

Gippsland Regional Roundtable

Regional Roundtable Playback

15 May 2020



About the Roundtable

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for our communities, governments, industries and business.

On 15 May 2020 Gippsland community and industry leaders, government and MPs came together for a roundtable discussion on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Gippsland's rural and regional communities, and opportunities for a strong post pandemic recovery.

This document reflects a summary of the roundtable discussion including opportunities for short, medium and long term action. This report serves as a record of the roundtable conversation to support ongoing discussions by local Gippsland leaders, government executives, Regional Partnership and RDA representatives.

Questions we asked

1. Where have we felt the impacts of the pandemic most strongly?
2. What immediate action is needed?
3. What does 2025 look like for Gippsland if we have undertaken a smart recovery?
4. What recovery actions will help us get there?

The Gippsland region at a glance



Regional Population

286,887

As at June 2019

Gross Regional Product

\$15.9 billion

As at 2019

Annual Tourism
Expenditure

\$1.65 billion

As at 2019

Tourism Operators

3057

As at 2018

1. Where have we felt the impacts of the pandemic most strongly?

Tourism and visitor economy

A halt on all travel has significantly impacted the region. Areas such as Phillip Island, Lakes Entrance and Alpine regions rely heavily on domestic and international travellers. The loss of revenue over the summer due to catastrophic bushfires has compounded the economic impact for the industry.

There is a high-reliance on the visitor economy in the region, upwards of 40% in Phillip Island and other destination areas. Surrounding retailers, hospitality, accommodation, attractions and other tourism providers have come to a complete stop.

Mental health

Social isolation requirements have impacted people's connectedness with the community and in some cases isolated many vulnerable people. Increased levels of fear and anxiety, job loss, job instability and increased pressures in the home are contributing to poor mental health for individuals. The region is seeing an increase in drug and alcohol related incidents.

Industry and business

Businesses have taken a downturn and employee and consumer confidence has decreased due to shrinking opportunities, postponed and reduced work, cashflow reductions and constraints with supply chain impacts. People are concerned about returning to work and job security. Small businesses reliant on steady cashflows are at greater risk of insolvency, some have already ceased trading. An online presence has become critical for all businesses.

Community safety

Restrictions and requirements to stay at home have impacted women and other vulnerable people whose home is not the safest place to be. As a result, some have sought out safety through public transportation (buses) and other essential service infrastructure.

Digital connectivity

Inequity has increased for disadvantaged and low socio-economic groups as they are constrained in terms of capability, affordability and access to enabling technology. Digital connectivity has been particularly challenging for students and businesses in remote regions and for many, low levels of digital literacy has limited their ability to adapt to new ways of learning, living and working during COVID-19.

Innovation

The forum recognised that the crisis has driven innovation and positive change. There has been a positive shift in online service delivery, particularly through government (eg. telehealth, remote learning). Many regional businesses quickly pivoted their business models to adapt to COVID-19, and local TAFEs and Universities developed new and innovative ways of working to deliver remote learning.

Skills and education

The pandemic has affected the international student market and is having an impact on educational engagement and attainment rates which was already an area of concern for the region. Access to skilled workers and upskilling is a challenge that will need greater focus as the region plans its recovery.

"Reduced and shrinking aspirations of young people...after triple whammy of drought fires and C19 what does the future hold for them in Gippsland?" – RDA

"Small businesses are cash-strapped and therefore unwilling to spend money, which limits their ability to adapt." – GippsTech

2. What immediate action is needed?

Tourism and visitor economy

- Collaborate with traditional owners to identify and develop cultural tourism opportunities that highlight the connection between indigenous culture and values with land and community.
- Support the public/private partnership of the Metung Hot Springs project for job creation and attracting a high yield market all year.
- Develop a marketing campaign to welcome back visitors and target domestic travellers.
- Fund delivery of the Gippsland Destination Management Plan to promote and attract those who want to visit and live regionally.

Health access

- Fast-track localised mental health support, and increase support services and resources to provide tailored support to local communities.
- Keep telehealth services in regional Victoria where it benefits communities who can't access local practitioners or facilities.

Digital connectivity

- Provide support and resources for small to medium size businesses to better leverage online and digital platforms.
- Better connect businesses with consumers (eg. telehealth model).
- Fund initiatives identified in the Gippsland Regional Digital Plan to improve digital skills and connectivity issues.

Liveability

- Identify and promote the region's competitive advantages.
- Retain flexible work environments by freeing up people in the public sector to continue to work from home.

Jobs and education

- Align training and skills needs with pathways into vocational and tertiary education for young people.
- Identify skills shortages and future training and skills needs and develop a plan to upskill various workforce cohorts (including youth, mature age and return to work).

Industry and business

- Fast track regional development opportunities eg. Battery Recycling Plant, West Gippsland Wind Farm, Kalbar Mineral Sands and Gippsland Plastics Recycling Facility.
- Develop a roadmap of priority areas that confirms and communicates expectations with local business and industry representatives.
- Support for innovation, helping businesses to develop new services / business models that can succeed in the new normal.

"Can we revisit the "bring a full wallet and empty esky concept" to bolster regional visitation - it was working very well in East Gippsland in February post fires until COVID." – RDA

*"Mental health supports were already floundering – we need to be ready to bump this up."
– Regional Partnership*

3. What does 2025 look like for Gippsland if we have undertaken a smart recovery?

Our community and small businesses are more digitally aware, enabled and connected through their professional and personal lives.

