

# MOORABOOL SHIRE

## VISITOR ECONOMY STRATEGY

### 2023-2027

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which Moorabool Shire sits, the Wadawurrung, Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and the Dja Dja Wurrung Peoples. On behalf of the municipality, Council pays respect to their Elders, past, present and future.

**Moorabool Shire's Visitor Economy Strategy has been prepared to provide a strategic and unified direction for the development of a strong visitor economy between 2023 and 2027.**

**Located as the gateway to western regional Victoria, Moorabool Shire is perfectly positioned to grow its visitor economy, leveraging an abundance of nature, quality produce, and quaint towns to fulfill its potential.**

**Informed by independent research and analysis, consultation with industry representatives, community groups, local businesses, Council and Government stakeholders, the Visitor Economy Strategy will be key to guiding the Shire's visitor economy success.**

# INTRODUCTION

## PROJECT OBJECTIVE

Moorabool Shire's Visitor Economy Strategy will provide a strategic and unified direction for the evolution of the visitor economy between 2023 and 2027, with a focus on awareness, product development, and enabling infrastructure. This will be achieved by empowering and supporting the local industry, including measures that support the recovery of the tourism sector (and tourism businesses) from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## The Project



Moorabool Shire Council (Council) has engaged Urban Enterprise to prepare a Visitor Economy Strategy (VES) to guide the growth of the Shire's visitor economy.

The Strategy takes into account the existing tourism environment and product mix, visitor markets, competitive strengths and weaknesses, and opportunities for investment and visitor attraction. It is informed by independent research and analysis, as well as consultation with industry representatives, community groups, local businesses, Council and Government stakeholders.

## Best Practice Destination Management



Destination Management Planning is based on the holistic consideration of a region's tourism industry, and its position within the regional economy. Destination Management Plans reflect the attributes of each destination, providing a blueprint for future investment in tourism including new experiences and attractions, and infrastructure requirements (roads, parks, technology) to support visitor growth.

The Visitor Economy Strategy for Moorabool Shire will follow the Guide to Best Practice in Destination Management, as developed by the Australian Regional Tourism Network (ARTN).

## The Region



Moorabool Shire is strategically located as the gateway to western regional Victoria, less than an hours drive from Melbourne.

Moorabool Shire encompasses over 2,000 square kilometres of land and is home to approximately 37,000 people. Over half the population live within Bacchus Marsh, the primary servicing town for the region.

With a population of almost six million in Melbourne, the close proximity provides a major comparative advantage for the region in comparison to other visitor destinations.

## Council's Role in the Visitor Economy



Council plays an essential role in the visitor economy of its region. Council acts as an enabler for the visitor economy by providing the foundations, including infrastructure, visitor information services, and support to the local industry.

The role of Council at its essence is to ensure liveability for its residents. By continually investing in the creation of liveable destinations, Council in turn facilitates the creation of a vibrant visitor economy by supporting the private sector to invest in products and experiences.

This role is typically supported by local or regional tourism entities, such as Regional Tourism Boards and Visitor Economy Partnerships, to help develop and support local tourism products and services in building capability and providing them with marketing opportunities to amplify destination awareness<sup>1</sup>.

## LOCAL DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

A number of relevant State infrastructure projects are underway or proposed, which may impact the visitor economy in Moorabool Shire. These include:

- West Gate Tunnel Project
- Western Victoria Transmission Network Project (proposed)
- Planning for Melbourne’s Green Wedges and Agricultural Land (underway)

In addition to the above projects, a number of local infrastructure projects are underway or proposed within the Shire. A selection of key projects impacting the visitor economy in Moorabool Shire have been detailed below.

### Bald Hill Activation Plan

This project provides a framework for investment in Bald Hill, a reserve located just north of Bacchus Marsh.

There are a range of opportunities identified for the precinct, including mountain bike trails, all abilities walking trails, events and conferences spaces and food and beverage facilities. These developments will support the attraction of a range of visitor markets, including those of different ages and abilities.

