

Loddon Murray Community Alliance

Partnerships Building the Region's Future



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1 Preface

Loddon Murray Community Alliance (LMCA)

The report '*Partnerships Building the Region's Future*' represents a major step and commitment by the Loddon Murray region towards coordinating a stronger and sustainable future for our communities.

The Alliance has already achieved much. It draws together the interests of twenty-eight organisations and agencies and, notably, three local governments.

The Alliance does not seek to duplicate the responsibilities of any of its members. Rather, it seeks to achieve much more by the members working together through an agreed regional communities plan. This plan will take a long-term, generational perspective, which, we believe, will deliver the economic potential of this region within a sustainable social and environmental landscape.

The genesis of the Alliance was a shared concern for the future of young people in the Loddon Murray region, which has seen achievements in four significant projects. While the interests and engagement of young people will remain an important focus for the Alliance, our objectives have been broadened to take a whole-of-community and sustainability approach.

The very existence of the Alliance and the commitment of members to working together represent its strength. This strength also represents an opportunity for government.

The '*Partnerships Building the Region's Future*' report confirms the commitment to 'raise the bar' in this region and provides the steps that need to be taken to achieve the vision we have determined as fundamental for our future.

The report calls for government support to assist the region achieve three outcomes.

The advantages for government from backing this initiative are primarily those of optimising the economic potential of the region, addressing issues of population decline that are otherwise projected and of dealing with a region that has 'got its act together', rather than responding to a clamour of separate representations on behalf of specific interests.

The LMCA regional communities plan offers the means for strong whole-of-government collaboration. The Alliance initiative has already received endorsement from the (State) Regional Managers Forum as a 'lighthouse' project, which recognises both the potential of the initiative and the needs of this region.

2 Executive Summary

THE ALLIANCE

Loddon Murray Community Alliance (the Alliance) was formed to engage with young people and build capacity in the communities of the Shires of Gannawarra and Loddon and Swan Hill Rural City.

Founded on a community's desire to offer a positive future to its young people, the Alliance progressed swiftly in a relatively short period of time. Now comprising 28 community bodies, from councils to schools, the Alliance has sourced over \$800,000 to establish regional youth programs that will provide long-term benefits. The most recent regional project for its Partners, establishing a university presence in Swan Hill and Kerang, is moving towards fruition. The key achievements of the Alliance are:

- ❑ **Twenty-eight significant partners coming together in the first place, forming probably a unique group within regional Australia;**
- ❑ **Supporting the initiation and implementation of tangible programs.**

REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

The Alliance represents a significant community partnership and is a regional asset worth developing to its optimum potential. Its key strengths include strong commitment from agencies that:

- ❑ **Provides services to different communities across the region;**
- ❑ **Provides opportunity to plan at a broader regional level;**
- ❑ **Facilitates co-ordination of regional planning at agency and community level;**
- ❑ **Offers an inducement for bodies across the community to work together and share resources. LMCA understands, and works through synergy;**
- ❑ **Provides a proven alternative to the competitive relationships that operate between service providers at the moment. LMCA provides a collaborative approach to problem-solving, with much better outcomes;**
- ❑ **Provides improved value for the government resources and funding provided into the region, and**
- ❑ **Provides the platform for a truly whole-of-government approach to regional needs.**

TIME FOR CHANGE

Although the Alliance has been very proactive to date, Partner representatives can offer significantly more to their regional communities, for which current demographic estimates indicate an ongoing decline in the 'dynamic' population groups over the next thirty years. The following strategic factors influence the future direction of the Alliance:

- ❑ **The region's communities have recognised that the future will be challenging and leaders have come forward to shape that future rather than succumb to events;**
- ❑ **Government policy and service delivery is moving to work more effectively with regional communities. An opportunity exists to optimise the benefits for Loddon Murray from a proactive relationship with government;**
- ❑ **There is no other body in the Loddon Murray region that can offer government the opportunity of working directly with the total community of three LGAs.**

Importantly, the Alliance will not just be another committee. It will undertake crucial future-building and regional coordination roles that are not performed by any agency.

THE ALLIANCE PARTNERS CAN BUILD THE REGION'S FUTURE

In undertaking roles that are presently not fulfilled by any agency, the Alliance can:

- ❑ **Provide a strong regional voice;**
- ❑ **Undertake the regional planning process and identify a long-term regional Vision, through development of a Regional Communities Plan;**
- ❑ **Identify and assist in implementing the short-term programs through which the community and government can build the region's long-term future;**
- ❑ **Build on the new employment prospects being created in the region;**
- ❑ **Offer government a complete engagement with all the region's communities;**
- ❑ **Engage with three LGAs as one region;**
- ❑ **Coordinate short-term regional programs.**

Driven by a committed Chair and supported by skilled staff, the Board and Partners will identify regional priorities and work with Department Heads to develop policies and programs that deliver effective regional outcomes. Service Delivery Teams comprising Partner and Department representatives will work with communities to build capacity to shape their futures. *"Partnerships Building the Region's Future"* presents a clear direction for the Alliance, encapsulated in its Vision of:

- ❑ **A Loddon Murray region whose communities have a belief in a positive future; and**
- ❑ **An Alliance that engages with people to build that future.**

and its Mission Statement:

Loddon Murray Community Alliance will engage with each of its regional communities to build the capacity to shape a sustainable, desirable future that will make Loddon Murray a great place in which to live.

The Alliance's success will be measured by the achievement of demographic, economic and wellbeing indicators that compare favourably to those of the best of regional Victoria.

