

Material Thinking

INTO THE CURRENT

Cultural Strategy Discussion Paper for the Mildura Rural City Council

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Contents

Contents	2
PART I. Overview	3
Project background	3
Guide to this document.....	3
About the consultations and research methods informing this Strategy	3
What a Cultural Strategy can do.....	5
The Mildura Local Government Area at a glance.....	5
Context: A creative region and its community.....	6
What do we mean by culture, cultural change, and cultural development?.....	6
5 principles of creative cultural development	7
Recommended actions at a glance.....	7
PART II. Who are We? The need for robust civic exchange for a connected community	9
Action 1. Strengthen MRCC advisory groups	9
Action 2. Strengthen exchange and partnerships between MRCC and its community	10
Action 3. Review and revitalise the volunteering sector.....	10
Action 4. Cultivate stronger interaction across Sunraysia heritage sector	11
Action 5. Advance work towards a First Nations cultural template.....	12
Action 6. Expand promotion of community participation in environmental work.....	13
Action 7. Improve local food security	14
Action 8. Make the connected region visible	15
PART III. Revitalising the Arts and Creative Industries.....	17
Background.....	17
Now and then: Context for a new arts and creative industries strategy	17
Mildura's creative import-export economy	18
Recommendations for a revitalised creative Mildura	20
PART IV. Stimulating a new culture of strategic problem solving	24
Implementation Strategy	27
PART V. Audit of key Arts and Creative Industry organisations*.....	30
Major Community Arts Organisations	30
Visual Arts	30
Performing Arts, inc Theatre, Dance and Music	30
Graphic Design.....	32
Digital Design.....	32
Architectural Design and Drafting	33
Sign Industry and printing.....	33
Photography and Videography.....	34
Fashion Design	35
Art Therapy.....	36
Art Education providers (senior and post-secondary only)	36
Arts and Creative Industry-specific Festivals	37
APPENDICES	38
Appendix 1. Engagement list	38
Appendix 2. Cultural place survey analysis	42
References	43

PART I. Overview

Project background

In August 2023 Material Thinking was contracted by MRCC to develop a Strategy with the following objectives:

- Articulate a vision for the cultural life of the region;
- Identify key opportunities and areas of focus to realise the vision;
- Define Council's role and guide its investments;
- Conduct an audit of cultural assets.

Initial conversations with MRCC officers and Councillors highlighted key areas for the Strategy to explore:

- Tell the story of the region and its people, building a shared identity to connect the past to the future;
- Engender civic pride across the community;
- Deepen understanding of the municipality's various cultures and connections between communities;
- Strengthen the region's creative sector and enable it to thrive;
- Foster an environment of creative innovation;
- Foster an understanding of the cultural value of innovation;
- Connect to opportunities in the wider cultural and tourism sectors;
- Look beyond mainstream obvious creative industries, such as education and commercial artists (such as graphic designers, architects, sign writers, inventors, etc);
- Consider local colloquialisms and indigenous names;
- Establish an evidence base for further investment in targeted areas; and
- Ensure impact is felt across the entire municipality.

Guide to this document

The Strategy report is structured in five sections. The first section sets out the background and establishes the context for a new Cultural Strategy for the Mildura Rural City Council. Part II recommends actions in support of revitalised and strengthened public cultural life in the MRCC jurisdiction. Part III examines the state of the region's arts and cultural industries and makes recommendations in support of a refreshed arts ecosphere. Part IV outlines recommendations for further work that would significantly advance the ambitions of this Strategy and captures the recommendations of sections II, III and IV in an Implementation Plan. Part V is an arts and creative industries audit. Additional contextualising material including project engagement list and survey analysis is presented in appendices.

About the consultations and research methods informing this Strategy

This strategy has been shaped by consultations of significant depth and breadth undertaken across the Mildura local government area, guided by qualitative research methods. Open-ended interviews with individuals and small groups were the primary means of data collection, allowing issues and themes to be flexibly explored and relevant experiences and perspectives to be drawn out in some

detail. Open-ended interviews generate a different kind of data to surveys. Through dialogue they enable an interviewee to identify issues of significance to them, and the interviewer to pose questions, respond dynamically to issues raised, and draw connections between issues in ways that surveys cannot.¹

120 interviews ranging from 30 to 90 minutes were held with more than 200 individuals and representatives of organisations, businesses, and associations. These include leaders, staff and volunteers of community organisations and the social sector, First Nations communities, multicultural and multifaith communities; schools, TAFE, La Trobe university; business, agriculture, arts, tourism, sports and recreation, and heritage sectors; residents and liaison committees of small townships; Mildura Hospital, Mildura Police, and members of the community at large. The views of young people have been canvassed in a senior secondary classroom and with Mildura's Youth Council. MRCC staff and councillors have been interviewed. Appendix 2 provides a comprehensive engagement list. Public submissions were invited via an online Have Your Say survey on the MRCC website, 15 responses were received. A supplementary survey, whose results are summarised as Appendix 1, was conducted with 41 residents by phone in the final stage of this project. Attendance at a range of community events and cultural activities, also listed at Appendix 2, have provided further opportunities for community engagement, and have helped shape the ideas in this strategy.

Consultations have explored several wide-ranging lines of investigation that respond to the initial brief and can be distilled in the following questions:

- Who are we and what unites us?
- What do we care about and prioritise?
- What are the places we cherish, feel nourished, and can express who we are?
- Through what creative pursuits are we inspired to reach our highest achievements?
- What stories narrate and animate our shared identity?
- Where are the fault lines in this region and how might relationships across the larger community be strengthened?
- By what means can we secure a future in this region that is sustainable, secure, flourishing?

Recurring themes and issues of significance were identified across the interviews. This report takes the core issues raised in interviews and surveys as a way of taking the pulse of the community at a critical time in the region's history. It pays attention to what people have said in relation to the region's cultural identity historically and in the present. It considers future ambitions. The report translates that data into a vision for the cultural life of the region, for creative cultural development, and a related plan for action.

It is intended that the Strategy will guide Council's future work across all portfolios. Accordingly, this work is informed by and engages with other relevant MRCC strategies and projects. MRCC is doing significant work via a series of plans and strategies that relate variously to the cultural life in the region. These include: Community Vision 2021-40, Council Plan 2021-25, Community Climate Change Response Plan 2024-29, Reconciliation Action Plan (under review), Community Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-25, Environmental Education Plan 2020-24, Tourism Signage Audit and Strategy 2022, Heritage Strategy (in process), various Masterplans, Community plans, and Youth Council Strategy (in process). In several instances this report makes recommendations for expanding work under other existing plans and strategies. It is also intended to stand on its own as an inspirational future focused guide to cultural development in this region.

What a Cultural Strategy can do

Securing conditions for a thriving cultural life requires constant and energetic attention. To be authentic, a cultural strategy draws from traditions and local knowledge, from memory and imagination, from tried and tested ways of solving problems and creating enterprise. It requires ongoing reassessment, experimentation, new partnerships, and new ways of working. A successful cultural strategy embraces openness, flexibility, risk taking, and ambition. It engages all stakeholders in social contracts of shared responsibility. A useful, practical, and inspiring cultural strategy channels energy into pathways that strengthen social inclusiveness, ecological care, and economic value.

A cultural strategy reminds people of where they have come from and provides inspirational guidance to the future. It attracts newcomers who wish to be a part of the story and it stimulates economic growth. A well-crafted cultural strategy should thread through and stimulate activity across every area of civic life.

At a practical and aspirational level, this strategy is intended as a catalyst to enable a community that has long lived with the pressures of accelerating change to pursue a secure, sustainable, and vibrant future. It identifies for activation resources held by the community, and it proposes some new directions.

Listening to what people have said in open ended interviews—and hearing a series of strong recurring messages—has had a formative impact on the crafting of this Strategy at the level of form as well as content.

The most significant and recurring messages call for transformations in communication and connection at a time of rapid change and fragmentation, for the strengthening of relationships between people, and between people and their places. Consultations suggest that securing shared cultural identity and common purpose will require collective community effort. Many distinct cultural identities are recognised and in some cases are flourishing across the region, yet shared cultural identity remains elusive.

There are no silver bullets in the challenging arena of cultural development. In the first instance trust must be established—at a time of diminished social cohesion, misinformation, and with lack of trust in governments being widespread and historically unprecedented.² Consequently, many of the recommended actions of this strategy emphasise processes to be undertaken. It would be counter-productive to anticipate the duration or outcomes of those processes. They need to be genuinely embraced as open-ended projects. Consultations suggest that MRCC should lead this work of cultural development with the people of the region as a matter of high priority.

The Mildura Local Government Area at a glance

Mildura Rural City Council is located in north-west Victoria with a population of 57,156 and covering an area of 22,082 square kilometres.³ The municipality is home to communities who speak seventy-two languages. 9.5% of residents speak a language other than English at home. 4.6% of the population identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Mildura is the largest town, with a population of approximately 35,000 which has doubled since 1981. Significant industries include agriculture and horticulture, with Mildura ranked “Australia’s richest farming region” by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2022.⁴ Health care and social assistance sectors are currently the largest

employers. Mildura is a service centre with a catchment population of approximately 60,000 people that extends into New South Wales and South Australia. The second largest township is Ouyen which operates as a service hub for the surrounding agricultural hinterland and Mallee Track townships. The region's population is predicted to grow to 62,500 by 2036.⁵

Context: A creative region and its community

Travelling across the vast 22,000 square kilometres of the Mildura local government area can be an exhilarating experience. Sun-blasted landscapes of Mallee eucalypt, pine, and belah meet the life-giving floodplains and flows of the Murray River. Vast cropping fields and irrigated blocks of grapes and citrus drive an economy anchored in food production. A cosmopolitan rural city renowned for its arts festivals, cuisine, and motor sports. Self-organised townships and tight-knit villages provide gateways to national parks and rich heritage. Sunraysia-Mallee is a zone of diverse and interconnected landscapes, communities, experiences.

Out here, all things lead to and from the mighty Murray River. The river creates an interdependent region. It carries its history and its future within its flows. For millennia, neighbouring Aboriginal communities have modelled good governance on water's creative energy. Irrigation-based food production has been at the heart of Mildura's postcolonial economy. Under conditions of climate emergency water is increasingly precious, a site of contestation and environmental care. Today the river marks state boundaries, yet for millennia it has been its own force of connection, spiritual power, nourishment. A place of recreation, relaxation, and business. A source of joy and threat. Its precarious wellbeing links directly to the security and sustenance of the communities and ecosystems who rely upon it. MRCC recognises this fragility in its declaration of a climate emergency. This Strategy suggests Sunraysia-Mallee can be usefully identified as an indicator region for the wellbeing of rural Australia.⁶

Like water, ambition, inventiveness, and determination run as life forces through the MRCC jurisdiction. People are invested and passionate advocates of their places, communities, creative pursuits, and future aspirations. The people of the region are the drivers of the future.