Stage one of the project has been completed with \$750,000 funding from Regional Development Victoria, and includes the establishment of the 1000+ Steps walking trail, spanning 1.5 kilometres to the peak of Bald Hill.

### BALD HILL CONCEPT PLAN



### Moorabool Aquatic and Recreation Centre

This is an Integrated indoor sports and aquatic Facility, which includes the design of indoor sports courts, an aquatic centre including gymnasium, consulting rooms and multi-purpose spaces.

The project is being staged with the indoor stadium currently under construction and further funding advocacy is in progress for the aquatic facility as stage 2.

This facility will help drive visitation to the area and grow the visitor economy through the attraction and delivery of regional sporting events.

### Aqualink Cycling and Walking Corridor

The Aqualink Cycling and Walking Corridor will connect the Lerderderg River with the Werribee River for residents and visitors via a 4.5 kilometre off-road cycling and walking path network.

The network of paths will be developed to provide better access to the town’s main attractions and services. It will see linkages by non-car transport between Bacchus Marsh, Darley and Bacchus Marsh Train Station.

### Bacchus Marsh Racecourse and Recreation Reserve

The development of the Bacchus Marsh Racecourse and Recreation Reserve will see the establishment of an active sports precinct. This project will be developed in three stages.

Stage one of the project is complete, including a new BMX Track, multipurpose oval, equestrian cross-country course, dressage arenas, sports pavilion, cricket practice nets, playground, as well as civil works and sight services.

### OTHER PROJECTS

- Darley Park Community and Sports Centre
- Parwan Employment Precinct
- Ballan Library, Arts and Tourism Hub
- Western Irrigation Network

# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

## Local Insights

The development of the Strategy was underpinned by robust stakeholder engagement, which facilitated an in-depth understanding of the unique local conditions, challenges and opportunities.

Engagement with over 300 local residents, community and Council personnel, across the engagement sessions displayed adjacent. This has ensured the Visitor Economy Strategy is grounded in local aspirations, responds to local needs, and is supported by local stakeholders.

The engagements were undertaken virtually via videoconferencing, across November and December 2021, due to COVID-19 restrictions.



### Key Outcomes Desired from the Visitor Economy Strategy<sup>4</sup>

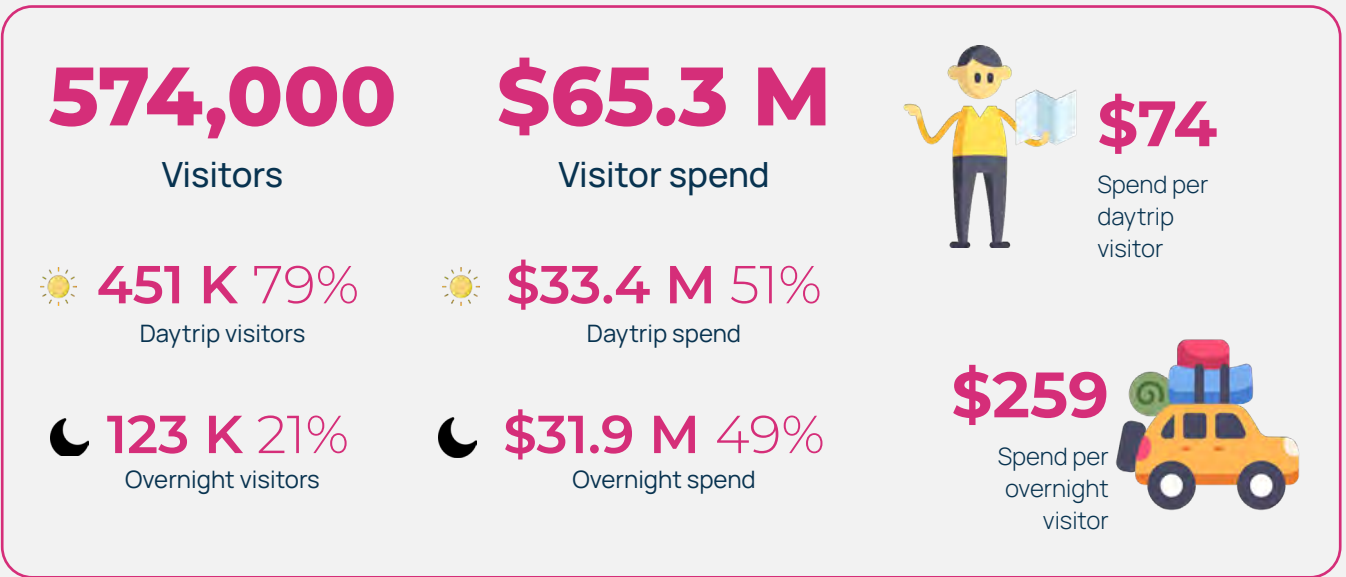
The business and community survey sought to understand local aspirations for the visitor economy and key outcomes desired from the delivery of this Strategy.