Our population has grown, and we are a thriving, safe, healthy place to live with access to sustainable and diverse employment and education opportunities.

Our logistics, freight and supply chains are better connected through enhanced transport networks and infrastructure.

Manufacturing has resurged and we have attracted new businesses that are producing goods locally for national and international markets.

Our visitor economy is sustainable all year round and supported by diverse experiences associated with our nature, food, wine, art and culture, and we showcase events consistent with our regional brand.

It is easier to get to, around and from the Gippsland region, our bus and rail connectivity has improved for community members and visitors.

We are a hub for the environment and renewable energy industry and are establishing a footprint for green energy technology in Australia.

We have shifted our focus and reliance from non-sustainable energy to more sustainable fuels.

We have a leading university and vocational training presence. Education is affordable, accessible and aligned with industry needs.

There is a realisation about the importance and value of health and wellbeing and we are making economic decisions with a health and wellbeing lens.

“By 2025 I'd like to see local businesses accepting that technology and innovation is necessary long term, not just in a crisis, and local workforce accepting that tech and innovation are not optional skills and using recovery funding to upskill.” – GippsTech

“There is a realisation about the importance and value of health and wellbeing and we are making economic decisions with a health and wellbeing lens.” – RDA

“Gippsland 'provenance' (clean, green, smart, trusted) is well established on a national and global basis.” – Food and Fibre Gippsland

4. What recovery actions will help us get there?

Digital connectivity

- Develop training programs to increase digital literacy in the community.
- Expand accessibility for disadvantaged groups through digital community hubs to enable participation in online community events, services and recruitment opportunities.

Jobs and education

- Connect with industry and education providers (e.g. Gippsland TAFE) and explore opportunities to tailor short courses that fill identified skills gaps.
- Explore Federal/State Government investment and partnership arrangements.
- Map alternative pathways to tertiary education and vocational training and promote participation to other cohorts (mature age, re-trainees etc).
- Attract more secure employment to minimise reliance on casual workforces.

Liveability

- Amend government policy and enable more flexible working conditions for the public sector.
- Fast-track and decentralise commercial and industrial land planning requirements to attract businesses to the region.
- Incentivise residential, commercial and industrial building and development through stimulus or other financial enticements.
- Unlock greater supply in residential, commercial and industrial land/infrastructure.

Tourism

- Create Wilson Prom Sanctuary to protect internationally renowned environment / biosphere.
- Invest in the Gippsland Trail by completing all of the key rail and walking trails.

Environment and water

- Review regional water policy to determine the best ways to utilise and secure irrigation resources for farmers.
- Review and update policies in relation to less sustainable energies and resources (i.e. coal, timber).

Transport

- Provide on-demand transport services to improve safety and accessibility.
- Improve transport infrastructure to better integrate bus and rail connectivity.

Industry and business

- Explore circular economy partnership with the health sector.
- Provide grant funding for small business innovations and ideas across all industries including sports, recreation and creative.
- Fast track bushfire clean up actions.
- Support for businesses facing setbacks due to red tape and release controls on government procurement.

Food and fibre

- Support growth in dairy production by securing and sustaining irrigation resources for dairy farmers.
- Identify transformational opportunities and infrastructure investment to drive supply chain demands.

Regional Leadership

- Continue to promote and advocate for our region through a united voice.

"Much faster train service and more regular to assist people who may want to relocate to our areas but need a connection back to the city." – King and Heath Real Estate

"The links between tourism and the food and fibre circular economy are strong and provide a great opportunity for Gippsland." – Destination Gippsland

Thank you

Our Participants

Maree McPherson, Regional Partnership Chair
Jane Ponting, Regional Partnership Deputy Chair
Jane Anderson, Regional Partnership
Roland Davies, Regional Partnership
Val Prokopiv, Regional Partnership
Terry Robinson, Regional Partnership

Richard Elkington, RDA Chair
Tim Weight, RDA Deputy Chair
Raelene Hanratty, RDA
Angela Hutson, RDA

Anna Tyben, Latrobe Valley Bus Lines
Pasquale Lazzaro, Pureharvest
Chris Martin, King & Heath Real Estate
Andrew Bulmer, Bulmer Farms
Nicola Pero, Food and Fibre Gippsland
Jon McNaught, Viplus Dairy
Leigh Kennedy, Federation University
Andrew O'Loughlin, Federation University
Elena Kelareva, GippsTech

Catherine Basterfield, Phillip Island Nature Parks
Jane Oakley, Committee for Gippsland
Kate Graham, Neerim District Health Service
David Dyer, Dyers Transport
Kate Simmons, Latrobe Health Services
Angela Betheras, Nickelby's Yarragon

Danielle Green MP
Harriet Shing MP
Jordan Crugnale MP

Beth Jones, DJPR
Lill Healy, DPC

Our Regional Roundtable was
facilitated by: Ben Schramm,
Managing Partner Cube Group



Next steps

Some of the next steps we will be exploring include:

- Deepening our understanding of COVID-19 impacts and consequences across regions (through further engagement as well as deeper differentiated modelling)
- Continuing to work collaboratively with regional leaders and key stakeholders on place-based recovery
- Identifying ongoing opportunities and challenges for recovery at a regional level
- Designing and implementing a place-based approach to recovery in collaboration with community.

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