



An Australian Government Initiative



Regional  
Development  
*Australia*

LODDON MALLEE

# Regional Development Australia Loddon Mallee

## Business Plan 2025–26



# Contents

Message from the Chair	3
------------------------	---

About the Loddon Mallee	4
-------------------------	---

Strategic Priorities 2025–26	6
------------------------------	---

Key projects for delivery	7
---------------------------	---

Regional Economic Development Strategies (REDS)	10
---	----

The Mallee Regional Economic Development Strategy	12
---	----

The Loddon Campaspe Regional Economic Development Strategy	14
--	----

The RDA Committee in 2025–26	16
------------------------------	----

Communications Approach	17
-------------------------	----

RDA in the Loddon Mallee	18
--------------------------	----

Loddon Mallee Collaboration	19
-----------------------------	----

## Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we live. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge that the Loddon Mallee region is on traditional lands, including those lands of the First Peoples of the Millewa-Mallee (being Latji Latji, Ngintait and Nyeri Nyeri Traditional Owners), the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagalk Nations and Dja Dja Wurrung, Wurundjeri, Taungurung and Yorta Yorta People, as well as other Traditional Owner groups in Victoria who are not formally recognised.

We acknowledge the diversity of Aboriginal Victorians, their communities and cultures, the intrinsic connection to Country, the contribution and interest of Aboriginal people and organisations in developing a prosperous region. We are committed to advancing the principles of Aboriginal self-determination and supporting communities to realise self-determined economic development objectives.

We support initiatives that encourage greater unity, knowledge, cultural awareness and respect for the first occupants of our land.

# Message from the Chair

RDA Loddon Mallee plays a vital role in connecting government, industry and community to drive sustainable growth and prosperity across our region. As trusted local advisers, we bring timely, place-based insights that shape government policy, regional initiatives, public communication and targeted investment.

We work hand-in-hand with the Loddon Campaspe and Mallee Regional Partnerships to identify and harness opportunities within Australian and Victorian Government programs and funding priorities. Our collaborative approach ensures regional efforts are strategic, informed and designed for real impact.

Following the November 2024 local government elections, we briefed newly elected councillors on our role in unlocking Australian Government investment to grow jobs and economic activity in the region. Highlights from the past year include:

- Receiving the 2024 national RDA Investing in Services Award for our 2023 Digital Summit and building on that success with the 2024 Artificial Intelligence Summit;
- Driving the Western Southern Mallee Mining Development Collaboration Workshops and the Agri-Food Value Add initiative; and
- Launching work on an Enabling Water Infrastructure Proof of Concept; a Zero Emissions Economic Opportunities Action Plan; and a new International Engagement Strategy.

As the current RDA Loddon Mallee Committee term draws to a close, I thank all our members for their energy, insight and commitment over the past four years, in particular, our outgoing Deputy Chair Craig Neimann who has served on the Committee for many years.



With continued Australian Government funding secured through to 2030, the newly appointed RDA Loddon Mallee Committee will be focused on longer-term priorities in 2025–26, including:

- Support economic growth and transition in agribusiness professional services, advanced manufacturing, construction and mining.
- Increase innovation and digital uplift.
- Build opportunities for equitable workforce participation, capability and growth.
- Drive sustainable growth through a clean and circular economy.
- Foster investment in local initiatives that build on environmental, cultural, and structural assets.

We look forward to working with our Regional Partnerships, local governments and industry stakeholders to deliver lasting value across the Loddon Mallee region.

**Leonie Burrows**

Chair  
RDA Loddon Mallee



Enabling  
sustainable  
economic  
growth



Inspiring  
innovation



Facilitating  
collaborative  
advocacy



Leveraging  
our  
resources

# About the Loddon Mallee

The Loddon Mallee region is a unique blend of liveability and economic opportunity, where communities are committed to sustainable development and poised to lead in the transition to a carbon-neutral future. It is a place where creativity connects with new audiences, and innovation drives growth. The region's exports are primarily focused on the following sectors:



## Agricultural Products

Grains, livestock, horticultural, and dairy products.