This highlighted the strongest desire for increased marketing and promotion, delivery of new events and festivals, improved visitor amenities, and town beautification. In addition, this highlighted the local desire for Council support to guide the development of the Shire's towns as destinations.

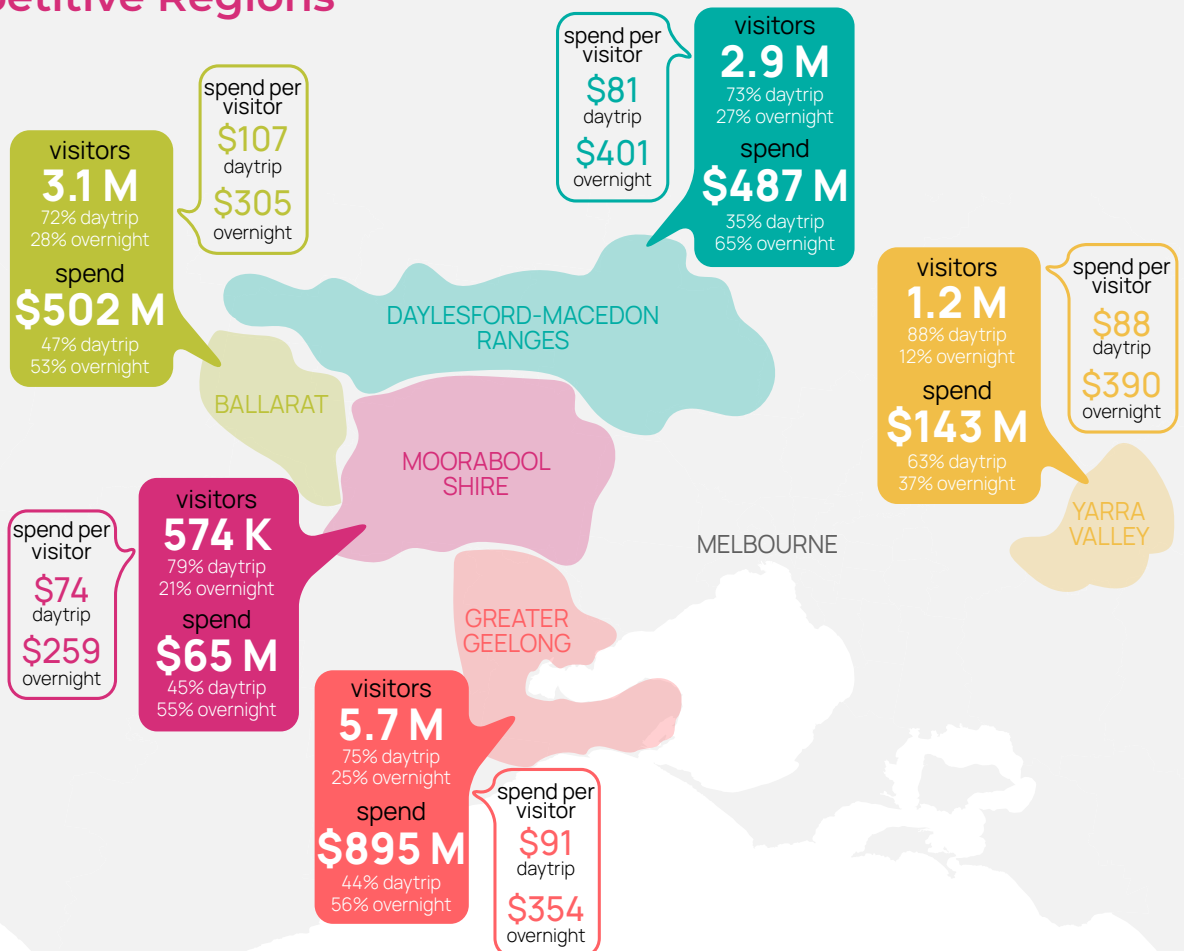


<sup>4</sup>Moorabool Shire Business and Community Survey, 2021.

# VISITOR ECONOMY<sup>2</sup>



## Competitive Regions<sup>3</sup>



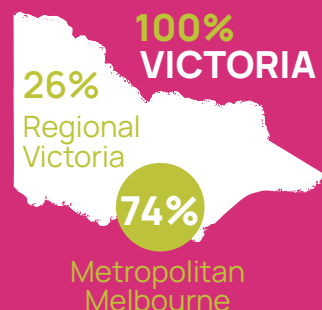
<sup>2</sup>Tourism Research Australia (TRA). Visitor numbers, TRA, 2019. Average spend per visitor, TRA LGA Profile, 2019. Total spend, calculated by Urban Enterprise, average spend applied to visitor numbers.

