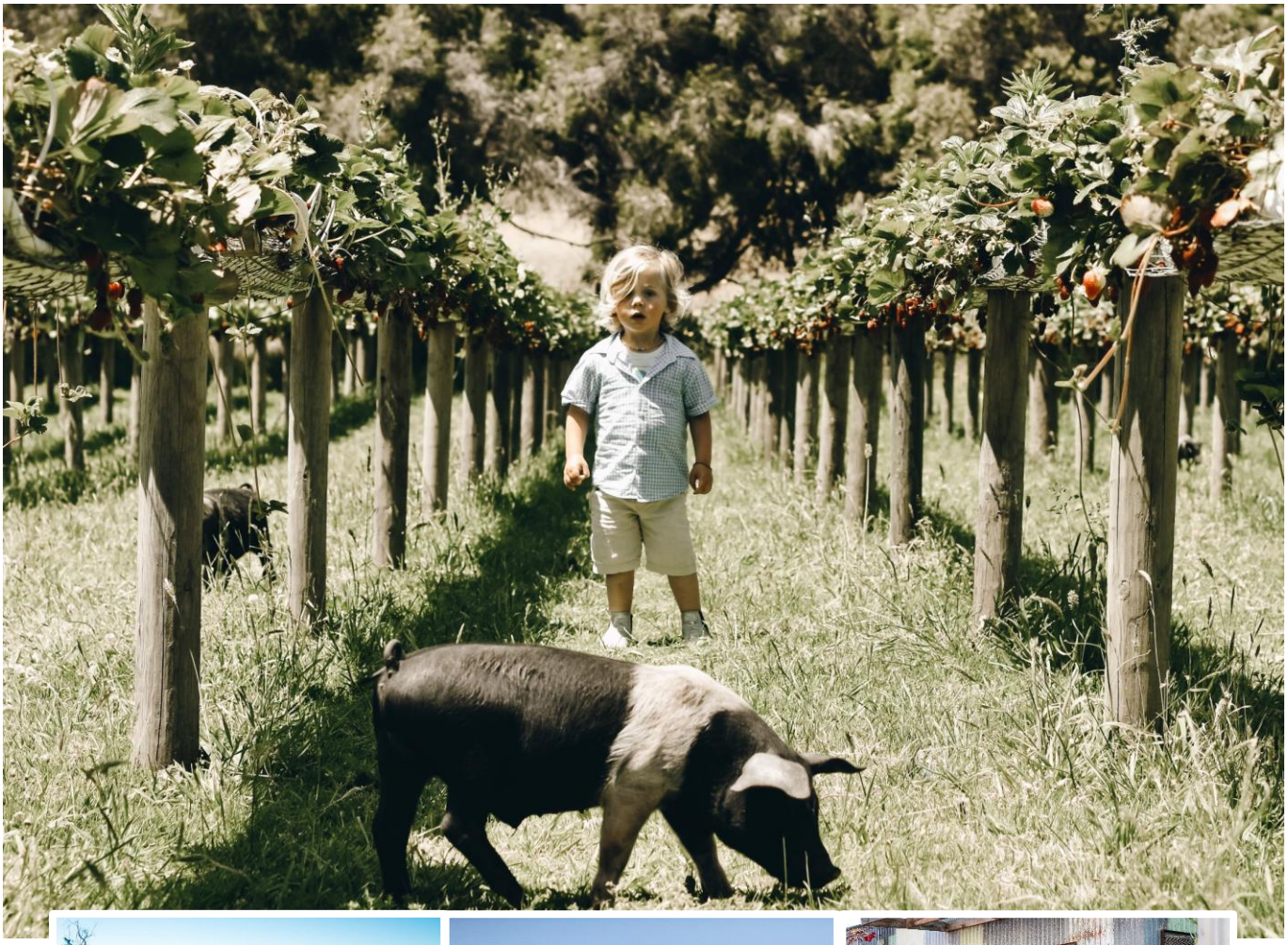








Bass Coast Shire Council, Economic Development Strategy 2016-2021

Year Four Snapshot 2020

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1. 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.

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.

This report provides an annual snapshot of the 2019/2020 year and progress on actions for the Strategy.

Five strategic directions help deliver the Strategy

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

The benefits of doing business in Bass Coast are demonstrated by the strong residential growth and visitation along with an increase in employment opportunities.

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.
- at a strategic level, attracts and encourages the kind of business activities that will drive the local economy.