THE ALLIANCE'S NEW STRUCTURE

The Regional Communities Plan

The Regional Communities Plan is the platform upon which the future will be built. This Plan will be a significant body of work, with the following characteristics:

- ❑ **Community engagement – based on community and Department input, with the assistance of a suitably qualified external team, this will be an objective, well-analysed Plan that provides a clear picture of the region's communities, and trends for the future;**
- ❑ **Long-term view – the region will identify its potential future at least 25-30 years ahead. This long-term view provides the underpinning rationale behind short and medium term programs;**
- ❑ **Short-term programs – with an objective appreciation of the long-term vision for the region, short-term programs, from one to three years, will be developed to achieve that vision;**
- ❑ **A living 'pathway' document – The Plan will provide a continuous, updateable reference for the region, its communities and government.**

The Board

The Alliance Board will undertake a clear, **strategic**, role for the community and will:

- ❑ **Commission and maintain the Regional Communities Plan;**
- ❑ **Determine the priority issues for its communities and drive the programs that are put in place to address these;**
- ❑ **Alliance Partners and government departments create and implement effective short-term community programs;**
- ❑ **Ensure that short, medium and long-term objectives are met;**
- ❑ **Liaise with government to influence regional policy;**

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- ❑ **Create communication pathways through and across the region so communities recognise that the Alliance can assist them;**
 - ❑ **Provide advice, support and facilitate access to government by community bodies.**

The Chair

The Chair of the Alliance Board will:

- ❑ **Be the public face of the Alliance, and someone who is respected by the community and by government;**
- ❑ **Provide dynamic leadership to the Board;**
- ❑ **Champion regional community needs and follow through to ensure those needs are met;**
- ❑ **Work with the Executive Officer to drive short-term and long-term concrete results and create wins for the community.**

The Executive Officer

After the Board sets strategic priorities, the Executive Officer will ensure that:

- ❑ **Alliance Partners and government departments are supported in maintaining a clear communication pathway through and across the region;**
- ❑ **The Board and community bodies are provided leadership and strategic advice;**
- ❑ **The Alliance is an accessible contact for community members wishing to develop initiatives;**
- ❑ **The function of the Board and its relationships are facilitated.**

Alliance Partners and Government Departments

Alliance Partners wish to work with government on three levels:

- ❑ **Firstly, through direct government participation in the understanding and development of regional strategies. The inclusion of a Departmental Secretary at the Board table will offer a unique and vital communication opportunity between community and government;**
- ❑ **Secondly, Alliance Partners can work with government departments to develop well-focused short-term programs to meet regional community needs;**

- **Thirdly, Alliance Partners will form Service Delivery Teams with government departments to implement and monitor programs into the region. A close working alliance between representatives will encourage successful outcomes, or will identify lessons to be learnt from the delivery process.**

The Region's Communities

Councils, agencies and organisations will consult the Regional Communities Plan as a reference for their own strategic planning, and will work collaboratively with the Alliance to achieve their long-term aspirations.

Through the Alliance, Loddon Murray will become a region where the long-term objectives of government and local communities coincide, and where both can work constructively towards common goals.

FUNDING

To capture this opportunity to engage regional communities and government, the Alliance is seeking the following support funding during the next five years:

| Item | Budget |
|---|---|
| Prepare the Regional Communities Plan | \$100,000 |
| Chair of the Board | \$40,000 pa |
| Executive Officer, staff and associated costs | \$315,000 pa |
| Total | Plan; \$100,000 Annual Costs; approx \$355,000 |

3 Loddon Murray Community Alliance

3.1 From Conception to Now

During early 2003 a series of community forums confirmed a desire to establish youth-engagement projects in north-central Victoria based on Swan Hill College, MacKillop College, Kerang Tech High and Lynall Hall Community School in Melbourne. The key concern was the trend for young people to drift away and not have the desire or opportunity to commit their energy and enthusiasm to the future of the region. The Victorian Schools Innovation Commission and Rotary Club of Melbourne were instrumental in encouraging the formation of a youth program, called the Loddon Campaspe-CBD Student Futures Project.

During the second half of 2003 a curriculum, business plan and funding strategy were developed and an expanding network of partners was encouraged, from which Northern District Community Health Services emerged as the lead organisation behind the Student Futures Project.

Subsequent partnerships were developed with the North Central Catchment Management Authority (and the Department of Primary Industries), following which the curriculum changed to focus on the sustainable management of natural resources, and on water resources in particular.

By the end of 2003, the core partners of the Loddon Campaspe-CBD Student Futures Project had developed a regional strategy to deliver a series of community projects, titled the Stronger Schools-Community Partnerships Program. The Student Futures Project was re-named the Schools-Community Water Resources Project.

In February 2004, the Loddon Murray Community Alliance emerged from the Stronger Schools-Community Partnerships Program, establishing its place within the municipalities of Gannawarra, Loddon and Swan Hill. By mid-2004 the Partner Network included key government and community organisations, a Project Manager was in place and a series of initiatives had commenced. By January 2005, some \$830,000 of financial and in-kind contributions had been sourced to maintain the Alliance programs.

