

YARRA RANGES COUNCIL CULTURAL POLICY AND ACTION PLAN 2008-2013



INDIGENOUS PEOPLE ENVIRONMENT PARTICIPATION
INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT **LOCAL HERITAGE** STRATEGY
DEVELOPMENT CULTURAL PLANNING COMMUNITY

1. Context

Yarra Ranges Shire is located in Victoria, Australia, on metropolitan Melbourne's eastern fringe. Home to a population of 145,000, Yarra Ranges covers approximately 2,500 km². The municipality stretches from the densely populated outer suburbs up into the surrounding foothills, agricultural valleys and forested areas of the Great Dividing Ranges. It is one of Victoria's largest, most varied and scenic municipalities. It is also the largest area of any Melbourne metropolitan council. There are more than 55 suburbs, townships, small communities and rural areas in the Yarra Ranges. The region, and in particular the 'Yarra Valley', is gaining local and international recognition as a fine food and wine producing area. Each year, over 2.2 million tourists visit the area, including townships and gardens of the Dandenong Ranges and the wineries of the Yarra Valley. Yarra Ranges is an inspirational place for those who live here on a daily basis and it has long been recognized as a special place for its natural beauty and diverse habitats. The combination of national parks, state forests, private gardens, and its location on Melbourne's door step combine to make the area unique in both natural and cultural amenities.

Yarra Ranges is a place that values culture. The community understands the profound and powerful influence arts, culture and heritage have in shaping lives. The margins of cities are places where artists, musicians and writers have always congregated. Yarra Ranges is, and always has been, a place for artists and storytellers. The indigenous heritage and the creativity of its community is expressed through music, film, dance, visual art and the written word revealing an enviable cultural richness. In late 2006 Yarra Ranges Council commenced the creation of a Cultural Policy and Action Plan. The Plan aimed to provide direction for arts, culture and heritage in line with the community's vision statement *Vision 2020*.

At the time one of the major needs driving the establishment of this policy was the lack of detailed strategies to deliver on key aspects of *Vision 2020*, particularly the Arts, Culture & Heritage theme. Other issues included a need for guidance around the appropriate allocation of Council resources (facilities, staff and financial) in managing cultural facilities and programs into the future, confusion surrounding the role of Councils cultural facilities, and challenges in successfully securing external funding. The *Cultural Policy & Action Plan 2008-2013* articulated the community's cultural aspirations as indicated in *Vision 2020*, expanding on the importance the community identified in relation to providing opportunities for people to participate in cultural activities. With a great deal of creative activity already underway across the region, the development of the CP & AP was necessary to identify and articulate the community's key cultural interests, and establish a strategic framework to inform the direction of arts, culture and heritage funding, partnerships, programs, projects, facilities and services.

COUNCIL, COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDERS REQUIRED CONSULTATION AND PERSUASION TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE, RELEVANCE AND BENEFIT OF CULTURAL PLANNING. AGENDA 21 FOR CULTURE PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN ADVOCATING FOR THE CP&AP.

2. Yarra Ranges and culture.

2.1. Cultural policy & Action Plan 2008-2013

The *Cultural Policy & Action Plan 2008-2013* was created to guide the provision of arts, cultural and heritage services as a key facet of achieving the community's vision for Yarra Ranges. The award winning 'Cultural Roadshow' engagement process received over 1500 responses from surveys, on the street activities and forums. The CP & AP was developed in consultation with the community and endorsed by Council in September 2008.

2.2. Vision 2020

The CP & AP was created to further articulate the community's cultural aspirations as outlined in *Vision 2020* which highlighted the importance the community places on providing opportunities for people to participate in cultural activities, and describes the region as a place where arts and heritage are 'thriving': *'In 2020... people have numerous opportunities to express their creativity and to enjoy the heritage of those who have contributed to our cultural, built and artistic history'*.

It was developed in partnership with the community, identifies their needs and aspirations for the future, and is regularly reviewed. The original *Vision 2020* was developed in 1999 and reviewed in 2003, 2006 and 2008/09 to ensure it continued to represent the values, needs and aspirations of the diverse community. The community was involved in the review in a number of ways, supported by Council and a Community Reference Group. The views and ideas of a cross-section of the community were brought together through submissions to a discussion paper, youth interviews, a children's survey program through local schools, and a children's workshop. The outcomes were then fed into a Community Forum held over 2 days where key community priorities were debated.

The CP & AP provided a more detailed articulation of the community's aspirations with respect to key themes of *Vision 2020*, particularly "Arts, Culture & Heritage", "Strong, Healthy & Connected communities", "Local Economy & Tourism" and "A Living & Learning Community".

