

Thank you for the opportunity as Candidate to share my plan to help lead our Shire through the impact of the pandemic, and to offer strategies to build a stronger and more resilient local economy. Previous Councils have demonstrated strategic vision and leadership during difficult times. One example of this was the part purchase of the local abattoirs so this industry could remain in Colac to become a major employer with global export product and 'state of the art' training facilities.

But getting Colac Otway 'back on track' in this post-COVID recovery must involve not only strategic vision but 'shovel-ready' sustainable jobs focus with a Council/Government, Business and Community engagement:

## **1. Plan to lead Colac Otway Shire through post-pandemic recovery.**

**Small business:** Many of the towns in the Shire are dependent on the hospitality industry. If COVID remains within our communities until a vaccine is developed, we need to support small businesses through grants, marketing opportunities and community 'buy in'.

Hospitality businesses can access Vic Govt Grants up to \$5000 to create new or expand existing outdoor dining areas with chairs, tables, umbrellas, screens. What a great time to facelift those under-utilised laneways or build on street dining facilities that look out on the ocean or rural pastures.

Collaborative marketing strategies can encourage businesses to market partner products or leverage what they already have (small gifts with purchases, limited edition products). Murnane's Country Fresh Meats and Casey McDonald Realty did this. And the 'Eat Local Meat Deal' in May promoted collaborative marketing through a catchy slogan and good publicity.

A 'Buy Local' campaign encompassing the whole Colac Otway Shire set aside \$40,000 towards this. Builders have suggested working together to promote local tradies and give focus to keeping cash in Colac. Other methods of spearheading this could include: Voucher promotion, Hero local produce, 'Take a friend for a coffee/meal' publicity campaign similar to the familiar local faces promoting 'Towards Zero'.

Recent Federal Government incentives encourage hiring 18-35 year olds through JobMaker. This funding can help offset costs of employing more staff at this time, but can also help build our future workforce through career pathway collaboration with schools and employment groups. For businesses with less than \$50million turnover, the Instant Asset Write-Off scheme encourages investment in new equipment while business turnover is slower. 'Greening initiative' funding and grants are available for Installation of large scale solar energy systems. And local community-led initiatives like the Solar PV Bulk Buy by Colac Otway Sustainability Group have good uptake because it helps the hip pocket as well as reducing carbon emissions and offering jobs opportunities. Over 100 local businesses and households benefitted in the initial bulk buy 10 years ago with significant cost-savings e.g. Rosie's dry-cleaning business.

And helpful resources are available as well. 'Upskill My Business' online platform connects small businesses to free training on a range of topics. Any local businesses needing help to market themselves online through social media can access marketing assistance through Small Business Mentoring Program (Business Victoria). Small business financial counselling is also available when economic downturn as a result of COVID is having a major impact.

## **Larger employers**

Colac has demonstrated wonderful industry leadership in managing COVID outbreaks, for example the small committee at AKD who developed an early plan to minimise risk of COVID and also to minimise the spread of any COVID positive case. As last Friday's 'Colac Herald' demonstrates, industry is also leading our post-COVID recovery as seen in a heartening range of advertisements for Positions Vacant in cleaning, sales/OH&S, full-time Teacher, Physiotherapist, Retail, enrolled Nurse, mechanic and grader operators, fitter & turner, TAFE customer service officer, as well as 20 ALC positions and AKD assorted positions and school-based apprenticeships. It is vital that Council support this industry-led recovery.

Colac Otway has also lead the way with innovative industry partnerships focused on jobs and industries in renewable energy e.g. industry partnerships like the Barwon Water/ALC/Bulla 'Organics Network' recycling waste into energy. Market this and build examples like this into our 'Greening initiative' to lead the way for other industries to build partnerships based on sustainable alternative energy sources. Council has an existing policy to reach a Carbon Neutral Emissions target by 2020. It was initiated and started through Council's last budget, but more opportunities will be available through the new Federal Budget as shown by last week's 'Colac Herald' article 'Cash Splash \$260 million for railway upgrades'.

Colac Otway also has innovative individuals who can assist industry initiatives such as Lucas Merlo (Lavers Hill but now in Melbourne), interviewed by the 'Colac Herald' last week. Merlo has partnered with Federal Govt agencies to modernise the regional manufacturing sector under the new National Business Innovation framework. The aim is to help small and medium local manufacturers expand into global markets while increasing their competitiveness to hire more staff and increase sales. He is hoping to get the framework released initially for Otways businesses with workshops and information sessions.

## **Farmers/Fishing:**

Federal Government has committed \$76 million to Tourism Australia to boost their marketing and promotional efforts including a campaign to encourage Australians to forgo their international holidays and holiday in Australia this year. The 'Holiday Here This Year' campaign will be the catalyst for each State to ramp up their domestic marketing efforts, creating a more competitive domestic market. As a region we need to take early advantage of this funding and marketing network.

Second round Business Diversification Grants of up to \$3000 support businesses having to significantly change the way their business operates in response to the pandemic. The Apollo Bay Fishermen's Coop have diversified their product as export markets closed and normal domestic and international tourists visitors disappeared. It's a good time to build support for local regenerative farming practices for example, payment for getting rid of silage to develop useful by-products or energy sources or the Mushroom Composting business at Camperdown.