LMCA has its administrative processes fully in place, and initiates, implements and reviews activities through a Board, which meets monthly. A Partners' meeting takes place bi-monthly. **The key achievements of the Alliance are:**

- ❑ **Twenty-eight significant partners coming together in the first place, forming probably a unique group within regional Australia;**
- ❑ **Supporting the initiation and implementation of tangible programs.**

3.2 Current Objectives

By March 2005, the Alliance was an incorporated body representing the collective commitment of regional municipalities, agencies, organisations, clubs, businesses and individuals who had come together to share ideas and information, and to develop a broader and more strategic approach to

issues and projects of interest that would benefit the region's youth. Its key objectives were identified as:

- ❑ **Providing incentive and opportunity for youth to remain within the region, or to return to the region;**
- ❑ **Providing increased employment and business development opportunities for young people who stay, or who return after study or other experience; and**
- ❑ **Encouraging and providing opportunities for young people to develop and undertake leadership roles within the community.**

3.3 Current Alliance Partners

During its short history the Alliance has grown to the following 28 Partners:

Table 2 -1 – Alliance Partners

| Area | Partners |
|-------------|--|
| Councils | Gannawarra, Loddon, Swan Hill Rural City |
| Government | Central Victoria Area Consultative Committee, Department of Education & Training Loddon Campaspe-Mallee, Department of Primary Industries, North Central Catchment Management Authority |
| Education | Catholic Education Office Ballarat Diocese, Kerang Learning Centre, Kyabram Community & Learning Centre, Murray Mallee LLEN, Campaspe-Cohuna LLEN |
| Health | Northern District Community Health Services, Southern Mallee Primary Care Partnerships |
| Training | Murray Mallee Training, Swan Training |
| Business | Nutrigreen |
| Clubs | Kerang Lions, Swan Hill Rotary |
| Schools | Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE, Boort Secondary College, Kerang Tech High, Lynall Hall Community School, MacKillop College, Pyramid Hill College, Sunraysia Institute of TAFE, Swan Hill College, Wedderburn College |

The Alliance, therefore, represents a significant community partnership and is a regional asset worth developing to its optimum potential. Its key strengths include strong commitment from agencies that:

- ❑ **Provides services to different communities across the region;**
- ❑ **Offers an inducement for bodies across the community to work together and share resources. LMCA understands, and works through synergy;**
- ❑ **Provides a proven alternative to the competitive relationship that operates between service providers at the moment. LMCA provides a collaborative approach to problem-solving, with much better outcomes; and**
- ❑ **Provides the platform for a truly whole-of-government approach to regional needs.**

The growth of the Partner Network between 2003 and 2005 is a testament to the self-motivated commitment of a region that is experiencing gradual population decline.

However, there is still work to be done to encourage other sector participants to become Partners. For example, media partnerships would be very effective, as would a more inclusive partnership with business, particularly through Chambers of Commerce and some significant regional businesses. The current membership reflects, in part, the previous focus on youth and the Alliance has sought to complete this plan as a basis for engaging a broader membership.

3.4 Initiatives

Under the subsequent auspices of Murray Mallee LLEN and Northern District Community Health the following major initiatives have been undertaken:

Schools-Community Water Resources Project – a development step for the Alliance whereby young people are encouraged to form a greater appreciation of their region through learning about and taking an interest in sustainable natural resource management;

Centre for Enterprise Learning – as a specific outcome from the Water Resources Project a funding application was submitted to establish a specialised learning centre for the study of aquaculture. However, this project was unable to commence. The project has now changed focus to a broader examination of the enterprise learning gaps, facilities and, hence, opportunities across the region. A funding application is currently before Regional Development Victoria;

Swan Hill Regional University – seen as a major long-term need for the region, discussions have been held with interested tertiary education providers to establish a campus at Swan Hill. At the time of writing this initiative had moved positively to a short-list of options;

Youth Participation Strategy – This project has been funded by DVC and is soon to be commenced by the Alliance. It creates opportunities for the community to engage with young people by encouraging them to become involved in leading roles and regional decision-making.

Following thorough discussion by the Board, each of these initiatives has been fully supported by Alliance Partners. Each project contributes to developing the social capacity of the broader community, and already the synergies between these projects have demonstrated the value of collaborating on initiatives and leveraging scarce resources.

3.5 Regional Community Policy

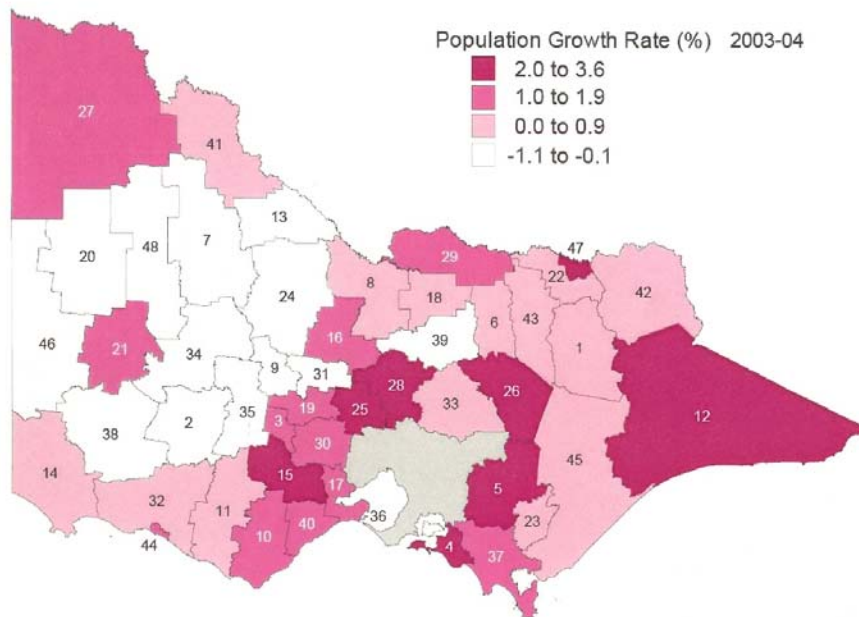
Consideration of a change in direction for the Alliance is very timely given the thrust of state government regional policy. Some principles behind that regional policy are:

