



Berrigan Shire



Strategy for the Visitor Economy
2022-2026



Cr Matthew Hannan | Mayor
Berrigan Shire Council

Our Vision for the Visitor Economy: Sought by a broad audience, the visitor experience reflects the big landscape, unique history, unrivaled sporting opportunities and diverse culture of the region.

Message from the Mayor

The 2022 – 2026 Berrigan Shire Strategy for the Visitor Economy supersedes the 2019 – 2023 Berrigan Shire Tourism Strategy. The document has been renamed to reflect the economic and social importance of visitation to the region and rewritten two years early as a consequence of the disruption to business during the pandemic.

In 2022 we have a new and invigorated Council, and we are looking at further opportunities in tourism with many of the planned infrastructure projects being completed. The Council will be providing visitor information from within the recently opened Tocumwal Foreshore building that also has hospitality and retail with the most exceptional views of, what I believe is, the best part of the Murray River. This is a new venture for the Council but one that was repeatedly articulated during industry consultation as businesses, in recovery mode, see marketing and promotion as currently a bridge too far.

We have been inspired to see new attractions exposing our rich history and heritage, with the Finley Foundry Museum telling the wonderful story of Closes Engineering from its pioneering days keeping agriculture moving by horse and cart. In 2021 the Tocumwal Aviation Museum opened. It has a fascinating narrative around Tocumwal's long association with aviation in its many guises.

The Council is always looking at opportunities to host, attract and encourage events to our region. When I attend the medal ceremony for the Beach Volleyball or present trophies to the PGA Associates Golf Championships at Tocumwal, recipients never fail to acknowledge the beauty of the region and go out of their way to comment on how professionally run our events are and the efforts of all to make their certain event the best experience that they can have.

Whilst this is the Council's strategy it has been developed with extensive industry engagement and input over an extended period of time. We are optimistic that we will continue to rebuild confidence within the visitor economy and continue to achieve sustainable growth for what I believe is the most liveable shire in NSW!

Contents

Message from the Mayor	1
Overview – Strategy for the Visitor Economy at a Glance	4
Introduction	4
Strategic Context	4
Industry Engagement	5
Target Markets and Visitor Profile	5
<i>The Holiday Market</i>	7
<i>Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR)</i>	7
<i>Caravan and Camping</i>	7
<i>Golf</i>	7
Strategic objectives	8
Regional Priorities	8
Local Priorities	8
<i>Accommodation upgrades</i>	8
<i>Aviation opportunities</i>	8
<i>Events and Sport Tourism Events</i>	9
<i>Industry and Council Partnerships</i>	9
<i>River Camping</i>	9
<i>Signage</i>	9
<i>Tracks and Trails</i>	9
Roles and responsibilities	10
<i>Glossary</i>	11
Activate the plan	1
Good Government	2
Diverse and resilient business	3
Appendix A	2



Overview – Strategy for the Visitor Economy at a Glance

This strategy outlines the Council's plan for tourism business recovery after the pandemic and future growth of the visitor economy in Berrigan Shire. Whilst this is the Council's plan the changes to the roles and responsibilities that are outlined are informed by the industry engagement sessions.

Visitors come to the towns of Berrigan Shire as holidaymakers and to visit friends and relatives. These markets have remained constant for many years as has their origin from Melbourne and regional Victoria. In this plan there is an acknowledgment of an increase in visitation from regional NSW and this market will be addressed as an emerging opportunity.

It became obvious during the industry engagement sessions that the industry was facing significant challenges and its capacity to compete in marketing and promotional campaigns had all but evaporated. The industry indicated that they believed that the Council should step into Visitor Services as a matter of urgency using the space that had always been designated in the Tocumwal Foreshore Building. This action is already underway as the strategy is being finalized.

Several local priorities have been identified to grow the visitor economy including walking and cycling tracks to connect our communities, improved signage, aviation tourism, more contemporary accommodation, retention of free river camping, events, and marketing.

Introduction

The Berrigan Shire Council Strategy for the Visitor Economy 2022 – 2026 replaces the Berrigan Shire Council Tourism Strategy 2019 – 2023. The 2019 - 2023 strategy is being replaced early due to the devastating impact of business and border closures that occurred during 2020 and 2021. Businesses directly involved in the visitor economy experienced a severe economic downturn, commencing with the first lockdown in March 2020. A short revival was experienced in November 2020 and then another series of business and border closures occurred in January 2021 and again in July 2021.

Strategic Context

This strategy has been developed recognizing a vastly changed operating environment for businesses that exist to service the visitor and for those who benefit from the visitor economy but are not reliant on it. The business and border closures in 2020 and 2021 decimated the local visitor economy. It is expected that whilst traditionally busy holiday seasons will return, low and shoulder seasons will take more time to rebuild. It was evident during the pandemic that potential visitor markets to the north of Berrigan Shire were untapped, and that more attention should be paid to these opportunities to balance out the reliance on the Victorian market.

