

SouthWest Victoria Alliance

Advocacy Priorities 2021/22



SouthWest Victoria
ALLIANCE

SOUTHWEST VICTORIA

The SouthWest Victoria (SWV) region is home to more than 110,000 people and covers 23,000 square kilometres, stretching from Apollo Bay to the South Australian border, incorporating parts of the Great Ocean Road and the Grampians.

The SWV encompasses the economic centres of Victoria's south-west, such as Warrnambool, Port Fairy, Camperdown, Portland, Colac Otway and Hamilton - each with unique commercial and industrial sectors.

With 7,000 people employed across 1,300 farms - the SWV is Australia's agricultural powerhouse. The region is responsible for 24 per cent of Australia's milk production and 27 per cent of the national total dairy production - equating to \$2.3 billion in agricultural output each year. Exports are supported through the strategically located Port of Portland, which oversees \$1.5 billion in annual trade value.

While agriculture has been the mainstay of the region, there are also established fishing, grain, wool and forestry sectors - the SWV is home to 17 per cent of Australia's forest plantations. Renewable energy is also seen as a valued provider for future career opportunities in the area.

The region also has a spectacular natural environment and internationally recognised tourism assets such as the Twelve Apostles, the Great Ocean Road, the Grampian Ranges and

Budj Bim. Visitors to the region are serviced by hundreds of businesses and traders in the local tourism and hospitality sectors.

The Group recognises the importance of the Geelong City Deal, signed by the Australian Government, Victorian Government and City of Greater Geelong in March 2019.

The total investment of nearly \$382.48 million to our region's gateway will yield benefits for Victoria's South West. In order to continue Geelong's development as Victoria's second economic hub, Melbourne's Western Region will require development, in order to preserve Victoria's tourism sector and help ensure Australia's food and energy security.

Our primary short-term need is to provide services, jobs and accommodation for people living or relocating to the region. This prospectus offers ways to do this through investment opportunities in roads, infrastructure, tourism and health projects - all of which will create immediate benefits to the region.

The longer-term opportunities for the SWV, which are extrapolated in this document, are to future proof the economy, and ensure the next generation of workers have the skills and desire to work in our key industries.



HOME TO MORE THAN
110,000 PEOPLE



COVERS 23,000
SQUARE KILOMETRES

ABOUT THE SOUTHWEST VICTORIA ALLIANCE

The SWV Alliance is a formal alliance of local government authorities and businesses working towards a more prosperous, equitable, connected, sustainable and liveable SWV region.

The SWV Alliance brings together the Shires of Colac Otway, Corangamite, Moyne, Southern Grampians and Glenelg, the City of Warrnambool and business leaders to support growth and economic development, strengthen local communities, improve infrastructure and ensure the sustainability of natural assets and tourist economy.

The SWV Alliance provides a collaborative voice on diverse and complex issues, working with stakeholders and strategic partners to identify, develop, promote and deliver initiatives that are key to the success of the region.

Practicing collaborative leadership, the SWV Alliance ensures the region is working together to advocate for the best outcomes, especially throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery.

IMPACTS OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has had wide-reaching health, social and economic impacts across Victoria's South West. Critical elements of the SWV economy, the tourism and hospitality sectors, have been severely impacted over the past 18 months.

However, the pandemic has also brought growth and fresh opportunities to the area, with people looking to relocate to the regions.

The critical investments made in SWV from both federal and state governments has enabled us to survive the pandemic. In

May of 2020, all LGAs in the region relied on JobKeeper with the average rate of businesses on JobKeeper at just under 30 per cent. The Victorian Government's \$3.7 billion investment in regional Victoria as part of the 2021/22 Budget has helped keep our community and industries afloat.

However, SWV has extensive structural economic issues that must be addressed if the region is to recover in the long-term from the COVID-19 pandemic and recession.



UNDERLYING ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

There are many reasons to be optimistic about our region's economic future. The local agriculture industry avoided the worst of the 2017-19 drought and has taken advantage of the region's climate, water and soil, as a result, SWV's fishing and agriculture sectors are among the strongest in the nation. If our region is to overcome the pandemic and years of economic contraction that preceded it, our agricultural industry will need support to grow as it looks to take advantage of emerging technologies.