<sup>3</sup>Daylesford-Macedon Ranges includes the LGAs of Hepburn Shire and Macedon Ranges. Visitor numbers for the Yarra Valley are by SA2 and visitor spend is calculated using the spend per visitor to the Yarra Ranges LGA.

## Visitor Profile

### Visitor Origin

#### Daytrip



#### Overnight



### Lifecycle Group



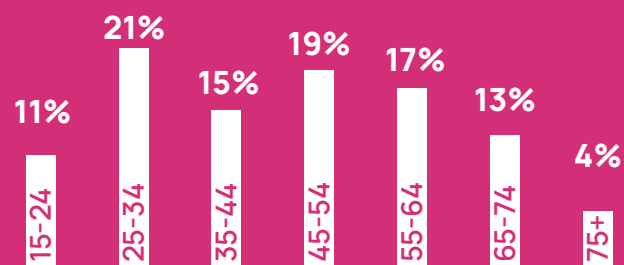
**24%**  
Parent with children under 14 years

**23%**  
Older couple

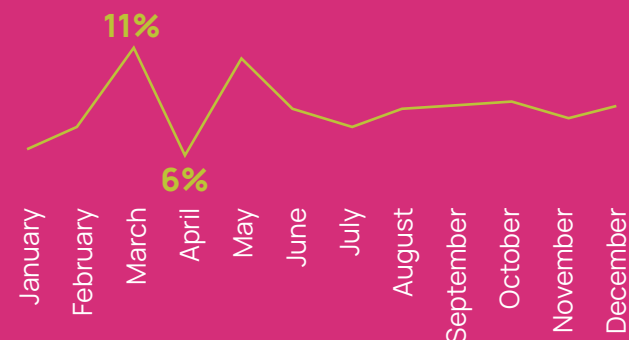
**23%**  
Young to midlife couple (no children)

Older single 13%; Parent with children over 15 years 10%; Young to midlife single 6%.

### Age



### Seasonality



### Purpose of Visit



**45%**  
Holiday and leisure

**36%**  
Visiting family and friends

**10%**  
Business

Other reasons 8%.

