



WIMMERA SOUTHERN MALLEE DEVELOPMENT

Chris Souness

Enabling the renewable energy revolution in the regions

Chris Souness, Wimmera
Southern Mallee Development



Economic profile

54,000 people delivering \$7.4B GDP



- Predominantly broadacre farming Cereals, oilseeds and pulses; Sheep (meat and wool)
- Highly export focused (60% of crops)
- Average farm size 880ha \$10000+ a Ha. Annual Sales \$1M plus
- Family-owned farms are the dominant structure
- Less than 10 private companies have over 100 employees
- 24 towns. Horsham over 16 000, Stawell over 6000. 5 towns over 1000
- 70% population bottom 30% poorest in Aus.
- Family-owned farms are the dominant structure
 - Agriculture over 20% of GDP in region
 - Nationally Ag is only 1.9%

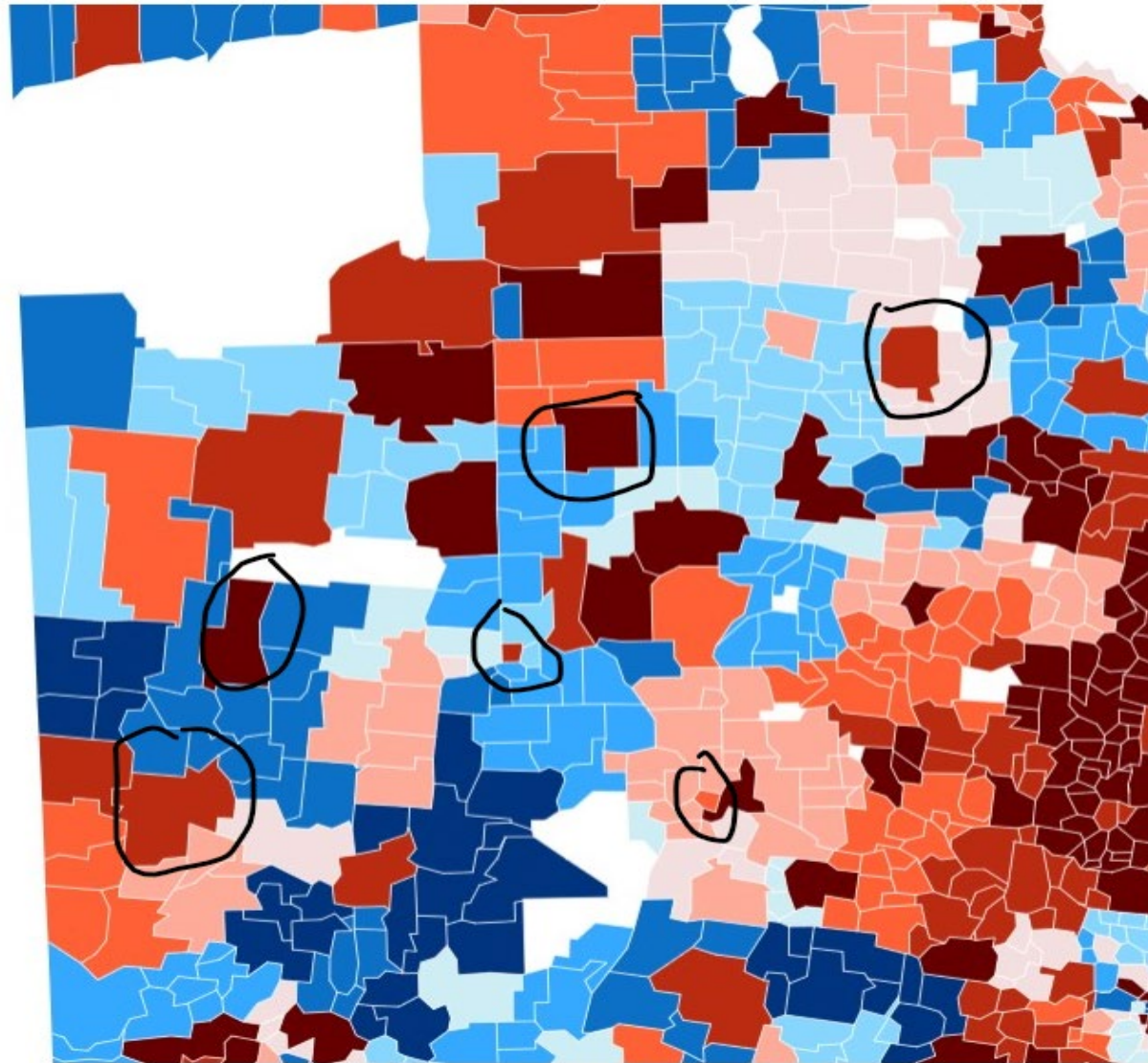
Demographics summary

- **Age Demographics:** 25% of the WSM population is aged 65+ years, compared with just 17% across all Victoria
- **Unemployment:** Low, but so is the diversity of employment opportunities and career progression pathways are limited.
- **Housing availability:** a major barrier to capitalising on economic development opportunities. Housing issues include:
 - A high level of outright home ownership, but most dwellings have relatively low market value
 - A large proportion of the dwelling stock is unsuitable
 - Housing developers cannot be attracted to the region's smaller towns
 - Rental stock very low and a large proportion is rented informally and therefore not 'on-the-market'.
- **Trades businesses:** Fully employed and have staff shortages. However, 25% of local school leavers become tradespeople but the majority leave the region.

SEIFA Index

Socio
Economic
Index
For
Areas

Most disadvantaged (1) Most advantaged (10)



WSMD activities

Resilient people and communities is our goal.

- Advocacy – Jobs, Early Years, Population and Housing, Leadership