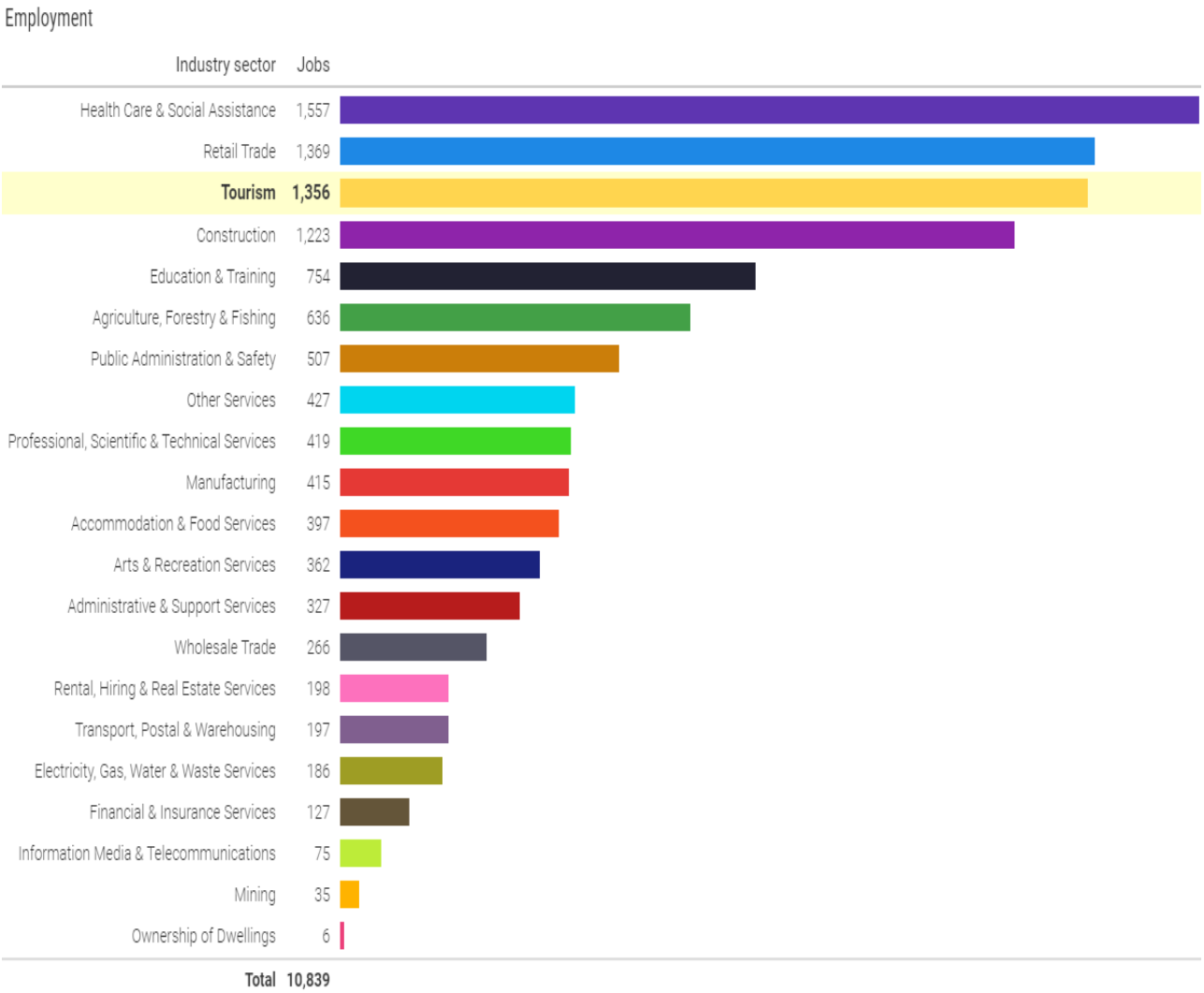
Council has worked to implement policies to attract and encourage new investments that complement the natural environmental values of the region. It will also support existing businesses to grow into new markets and products through training and mentoring.

Home to 36,320 people, Bass Coast supports 10,839 jobs and has an annual economic output of $3.068 billion.

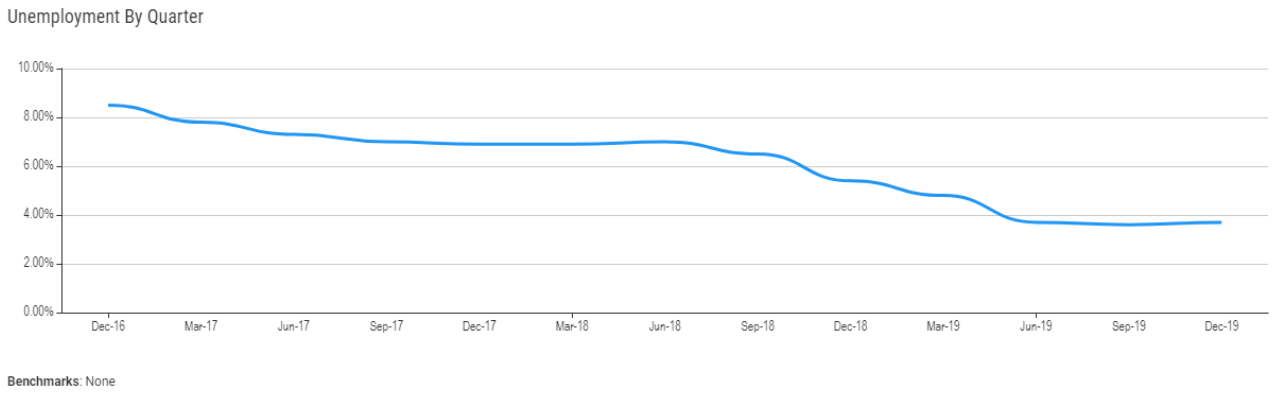
Key business sectors by employment for Bass Coast include health, visitor economy, retail, construction, education and agriculture. Health Care & Social Assistance is Bass Coast's largest employment sector, supporting an estimated 1,557 jobs.

