

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Mr Chris Wightman

Organisation Name:Bass Coast Shire Council

Your position or role: Coordinator Social and Community Planning

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Drag the statements below to reorder them. In order of priority, please rank the themes you believe are most important for this inquiry into homelessness to consider::

Housing affordability,Public housing,Services,Rough sleeping,Indigenous people,Family violence,Mental health,Employment

What best describes your interest in our Inquiry? (select all that apply) :

Public sector body

Are there any additional themes we should consider?

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

Submission from Bass Coast Shire Council is set out in the attached document.

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

Nil

FILE ATTACHMENTS

File1: [5e265f54311ba-Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria_Bass Coast Shire Council Submission_FINAL.pdf](#)

File2:

File3:

Signature:

Chris Wightman



Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria - Submission

January 2020

Introduction

Bass Coast Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria.

The lifestyle opportunities afforded by Bass Coast have resulted in the municipality being the second fastest growing area in regional Victoria and experiencing increasing levels of demand from tourism during peak periods. This is positive news for the Council as we continue to become a vibrant regional centre and a preferred area for people to live, work, invest and play. It does, however, provide challenges for our community in relation to the availability of affordable housing and issues for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

We set out in this submission the evidence of homelessness in Bass Coast and, importantly the experiences faced by some of the more vulnerable members of our community.

In response to the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry, our submission is based on the following themes:

- Analysis of the changing scale and nature of homelessness across Victoria
- Social, economic and policy factors that impact on homelessness
- Policies and practices that have a bearing on delivering services to the homeless.

Changing scale and nature of homelessness in Bass Coast

Population and Households

The population of Bass Coast is experiencing rapid growth, with projections for continued strong population growth continuing through to 2036. The population in 2019 is approximately 35,000, which will increase to 46,500 by 2036. This is highlighted in the following table:

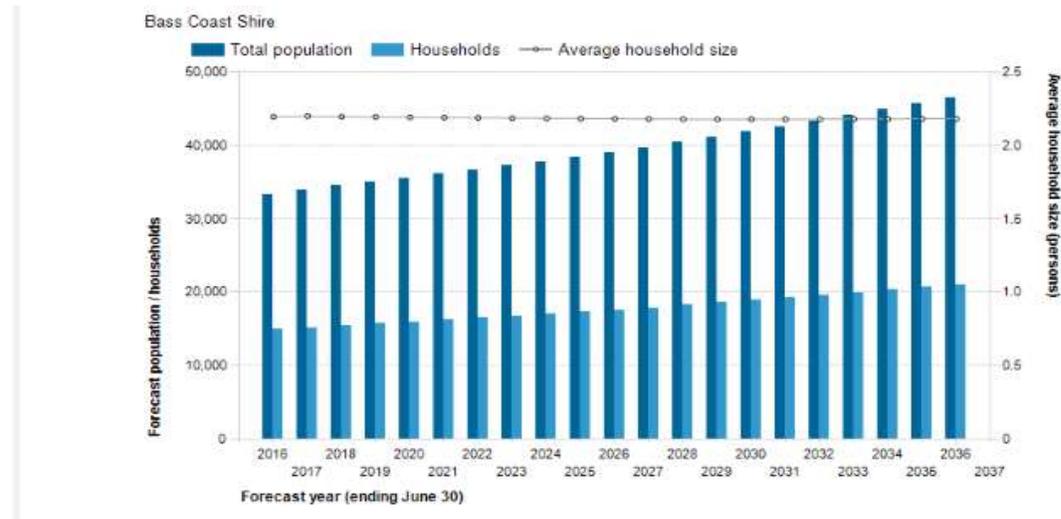


Table I. Forecast Population, Households and Average Household Size (id November 2017)

The population growth statistics are reinforced by building permit activity for dwelling construction in Bass Coast. In the period January 2015 to December 2019 there were 2,974 building permits issued for new dwellings.