What do we mean by culture, cultural change, and cultural development?

Through the twentieth century to the present, Mildura's cultural identity has been tied up with Sunraysia, the place of vine-ripened dried fruit.⁷ Its geographic isolation encouraged a culture of self-sufficiency, of helping, of proud independence. An oasis and a utopia, a place of nourishing, multicultural life.⁸ From the post-WWII period to the present, successive waves of migration have deepened the cultural diversity of Sunraysia communities. This diversity is embraced with enthusiasm by a wide cross-section of the population and distilled in the MRCC vision, to make this "the most liveable and people-friendly community in Australia".⁹

Yet transformations in global agricultural economy, depopulation of the farming hinterland, decoupling of water from land, and an expanding centralised service industry have, as elsewhere in rural Australia, delivered major shifts to the social fabric of this region.¹⁰ 2021 census data show that while income from agricultural production continues to be central to the economy, the largest employers of people are the health and service sectors.¹¹ High levels of disadvantage and social indicators for health and wellbeing below state averages are also characteristic of this region. The horticultural industry relies upon thousands of seasonal workers, many of them currently under the Pacific Australia Labour Migration (PALM) scheme, and transience in the wider community adds

Material Thinking

another complex set of social dynamics. Challenges associated with Mildura's tri-state border location and relative geographic isolation have been highlighted and exacerbated by the pandemic. Coinciding with challenges associated with variable water availability and cost, rising temperatures, and other impacts of climate change, Sunraysia-Mallee stands at a pivotal moment. Choices made now will have profound, interconnected implications for the wellbeing of environments, towns, communities, individuals.

This Strategy takes seriously this complex of issues that impact upon individuals, families, communities' senses of who they are, what they value, whether, where, and how they find security and sense of purpose. These issues equally impact upon governments' capacity to meet the needs of their constituencies.

"Make it new" is a phrase attributed to American poet and critic Ezra Pound. As in cultivation and pruning for new fruit, purposeful cultural development is a generative process—it preserves core strengths while activating new growth in support of flourishing life. Recommendations associated with this strategy follow this principle. These recommendations are made in the larger context of Mildura's history, a history replete with the pursuit of bold, creative ideas for change. In its histories of environmental adaptation, entrepreneurial innovation, volunteerism, and multiculturalism, Mildura offers unique resources and responses to the most pressing challenges of our times.

5 principles of creative cultural development

Five broad principles have emerged in consultations that inform the recommended actions of this strategy. These principles are fundamental to a healthy society and any successful project in creative cultural development.

- **Making space:**
for plural modes of expression, for voices that don't often get heard, for curiosity, debate, and pursuit of new ideas;
- **Increasing visibility:**
of what is working well, of unseen or under-appreciated assets;
- **Building support:**
financial, social, and material in response to need and priorities;
- **Fostering respect and responsibility:**
shared purpose only emerges from openness, genuine interaction, and commitment;
- **Encouraging ambition:**
outside-of-the-square thinking, fostering "can do" attitudes.

Recommended actions at a glance

PART II: Who are we?

- Strengthen MRCC advisory groups
- Strengthen exchange and partnerships between MRCC and its communities
- Review and foster a revitalised volunteer sector
- Cultivate stronger interaction across Sunraysia heritage communities
- Advance work towards a First Nations cultural template
- Expand promotion of community participation in environmental work
- Improve local food security

Material Thinking

- Make the connected region visible

PART III: Arts and cultural industries

- Conduct further consultations and feasibility for a First Nations Cultural Centre
- Conduct a review leading to restructure of the Mildura Arts Centre
- Provide support, where possible, to the larger not-for-profit arts sector
- Establish an inter-disciplinary arts hub
- Endorse the application for Mildura as a City of Public Art
- Develop authentic cultural tourism infrastructure and activities around the River
- Encourage better engagement between arts organisations and diverse communities
- Undertake scoping review and strategy to intensify creative precincts in Mildura city
- Explore options for an international artists' residency program for the region

PART IV:

- Explore feasibility for a new advocacy body, The Indicator Forum
- Initiate discussion for a cross-jurisdictional Cultural Strategy for the Riverland region

¹ At the commencement of each interview, the purpose and scope of the consultations was explained. Each interview canvassed the idea of a cultural strategy with a particular focus on the perspective of the interviewee and their background, their area of community and/or professional responsibility. In this way no two interviews were the same. In some interviews a single question was posed, and this was sufficient to frame an entire discussion. Interviews were not audio recorded as anonymity was promised, to encourage uninhibited discussion. Detailed notes were taken.

² Scanlon Foundation, 2023, Mapping Social Cohesion annual report, available at:

<https://scanloninstitute.org.au/publications/mapping-social-cohesion-report/2023-mapping-social-cohesion-report>

³ <https://www.mildura.vic.gov.au/Council/About-Council/City-Profile>

⁴ <https://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au/news/national/australias-richest-farming-region-mildura-tops-the-list/news-story/67287a13f311eb938a6d6a7755c4f471>

⁵ <https://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/victorias-regions/mildura>

⁶ Paul Carter, *Ground Truthing: Explorations in a Creative Region*, UWA Press, 2010;

Richard Broome, Charles Fahey, Andrea Gaynor and Katie Holmes, *Mallee Country: Land, People, History*, Monash University Press, 2019; Melinda Hinkson, 2024, Farming Futures: Views from the Millewa-Mallee, *Griffith Review* 83, pp. 162-72; Lauren Rickards and Todd Denham, 2023, Rural and Regional Change: Opportunities for La Trobe University, Climate Adaptation Lab, unpublished "pitch deck", December 2023, in author's possession.

Lauren Rickards and Melinda Hinkson, 2020, Reimagining rural relationships, *Arena Quarterly* 4, available at:

<https://arena.org.au/reimagining-regional-relationships/>

⁷ Ernestine Hill, 1965, *Water into Gold*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson.

⁸ Stefano de Pieri, 1999, *A Gondola on the Murray*, Sydney: ABC Books.

⁹ <https://www.mildura.vic.gov.au/Council/Policies-plans-and-strategies/Community-Vision-Council-Plan>

¹⁰ Gabrielle Chan, 2021, *Why You Should Give a F*ck about Farming*, Penguin, Sydney; Linda Cheshire and Geoffrey Lawrence, 2005, Neoliberalism, individualisation and community: Regional restructuring in Australia, *Social Identities*, 11(5), 435-45; Scott Hamilton and Stuart Kells, 2021, *Sold Down the River*, Melbourne: Text Publishing.

¹¹ <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/215021398>; MRCC, *State of Mildura Report*, 2018.

PART II. Who are We? The need for robust civic exchange for a connected community

Utopianism, the generation of bold ideas, making change through dogged determination, are qualities associated with Sunraysia-Mallee culture. Culturally diverse and tight knit ethnic communities prioritise kinship and community care as much as business. A strong independent and community-controlled health and social support sector has been built over several decades. Self-sufficiency and “helping out” are attitudes adopted out of necessity in the early years of the settlement that remain essential to local culture and the workings of the local economy.

Yet fragmentation, stretched social fabric, and social isolation are widely identified matters of concern. Across the region there are strong and consistent calls for new ways of bringing people together, for new kinds of future-focused dialogue in support of a strengthened community and a flourishing region. The most pressing issues consultations identified include: impacts of transformations in agriculture; depopulation of townships and the rural hinterland; retraction of volunteering; marginalisation of non-English speaking families; youth disengagement; family violence and safety; lack of affordable and available housing; deteriorating mental health and wellbeing; politics of water reform; river health; tyranny of distance; diminishment of the arts sector; infrastructural needs; overreach of government regulation.

This section of the Cultural Strategy responds to a consistent message heard across the consultations—that fragmentation, siloing, and isolation are core barriers to a shared culture, and that new forms of interaction, building trust, and new relationships are the essential foundations for a flourishing cultural life.

Action 1. Strengthen MRCC advisory groups

Within its existing organisational structure, MRCC has a series of advisory bodies and liaison committees established as conduits for communication between Council and key sectors of the community, and between Council and smaller townships, over matters of concern. While this Strategy has not been tasked with investigating advisory committees, several of these groups were key conduits for consultations. It is apparent that some advisory groups are highly effective while others lack direction and purpose. Reviewing membership, scope and purpose of these committees and more fully activating them as vehicles for genuine and effective engagement is the logical place to start in addressing a widely reported need for transformed communication and relationship building.

Recommendations

In reviewing its advisory groups MRCC should ensure that all priority areas are appropriately represented. If a key purpose of advisory committees is to foster interactions between community and Council over pressing matters of social and economic concern, do the existing groups provide holistic coverage or should further groups be established?

Review purpose, remit, and membership of each group.

Ensure efficient channels of communication and genuine engagement with MRCC staff are in place and that baseline information such as contact lists are reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis.

Material Thinking

Explore opportunities for expanding the public outreach role of advisory committees.

Action 2. Strengthen exchange and partnerships between MRCC and its community

Mildura has always been an import-export creative economy, thriving on the circulation of new energy, ideas, and new relationships. It is celebrated for its “open arms” welcome of new arrivals and rich program of ethnic celebrations, cultural festivals, and community events. Churches, ethnic communities, faith communities, sporting competitions, and migrant support agencies play vital roles in welcoming and lending support to newly arrived residents and seasonal workers. Yet some of these relationships are fragile. There is a delicate balance between the positive recognition of cultural difference and its segregation.

MRCC through its grants programs lends support to and partners with an enormous variety of community development projects across the region. However, consultations with people in community development, townships, the not-for-profit and arts sectors have identified a desire for a qualitative shift in interactions between MRCC and local projects and applicants for grants. There is an obvious challenge here for MRCC to navigate the regulatory requirements of the Local Government Act while enabling the creative aspirations of its residents. How can MRCC transcend a widely observed disconnect between “Council culture” and grassroots ways of working? Consultations suggest that one positive response would be to enable MRCC staff in relevant portfolios to spend more time out in the community, building stronger relationships with people, a better sense of the aspirations behind proposed projects, and greater appreciation of grassroots approaches to project development.

Recommendations:

MRCC to review the working arrangements of staff in relevant roles associated with community and cultural development to foster more effective grassroots interaction and enabling of local projects. A standout success story is the Mallee Track Community Development Officer position. Assessment of that role would be advantageous in any review of working arrangements for other staff.

MRCC to take a more active role in connecting established and embryonic projects for mutual benefit and mentorship.

Action 3. Review and revitalise the volunteering sector

The creative work of volunteers is foundational to incredible achievements across this region. The work of energetic and committed volunteers is everywhere; in the running of sports competitions, delivery of many kinds of social care, operation of food banks, curation of festivals, and in the functioning of diverse community-owned enterprises. Small voluntary projects have over time evolved into robust enterprises with far reaching benefits. Along the Mallee Track entire towns run on the committed efforts of volunteers. Fantastic project ideas continue to be dreamed into reality: theatres and heritage buildings are restored, botanical gardens are maintained, wetlands are rehabilitated, and community owned and operated enterprises including caravan parks, a fuel station, even a recreational lake have been created.