The Council has undergone a successful period in the development of infrastructure that attracts visitors. In 2018 and 2019 the Tocumwal Splash Park and the Barooga Adventure Park were opened and in 2021 the Tocumwal Aviation Museum and the reimagined WAAAF Creek Walk.

This plan reflects a new Council who are looking to take advantage of opportunities and grow the visitor economy.

The Council has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Moira and Indigo Shire Councils and Federation Council in the context of the MOU we will be working closely with our neighbours when considering tourism infrastructure and marketing.



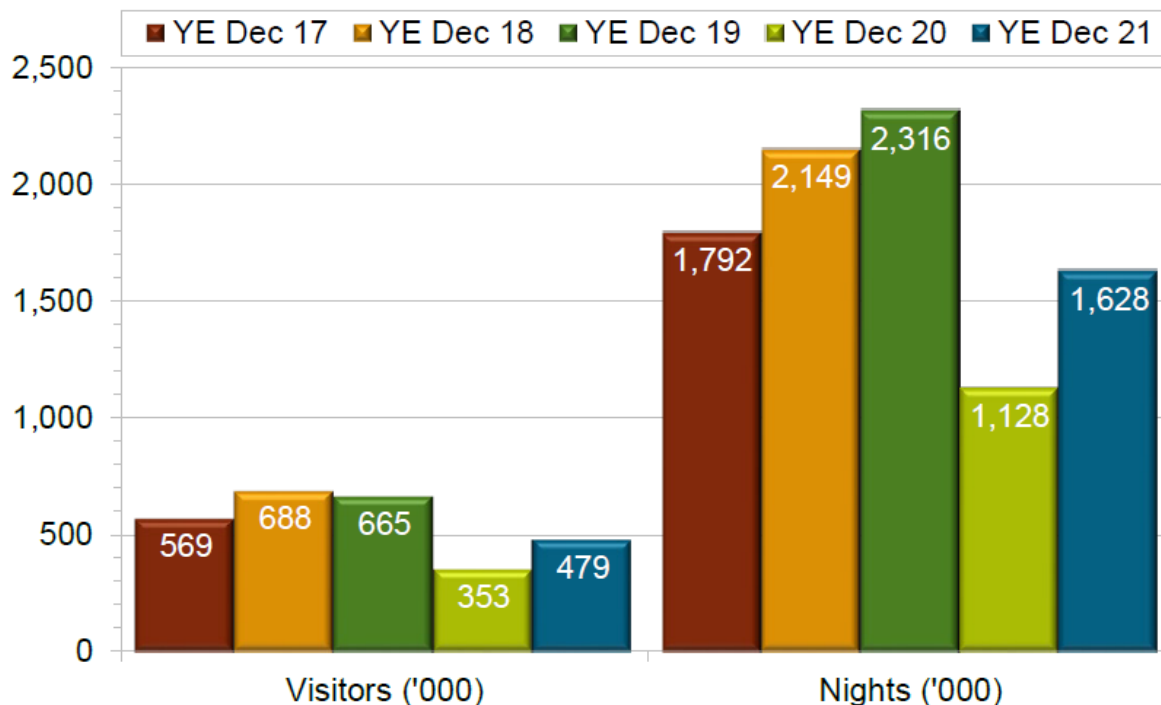
Industry Engagement

In 2019 Accommodation and Food Services was the second highest employing industry in Berrigan Shire – a statistic supplied by .idcommunity – economic profile. In 2022 the same data set now has Accommodation and Food Services as the fourth highest employing industry and only just holding that position over Transport, Postal and Warehousing. In October 2021 the Council decided that the Berrigan Shire Tourism Strategy 2019 – 2023 should be reviewed as many sections had become irrelevant in the context of building a recovery for the industry post COVID19. Industry consultation commenced immediately and, under the health orders that were in place at the time, the consultation sessions were kept to one-on-one meetings or a small gathering of fewer than eight people. There was a pause in the process during the Council election and Christmas and the final consultation with the new Council occurred during the Corporate Workshop in February 2022. The Engagement Report was an essential piece of work to inform the development of the strategy and is published in the appendix.

Target Markets and Visitor Profile

The visitor statistics that are included here represent the Sun Country on the Murray region – Berrigan and Moira Shires and Federation Council. The Council has access to this data as a financial member of Murray Regional Tourism and is modeled from the National Visitor Survey (NVS) and the International Visitor Survey (IVS) data. These reports are available quarterly and allow the Council to track trends and changes in the visitor profile and target markets. The charts below indicate the ground that was lost during the pandemic and shows that the road back to sustainable growth is going to take some time. Since March 2021 there has been a focus on attracting visitation from regions north of the LGA and within a two/three-hour drive. This is a campaign in its infancy but one that should continue to be pursued in an effort to reduce the area's disproportionate reliance on Victoria. New South Wales has contributed 12.3 % of visitors and 19.1% of nights to the region in 2021. Compared with the year ended December 2020, visitors from NSW are up by 15.2%.