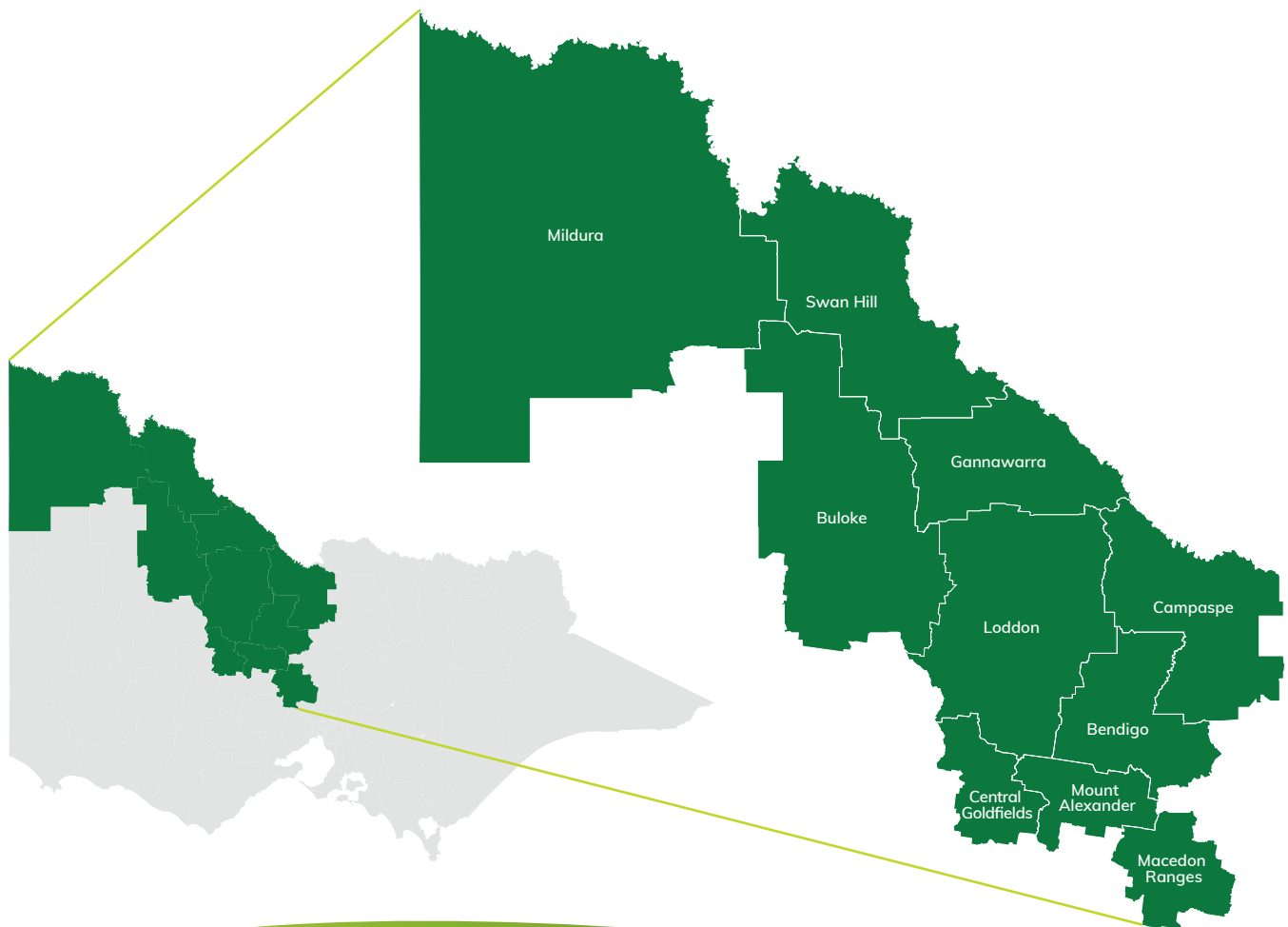
## Wine and Food Processing

Wine and value-added agricultural products, including processed fruits, vegetables, dairy, and packaged goods.



## Manufacturing and Clean Technology

Manufactured goods, particularly in clean energy, climate technology, and mining resources.





### The Loddon Mallee region is:

- One of Victoria's – and Australia's – largest agri-food and fibre producers, supported by an ideal climate, extensive irrigation infrastructure, and one of the country's most diverse agricultural economies.
- A leader in solar and renewable energy, with the majority of Victoria's large-scale solar generation concentrated within the region.
- Home to the Loddon Campaspe Employment and Innovation Corridor connecting Melbourne to Bendigo and Echuca, offering exceptional connectivity through rail, freeway-grade roads, and close proximity to major airports, including Melbourne Airport.
- Home to internationally reputed tertiary institutions, the region produces a steady pipeline of skilled graduates entering the workforce annually.
- A distinct creative industries sector fostering a vibrant cultural scene, strongly underpinned by respect for and inclusion of First Nations voices.
- Bendigo is recognised as a "100-gig city," with internet speeds over 500 times faster than the Australian average, and holds the UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy title, marking it as a hub for food, wine, and creativity.
- Home to the Gannawarra Solar Farm integrates solar capture with battery storage, ranking among the largest projects of its kind nationally.
- Home to Bendigo Bank as the only major financial institution headquartered in a regional city.
- Enjoying a resurgent mining industry, hosting Australia's only operational antimony mine, Victoria's largest gold producer, and a rapidly growing critical minerals sector.





