



Bass Coast Shire Council, Economic Development Strategy 2016-2021

Five Year Summary Snapshot

Table of Contents

- 1. Introduction.....3
- 2. Employment by Industry Sector5
- 3. COVID-19 Impacts and Response7
- 4. Summary and Highlights of Key Strategies8
- Strategy 1: Growing our Businesses.....8
- Strategy 2: Sustainable Economy 10
- Strategy 3: Visit Bass Coast 11
- Strategy 4: Economic Diversity 13
- Strategy 5: Farming for our Future..... 14

I. Introduction

The Economic Development Strategy 2016 -2021 (the Strategy), adopted by Bass Coast Shire Council (Council) in April 2016, provides a framework to promote and facilitate sustainable economic development in Bass Coast. This report provides a review of the actions and outcomes for the Strategy.

The Strategy outlines:

- what Council aims to achieve in economic development
- the role Council, in partnership with business and other levels of Government, plays in delivering the objectives of this Strategy
- Economic Development Annual Action Plans.

Identified in the Strategy are five strategic directions to assist with the implementation of economic growth and prosperity across the municipality. The Strategic Directions are:

1. Growing our Businesses
2. Sustainable Economy
3. Visit Bass Coast
4. Economic Diversity
5. Farming for our future

Council, through the Strategy, makes a strong contribution to the creation of an environment that at an operational level, supports existing businesses to be innovative and sustainable and at a strategic level, attracts and encourages business activities that drive the local economy.

Council has worked to implement initiatives to attract and encourage new investments that complement the natural environmental values of the region. Council also support existing businesses to grow into new markets.

Bass Coast has experienced strong population and economic growth over the past five years:

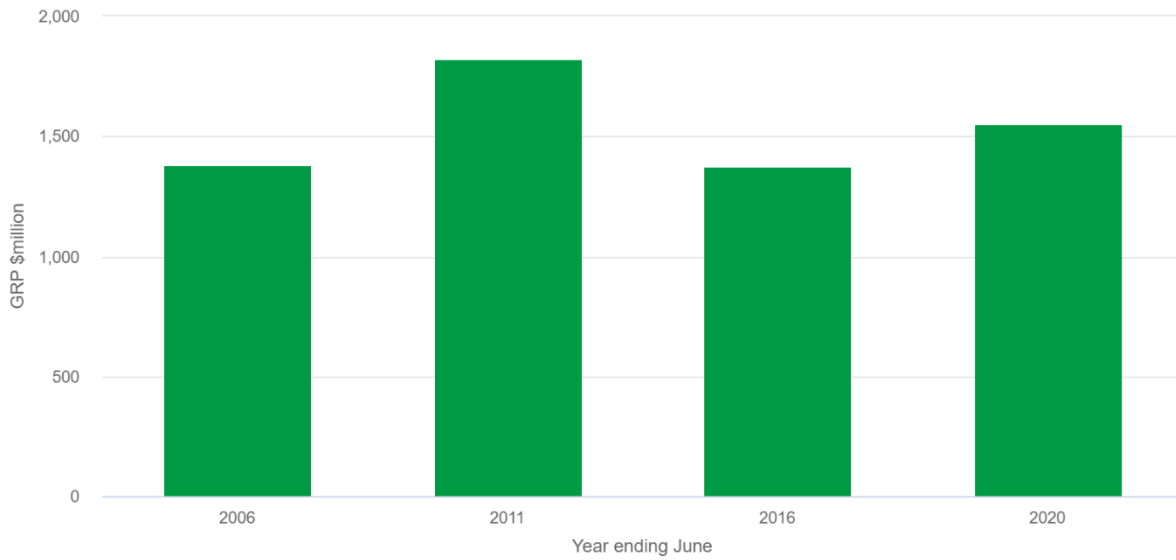
- 2016 to 2020 average annual population growth of 2.82% to 37,445 people
- gross regional product (GRP) estimated at \$1.55 billion 2020

Key Statistics

GRP \$1.55 billion <small>NIEIR 2020</small>	Population 37,445 <small>ABS ERP 2020</small>	Local jobs 12,503 <small>NIEIR 2020</small>
Largest industry (by employment) Health Care and Social Assistance <small>Census 2020</small>	Local businesses 3,134 <small>ABS 2020</small>	Employed Residents 15,471 <small>NIEIR 2020</small>

Gross Regional Product

Bass Coast (S)



Source: National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR) ©2019 Compiled and presented in economy.id by .id (informed decisions)

.id informed decisions

Bass Coast Shire's Gross Regional Product was estimated to be worth \$1,549m as of the 30 June 2020. This is an increase of \$173m or 12.57% from the 2016 estimate of \$1,376m.