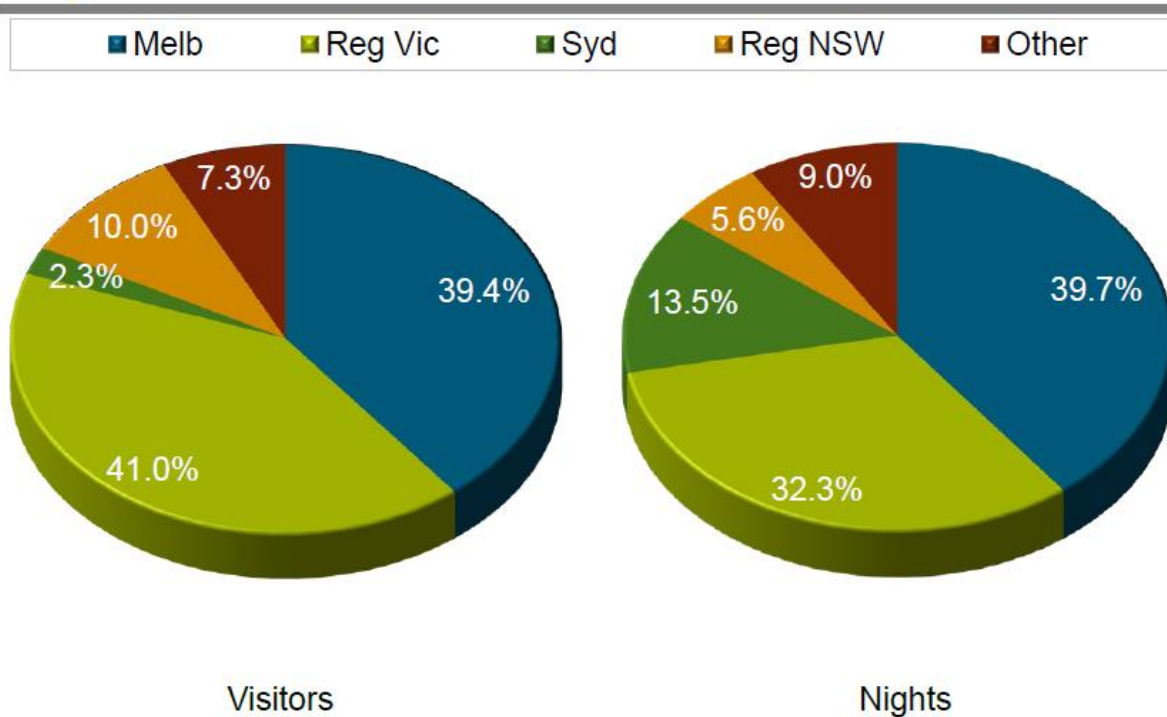
Visitors and nights



Purpose of visit



Origin





The Holiday Market

The "Holiday Market" is a visitor who describes their reason for being in the region as taking a holiday. They may have a historic connection to the region through friends or relatives but will be using commercial accommodation or camping. The holiday market is traditionally those who play golf, are involved in water sports, or are just explorers. This market will commonly visit local attractions.

Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR)

The VFR market represents a large portion of visitation to Berrigan Shire. They are unlikely to use commercial accommodation but will often be river campers. There is a challenge with this market to keep them in the local area as resident families will often prefer to explore beyond their hometown with friends rather than show off their own backyard.

Caravan and Camping

Families with children in the travel party are taking the greatest percentage of caravan and camping trips. This group overtook Adult Couple and Friends or Relatives without children a few years ago and the trend continues upward. This movement should be kept top of mind when tourism infrastructure is being planned in Berrigan Shire as the natural environment and the number of caravan parks make the caravan and camping market a primary target.

Golf

The trend for short breaks and holidays continues although the golf market remains a longer stay. This may explain why the region has a slightly higher average length of stay than the rest of the Murray River destinations at 3.2 nights.

The target market for visitation to Berrigan Shire remains the holidaymakers, campers and those visiting friends and relatives from Melbourne and regional Victoria. The emerging target market is regional NSW within a 2 ½ - 3 hour drive of Berrigan Shire.

Strategic objectives

The Community Strategic Plan, Berrigan Shire 2032, outlines several Strategic Objectives that are relevant to the Strategy for the Visitor Economy.

- Support sustainable use of our natural resources and built landscapes.
- Retain the diversity and preserve the health of our natural landscapes and wildlife.
- Connect and protect our communities.
- Strengthen strategic relationships and partnerships with community, business and government.
- Diversify and promote local tourism.

Regional Priorities

Murray Regional Tourism and Destination Riverina Murray represent the tourism aspirations of the region.

The Murray Regional Tourism 2021 – 2024 Strategic Plan identifies five strategic pillars:

- Regional marketing
- Product development
- Leadership and Advocacy
- Industry Development
- Governance and Sustainability

The key products under development and prioritized are:

- The Ports of the Murray
- The Murray River Road
- The Murray River Adventure Trail

Local Priorities

Accommodation upgrades

Murray Regional Tourism is developing an audit of accommodation offerings throughout the 13 LGA's represented by the cross-border entity. The audit was prompted by the apparent over-supply of 3 and 3.5 star rated motel-style accommodation along the Murray and the anecdotal evidence that visitors are searching for higher quality and different styles of housing.