# Strategic Priorities 2025–26

Informed by evidence provided in Victoria's Regional Economic Development Strategies (REDS)

## Strategic Priority 01



**Support economic growth in agribusiness, professional services, advanced manufacturing, construction and mining.**

- Support industry clusters and enable industry transition.
- Attract investment to enhance regional growth.

## Strategic Priority 02



**Increase innovation and digital uplift to address regional challenges and opportunities.**

- Improve digital capability to drive productivity.
- Strengthen research capability to drive innovation.

## Strategic Priority 03



**Increase opportunities for equitable workforce participation, capability and growth.**

- Improve the supply of affordable childcare and housing.
- Strengthen workforce development to support growth sectors.

## Strategic Priority 04



**Drive sustainable growth through a clean and circular economy.**

- Explore and invest in initiatives that advance the clean economy.
- Realise community-benefit through renewable energy and mining initiatives.

## Strategic Priority 05



**Foster investment in local initiatives that build on environmental, cultural, and structural assets.**

- Support place-based investment
- Support initiatives that drive tourism and economic development.



# Key projects for delivery



## Project: Strengthening Tri-State Collaboration

### Challenge

The Mallee region's cross-border location has long created both opportunities and complexities for economic growth. While the Murray, Mallee, and Riverland regions across New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia share significant strengths in workforce capability, freight and logistics, planning, horticulture, and skills development, there is not an overarching governance model to realise economic opportunities. Harnessing this potential became a key priority for the Regional Development Australia Loddon Mallee (RDA LM) Committee, the Mallee Regional Partnership (MRP), and the Victorian Cross Border Commissioner.

### Approach

In late 2023, RDA LM, Regional Development Victoria, and the MRP initiated preliminary investigations into the feasibility of a Tri-State Economic Alliance (TSEA) to unlock the benefits of coordinated cross-border economic development.

- A scoping study was commissioned, which highlighted the region's substantial economic base, including more than \$1.7 billion in horticultural exports annually.
- In 2024, a TSEA working group was established, bringing together CEOs of local councils across the three states, RDA Chairs, and government representatives.
- With funding from RDA LM, a stakeholder engagement plan was developed to refine priorities and identify shared areas of focus.
- The group began exploring potential governance models and focus areas, including workforce outcomes, transport and freight efficiencies, expansion of horticulture and agribusiness, minerals processing, waste management, skills training, and the visitor economy.

### Outcomes

The feasibility work and stakeholder engagement generated several key outcomes:

- Strong cross-border support for the TSEA concept from local government leaders, RDAs, and state agencies.
- A clearer understanding of the economic scale and strengths of the region, providing a solid evidence base for future investment.
- Initial consensus on priority sectors and areas for collaboration, particularly in horticulture, freight and logistics, and workforce development.
- A pathway towards designing governance models that can support effective tri-state collaboration and alignment with broader government strategies.

### Impact

The TSEA initiative has established a foundation for transformative cross-border collaboration, positioning the Murray, Mallee, and Riverland regions to work collectively rather than in isolation. By aligning priorities across three states, the project is helping to:

- Strengthen the region's capacity to attract investment and grow exports.
- Improve transport and supply chain efficiencies critical to horticulture and agribusiness.
- Build a more skilled and adaptable workforce to meet industry needs.
- Create opportunities for innovation in areas such as minerals processing, waste management, and the visitor economy.

The Tri-State Economic Zone concept is now recognised as a strategic opportunity to unlock the full economic potential of the Mallee cross-border zone, fostering resilience, growth, and prosperity across the three-state region.



## **Project:** **Loddon Mallee Clean Economy Workforce Development Strategy**

### **Challenge**

The Loddon Mallee region faces barriers in capitalising on the clean economy transition. While renewable energy projects were growing nationally, the region did not have a strategy for realising the potential for local job creation or workforce development, and to foster innovation, attract investment and build long-term economic resilience.

### **Approach**

The Loddon Mallee Zero Emissions Economic Opportunities Analysis and Action Plan is being developed as a blueprint to guide the region's clean economy transition. The project will:

- Define clean economy sectors critical to achieving zero emissions and assess their current strengths and growth opportunities.
- Analyse workforce capacity and identify strategies to align local skills with the needs of renewable energy, circular economy, and climate technology industries.
- Map investment opportunities to attract climate tech, build regional competitiveness, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Be informed by evidence – drawing on ABS data, State and Federal strategies, regional and municipal economic development plans, and sector-specific roadmaps such as the Loddon Mallee Renewable Energy Roadmap, Zero Emissions Roadmap, and Circular Economy Plan.

