual representation of the cemetery's grounds and details of every plot within.

-This project also received an Award at the 2022 Local Government Awards in August: 'Winner, Reporting to Your Community' category.

## Improvements to data integration and access

Internal documentation linkages have been created in Council's mapping platform (Intramaps) to allow access to design plans, specifications and WAE plans via hyperlinks.

This ensures that current, accurate details can be located quickly for all MRC Infrastructure-related data and details, reducing data errors and staff workload.

## Update of property mapping

Property mapping (lot boundary detail) is maintained by NSW Spatial Services and used by Council for the mapping of all property/lot boundaries and associated ratepayer data.

Using FME (Feature Manipulation Engine) a process has been developed to download NSW Spatial Services data directly to the TechOne Spatial Catalogue for use in Council's mapping platform (Intramaps) and TechOne Property & Rating system. This will enable daily updates of all property mapping (including subdivisions and new lots) and associated ratepayer information, reducing data errors and time-consuming manual updates.

This also enables fast and accurate mapping-based queries, such as neighbour notifications, to be performed inside Council's Mapping platform without manual checking required in the rating system, reducing wait times for customers and staff workload.

A similar process is currently being developed to download planning layers (i.e. LEP) from relevant government departments for use in Intramaps.

## Service Location Diagram automation using Before You Dig (BYD)



All Murray River Council buried infrastructure assets (water, sewer and stormwater drainage assets) have now been loaded into the Before You Dig platform (formally Dial before you Dig) – a free public access 3rd party platform.

This means the location, asset details and maps of where these assets are situated can be accessed by ratepayers and developers on demand, for free, 24 hours a day, without requiring a service request or service location diagram from Council staff.

In the 2023/2024 year, 1913 referrals have been provided via BYD, removing wait times for customers and significant staff workload.







During this Council term, we have undergone a time of significant reflection to ensure that Council remains financially sustainable whilst working together to progress the community's vision for vibrant and liveable spaces.

Thank you to our hard-working and dedicated staff and volunteers who share our vision to deliver the best possible future for the Murray River Council region.

- The Council (2021-2024)











# murray river council

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