There are widespread observations across the region of a shrinking pool of volunteers jeopardising the delivery of social care and important projects. In 2015 the Mallee Track Resilient Volunteer Services Review found an aging and declining pool of “traditional” volunteers; a preference for

project based or “micro-volunteering”; negative impacts of training and regulation requirements; and, the influence of intergenerational change, were placing significant pressure on township communities and their essential services.

MRCC is aware of the shrinkage in volunteering commitment and has been hosting a series of volunteer expos and associated activities. Consultations indicate that there is a need for further fresh thinking and new ways of bringing together potential pools of volunteers with activities in need of support.

Despite perceptions that volunteering is an activity associated with older people, Mildura’s youth are passionate and proud of their volunteering efforts but also express frustration over the difficulty of identifying projects requiring assistance to which they might contribute their time. They describe volunteering as a vital activity of purpose and fulfilment for young people, as well as a vehicle for the cultivation of skills, new relationships, and future employment. They point out that through volunteering young people become invested in the community and see possible futures for themselves.

There are important counter-movements to be highlighted in the volunteering activity of the region. At Ouyen and along the Mallee Track the work of volunteers literally runs communities. Against the perception of a volunteer crisis, inventive intergenerational training and transfer of responsibility is underway in projects such as the Mallee Root Festival. The people leading these projects have considerable insights to share.

Recommendations:

MRCC to instigate a review of the transforming social landscape of volunteering leading to a new strategy to address the region’s volunteering needs and opportunities. The review should build upon the important work completed by the 2015 Mallee Track Resilient Volunteer Services Review and give attention to the differing situations of volunteering in the townships and in Mildura city. The strategy should look to engage the participation of young people and newly arrived residents and consider recommendations of The Mallee Track Resilient Volunteer Services Review. It should especially investigate ways to sensibly minimise overbearing regulatory requirements and make it easier and more attractive for people to volunteer.

Action 4. Cultivate stronger interaction across Sunraysia heritage sector

Sunraysia’s identity is a meeting place of rich First Nations, agricultural, environmental, and migrant heritage. While the connections that cut across these realms are vital in the history and cultural identity of this region, they are commonly treated as separate domains. First Nations traditional owners and custodians work with environmental and water authorities to repair landscapes and waterways, as well as to return ancestral remains to Country. A network of local historical societies holds substantial archives of postcolonial heritage and responsibility for the management of significant places, including the world heritage listed homestead at Kow Plains, and replica agricultural pioneer village at Meringur. The societies are run by a shrinking pool of passionately committed yet ageing volunteers. MRCC has commissioned a Heritage Study of post-contact assets, focused predominantly on the built environment. Important oral history and audio-visual heritage preservation projects including Frames of History and Mallee’s Living History are pursued by local organisations and funded with local philanthropic support. These dispersed activities raise questions of sustainability as well as the potential for relationship making that could be mutually beneficial. It is

timely to facilitate dialogue between all custodians and stakeholders in the cultural heritage of the region, to explore avenues for fostering sharing of knowledge and resources, promotion of assets and activities, and collective ownership of a new vision of the interconnected heritage of Sunraysia.

Recommendation:

MRCC to coordinate a meeting of stakeholders and interested public on the future of heritage of the region. This meeting could be organised under the banner of a revised reconciliation action plan which is due for renewal. The meeting should canvass sustainability issues in relation to the future of the historical societies and custodianship of the collections they hold and manage. It should canvas potential for closer working relationships and shared projects between the historical societies and local Aboriginal communities. It should canvass volunteering needs, recommendations from MRCC's recently completed Heritage Strategy, questions of infrastructure need, and explore possible benefits of co-location of historical societies with other public education projects including libraries. The meeting should bring staff of the historical societies together with MRCC and representatives of Mildura's First Nations communities, Youth Council, Frames of History and other relevant projects, dryland farming and horticulture industries, senior history students and teachers, and the interested general public to explore fresh ideas for further activating their work.

Action 5. Advance work towards a First Nations cultural template

In the 2023 referendum on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament Mildura LGA recorded one of the highest 'no' votes in the nation. Yet across the region important projects and partnerships demonstrate that committed work towards justice, self-determination and shared responsibility is well advanced. The Ngiwa Yarna Advisory Committee have made recommendations to MRCC that are the outcome of many years of work by themselves, traditional owners, and other community-respected elders. These recommendations stand as an integrated whole, a potential cultural overlay that if implemented would significantly enhance the visibility of Aboriginal traditions and cultural practices in the region, open new opportunities for Aboriginal economic enterprise, optimism and wellbeing, and the enrichment of the entire community.

The working culture of several Mildura-based organisations has been shaped by years of committed relationship-building with traditional owners and community-respected elders. Important change is being made in these cross-community relationships. At Ned's Corner Conservation Reserve on Ngintait Country, Trust for Nature have been partnering with First Peoples of the Millewa-Mallee Aboriginal Corporation in a series of land and waterways management projects. In 2022 the Trust committed to the transfer of ownership to traditional owners. New on-country employment and training opportunities build confidence and skills and are life changing for the rangers who have taken up these positions. Collaborations with regional authorities and state departments are enabling important reburial programs, wetlands restoration, revegetation, and fish breeding projects.

However, Aboriginal leaders identify intractable challenges, including high levels of segregation and little collaboration between Aboriginal organisations and the wider community; little participation of Aboriginal people and projects in the mainstream economic life of the region; a large youth population with compromised health and wellbeing whose creative potential is not fully engaged; a small number of community-respected elders who carry a heavy burden of community demands; entrenched discrimination.

Material Thinking

Council has been responsive to key recommendations of Ngiwa Yarna. In 2023 Council was guided by and accepted the committee's recommendation to take a neutral position in relation to the 2023 referendum on the Voice to Parliament. More recently, Council agreed to move the date for official citizenship ceremonies from 26 January. The local First Nations community played a significant role in hosting the 2024 Change Fest summit with its focus on systems change in governance, partnerships, and service delivery and performed Corroboree on the opening night, before an audience of hundreds of residents and summit delegates.

Recommendations:

- MRCC to accelerate its work with local First Nations communities and explore co-design principles to advance an integrated body of work, including:
- delivery of cultural awareness training across local government and industry;
- increased visibility for and new opportunities to participate in cultural exchanges, cultural tourism and public education activities;
- support for the development of new Indigenous economic enterprise opportunities;
- convening public forums and cross-community dialogues over issues of shared concern to break down barriers, improve trust, and work against segregation.
- Review existing preferred First Nations procurement policy. Explore opportunities for expansion and apply appropriate scrutiny to ensure that any First Nations companies that are contracted are genuine.

Action 6. Expand promotion of community participation in environmental work

Love of place is a vital starting place for community-building, for the cultivation of trust, shared responsibility, and identity in a postcolonial multi-origin society such as Mildura. Environmental restoration projects, conservation work in national parks and botanical gardens have become sites where diverse and committed communities of volunteers come together with First Nations custodians and management authorities to care for the biodiversity of the region. In an inspired private garden project, the Mallee Sky Garden in Irymple was commenced in 2015 on a dried off fruit block.

Following research into the precolonial botanical life of the local area, hundreds of rare and threatened species of banksia, eucalyptus and Murray Pines have been planted to create a beautiful, landscaped environment. This living work of art pays homage to the fragile and deep history of local native vegetation. The garden continues to expand. It is a novel experiment in public-private-philanthropic-faith-based environmental care. A section of adjacent land has been gifted to the local Vietnamese community to build a Buddhist Temple and Zen meditation centre.

Collaborative fundraising is underway to secure the future of the garden. In another community driven environmental transformation, the Murrayville Wetlands project has resolved a longstanding potential flooding problem for the town through the creation of a new attractive place for community gathering and biodiversity support. A common feature of these restorative environmental projects is that they create valuable new public amenity while bringing people together in shared responsibility and custodianship.

Recommendations:

As part of the implementation of the Community Climate Response plan, MRCC should work with relevant stakeholders and agencies to expand its promotion of community-based environmental projects and related volunteering needs and opportunities.

Through the process of revising the Reconciliation Action Plan, explore opportunities with FPMMAC and the wider First Nations community for members of the wider community to volunteer in appropriate ways in Caring for Country activities.

Action 7. Improve local food security

A flourishing community requires a healthy, well-nourished population. Mildura's origins as an irrigation settlement centre the growing, harvest, and distribution of fruit and vegetables. Today, Mildura LGA generates the highest agricultural income in the country,¹² and its "food bowl" is a major attractor of tourist visitation as well as new residents. The region has a proud history of invention and of influencing significant change in irrigation practices, techniques for growing and harvesting grape vines, the collective marketing of fruit, and in innovative wine making. For example, now running in Mildura for more than two decades, the Australian Alternative Wine Varieties Show was conceived by local wine growers and their creative partners to profile lesser-known varieties and celebrate innovative winemaking practices. The show has had far reaching economic and cultural impacts, expanding the drinking choices of Australians with flow on effects through domestic and international wine markets.¹³ Mildura's creative merging of local culinary and cultural activities continue to attract sell out audiences to its annual writer's festival, now in its twenty-ninth year.

Such examples of import-export invention demonstrate that Sunraysia's growers continue to be influential in Australia's culture and economy of food production. Yet remarkably, very little of the food produced here is available for local consumption. Volatilities in climate, markets, supply chain disruptions, border governance, unreliable availability; and cost of water, put the region's own food security at risk.¹⁴

Economies of scale are dictating major changes in the organisation of horticulture and agriculture—human scale family farms are increasingly giving way to large corporate operations, with significant social and economic implications for local and regional communities.¹⁵ The oft referred to "swiss cheese" affect across Mildura's Older Irrigated Area as exiting horticulturalists sell off water, leaving a patchwork of dried off blocks and intensifying challenges for the small growers who remain, is a major issue for the future of the town and community as a whole.

It is a paradox that while Mildura is celebrated as one of the nation's most significant food bowls, it is also a place where more than 50% of the local population have been reported as not eating sufficient fruit and vegetables. The same study reports more than 50% of the adult population as being overweight or obese.¹⁶ The celebrated food bowl coexists with a food desert, with large neighbourhoods where residents with low socioeconomic backgrounds have poor access to shops selling fresh fruit and vegetables.¹⁷

Since 2017 the social enterprise Out of the Box Sunraysia has been selling fresh produce grown by small local suppliers via a subscription model. Fortnightly farmers markets offer limited opportunities for locals to purchase fresh produce directly from growers. A recent survey conducted by Sunraysia Local Food Movement found very strong interest in the purchase of locally grown produce—beyond the current operating capacities of the subscription service, local farmer's markets, and roadside stands. Small-scale local growers who report feeling significant financial pressure also express the desire to diversify, to find new ways to work collectively, and identify the need to add value to their produce if their business is to be sustainable.¹⁸

Recommendations:

Membership of MRCC's agricultural advisory group should be expanded, and nomenclature of this committee should be reconsidered to better represent the food system as an integrated whole. Invitations to nominate for membership should be extended to, for example, local food enterprises and initiatives, innovative growers, logistics companies, as well as the restaurant sector. This enlarged membership will increase the capacity of the committee to act as a strategic body to identify, foresee and respond to threats and opportunities.

