Submission from Bass Coast Shire Council into the Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education

PROFILE
Bass Coast Shire is located approximately 130km south-east of Melbourne and is predominantly a coastal municipality with a unique coastline complemented by a beautiful hinterland. The major population centres are Wonthaggi, Cowes and Inverloch with a number of other towns and villages spread throughout the Shire. Bass Coast is one of the few Victorian municipalities whose two major industries are tourism and agriculture. Cattle and dairy farming are the area’s agricultural backbone, with boutique farming such as venison and vineyards fast emerging.

The traditional landowners of Bass Coast are the Bunurong people. The area takes its name from George Bass who sighted the area during an expedition to prove the existence of Bass Strait in 1798. Approximately 30,000 people now call Bass Coast their permanent home and 3.4M domestic and international tourists visit the area every year.

Bass Coast Shire has an estimated resident population of 30,191 of which 29.3% are over the age of 60. In 2005-2006 Bass Coast Shire’s population grew by 2.3% (2.74% Phillip Island and 2.11% balance) compared to the Gippsland region, which grew by 1.6%. This accelerated population growth brings with it many opportunities to live, work and invest in Bass Coast. It is estimated that Bass Coast’s population will be approximately 38,000 by 2020.

The towns in Bass Coast Shire have a higher proportion of people aged over 60 years than the rural areas of the Shire, reflecting that older people are more likely to live in the towns for greater access to the services they require. The age structure in the Bass Coast Shire shows that it has a higher proportion of older people than regional areas and Victoria as a whole.

- 30.6 are aged 60 years and over (22.3% regionally, 18.1% Victoria)
- 5.9% are aged 5-19 years. (The average for country Victoria is 7.1%)
- 5.3% are aged 0-4 years (5.7% in Gippsland)
Each point of the Terms of Reference will be addressed individually:

(a) Variations in the number and type of university applications, offers, acceptances and completions in different metropolitan, rural and regional areas.

### Table 1 Post Secondary Pathways

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Total Year 12s</th>
<th>Tertiary Applicant Uni Offers</th>
<th>TAFE/VET Offers *</th>
<th>Any Tertiary Offer *</th>
<th>Uni Enrolled</th>
<th>TAFE/VET Enrolled</th>
<th>Apprentice/Trainee</th>
<th>Employed</th>
<th>Looking For Work</th>
<th>Deferred</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newhaven College</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>28 (56%)</td>
<td>17 (42%)</td>
<td>43 (86%)</td>
<td>19 (33%)</td>
<td>8 (14%)</td>
<td>8 (14%)</td>
<td>8 (14%)</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wonthaggi Secondary College</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>41 (69%)</td>
<td>24 (35%)</td>
<td>63 (91%)</td>
<td>22 (20%)</td>
<td>14 (13%)</td>
<td>17 (16%)</td>
<td>25 (23%)</td>
<td>5 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals for the LLEN Region</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>197 (59%)</td>
<td>98 (29%)</td>
<td>286 (86%)</td>
<td>132 (29%)</td>
<td>63 (14%)</td>
<td>79 (17%)</td>
<td>80 (18%)</td>
<td>18 (4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*VTAC DATA AS OPPOSED TO ON TRACK DATA these columns are a percentage of total tertiary applications – not total student numbers

1Includes South Gippsland and Bass Coast Shires

### Table 2 University deferral trends 2003-2006 Bass Coast Shire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newhaven Secondary College (Phillip Island)</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wonthaggi Secondary College</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass Coast Total (average)</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>19.25%</td>
<td>23.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gippsland</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: South Gippsland Bass Coast LLEN

As can be seen from table 2, university deferrals in Bass Coast have been increasing, and are higher than for Gippsland as a whole and considerably higher than for Victoria as a whole.

A longitudinal study of ‘On Track’ data shows that a high proportion of students who defer from university do eventually take up the course of their choice.

(b) influences of school retention rates, including enrolments and completions for VCE, VCAL and VET in schools on participation in higher education.

- Years 10-12 retention rates are lower than the state average. Bass Coast retention rate was 70.2% in 2006 compared with the state average of 82%.
At a local level, VCAL, whilst intended to improve retention rates, is tending to lead to successful employment outcomes before students complete their VCAL.

(c) influences of participation in post school pathways, including TAFE enrolments and take up of apprenticeships, employment or other employment opportunities, on participation in higher education.

Enrolments in apprenticeships have declined and enrolments in traineeships have increased but, it is mainly mature aged students who are taking up the traineeships. It therefore would not appear that these trends would have influenced the low participation of Bass Coast students in higher education.