The achievements of agricultural sectors overseas serve as tangible examples of what is possible if industries are supported through digital transformation. For example, the Netherlands creates over 50 times the value on the same amount of agricultural land as Victoria's South West.

In order to realise the potential of our natural assets, the region must address its ageing workforce and ensure workers have access to training. However, according to data published by Regional Development Victoria, our region has been experiencing an economic contraction for the 15 years to 2019. Critically, by 2019 SWV as a region contributed less to the Victorian economy than in 2006. In the same period, Victoria's economy grew by 50 per cent.

The pre-COVID issues in our region's economy persisted despite the growth of Chinese and South East Asian markets for education, tourism and produce. As the international economy becomes more uncertain, the region will need targeted commercial and public sector investment to support critical infrastructure and build a workforce for future industries and catalyse business investment.

The Group welcomes the Victorian Government's \$5 million investment in Regional Workforce Pilots to address housing shortages and other roadblocks to regional workforce attraction, we look forward to continuing to partner with governments to address our region's workforce challenges



SMALL BUSINESSES AND LOCAL ECONOMIES

A survey of local businesses¹ on the impacts of COVID-19 on Victorian regions and regional businesses found that 54 per cent of businesses expected a decline of greater than 50 of revenue over the last six months.

Accommodation, food, retail, other services businesses, and health and social services were nominated as those most likely to see revenue declines. Businesses within the SWV region accounted for over 73 per cent of survey respondents.

SWV member councils have also seen a significant underlying deficit due to their operating businesses and facilities which were restricted or closed during the year. In a briefing paper for their 2021-22 Annual Budget, Warrnambool City Council estimates a loss of over \$3 million in revenue from April 2020 to March 2021.

Most local government bodies in the SWV region have also stepped in to provide their own COVID-recovery programs – funding support for local businesses and community groups to keep them operating during the pandemic.



TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

Tourism expenditure contributed over \$700 million to the region's economy pre-pandemic in 2019. However, state-wide lockdowns, restricted interstate borders and the closure of key tourist attractions during the pandemic has had a significant impact on the region's tourism operators.

SWV is home to several internationally recognised tourist destinations and is of importance to the national tourism industry. For example, the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape is Australia's only UNESCO World Heritage site listed exclusively for its Aboriginal cultural values.

According to Tourism Research Australia, the Great Ocean Road has experienced a 77 per cent decline in international visitors.² Famous destinations for holidaymakers like Apollo Bay and Port Fairy recorded declines in average daily sales of 56 per cent and 72 per cent, respectively.³ The local hospitality sector has suffered the compounding effects of trade restrictions, movement restrictions for locals, and a significant reduction in visitors to the region.

This has had a detrimental multiplier effect through supply contracts with local businesses and associated industries.

The introduction of the Regional Travel Voucher Scheme at the end of 2020 was a welcome incentive and this, combined with local council business support packages, has helped the local tourism and hospitality sector through the past 18 months.

Tourism started to pick up in early 2021, due to a strong summer of visitors, particular during the long weekend in March and with a number of events held at this time. However, the region's tourism industry is reliant on domestic visitor numbers that have proven unreliable due to COVID-related lockdowns.

While recovery in the tourism sector is currently domestically-led (with international borders likely to remain closed until 2022), the most recent return to lockdown in Victoria, combined with interstate border closures and travel restrictions on Victorians, will hinder this recovery.

This is why it is critical for governments to continue to invest in the SWV region, and for the initiatives in this document to be seen as a matter of priority.

1 Pulse Survey 20.1: Impacts of COVID-19 on regions and regional business, SED Advisory

2 Tourism Region Profiles Data Tables

3 Pulse Survey 20.1: Impacts of COVID-19 on regions and regional business, SED Advisory

AREAS OF FOCUS

This document sets out the three key areas of focus that will see the SWV region navigate its way through the COVID-19 pandemic, capitalise on its considerable assets, and ensure a vibrant and prosperous future.