- Growing Agriculture and Agribusiness
- Land Use Changes, Energy and Mining
- Leadership - Community Leadership, Food Business Growth, HR Network and Building Employer Capability
- Drought Community Resilience and Community Wealth Building
- Settlement Services and Migrant Workforce
- Early Years - 0 to 5 years old in our region have learning and health outcomes more aligned with the Northern Territory than the rest of Victoria



Transition Opportunities

WSM will see \$20B worth of construction over the next 10 years. Evidence suggests that the construction phase is the major opportunity to regions to capture benefits. How can we capture this and what will the legacy of these project be?

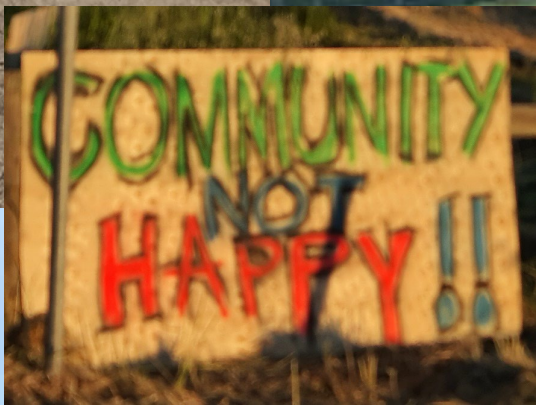
Projects:

- Critical Mineral Sands – \$4B
- Transmission – \$4B (Construction)
- Renewables – \$12B (Construction)

Plus:

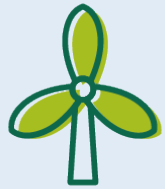
- Farming practice change due to international ESG demands
- Farming practices and emission reporting to access EU and North Asia





Transition success factors

Transition will occur on private land and impact towns. WSMD is advocating for a sustainable and inclusive transition, which includes capturing the benefits of lower emissions and electrification in the region.



Infrastructure Investment

Ensure the project get built



Community Engagement and Education

Work with the community and ensure they are on board



Workforce Development

Have the skills and people to do the work



Housing and Liveability

Top priorities for investment

WSMD sees that there are two investment types that will leave largest positive legacy.

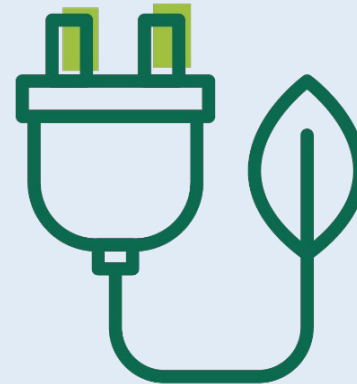
1

Housing Investment



2

Electrical Network –DSNP!!!!



Social license activities

WSMD is undertaking a range of projects to support social license for renewables in the region.