Bass Coast Shire Council has one of the highest proportion of non-resident ratepayers in Victoria at 55% (ABS 2016). This means that whilst the total number of dwellings is statistically sufficient for the existing and projected size of population, over half of these homes are only utilised for ‘holiday home’ purposes on a seasonal basis and are generally not available for permanent accommodation.

In 2016 there was an estimated 25,817 separate dwellings in Bass Coast with a permanent occupancy rate of 55% (i.e. only 14,199 homes were available and utilised for our permanent population). The average household size of 2.17 people per household means that, excluding ‘holiday homes’, there was sufficient accommodation for 30,812 people; a shortfall of accommodation for 2,499 people (total population of 33,311).

It is acknowledged that this is a very basic statistical assessment of the correlation between housing availability and population/household size and that there are a range of complex factors influencing the housing market. Notwithstanding, this assessment highlights the potential deficiency of accommodation for our growing population.

Other contributing indicators

In addition to population and housing indicators, there are a range of indicators that effect the prevalence and risk of homelessness in Bass Coast.

Poverty indicators

The municipality has a high level of disadvantage identified by the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). This is reinforced by the Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS) overall rates of poverty being identified at 17% (3,900 people) of the Bass Coast population living in poverty. These indicators reflect a high risk of homelessness for a significant proportion of our population.

Housing affordability

Housing stress is defined as a household that is paying 30% or more of their income on housing. A 'point in time' assessment of all rental properties available in Bass Coast in November 2019 (via realestate.com.au) revealed that there were 68 properties available for rent with an average rental value of \$348 per week.

For the more vulnerable sections of our community who may be unemployed or underemployed (particularly for community members on the NewStart Allowance or Youth Allowance), this average rental cost is placing these households under significant housing stress. Some areas of the municipality, including parts of Wonthaggi, Cowes and Waterline communities, have in excess of 20% of households experiencing housing stress (VCOSS).

Crisis accommodation availability

There is a severe shortage of crisis accommodation available in Bass Coast. This situation has been exacerbated by the imminent closure of the Miners Rest Caravan Park and Capital Motel in Wonthaggi. These two facilities provide accommodation options for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness in the Bass Coast area. It is acknowledged that these accommodation options are not of appropriate standard, however, in many cases it is the only option.

The closure of these crisis accommodation facilities will result in the displacement of approximately 60 tenants, many of whom may need to leave the area to find alternate accommodation.

Homeless statistics and experiences

The factors highlighted above have contributed to an increase in the number of people seeking housing support services within Bass Coast. Data from the 2016 Census indicates that there were 45 people experiencing homelessness in Bass Coast. Based on the above indicators, it is apparent that the issue is more significant than the census data shows. The following provides a snapshot of the demand on service providers in Bass Coast:

- In Bass Coast, requests for Crisis Accommodation from SalvoCare Eastern has increased by 47% since 2016.
- In Bass Coast in 2018/2019, SalvoCare Eastern assisted 804 people in crisis with housing.

- SalvoCare Eastern have assisted approximately 2,600 people within the Bass Coast and South Gippsland Shires with housing from 2016 -2019.
- In Bass Coast in 2018/2019, SalvoCare Eastern have assisted 778 people with housing due to experiencing significant financial difficulties.
- In Bass Coast and South Gippsland in 2018/2019, SalvoCare Eastern turned away 769 people. This is more than 60% of the total number of people who requested help for this same period.
- From 2016 to 2019 there has been an increase of 6% in SalvoCare Eastern clients with children under the age of 10 needing housing support.
- In Bass Coast, since 2016, SalvoCare Eastern have assisted 369 people with housing, due to sleeping rough.

* All statistics are derived from The Salvation Army Client Database – SAMIS.

At a recent Homelessness Week 2019 event in Wonthaggi, SalvoCare Eastern provided a sample of case studies that highlights the impact of homelessness in the Bass Coast community. Council considers these stories to be more powerful than statistics alone and they highlight the impact on our community. These experiences were reinforced during a Council led workshop on Youth Homelessness which highlighted experiences from agencies and young people with lived experience.