Connecting Our Community

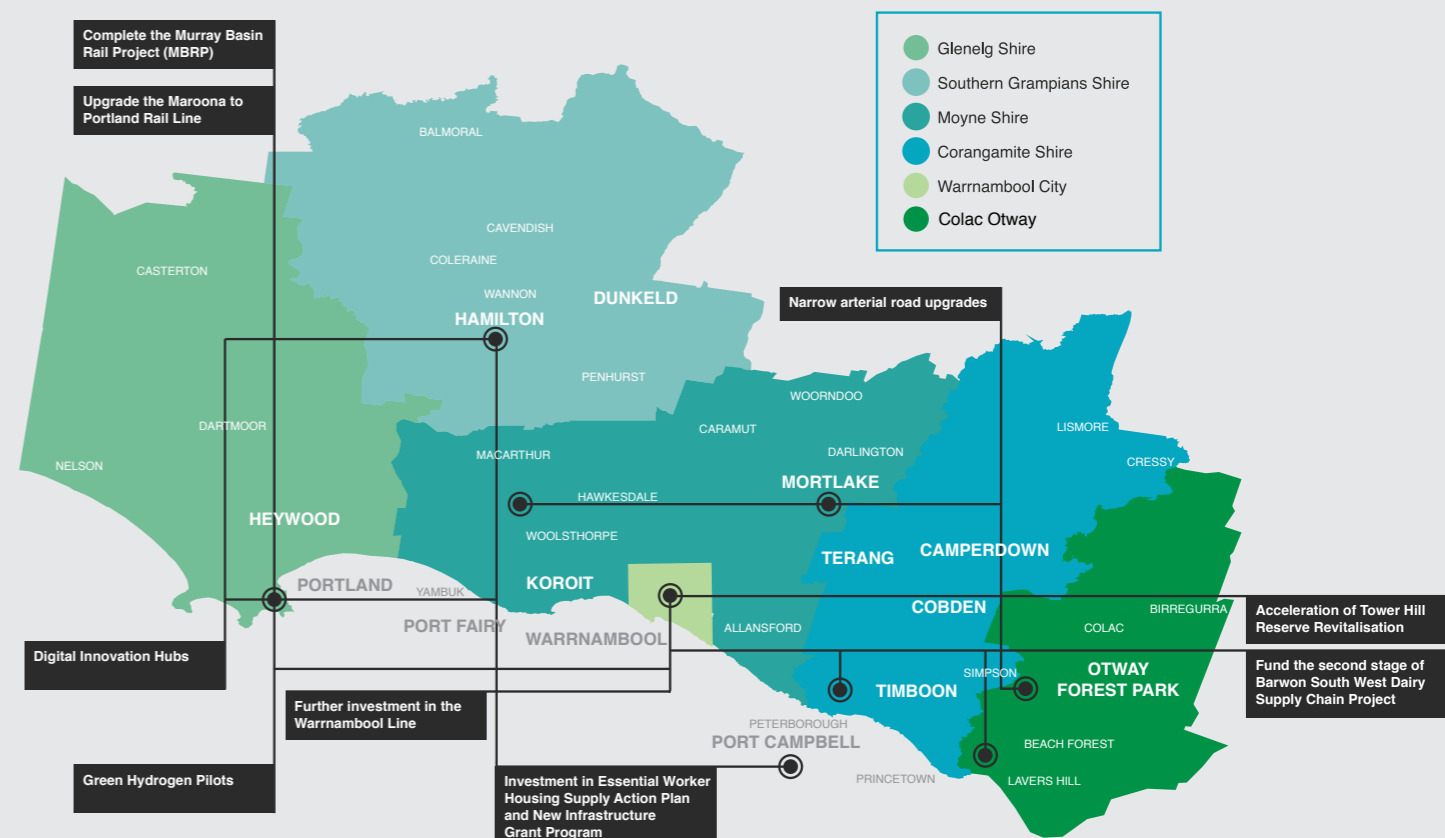


A Sustainable South West



Growing Our Economy

SWV REGION



SUMMARY OF KEY ADVOCACY PRIORITIES



CONNECTING OUR COMMUNITY

ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

- **Second stage of Barwon South West Dairy Supply Chain Project**
Project cost: \$63 million over 2 years
- **Victoria's South West Narrow Arterial Road Fund**
- **Grain Road Supply Chain Study**
Project cost: \$150,000 investment from State Government (\$50,000 Local Government contribution)

PASSENGER AND FREIGHT RAIL

- **Further investment in the Warrnambool Line**
 - Ensuring 6 services a day
 - Rolling stock upgrades
- **Funding to complete the Murray Basin Rail Project (MBRP)**