The employment data presented below represents the number of people employed by businesses and organisations in each of the industry sectors in Bass Coast. In this snapshot, the employment data is place-of-work data and represents total numbers of employees without any conversions to full-time equivalence.

2. Employment by Industry Sector

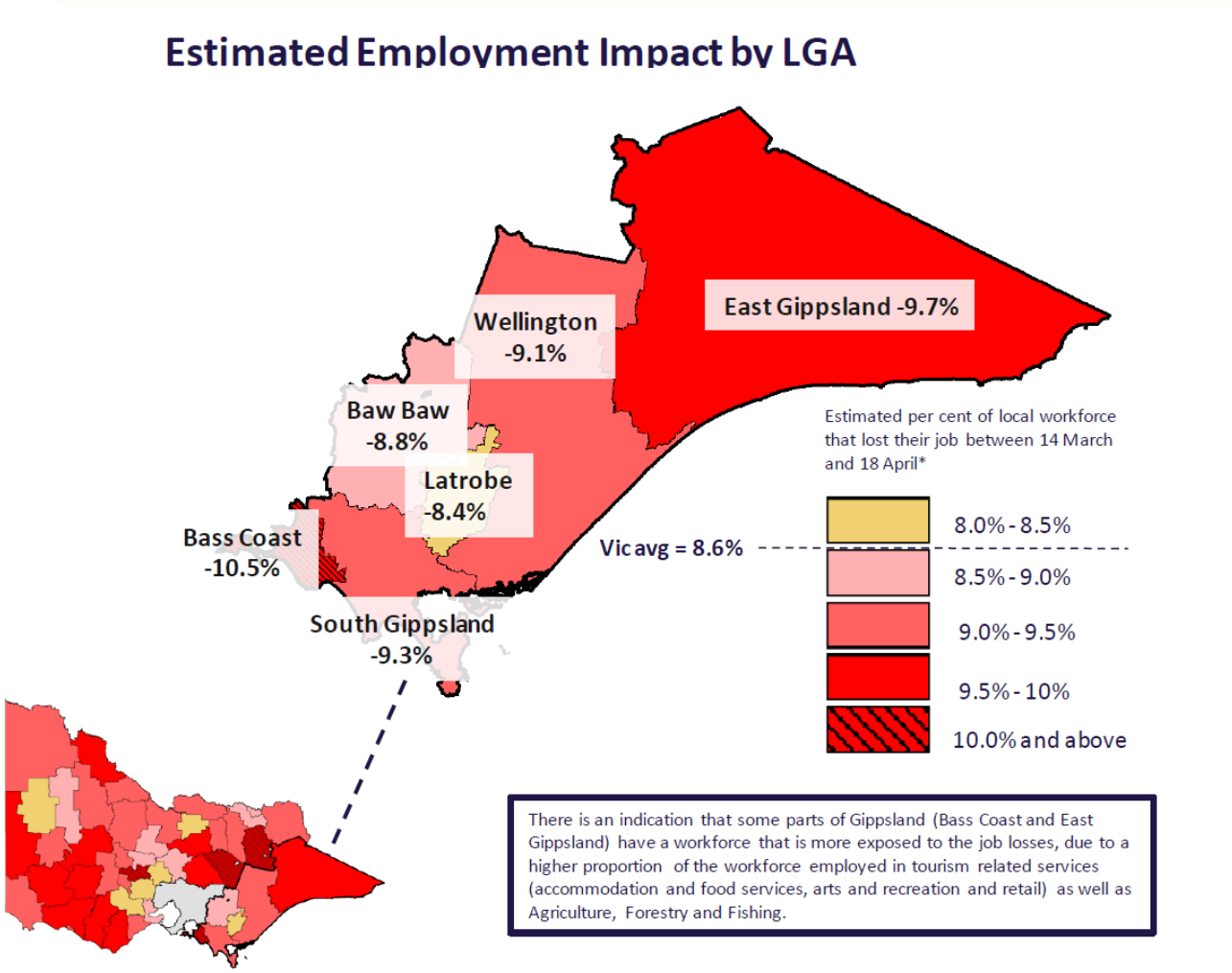


Bass Coast unemployment rate has been trending down since mid-2016



Source: the economic data presented has been sourced from REMPLAN

Bass Coast has suffered the greatest employment impact of any Gippsland LGA as a result of COVID-19 as shown below.