Action 8. Make the connected region visible

As this Strategy was being completed, MRCC was in the process of developing a new tourism strategy. Consultations with First Nations community leaders, township community leaders, tour operators, and people in the creative arts sector all made pertinent observations regarding fundamental needs, untapped potential, and new opportunities for promotion of connected-up place-based experiences and cultural exchanges.

Recommendations to be considered in tandem with development of tourism strategy:

- Work closely with township communities, where appropriate through Community Plans, to better promote local attractions and support promising new ideas.
- Facilitate improved communication and collaboration between tourism operators through the development of an improved, integrated, and well-promoted and publicly accessible calendar of activities and events.
- Implement and extend recommendations of the Tourism Signage Audit: including, a) new signage to promote clustered visitor experiences in particular areas of the region, and b) recommendations in relation to refreshing the content of promotional billboards.
- Explore the possibility of establishing two digital promotional billboards at the intersection of 15th Street and Deakin Avenue and at a suitable location on the riverfront. These should serve as an electronic events directory, a 'what's on in the region'. The riverfront billboard, accessible to pedestrians, could include a menu of information including an indigenous welcome, what's on, short videos of artists and makers, local identities, culturally significant festivals, edited documentaries from the archive of 1956 flood, historical photographs, Dried fruit and slow food initiatives and images of the river in all its moods.

¹² <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/215021398>;

<https://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au/news/national/australias-richest-farming-region-mildura-tops-the-list/news-story/67287a13f311eb938a6d6a7755c4f471>

¹³ Max Allen, *Alternative Reality: How Australian Wine Changed Course*, Melbourne Books, 2023.

¹⁴ Lauren Rickards and Melinda Hinkson, 2021, Supply chains as disruption, in Victoria Stead and Melinda Hinkson (eds) *Beyond Global Food Supply Chains: Crisis, Disruption, Regeneration*, Palgrave Press; Productivity Commission, 2021, *Vulnerable Supply Chains: Interim Report*, Canberra: Australian Government; M. Tracey, 2020, How much Aussie farmland is foreign owned? *Farm Weekly*, December 28.

¹⁵ Matthew Tonts and Allen Black, 2002, *The Impact of Changing Farm Business Structures on Rural Communities*, Canberra: Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation; DT Lichten, DR Graefe, 2011, *Rural Economic Restructuring*, F Vanclay, 2003, The impacts of deregulation and agricultural restructuring for rural Australia, *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 38(1): 81-94.

¹⁶ <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/215021398>; MRCC, *State of Mildura Report*, 2018.

¹⁷ Mildura Rural City Council, 2013, *VLGA Food Scan Report*, copy in author's possession.

¹⁸ See also David Downie, Don Gunasekera, and Rebecca Lester, 2023, "Dynamic Diversification—A Paradigm Shift: Assessment of Opportunities for Business and Industry Diversification in the Wimmera Mallee region in Victoria; A case study

of Grampians and Loddon Mallee regions", Melbourne: Centre for Regional and Rural Futures, Deakin University.

PART III. Revitalising the Arts and Creative Industries

Background

The arts play a vital role as catalyst for a creative community. The term “arts and creative industries” encompasses the expansive and shifting nature of creative activity in Mildura city and the wider region. It is a broad approach which reflects what is happening locally, nationally, and internationally.

For the purposes of this strategy, the activities and professions that make up the arts and creative industries are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural and creative practices
- Film, digital, videography, commercial photography, broadcasting/podcasting and new media
- Design (including, fashion, app development, digital games, architecture/drafting, industrial design, sign/branding industry)
- Galleries, museums and cultural heritage
- Literature and print/publishing media
- Visual/Fine arts and crafts (including, photography, painting, sculpture, ceramics/pottery, printmaking)
- Performing arts (inc. music, theatre, dance)
- Other supporting activities (including arts administration, education, therapy, picture framing, marketing, local government).

Arts and creativity are integral to the new global economy, which values knowledge, flexibility and innovation. In 2019-20 the Creative Industries in Victoria contributed \$31.6 billion in gross value to the Victorian economy. National statistics indicate that “98% per cent of people engage with arts and culture in some way”.¹⁹

Hence, towns and cities around the world are transforming themselves into “creative communities”. The notion of the creative community was penned by American urban theorist, Richard Florida in 2002 in recognising the inter-disciplinary innovations of young professionals. Florida categorised them, *the creative class* which saw them demonstrate three 'Ts': *talent, tolerance and technology*. This model would then be interpreted across many cities and projects, for example, Marcus Westbury's, *Renew Newcastle* and its extension, *Renew Australia, the City of Bendigo*, through its outward and international programming of events via the Bendigo Art Gallery and the Ulumbarra Theatre and the re-positioning of the city of Shepparton through a re-vitalised SAM.

A creative community prospers, attracts and retains talented citizenry who in return bring vibrancy and investment. In addition to this, a creative community builds connections and partnerships between its component parts (cultural and linguistic diversity) and improves health and wellbeing which increases all the social indicators of “livability” into the future.

Now and then: Context for a new arts and creative industries strategy

Mildura has long been a meeting place for creative communities. Significant festivals and events have been conceived and curated, attracting international attention and enriching public life. In

Material Thinking

some areas of the arts Mildura continues to be held in high regard.

Below is an outline of some of these events. It is not meant to be a definitive history, but instead an attempt to demonstrate how the focus of arts activity changes and the circumstances impacting these cycles.

The precedent for much of Mildura's more recent arts activity was the Mildura Sculpture Triennials (1961-88). This large-scale contemporary Sculpture event inaugurated by Mildura Arts Centre Director, Tom McCullough, commissioned site specific installation and performance art, supported by the then infant Australia Council. In 1975 the *Sculpturescape* adjacent to the Lawn Tennis courts was used to exhibit ephemeral works in keeping with postmodern visual art practices. During the mid- to late-1970s, thousands of artists, students, and visitors flocked to Mildura to participate in this major event on the national calendar. In 1978, McCullough resigned in controversy and despite two more events being held, the triennial lost its relevance and appeal. It is nearly 50 years since the Triennials were at their zenith, yet the sculptural legacy of Mildura is still on show with significant modernist works with unequalled reputation positioned around the city. Many cities the world envy this collection.

There were many subsequent attempts to replicate or re-kindle the energy and importance of the sculpture triennials. In 1995, US Artist Judy Sutton-Krake's, *One sun, one earth, one peace* was commissioned and installed at Rio Vista Park. Then a transitional project, *Confluence* held in 1995 and 1996, continued the theme of artists coming to Mildura to make site specific installations.

Mildura's creative import-export economy

Mildura is internationally renowned for conceiving and hosting significant festivals including The Mildura Sculpture Prize/triennials, Mildura Palimpsest, Mildura Writers Festival, and Australian Alternative Wine Varieties Show. Behind the success of each of these events is an entrepreneurial vision, and a quest to generate a special kind of magnetic attraction and engagement with place—renowned artists, poets, creative writers, musicians have come to engage with the people and places of Sunraysia-Mallee from across the country and around the world. Many of those creatives-producers have in turn found inspiration in the region and formed committed creative friendships. These events continue to draw return audiences and economic benefit to the region year after year.

It wasn't until the Mildura Palimpsest Biennale (1997-2015) that an event had the longevity and ambition to rival the earlier Triennials. Originally auspiced through Mildura Arts Centre, the Biennale became part of the suite of projects organised by Mildura Arts Festival/Arts Mildura. The concept behind Palimpsest is the layering of history, industry and sociology responding to George Orwell's statement, '*all history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and re-inscribed*'.²⁰

In 2000, in conjunction with Mildura Palimpsest, six artists were commissioned to make new works under the SunRISE21, Artists in Industry initiative. Major sculptural works on Loch Island, Mildura, and at Psyche Pumps were installed and remain under the *Interceptions: Art, Science and land in Sunraysia* project.

Palimpsest became the prime visual arts event at Arts Mildura, with discrete and specialised activities held across the year. The *International Music Festival, Mildura and Wentworth Arts Festival, Mildura Jazz, Food and Wine Festival, Perry Sand Hills concerts* and the *Mildura Writers Festival* made Mildura a significant cultural venue in the late 1990's and early 2000's.

Material Thinking

The Mildura Writers Festival has sustained a nationally significant reputation for over more than 25 years. Commenced in 1994 with antecedent poetry readings, the festival continues today under the direction of Donata Carrazza and formerly Paul Kane. Its model of governance, ambition and community support should inspire other high calibre curated activities.

The success and longevity of these national and international events depend on many factors. A backlash in local community support for the Sculpture Triennials led to the departure of key players and hence the loss of vital funding and levels of participation. The role of Mildura's major arts organisations (MAC and Arts Mildura) in supporting these ambitious projects is central in providing base administration, seed funding and core infrastructure for sustaining these projects.

The Mildura Arts Centre was re-developed in 2012. A new 500 seat theatre was a central feature of the new building. This is the principal theatre in Mildura, supported by smaller venues in Ouyen (The Roxy) and in Murrayville. Theatre in Mildura was and is largely comprised of local amateur groups and a touring schedule of State and National performing arts companies.

Feedback from the 2012 re-development supports the provision of the new theatre, but this seems to be at the expense of the galleries and visual arts programming. The proposed *Master Plan Review* must prioritise the re-development of the gallery now substantially hidden behind closed doors and cafe functions.

The performing arts are strongly supported in many of the region's schools through *the Beat* and other annual performances. These local theatre and musical groups are struggling and, in some instances, having to amalgamate their efforts, eg *STAGE*. There are myriad private dance companies that cater for all styles of traditional and contemporary dance. Local Music is supported by the busking program through Mildura City Heart and a cycle of festivals including, *Mildura and Wentworth Musical Festival*, *Cullulleraine Music Festival*, and the *Patchewollock Music Festival*.

Art Therapy seems well serviced in the region with *ArtRageUs* at the Christie Centre, and private organisations in community settings such as, *Sunraysia Arts and Learning*, *Pelican Arts* and *Mallee Arts and Wellbeing*.

Despite these historical highlights, the current health of the Arts and Creative Industry sector across the Mildura Shire requires urgent attention. There is a strong perception in the community that Council have pursued and supported a sports agenda at the expense of the arts. This is understandable when assessing the economic, community and visitor participation and other benefits of sporting activity. However, a healthy community should be well-balanced, and the arts are central to notions of access, inclusion, and wellbeing.