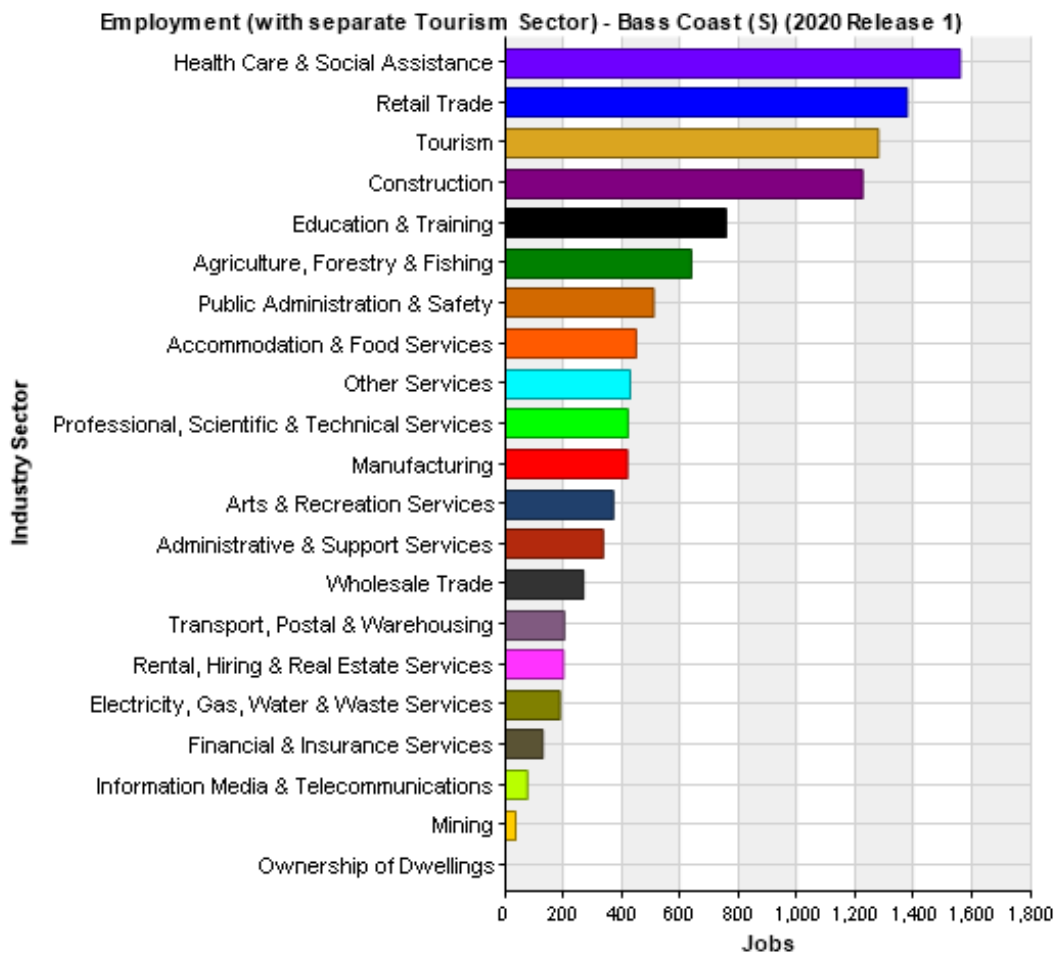
2. Employment by Industry Sector

Key business sectors by employment for Bass Coast include health, visitor economy, retail, construction, education and agriculture. Health Care & Social Assistance is Bass Coast's largest employment sector, supporting an estimated 1,560 jobs.

The employment data presented below represents the number of people employed in each of the industry sectors in Bass Coast. The estimated employment generated by tourism for each industry sector has been deducted and consolidated into a separate tourism sector.