Motel Style accommodation is the predominant style of commercial accommodation in Berrigan Shire and many operators are upgrading to offer self-contained options and more contemporary styling to attain 4 and 4.5 star ratings. The Council will continue to support efforts to upgrade accommodation in the region.

Aviation opportunities

Tocumwal has an extensive aviation history. From the first aeroplane landing at Tocumwal in September 1919 through the barnstorming days of the 1920s and early regional airlines of the 1930s to the construction of the largest aerodrome in the southern hemisphere in 1942, the largest base ever operated by the Royal Australian Air Force and a world-class gliding destination.

Tocumwal is embracing its extensive aviation links with the town entry signage boldly claiming the heritage, the aeronautical theming of the Tocumwal Splash Park, the interpretative signage on the WAAAF Creek Walk, and the opening of the Tocumwal Aviation Museum. Aviation Event organisers accessed the Tocumwal Aerodrome for many years and recently hosted the national Gliding Championships, State-based Aerobatic Championships and in 2019 and again in 2022, the Tocumwal Air show. A sound tourism product is building with a strong and clear point of difference for the region. Opportunities exist for the development of accommodation that caters to pilots travelling for leisure and business and the Council will be interested to support future development in the aviation space.

Events and Sport Tourism Events

Several events in Berrigan Shire bring large crowds to the region and, although two-plus day events are preferred to generate overnight stays, single day events such as the revamped Berrigan Show and Shine can be very effective in drawing crowds. The Council has an exceptional working relationship with the event proponents of Strawberry Fields and will continue to support them to host this event at their permanent site in Tocumwal.

The Council has had a successful relationship with Cobram Barooga Business and Tourism Inc., Sporties and Sports Marketing Australia for the past five years in the delivery of sport tourism events and this has included Thompsons Beach being a week-long stop on the Australian Beach Volleyball Tour and Barooga Recreation Reserve hosting youth Australian Cricket Carnivals. The Council has sponsored the PGA Associates Championship at Tocumwal Golf and Bowls Club for many years and recognizes the economic value of these events that utilize the exceptional venues available within the LGA. Hosting events is an opportunity to showcase the region to an unfamiliar audience and there is no better example of that than the exceptional TV coverage that was achieved by the recent TPS Murray River event held at the Cobram Barooga Golf Club in February 2022.

Industry and Council Partnerships

The Council has recently entered into Memorandums of Understanding with The Sporties Group and Tocumwal Golf and Bowls Club. These agreements articulate the importance for the Council of a strong working relationship with these two major employing tourism-based businesses and outline areas of mutual cooperation and information sharing.

The Council has also recently signed a memorandum of Understanding with Federation Council and Moira and Indigo Shire Councils. This historic agreement is important in acknowledging shared goals for regional visitation and opens the dialogue for future cross-border marketing campaigns.

River Camping

Historically, river camping is associated with the Murray River and the river beaches that are found between the Yarrawonga Wier and Tocumwal are famous as destinations for generations of families to get together. In 2020 and in response to capacity regulation during the pandemic, NSW National Parks and Wildlife introduced bookings for campsites within the parks under State Government management. This continuing arrangement on the NSW side of the river has caused the number of campers to be restricted

Signage

Modern wayfinding signage is an important and often neglected part of contemporary regional visitation. A high percentage of visitation to attractions and accommodation occurs with the visitor finding their way using technology that is confirmed by good signage. Tourism signage – white on brown, and service signage – white on blue, have had undefined use over decades and an audit should reveal deficiencies that need to be rectified.

Tracks and Trails

Walking and bicycle trails are a popular area drawcard, and our region is well suited to attracting young families and older people who seek this sort of recreation on flatter ground. There are numerous options for trails including the existing tracks through the National, State and Regional Parks as well as the continuation of recently developed road trails in adjoining LGA's. This includes an opportunity to connect Barooga with Mulwala to Corowa track and also use the extensive road reserve to connect Barooga to Tocumwal. There is an existing (disused) train connection between Tocumwal, Finley and Berrigan that also presents an opportunity for safe cycling in proximity to the Newell Highway.

Roles and responsibilities

	State and Federal Government	MRT and/or DRM	Berrigan Shire Council	Tourism Advisory Panel	Sun Country on the Murray, Local Chambers of Commerce	Industry
Industry Policy setting and strategy	Lead		Facilitate	Inform		
Transport communication and infrastructure	Lead	Facilitate	Provide			
Advertising and Promotion		Lead	Provide and Partner	Inform	Partner	Partner
Website, Digital Platform, social media			Provide	Inform	Partner	Partner
Product Investment and development	Regulate	Lead	Lead/Facilitate			Provide
Industry education and training	Facilitate	Lead	Facilitate/Provide	Inform	Provide	Provide
Research and data provision	Facilitate	Lead	Inform/Facilitate	Inform		Provide
Tourism-related infrastructure			Lead/Partner/Provide			Partner/Provide
Visitor Information Centre – Services			Lead/Provide	Inform	Partner	Partner

Glossary

Lead

- The Council will guide in direction, course, action, opinion,

Facilitate

- The Council coordinates and brings together stakeholders to collectively pursue a shared interest / service or to resolve an issue

Inform

- The Council distributes or publishes information produced by other agencies (e.g.: information pamphlets and temporary displays)
- Council commissioned reports, studies; surveys are published on its website, social media platforms, community notice boards and libraries etc.

