



29th August, 2017

**TO THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND
DECENTRALISATION.**

This submission is presented by Rural Australians for Refugees. We have used the local community of Mansfield as an example. In our view this example could apply to many medium sized communities in rural Australia where there is the potential to settle refugees to the advantage of the refugees and members of the current communities. This initiative of course must have the support of Federal, State and Local governments.

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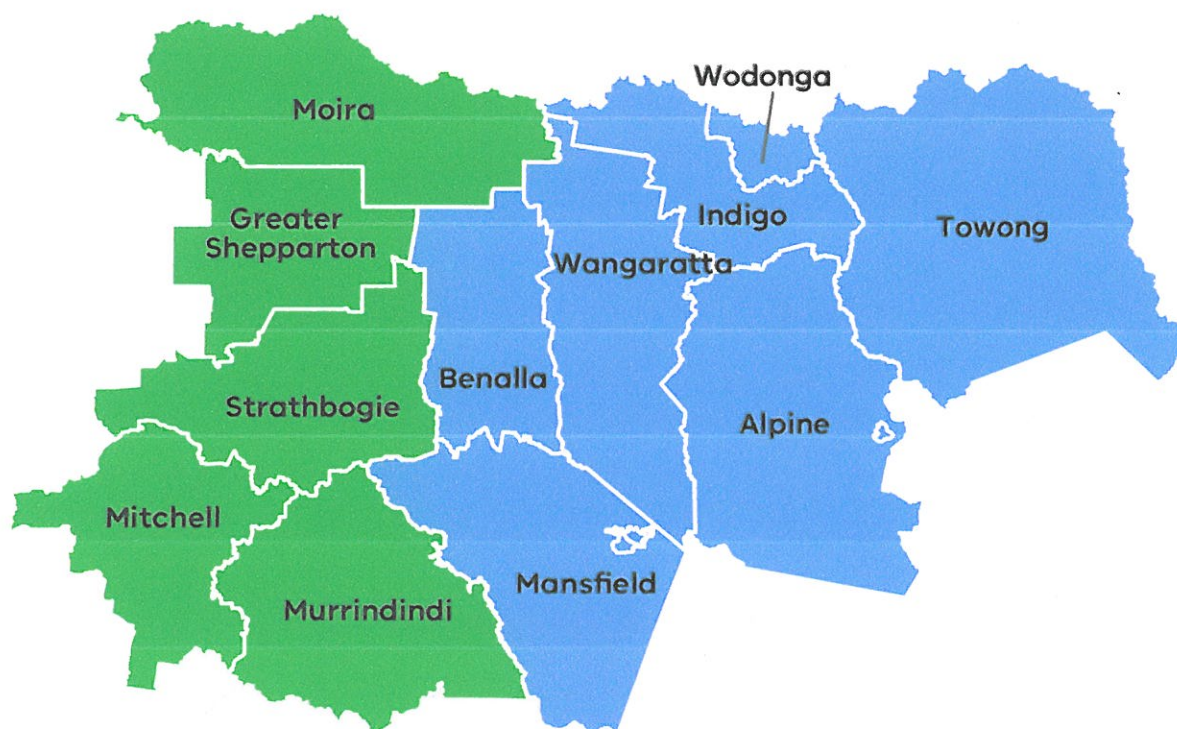
Rural Australians for Refugees on Twitter and Facebook.

RAR is a member of the Australian Refugee Action Network

(a) Best practice approaches to regional development, considering Australian and international examples, that support:

(i) *Growing and sustaining the rural and regional support base.*

The Shire of Mansfield as in many rural communities is well placed to consider the settlement of refugees into the district. The economic, social, and cultural benefits that additional population numbers will bring, will support the existing locality to develop and flourish further and provide sound settlement experiences contributing to the wellbeing of refugees in contributing to regional development. Mansfield Shire is located in the Hume region of Victoria, please see map below



(Ref: Victorian Regional Development-<http://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/victorian-regions>)

Community Profile:

Mansfield is located 180kms, north east of Melbourne, and consists of 3,843 square kilometres. The geographical terrain and optimal landscapes provide itself to a range of year round tourist options, utilising the Alpine resort areas Mt Buller, Mt Stirling and the Great Dividing Range. Alpine National Park and waterways include Lake Eildon which attracts a range of recreational and lifestyle options. The beauty of the area is one of the attractions for people to visit, and many refugees from war torn

countries have remarked anecdotally that the rural area is something they feel connected to as it reminds them of villages and homes in the countryside of their countries of origin.' (MRAR- Family Billeting Weekend May 2017)

Conversely there are also 14 villages located within the Shire that are geographically, historically and socially unique and combined with differing micro climates, offers further range of choice.

(ii) *The benefits of economic growth and opportunity being shared right across Australia*

Mansfield requires a growing and sustaining rural and regional population base, to ensure the economic efficiency of the municipality if it is to develop further.

A number of younger families are attracted to moving to Mansfield based on its close proximity to Melbourne and the relevant cheaper costs of first homes and rural lifestyle, not afforded to them in Melbourne. There are also new housing estates opening up, for families to buy into the new home market.

The 45% of Mansfield rate payer base who do not live in the shire, have holiday homes that when sold are more affordable for first home buyers, having an opportunity to enter the market, as a first step. There is a shortage of available long term rental homes, and during the tourist season many holiday homes are utilised as cash flows, as tourism and accommodation businesses. Air BnB and other on line accommodation sites are promoted by locals as a mechanism for catchment of weekenders during peak tourism times. The older nearing retirement non - residential ratepayers consider their long connections with the Mansfield and districts, as attractive option for retirees.

There is a need in Mansfield to change the demographic and economic base of the town to ensure that the schools, the hospital, the services - can continue to function and so the life of the community is preserved.