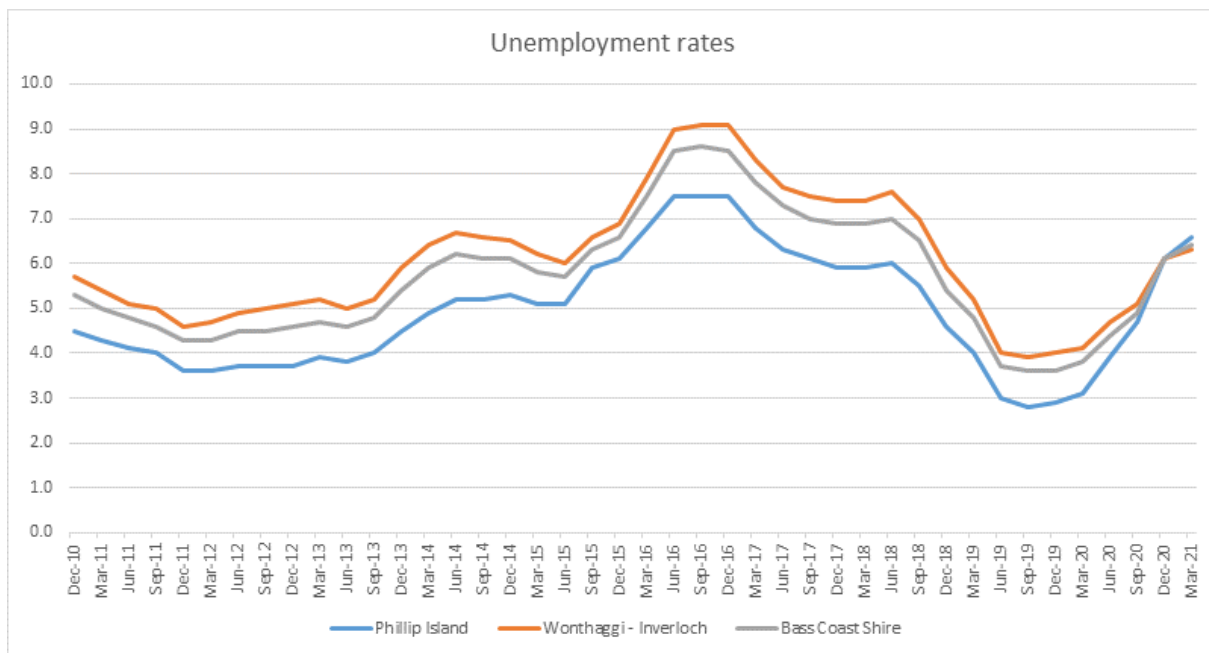
In this snapshot, the employment data is place-of-work data and represents total numbers of employees without any conversions to full-time equivalence. The total employment estimate for Bass Coast is 10,839 jobs.

Employment by Industry Sector



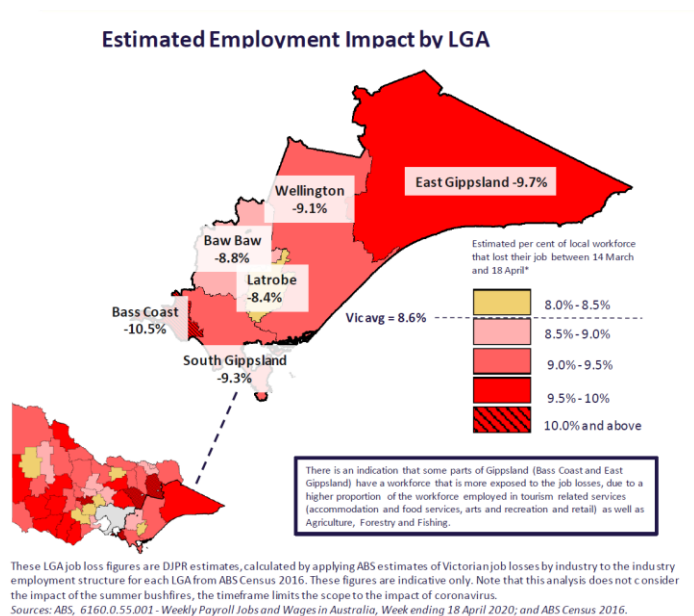
The graph below shows the unemployment trend for Bass Coast as a LGA, Phillip Island and Wonthaggi/Inverloch. Bass Coast unemployment rate has been trending down since mid-2016 and the trend upwards from March 2020 shows the impact from Covid-19. (Source Department of Education, Skills & Employment).