- **Upgrade the Maroona to Portland Rail Line**
Project cost: \$30 million
 - Endorsed by Victoria's Freight Plan and Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021-2051

DIGITAL

- **Expansion of IoT network to enable high value agriculture**
Project cost: \$3 million to facilitate a further \$3 million investment
- **Funding to implement all recommendations from the Great South Coast Digital Plan**
- **Funding for the Great South Coast Digital Innovation Hubs Pilots**
Project cost: \$1 million over three years



GROWING OUR ECONOMY

FOOD AND FIBRE

- **Develop pilot projects from the Great South Coast Green Hydrogen Strategy**
Project cost: \$750,000, outlined in Great South Coast Economic Futures Report
- **Upgrade region to three-phase power**
Project cost: \$10 million investment expected to be recovered in 5 years.
- **Groundwater reform to support the local food and fibre economy**
Project cost: \$3 million investment to facilitate a further \$6 million investment
 - Regulatory changes to enable longer-term groundwater licenses
 - 150 farms supported

TOURISM

- **Extend Recovery for Regional Tourism Program**
- **Acceleration of Tower Hill Reserve Revitalisation**
- **Diversification High Value Tourism – Site Identification and concept plan for Geothermal Hot Springs**
Project cost: \$300,000, outlined in Great South Coast Economic Futures Report

WORKFORCE AND SKILLS

- **Develop Food and Fibre careers and pathways**
Project cost: \$450,000 over 3 years
- **Establish a GROW program for the SWV region**
Project cost: \$600,000 over 3 years



A SUSTAINABLE SOUTH WEST

HOUSING

- **Investment in Essential Worker Housing Supply Action Plan and New Infrastructure Grant Program**
Project cost: \$5 million (\$20,000 support for 250 lots)

WATER

- **The development of a new South West Sustainable Water Strategy**
 - Urgent policy innovation is needed including reforms to groundwater licencing.
- **Irrigation infrastructure to support high value agriculture pilots and capitalise on groundwater resources**

HEALTH

- **Investment in a community-based care site in the SWV region, providing a 'front door' support service**
 - SWV seeks to be one of the first 20 new local service sites in Victoria providing a 'front door' for care
- **Grow Our Own Mental Health Workforce – Internship Pilot**
Project cost: \$280,000 supporting 10 placements over 2 years

1. CONNECTING OUR COMMUNITY

ROADS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

SWV is Victoria's food bowl with the largest agricultural output of any region in Victoria. More than a quarter of Victoria's beef and a third of the state's dairy and sheep come from farms in Victoria's South West. While the region is of critical importance to the state and nation's food supply our communities are some of the most remote and poorly connected in Victoria.

As recognised by Infrastructure Victoria in Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021-25, "many stakeholders expressed major concerns about the reduced scope of the Murray Basin Rail Project, particularly for businesses. Publishing a plan can help address these concerns and should include a program of projects."

Situated within what the Federal Government refers to as the Green Triangle, SWV has some of Australia's most strategically important roads,⁴ yet poor and unsafe conditions are risking the safety of all workers and the reliability of critical supply chains. These roads need to be safe for locals and tourists, and efficient to allow industry to remain competitive.

One of the highest priorities for investment in the SWV region is major road upgrades.

KEY PROJECTS

Second stage of Barwon South West Dairy Supply Chain Project Project cost: \$63 million over 2 years

SWV welcomes the investment from both the state and federal governments towards the Barwon South West Dairy Supply Chain.

Further funding is now required for the second stage of this project. This will include: structures on the Princes Highway and Warrnambool – Caramut Road; and Priority A Roads including Cobden Port-Campbell Road, Great Ocean Road, Caramut Road, Mailors Flat-Koroit Road to be upgraded for vehicles up to 85.5 tonnes.

SouthWest Victoria Narrow Arterial Road Fund

A number of key arterial roads in the region are either single lane or unsealed, presenting a significant challenge to regional supply chains. Investment is required to ensure all roads are upgraded to a double lane standard.