These LGA job loss figures are DJPR estimates, calculated by applying ABS estimates of Victorian job losses by industry to the industry employment structure for each LGA from ABS Census 2016. These figures are indicative only. Note that this analysis does not consider the impact of the summer bushfires, the timeframe limits the scope to the impact of coronavirus.
Sources: ABS, 6160.0.55.001 - Weekly Payroll Jobs and Wages in Australia, Week ending 18 April 2020; and ABS Census 2016.

3. COVID-19 Response and Recovery - Business Support

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a massive impact on the Bass Coast economy. As the region most reliant on tourism in Victoria, and tourism being one of the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic, the implications for the local economy are far reaching.

In the lead up to the pandemic key indicators in Bass Coast were strong, meaning Bass Coast was better placed than many regional areas to cope with the pandemic:

- Unemployment rate at December 2019 of 3.7 per cent.
- Significant federal, state and private investment into the region in recent years including the Penguin Parade building redevelopment, Bass Coast Health expansion and the construction of the new Wonthaggi Secondary senior campus.
- Continuing strong population growth.
- Diverse business sectors including tourism, agriculture, construction, retail, health, education and professional services developing and performing strongly.
- Sustained, buoyant property market.

Council has responded strongly to the challenges presented by the pandemic, acting quickly to free up $965,000 for a Response and Recovery Package, including $700,000 for the Business and Community Resilience Grants program to support businesses and community groups.

Council's Response and Recovery Package – Phase One

- Reimbursement of six months of the 2019/20 Street Trading Permit fees
- Financial relief for caravan park and business operators in Council-owned facilities
- Waiving business signage and liquor licensing permit fees for the remainder of 2019/20
- A new Financial Hardship Policy that was endorsed at Council's May 2020 Ordinary Council Meeting
- $700K in COVID-19 Resilience Grants

The impacts on local businesses has been mixed, with significant winners and losers. Supermarkets, pharmacies, delivery and cleaning services, hardware, nurseries and a number of other sectors have prospered and in some cases employed additional staff to meet demand.

Those in the entertainment/arts sectors, recreation, retail, hospitality, accommodation, tourism attractions, eateries and many others have been severely impacted and in many cases are only surviving due to government subsidies.

There are, however, many tales of innovation and collaboration, none more inspiring than Mat Bowtell from Free 3D Hands in Cowes, who rapidly transformed his 3D hand manufacturing operation into medically-approved face shields which he then supplied free of charge to Bass Coast Health and other medical facilities.

4. Business Support Role

The rapid escalation of COVID-19 and measures to contain its spread have led to widespread disruption and hardship to businesses and the community overall. Whilst there are numerous Federal and State Government support measures in place, due to its close connection with the local community, Council is well placed to support and facilitate additional measures targeted specifically to support local businesses and community.

Council officers from across a range of Departments including, Economic Development, Business Support, Events, Visitor Services, Community Strengthening, Customer Services, Communication and Advocacy, Emergency Management and more have come together to provide support right across the community.

Council has also engaged with the community through a Community Leadership Recovery Group, chaired by the Mayor, to hear first-hand information about the impacts of COVID-19 and to assist Council to deliver its Response and Recovery package.

The Business Support Team (BST):

- Worked with the Community Strengthening team to prepare the Response and Recovery Package and support the Community Leadership Recovery Group.
- Contacted over 400 business operators to check in, provide information about government programs and provide assistance with pivoting their businesses.
- Discussed applications for Council's Business and Community Resilience Grants with more than 200 businesses.
- Established the Bass Coast Businesses 'Buy Local' Campaign and continues to promote it via social media, print media and other channels.
- Distributes a fortnightly newsletter for local businesses, via direct email to our business data base and via social media channels.
- Negotiated with a local Accountant to run a free webinar and Q&A session on government assisted grants and funding for local business operators in conjunction with a Solicitor: 25–30 businesses attended.
- Made a video using a local business operator promoting the State Government's Business Support Fund to encourage businesses to apply.
- Is providing relevant COVID-19 business support and grant information via the Business in Bass Coast social media channel.
- Promotes the REMPLAN COVID-19 business survey which is being rolled out across the state to gather data from businesses about the direct impacts of COVID-19.
- Made the decision to cancel this year's Bass Coast Business Awards and invest those funds into enhancing business capacity building and training as part of the Small Business Festival.

Council is committed to supporting businesses and the local community and Council officers have reviewed current budget priorities to establish a proposed range of measures to assist individuals, families, business operators and the community overall.