### **Outcomes**

The plan will deliver:

- A clear framework for workforce development, identifying skill gaps and opportunities to build local talent pipelines for the clean economy.
- Strategic recommendations for industry and government to attract investment, foster innovation, and strengthen regional competitiveness.
- An evidence-based roadmap for reducing emissions, creating local jobs, and ensuring vulnerable communities are supported during the transition.
- A foundation for regional collaboration across government, industry, education, and training providers to implement coordinated actions.

### **Impact**

The Action Plan will position the Loddon Mallee to:

- Lead Victoria's transition to a zero-emissions economy, supporting the state's 2030 and 2050 emissions reduction targets.
- Drive economic resilience by creating clean economy jobs and reducing exposure to rising energy costs.
- Unlock regional strengths in renewable energy, circular economy, and innovation to attract new investment and enhance global competitiveness.
- Foster inclusive growth, ensuring workforce development and clean economy opportunities are accessible across communities, including those most vulnerable to climate and energy challenges.





## Project: Loddon Mallee International Engagement Strategy

### Challenge

The Loddon Mallee region faces several barriers that limit its ability to compete and connect globally. Some markets remain undefined, and there is significant potential to increase regional awareness of international opportunities. Efforts across stakeholders have been fragmented, highlighting a need for greater alignment and stronger connections with Global Victoria and Austrade priorities.

### Approach

To address these challenges, a place-based Loddon Mallee International Engagement Strategy is being developed. The strategy will provide a single, coordinated framework that could be adopted by Regional Development Victoria ensuring a consistent voice and vision for the region. Key elements of the approach include:

- Developing a comprehensive, region-specific strategy document.
- Mapping and benchmarking existing international relationships to establish a clear baseline.
- Prioritising markets and articulating the rationale and expected outcomes for targeted engagement.
- Highlighting the Loddon Mallee's competitive and comparative advantages for international markets.
- Aligning regional objectives with Global Victoria and Austrade strategies to maximise leverage.
- Piloting data-driven export benchmarking by commodity and destination to guide future opportunities.

### Outcomes

The strategy will deliver a clear roadmap for international engagement, with tangible outcomes including:

- A unified and place-based strategy to guide consistent activity across stakeholders.
- Stronger alignment of regional opportunities with state and national priorities.
- Improved understanding of priority markets and a structured process for engagement.
- Evidence-based insights into export opportunities, informed by commodity and destination benchmarking.
- A strengthened platform for collaboration across local government, industry, and state and federal agencies.

### Impact

The Loddon Mallee International Engagement Strategy will enhance how the region approaches global opportunities. By providing clarity, focus, and alignment, the strategy has broadened the region's international reach and improved the efficiency of engagement efforts. It is enabling the region to proactively attract investment, expand exports, and foster partnerships across culture, research, innovation, skills, and education. Importantly, the strategy has positioned the Loddon Mallee as a more visible and competitive region within global markets, creating a foundation for long-term economic resilience and growth.



# Regional Economic Development Strategies (REDS)

The Victorian Government has developed Regional Economic Development Strategies (REDS) for the Mallee and Loddon Campaspe regions, which identify strategic directions for future economic development based on a strong evidence base. The REDS have informed the identification of the strategic focus areas for the RDA Loddon Mallee Committee.

The REDS also identify four key factors that are critical to enabling economic growth in the region – digital connectivity, transport connectivity, workforce and housing.

In addition to providing a consistent evidence base and the strategic framing of economic opportunities to coordinate investment and activity, the REDS also identify opportunities for Aboriginal economic development.



## Comparative advantage

**65.0  
to 67.5**

**Australian Digital Inclusion Index Score in Mallee in 2022**  
(Victorian Average: 73.2)

**56.3%**

**Local workforce in Mallee was employed in skilled occupations in 2024**  
(Reg Vic 58.2%, Melbourne 67.8%)

**14%**

**Residents in Mallee with a bachelor's degree or higher in 2021**  
(Reg Vic 20.8%, Melbourne 36.8%)



## Strategic directions

**2.8**

**Overall access to roads and public transport in Mallee region**  
(Reg Vic 2.9 and Victoria 3.4)

**\$450K**

**Average property price in Mallee in 2024**  
(Increase of 58.7% since 2019)

**48.7%**

**Increase in median rent in RDA Loddon Mallee region from March 2020 to 2025**  
(Victoria 34.1%, Reg Vic 37.3%)





### Regional profile

65.6  
to 74.5

Australian Digital Inclusion Index Score in Loddon Campaspe in 2022  
(National Average: 73.2)