Priority roads include:

- Darlington Road, Mortlake
- Lavers Hill-Cobden Road
- Woolsthorpe-Heywood Road
- Macarthur-Penshurst Road

Grain Road Supply Chain Study Project cost: \$150,000 investment from State Government (\$50,000 Local Government contribution)

SWV appreciates the Victorian Government's \$8 million investment in improving access to food and fibre markets for local producers.

As our local agricultural sector becomes more productive it is critical that supply chains are able to keep up with increased output.

⁴ Australian Government's Roads of Strategic Importance Initiative



RAIL

Commuter

State and federal government investment into the Regional Rail Revival program has created jobs and supplier opportunities across regional Victoria.

Further improvements to public transport will bolster the region. As it stands the Warrnambool Line services more than 200,000 residents across South West municipalities, including:

- Colac Otway Shire
- Corangamite Shire
- City of Warrnambool
- Southern Grampians Shire
- Glenelg Shire
- Moyne Shire
- Surf Coast Shire

Inadequate train services on the Warrnambool Line are inhibiting growth and tourism opportunities, and failing to meet the needs of Victoria's South West.

The importance of a strong rail network has never been more prominent in a post COVID-19 environment. There is a need to provide passengers with more choice on when to travel, as well as, improving the comfort and reliability of passenger rail services, including ensuring passengers have access to the internet.

PASSENGER AND FREIGHT RAIL

The Western Victorian Rail Network has seen improvements under the Victorian Government's Murray Basin Rail Project. Further investments to connect the Port of Portland via Maroona to the Portland Line would help to unlock the region's potential.

In Infrastructure Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021-25, recommendation 79 encourages development of the Murray Basin

Rail project plan.⁵ Following promising preliminary discussions with the Commonwealth we believe this business case will demonstrate the benefits of improving the Port of Portland's freight rail access and facilitate partnership across all levels of government.

KEY PROJECTS

Further investment in the Warrnambool Line

The Federal Government has committed funding for the Warrnambool Line, it is set to be delivered in two stages:

Stage 1, now underway, includes:

- building a new crossing loop.
- signalling upgrades between Waurn Ponds and Warrnambool
- level crossing upgrades (complete).

Stage 2 includes:

- upgrades to train detection technology at more than 50 public level crossings, and
- a stabling upgrade at Warrnambool Station.

The next step is to ensure the line offers 6 services per day (double the current capacity) and provides passengers internet connectivity for the entirety of their journey. The Group also calls on the State Government to improve the rolling stock on the line and introduce the new modernised 'sprinter' trains to cut the commute time in half.

Furthermore, the group requests a State Government funding commitment in the forward estimates for 2022-23 for VLocity trains to replace the current antiquated, unreliable locomotive-drawn service on the Warrnambool Line.

Funding to revise and complete the Murray Basin Rail Project (MBRP)

Endorsed by Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021-2051

The Victorian Government's Murray Basin Rail Project (MBRP) was developed to standardise a large part of the Western Victorian Rail Network to increase freight efficiency.

SWV Alliance calls on Federal and State Governments to revise this plan and come to a new agreement informed by the project's business case review to complete the MBRP.

Upgrade the Maroona to Portland Rail Line Project cost: \$30 million

Endorsed by Victoria's Freight Plan and Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021-2051

⁵ Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021-25, Infrastructure Victoria, pg. 219



DIGITAL

Local businesses, students and workers are now dependent on reliable digital infrastructure. The region's geographic size and disparate population centres has made it difficult for commercial telecommunications companies to justify building appropriate digital infrastructure in our region.

In order to address these pressing challenges the region needs state and federal government support to attract investment in digital infrastructure.

With the increase in people working from home, significant strain has been placed on broadband and mobile networks across SWV, which are

already subject to 262 mobile blackspots.⁶ Demand pressures on already stretched regional digital networks are impacting business productivity and telecommunications accessibility across the region.

Improving the access and reliability of digital and mobile networks is essential as these modes of working and learning are already integral to everyday life.

Through the SouthWest Victoria Regional Partnership, the Great South Coast Digital Plan has been developed to address issues of mobile coverage and access to business-grade broadband in significant population areas.

KEY PROJECTS

Expansion of IoT network to enable high value agriculture
Project cost: \$3 million to facilitate a further \$3 million investment

Expansion of the SWV region's IoT network connectivity would enable investment into IoT applications and technology in high-value agricultural activities.