The arts feed on energy. This energy galvanises bold and innovative individuals to collaborate and provide leadership under a shared vision for the future. This happened in Mildura during the late 1960s to 1978 and again from the early 1990s to the early 2000s. There are many factors that have led to the current state of the arts and its low ebb.

The pandemic was devastating for the arts and its impacts continue to be significant. The arts were abandoned, rendered non-essential. Galleries, Theatres and Museums were instantly closed to the public, exhibition programs, festivals, concerts, and tours were cancelled, and studio-based art schools were delivered online. In Mildura, due to its smaller and hence more vulnerable arts scene, the impact is even more lasting. The region's small performing arts groups previously mentioned were closed and since re-opening, participation has declined and is yet to return to pre-COVID

Material Thinking

levels. Some of these groups also suffer from the loss of a home base with the recent re-purposing of the Powerhouse building. They currently have only temporary and makeshift access to storage and rehearsal facilities.

Many local arts organisations rely on volunteers (retired professionals, teachers, etc). This aging workforce, not regenerating at replacement levels, and increasingly burdened by government regulations are exhausted by years of toil. Where is the workforce for these groups into the future?

The discontinuation of creative arts degrees and post-graduate degrees at La Trobe University, Mildura Campus in 2020/21 has been a major setback for the area. These degrees generated professional graduates every year and stimulated significant energy in the local sector. Since the cancellation of the degree, specialised lecturing, technical and support staff have left the area. Data from local secondary schools indicate that students applying into university arts programs have dramatically decreased due to costs of travel and accommodation since the closure of the local university option.

In addition to the vacuum left in the university sector, the closure of Art Vault has also had a major impact. Art Vault was a serious commercial gallery employing local people, attracting cultural traffic through the region, and supporting a schedule of artist in residency programs. The initiative behind the new NAP Contemporary Art Gallery and Work-space3496 galleries will compensate in part, but both these ventures seem isolated and vulnerable in the current environment.

Now is the time for a bold and ambitious new Cultural Strategy. A strategy that will nurture and inspire a new generation of talented makers and performers that can showcase their talents to the world. A strategy that invests in its creatives and their support structures, and facilitates leadership and entrepreneurialism, innovation, and risk taking. A strategy that helps us define who we are and who we want to be? A strategy that defines our sense of place, and our sense of belonging.

Recommendations for a revitalised creative Mildura

Action 9. Advance consultations and feasibility for a Millewa-Mallee Cultural Centre

An integrated celebration of Australian inland river peoples, their histories, cultures, practices, heritage. The Cultural Centre should be a unifying place in the community. It will act as a gateway to Mungo National Park and its deep history and will also provide a greater visible presence to the region's rich Indigenous culture. Work needs to be undertaken with traditional owners and the wider Aboriginal community to define the Centre's charter. There is widespread support for a dedicated First Nations Cultural Centre. Consultations have however also found significant interest in a Centre with broader reach and remit, bringing together First Nations, migrant, and agricultural heritage of the region. A survey conducted as part of consultations for this Strategy that included local First Nations people was evenly split on the question of whether a Centre should be dedicated to First Nations or *all* cultures of the region. Further sensitively conducted consultation will be essential to ensure that such a significant new regional resource will be widely embraced by its communities. Whichever direction is determined, the Cultural Centre should combine authentic cultural tourism experiences, employment and training opportunities for local First Nations communities, an historical archive/keeping place, a museum and/or gallery space, and a research/education hub.

Action 10. Conduct a review and re-structure of Mildura Arts Centre

As the largest and most important arts Institution in the region, MAC has responsibility to drive

Material Thinking

Council's vision and ambition for the arts and be a primary connecting place for leading other community organisations. Council have commissioned a Master Plan review that is largely focused on proposed buildings and infrastructure and does not include a broader vision for the Centre. Council should encourage risk-taking, passion and innovation and strongly promote the importance of the Centre and the arts more generally. It is now ten years since MAC's major facility upgrade. The review and re-structure must take account of previous planning processes, including stage 1 & 2 of the Riverfront Masterplan and MAC Masterplan Review. The review must be comprehensive, including the following which could form the terms of reference:

- benchmarking against other Regional arts centres,
- current facilities/buildings and future re-development plans,
- recurrent funding and additional income generation initiatives including philanthropy,
- staffing resources and team profiles and structure,
- exhibition and theatre programming,
- community engagement and enabling (including Mallee Track),
- marketing and outreach,
- local and external partnerships, eg programming in conjunction with NAP and Work-space 3496 initiatives,
- heritage values,
- education and linkages with schools/community,
- residencies and Acquisition/collection policy, etc.
- arts leadership
- institutional reputation via hosting and curating major events,
- MACAC advisory committee governance and representation.
- Once completed, the review should form the basis of a new *MRCC Art, Culture and Heritage Strategy* replacing the out-of-date *2016 - 2020 Strategy*.

Action 11. Provide support where possible to the larger not-for-profit arts sector

Council is well placed to encourage, via its Arts and Culture Advisory Committee (MACAC), supportive, dynamic and generative relationships across Mildura's wider arts community.

Action 12. Progress work to establish an inter-disciplinary community-based Arts Hub

Such a space is urgently needed to enable the co-tenanting of small, voluntary, performing, and visual arts and crafts groups currently without studios, rehearsal space, or storage facilities. Community consultations indicate strong support for the re-furbished *Powerhouse* but this has had an unfortunate impact of displacing previous tenants of this building. A space to accommodate these groups is identified in the MAC Masterplan Review and is the subject of ongoing consideration at Council. In the short term a re-purposed building or temporary space could be identified with modest resources. All the groups consulted are agreeable to a shared, interdisciplinary resource, although utilization agreements will need to be negotiated. Council could partner, lead, or underwrite the collective. *Arts Mildura* could be invited to join the consortia. The proposed *Arts Hub* would encourage cross-collaboration between organisations and art disciplines and could incubate new initiatives, such as a marketplace/arts fair where regional work can be promoted to the public, similar to the weekend food and produce markets.

Material Thinking

Action 13. Support application for Mildura to be listed as a City of Public Art

Building on the important sculpture/public arts legacy of Mildura, incorporating the MAC collection from previous *Sculpture Triennials*, *Confluence*, *Mildura Palimpsest*, *SunRISE 21*, *Arts and Industry project*, and promoting Mildura's cultural destination reputation and tourism credentials. The achievement of this listing would direct the commissioning of new public sculptures and installation art as a central pillar of MAC's collection policy. Other future works would be consolidated into this policy, for example, the city murals, Powerhouse screen projections and the forthcoming Bruce Munro, *Light State project*. Future urban planning and built environment strategies should incorporate public art commissions into key projects (as per the old percentage for the arts scheme). A public arts program would increase community pride. First Nations and ethnic communities should be invited to help shape commissioning projects. Initially, a full audit of existing sculpture and their preservation condition should be completed, and decisions made to de-commission, repair or re-create (as per Annabelle Collett's, 1999 *Fruit pickers Skirts* adorning the palm trees across the city). The sculptures and public works would form the basis for guided or self-guided walking tours and saleable, quality merchandise and publications.

Action 14. Develop and encourage *authentic* cultural tourism infrastructure, activities and events around the River

The *Creative Australia strategy* reports that "international art tourists are more likely to visit regional Australia than international tourists overall". The Australia Council for the Arts strategic objective "First Nations arts and culture are cherished" includes the following action, "Continue to support the First Nations arts and culture sector to protect, promote and increase First Nations participation in the cultural and creative industries".

With the proposed Cultural Centre at its heart, MRCC's new Tourism Strategy should facilitate a broad suite of authentic, river-based tourist experiences targeting an international audience. Using the region's rich natural resources including Hattah-Kulkine National Park, Murray Sunset National Park, the Willandra Lakes World Heritage site/Mungo National Park and the many state Reserves, create a new visibility for the celebration of the river and its rich cultural legacy. Encourage recognition of the river (Murray or Mil/Dhungala) in its broadest Riverine terms—its floodplains, wetlands, billabongs, and seasonal lakes. The recent *Borders* project by Regenerative Communities is an excellent starting point towards development of a river festival which could draw together the celebration of First Nations cultural connections and ceremony, collaborative environmental care projects, and locally grown food and wine.

Action 15. Encourage arts organisations to invite, exchange, and where appropriate integrate, the cultural activities of Mildura's diverse migrant/ethnic communities

Consultations support closer collaboration with the region's substantial ethnic and recently arrived migrant communities. Despite this, these linkages have not developed. MRCC through MACAC and its multicultural and multifaith advisory group and SMECC is well placed to facilitate closer engagement. MAC/Arts Mildura and local performing arts groups can do more to support the region's ethnic communities through hosting culturally diverse exhibitions, concerts, performances, and events. Encourage wider community participation in and visibility of the annual multi-cultural festival and the annual calendar of ethnic community celebrations.

Action 16. Intensify creative precincts in Mildura city

Although Council have developed a Deakin Avenue Masterplan and CBD Strategy further scoping of the City Heart/Mall/ Langtree 'feast' street to riverfront precinct is encouraged, with the aim of intensifying creative precincts. This is arguably the most important pedestrian and recreation precinct in Mildura, and all development options must be carefully considered. It seems essential to have a flow, connection from the Ninth Street end of the mall to the Riverfront. The precinct requires activation both in infrastructure and programming of activities. Considerations include additional green spaces (trees, gardens, lawns), Sculpture/Public/Mural art, pop-up specialty venues, lighting and projection, Al fresco dining/hawker market, music and performance, consideration of extending the pedestrian only precinct to create an immersive experience of a community village. Some elements will be logically pursued under the Urban Tree Strategy 2021-26 and Community Climate Response Plan 2024-29.

Relatedly options should be explored for intensifying Deakin Ave as a revamped arts/culture/cuisine precinct, maximising use of prime heritage buildings for high calibre visitor experiences.

NB: Some of these recommendations are predicated on the re-routing of the rail into Seventh Street and the re-development of the current Railway Station and the ridge line to Jaycee Park. Such developments are beyond the brief of this Strategy.

Action 17. Support an International and National Artist in Residency program in the region

The region has recently lost key arts infrastructure, eg La Trobe University Art School. It is unlikely that in the period of this Strategy that this will be re-instated. The arts can be re-invigorated by a series of short-term residencies (2/3 months duration) linking in with existing infrastructure, for example MAC programming, Mildura Writers Festival, senior school, art programs etc. Mildura's Tri-State location and its unique environment make it a very attractive destination for visiting artists to live and work. A feasibility study should be developed to investigate possible funding sources and potential utilisation of existing infrastructure. Mildura's Sky Garden could be a model where local philanthropy meets vision and community spirit.

¹⁹ *Connecting Australians*, Australia Council, 2016.

²⁰ George Orwell, 1984, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1959, p. 42.