(iii) *Developing the capabilities of regional Australians*

Refugees and migrants are an essential component to the development of regional and rural Australia.

We know from recent studies that the settlement of refugees in Australia brings net economic benefit. We also know from the experience of other regional towns in Victoria that the contribution of refugees can make a significant difference to community life. In the case of Nhill it meant that the foundation elements of the community were secured. The school had an influx of students. The town had an economic boost. And the community has had an opportunity to show its heart through the welcome it has offered.

Refugees currently living in Wodonga and Shepparton are visiting Mansfield and seeing the opportunities for future expansion. As the communities grow and support each other across the North East there is potential for Mansfield as a settlement options, as in similar regions in Australia.

(iv) *Growing and diversifying of the regional economic and employment base*

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data (2012) shows Mansfield's Shire's resident population at 8,067 in comparison the 2016 Census of 8,589. There would be increased economic development if permanent resident numbers expanded.

- (a) At the moment the 25-64 age range makes up half the municipality, supporting the older and younger aged quadrilles. If Mansfield increased demographics in the 20-50 year old residential cohort it could provide additional labour, potentially expand services and build infrastructure creating dynamic future for the community.
- (b) The opportunity for Refugees and Asylum seekers to support this development and participate in Mansfield's growth also adds value overall to the North East region.

Population	8,589	
0-14	1,539	17.9
15-24	798	9.3
25-64	4,180	48.7
65+	2,062	24.0
Total	8,589	100
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Aboriginal & TS Islanders	66	0.8
Ranking	53	

(ref: 2016 Statistics Greater City of Dandenong Victorian Statistics)

(c) Elderly population

Ref: The Department of Health and Human Services projections including the ageing community in the Hume region.

- (d) Mansfield's Aged population is projected to increase by 92% (2011-2025 projected)
- (e) Similarly the Mansfield shire website highlights population growth: 2.2% (ABS 2012). It is estimated that by the year 2031 Mansfield Shire's resident population will be 10,011.
- (f) Dependency ratio – the ratio between those who are not economically active and those who are economically active) – is projected to increase from 2011 to 2031.
- (g) Ageing in place – people want to live at home among their own communities and networks
- (h) Ageing population will contribute to an increase in the number of older people living in single-person households
- (i) Transport - accessible transport options are paramount for older people to gain access to health and community services
- (j) Aged care settings – it is important that building design considers the needs of older people
- (k) Climate – the physical climate and climate change can impact on ageing communities – high temperatures, flood, air pollution

(v) *An improved quality of life for regional Australians*

Refugees add to the social, cultural and economic development of rural communities.

Education and schools are requiring expansion as the municipality is growing

- Primary Schools (Public, Catholic, Steiner)
- Mansfield Secondary College
- Mansfield Adult Continuing Education (MACE)

Health:

- Aged & Community Health Services

- Hospital
- Nursing Home
- Aged Care Facility
- Retirement Village

(vi) *Vibrant more cohesive and engaged regional communities*

Residents from a range of ethnic groups will strengthen the social fabric and add value through culture, food, art, music.

There is a broad base of community activities:

- Performing Arts, theatre, music, orchestra, choir, pottery, art, sculpture.
- Recreation and Civic development groups Scouts, Guides.
- Social groups: Rotary, Apex, Lions, Sports.
- Mansfield Multicultural group
- German Austrian Social group
- Regional outreach services from NEMA (North East Multicultural Association)
- Wodonga Albury Ethnic Communities Council
- Shepparton District Ethnic Communities Council
- Victorian Multicultural Commissions Regional Advisory Committees

(vii) *Leveraging long term private investment*

Growing and diversifying of the regional economic and employment base

Mansfield has a sound economic base with the current population figures to complement it. As families move into Mansfield the diversification and the growth of employment opportunities becomes apparent. Mansfield has traditionally been a primary producing area with cattle, sheep and agriculture, but the changing growth of the district has seen the development of unique approaches to work, and business development.

An increase to permanent residents would lead to increased economic development.

Advantages to Mansfield

Residents from a range of ethnic groups will strengthen the social fabric and add value through culture, food, art, music.

Economic development opportunities.

It is estimated that Mansfield Shire has an employment base of 3,743 and an industry output of \$823m. The impact of tourism as an economic driver is estimated as 20% of total industry output and 25% of total employment .

(RDA Australia - Hume Economic Profile report).

Commercial / Industrial Profile (Council website)

No. of businesses: 500+ (small business)

Major Industries:

- Farming - seed, sheep & cattle
- Industrial
- Manufacturing i.e. Crawfords Kitchens
- Related timber industry
- Retail

Agribusiness

- Farming and agribusiness are key economic drivers, contributing \$60.7m to the shire
- Seed production
- Leveridge long term private investment in agribusiness
- Value added products grape and tomato production
- Local farmers markets with growing sales of local produce supporting cafes and restaurants, and an emerging bespoke gourmet food supply industry such as saffron, capers, and organic products.

Employment/Services

- Vacuum trucks
- Construction
- Maintenance, house and property
- Support for Ageing in place
- Lifestyle and recreation

Tourism

- Resort Management Board (employment)
- Ski hire, accommodation services

Unemployment rate: Below State average.

(viii) A place based approach that considers local circumstances competitive advantages and involves collective governance

Contribution required from Government

- Socially and economically disadvantaged residents will also be advantaged by the following services.
- English language classes via MACE or extension classes at secondary college.
- Skills training via MACE or TAFE outreach in partnership with secondary college.

- Increase to social housing with associated employment opportunities.

References:

Victorian Regional Development-<http://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/victorian-regions>

2012 Australian Bureau of Statistics Report - Mansfield Shire

<http://www.greaterdandenong.com/document/18464/statistical-data-for-victorian-communities>