### Activity Profile

Visit friends & relatives **37%**

Dine at a restaurant/ cafe **35%**

Bushwalking & rainforest walks **19%**

Sightseeing & looking around **14%**

Visit national park & state park **14%**

### Spend Profile



**33%**  
Petrol

**22%**  
Dining out

**13%**  
Shopping

Accommodation 11%; Groceries for self-catering 9%; Alcohol, drinks (not already included) 7%; Entertainment 4%; Rental vehicles 2%.

### Accommodation

**2.1**

Nights  
Average length of stay in Moorabool Shire

**\$73**

Spend per night  
Average accommodation spend in Moorabool Shire

### Accommodation stayed in

**53%**  
Friends or relatives property

**15%**  
Non-commercial caravan or campground

**11%**  
Commercial Caravan park or campground

Hotel/resort/motel or motor inn 5%; Own property 4%; Other commercial 4%; Rented house/apartment/flat/unit 4%; Other private accommodation 2%.

## Target Markets

The following have been identified as the target markets for Moorabool Shire. Whilst some are existing markets, emerging markets have also been identified in terms of their potential to drive visitation and yield.

### Existing and Emerging Markets

#### Visiting Friends and Relatives Market

Moorabool Shire is projected to experience a rapid population increase. This rapid increase in population will drive the growth of the visiting friends and relatives (VFR) market to the region.

Marketing targeted towards residents will educate them on local products and experiences, increase their awareness and create local ambassadors for Moorabool Shire.

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#### Family Market

14% of overnight visitors are family groups. The low proportion of the family market visiting the region may be due to a lack of suitable accommodation available for families with children.

Investment in family-friendly activities and suitable accommodation, such as high quality tourist parks, is needed to attract this market.

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#### Touring and Grey Nomad Market

With an abundance of natural assets, Moorabool Shire is well placed to expand the touring offering and attract semi-retired and retired travellers and grey nomads.

Moorabool Shire has the potential to service this market well with its close proximity to population centres, Melbourne and Geelong, as well as the abundance of resident-based services available in the region, including medical facilities and supermarkets.

### Growth Potential Markets

#### Accessible Tourism Market

This is a growing tourism market segment that could be serviced by Moorabool Shire, given the breadth of soft nature experiences and the number of highly accessible locations.

Ensuring accommodation, attractions, towns and nature-based assets are accessible and inclusive, through access, signage, and adhering to standards, should be a best practice standard held by Moorabool Shire.

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#### Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events Market (Business)

Moorabool Shire is well-placed for growth in the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events (MICE) market due to proximity to major population centres, and access by public transport and car.

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#### Adult Couple Market

23% of overnight visitors are adult couples. This is considerably lower than comparable destinations, as a result of the currently limited accommodation and product offering.

Moorabool Shire is well placed to be a weekend escape destination for the adult couples market through product and accommodation investment. Specifically, investment in the food and beverage offering, as well as the arts and culture offering, will make Moorabool Shire a desirable destination for an overnight escape.

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#### Sporting Market

A major opportunity for Moorabool Shire is growing the sporting market, particularly for regional sporting competitions and events.





## STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

### Awareness, Marketing and Brand Considerations

- 1 To build market awareness, focus marketing and promotion in towns that have high market awareness and resonate with the consumer. These are Bacchus Marsh and Ballan.
- 2 Lack of motivating products and experiences influences the low market interest and awareness of Moorabool Shire towns.
- 3 Leveraging proximity to and awareness of Ballarat and Daylesford will support visitation growth to Moorabool Shire.
- 4 Leverage the Shire's comparative advantage of a 'rural escape in proximity to Melbourne' by maintaining local character, rural amenity and utilising heritage buildings.

### Driving Demand

- 1 Development and promotion of hero attractions is critical to driving demand and awareness. Nature-based attractions and First Nations experiences provide this opportunity.
- 2 Events and Festivals are a vehicle to drive demand and awareness in the market, and would motivate 48% of the Victorian market to visit a new destination.
- 3 Agritourism, food and wine, nature, and arts, culture and heritage, have opportunity to be developed as the Shire's product pillars, and have strong strategic alignment to the broader region.
- 4 Development of high quality, contemporary accommodation is critical for Moorabool Shire. Comparable destinations, such as Yarra Valley, attract high levels of overnight visitation due to having a quality accommodation supply, as well as having a compelling product offer.