The ‘Buy Local’ campaign encouraged the community to support local businesses



5. Strategy 1: 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 3,000 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 Bass Coast Shire Council Economic Development Strategy.

Key Activities

Bass Coast Business Awards: Delivered the 13th annual Business Awards to highlight and acknowledge the achievements of local business. A total of 198 local businesses participated in the awards program and were celebrated for their success.



Business Development: Prior to COVID-19 delivered business events and tourism training workshops to over 100 business operators. During the COVID-19 pandemic the Business Support Team has pivoted its operation to contacting businesses directly to check in, providing fortnightly newsletters with up to date industry news, access to relevant webinars and hosted a cash flow and e-commerce training session.

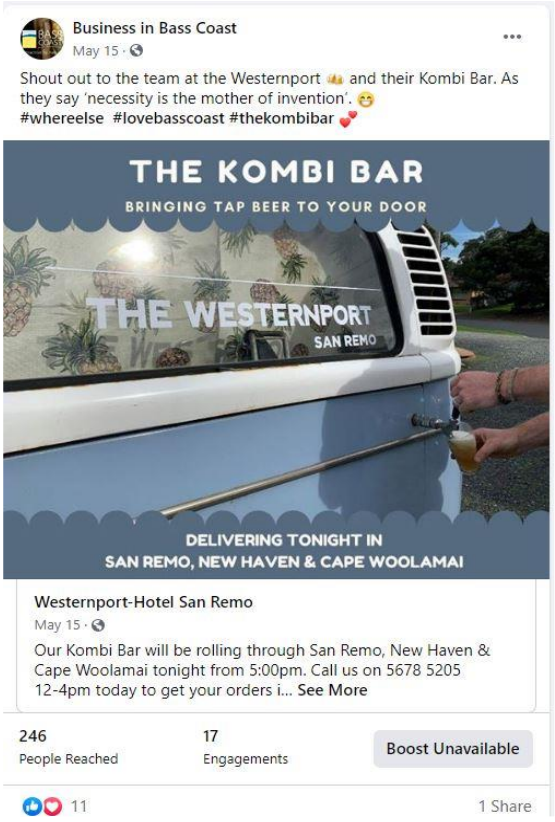
Small Business Mentoring: Council facilitated small business mentoring sessions with an experienced small business mentor. 17 business owners participated in the sessions that can be used to work through an issue or fill an information gap and are hosted monthly in different locations around the Shire.

Business Victoria Small Business: Visited Bass Coast nine times offering free advice on starting a new business, business planning, marketing and growing a business.





Business in Bass Coast Facebook: Is used to inform, share business information, promote business events and profile local business achievements. Business in Bass Coast has 1,299 followers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, followers increased by 20 percent as local businesses turned to our Facebook page to keep up to date with COVID-19 information, support and grant programs.





Gippsland Business Festival: The Gippsland Business Festival is an annual event delivered in collaboration with the other five Gippsland Councils. The Gippsland Business Festival is a month long festival of events held during August each year and the Gippsland Small Business Festival team work together to deliver a program of events that cover a wide range of topics.



In 2019, Chris Helder was our feature speaker discussing the Power of Influence. Businesses enjoyed one of Australia's best speakers guiding them to master mindset, create genuine connections with customers and take their business to the next level.

Council was also pleased to provide a business breakfast featuring inspirational Beechworth Bakery founder, Tom O'Toole. Tom delved into The Ingredients of Success and shared his incredible entrepreneurial story of how he created Australia's most successful standalone retail bakery business.







This roadshow series was complimented by other local events such as the Bass Coast Business Awards, Small Business Mentoring, Business workshops on a wide range of topics and visits from the Victorian Governments Small Business Bus.

6. 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

Developing Bass Coast Forums: Two forums were hosted providing information and networking opportunities for investors, local businesses, Councillors and Council officers. These events include guest speaker presentations as well as updates from Council's Planning and Economic Development teams. This year guest speakers included former Planning Minister, Justin Madden and Simon Kuestenmacher focusing on demographics, future cities and strategic planning.





Victorian State Government Infrastructure Investment: Council advocacy achieved major funding commitments for the Bass Coast University Centre ($1.5m), major road upgrades and Cowes Jetty repairs ($9.7m) and erosion infrastructure ($2.675m). As well as servicing the needs of the growing community and visitors these projects will create local jobs (construction and operational) plus stimulate investment opportunities in ancillary services. Council has been leading the push for an exciting tertiary education presence for Bass Coast.

The Bass Coast University Centre will provide a local facility where multiple providers can deliver courses, and where any online student can access important resources including technology, study spaces, career mentoring, library, student support services, and importantly socialise with other students and feel a part of the student environment. This project has been driven by the Bass Coast Higher Education Steering Committee and the recently formed Bass Coast University Centre Board.