- ❑ **The development of policies to build and strengthen communities. The key to this is that communities must be part of the policy development process so government is aware of community needs and expectations;**
- ❑ **Aligning community and state goals;**
- ❑ **As the primary conduit, encouraging councils to develop community plans;**
- ❑ **Basing those community plans on the best information available;**
- ❑ **Identifying the interconnectedness of community issues so that programs can have a broader effect than in the past; and**
- ❑ **Encouraging opportunities for departments to coordinate their services for better outcomes;**

The Alliance's commitment to working with these principles is demonstrated throughout this document.

4 Loddon Murray Community

4.1 Rate of Population Growth



This graph was used in a presentation by the Secretary, Department of Infrastructure in Bendigo, 31 August. It cites the sources of information to be the DSE Victorian Population Bulletin 2005 & ABS Cat No 3218.0

This graph encapsulates the key concern of Alliance partners, being the decline in population of Gannawarra (13) and Loddon (24) Shires, and the slow rate of growth of Swan Hill Rural City (41). Although growth is not even across Victoria, Alliance Partners do not accept that their region should not share in the economic and social benefits of the higher rates of population growth being experienced elsewhere in the state.

4.2 Demographic Outlook

The following table is constructed from the data behind "Victoria in Future" 2004, a Department of Sustainability (DSE) and Environment estimate of demographic change over a thirty year period:

Table 4-1 – Estimated Population Movement, 2001-2031

| Age Group | Gannawarra | Loddon | Swan Hill |
|--------------|------------|--------|-----------|
| 0 – 14 years | (858) | (573) | (1,302) |
| 15 - 24 | (439) | (270) | (780) |
| 25 - 49 | (1,032) | (951) | (1,173) |
| 50+ | (443) | 931 | 3,489 |

*Note; () denotes a reduction in number

Given the Alliance's current focus on young people in the 15-24 year age group, features of current demographic estimates include the following:

- ❑ **Although the number of 15-24 year olds is expected to decrease by 1,489 during the next thirty years, the number of 0-14 year olds is expected to decrease by 2,733;**
- ❑ **Given that those young children (and some of the 15-24 year olds) will be living at home with parents, their expected decrease must be linked to the expected reduction of 3,156 25-49 year olds;**
- ❑ **Therefore, a significant number of the population will not reach the 15-24 age group, whilst a relatively high number of adults are expected to leave, right up to their late forties;**
- ❑ **An ageing population will present the region with opportunities and challenges that have not yet been recognised.**

Although the decrease in young people is of concern, other 'dynamic' sectors of the community are expected to reduce by four times the rate of decrease for young people. Combined with new issues associated with greater numbers of older people, there is an opportunity for the Alliance to have a significantly wider role to play.

4.3 Building on Regional Success

Although the demographic data appear pessimistic, the Loddon Murray region has experienced new economic activity which will encourage people to remain here. Based on the transfer of irrigation water from lower-value to higher-value agriculture, there has been notable new investment in intensive horticulture enterprises, such as:

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- ❑ **Fourteen major private industry projects that have commenced (since July 2003) or are likely to commence in the next 1-2 years. These projects are principally large-scale horticultural production activities but also include an abattoir and an ethanol production facility. Total investment for the fourteen projects is \$410 million, which will create 974 direct, full-time equivalent jobs;**
 - ❑ **An additional 12,000ha becoming available for almonds, grapes and vegetables at Robinvale. Over the next ten years there is an expectation of a further 100 new developments investing up to \$1 billion and creating 1,000 full time equivalent jobs, with a need for 500-1,000 new accommodation units. Local and state governments have worked to jointly fund an Executive Officer to coordinate Economic and Social programs and a Youth and Families Officer to assist in managing the community needs that have emerged in the wake of this rapid growth;**
 - ❑ **The creation of a potential 760 full-time and part-time jobs at Boort, built on a state government project to improve irrigation and power infrastructure in the district. This investment has created the environment for over 5,000ha of new high-value crops, including Australia's largest olive plantation and a \$40 million olive oil processing plant. In addition, the Boort area has experienced significant new investment in wine grape plantings.**

New investments such as these create job opportunities through which communities can look to the future with confidence. They also represent examples of communities and government working together for tangible, sustainable benefits.

The Alliance can play key roles that emerge from this investment activity:

- ❑ **It provides an ideal Forum to discuss and act upon the issues associated with changes in land and water use;**
- ❑ **Through its Partners, the Alliance brings a productive, collaborative approach to addressing the educational, health, infrastructure and social issues that arise from change, such as those in Robinvale for example.**

4.4 What is a Community?

The name, 'Loddon Murray Community Alliance', presents itself as a representation of a homogeneous 'community' set in a definable 'region'. The reality is somewhat different from this and may be viewed in the following terms:

- ❑ **Location – the factors affecting Wedderburn, because of its proximity to Greater Bendigo, will be different to those affecting Kerang;**
- ❑ **Size – the future needs of Swan Hill city will not be entirely the same as those of Pyramid Hill;**

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- ❑ **Age – the needs and expectations of young people are different from those of older people;**
 - ❑ **Infrastructure – there may be similar expectations of access to education, health and physical security across the whole region;**

Given the range of people's needs and expectation, in a variety of contexts, the reality is that the Alliance serves many 'communities' and this is the context in which this document will refer to its future role.