Funding to implement all recommendations from Great South Coast Digital Plan

Launched in March 2020, the Great South Coast Digital Plan is an evidence-based, place-based analysis of the supply of and demand for digital services and skills.

The Great South Coast Digital Plan complements other regional Plans prepared by the Government to strengthen local economies and communities across regional Victoria – including Infrastructure, Transport, Skills and Growth Plans.

Specifically, we ask that the;

- State Government reviews and extends its regional telecommunications advocacy; provides co-investment funding and pilot programs; and facilitates regional Internet of Things (IoT) and 5G developments.
- Commonwealth Government continues and extends mobile blackspot co-funding program; mandate that the telecommunications industry meets stronger NBN service connection and maintenance requirements.

Funding for the Great South Coast Digital Innovation Hubs Pilots
Project cost: \$1 million over three years

A feasibility assessment has identified Hamilton and Portland as locations to trial digital hubs as outlined in the Great South Coast Regional Digital Plan.

The SWV Alliance believes the hubs will influence NBN high performance technology deployment and facilitate digital literacy training. With high bandwidth services unavailable to many in the SWV region, digital hubs would improve equity of access to disadvantaged communities.

2. GROWING OUR ECONOMY

FOOD AND FIBRE

SWV is the largest food and fibre region in Victoria, producing \$2.3 billion in agricultural output annually. The food and fibre industry drives the local economy and creates job opportunities in the region.

SWV farms produce more than one quarter of Victoria's beef and around one third of Victoria's dairy and sheep. Broad acre cropping, food processing, aquaculture and forestry are additional regional strengths. The region is also home to the Port of Portland, through which the Victoria's agricultural, forestry and mining products are exported.

KEY PROJECTS

Develop pilot projects from the Great South Coast Green Hydrogen Strategy
Project cost: \$750,000, outlined in Great South Coast Economic Futures report

Green hydrogen manufacturing opportunities should be developed in Warrnambool and Portland. The region is home to several strategic assets, including Deakin University's Warrnambool campus, the Mortlake gas generator and the Portland aluminium smelter.

Upgrade region to three-phase power
Project cost: \$10 million investment expected to be recovered in 5 years

Endorsed by Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021-2051.

In order for the renewable energy zone identified in Victoria's South West to be developed the region's connection to the electricity grid will need to be improved. Upgrading power lines along a stretch shorter than 100kms would improve connectivity for Tyrendarra, Strathdownie, Cape Bridgewater and Gorae West customers.

Improved power infrastructure will enable better water management on farms and enable more sustainable agricultural practices.

Drive local food and fibre economy – groundwater
Project cost: \$3 million investment to support 150 farms

Southern Grampians Shire has implemented Low-Power Wide-Area Network (LoRaWAN) technology to enable Smart Farming Practices. This technology facilitates smarter groundwater use which will ensure more sustainable farming practices.

Supporting the expansion of this network would allow for the improvement of agricultural activities and management of the Dilwyn Acquirer.



SWV FARMS PRODUCE MORE THAN ONE QUARTER OF VICTORIA'S BEEF



\$2.3 BILLION IN AGRICULTURAL OUTPUT ANNUALLY



TOURISM

Tourism is one of the largest drivers for the local economy.

With international borders not expected to open for broader tourism visitation until 2022, it is unlikely SWV will see visitor numbers return to pre-COVID levels for years to come. Our region's tourism industry is of national importance and support is critical to avoid further erosion of the industry.

According to Austrade, the nation's tourism losses for the year ending March 2021 were \$82.9 billion. SWV lost 250,000 international overnight visitors, or a million nights' worth of revenue, and 800,000 day visitors.⁷

Exacerbating the loss of international visitors is the unreliability of domestic travel. In the March quarter 2021, the region had begun to see signs of recovery with overnight trips to regional Victoria up by 6 per cent. However, domestic visitor numbers have proven unreliable as states lockdown to manage COVID-19 outbreaks. Without JobKeeper support businesses are being eroded by disruptions to the flow of travellers to their attractions and venues.

Our most optimistic estimates suggest that spending in the region's visitor economy in 2022/23 compared to 2018/19 levels will fall by 3 per cent, pessimistic analysis shows a decline of 9 per cent in 2022/23. In 2020/21 the region's visitor economy experienced a 26 to 36 per cent drop in spending and between 3,403 and 4,711 jobs lost.