Distinctive Area Landscape (DAL) Project: The DAL sets out a long term vision and strategy on how land is used, protected and developed. The declaration aims to protect the environment, landscape and lifestyle of the Bass Coast.

Advocacy is continuing for community priorities such as:

- Investment in eliminating mobile blackspots to improve Bass Coast Shire competiveness in attracting businesses to our region.

Business Support and Relationships: The Business Support team meet with hundreds of local businesses operators each year to identify business development needs, concerns and link to opportunities such as grants.



Cowes Revitalisation: Works including the Phillip Island Transit Centre were completed in September 2019, providing additional parking spaces, bus transit area, a taxi rank, well-lit accessible pathways, public toilets and changing places facilities.

In October 2019, the revised concept of the Cowes Cultural and Community Centre was approved and construction is scheduled to commence in early 2021. The new Centre is forecast to generate $51.8 million in benefit to the Bass Coast economy over the life of the project. The many economic and job benefits this project will bring the region ensures it will continue to progress.

7. 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 Shire as an all year, unique tourism and events destination is integral to ensure economic prosperity for the Shire.

Key Activities

My Phillip Island Tourism Ambassador Program: Launched in October 2019. The program was developed to teach the basics of exceeding customer expectations, why tourism is important to our region and give destination product knowledge to mobilise Phillip Island and San Remo frontline workers to turn every visitor encounter into a positive experience. The program is an accessible, industry-focused, online customer service training program for Phillip Island and San Remo tourism, hospitality and retail businesses. A total of 27 businesses and 385 students have initiated training and are in the process of receiving their ambassadorship.

MY PHILLIP ISLAND TOURISM AMBASSADOR



MY BASS COAST TOURISM AMBASSADOR

Work on the My Bass Coast Tourism Ambassador platform is progressing with the design of a new logo complete and training modules currently in the development stage. This complementary program will be completed and launched in 2020/21.

Victorian Tourism Awards: Council won Silver in the Local Government Award for Tourism and the Visitor Services categories at the 2019 Victorian Tourism Awards.



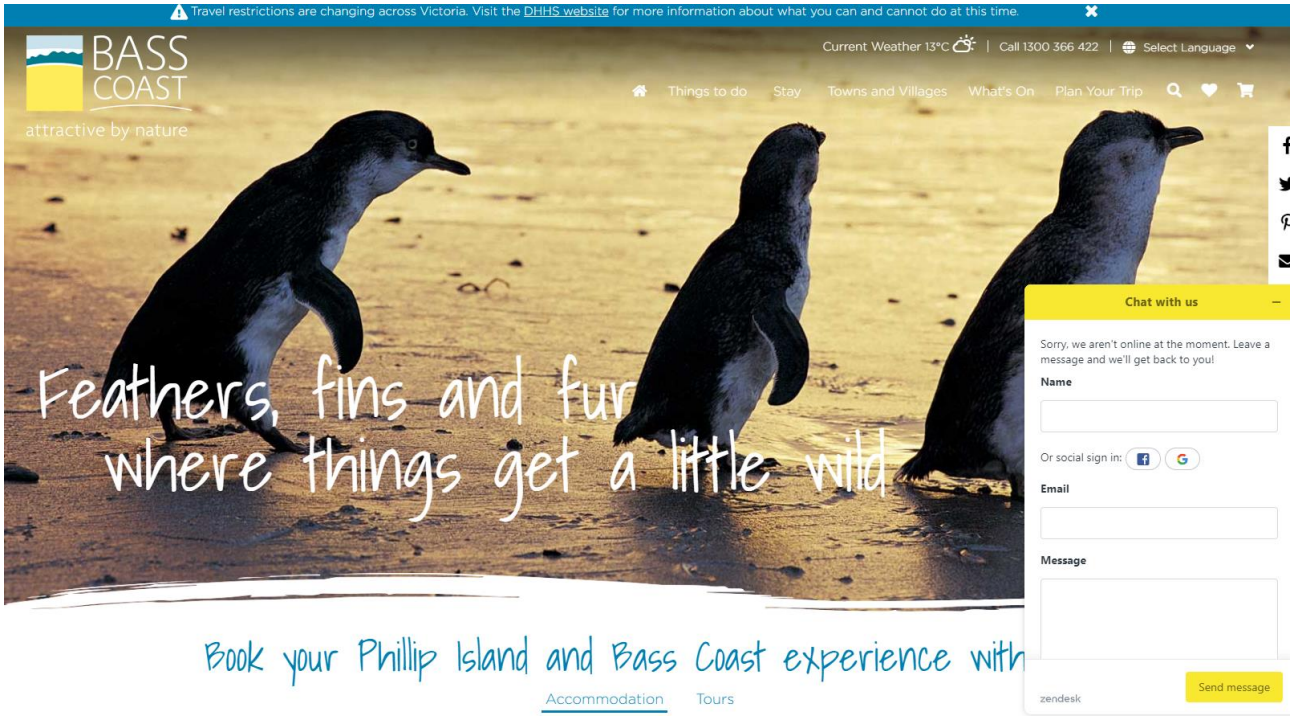
Phillip Island and San Remo Visitor Economy Strategy 2035, Growing Tourism (VES): Excellent progress has been made on the years 2 – 5 actions from the VES. These are highlighted in the Phillip Island and San Remo Visitor Economy Strategy 2035, *Growing Tourism* Annual Snapshot for 2019/20.