PART IV. Stimulating a new culture of strategic problem solving

The actions proposed in preceding parts II and III of this Strategy identify work to be undertaken within MRCC's existing organisational framework, strategies, and plans. However, consultations for this Strategy have persistently identified a pressing need for a *qualitative shift in community dialogue and approaches to problem solving that transcend MRCC's structure and remit*. This is not surprising given the complexity of the underlying processes involved, which are at play across Australian society and globally. In one insightful recent commentary, journalist and editor-at-large Paul Kelly writes:

"The pace of life is intensifying. The rapidity of social change is empowering yet demoralising. The risk is that cultural fractures will only deepen. The social changes [we will witness in the next decade] will be akin to a hurricane and without precedent in human history. *The social task will become the successful management of disagreement.*"²¹

Diminishing levels of trust and cooperation are widely observed challenges facing democratic societies globally. The need for better and different dialogue leading to new approaches to problem solving associated with social change, isolation, and fragmentation have been the most persistent themes in consultations. Given the depth and reach of such challenges—which as this Strategy highlights take particular forms in the Mildura LGA—MRCC is restricted in what it can do but also uniquely positioned to help drive positive cultural development in support of future need.

Consultations have voiced a strong demand for genuine and robust public dialogue and relationship building *at the level of the community at large* to tackle significant matters that will shape the future of life in this region. This persistent messaging has led the project team to interpret the central challenge for the Mildura Cultural Strategy in terms of a single question: "Where is our town square?"

There is an urgent need to identify and *create the social infrastructure* that will best position the people of the Mildura region to find security and face the challenges of the future.

To invoke the "town square" is to call into being spaces of healthy and robust civic exchange and debate over matters of concern. Town squares are democratic spaces open to all.

A genuinely democratic arena needs to address imbalances of power, principles of governance, and to make space for plural voices, for robust dialogue and disagreement, for languages and perspectives other than those that most often dominate. Town Squares are flexibly configured and scaled; they are face-to-face as well as digital. There will always be many town squares.

The aim of recreating the town square is to transcend segregation and silos, to bring contesting views into dialogue and to foster safe and mutually respectful conditions under which new kinds of agreement can be realised over matters of shared importance.

Action 18. Proposed new body: The Indicator Forum (working title)

Town square dialogues require high calibre representation to ensure talk leads to action. Across the region there are calls for a new approach to leadership, guidance, mentorship, and advocacy in and for this region and its future projects. Building on the recommendations of Part II of this Strategy in relation to further activation of MRCC's advisory groups, it is recommended that a future piece of

work be commissioned to investigate feasibility for the establishment of a new high-calibre autonomous body, with the working title The Indictor Forum.

Chambers of commerce exist to organise and advocate to higher levels of government on behalf of local business and development initiatives. The idea of an Indicator Forum goes beyond a chamber of commerce, taking the social, economic and environmental needs of a community as an interrelated set of high-level priorities requiring a coordinated, dynamic, creative response.

The purpose of this new proposed entity is to sit between MRCC—outside of its existing organisational structure—and the wider community. This new autonomous body is required to reach beyond MRCC's remit, jurisdiction, and governance arrangements. The formation of this body would create additional high-level strategic support for MRCC and herald in a new era of trust and partnership between the MRCC and the people of the Mildura region.

The idea of an Indicator Forum is inspired by and builds upon two significant projects in early and more recent local history.

The legacy of cooperation

In Mildura's infancy the settlement nearly failed. In response to the combined pressures of drought, salinity, market exploitation and water insecurity, stressed *fruit growers came together and formed cooperatives* for the marketing of fruit, advocacy of fair terms of trade, and management of irrigated water. The cooperative model was adopted widely and created stable conditions for Australia's fruit industry for nearly a century. The ethos of cooperation is carried in the memories of old blockies who helped each other during harvests, openly shared new inventions, and ideas for solving problems, and collectively rallied against the federal government's dismantling of the tariff system and cooperative ownership from the 1970s. Cooperation has been carried forward in diverse forms, from the everyday neighbourly sharing of knowledge, resources and care, though to robust community development bodies such as Ouyen Inc.

Towards connected community

In 2015, in response to persistent poor social indicators for the Mildura region, MRCC established a new Mildura-based "collective impact" initiative, Hands Up Mallee (HUM). HUM was created to delve holistically into intractable social disadvantage and investigate why the social service sector was failing to shift areas of substantial human need. Working with relative autonomy, HUM was able to experiment in its program and methods of community engagement. Developing strong and flexible relationships with families and local communities has been central to the design and implementation of HUM projects, which prioritise fostering a better start to life for local children through the "creation of a connected community". Advocating for systems change and new ways of making partnerships, HUM has been a strong advocate for committed place-based relational work of a kind that is rarely funded by government but essential to any successful community development.

Drawing inspiration from such local initiatives, the proposed Indicator Forum would provide a holistic expansion of the visionary work undertaken by MRCC in establishing and resourcing Hands Up Mallee. The Indicator Forum would be assembled from diverse high calibre expertise and experience, a group of people capable of advocating the interests of the Mildura LGA regionally and nationally. Its membership would include well-connected, community-concerned residents to identify and adjudicate indicators—high-level issues—for "joined up" response. The Forum would serve as a constantly adaptive body, responding to the most pressing social, economic, and ecological needs.

Material Thinking

For example, water availability is an existential issue for this region. The politics of water tend to fragment and segregate water interests and pit irrigators against environmental and First Nations communities. Consultations suggest however that dialogue could lead to the creation of one significantly strengthened regional voice for water reform.

The working title of this proposed new entity, The Indicator Forum, is drawn from the observation that Mildura's unique conditions position it as an *indicator region*—akin to an indicator species whose relative wellbeing reflects the wider state of an ecosystem under conditions of instability or crisis.

The Forum would establish priorities, instigate programs, and pursue partnerships and funds to enable its goals to be achieved. It would work autonomously from but in close collaboration with MRCC, in the interests of the future community. It is not anticipated that the operations of the Forum would impact on existing MRCC recurrent operational expenditure.

Action 19. A Cultural Strategy for river region communities

In inviting the MRCC to think about Mildura as an *indicator region*, this Strategy points to an additional future piece of work of a vital kind—for MRCC to extend the work it is currently undertaking in partnership with neighbouring local government councils and take the lead in incubating a Cultural Strategy for the larger Riverland region.

To claim “indicator” status for the Mildura local government area is to observe that MRCC’s jurisdiction is situated in the crosshairs of contested politics over climate change, water usage, the future of agriculture, and rural community life. MRCC already recognises in a series of embryonic cross-jurisdictional partnerships that one local government cannot act independently of its neighbours and expect to make any headway on complex and intractable challenges. Ultimately a cultural strategy needs to speak to and compel a much larger polity, it needs to activate partnerships with significant heft and reach. It needs to re-imagine regional governance, bringing into being new relationships of shared purpose, resource-sharing, and responsibility.

²¹ Paul Kelly, 2024, The balance is broken: What now for democracy? *The Australian*, July 13.

Implementation Strategy

Recommended actions	2024-25	2026-27	2028-29	2030-31	2032-33	Primary responsibility	Measures of success
1. Strengthen MRCC advisory groups	Review internally effectiveness of existing groups, criteria and terms for nomination of members, assess whether new groups are required	Implement review recommendations, establish meetings schedule, regular meetings	Project proposals	Project proposals and implementation	Project proposals and implementation	MRCC and Councillors with relevant portfolio responsibility	Increased interaction, advocacy, project proposals
2. Strengthen exchange and partnerships between MRCC and its communities	Review working arrangements of staff in community development roles to encourage increase in grassroots interactions	Implementation				MRCC and Councillors with relevant portfolio responsibility	Increased interaction, new project proposals
3. Review volunteering sector	Establish terms of reference for review	Conduct review 2026, Commence implementation 2027	Implementation			MRCC, Mildura Youth Council, Ouyen Inc	Increased voluntary participation
4. Cultivate stronger interaction across the heritage sector	Establish cross-heritage sector network, coordinate informal meetings of stakeholders, public meeting by late 2025	Review outcomes of public meeting, encourage ongoing meetings, exchanges, new projects	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	MRCC, Heritage Societies	Robust and dynamic heritage sector, new project proposals
5. Advance work towards a First Nations cultural template	Establish meeting schedule of First Nations stakeholders, revisit and prioritise for implementation Ngiwa Yarna recommendations	Undertake work towards new Reconciliation Plan	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	MRCC, Ngiwa Yarna, FPMMAC, First Nations community organisations, HUM	Increased positive visibility and exchange between FN communities and wider community
6. Promote community participation in environmental projects	Recommendation to Community Climate Response advisory group	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	MRCC, Environmental authorities, Mallee Catchment Authority, FPMMAC	Increased participation in voluntary environmental work
7. Improve local food security	Review and expand Agriculture Advisory Group membership	Establish meetings schedule	meetings, advocacy, projects	Meetings, advocacy, projects	Meetings, advocacy, projects	MRCC and food system stakeholders	Increased exchange between stakeholders, increased options for

Material Thinking

Recommended actions	2024-25	2026-27	2028-29	2030-31	2032-33	Primary responsibility	Measures of success
							purchase of local produce
8. Make the connected region visible	Recommendations to Tourism Strategy	Implementation	Implementation				Increased visibility of connected up visitor experiences
9. Feasibility for a Cultural Centre	Establish community consultation process and working party	Develop recommendations, Concept for Centre	Feasibility study Call for design tenders	Project commencement	Completed and Operational end 2034	MRCC, FPMMAC, First Nations Community, State & Federal Govt.	Visitation numbers, cross-community engagement
10. Review MAC	Establish terms of reference	Appoint reviewer, Review complete end 2026, Implementation from 2027	Implementation			MRCC/MAC	Restructured MAC equipped to lead a new era of arts innovation
11. Initiate dialogue across arts sector	Establish terms of reference	Council to lead discussion	Implementation			MACAC, Arts Mildura Board, Community stakeholders, Creative Victoria, RAV	A cohesive community arts program across the region
12. Establish community arts hub	Convene meetings of stakeholder needs case, identify participating orgs	Identify and re-purpose existing infrastructure				MRCC, MACAC, STAGE, Arts Mildura, Community arts orgs	Publicly visible and accessible premises with secure tenure for local arts community
13. Support nomination of Mildura as City of Public Art	In conjunction with launch of Bruce Munro "Light State" and new MRCC tourism strategy, prepare and lodge application					MRCC, MACAC	Mildura's reputation as arts tourism destination, MAC policy to direct future acquisitions
14. Develop authentic cultural tourism infrastructure, activities, on the river	Convene meeting of MACAC, FPMMAC, Ngiwa Yarna, tourism operators, MRCC to open dialogue and explore opportunities	Ongoing partnership-building and project proposals	Ongoing partnership-building and project proposals	Implement one new initiative	Implement two new initiatives	MRCC, MACAC, FPMMAC Ngiwa Yarna Tourism operators	Mildura's reputation as unique cultural tourism destination
15. Increase participation of ethnic communities in mainstream arts programs	Identify active groups and cultural activities, establish communication network	MAC to consider cultural diversity in theatre and exhibition programs to reflect Mildura's cultural diversity	Ongoing partnership-building and programming	Ongoing partnership-building and programming	Ongoing partnership-building and programming	MRCC, MACAC	Increased participation at MAC from migrant communities