International visitors ensure our tourism economy remains viable year round and will be central to seeing spending in the visitor economy increase. Pre-pandemic, midweek visitors to SWV were 30 per cent domestic and 70 per cent international, signalling the importance of international tourists to businesses during non-peak periods.

Once international borders re-open, SWV must continue to attract visitors to the region's rich natural assets and unique cultural tourism offerings, as well creating much-needed new jobs in the visitor economy.

KEY PROJECTS

Extend Recovery for Regional Tourism Program

The Federal Government's \$50 million Recovery for Regional Tourism Fund supports nine tourism regions which are heavily reliant on international tourism. Analysis from Tourism Research Australia ranked the Great Ocean Road the third most visited place in regional Australia by international travellers in 2019 with 1,046,347 visitors. The Great Ocean Road ranked above the Great Barrier Reef (Daytrip), Byron Bay, Hobart and Port Douglas. SouthWest Victoria, home to the Great Ocean Road, Port Campbell, the Twelve Apostles and Budj Bim is a key regional tourist region and should be included in this program

Acceleration of Tower Hill Reserve Revitalisation

The Victorian Government has identified the Tower Hill Reserve as an area that should be activated given its proximity to Budj Bim. The final plan is due to be released in 2021.

The Victorian Government recently announced \$11.3 million for upgrades at Tower Hill Wildlife Reserve as part of the \$2.7 billion COVID-19 pandemic works stimulus package.

SWV Alliance hopes to work with the Victorian Government to accelerate the delivery of this project and strengthen the local tourism industry.

Diversification High Value Tourism – Site Identification and concept plan for Geothermal Hot Springs

Project cost: \$300,000, outlined in Great South Coast Economic Futures report

Between Geelong and the South Australian border, approximately 400 volcanoes have been identified. This creates conditions for geothermal water in Dilwyn aquifer which sits under most of SouthWest Victoria.

The scale of water required for hot springs tourism is negligible compared to town or agricultural uses. By contrast, the value creation on offer from such water in settings such as luxury spa resorts would make this the most productive of all water uses by far.

WORKFORCE & SKILLS

As identified by the Victorian Government's SouthWest Victoria Regional Skills Taskforce - not only is there a general shortage of workers to fill jobs in the region, there is a growing shortage of skills within the region. In 2018, the Victorian Skills Commissioner noted, with regard to SWV, "a supply of locally skilled workers to underpin growth is critical."⁸

For SWV industries to prosper, there must be a reliable stream of skilled workers and learning opportunities aligned to the current and future economic needs of the region. In order to attract businesses to create jobs SouthWest Victoria needs to be able to accommodate the highly skilled workforces of modern businesses.

In addition to investment attraction, diversification of the local economy is critical for our future economic resilience. According to Victorian Government data, the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry saw a 10 per cent reduction in jobs across the state between 14 March and

14 November 2020. In addition, 22.6 per cent of accommodation and food service sector jobs disappeared state-wide in the same time period.⁹ With the agriculture and hospitality sectors employing approximately 17 per cent and 21 per cent of the region's workforce, our dependence on the agricultural and hospitality sectors leaves us vulnerable to fluctuating commodity prices as well as range of disasters and emergencies.

While SWV welcomes the restart of the Seasonal Worker Programme there is still a significant skills gap not only in the agricultural sector but also in construction and energy production.

Skilled local jobs create new opportunities for young people and other residents to find rewarding careers locally, which has flow-on benefits across the region's economy and community.

KEY PROJECTS

Develop Food and Fibre careers and pathways

Project cost: \$450,000 over 3 years

It is estimated the area will see a 30 per cent growth in food and fibre jobs by 2035 - 39 per cent of these jobs will require a vocational qualification; while 19 per cent of these jobs will require a university degree.

A food and fibre careers and pathways initiative will:

- establish programs in schools promoting this career path;
- prepare clearer career pathways and address skills gaps and education;
- build leadership programs for this sector; and
- support more integrated learning opportunities.

Establish a GROW program for the SWV region

Project cost: \$600,000 over 3 years

The region would significantly benefit from a Growing Regional Opportunities for Work (GROW) program.

