



## Community Economic Development Program

### Murray Shire – Success Story

#### Challenges and opportunities

The Murray Shire, located 800 kilometres south of Sydney and 200 kilometres north of Melbourne, covers more than 4,300 square kilometres in the Murray Region.

Almost totally surrounded by the Murray River and its tributaries, the Shire has many striking physical features, including the Cadell Fault which changed the course of the Murray River about 30,000 years ago.

The Murray Shire also has one of the world's largest redgum forests – enormous River Reds (*Eucalyptus Camaldulensis*), many over 40 metres high – which are part of the World Heritage listed Barmah Wetlands. An atmospheric place of deep significance to the Aboriginal people, the wetlands are often compared to Kakadu; 'the Kakadu of the south without the crocodiles', is how they are often described.

The region was first settled in the 1840s by squatters who had moved cattle along the overland route from Queensland to Victoria. The early settlements of Moama and Mathoura developed into towns which became centres for agriculture and the timber industry.

The Murray Shire's main township is Moama, which is usually paired with Echuca, its near neighbour on the other side of the river in Victoria. Often referred to as twin towns, they are ideally positioned for river sports, for the Paddle Steamer tourist trade, and as a base for the large number of visitors who come to enjoy the region each year.

Mathoura, a small country town 40 kilometres north of Moama, still retains much of its unique outback heritage. Located near the junction of the Murray and Edward Rivers and Gulpa Creek, Mathoura is considered to be a gateway to the redgum forests and waterways.

By the 1990s, although not facing actual economic hardship, people in the Murray Shire Council felt that the time had come to reinvigorate the area, to improve business and economic activity, to capitalise on the tourism industry which had sprung up along the banks of the Murray, and to promote the region as a place to come and live.

#### A program for change

The NSW Department of State and Regional Development worked with the Murray Shire Council on a number of projects in the late 1990s to help develop the area.

In 2001, the Department backed the Murray Shire's campaign, 'Make an Inland Seachange', which was developed to take advantage of publicity given to the area by the film 'All the Rivers Run', and to the idea of retiring to a beautiful environment by the television series, 'Seachange'. The actor, Sigrid Thornton had appeared in both films, providing a link between the two. The Murray Shire adopted the slogan 'The leading lifestyle destination in rural Australia – make an Inland Seachange', and the resulting campaign was successful in attracting new residents and retirees to the district.

In Mathoura, the *Great Mathoura Land Give Away* had been another outstanding and instant success, attracting a huge amount of publicity throughout the country in the late 1990s, with more than 1,500 enquiries and 200 applications received. The exposure Mathoura received created a boost to other land sales in the area.

The program for change in the Murray Shire was also given a boost with the creation of a role for an Economic Development Officer. This move was such a success that Council continues to employ an economic development officer on a permanent basis.

#### Goals

In order to reinvigorate the region, the proactive Murray Shire Council decided to:

- Encourage business opportunities and new industry
- Facilitate and market tourism in the area, including eco-tourism within the Redgum Forest
- Foster a greater partnership between the community, local businesses and the Murray Shire Council
- Maintain and promote the cultural heritage of the region.



## Projects

A large number of projects have been put in place in the Murray Shire during the past decade, ranging from events such as the annual Cadell County Fair to the development of historic touring routes and the adoption of highly effective new ways of getting information about the area out to the wider population.

The NSW Department of State and Regional Development helped fund a tourist and service directory for the small town of Mathoura in 2004. A useful guide, the directory is updated every eighteen months.

The Mathoura website – [www.mathoura.com.au](http://www.mathoura.com.au) – which went live in 2006, is beautifully designed and has proved beneficial in promoting the area. Subtitled, 'Mathoura – gateway to a nature wonderland that still bears the traces of ancient origins', it has a plethora of information for both residents and visitors. The website gives the town increased exposure, backs up the work of the Mathoura Visitor Centre and provides local residents with up-to-date information.

The promotion of a new touring route along the Cobb Highway, which passes through the Murray Shire and takes advantage of the region's history, has also been a success.

Named 'The Long Paddock', the route has its own website ([www.thelongpaddock.com](http://www.thelongpaddock.com)) explaining how visitors can follow in the footsteps of the drovers and other pioneers who used this trail so long ago.

## How the Department has helped

In early 2007, the Murray Shire was named the fastest growing Local Government Area (LGA) in NSW. The NSW Department of State and Regional Development, under its regional programs, particularly the Community Economic Development Program and its predecessors, has helped with this growth by matching the Shire with funds of more than \$100,000 over the past decade.

## Ongoing activities

Promotion of the Murray Shire continues to evolve as the region continues to experience development and progress.

During the past two financial years alone, the Council has granted over \$240 million in development approvals – a clear sign of the success of this LGA's proactive and innovative strategies in attracting new industry and development into the area.

"The tourism of Echuca-Moama is considered a main driver of our population growth," explains the Shire's Economic Development Officer, Beck Rendle. "These towns are close to Melbourne – it's only a two hour drive – and people who come originally to enjoy the pleasure of recreation on the Murray often end up relocating here for good."

There is an ongoing pride in what the region has achieved. The calendar of events, for example, has been designed so that there is always something to look forward to throughout the year.

Major annual events in the region include the Southern 80 Ski Race on the Murray River, the Jazz Food & Wine Festival, and the Deniliquin Ute Muster – all appealing to different parts of the community.

Other anticipated events on the calendar are the annual Mathoura Fishing Classic held at the beginning of March, the Easter Fair held in March/April, and the Cadell Country Fair held the weekend before the Melbourne Cup at the beginning of November.

## Contacts

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LGA: Murray Shire Region: Murray

Population: 6,417 (2006 Census) – services 20,000 from nearby towns

Main industries: Agriculture, retail, tourism