### Visitor Economy Foundations and Support

- 1 Council's role is to provide the foundations for a successful visitor economy. This includes infrastructure, visitor services and a supportive internal Council.
- 2 Township amenity, activation, and attraction of new contemporary food and retail businesses is key to developing as a visitor destination. Critical product mass in townships is needed to motivate visitation.
- 3 Strengthen and support the tourism industry to become 'Visitor Ready' through training, capacity building, and supporting skilled workforces attraction.

# STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

## VISION

“ Moorabool Shire will establish itself as a thriving destination by embracing strengths in agritourism and nature, developing compelling new experiences, and building a strong identity. ”

## OBJECTIVES

- > Establish hero products, experiences and major events to drive visitation and increase market awareness.
- > Support investment in contemporary products and supporting infrastructure that position Moorabool Shire as an attractive visitor destination.
- > Create critical product mass through focused investment at key visitor nodes.
- > Enhance visitor servicing, marketing and promotion to encourage increased visitation, yield and dispersal across the Shire.
- > Foster and empower a strong, connected and visitor ready tourism industry.

## TARGETS

**Target 1**  
**180k**  
Overnight Visitors

Increase overnight visitation to Moorabool Shire from 123,000 to 180,000 by 2027.

**Target 2**  
**\$120M**  
Spend p.a.

Grow visitor expenditure from \$65 million per annum to \$120 million per annum by 2027.

## STRATEGIC THEMES



### Theme 1. Branding, Marketing and Resourcing

Develop a strong brand identity through marketing, collateral and digital to promote increased awareness of the Shire's offering.



### Theme 2. Enabling the Visitor Economy

Deliver high quality accommodation and infrastructure to support development of a strong and accessible tourism industry.



### Theme 3. Food, Farmgate and Ferments

Leverage the region's high quality agricultural produce to develop a motivational and contemporary agritourism and foodie scene.



### Theme 4. Nature and Outdoors

Activate and celebrate the natural environment through investment in infrastructure, trails and interpretation.



### Theme 5. Events

Utilise events as a destination awareness driver by building a strong events calendar, events infrastructure and enhancing resourcing and internal processes.



### Theme 6. Arts, Culture and Activation

Improve the visitor experience through a focus on vibrant high amenity townships, art, culture and heritage.

## STRATEGIC THEMES

Key themes to guide future investment have been identified in response to strategic considerations and objectives for tourism development in Moorabool Shire.

Priority projects have been assessed against current objectives and themes. Projects that best address critical issues or opportunities for Moorabool Shire have been prioritised.

### Theme 1 Branding, Marketing and Resourcing

Develop a strong brand identity through marketing, collateral and digital to promote increased awareness of the Shire's offering.

#### PRIORITY PROJECTS

- **Digital Marketing and Visitor Servicing Action Plan.** Develop and deliver a digital marketing and visitor services strategy for Moorabool.
- **Brand Strategy.** Develop a Brand Strategy for Bacchus Marsh, Ballan and surrounds, considering the need for a unique and contemporary brand.
- **Governance and Resourcing.** Allocate additional resourcing to support marketing and promotion and industry development.

#### OTHER PROJECTS

- Undertake a 'business digital presence' program to improve online operator visibility and quality.
- Develop and promote a range of digital and physical touring itineraries, which may include seasonal 'pick your own' marketing campaigns and touring routes.
- Deliver a signage strategy that considers wayfinding and tourism signage to connect the Shire and its tourism experiences.



### Theme 2 Enabling The Visitor Economy

Deliver high quality accommodation and infrastructure to support development of a strong and accessible tourism industry.