4.5 Loddon – Community Decisions

In recent years Loddon Shire has introduced a process whereby towns and districts can develop their own strategic plans. These plans are reflections of the Shire Plan, but provide an opportunity to build local capacity for the future. As part of its budgetary process, Council then allocates a sum of money for each participating town from which that community can decide what needs should be funded. Again, this encourages local understanding of issues and devolved decision-making.

This model is well regarded by Gannawarra Shire and Swan Hill Rural City Councils. It provides each community with an opportunity to make some decisions and gain a greater understanding of strategic actions that can determine a better future. It is also a tangible way of linking government to community needs.

There is value in implementing this concept in other regional communities. As a first step the three CEOs of the three municipalities have agreed that Community Plans developed for their respective jurisdictions will use similar methodologies so that an overall picture of regional aspirations and needs can be developed. This will be of significant value to the Alliance and a notable example of the willingness of these key Partners to work in collaboration.

The Shire of Gannawarra is embarking, through funding provided via the Departments of Victorian Communities and Human Services, on a significant program of formalising and collating the community planning already undertaken across the municipality. Where gaps are identified, additional work will be done with the communities to create a comprehensive set of Community Plans. These together with the other community plans developed across the broader region will form the basis for the regional plan.

5 A New Direction

5.1 Why Have the Alliance?

The Alliance's membership includes councils, agencies and a range of service providers, each of which has been working with regional communities for a long time. There are many examples of good outcomes for the region because those service providers have adapted their delivery to respond to changing circumstances. Collectively they have delivered or are developing such innovative projects as;

Tower Hill residential Estate, Swan Hill;

Enterprise Learning Centre Network;

Swan Hill International College

Kerang Post Compulsory Learning Network;

Harrison Hall/Town Hall Performing Arts Complex; and

Given that, what is the use of the Alliance? What can it do that isn't being done already?

5.2 Providing Value to the Region

The Alliance can undertake some special roles that are presently not fulfilled by any agency. It can:

- ❑ **Provide a strong regional voice. The articulation of regional needs can be lost in the competitive lobbying to government that is the right of any other part of Victoria, or Australia. The Alliance offers an opportunity for Loddon Murray communities to seek support to develop resilient and sustainable futures;**
- ❑ **Identify a Vision for the long-term. The Alliance can determine what the Loddon Murray region and its communities could be in thirty years' time. It is critical that the regional population can look forward to a sustainable future and understand the contribution each person can make to its development. A belief in a sustainable future will encourage residents to stay and new people to migrate to the region;**
- ❑ **Undertake the regional planning process. Loddon Murray requires a Regional Plan for its communities through which more effective decisions can be made;**
- ❑ **Offer government a complete engagement with all the region's communities. There is no other single entity that has the Alliance's engagement across and into the total community;**
- ❑ **Engage with three LGA's as one region. The Alliance represents a unique representation of communities with common interests. It offers a high level of coordination and is the platform for better whole-of-government outcomes. For example, the three Councils can combine resources to improve regional**

sustainability where current arrangements are not working as well as they would like;

- ❑ **Coordinate short-term regional activity. The Alliance will communicate its roles throughout the region, and ensure that a copy of the Regional Communities Plan is available to every organisation. The Alliance could coordinate short-term community programs to achieve greater outcomes, and become a 'first-stop shop' for many community initiatives. The Alliance can assist in minimising the dissipation of government funds, and ensuring that government resources meet community needs.**
- ❑ **Provide linkages to build on ideas or needs and deliver initiatives addressing regional needs or opportunities.**

Importantly, the Alliance will not just be another committee. It will undertake crucial future-building and regional coordination roles that are not performed by any other agency.

Its Vision is of:

- ❑ **A Loddon Murray region whose communities have a belief in a positive future; and**
- ❑ **An Alliance that engages with people to build that future.**

5.3 The Time for Change is Right

The following strategic factors influence the future direction of the Alliance:

- ❑ **The region's communities have recognised that the future will be challenging and leaders have stepped forward to shape that future rather than succumb to events;**
- ❑ **The Alliance has already demonstrated that it can change to best meet community needs. It has a proven record of creating and meeting opportunities, such as**
 - Conducting a review of post-compulsory education
 - Initiating the process to create a regional universities centre in Swan Hill
 - Supporting the creation an international college, including the reinstatement of previously underused facilities
- ❑ **Government policy and service delivery is moving to work more effectively with regional communities. An opportunity exists to investigate just how much Loddon Murray could benefit from a proactive relationship with government;**
- ❑ **Economic activity has increased. The Alliance can work effectively with government across the region to build on the employment gains which have begun to emerge;**

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- ❑ **There are discrete roles the Alliance could undertake that would not conflict with other agencies; rather, it must complement and enhance the work of Partner agencies;**
 - ❑ **There is no other body in the Loddon Murray region that can provide this opportunity.**

5.4 The Objective – Building Capacity for a Sustainable Future

The balance of this document will determine how the Alliance can;

- ❑ **Identify a sustainable, long-term future for the communities within the Loddon Murray region;**
- ❑ **Assist regional communities to develop the capacity to manage change effectively; and**
- ❑ **Achieve ‘Wins’ for the region.**

Alliance Partners are committed to sustainable communities. Their futures will not be built on a ‘welfare’ mentality, but rather on working with government to understand what those futures could be, and then collaborating to direct regional programs towards assisting the community to manage change.