2.3. Other key council strategies

Understanding that the quality of local development depends on the interweaving of cultural policies and other public policies (*Agenda 21 for culture*), the CP & AP also linked with other key Council strategies, including:

- Cultural Facilities Strategy 2002
- Cultural Collections Policy 2007
- Community Grants and Funding Policy 2008
- Community Festival and Events Policy 2008
- Community Well Being Plan 2007-2010
- Economic Development Strategy 2005-2009
- Disability Action Plan 2007-2009
- Family and Children's Strategy 2005-2008
- Reconciliation Strategy and Action Plan 2008-2010
- Youth Strategy 2008
- Positive Ageing Strategy 2006-2009

Agenda 21 for culture was vital to the initiation of the CP & AP, and a key reference in the development of the Plan. It proved to be a valuable tool in advocating for the importance of culture in local development, leading to the initiation of the first formal cultural plan for Yarra Ranges Council. *Agenda 21 for culture* helped influence the CP & AP by providing principles upon which discussion and engagement could be undertaken. It provided a framework against which to assess our direction and values as the CP & AP progressed over the years, and offered an ongoing contribution to the cultural development of the region. One of the key themes identified in the CP & AP was 'understanding and celebrating our cultural heritage'. Principle 9 was particularly used to work with local heritage groups and heritage networks to establish a basis for moving forward on this theme. This ultimately resulted in a community heritage officer being employed by Council, and an MOU being developed to protect, foster and celebrate our cultural heritage together.

THE CP&AP WAS CREATED TO FURTHER ARTICULATE THE COMMUNITY'S CULTURAL ASPIRATIONS AS OUTLINED IN VISION 2020 WHICH HIGHLIGHTED THE IMPORTANCE THE COMMUNITY PLACES ON PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN CULTURAL ACTIVITIES.

3. Aim, goals and implementation of the project

3.1. Aim and specific goals

To shape Yarra Ranges as a place where access to and participation in arts, culture and heritage is sustained as a seamless and deeply meaningful experience.

The key objectives of the CP & AP were to demonstrate leadership in the provision of arts, culture and heritage services by:

- Guiding the delivery of the Council's arts and heritage programs, services and activities
- Assisting with the planning, development and resourcing of cultural facilities
- Supporting key organisations and groups in the provision of arts and heritage services
- Further increasing community participation in arts, culture and heritage activities
- Further developing partnerships with state and federal governments, commercial and philanthropic organisations, and
- Better positioning Council to advocate for and access funding for local arts, cultural and heritage activities

3.2. Obstacles

The CP & AP created the space for culture in Yarra Ranges to flourish. Over the life of the Plan, the Council supported cultural development through a broad range of arts, culture and heritage activity, and expended A\$21.2 million on improving Cultural Facilities, delivering permanent cultural assets to

the community for future generations to enjoy. As this was the 1st cultural policy statement and plan, the key obstacle faced in implementation related to understanding the need for such a policy in the first place. Council, community and stakeholders required consultation and persuasion to understand the importance, relevance and benefit of cultural planning. *Agenda 21 for culture* played an important role in advocating for the CP & AP.



3.3. Development

In 2007 the Council endorsed the development of a Cultural Policy and Action Plan and a Cultural Plan Steering Committee was formed. This committee developed terms of reference and established a Community Reference Group. 32 community members with experience and expertise in arts and heritage were invited to join the group. The Reference Group was charged with the task of developing a unique approach to engaging the broader community on the future delivery of arts, culture and heritage services in the Shire. It developed a range of innovative and interactive activities to gather input from the community, and created multiple opportunities for people from all walks of life to participate and have their say. This was delivered through the award winning 4-week community consultation program known as the *Cultural Roadshow*.

In October and November 2007, over 4 consecutive weekends a series of Open House Days were staged in 4 of the Councils cultural facilities. Community members participated in interactive games, exhibits, video and sound installations, workshops and classes. An additional umbrella program was also presented, involving a series of 16 events including music concerts, film screenings and visual art exhibition openings. During these events audience members were asked to articulate their preferences for future arts and heritage activities. It also featured a program of outdoor performances involving street theatre, live music and dance performances staged without notice at different locations across the region. Community members were interviewed and their responses recorded. The data collected through these processes was used to develop the 6 key themes:

1. Creating vibrant public places
2. Weaving cultural activities into our daily lives
3. Understanding & celebrating our cultural heritage
4. Providing quality facilities
5. Delivering dynamic programs
6. Building effective partnerships

The completed CP & AP was launched in 2008.

3.4. Delivery & results

Quality Cultural Facilities – the establishment of the CP & AP assisted with the planning, development and resourcing of cultural facilities and positioned Council and others to advocate for and access funding for local arts, cultural and heritage activities and infrastructure. With the support of this plan Council attracted over A\$9 million in state and federal funding for capital works projects, and expended A\$21.2 million on improving Cultural Facilities between 2008 and 2013.

This significant investment ensured that there are quality cultural spaces (galleries, museums, libraries, performance venues) for people to learn skills, express themselves, be entertained and enlightened, and connect with the community.

Dynamic Cultural Programming – Once cultural facilities were established and upgraded, programming became a key focus in order to activate these new and revised spaces. With the increased support of Arts Victoria and Council, the level of programming and professional standard in delivery has increased significantly over the past 5 years commensurate with the improvements to facilities. This provides a unique opportunity for communities to experience and participate in arts and heritage content. Programmed activity and community driven cultural activity occurs in multiple Cultural facilities across Yarra Ranges, delivered, facilitated and supported by Council (Museum exhibition program, Burrinja Visual Arts Program and Performance Program, Healesville and Upper Yarra Film and Performance program, Montrose Concert Program, School Holiday Programs, Workshops and widespread utilisation of spaces by community).