Unemployment Rate Trend 2010 - 2021



It is estimated that Bass Coast experienced the greatest impact on employment of the six Gippsland LGA's as a result of COVID-19. The graph image below indicates that Bass Coast was in the highest bracket of estimated per cent of local workforce that lost their job between 14 March and 18 April 2020.

Estimated Employment Covid-19 Impact by Local Government Area



3. COVID-19 Impacts and Response

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the Bass Coast economy and community. Bass Coast is considered the most reliant Local Government Area on tourism in Victoria. Tourism is one of the sectors that has been significantly impacted by the pandemic, the implications for the local economy are far-reaching.

Impact from the pandemic has varied depending upon industry, location, customer base, business-preparedness and ability to respond. In the lead up to the pandemic, key economic indicators in Bass Coast were strong including;

- the unemployment rate at December 2019 was estimated at 3.7 percent;
- strong population growth with average annual growth of 2.82%; and
- significant Federal, State and private investment into the region.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Governments initiated a number of measures to contain the virus that had adverse impacts on business. Measures implemented included lockdowns, travel restrictions, international travel suspended, state & territories border closures, and capacity limits. The measures had significant and lasting impacts on tourism and events.

The pandemic has led to widespread disruption and hardship to Bass Coast businesses and the community overall. Businesses in the entertainment/arts, recreation, some retail sub-categories, hospitality, accommodation, tourism attractions, and personal services sectors have been severely impacted and in many cases only survived due to government subsidies.

It is also recognised that some sectors have benefited from the implications of the pandemic, these include postal & freight services, construction, home improvement/hardware retail, digital service providers, telecommunications, and others.

In response to the impacts of COVID-19, Bass Coast Shire Council established a COVID-19 Community Leadership Recovery Group to support Council decision making. Council responded to the challenges presented by the pandemic, acting decisively and allocated \$965,000 for a Response and Recovery Package.

A key feature of the Package was a Business and Community Resilience Grants Program, which delivered more than \$700,000 to 133 businesses and community organisations across the Shire. The majority of the businesses applying for support from Council were accommodation providers, food and beverage, attraction and retail businesses.

Council was successful in the State Government's Outdoor Eating and Entertainment Package to support local hospitality businesses that have been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and dining density restrictions.

Working closely with the Business and Tourism Associations and individual traders for a holistic approach to each town, the funding allowed Council to activate outdoor dining areas across Bass Coast. A number of extended outdoor dining options were activated by extending footpath trading, introducing parklets (temporary dining space in carparks), public space activations and changed traffic to one way streets in Inverloch and Cowes. This allowed for businesses to increase trade during heightened restrictions and creating enhanced atmosphere. Local event businesses

were contracted to assist in the activations which helped them during a time when no events were running.

Other support Council provided included;

- contacting business operators to check-in, provide information about government programs and general business support;
- establishing the Bass Coast 'Buy Local' Campaign and continuing to promote it via social media, print media and other channels; and
- providing relevant COVID-19 business support, to ensure COVID safe principles are understood and best practices are adhered to.

4. Summary and Highlights of Key Strategies

Strategy I: Growing our Businesses

Facilitate activities that support and promote businesses to become commercially resilient

A resilient economy has businesses from a variety of industry sectors, which are able to adapt to changing environments, are alert to new opportunities and respond to challenges. Businesses will be innovative and financially and structurally stable. They contribute to the Bass Coast community and are an integral part of community life.

Around 3,100 businesses employing almost 11,000 people operate in Bass Coast Shire. Assisting these businesses to maintain their competitiveness and to grow or diversify their operations is a key strategy within the Strategy.

Key Activities

Business Development:

Prior to COVID-19 Council delivered regular business workshops, including the Gippsland Small Business Festival and tourism training workshops. During the COVID-19 pandemic the Business Support team pivoted its operation to contacting businesses directly to check in, providing fortnightly newsletters with up to date industry news, access to and hosted a number of webinars.