Provide

- Service provided by the Council
(A Council provided service may be fully funded by the Council or funded and provided by the Council on behalf of the State government. If provided by the Council on behalf of the State or Commonwealth government the service may be fully or partly funded by the funder (State / Commonwealth government) or it may be a requirement of the State government on Council which is unfunded.
- A shared service purchased by the Council

Partner

- The Council partners with other agencies, community groups in the delivery of a Council provided service or activity provided by another agency or community group

Activate the plan

Berrigan Shire 2027 Strategic Objective: 1.1 Support sustainable use of our natural resources and built landscapes 1.2 Retain the diversity and preserve the health of our natural landscapes and wildlife 1.3 Connect and protect our communities	
Delivery Program Objective: 1.1.3 Enhance the visual amenity, heritage and liveability of our communities 1.2.1 Partner with community groups and agencies on projects that retain and preserve the health of our natural landscapes and wildlife 1.3.1 Coordinate flood levee, local road, water, sewer, stormwater asset management and planning	
Operational Plan Objective: 1.1.3.2 Continue its rolling program of works – town entrances 1.1.3.3 Implement the Tocumwal Foreshore Master Plan	

Tourism Function: Product Development			Council Role: Facilitate		
What we want to do	How are we going to do it	What will be the outcome	Who is responsible	Resources/cost	Commencing
Preserve and further develop the cultural heritage and local history of Berrigan Shire.	Facilitate development and preservation of cultural heritage.	Increased value and visibility of cultural heritage and product	BSC Landholders Businesses	MEDT	2022
Identify signage, amenity and infrastructure needs	Conduct an audit of tourism related signage. Review tourism related infrastructure under Council control.	A signage upgrade program is developed in consultation with the industry.	BSC	DCS, DSPD MEDT	2022
Continue to invest in and maintain town entrances and the visual amenity and accessibility of our streetscapes and the river precincts	Monitor maintenance programs.	Visually attractive and welcoming streetscapes. Increased usage of the Tocumwal river precinct.	BSC	External Funding/Annual Budget	2022
Improve the Murray River environment for fishers	Access funding to complete the “wet-side” of the Tocumwal Foreshore Masterplan	Fishing stations installed will improve the aquatic environment	BSC	BSC	2022

Good Government

Berrigan Shire 2027 Strategic Objective: 2.2 Strengthen strategic relationships and partnerships with community, business and government
Delivery Program Objective: 2.1.1 Council operations, partnerships and coordination of resources contribute toward the implementation of Berrigan Shire 2027. 2.2.1 Participate in networks that promote regional and cross-border collaboration, planning and service delivery
Operational Plan Objective: 2.1.1.1 Promote and support the engagement of residents local businesses and agencies in the development and implementation of Berrigan Shire 2027 2.2.1.1 Develop resources and establish partnerships that improve local assessment of social and economic implications of regional and inter-government decision making on Shire residents, business and Council operations

Tourism Function: Product Development			Council Role: Facilitate		
What we want to do	How are we going to do it	What will be the outcome	Who is responsible	Resources/cost	Commencing
Facilitate inter-government coordination and collaboration	Lobby NSW National Parks and Wildlife for improved signage and track maintenance	Improved National and State Park signage and track maintenance	BSC	MEDT	2022
	Lobby Murray River Managers to ensure appropriate river flows during peak holiday times.	Reliable river flows during peak holiday seasons and events	BSC	MEDT	2022
	Continue to lobby for improved mobile phone coverage in the Shire	A competitive and connected community	BSC/ MRT	MEDT	2022

Diverse and resilient business

Berrigan Shire 2027 Strategic Objective: 4.1 Diversify and promote local tourism
Delivery Program Objective: 4.2.1 Implement the Berrigan Shire Tourism Strategy 4.2.2 Partner with regional Tourism Boards
Operational Plan Objective 4.2.1.1 Invest in infrastructure that will add value to and increase the competitiveness of the Shire's visitor economy. 4.2.1.1.1 Commence construction – Tocumwal Foreshore and Economic Revitalisation Project 4.2.1.1.1.2 Continue to investigate options for the development of the Tocumwal Historic Aerodrome Museum 4.2.1.2 Partner with industry and other levels of government on securing investment needed for the Ports of the Murray and Adventure Trail project. 4.2.1.3 Provide support to event proponents and organisers 4.2.1.4 Facilitate local industry review and update of digital content and marketing 4.2.2.1 Membership of regional tourism boards to increase visitation and economic activity and the Murray region of NSW and the Murray River towns.