Event Facilitation: Council delivers annual workshops and training to local event organisers to assist in the running of safe, well managed events. Training includes risk management, traffic management, running an environmentally sustainable event and event promotion. This year facilitated a Visit Victoria training program delivering two sessions for 20 participants to ensure all events are uploaded to the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse to increase promotion. Council's Events team supported 107 major and community events, providing funding of almost $120,000 and in-kind support, including traffic management, signage placement and waste services.

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

Digital Promotion and Booking Capacity: The Visitor Economy Team delivered the new Visit Bass Coast tourism website to provide a better digital experience for visitors with enhanced functionality and imagery. The site is mobile responsive and easy to use. This year Council introduced Zen Desk on our website which has proved to be very useful in continuing to provide Visitor Services during COVID lock downs. Our tourism website had 122,349 visits during 2019/20. Visitor Services use social media sites Instagram, Facebook and Trip Advisor to promote Bass Coast.





Visitor Services: Council manages three accredited Visitor Information Centers (VIC) located in Cowes, Newhaven and Inverloch. The VIC Network welcomed a total of 108,008 visitors to the Bass Coast region in 2019/20, contributing $808,000 to the local tourism economy. Revenue comes back to Council from commissions on accommodation, attraction and event tickets bookings as well as advertising and retail sales. Whilst the Visitor Information Centres have been closed to walk-in visitors from March 2020, services continue to be provided online and via phone.





Cruise Industry: Phillip Island welcomed 14 cruise ships and over 14,000 passengers to the Island in 2019/2020 for an estimated economic impact of $2.5m. Phillip Island is now the preferred regional port and second busiest cruise ship destination in Victoria behind Melbourne. Staff have worked closely with the cruise ship industry and Destination Phillip Island that resulted in this season's increase from five visits in 2018/2019. While 19 ships were pre-booked for 2020/21, many have cancelled or postponed their visits due to COVID-19 impacts on world cruise itineraries. The Phillip Island Visitor Information Centre operate a mobile service at Rhyll to welcome cruise ship passengers to Phillip Island.



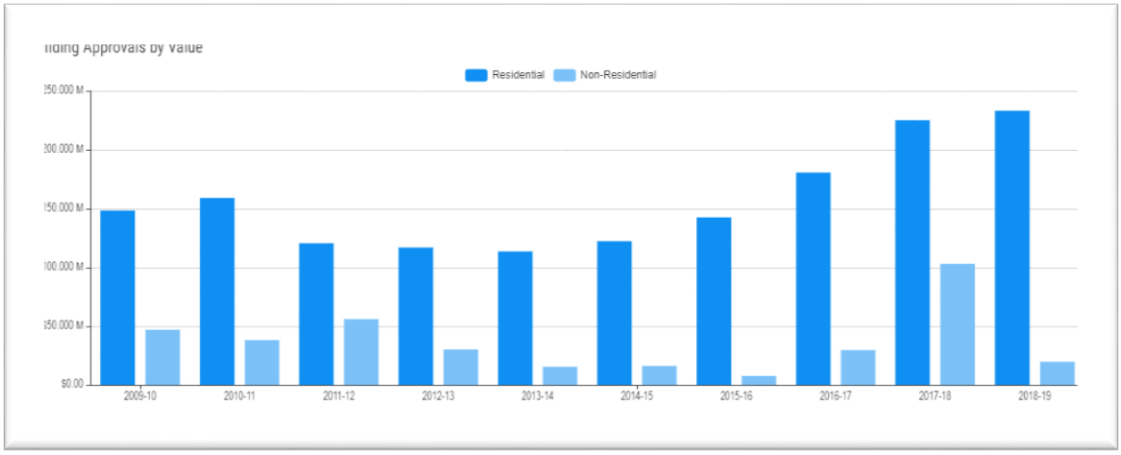
Training and Networking: Accommodation providers were provided one-on-one training sessions and ongoing support. The Inverloch VIC organised and hosted a local business Networking and Information Forum. A total of 17 local businesses attended the forum that provided updates from local businesses, updates about events in the region and industry updates from relevant Council Officers. These events provide a great opportunity for industry to connect and network with other businesses.