Bass Coast Business Awards:

Now in its 14th year, Council delivers the annual business awards to highlight and celebrate the achievements of local business. This year the key themes are celebration and inclusiveness. For 2021, the business awards will celebrate a challenging 18 months of operating a business and also show gratitude to the businesses who have pivoted and adapted to our current way of life. The categories have evolved this year to be more inclusive and reward the key elements of local businesses.

Small Business Mentoring:

Council facilitates small business mentoring sessions with an experienced small business mentor. Business owners participate in the sessions that can be used to work through an issue or fill an information gap and are hosted monthly in different locations around the Shire. Council also hosts the Small Business Bus quarterly in Bass Coast offering free advice and mentoring on starting a new

business, business planning, marketing and growing a business.

Business Engagement

Council engages directly with business to inform, share business information, promote business events, grant opportunities and profile local business achievements through a number of channels including:

- Face to face business visits
- Social media channels – Business in Bass Boast Facebook page and Instagram
- Website
- Networking events and presentations

Business support and relationships:

The Economic Development team meet with hundreds of businesses operators each year to identify business development needs, concerns and provide links to opportunities such as grants.

In 2020, Council launched a free online service that enables individuals, businesses and community organisations to easily identify and access funding opportunities from local, state and federal governments and other grant programs via the Grant Guru platform.

Strategy 2: Sustainable Economy

Facilitate the attraction of businesses and industry with sustainable principles

A sustainable economy comprises businesses that are financially and structurally sound through developing sustainable business models. This will include being environmentally sustainable in response to the challenges of climate change, and being resilient and adaptable in the face of new markets and changes in economic environments.

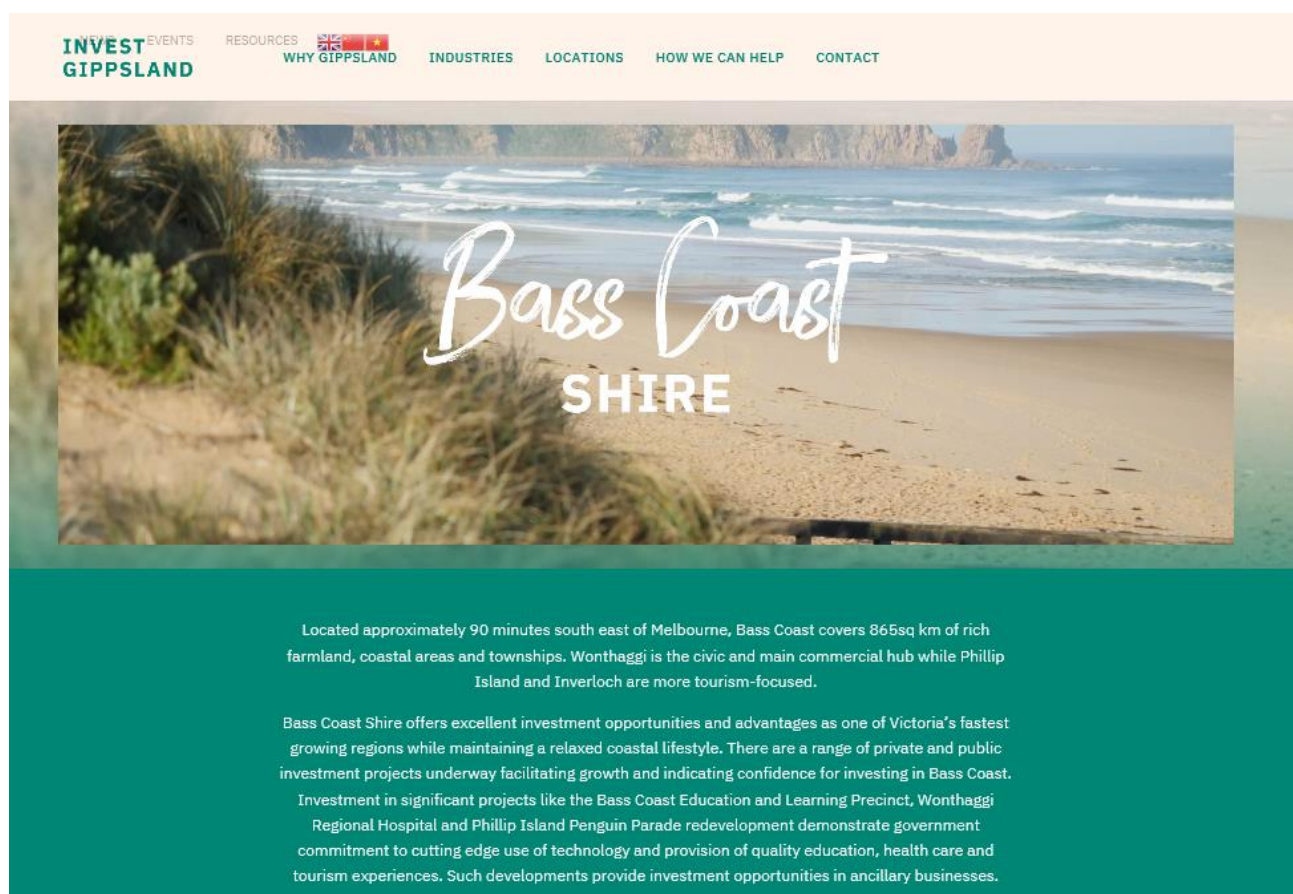
Attracting new businesses to Bass Coast Shire is a key business development activity. Council seeks to increase the number of new businesses with sustainable environmental and commercial practices.