58.4%

Local workforce in Loddon Campaspe was employed in skilled occupations in 2024  
(Reg Vic 58.2%, Melbourne 67.8%)

22.4%

Residents in Loddon Campaspe with a bachelor's degree or higher in 2021  
(Reg Vic 20.8%, Melbourne 36.8%)



### Policy insights

3.5

Overall access to roads and public transport in Loddon Campaspe region  
(Reg Vic 2.9 and Victoria 3.4)

\$579K

Average property price in Loddon Campaspe 2024  
(Increase of 37.2% since 2019)

44.2%

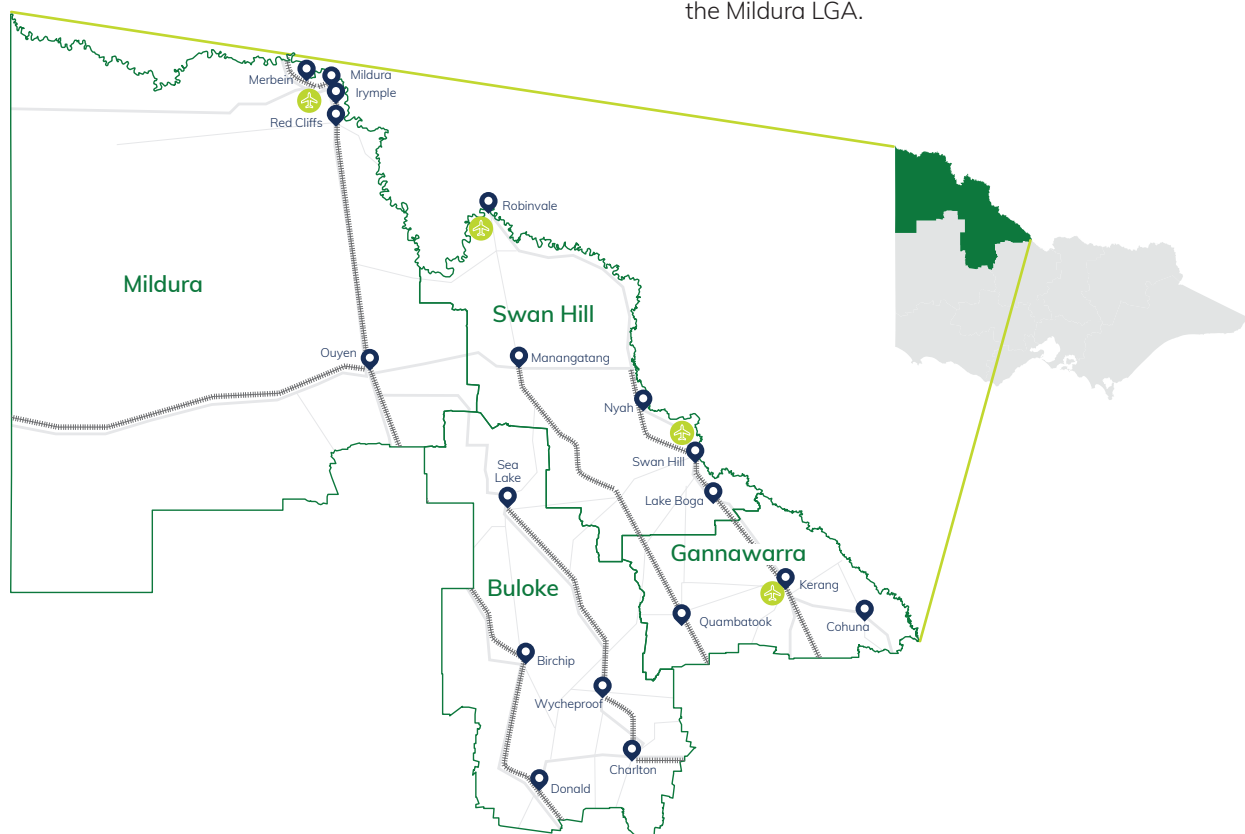
Increase in median rent in RDA Loddon Campaspe region from December 2019 to 2024  
(Victoria 34.1%, Reg Vic 37.3%)



# The Mallee Regional Economic Development Strategy

Mallee's five strategic directions have been identified using an evidence base that considers the region's unique attributes, existing and emerging industries, and socioeconomic context.