COMMUNITY MEMBERS WERE INTERVIEWED AND THEIR RESPONSES RECORDED (...) TO DEVELOP THE 6 KEY THEMES: CREATING VIBRANT PUBLIC PLACES – WEAVING CULTURAL ACTIVITIES INTO OUR DAILY LIVES – UNDERSTANDING & CELEBRATING OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE – PROVIDING QUALITY FACILITIES – DELIVERING DYNAMIC PROGRAMS – BUILDING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS.

Cultural Grants – Council offers community grants to foster the development of rich and diverse cultural activities and programs to support artists and groups in shaping Yarra Ranges as a cultural place. Over the past 5 years the cultural grants program has supported multiple artists, art workers, organisations and groups to deliver a variety of projects and programs (performances, comedy tours, learning and engagement opportunities, history group publications and projects, pop-up galleries, and projects in public spaces). 87 cultural development projects have been supported through cultural development grant program since 2008, delivering a total of A\$356,263 directly to the community to support cultural development initiatives.

Festivals and Events – In November 2013 Council endorsed a policy and framework for Community Festivals and Events to support community driven festivals in accordance with the CP & AP. Acknowledging the important role that Festivals and Events play in creating vibrant public places, Council provides the framework for community to develop their own festivals and events. Since 2008, Council's position through policy and improvements to process, matched with an increase in funding to community driven festivals and events, has resulted in a vastly different festival and event environment. Since the development of the CP & AP Council has advised groups and assisted events across the region, and financially supported over 96 festivals and events with a direct contribution totaling A\$522,196.

4. Impacts

4.1. Impact on the local government

- Articulated Council's role in direct service provision, development and resourcing of cultural facilities, and support for key organisations and groups in the provision of arts, cultural and heritage services.

- Increased community participation in arts, cultural and heritage activities as a way of achieving key themes of the community's vision for the region as expressed in *Vision 2020*.
- Helped further define the regions cultural identity and the cultural personality and preferences of its townships and communities to inform the programming and delivery of arts, culture and heritage services and activities
- Better positioned Council to access external funding for local arts, cultural and heritage activities and the development and provision of cultural facilities.

4.2. Impact on culture and its local workers

- Provided direction and impetus to support cultural development initiatives (including festivals and events, projects, programs, organisations, and partnerships) that provided opportunities for cultural actors and the broader community to participate in cultural activities.
- Enhanced public spaces by increasing presentation of arts and heritage activities for the benefit of the whole community.
- Fostered relationships between cultural actors in the region and initiated new partnerships between local arts and heritage groups, organisations and individuals to deliver improved cultural services.



4.3. Impact on the territory and on population

With the support of this plan Council attracted over A\$9 million in state and federal funding for capital works projects, and expended A\$21.2 million on improving Cultural Facilities between 2008 and 2013. Among other projects, this included:

- Burrinja Community Cultural Centre redevelopment, A\$9.6M, completed 2011.
- Yarra Ranges Regional Museum redevelopment, A\$4.4M, completed 2011.
- Arts and community precinct - Healesville, A\$6.85M, completed 2012.

This capital asset investment provided the community with high quality arts and heritage facilities for cultural participation, and will leave a lasting cultural legacy in the region for future generations to enjoy.

4.4. Cross-sectorial impacts

The transversal impacts of the CP & AP were both economically and socially significant. As an example, the Yarra Valley Open Studios program was initiated by local artists in 2009 following the release of the CP & AP. In its 1st year 53 local artists opened their studios to the public over one weekend, attracting 22,000 studio visits. These strong results have continued, and the program is now heading into its 6th year. As a direct result of the success of this program 3 new regional arts businesses were established in the area catering to both the tourist and local markets. Concurrently the Dandenong Ranges Open Studios program has continued to grow steadily and brings in around A\$25,000 of income in direct artist sales alone (an average of \$1,000 per artist). Both programs draw over half of their visitation each year from outside the local region. Programs like this have succeeded in adding the Arts to the tourism mix in the local area, and have sparked a real and ongoing interest in the arts in the region.

4.5. Continuity

The CP & AP provided a solid basis to build from and the next iteration of the Yarra Ranges Council Cultural Policy and Action Plan, is currently in development. . The significant improvement to Cultural Facilities has delivered permanent cultural assets to the community for future generations to enjoy. Cultural programming, both within and beyond cultural facilities, is emerging as a priority as the region continues to progress the sentiments identified in the CP & AP 2008-2013.

5. Other Information

Yarra Ranges Council was a candidate to the first edition of the “International Award UCLG – Mexico City – Culture 21” (January-May 2014). The Jury of the Award elaborated its final report in June 2014 and requested that the UCLG Committee on Culture promotes this project as a good practice of the implementation of Agenda 21 for culture.

Text approved in September 2014.

Good practice published in October 2014.

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