Key Activities

Investment facilitation:

Economic Development lead pre-application discussions with a range of potential investors to demonstrate that Bass Coast is open for business and to provide key investors with a 'concierge' service at Council.

The new Invest Gippsland website was launched in December 2019 showcasing investment opportunities and highlighting the best Gippsland has to offer to enhance the region's economy.



The image is a screenshot of the Invest Gippsland website. At the top, there is a navigation menu with the following items: INVEST GIPPSLAND, EVENTS, RESOURCES, WHY GIPPSLAND (with a small flag icon), INDUSTRIES, LOCATIONS, HOW WE CAN HELP, and CONTACT. Below the menu is a large banner image of a beach with waves and cliffs in the background. Overlaid on the image is the text "Bass Coast SHIRE" in a white, cursive font. Below the banner, there is a green section with white text. The text reads: "Located approximately 90 minutes south east of Melbourne, Bass Coast covers 865sq km of rich farmland, coastal areas and townships. Wonthaggi is the civic and main commercial hub while Phillip Island and Inverloch are more tourism-focused." Below this, it says: "Bass Coast Shire offers excellent investment opportunities and advantages as one of Victoria's fastest growing regions while maintaining a relaxed coastal lifestyle. There are a range of private and public investment projects underway facilitating growth and indicating confidence for investing in Bass Coast." Finally, it states: "Investment in significant projects like the Bass Coast Education and Learning Precinct, Wonthaggi Regional Hospital and Phillip Island Penguin Parade redevelopment demonstrate government commitment to cutting edge use of technology and provision of quality education, health care and tourism experiences. Such developments provide investment opportunities in ancillary businesses."

Developing Bass Coast Forums:

Forums provide information and networking opportunities for investors and local businesses. These events include key note speakers and updates from Council's Planning and Economic Development teams. Previous guest speakers included former Planning Minister, Justin Madden and demographer, Simon Kuestenmacher.

Victorian State Government infrastructure investment:

The Victorian Government has provided over \$230 million in funding to the Bass Coast community to deliver a range of developmental, economic stimulus and community projects over the last three years.

This includes \$115 million for the Wonthaggi Hospital redevelopment and support for the education sector including \$32.7 million for the Wonthaggi Secondary School project and a commitment of \$24.7 million in funding for the Bass Coast Junior Campus. In addition, funding has been committed for the White Road kindergarten, a new indoor competition-grade gymnasium at Cowes Primary School; and free TAFE courses at the Wonthaggi Chisholm campus.

Other projects supported through Victorian Government funding include \$25 million for public and community housing, \$2 million for land acquisition for the Wonthaggi State Emergency Services unit, \$241,000 for the State Coal Mine - Old Energy New Energy project, the opening of a new Justice Service Centre in Wonthaggi, \$58,460 for solar panels for the Wonthaggi Civic Centre; and local road works.