- The Mallee Regional Partnership region is in the northwest corner of Victoria comprising the local government areas of Mildura Rural City, Swan Hill Rural City, Gannawarra Shire and Buloke Shire. The region is home to Latji Latji, Ngintait, Nyeri Nyeri, Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia, Jupagalk, Barengi Gadjin, Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung and Yorta Yorta Nations.
- Bounded by New South Wales to the north and South Australia to the west, the region is home to some of Victoria's most remote communities whose residents live several hours by road from capital cities.
- Agriculture and related industries such as food and beverage manufacturing are the principal engines for economic activity. Areas close to the Murray River typically produce horticultural goods while inland areas focus on dryland farming.
- The sunny climate and water infrastructure which support this 'agri-food' sector also underpins the region's growing renewable energy industry. Sharing borders with South Australia and New South Wales, the region is home to key road, rail and air infrastructure, with the main freight route between Adelaide and Sydney passing through the Mildura LGA.



## Mallee Regional Economic Development Strategy Strategic directions

- Drive sustainable growth in the food industry.
- Leverage natural endowments to diversify the economy into emerging industries.
- Enhance the visitor economy by developing natural, cultural and built attractions.
- Ensure an accessible and suitably qualified workforce to unlock the growth potential.
- Harness the economic potential of the cross-border zones.



**95,080**

**Population**  
(2023–24)

**–0.5%**

**Population growth**  
(2020–24)

**\$7.0B**

**Gross Regional Product**  
(2023–24)



### Labour market

	Mallee	Regional Victoria	Metro Melbourne
Unemployment rate* (%) (Mar–25)	3.7	3.8	4.6
Annual employment growth (2023–24)	1.9	3.3	3.6



### Top employing sectors (2024)

Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	8,563
Health Care and Social Assistance	7,452
Retail Trade	4,863
Education and Training	4,057
Construction	3,441
Accommodation and Food Services	3,221



### Top sectors by gross value add (2024)

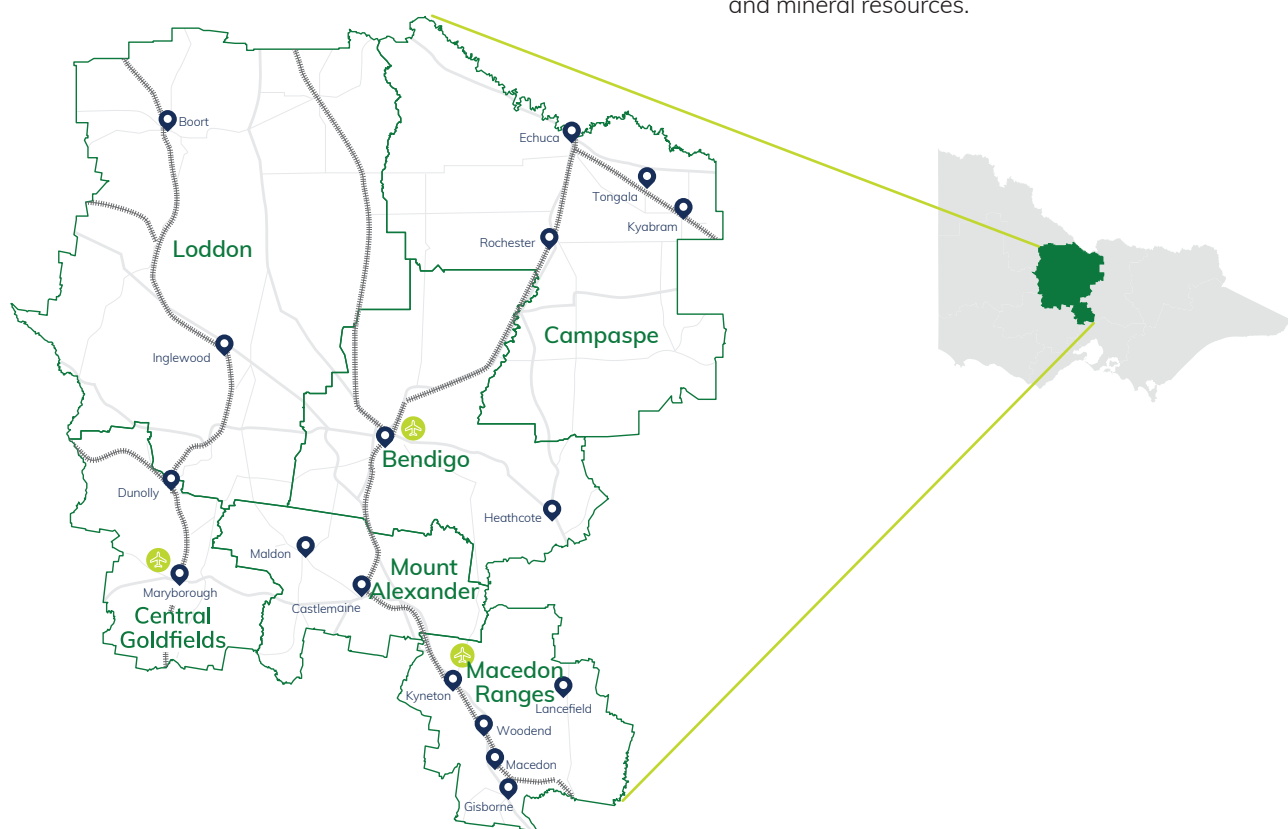
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	\$2,052M
Health Care and Social Assistance	\$677M
Retail Trade	\$372M
Manufacturing	\$361M
Construction	\$339M
Education and Training	\$284M