• Apprenticeships have declined from a peak in 2004 of 174 to 155 in 2005. In 2005, 135 were 15-24 year olds. The majority are enrolled at Gippsland Group Training.
• Traineeships have been steadily increasing but 36% of participants were over 25 years with the proportion of teenagers decreasing.

(d) Potential geographic, economic, social, cultural and other influences on university applications, offers, acceptances and completions.

The major barriers to local students accessing tertiary studies are:

• **Geographical access:** There are no frequent, regular public transport options by which students can travel to tertiary institutions from Bass Coast Shire. The nearest university is Monash University Gippsland in Churchill which is 96 kms from Wonthaggi and takes over an hour and a half to travel there by car. There is a campus of Monash University in Frankston which is 97 kms from Wonthaggi and takes an hour and a half to travel by car. The nearest metropolitan university is Monash University Clayton which is 116 kms from Wonthaggi and would take at least 2 hours to travel there by car. These distances then lead to students having to move away from home at seventeen or eighteen.

• **Limited social support:** Rural students who have to relocate to the metropolitan areas for university are often isolated from family and friends. Unless there is extended family in the city, their social support can be limited. This, in turn, can influence whether a student actually wants to leave home or if he/she decides to leave then may influence whether he/she completes the university course or not. It also affects parents who are not close enough to support their children if needed. On campus accommodation can be prohibitive due to cost and also limited at some universities.

• **Affordability:** Bass Coast Shire is a very low socio economic community with 34.44% of families of students in secondary schools regarded as low income earners.
  o Unemployment rate 5.8%.
Average taxable income of residents is $35,674 compared to the Victorian average of $44,814.

49.5% people have a weekly income of less than $400.

‘Living away from home’ costs are prohibitive for many families in Bass Coast Shire. Costs can include: course fees, accommodation, food, clothing, books, entertainment and travel expenses.

Many students from Bass Coast Shire realise that the only way they can access higher education is by supporting themselves. To do this many opt to defer from university for at least a year and work to become financially independent. Others find this prospect daunting and therefore don’t pursue it.

- **Lack of a ‘Learning Culture’**: Anecdotal evidence from local education providers is that many families do not understand the importance of education on a person’s quality of life. (BCSC Education Plan 2008)

- **Limited employment opportunities**: There are limited employment opportunities to entice students to return to Bass Coast on completion of university.

- **Limited local industry options** for apprenticeship training.

(e) Advantages and disadvantages of participation and non-participation in higher education for school leavers and their families and communities in different metropolitan, rural and regional areas.

There are numerous advantages for students and families of participation in higher education. These include the enhancement of social connectedness as well as economic advantages. It is documented that Bass Coast Shire would have a greater chance of attracting young professionals, or ‘Global Knowledge Workers’ to the region if the standard of the education services and facilities were high. (Brain P 2005) Areas where families value education record higher levels of parent participation in the schools and greater levels of social cohesion. (Putnam R, 2001)

The disadvantages for local families if their children access higher education are:

- the financial hardship the costs will contribute to;
- the break up of the family unit when the student leaves home;
- the real possibility that the student will not return to the area to live once they have completed their course.

Bass Coast is an ageing shire with many young people leaving the area to pursue education and employment options. There are also a high number of young people who are remaining in the area but are disengaged from education, training and full time employment.
(f) potential effects of geographical differences in participation in higher education on skills shortages and the Victorian economy.

It is well documented that there are skills shortages nationwide due to numerous reasons such as the ageing population. Many rural towns are becoming less viable due to a skills shortage as the young people relocate to the city for lifestyle and educational opportunities. The attraction of the city with its various forms of entertainment on offer, its educational facilities and employment opportunities make it difficult for areas such as Bass Coast to retain their youth. There is no major industry to support the local economy in Bass Coast and whilst there are plenty of natural lifestyle attractions such as the beautiful beaches, there are no nightclubs and most recreational activities are limited to the sports. There is currently no provision for access to tertiary studies and the TAFE state priorities do not always reflect the local student and industry needs.

As stated previously, the main areas of employment are in tourism, agriculture and more recently, the construction industry. The major employees in the Shire are Local Government, the Education and Health sectors. Bass Coast Shire Council is aware that it has to implement strategies to increase the levels of education, the value of education and the employment options across the shire if its economy is to remain buoyant.

(g)

i. Bass Coast Shire Council has taken the initiative to develop partnerships with the local education and training providers to improve the educational outcomes of students in Bass Coast. Attached is a copy of the Bass Coast Shire Education Plan 2008-2012.

ii. Bass Coast Shire Council is a partner in the Gippsland Youth Options Commitment (GYOC). It is a region wide, cross-sectoral approach to ensure that all young people remain connected with education and training.

Allan Bawden
CEO BASS COAST SHIRE
References