In the final analysis, the Alliance must be a body that gets things done and creates ‘wins’ for its communities.

Some work the Alliance puts in place with government and service providers may take years to come to fruition. To a degree, it may never be able to claim that it instigated the final outcomes; but those outcomes would not have been possible without the Alliance’s work.

However, Partners are keen that the Alliance creates some definable, short-term ‘wins’ to encourage regional trust in its activities. The youth programs underway are existing examples of those, and the possibility of establishing a regional universities centre at Swan Hill would be a significant achievement.

A clear direction for the Alliance is encapsulated in its Mission Statement:

“The Mission of Loddon Murray Community Alliance is to assist each of its regional community partners to build the capacity to shape a sustainable, desirable future that will make Loddon Murray a great place in which to live”.

The Alliance’s success will be measured by the achievement of demographic, economic and wellbeing indicators that compare favourably to those of the best of regional Victoria.

6 Future Alliance Structure

6.1 Introduction

Building a future for the region will be underpinned by the following key elements:

- ❑ **Objective, comprehensive information and analysis about the region;**
- ❑ **An informed and achievable Vision for the future;**
- ❑ **The ability to turn ideas into short, medium and long-term actions; and**
- ❑ **Communities that take ownership of, and participate in, building the capacity to shape their futures.**

The structural elements of the Alliance will comprise:

- ❑ **The Regional Communities Plan;**
- ❑ **The Alliance Board;**
- ❑ **The Chair of the Board;**
- ❑ **The Executive Officer and support staff;**
- ❑ **The Alliance Partners;**
- ❑ **Government Departments; and**
- ❑ **Regional communities.**
- ❑

6.2 The Regional Communities Plan

The Regional Communities Plan is the platform upon which the future will be built. This Plan will be a significant body of work with the following characteristics:

- ❑ **Community engagement – based on community and Department input, with the assistance of a suitably qualified external team, this will be an objective, well-analysed Plan that provides a clear picture of the region’s communities, and trends for the future;**
- ❑ **Long-term view – the region needs to identify its potential future at least 25-30 years ahead; that is, in one generation’s time. This long-term view provides the underpinning rationale behind short and medium term programs;**

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- ❑ **Short-term programs – with an objective appreciation of the long-term vision for the region, short-term programs, from one to three years, can be developed to achieve that vision;**
 - ❑ **A living ‘pathway’ document – The Regional Communities Plan cannot influence future outcomes like an arrow flying directly to the bull’s eye on a target. Over the long term human activity is too complex to state that any process will deliver outcomes that precisely.**

However, an updatable, living Plan can provide a continuous broad pathway for the region and its communities. As new information is introduced over time, the broad direction of that pathway may change a little, but it will still be relevant to the region in providing an informed indication of where its future might lie.

Initially, information would be collated during one comprehensive process. However, over time the Alliance will receive new information which can be added to the database and from which new conclusions may be drawn. After three years the Plan would be professionally reviewed to ensure that its directional analysis is still objectively founded, and reviewed every five years thereafter. In this way, the Plan will continually probe the region’s future at least one generation ahead.

Once completed each Partner would adopt the Plan, with the three Councils formally signing the document. Other Partners would be expected to commit themselves to work within the broad directions of the Plan. It would then become an invaluable pathway to guide the strategic activities of each Partner at the local level.

The Plan will also become a record of the strategies pursued and outcomes achieved from the range of activities undertaken to build community capacity. It will be a repository of lessons learned from trying.

The objectives of the Regional Communities Plan are to:

Collate all available data about the region and its communities’ activities

There is no lack of information about most aspects of regional activity. However, this information tends to be retained in discrete silos, or in disparate research papers or strategic plans. The first task is to gather information in order to have a solid platform upon which to base decisions about the region.

Develop an informed Vision for the future, 25-30 years ahead

Based on the collated information, the Plan will provide a picture of the region in 2006, and describe the critical factors that will shape its future. From an informed analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, the Plan will describe what Loddon Murray could look like in 2036.

Present analysis of the inter-connectedness of communities and activities

The Plan should describe the linkages between community activities that may enable programs to address more than one problem. A greater awareness of linkages may also encourage stakeholders to work together on a particular issue.

Knowing more about how the region's communities' work will be helpful in determining what short, medium and long-term actions could be taken to improve their lot.

Determine the broad strategies that will encourage successful outcomes

Once information about the present is known and a future Vision is established it then becomes possible to identify the major short and long-term strategies that should be considered to achieve that Vision. The purpose of the Plan is not to determine how those strategies should be enacted; those will be instigated and implemented by the Alliance Partners in conjunction with government.

The key issue is that government and each Partner will have a clear indication of the broad strategies the region should pursue in order to progress.

Also, the Regional Communities Plan does not seek to replace the strategic plans undertaken by many other community bodies. Each of those represents the commitment and energy of a wide range of community stakeholders and must continue so that those bodies can function effectively. However, the Plan should show how Partner plans complement each other and, through coordination, achieve improved outcomes.

Rather, the Regional Communities Plan will be a key resource to which government and community bodies can refer when each is undertaking its planning activities.

Identify measurable outcomes

The Vision for 2036 will be measured by demographic, economic and wellbeing indicators that will compare favourably to those of the best of regional Victoria.