#### PRIORITY PROJECTS

- **Investment Attraction Strategy.** Prepare an Investment Attraction Strategy to facilitate private sector tourism investment in Moorabool Shire.
- **Infrastructure Advocacy and Delivery.** Advocate for and deliver improved infrastructure to support the development of the tourism industry.
- **Small Towns Placemaking and Activation Plan.** Activate key townships and provide amenity and experiences to support local visitor economies.



## Theme 3 Food, Farmgate and Ferments

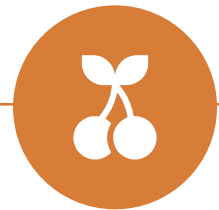
Leverage the region's high quality agricultural produce to develop a motivational and contemporary agritourism and foodie scene with Moorabool Shire to own the 'pick your own' experience.

### PRIORITY PROJECTS

- **Agribusiness Branding.** Build a local produce brand to increase awareness of local offering, leveraging the awareness of Bacchus Marsh as a high-quality produce destination.
- **Farmgate Experience Development and Enhancement.** Promote value adding to farming and food production with the establishment of farm gate, tastings and other on farm experiences.

### OTHER PROJECTS

- Undertake a campaign to local and regional business operators to encourage businesses to use local Moorabool Shire produce, such as Sher Wagyu and truffles.
- Development of a seasonal Shire-wide farmers market, rotating across key towns of Ballan, Blackwood and Bacchus Marsh.



## Theme 4 Nature and Outdoors

Activate and celebrate the natural environment through investment in infrastructure, trails and interpretation.

### PRIORITY PROJECTS

- **Natural Attractions Masterplan.** Undertake a Natural Attractions Masterplan focusing on investment in Moorabool Shire's nature assets.
- **Trails Investment Masterplan.** Undertake a Trails Masterplan with consideration of recreation, bushwalking, mountain biking, road and gravel cycling across Moorabool Shire.

### OTHER PROJECTS

- Continue investment in Bald Hill, including walking and mountain biking trails.
- Develop a Moorabool Shire mineral springs precinct plan and activation strategy.
- Develop First Nations Experience and Interpretation Action Plan.



## Theme 5 Events

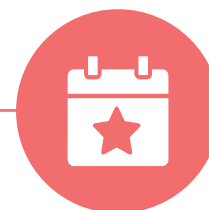
Utilise events as a destination awareness driver by building a strong events calendar, events infrastructure and enhancing resourcing and internal processes.

### PRIORITY PROJECTS

- **Signature Events Attraction.** Identify and attract 3 signature events to Moorabool Shire aligned to market demand.
- **Internal Events Processes and Resourcing.** Review and enhance internal process and resourcing to support tourism events development.
- **Events Venue Feasibility Study.** Undertake an events venue feasibility study to identify the type and scale of indoor and outdoor events facilities that could be supported in the Shire.

### OTHER PROJECTS

- Develop a prospectus for attraction of major sporting events to the new Bacchus Marsh multipurpose indoor stadium.
- Develop a Bacchus Marsh Open Farm Weekend Event, inclusive of businesses across the Shire. Support event operators through provision of training and event operation and planning guidelines.
- Support event operators through provision of training and event operation and planning guidelines.



## Theme 6 Arts, Culture and Activation

Improve the visitor experience through a focus on vibrant high amenity townships, art, culture and heritage.

### PRIORITY PROJECTS

- **Bacchus Marsh and Ballan Key Township Activation.** Develop attractive and vibrant townships through streetscaping, beautification and maintenance of heritage facades to retain local character.
- **Art Gallery Development.** Explore the development of an Indigenous gallery in Moorabool Shire, undertaken in partnership with Traditional Owners.
- **Avenue of Honour Activation Masterplan.** Activation of the Avenue of Honour.
- **Heritage and Arts Activation Program.** Establish an arts activation program across Moorabool Shire's small towns.

### OTHER PROJECTS

- First Nations Cultural Heritage activation.





The Moorabool Shire Visitor Economy Strategy was prepared by Urban Enterprise in collaboration with Moorabool Shire Council.

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