Please note: Regional Partnership unemployment data lags the state release.

# The Loddon Campaspe Regional Economic Development Strategy

Loddon Campaspe's five strategic directions have been identified using an evidence base that considers the region's unique attributes, existing and emerging industries, and socioeconomic context.

- The Loddon Campaspe Regional Partnership region is at the heart of Victoria, encompassing the local government areas of Campaspe, Central Goldfields, Greater Bendigo, Loddon, Macedon Ranges and Mount Alexander.
- The region has been home to the Dja Dja Wurrung, Yorta Yorta, Taungurung and Wurundjeri people who have lived, worked and cared for their people and resources for many thousands of years.
- Stretching from Melbourne's north-west peri-urban region to the banks of the Murray River, the Loddon Campaspe region has a diverse economy centred around the City of Bendigo, which is one of Victoria's largest and fastest growing regional cities.
- The region has strengths in agriculture, mining, food processing and tourism based on its local endowments, including the region's strategic location, road and rail network, fertile environment, abundance of natural parks, Aboriginal heritage and mineral resources.





## Loddon Campaspe Regional Economic Development Strategy Strategic directions

- Support growth in agriculture and food product manufacturing to enhance value adding throughout the supply chain.
- Pursue diversification of the tourism sector by leveraging natural, cultural, and built endowments.
- Maximise gains in the 'employment and innovation corridor' to attract professional services workers and entrepreneurial activity.
- Foster better links between education providers, industry, research, employers and students to develop career pathways and a workforce that meets the future needs of the region.
- Leverage local opportunities to strengthen value chains and diversify into new industries, including in mining, renewable energy and waste processing.



**260,000** Population  
(2023–24)

**3.9%** Population growth  
(2020–24)

**\$15.9B** Gross Regional Product  
(2023–24)



### Labour market

	Loddon Campaspe	Regional Victoria	Metro Melbourne
Unemployment rate (%) (Mar–25)*	3.4	3.8	4.6
Annual employment growth (2023–24)	2.2	3.3	3.6



### Top employing sectors (2024)

Health Care and Social Assistance	23,848
Construction	12,493
Manufacturing	12,483
Education and Training	10,771
Retail Trade	10,614
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	9,019



### Top sectors by gross value add (2024)

Healthcare and social assistance	\$1,786M
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	\$1,595M
Manufacturing	\$1,292M
Construction	\$1,047M
Financial and Insurance Services	\$888M
Retail Trade	\$784M

Please note: Regional Partnership unemployment data lags the state release.

# The RDA Committee in 2025–26

Our committee members are selected for their industry expertise and deep understanding of how our communities function.

The team has global, national and local experience in horticulture, agricultural research, food and fibre, health, education, digital and telecommunications, manufacturing, housing and town planning and policy.

Committee Chair, Leonie Burrows, is also Chair of the Mallee Research and Innovation Centre (MRIC), and the former CEO of Mildura Rural City Council.

Read more about our Committee members at [rdv.vic.gov.au/regional-development-australia/loddon-mallee/about-us](https://rdv.vic.gov.au/regional-development-australia/loddon-mallee/about-us)

The executive support team promotes the region's activities to all levels of government, industry, business and community, highlighting competitive advantages and encouraging decentralisation opportunities.

They oversee RDA projects and report on activities, including the management and monitoring of the Commonwealth and State grants programs. RDA Loddon Mallee has offices in Bendigo and Mildura and holds meetings and events in locations across the region.