GROW programs have had success across Victoria in Bendigo, Ballarat, Shepparton and Gippsland.

The program is focussing on generating job opportunities for key target groups – including young people, transitioning workers, Aboriginal people and the long-term unemployed.

The three elements of the GROW program include:

- redirecting procurement spend towards local business;
- creating jobs through local inclusive employment approaches; and
- cultivating impact funding and investment opportunities

⁸ Victorian Skills Commissioner, 2018 Regional Skills Demand Profile: The Great South Coast

⁹ Coronavirus (COVID-19) impact on Victoria's Visitor Economy, April 2021, Tourism, Events and Visitor Economy Research Unit

3. A SUSTAINABLE SOUTH WEST

HOUSING

SWV member councils are challenged by not having sufficient budgets for infrastructure investment. This creates limited opportunities for the development of new assets. With strong growth in the regions predicted, there is concern about the long-term impact of underinvestment in enabling infrastructure.

As rural municipalities with smaller populations but large areas to maintain, government support in providing enabling infrastructure is critical to ensure the liveability and economic strength of the SWV region.

KEY PROJECT

Investment in Essential Worker Housing Supply Action Plan and New Infrastructure Grant Program **Project cost: \$5 million (\$20,000 support for 250 lots)**

Federal and State Governments have previously managed regionally-focused grants. Provide financial support to pilot a process that reduces costs of service provision for residential subdivisions identified in the Key Worker Housing report in Hamilton, Mortlake, Port Campbell, Portland and other towns across South Western Victoria.

WATER

SWV understands there are potentially significant economic benefits by using available groundwater resources for high value agriculture. However, there are regulatory barriers blocking these opportunities. At the same time, the region needs to address climate challenges for water management and opportunities to secure water resources for the future.

The Western Region Sustainable Water Strategy was released in 2011. Of the 69 actions from the Strategy, 17 are still only partly achieved or not yet achieved. We are calling for a new and focussed South West Sustainable Water Strategy to focus on realising underutilised groundwater for high value agricultural enterprise and sustainably planning for a drying climate.

KEY PROJECT

The development of a new South West Sustainable Water Strategy

The following policy innovation should be implemented as a matter of urgency:

- Extension of groundwater licence duration to 30 years (from 15 years)
- Upstream trading on regulated rivers
- Unbundling of groundwater licences
- Improved water monitoring
- Preserving cultural values of Lake Condah



HEALTH

SWV welcomes the Victorian Government's investment in mental health support, particularly in relation to the continued support for Hospital Outreach Post-Suicidal Engagement in Warrnambool, and the announcement of a new Youth Prevention and Recovery Care Unit in the Grampians region.

This is an important issue in the region as the SWV continues to experience poor health outcomes compared to Victoria's averages, including lower life expectancy, higher propensity for obesity among adults, and a greater number of mental health treatment plans.

The Western Victoria Primary Health Network (WVPHN) have long advocated for the adoption of telehealth services in regional Victoria. The pandemic forced the WVPHN to implement a telehealth trial to improve access to healthcare services for particularly remote clients. Almost eight per cent of respondents said they would use telehealth again and importantly recommend it to another person. 78 per cent rated their experience in the trial as either good or excellent.

The expansion of telehealth and mental health services is critical for the ongoing health and wellbeing of residents in Victoria's South West.

KEY PROJECTS

Investment in a community-based care site in the SWV region, providing a 'front door' support service

The SWV seeks to be one of the first 20 new local service sites in Victoria providing a 'front door' for care – joining locations already announced such as Benalla, Greater Geelong and Latrobe Valley.

Grow Our Own Mental Health Workforce – Internship Pilot **Project cost: \$280,000 supporting 10 placements over 2 years**

In order to deliver the Victorian Government's ambitious mental health agenda in Victoria's South West our regional mental health workforce needs to be bolstered.

Funding required to support the rigorous supervision and accreditation requirements for discipline specific mental health psychology and social work graduates through paid internships



SouthWest Victoria ALLIANCE

SWV stands ready to support the Commonwealth and Victorian Government's response and recovery to the COVID-19 pandemic through short-term investment opportunities that will have an immediate impact on the regional economy, and longer term priorities which offer higher-growth economic productivity.

To discuss the opportunities outlined in this document, please contact:

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