Material Thinking

Recommended actions	2024-25	2026-27	2028-29	2030-31	2032-33	Primary responsibility	Measures of success
16. Intensify arts and culture precincts in Mildura City	Conduct community forum of stakeholders	Revise existing strategies	Develop programs	Ongoing	Ongoing	MRCC, MAC, Mildura City Heart, CBD Traders.	Pedestrian focused creative precinct
17. Establish visiting artist residencies	Form sub-committee of MACAC to explore feasibility, philanthropic and other fund-raising opportunities, develop policy	Implement policy	Explore options for partnerships and additional residencies with high calibre local creative events	Ongoing	Ongoing	MACAC, MAC, AM	Regular flow of visiting artists to the region, Increased community engagement in the arts, enhanced reputation for Mildura as a significant centre for creative exchange
18. Establish Indicator Forum	In conjunction with reviewing functionality of advisory groups, investigate need for / interest in establishing Indicator Forum	Appoint review team to determine feasibility, scope, business plan, Implement recommendations, appoint forum members	Forum meetings and projects	Forum meetings and projects	MRCC	Dynamic high calibre advocacy and projects in support of a thriving Sunraysia	
19. Initiate Cultural Strategy for Riverland communities	Discussions with neighbouring riverland local govts, determine arrangements for review	Appoint review team Complete review	Implementation	Implementation	MRCC and neighbouring local governments	Strengthened partnerships for strong regional future	

PART V. Audit of key Arts and Creative Industry organisations*

This audit includes organisations, businesses and individuals that reside or are based primarily in the Mildura Rural City Council Shire. Excluded are organisations whose head offices reside elsewhere and may service the local community through distance or online commerce. Reference to supporting buildings and infrastructure is made in each instance. This audit does not include an archive of the shire's artwork collections as this archive is well documented at Mildura Arts Centre.

Major Community Arts Organisations

Mildura Arts Centre (MAC)

The major arts organisation in the shire. Supported by Creative Victoria, Council funds and special purpose grants, including major infrastructure. Performing arts theatre, galleries, Rio Vista house, Homestead, Nowingi Place, Amphitheatre (closed) and the Powerhouse? Programming charter of touring and supporting local artists.

Arts Mildura (AM)

Leading local arts organisation. Currently funded largely from Creative Victoria and Vic Health grants. Undertaking a *Future Reset* that focuses on post-COVID youth and First Nations community. Traditionally supported Mildura Writers Festival, Mildura Palimpsest, Perry Sandhills concerts, Jazz, Food and Wine festival, etc. Currently without permanent accommodation and temporarily housed at NAP.

Visual Arts

NAP Contemporary Art Gallery

Contemporary commercial gallery at 94 Deakin Avenue, Mildura. Exhibits ambitious nation-wide artists. Also, a focus on Indigenous art. Has very good networks and links to the broader sector both within Mildura and Australia at large.

Work-space3496

Contemporary Gallery and workshop venue at shop 2, 38 Indi Avenue, Red Cliffs. Has a charter of supporting local artists, liaising with other agencies/organisations.

Gallery F

A group of local visual artists of no fixed address (no studio base).

Performing Arts, inc Theatre, Dance and Music

Mildura Musical Society

To stage musicals and pantomimes and foster local artistic talent

Material Thinking

Mildura Theatre Company

An amateur theatre company based in Mildura. Has a focus on youth but caters for all. Interested in all performing arts styles and genres.

Electric Light Theatre (ELT)

A youth theatre group promoting stagecraft training (singing, dancing and acting) for the young. Culminates in an annual production at the MAC theatre.

Red Cliffs Players

Performing arts group based in Cardross (no permanent base).

STAGE

A new organisation bringing three local groups together to consolidate activities/energies. Mildura Theatre Company, Mildura Musical Society and Electric Light Theatre.

Sunraysia Gang Show

A youth theatre group and train ground that emerged out of the local Scouting and Guiding organisation in 1997.

Sunraysia Dance Academy

A private dance group focusing on tap, jazz and lyrical dance styles. In operation for 40 years with annual performances at MAC.

Hotshots performance dance team

Irymple-based all genre/all ages/all disability dance/performance workshop, including adult burlesque, classical, jazz, tango, circus and contemporary.

Mildura Ballet and Dance Guild inc.

Established in 1959, a not-for-profit organisation offering classical ballet, contemporary, jazz, hip hop, tap, character and tiny tots.

Mildura Eisteddfod

A Victorian Incorporated Association, it encourages, celebrates and showcases the region's talented singers, musicians, dancers and performers in an annual event.

The Beat

The Sunraysia State School Showcase is an annual event celebrating the talent of local performing arts students in Victorian government schools.

Growing Community Music (GCM), Mildura

Aims to increase participation in community music so that diverse communities can experience the social and health benefits of making music together.

Material Thinking

Sunraysia Music Club

A group established to help local musicians keep in touch and organise regular gigs.

Mildura City Heart

To engage in projects and events to boost the economic, social and cultural growth of Mildura's City Heart. Musical festivals, school holiday workshops and murals.

Ouyen Inc.

A voluntary community group that programs performing arts events at the *Roxy Theatre* in Ouyen.

Graphic Design

Saunders Design Group

A Mildura graphic and web design company with a focus on logo design, brand development, marketing campaigns and website design.

AD media

A comprehensive advertising agency, including branding, content creation, design, digital marketing and web development

Kylie Norton Design (KND)

Design services include branding and identity, logo design, branding, packaging, illustration, social media.

Haynes Design

In Mildura since 1989. Provision of identity design and brand activation

Gary Davis Illustration and Design

Designer, illustrator, photographer and teacher.

Hello Agency

An integrated approach to brand, design, and marketing.

Digital Design

Mildura Web Design

Commercial web design using *WordPress*

AC Digital

Web design and development, *WordPress* for brochure sites and *Shopify* for e-commerce solutions

Material Thinking

Exdesign

Specialising in company branding, website development and online advertising.

Ajs Design lab

Functional websites, specialising in *WordPress*.

Build Digital Growth

Website design and SEO agency (google ranking).

Mildura Living Magazine

Published quarterly magazine showcasing the Sunraysia region and its lifestyle

Architectural Design and Drafting

Aspire Architecture

40 years in Mildura, an amalgamation of two companies; *Jacan* and *Nairn*. Both Commercial and residential designed projects.

Energy Architecture Mildura

An architectural, design, and sustainability consultancy practice, established in Adelaide in 1990, then subsequently expanded to Mildura.

GSD Architects

Project management, residential and commercial projects, town planning and interior design.

Innovative Design and Drafting

Design services and development, site analysis, and planning applications.

Mildura Building Designs

Small multi-skilled design studio in NW Victoria, experienced with building design.

Sign Industry and printing

Branded Assets

Over 30 years' experience in delivering signage to all industries and commercial businesses.

Exposed Signage and Apparel

Specialising in both format digital printing and garment printing.

Mattnifico Design and Print

Specialising in design, signs, printed apparel, promotional items and stubby holders.

Material Thinking

Mildura Printing Services

Local service since 1986 offering digital printing; including corporate stationary, publications, flyers, posters and labels, etc.

Sunnyland Press

Local business since 1944, offering printing, design, publishing, signage, packaging and mailing and distribution solutions.

Park Douglas Printing

A family-owned printer since 1982 with a focus on the hospitality industry.

Jamesprint

Established in 1997, specialising in the production of labels, packaging and commercial printing.

Laser Signs and Print

Offering signage and garment solutions.

Photography and Videography

I SEE I HEAR

Mildura-based commercial videography business

AD Media Australia

Across multiple regional locations, a comprehensive ad agency focusing on digital media and TV commercials.

Darren Seiler

Local commercial photographer specialising in weddings, portraits and real estate.

Otto Studio

Full-service film, photography and corporate video (live streaming and TV production).

Photography Productions/ Mildura Wedding Videography

Comprehensive cinematic wedding filming (including video and photography).

Gange Productions

Promotion/Commercial/Corporate/Live event across social media, television and cinema.

Mildura Photography

Wedding, maternity and family photography

Vision House Photography

Material Thinking

Specialising in photography for commercial businesses, fashion designers, instagramers, government organisations, real estate agencies and weddings.

Pure Beauty Photography

Specialises in beauty and boudoir portrait photography.

Captured by Mikelle

Specialises in weddings, maternity, newborns and family photography.

Gregory Williams Photography

All commercial and corporate photography

Le Bella Visuals

Photography services include boudoir and spicy couple photography.

Miss Moody Photography

Mildura based wedding photographer.

Remi Jordan Photography

Services include weddings, maternity, newborn and couples/family.

Cass Leerssen Photography

Services include weddings, maternity, newborn and couples/family.

Amy Jayne Photography

Focuses on documenting music concerts, festivals and Portraiture.

Lemonade Wedding Films

Wedding films, slideshow packages and other event filming.

Wedding Films

With bases in Mildura and Adelaide, offers videography and photography packages.

Picture Parlor

Specialises in custom framing, printing, photo restoration, sporting memorabilia and medals.

Prints Charming

Provided custom framing for over 25 years.

Fashion Design

Materialbyproduct

Material Thinking

Mildura based fashion design company by creative director, Susan Demasi. A blend of fashion and art with a focus on sustainable materials

Art Therapy

ArtRageUs

A social enterprise program offered through the Christie Centre where participants can express themselves through the visual arts.

Sunraysia Arts and Learning

A provider of teaching and learning for all ages and abilities. In conjunction with *One voice Mildura Choir, the Generations Music Together Program*, and the *Art Mildura Walk Wentworth Sing initiative*.

Pelican Arts

Located in Mildura, a registered art therapist and social worker private business.

Kerry Birch Art Therapy

Transpersonal art therapist.

Art Education providers (senior and post-secondary only)

Mildura Senior College

VCE offerings in *Visual Art, Music, Dance, Drama and Visual Communication and Design*.

VET offerings in *Cert 3 in Screen and Media, Cert 3 in Music, Performance and Music, Sound Production*.

Red Cliffs Secondary College

VCE offerings in *Art Making and Exhibiting, Dance, Media, Music Performance, Product and Design Technology, Theatre Studies and Visual Communication*.

VET offerings in *Cert 3, Music Performance and Music Sound Production, Screen and Media, and Dance*.

St Josephs Secondary College

VCE offerings in *Visual Arts, Visual Communication and Design, Textiles, Drama and Music*.

VET offerings in *Cert 3 in Music Industry, Applied Fashion, Design and Technology, and Screen and Media*.

