Glenn Stewart
Murray Mallee Local
Learning and Employment
Network

**MDBA Submission – Swan Hill sitting**

The Swan Hill region is an interesting mix of great wealth and prosperity intermingled with significant social infrastructure issues and damning indicators.

The total gross value of agricultural production in the Swan Hill Rural City Council was estimated at $343.3 million in FY 2005-06. The horticultural industry was worth an estimated $209.9 million in the same year and the value of crop and sheep (including wool) production from the region was estimated at $99.3 million and $11.1 million respectively. With the expansion of irrigated horticulture since 2005 it is estimated that the value of agriculture and horticulture is now worth well over 1.2 billion dollars annually in the Swan Hill LGA.

A workforce of approximately 14,000 people exists in the region, with a substantial number of individuals being employed in the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry. Retail trade is another major sector, as well as health and community services and manufacturing.

A large proportion of workers are involved in management and administrative roles. Labourers are also common, followed by those working in clerical, sales and services roles, professionals and tradespersons.

Requirements for both labourers, and semi-skilled management in horticulture have been accelerated by the rapid expansion in land zoned for irrigation between Robinvale and Swan Hill.

Turning our attention to the social infrastructure of the Swan Hill LGA we find some startling results. Swan Hill LGA is ranked the 10th highest in the State of Victoria for social disadvantage. The SEIFA index (which is a measure used to indicate a communities vulnerability) compares 1474 State Suburbs measured across Victoria.

The Robinvale and Swan Hill State Suburbs are in the 2 most disadvantaged deciles in other words - 80% of Victoria is MORE socio-economically advantaged.

Tony Vinson in his well publicised report "Dropping off the Edge" has Nyah, Nyah West and Lake Boga identified as among Victoria's 40 most socially disadvantaged postcodes.

1

23.2% of the municipality's 15-19 year-old school leavers are disengaged compared to the Victorian State average of 15.4%; of those youth still at school the Department of Education and Early Childhood's 'Swan Hill Network' exhibited a higher level of absenteeism mean for school years 7-12 (at 18.2 days) than the 2007/08 state benchmark (of 16.3 days).

In 2007/08 Swan Hill Rural City Council had more than double the Victorian average of family incidents (including a much higher rate of family incidents where charges were laid and where an intervention order (IVO) was applied for) and during 2006 9.8% of all confinements in the Swan Hill Rural City Council were to teenage mothers (women aged under 20 years) compared to a Victorian average of 2.9%.

In 2009, the Swan Hill LGA had the lowest Year 12 or equivalent completion rate in Victoria (53.7 % in 2009 table below), but conversely had one of the highest participation rates in VET per capita in the State - doubling the State average.

| Region | Local Govt Area | Attainment Rate | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
| Loddon Mallee | | 73.4 | 71.2 | 70.7 |
| | Buloke (S) | 76.2 | 87.2 | 77.7 |
| | Campaspe (S) | 70.3 | 67.8 | 72.4 |
| | C. Goldfields (S) | 75.9 | 66.9 | 63.2 |
| | Gannawarra (S) | 64.7 | 75.0 | 64.3 |
| | Gr. Bendigo (C) | 67.9 | 64.2 | 68.5 |
| | Loddon (S) | 84.3 | 85.1 | 112.0 |
| | Mac. Ranges (S) | 80.1 | 84.4 | 76.5 |
| | Mildura (RC) | 65.1 | 63.4 | 63.7 |
| | Mt Alexander (S) | 74.7 | 71.1 | 69.5 |
| | Swan Hill (RC) | 73.0 | 62.8 | 53.7 |

An example of this participation in Vocational Training can be seen through a 30% increase in the number of scheduled hours delivered at Sunraysia Institute of TAFE's Swan Hill campus since 2005.

Changes to water policy we believe will dampen economic activity and thus threaten the availability of apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities in the region in the future.

Evidence clearly indicates that when economies slide into recession or experience sudden impacts that young people in the main are the first to suffer.