Celebrate Festivals: Birregurra, Apollo Bay Seafood, Farmers' markets. Golden Plains Council plays an integral role in marketing and celebrating local wholesome products. And Colac Otway has plenty of excellent local products to celebrate

The most successful projects are ones that involve and engage community. 'Clean up the Lake' day lead by former CEO Tracey Slater engaged all ages and was a wonderful way of 'making a difference top where we live'. Similar projects at grassroots level to improve urban greening through street planting could provide a wonderful opportunity for community groups to work together outdoors (with masks and social distancing) to build a 'greener' more sustainable community. Community groups such as Landcare and Alvie Tree-planters are already doing this in a way that benefits and engages our local communities.

### **Sporting groups & bike paths**

According to a recent survey by GORRT, domestic overnight and domestic day visitors account for 92% all visitors to Colac Otway. 75% domestic overnight visitors were for purpose of holiday. The largest group international visitors 44% were from UK (av.3 nights).

The areas people use most: Botanic Garden/cafe 70%, Lake Colac foreshore 64%, Lake Colac foreshore pathway 50%.

It's critical during COVID restrictions to have safe public spaces where locals can exercise and visitors can enjoy the rural experience. The tip site could be beautified as native grassland and the wetland extended further eastward with raised bird-watching points. The bike path could be extended further around the Lake, linking to some of our natural features such as Meredith Park (east) or Cororooke/Red Rock (west). This needs to be shovel-ready for when funding becomes available, as initial planning has already been undertaken. What an asset to have a bike/walking track around Lake Colac, like Lake Elizabeth offers to Forrest or the Great Ocean Walk from Marengo along our beautiful coastline.

### **The Arts community.**

Council's '*Arts & Culture Strategy 2018-2022*' supports Arts, Heritage and Cultural Groups to develop economic activity and tourism. There are also a range of grants available such as seed investment to reactivate productions, and tours and show starter loans. Recent

initiatives like the Night In fundraiser by Red Door and Red Violets illustrates how successful this can be for community partnerships and well-being.

Creative Arts employs 600,000 nationwide and contributes \$112 billion to our economy. I believe that the Arts, like sport, plays a vital role in how we develop and relate as a community, as well as having links to business development and tourism. The Murray Street Art Trail is an example of businesses and artists working together to promote local artwork and shopping. The Red Rock Christmas Hay Bale Trail helped to showcase the unique community spirit of our farming sector. Grants can help Council and Chamber of Commerce to develop a discovery trail with quirky arts and points of interest around Colac, with links to outlying small towns like Gellibrand Gallery, Red Rock Theatre & Gallery, or Beeac's Windmill park. We also need to promote events like CrossXpollination, Otway Food & Fibre Festival, Colac Otway Arts Trail that market Colac Otway above the rest.

The Small Art Project Grants enable artists and event organisers to undertake local projects to lift community spirit during post-COVID recovery. StudioForrest art group have successfully applied for a one-off \$3000 grant to establish a window space with rotation of local artwork, based on hope during recovery. And the community supports this and engages in it.

And a \$2million grant application is currently underway for the Federal Government's COVID Creative Economy Support Package to support the employment of artists and workers in the arts and entertainment sector, as well as in connected industries such as hospitality, accommodation, transport and freight. RISE (Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand Fund) is a \$75 million grant opportunity available in 2020–21 to support the arts and entertainment sector to reactivate. This Fund targets sector organisations who are seeking to restart, re-imagine or create new activities. The program is intended to assist by providing finance for the presentation of new or re-shaped cultural and creative activities and events.

## **2. Strategies to build a stronger & more resilient local economy**

It's important to recognise and publicise that good recovery also requires good strategic planning and that funding opportunities might take time before actual product or services are visible. For example, the front page newspaper article about the Specialist school move to the former high school site requires \$1.5million commitment to fund all planning until the construction works are ready to go to tender, however more funding opportunities will follow. Council, working with Chamber of Commerce and other established business support networks, must be flexible to these opportunities through the recent Federal budget and through other funding and grants bodies.

‘Colac Destination Action Plan’ GORRT seeks to establish priority actions designed to increase Colac’s competitiveness as a tourist destination. The aim is to position Colac as a gateway/hub for exploring the region (Great Ocean Road, The Otways, the volcanic lakes and plains, Great South Coast and vibrant food and beverage sector). ‘Destination Action Plan’ is a guide to market Colac as a domestic overnight and day tripper destination and to guide the development of product as events. Promotion, infrastructure. (Stage 1&2 are complete).

Colac is centrally located between the proposed \$10.5million Victorian Blue Ocean Safety Skills Centre at Apollo Bay and the State Government planned Cape Otway Road Australia’s \$350million high performance sports training facility for elite athletes. Take advantage of this strategic vision.

### **Existing networks and resources:**

G21 - a collective voice of 5 neighbouring Councils) that advocate to improve access to public transport and major road projects with State & Federal funding. I believe continued commitment to G21 is a key to future access to State and Federal funding, to continue to order to deliver big projects like the highway duplication and upgrade of the Geelong-Warrnambool train line. This develops Colac Otways accessibility for private and public transport connections.

GORRT is actively working in partnership with Visit Victoria and Tourism Australia to encourage visitors along the Great Ocean Road region as they embark on ‘Holiday Here This Year’ support to recover from bushfires and now coronavirus. To underpin the Victorian message, Visit Victoria has launched, a tactical campaign ‘A Short Stay goes a long way’ to encourage Melbourne and regional Victoria to continue to visit both fire-affected and non-affected areas in regional Victoria.

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