## RDA Loddon Mallee Committee Members



**Leonie Burrows**  
Chair



**Margaret O'Rourke**  
Deputy Chair



**Andrew Cooney**



**Mandy Hutchinson**



**Anne Mansell**



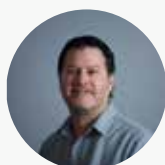
**Andrea Tomkinson**



**Wayne O'Toole**



**James Sorahan**



**Steve Tinker**



**Brett Millington**



**Steven Abbott**

## Executive Support Team Members



**Leanne Rosewall**  
Regional Director  
RDV & RDA Loddon Mallee



**Alison McKenzie**  
RDA Coordinator  
– Loddon Mallee

# Communications Approach

RDA Loddon Mallee will leverage several regional stakeholder group communications channels and assets to improve awareness, engagement and influence for Loddon Mallee's economic priorities.

Our primary online asset is the *Invest Loddon Mallee* website, which is a collaborative initiative to increase investment in our region, funded and developed in partnership with our region's ten local councils, the Loddon Campaspe Regional Partnership, the Mallee Regional Partnership and the Victorian Government.

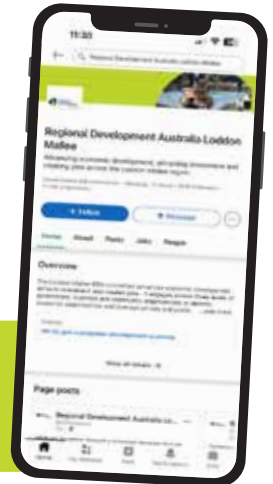
Other key communication channels and opportunities that we will leverage in 2025–26 include:

- Direct email
- Social media (LinkedIn)
- Invest Loddon Mallee website
- RDA website
- Reports and Submissions
- Promotional videos
- Workshops and forums
- Meetings and delegations.

## Social media opportunities

In 2025–26 we will continue the implementation of a social media strategy to leverage the extensive business, political and community networks of RDA Committee members in Loddon Mallee and beyond.

Join us on  
LinkedIn





# RDA in the Loddon Mallee

**Regional Development Australia (RDA) is a national network of committees across Australia, including the Indian Ocean Territories and Norfolk Island.**

The committees are made up of local leaders who work across government, business and community groups to support economic and workforce development, local procurement, strategic regional planning and inform government programs and infrastructure investments.

In Victoria, there are six RDA Committees covering all areas of the state, including an RDA Melbourne Committee for which provides capital city business connections for the five regional RDA Committees.

The RDA Loddon Mallee region sits on the lands and waters of several First Nations groups including the First Peoples of the Millewa-Mallee, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wurundjeri, Taungurung and Yorta Yorta. It extends from the edge of metropolitan Melbourne to the northern tip of Victoria and borders both South Australia and New South Wales, which provides unique cross-border challenges and opportunities for our economy and communities.

The RDA Loddon Mallee region incorporates the operating areas of the Mallee and Loddon Campaspe Regional Partnerships, with whom we work closely to maximise outcomes for the Loddon Mallee.

## **Honouring Culture, Healing Country**

- Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.
- The Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation.
- Dja Dja Wurrung Traditional Owner Group.
- Taungurung Land and Waters Council.
- First Peoples of the Millewa-Mallee Aboriginal Corporation.



# Loddon Mallee Collaboration

The RDA Loddon Mallee committee are passionate and dedicated local leaders who are appointed by the Commonwealth Government.

We act as an effective conduit across government, industry and the community to support the development of the Loddon Mallee region. As real-time advisers to the Commonwealth Government on critical regional development issues, opportunities and challenges, we provide advice that informs government policy, regional programs, information campaigns and grant funding opportunities.

By working closely with the **Loddon Campaspe** and **Mallee Regional Partnerships**, which are a Victorian Government initiative, we can collectively

identify Commonwealth and Victorian programs and strategies that allow us to address Loddon Mallee region priorities in an informed, efficient and effective way.

Our direct connections with our ten local government councils and other key regional stakeholder groups (including those listed in the diagram opposite) enable us to more effectively raise **awareness** of the issues, share **knowledge** and **identify** growth opportunities, **influence** required policy and regulatory change, **enable** local action through Commonwealth and State funding, and **attract** more business investment to the Loddon Mallee region.





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LODDON MALLEE

## Contacts

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[rdv.vic.gov.au/regional-development-australia/loddon-mallee/](http://rdv.vic.gov.au/regional-development-australia/loddon-mallee/)  
[investloddonmallee.com.au](http://investloddonmallee.com.au)



[linkedin.com/company/regional-development-australia-loddon-mallee/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/regional-development-australia-loddon-mallee/)

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Local people developing local solutions [rda.gov.au](http://rda.gov.au)