6.3 The Board

The future Alliance Board will undertake a clear, **strategic**, role for the community. Its objectives will be to:

- ❑ **Commission and maintain the Regional Communities Plan;**
- ❑ **Understand, adopt and drive the strategic direction implied by the Plan;**
- ❑ **Determine the priority issues for its communities and ensure that short-term programs are put in place to address these;**
- ❑ **Ensure that short, medium and long-term objectives are met;**
- ❑ **Liaise with government to influence regional policy;**
- ❑ **Create communication pathways through and across the region so communities recognise that the Alliance can assist them;**
- ❑ **Ensure the commitment and enthusiasm of Alliance members is maintained; and**
- ❑ **Ensure the financial sustainability of the Alliance.**

The Alliance Partners will choose board members on a skills basis, to provide community ownership of Alliance activities. The composition of the Board will include;

- ❑ **A core number of directors, elected by the Alliance Partners. Each director will hold office for a fixed term of four years but could be re-elected for a further term. Key skills required by directors include:**
 - **A knowledge of the region’s communities;**
 - **Leadership qualities and an appreciation of a community Vision;**
 - **Strong management and strategic skills.**
- ❑ **It is critical that the Alliance can speak directly to government, most usually to the Regional Heads of Department for the Victorian State Government. There are difficulties in co-opting Heads of Department to the Board, but it is strongly felt that there is a place for a Departmental Secretary as Regional Champion, currently Ms Penny Armytage. The inclusion of a Departmental Secretary will encourage high-level dialogue with those in government who influence and implement regional policy.**

6.4 The Chair

There will be particular roles for the position of Chair of the Alliance Board, including the following:

- ❑ **Be the public face of the Alliance, and someone who is respected by the community and by government;**
- ❑ **Champion regional community needs and follow through to ensure those needs are met;**
- ❑ **Work with the Executive Officer to drive short-term and long-term concrete results and create wins for the community;**
- ❑ **Be an enthusiastic motivator for Alliance Partners and the Board.**

The Chair will be a person who:

- ❑ **Has a strong commitment to the long-term sustainability of the region;**
- ❑ **Is a visionary person, but who can back up rhetoric with successful action;**
- ❑ **Has already demonstrated a successful career and wants to commit energy and time to make a difference;**
- ❑ **Is equally comfortable in the corridors of power or mixing with people at the local football match;**

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- ❑ **Can give more to the position than lip service. This person may well work two to three days a week to do justice to this position;**
 - ❑ **Is committed to the people who live in the regional communities and to the people who provide services to them.**

Although there may be a suitable candidate who would perform this function at no cost other than expenses, this will initially be offered as a paid position.

6.5 The Executive Officer and Support Staff

Once the Board has set strategic priorities, the Executive Officer will be the person who ensures that:

- ❑ **Alliance Partners and government departments create effective short-term community programs;**
- ❑ **There is a clear communication pathway through the region;**
- ❑ **The Alliance is a first contact for community members wishing to develop initiatives;**
- ❑ **In conjunction with the Chair, the Alliance produces effective outcomes**

The Executive Officer will have very good communication and organisational skills. He/she will be self-motivated and have a proven track record in a similar position. This person should receive a salary package commensurate with the skills and energy expected of this position and will be supported by a small staff team and very good communications infrastructure.

6.6 Alliance Partners

The future holds the following critical roles for Alliance Partners that will provide enthusiasm amongst this group of stakeholders:

- ❑ **Following Board identification of short-medium priorities for the region, Alliance representatives will be co-opted to Board steering committees to provide specific advice and assistance as focused strategies are identified and implemented;**
- ❑ **Alliance Partners will work with government departments to develop the Service Delivery Teams that will develop and monitor priority program delivery;**
- ❑ **Alliance Partners will introduce new information to be included in the ongoing Regional Communities Plan;**

The Partners are the platform for the Alliance being in existence. It is a fundamental responsibility of the Board to ensure that each Partner knows their commitment is valued and being used constructively.

6.7 Government Departments

Government is a significant stakeholder in the core objectives of the Alliance. The Alliance will wish to work with government on three levels:

- ❑ **Firstly, through direct government participation in the understanding and development of regional strategies. The inclusion of a Departmental Secretary at the Board table will offer a unique and vital communication opportunity between community and government;**
- ❑ **Secondly, Alliance Partners can work with government departments to develop well-focused programs to meet regional community needs;**
- ❑ **Thirdly, Alliance Partners will form Service Delivery Teams with government departments to implement and monitor programs into the region. A close working alliance between representatives will encourage successful outcomes, or will identify lessons to be learnt from the delivery process.**