Social, economic and policy factors that impact on homelessness

As highlighted above, there are a number of indicators that are contributing to an increased prevalence of homelessness in Bass Coast. The causal factors that are behind these indicators are complex and inter-related.

Bass Coast Shire Council is committed, via its Council Plan, Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and Advocacy Strategy, to collaborate with service delivery partners and the community to seek to address these issues. The key factor, however, contributing to homelessness in Bass Coast at present is the lack of affordable housing, social housing and crisis accommodation.

The insufficient supply of housing options results in homelessness service providers having limited or no pathways for people to move through the cycle of crisis accommodation; to transition housing; and then into appropriate permanent accommodation.

The following social, economic and environmental considerations have affected the supply of accommodation options in Bass Coast.

Property and rental values

In a rapidly growing municipality, there has been a significant increase in property values, making it difficult for people to enter the housing market. This is demonstrated below.

Suburb	Median Property Value 2016	Median Property Value 2018	Change
Wonthaggi	\$280,000	\$339,000	↑ \$59,000
Inverloch	\$442,000	\$600,000	↑ \$158,000
Cowes	\$377,000	\$494,000	↑ \$117,000
San Remo	\$460,000	\$550,000	↑ \$90,000
Grantville	\$282,000	\$417,000	↑ \$135,000

Table 2. Median Property Prices – Bass Coast Suburbs

(Data from realestate.com.au via Hometrack Australia)

In conjunction with this (as stated earlier in this submission) there is a limited availability of housing in the private rental market. Where rentals are available they are often too expensive for community members who are on lower incomes.

The popularity of Bass Coast as a lifestyle and holiday destination has also influenced the price and availability of the private rental housing market. Short-term holiday rental market operators (e.g. Airbnb, Stayz etc.) have resulted in fewer properties being made available for long-term rental and a general increase in rental prices.

Availability of land for residential development

The major population centres within Bass Coast are located on, or close to, pristine and environmentally sensitive coastal locations. The availability of appropriate land for development to accommodate our growing population is therefore a challenge for Council. This is affecting the overall supply of land, particularly land that is affordable. Balancing the identification of land for growth with environmental considerations will continue to be important for Council, particularly in the context of implementation of the Distinctive Area Landscape program.

The cost of developing appropriate land for future housing is also an issue in Bass Coast. Wonthaggi is the regional centre for Bass Coast and plays an important role in accommodating future population growth. In collaboration with the Victorian Planning Authority (VPA), Council has prepared a Precinct Structure Plan for the creation of approximately 4,400 new homes to the north east of the town. Environmental and infrastructure constraints within the precinct (notably drainage and road infrastructure) mean that the cost of developing this land is high for a regional

town. Ultimately, these costs will be passed on to future land owners and impact upon affordability.

Accessibility

As a relatively large rural municipality, Bass Coast has challenges regarding the availability of public transport to allow community members who do not have their own transport to access employment opportunities and services. Public transport services are infrequent and often not suited to times aligned with employment or educational activities. This is a limiting factor for members of the community who may not be able to access employment in their immediate locality and can contribute to increased risk of homelessness.

Policies and practices that have a bearing on delivering services to the homeless

Council is committed to working collaboratively with service providers and partner agencies to address the impacts of homelessness in our community. In undertaking this work, however, Council is mindful that its role is limited to:

- Representing its community, particularly those community members who may be vulnerable, via appropriate and targeted advocacy.
- Collaboration of service providers and agency partners to seek to facilitate coordinated and effective outcomes for our community.
- The administration of regulatory requirements (e.g. planning approvals, licensing of accommodation premises etc.).

Council has no current strategy or policy direction in relation to homelessness, however, has identified a number of practices that aim to alleviate the prevalence and nature of homelessness in Bass Coast. These activities have the overall objective of seeking to deliver an appropriate supply of affordable/social housing and crisis accommodation. Via its Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan Council also seeks to support initiatives that assist with the primary prevention of factors that can lead to homelessness.