8. 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 $253m of building approvals (commercial $19.8m and residential $233.2m). The Economic Development team works collaboratively with other teams in Council such as the Statutory and Strategic Planners to facilitate these developments from initial conversations through to pre-application meetings and finally applications.



Better Business Approvals: Working towards faster, easier business approvals, Council has partnered with the State Government to deliver the Better Approvals Project.
As a result of this work, Council implemented a number of new initiatives to streamline the process for those applying for permit approvals for new or expanding businesses.

These include:

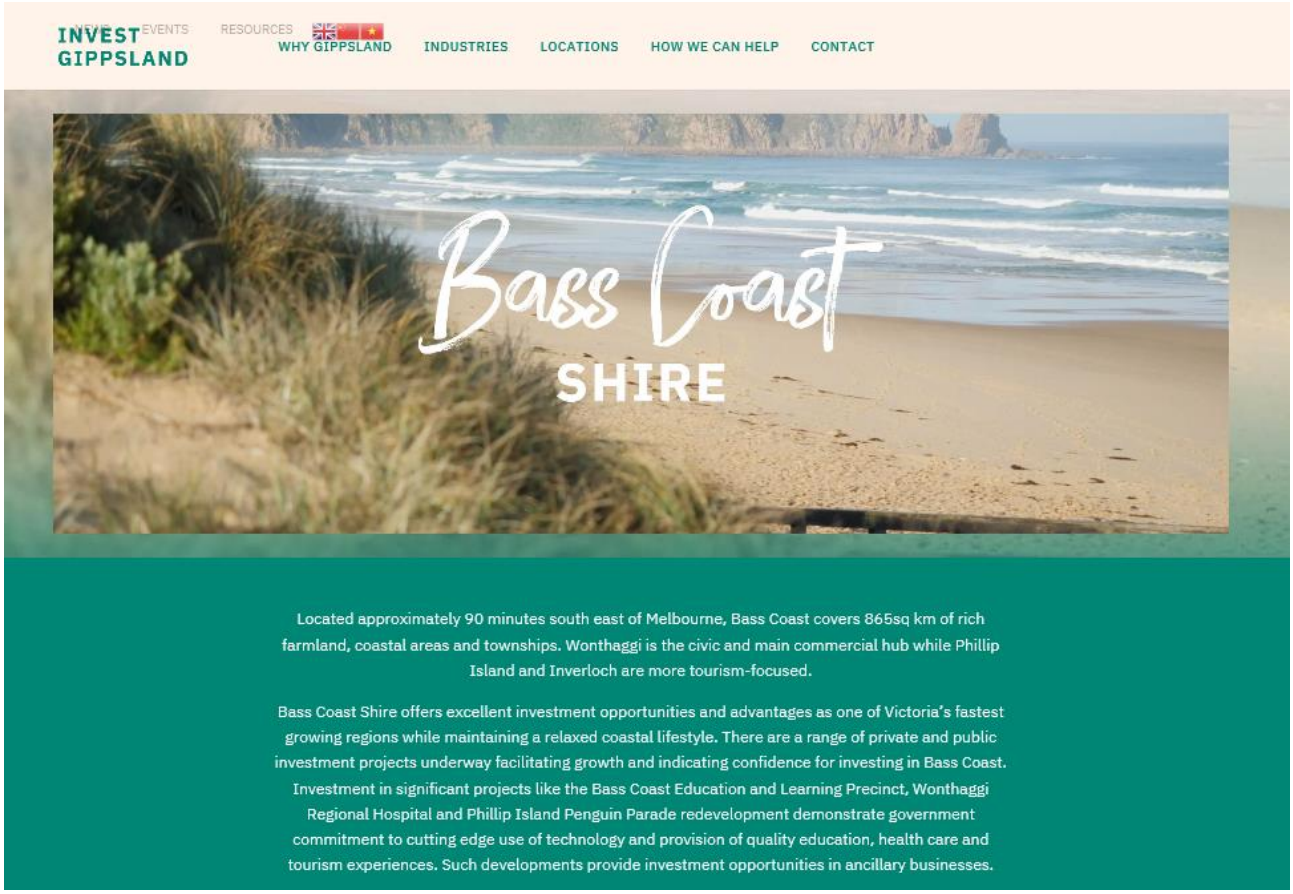
- The introduction of the Business Support Team, who act as a single point of contact for those looking to start or expand their business;
- A single online application form so people don't have to keep supplying the same information over and over;
- Better information on Council's website so that business operators can easily determine which permits they will need, and;
- 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. The changes in the process have been based on the feedback we received from our business community throughout the development process.

Since the commencement of better approvals, we have received 88 applications submitted through our new online portal.

Investment Facilitation: The Business Support Team led 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.



9. 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 being farm land. 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: The Economic Development team 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: Funded editorial and content to promote local businesses in the Gippsland Food and Drink Guide and facilitated a Postcards feature that showcased agricultural businesses in late 2019.