Strategy 3: Visit Bass Coast

Promote Bass Coast as an all year unique tourism and events destination

The Tourism industry offers diverse opportunities to experience Bass Coast's exciting natural environment and its artistic and cultural heritage. It takes advantage of the region's proximity to Melbourne to draw visitors to a range of events and natural attractions, including the National Surfing Reserve, becoming an all year tourist destination.

The Bass Coast economy is heavily dependent on the tourism sector. The promotion of the region as an all-year, unique tourism and events destination is integral to ensure economic prosperity.

Key Activities

Phillip Island and San Remo Visitor Economy Strategy 2035, Growing Tourism (VES):

Significant progress has been made on the VES. These are highlighted in the Phillip Island and San Remo Visitor Economy Strategy 2035, Growing Tourism 5 Year Snapshot.

Visitor Services:

Council manages two accredited Visitor Information Centers (VIC) and a mobile bus.

Event Facilitation:

Prior to Covid-19 restrictions, Council supported over 100 events annually and delivers workshops and training to local event organisers to assist in the running of safe, well managed events.

Regional Tourism Organisations:

Council provides support to Destination Phillip Island and Destination Gippsland Regional Tourism Boards with funding and cooperative marketing and industry development support.

Cruise Industry:

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of cruise ship visits to Bass Coast was steadily increasing with Phillip Island being the second busiest destination in Victoria for cruise shipping in 2020/2021 with 19 visits scheduled.

Digital Promotion and Booking Capacity:

The Visit Bass Coast tourism website promotes Bass Coast and provides booking capacity. Visitor Services also use social media sites Instagram, Facebook and Trip Advisor to promote Bass Coast.

My Phillip Island Tourism Ambassador Program:

The development of My Phillip Island and My Bass Coast Tourism Ambassador programs to include over 30 business, 470 registered students and 260 full certified tourism ambassadors.

Strategy 4: Economic Diversity

Encourage the diversity of small business that supports the culture of Bass Coast

A diverse economy supports resilience in the face of changing external environments. Economic diversity comprises businesses, large and small in a range of industries, which together support many different occupations. Businesses will have a culture of innovation and diversification. They will be supported by education and training services, which provide a skilled workforce for an expanded economy.

There has been \$1,529m of building approvals (commercial \$344m and residential \$1.185m) from 2016 - 2021. The Economic Development team works collaboratively with other teams in Council to facilitate these developments.



Better Business Approvals:

Working towards faster, easier business approvals, Council partnered with the State Government to deliver the Better Approvals Project and implemented a number of new initiatives to streamline the permit approval process, including:

- A single point of contact for those looking to start or expand their business
- A single online application form
- Improved permit information online
- Streamlining footpath trading approvals.

The outcome is a shorter, simpler permit approvals process for new and existing businesses, leading to increased economic activity in the region.

Investment Facilitation:

The Economic Development team lead pre-application discussions with potential investors to demonstrate that Bass Coast is open for business and to provide key investors with a ‘concierge’ service at Council.

The Invest Gippsland website was launched in December 2019 showcasing investment opportunities and highlighting the best Gippsland has to offer to enhance the region’s economy.

Strategy 5: Farming for our Future

Protect productive farmland and support rural business sustainability

Strong rural sectors require the protection of productive farmland in the face of development and other demands. The rural economy will be based on sustainable practices that respond to the opportunities and challenges produced by the combined effects of climate change, the need for increased food production by the escalating world population and the growth of new local and international markets.

Bass Coast has a strong agriculture sector with much of its 865 sq. kms used for farming. Agriculture will remain a significant driver in the Bass Coast Shire and contributes to the high standard of livability and tourism.

Activities

Rural Engagement Group (REG):

Council facilitates the REG to provide an important link between Council and representatives of the agricultural sector for networking, collaboration and engagement. REG meetings are held quarterly with approximately 20 attendees at each meeting. Some of the key issues discussed include farm rates, road side weed management and sustainable agriculture.

Assistance for Agri-business:

Council facilitates meetings and one-on-one assistance for agri-businesses with Regional Development Victoria to assist with business growth and potential grant opportunities.

Promotion of local produce and farm gate:

Council funds editorial and content to promote local businesses in the Gippsland Food and Drink Guide and facilitates promotional features such as the Postcards feature that showcased agricultural businesses in late 2019.