Advocacy

Council's Advocacy Strategy (2019) has a specific focus on alleviating homelessness in Bass Coast, as well as causal factors that can influence the prevalence of homelessness. Specifically in relation to homelessness, Council has worked with SalvoCare Eastern to identify the following advocacy request:

Emergency and Social Housing

Seek funding for Bass Coast Shire Council to work in partnership with local agencies and undertake critical strategic work to guide the development of emergency and social housing in Bass Coast.

This comprises an initial land assessment and audit to inform a Bass Coast Emergency and Social Housing feasibility study.

Bass Coast Shire Council seek immediate funding to produce a land assessment and audit report. This would form stage one of an integrated Bass Coast Emergency and Social Housing feasibility study.

Stage two would capture and analyse the needs, risks and opportunities to reduce homelessness and increase emergency housing in Bass Coast, and provide recommendations for the provision of Emergency and Social housing. Local agencies are struggling to meet the demands of case management, leaving no room for them to undertake critical strategic and planning work. Council would lead the development of this strategy in partnership with local agencies.

The objectives of the Bass Coast Emergency and Social Housing feasibility study would be to:

- Identify suitable land across the Shire for the provision of emergency and social housing
- Use data and metrics specific to Bass Coast to identify the needs of the community today and into the future
- Consider and recommend types of housing and program support which aligns with Bass Coast's needs
- Provide recommendations on advocacy priorities relating to social and emergency housing.

Increasing Housing Supply

To unlock the potential of additional housing opportunities (4,400 new homes) in the regional centre of Wonthaggi, Council is seeking funding for the facilitation of key infrastructure to the Wonthaggi North East Precinct Structure Plan. This funding will assist in bringing forward a wide range of housing options and in addressing the deficiency of available and affordable homes in Bass Coast.

Improved Public Transport

Council is seeking funding for the implementation of transport priorities associated with a South-West Gippsland Transport Strategy to improve transport options to increase accessibility to jobs and education. In particular, the funding will provide improvements to public transport bus services including increased connections to Melbourne and within the region.

Mechanism to Increase Affordable Housing

In collaboration with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) Council has provided a submission to the Planning Mechanisms for Affordable Housing Advisory Committee to provide support for alterations to the planning system to facilitate the provision of affordable and/or social housing, including the potential for inclusionary zoning of residential land. Council have requested flexible provisions within the Victorian Planning Provisions to secure social or affordable housing as a percentage of future residential development. It is considered that any provisions should be flexible to respond to local needs or to allow financial contributions in lieu of 'bricks and mortar' where appropriate.

Primary Prevention and Collaboration

Prevention of Family Violence

Council recognises that Family Violence is a significant contributor to the demand for crisis accommodation in Bass Coast. In collaboration with a range of partner agencies and service providers, Council is committed to primary prevention activities that tackle drivers of family violence.

Health and Wellbeing Priorities

Council has a range of evidence based health and wellbeing priorities contained within the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan. These include:

- Improving access to services
- Supporting social connectedness
- Reducing harmful alcohol and drug use
- Improving mental health
- Preventing violence and injury

Associated opportunities

In conjunction with the above initiatives, Council is also collaborating with agencies and service providers in relation to the following opportunities:

- Partnering with service providers and local schools to implement the 'Geelong Project'. This initiative facilitates the assessment of risk factors for homelessness with young people in their school environment, and early intervention initiatives through service providers.
- Collaboration with the private sector is being explored, particularly in relation to the imminent closure of the Miners Rest Caravan Park and Capital Motel. It is evident that end users, such as Bunnings and associated property development interests, have a strong desire for the private sector to be part of solutions to address homelessness. The key question is how can this opportunity be directed and facilitated by local government or other agencies?

Conclusion

In conclusion, Council is taking a proactive and strategic role to advocate on behalf of some of the most vulnerable members of our community. We understand that issues of homelessness are prevalent and increasing in our community and that partnerships and collaboration between all levels of government, service providers, the private sector and our community are necessary to tackle this important issue.

We encourage the Inquiry to consider how appropriate system changes, in conjunction with partnerships and collaboration can support the increased supply of affordable/social housing and crisis accommodation.