Underway

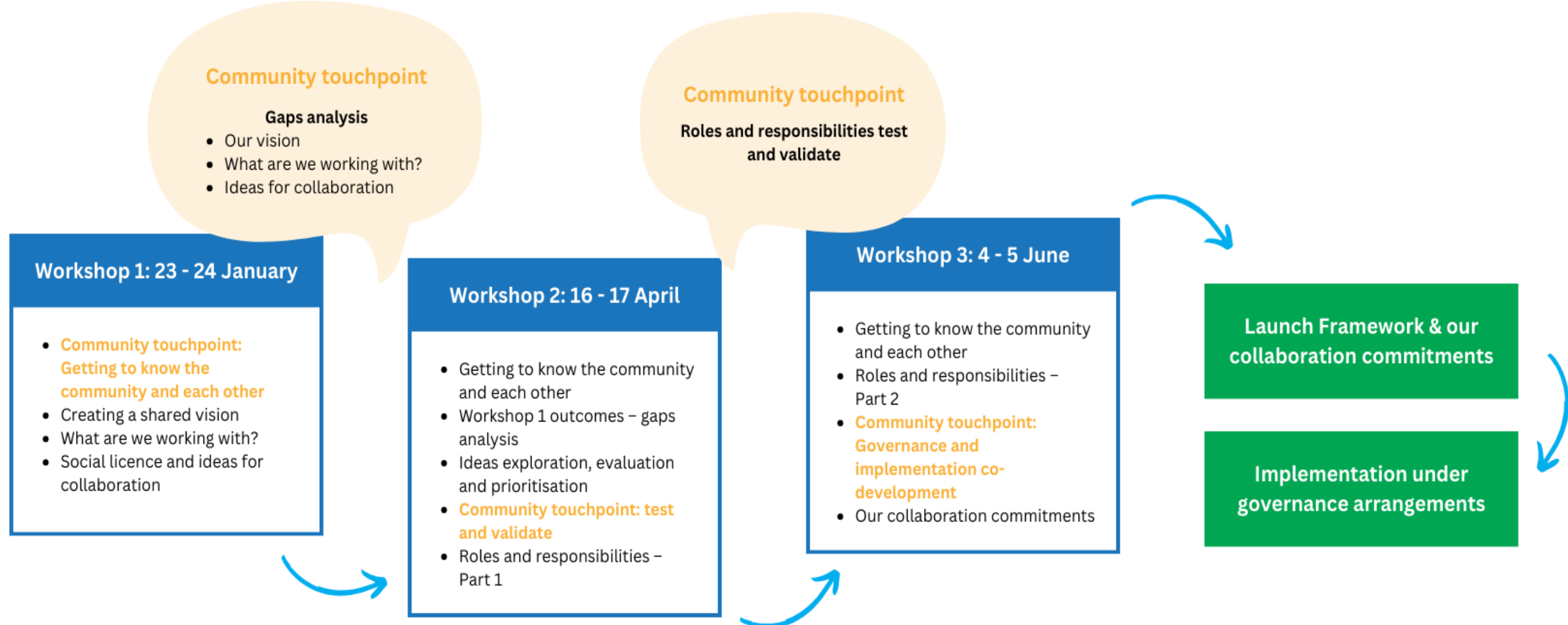
- “Nada to Negotiation” study tour – Learnings from the Toowoomba Surat Basin region (Nov 2023)
- Collaboration for Sustainable Wind Farm Development in the Western REZ Zone
- Western REZ Zone Coordination Construction Committee
- Regional Readiness Study – Urban Enterprise



Working on it

- Pilot: Engaging Wimmera Residents in the Renewable Energy Transition -
- Agrivoltaics: The Benefits of co-development on Agriculture, Renewable Energy and Mining in Western Victoria

Wind Energy and Transmission Company Engagement



NADA to Negotiation

Key Learnings

Lots of overpromising

Construction Phase – Largest Opportunity
Many projects deliver Boom then Bust.
Housing is the best opportunity.

Local Procurement won't happen without action.
Need to support local business to engage with
Corporate sector

The government is not nimble enough to be there.
at the start

Who is handling the misinformation?

Community Funds are nice, but



**WIMMERA
SOUTHERN
MALLEE
DEVELOPMENT**



Collaboration success factors



- ✓ Multi-organisational and networking is key
- ✓ Let each organisation play to its strength and share
- ✓ Work together and build trust. No one can control everything. Trust takes time to develop
- ✓ **All leaders need to be able to articulate why and what is in it for the local communities**
- ✓ Local Government plays a different role to State Government to Federal Government to regional advocacy development and community advocacy to business
- ✓ Business sector and ag sector need a voice and be active
- ✓ Learn from other regions and organisations around Australia.

Housing key to regional development

Innovation key – Govt and Developers not going to develop solutions for worker housing in rural towns
Our Solution – The Community need to become property developers.



THE
Housing
Blueprint



WSM Facilitated Housing Solutions





“Earn trust, earn trust,
earn trust. Then you can
worry about the rest.”

- Seth Godin