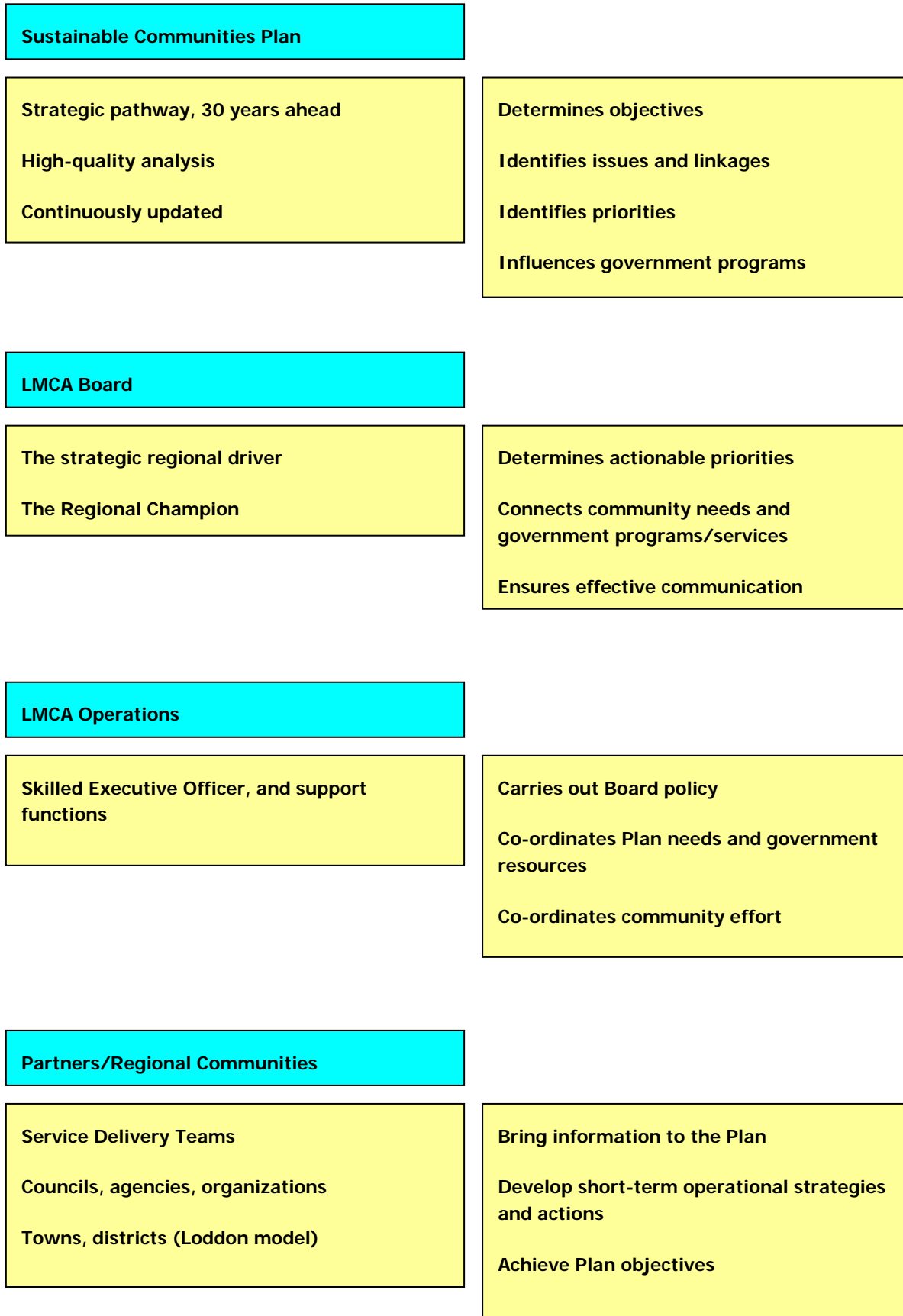
6.8 The Region's Communities

Councils, agencies and organisations will refer to the Regional Communities Plan as a pathway for their own strategic planning and they can work collaboratively with the Alliance to achieve their long-term aspirations. As regional priorities are identified, new community Partners will be brought into the structure.

As in Loddon, smaller communities will be encouraged to use the Alliance's strategic knowledge base and departmental access as a means of building their capacity to shape their future.

Through the Alliance structure, Loddon Murray will become a region where the long-term objectives of government and local communities coincide, and where both can work constructively towards common goals.

7 The Alliance Structure – A Schematic Summary



8 Operational Plan

8.1 Operational Requirements

To pursue the opportunity of a new direction, the Alliance requires government support to:

- ❑ **Prepare the Regional Communities Plan**
- ❑ **Fund a Chairperson**
- ❑ **Fund operational functions.**

To provide surety of purpose, the funding commitment should be for a period of no less than three years, but preferably for five years.

8.2 The Regional Communities Plan

Given the importance of this strategic document to the region's future, the cost of preparing it will require funding of at least \$100,000.

8.3 The Chairperson

This person will be a dynamic regional leader and is vital to sustaining the Alliance's focus and drive. A salary of \$30,000 per annum, plus \$10,000 expenses is a reasonable recompense for the significant regional benefits this person will deliver.

8.4 Operational Functions

The operational needs of the Alliance will include:

- ❑ **An Executive Officer, to implement Board strategies;**
- ❑ **A Support Officer, to liaise with regional communities;**
- ❑ **Administration support; and**
- ❑ **Operational and administration processes, including communications and information technology.**

Costs associated with operations are as follows. CPI increases of approximately 3% have been applied to 2007/08 and 2008/09 respectively:

Table 7-1 – Operational Costs (\$)

| Item | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 |
|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Executive Officer package, inc. super and vehicle | 85,000 | | |
| Support officer | 44,000 | | |
| Administration support | 22,000 | | |
| Salary on-costs, 25% | 38,000 | | |
| Accounting/audit/reporting | 10,000 | | |
| Advertising, promotion and establishment cost | 10,000 | | |
| Asset depreciation | 8,000 | | |
| Equipment and office supplies | 10,000 | | |
| Insurance | 2,000 | | |
| Motor vehicle | 25,000 | | |
| Motor vehicle costs | 7,000 | | |
| Printing | 5,000 | | |
| Rent, office space | 30,000 | | |
| Telephone, internet, postage | 9,000 | | |
| Travel and accommodation | 5,000 | | |
| Other expenses | 5,000 | | |
| Total Costs | \$315,000 | \$325,000 | \$335,000 |

8.5 Implementation Plan

An implementation plan is detailed on the following A3 sheets.