Tourism Function: Visitor Services			Council Role		
What we want to do	How are we going to do it	What will be the outcome	Who is responsible	Resources/cost	Commencing
Provide a complete range of visitor services	Operate an accredited Visitor Information Centre in Tocumwal to represent the region	Visitors in the region extend their stay. Visitors outside the region are motivated to visit	BSC	MEDT	2022
	Author websites and/or social media	Visitors and potential visitors have access to up-to-date local information	BSC	MEDT	2022
Ensure all promotional material is up to date	Regularly budget for image and video library upgrades	Visitors have a contemporary view of the town in the Berrigan Shire	BSC	MEDT	2022
	Produce a visitor Guide in hard copy and online every 2 years		BSC	MEDT	2023

Tourism Function: Marketing			Council Role		
What we want to do	How are we going to do it	What will be the outcome	Who is responsible	Resources/cost	Commencing
Focus on our target markets and develop appropriate messages to attract these markets to the region.	Work with the local Tourism Advisory Committee to develop an annual marketing plan	Increased visitation to the region	BSC/ MRT/ Industry	MEDT	2022
	Work as an active partner of MRT and ensure that all their marketing opportunities are assessed internally are disseminated to the industry.				
Understand changing visitation trends and communicate to the industry	In partnership with the MRT distribute 1/4ly visitation research and data for the region	An informed industry	MRT/BSC	MEDT	2022
Use social media as a marketing tool	Develop a SM marketing campaign in consultation with the Tourism Advisory Committee	Engagement with potential visitors through social media	BSC	MEDT	2022
Actively support the MRT Digital Platform	Partner with Moira Shire Council to develop content to support the new digital platform.	A seamless digital experience for the visitor	MRT/BSC/MS	MEDT	2022
	Encourage all tourism business operators to keep their ATDW listing up to date	Increased product content on the digital platform	BSC	MEDT	2022
Explore new markets	Partner with Moira Shire and other industry to test emerging markets	New visitation to the region	BSC/ Industry /MS	MEDT	2022

Tourism Function: Industry Development			Council Role		
What we want to do	How are we going to do it	What will be the outcome	Who is responsible	Resources/cost	Commencing
Work with MRT, DRM and the BEC to provide relevant training opportunities for tourism business operators	Liaise with all organisations and communicate industry needs	Local tourism businesses regularly access training opportunities	BSC Tourism Business Operators	MEDT	2022
Facilitate a BSC Tourism Advisory Group	Call for expressions of interest from tourism business operators to contribute to an advisory group.	A cohesive and informed approach to developing the Visitor Economy in Berrigan Shire.	BSC, MSC and FC	MEDT Annual budget	2022

Tourism Function: Product Development			Council Role		
What we want to do	How are we going to do it	What will be the outcome	Who is responsible	Resources/cost	Commencing
Use research to identify growth opportunities and product and service gaps.	Work with MRT to develop an accommodation audit and gap analysis	Completion of appropriate product gap and growth opportunity research	BSC, MRT and DRM	MEDT	2022
	Work with Tocumwal Aviation Museum and others to explore aviation tourism opportunities	Aviation becomes a point of difference for tourism in Tocumwal	BSC and the Section 355 Committee	MEDT	2022
	Support expansion and/or redevelopment of existing products or services by creating navigated pathways through the Council.	3 new businesses where tourism is the demand driver.	BSC	MEDT	2022
	Work with industry to broaden the accommodation offering	Accommodation which meets consumer demand is readily available	Industry	MEDT	2022
	Support MRT to promote new business opportunities related to the Murray River Adventure Trail and the Ports of the Murray	An updated Murray wide Tourism Investment prospectus	MRT, DRM	MRT MEDT	2022

Tourism Function: Events			Council Role		
What we want to do	How are we going to do it	What will be the outcome	Who is responsible	Resources/cost	Commencing
Focus event support on events that will attract overnight visitation	Continue partnership with Cobram Barooga Business and Tourism, MSC and Sports Marketing Australia	Three new events in the region per annum	BSC, MSC, CBBT,	MEDT	2022
	Encourage externally initiated events in the region.	Maintain existing externally initiated events and a new event per annum.	BSC	MEDT	2022
Promote the economic, social and value of events to the community	Publicize results from the ID data Event Modelling Tool through press releases and SM	The community has a greater understanding of the benefits of events	BSC	MEDT,	2022
Undertake a review of the Event Funding Program	The event funding program is reviewed and discussed and Council and changes, if any, are implemented.	Event Funding Program that delivers a satisfactory return on investment	BSC	MEDT	2022

Tourism Function: Research			Council Role		
What we want to do	How are we going to do it	What will be the outcome	Who is responsible	Resources/cost	Commencing
Facilitate evidenced-based research to support all initiatives	Facilitate product gap research	Product Gap research completed.	MRT, BSC	MEDT	2022
Require research-based supportive arguments for all tourism initiatives	In partnership with the MRTB undertake quarterly visitation research	Quarterly visitation research undertaken and distributed to the industry	MRT/BSC	MRT MEDT	2022
	Facilitate research reviewing the effectiveness of sports sponsorship in the shire	Annual marketing impact research undertaken	MRT/BSC	MRT MEDT	2022

Appendix A



Engagement Report

Merran Socha



Berrigan Shire Strategy for the Visitor Economy
2022 - 2026

Berrigan Shire Strategy for the Visitor Economy 2022 to 2026

Engagement Report

Introduction

The Berrigan Shire Council resolved, in September 2021, to review the Berrigan Shire Tourism Strategy 2019 – 2023 as a consensus of opinion was that it lacked any relevance to the current business environment following the numerous State border and business lockdowns experienced over the past 18 months. The visitor economy, dramatically affected by the health orders surrounding COVID19, will need support to recover and then grow on the trajectory enjoyed prior to COVID19 restrictions.

This report details the results of industry consultation around the existing strategy and outlines why some recommendations are made for change. It should be noted that the consultation has occurred during COVID19 restrictions on large gatherings so consultation has occurred in small groups rather than a large single forum.

The consultation sessions focused on four key points

- The Tourism Strategy Framework as outlined in the 2019 – 2023 Strategy.
- Tourism Recovery – post COVID19 restrictions
- Visitor Services
- Events and Event Funding

The Tourism Strategy Framework

The Tourism Strategy Framework within Berrigan Shire Tourism Strategy 2019 - 2023 articulates tourism functions and the Council's role within these functions. The table below shows what is in the current tourism strategy (columns one and two) and details what the industry has said during the consultation sessions (column three). There are only two sections where the opinion has changed however; the change is dramatic with visitor servicing identified as a significant failing in the framework. Advertising and promotion divided opinion with a lack of clarity around branding and the position of the Berrigan Shire within Sun Country on the Murray (SCM). The use of town names rather than Berrigan Shire was preferred for advertising and promotion however, the MRT digital platform, including its reliance on the SCM brand, was considered the best available option.

There was praise for the Council's role in the provision of infrastructure over the past three years including the Tocumwal Splash Park, Tocumwal Aviation Museum and the Barooga Adventure Park.

Tourism Strategy Framework		
Tourism Function	Council Role – Plan 2019 - 2023	Council Role as proposed by the industry
Industry Policy setting and strategy	Facilitate	Facilitate
Transport communications and infrastructure	Provide	Provide
Advertising and promotion	Facilitate	Lead/ Partner/Provide
MRT Digital Platform	Lead/Provide	Lead/Provide
Product investment and development	Facilitate	Facilitate

Industry education and development	Facilitate	Facilitate
Research and data provision	Facilitate	Facilitate
Tourism related infrastructure provision	Lead/Partner/Provide	Lead/Partner/Provide
Visitor Information Centre – Infrastructure	Provide	Lead/Partner/Provide all Visitor Services – Bricks and mortar, website and socials.

Tourism Recovery

The industry along the VIC NSW border was severely impacted by the border closures enacted by both State Governments with the snap lockdown by the Victorian Government on the 31st of December 2020 being the most devastating. An analysis of Spendmapp (Berrigan and Moira Shires) at this time clearly shows that the daily spend in Berrigan Shire dropped dramatically on the 1st of January whilst Moira Shire destination continued to enjoy strong spending until the 6th of January. Destinations in central NSW and central and southern Victoria also boomed in times when the State was open. Industry opinion is divided on how the recovery will roll out with some thinking there will be an immediate and sustained bounce back and others feeling that there is a definite reticence in regular visitors to re-book. Early signs are that peak holiday seasons will return however the main area of concern is that the shoulder and low seasons will not return to pre-pandemic levels. This will impact across the sector and especially on accommodation that is reliant on golf.

Visitors are showing a mistrust of government claims that borders will not close again as there is too much evidence of the willingness to shutdown at a moment's notice. There is also a general reticence for travel from the older demographic and motel operators are reporting that potential guests are asking about cleaning regimes for rooms between clients.

Overseas travelers will go sooner rather than later. This may not affect us as our typical visitor may not be an OS traveler and our market is also dominated by VFR.

Visitor Services

There was overwhelming support for the Council to provide visitor services. This was identified by all who participated in the consultation with the feeling that the Council had evaded a responsibility in this area, trying different models, all of which were considered unsuccessful to varying degrees. It is considered a failing of the Council to fulfil the role of doing things that the private sector can't or won't do.

The consultation revealed a fairly consistent opinion that Visitor services needs to cover a broad spectrum of activity and not be limited to the provision of a Visitor Information Centre (VIC). Traditionally a VIC will service up to 10% of predominantly new visitors however, it should also be the source of social media and other online material and also be a point of contact for the industry.

The consultation with the VIC volunteers indicated that those in attendance would be willing to return to a relocated centre in the new foreshore building and run by the Council. The accreditation process is no longer so prescriptive allowing for 4 hours opening each day on the weekend and for volunteers to work unsupervised for periods of time. There is a focus on digital information provision and volunteer training.

A Vision for Tourism

A number of people talked about the need for Council to have a vision for tourism and others talked about setting some goals within the strategy.

Partnerships.

Tourism partnerships need to be articulated – Sporties and TAM.

Desktop review of current programs and their efficacy:

Tocumwal Visitor Information Centre:

The Tocumwal Visitor Information Centre has had a number of different iterations over the past decade and different funding and management models have been implemented with varying degrees of success. Attempts were made to integrate the VIC into businesses in the highly visible old foreshore building but the balancing act for either business type did not prove to be financially viable. There was also a period of years where the Council gave the Tocumwal Chamber of Commerce some funding to assist in the operations of the VIC. Other funds were also raised through souvenir sales and being a Centrelink access point. The Centrelink access point did not compliment the VIC services and was an uncomfortable co-habitation. The one constant has been a faithful band of volunteers who have been present in nearly all situations.

Early predictions, in the mid naughties, was that technology would overtake the need for bricks and mortar VIC's. The use of Centres definitely declined however, there were those that refocused, became active online and in social media and enabled new information sources to flourish. These expanded VIC services have become the norm. There is general recognition that many people still prefer the one on one contact that is offered by a VIC and that the age groups that prefer this type of interaction varies greatly. As such, the staffing of VIC's has also changed with skills in the online world now required over a purely customer service roll.

The Tocumwal Chamber of Commerce and Tourism are operating the current VIC. The Council has supported the centre by paying the rent, supplying the telephone and internet connection. This agreement was due for review in October 2021, however the Chamber of Commerce has not responded to requests for dialogue around extending the agreement. The VIC is challenged by its location, reliance on volunteers for all operations and the lack of access to signage as it is not an accredited centre. One of the key advantages of accreditation is the well-recognised logos and directional highway signage that comes with it.

MRT Digital Platform review

The digital platform offered by Murray Regional Tourism had a rocky start but has grown into a useful tool and one that brings the Murray its greatest online exposure. Berrigan Shire tourism businesses registered with the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) receive free exposure on the www.suncountryonthemurray.com.au which is the local link to www.visitthemurray.com.au. The Council has not made full use of the digital platform as there has not been funds to participate in the marketing opportunities that MRT put forward. Moira Shire uses the website as the call to action for all its marketing campaigns so the Berrigan Shire businesses that are on it benefit by default.

The website continues to get substantial visitation with quarterly statistics provided through google analytics. The statistic suggest that people are still finding the website through organic search and referral from visitnsw and visitthemurray.

The platform continues to evolve and is the site where Berrigan Shire tourism businesses are getting the best exposure from a destination-based platform. All Berrigan Shire accommodation houses are registered with an online reservation provider such as www.booking.com or www.tripadvisor.com.au

Brand – Sun Country on the Murray

The Sun Country on the Murray Brand was put into effect in 2000 and Berrigan Shire commenced active participation in the brand as a promotional tool in 2010. The brand is used and recognised by Murray Regional Tourism to:

1. Categorise the LGA's of Berrigan Federation and Moira for statistical reporting purposes.
and
2. For use on the MRT digital platform by Moira and Berrigan Shire Councils.

Sun Country on the Murray is useful as a way of corralling and grouping the towns within the two LGA's but it lacks (probably has no) consumer recognition and was a "compromise that everyone could live with" or a necessity, rather than something that everyone loved and owned. The brand receives a good deal of exposure on www.visitthemurray.com.au A google search for Barooga, Berrigan, Finley or Tocumwal (with history cleared) brings www.visitnsw.com.au , www.visitthemurray.com.au and www.murryriver.com.au as the top three referrals. All of these link to www.suncountryonthemurray.com.au

Training program for Visitor Information Centre volunteers

The Council has invested in familiarisation tours and training for the Visitor Information Centre volunteers on a reasonably regular basis over the past 5 years. The tours have always been popular and the volunteers attended the Tourism Network lunches that were hosted by Moira, Federation and Berrigan Shire Councils quarterly prior to the COVID19 disruption.

Dedicated customer service training has not been offered and would be an advantage in future.

Appendix:

Consultation completed with the following:

Barooga Sporties:

- Bobby Brooks,
- Tony Tranter,
- Gary Hunt

Tocumwal Golf and Bowls Club:

- Paul Gemmill,
- Kathy Giddens,
- Lockie Sharp,
- Jenny Hehir,
- Spencer Rutherford,
- Dave Hansen

Visitor Information Centre volunteers:

- Gail Horan,
- Gayle Blakey,
- Shirley Absolom,
- Lois Bird,
- Dawn Huxtable
- Jan Brown.

Attraction and Accommodation Operators:

- Matt and Karen Henderson,
- Kristen Butas,
- Tracey Stewart,
- Clare Allan,
- Rick Shaw
- Carla and Christine von Brockhusen

Moira Shire Council and Federation Council representatives:

- Cameron Sutton,
- Kyla Carpinelli

Murray Regional Tourism

- Mark Francis

Chamber Presidents Group

- Gary Carr
- Rick Shaw
- John Lane
- John Bruce
- Niel Duffield

BSC Internal (Corporate Workshop)

- Councillors
- Executive Management Team
- Managers