Sunraysia Institute of TAFE

Full-time and part-time courses in:

Cert 2 in Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Cultural Arts, Cert 3 in Design Fundamentals, Cert 4 in Design, Cert 4 in Visual Arts.

Arts and Creative Industry-specific Festivals

Mildura Writers Festival

Now in its third decade, held in July every year, four days of words, wine and food featuring the best of Australian and International writing.

Mildura and Wentworth Music Festival

A country music event held at numerous venues around the shire. Temporarily postponed but hoping to resume scheduling in the future.

Cullulleraine Music Festival

A community based, not for profit, family friendly music festival held annually on the edge of lake Cullulleraine.

Patchewollock Music Festival

A unique bush festival of music, theatre, poetry, and workshops. Celebrating 10 years of annual event.

Mallee Root Festival

An annual festival celebrating all things mallee on the shores of Ouyen Lake.

Diwali: A festival of lights

Held annually by the Sunraysia Indian Association at Mildura Arts Centre. A celebration of dancing, live music, traditional food and fireworks.

***Please note:**

This list of events and organisations is accurate at the time of publication but is subject to the vagaries of change. The arts, design and creative industries sector is prone to constant mobility in its practitioners, nomenclature changes, shifts in charter and profile, regularity of event and economic sustainability.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Engagement list

Business and community sector

Lower Murray Water, Sharyon Peart, chair of board, ex-Councillor
Mallee Catchment Management Authority, Jenny Collins, CEO
Mildura Regional Innovation Centre, Chair of Board Leonie Burrows and Agriculture Manager Alina Saeed
Mildura Airport, Southern Cross Farms, Peter O'Donnell
Mildura Base Public Hospital, Terry Welch and Janelle McGregor
Mildura Police, Superintendent Tom Nairn and Inspector Michelle Young
Rural Financial Counselling Service, Stephanie Ferdelja and staff
Mallee Family Care, Teresa Jayet, CEO
MASP, Helena Moore, Director of Practice
Hands Up Mallee, Jane McCracken, CEO
SMECC, Ian Japp, chair, Trish Fotherington
Many Rivers, Richard Morfaw
Red Cliffs Community Centre, Jo Farrell, CEO
Christie Centre, Florence Anderson, CEO
Out of the Box, Deborah Bogenhuber
Food Next Door, Shingi Nyabonda, CEO
Regenerative Communities, Rhae Kendrigan
Youth LGBTQI+ communities, Paris Ribartis
Sunraysia Football Federation, Susan Watts
AMES, Albi Dinkar, Education director
Sunraysia Punjabi Association, Rosie Grewal, president
Fijian Association, Theresa Keating
Tristate Wantocks, Kennedy Roga
MRCC Youth Council
Year 12 class, Mildura Senior College

First Nations communities

First Peoples of the Millewa-Mallee, Kenny Stewart
Ngiwa Yarna committee, Patsy Doolan, chair
Ngiwa Yarna committee, Maria Collins, MRCC Aboriginal Development Officer
Peter Peterson
Ada Peterson
Craig Watson
Gary Papin
Verna Papin

Material Thinking

Karen Leary

Sonja Hodge

Leroy Badnock

Sandra Stewart

Janine Carr

Mark Bland

Kirsty Hampton

Arthur Smith

Arts sector

Helen Piscioneri, MAC

Luci Callipari Marcuzzo, MAC

Riley Davidson and Erica Tarquinio NAP Contemporary Art Gallery

Catherine Threlfall, Sunraysia Arts and Learning

Toni Stoeckel, Mildura Living Magazine

Rohan Morris, Work-Space 3496 Red Cliffs

Stedman Watts, Arts Mildura

Robert Biggs, Arts Mildura Board

Donata Carrazza, Mildura Writers Festival, Collins Booksellers

Danielle Hobbs, Mildura City Heart

Kerryn Sylvia, Prue Hobbs, Sophie Cook, Creative Arts dept SuniTAFE

Brett Saunders, Saunders Design Group

Renee Burke, Hotshots Performance Dance Team

Kylie Livingstone, Community Music Vic

Lynne Adams, Sunraysia Theatre Arts Group

Jill Antonie, MRCC Placemaking, Powerhouse

Robert Klarich, I see, I hear videography

Ross Lake, ex-chair, Arts Mildura

Helen Vivian, Director, Artmoves, curator, Palimpsest Coordinator

Cameron Carruthers, Branded Assets

Larry Cavallaro, Aspire Architecture

Susan Dimasi, Fashion Designer

Melissa Castleman, ArtRageUs program, Christie Centre

Patricia D'Arango, ex-MAC advisory committee

Jo Porter and Angela Frost, Regional Arts Victoria

Agriculture and Horticulture Sector

MRCC Agriculture advisory committee meeting

RFCS Agriculture sector forum

Nick Diamantopoulos, Australian Garlic

Kim Chalmers and Bart Van Alphen, Chalmers Wines

Material Thinking

Education

Mildura Senior College, Belinda Hudak, Principal
La Trobe University, Sandra Connor, Rebecca Crossling
SuniTafe, Brett Millington, CEO
Red Cliffs Secondary College, Don Mayne, music teacher
St Joseph's Secondary College, Jo Munro, Andy Higgins, Jo Fraser, Art teachers

Historical Societies

Mildura, Barbie Cornell
Redcliffs, Helen and Bob Watson
Merbein, Bernadette Wells
Meringur Pioneer Village and Red Cliffs Historical Railway, John Fitzgibbon
Ouyen, Merle Pole

Tourism

Murray Offroad Adventures, Peter Kelly
Mildura Cruises, Denis McLaughlan
Kow Plains Homestead, Jocelyn Lindner

Townships

Murrayville Liaison Committee
Carly Heintze, Murrayville Liaison
Jill Beer, Murrayville Liaison
Tracey Lawson, Ouyen Inc, Ouyen Community
Ron Hards, Millewa Advisory Group
Cassey Gloster, MRCC Community Project Officer
Morrison Polkinghorne, Artist and curator
Robert Carmack, Food and travel writer

Individuals

Kim Baldwin
Mick Callipari
Sophie Cook
Gary Davis
John Filippi
Sue James
Harvey Johnston
Mark Haynes

Material Thinking

Jane MacAllister

Brad Monaghan

Diedre Reid

Keith Richards

Chris Rodgers

Stephanie Rodgers

James Roccisano

Jayne Sunbird

Karen Whitelaw

MRCC Councillors

Stefano De Pieri

Helen Healy

Ian Arney

Jason Modica

Glenn Milne

MRCC executive and staff

Martin Hawson, CEO

Peter Alexander, GM Strategy and Growth

Mark Jenkins, GM Community Development

Antonette Zema, Manager Arts and Culture

Nicole Cavallaro

Claire Galvin

Genine Hook

Connie De Maria

Leesa Merritt

Attendance at community activities

Borders symposium, Mildura Powerhouse, April 2024

ChangeFest symposium, Mildura, April 2024

Mildura Corroboree April 2024

Cullulleraine Music Festival, April 2024

Mildura Vintage Vehicles Club members meeting, September 2023

MRCC Motorsports Strategy launch, April 2024

MRCC Agriculture Advisory Group meeting, February 2024

Rural Financial Counselling Service Victoria West agriculture industry briefing, September 2023

Appendix 2. Cultural place survey analysis

A survey conducted via phone in May 2024 of 41 Sunraysia residents aged between 27 and 74 years, 14 of whom identified as Indigenous.

Question 1: Do you have a community place or places to go to learn about your culture?

Of the 41 people interviewed 13 people answered 'yes'. Of the 13 who answered yes most identified various arts programs in Sunraysia for this fulfilment.

Note: only 2 of the 14 Indigenous participants answered 'yes'.

Question 2: Do you feel your culture is truly represented in Australia?

22 of the 41 answered 'yes'.

Note: only 2 of the 14 Indigenous people answered 'yes'.

Question 3: Do you have a community that is not sports-related where you attend that makes you feel welcome?

29 answered yes to this question.

Note: only 6 of the Indigenous participants felt they had a community (not family related) where they felt welcome (less than 50% for the Indigenous community and 49% for all people surveyed).

Question 4: Does your community provide cultural education to the wider community?

14 answered 'yes'.

5 of the Indigenous participants (c. 1/3) answered yes.

Question 5: Would you like to see a Cultural Centre in Sunraysia?

38 of the 41 participants answered 'yes'.

Note: all Indigenous participants answered yes to this question.

Question 6: Would you like to see Indigenous culture represented at a Sunraysia Cultural Centre?

All who answered 'yes' to question 5 answered 'yes' to this question.

Question 7: Should the Cultural Centre display Indigenous content only or be representative of all cultures of Sunraysia?

25 of the participants who answered 'yes' to question 5 would like to see all cultures being represented within a cultural centre.

Of the 14 Indigenous participants 8 expressed a desire for Indigenous only content.

References

Reports and Strategies informing this Strategy

Australian Government, The National Cultural Policy—*Revive: A Place for Every Story, a Story for Every Place*, 2023 - 2028

City of Greater Bendigo Annual Report 2022 - 2023

City of Greater Bendigo Annual Report 2021 – 2022

Creative State (VIC) Strategy 2025

Geelong Arts Centre, Making Change Creative Industries Strategy, 2021 – 2026

Greater Shepparton City Council Creative City Strategy 2022 - 2027

Greater Shepparton City Council Annual Report 2022 - 2023

Greater Shepparton City Council Annual Report 2020 - 2022

Greater CREATIVE Bendigo Strategy

Mildura Rural City Council Annual Report 2022 - 2023

Mildura Rural City Council Annual Report 2021 - 2022

Mildura Arts Centre Annual Statistics Dashboard 2023

Mildura Rural City Council Arts, Culture and Heritage Strategy. 2016 - 2020

Mildura Arts and Culture Advisory Committee Terms of Reference

Mildura Rural City Council CBD Strategy 2020-23

Mildura Rural City Council Community Climate Response Plan 2024-2029

Mildura Rural City Council COVID-19 Community Impacts Research 2020

Mildura Rural City Council Community Engagement Strategy 2020-2024

Mildura Rural City Council Community Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025

Mildura Rural City Council Community Vision 2021-2040

Mildura Rural City Council Council Plan 2021-2025

Mildura Arts Centre Masterplan Review 2019

Mildura Arts Centre Masterplan Overview

Mildura Rural City Council Public Arts and Design Policy - CP045

Mildura Rural City Council Deakin Avenue Masterplan

Mildura City Heart Annual Report 2022 - 2023

Mildura Riverfront Precinct, Conceptual Presentation by Aspire Architecture. 2023

Mildura Rural City Council Environmental Sustainability Report 2022-2023

Mildura Rural City Council State of Mildura Rural City Report 2018

Mildura Rural City Council Tourism Signage Audit Review and Strategy December 2022

Mildura Rural City Council Towards Zero Emissions Strategy 2021-2050

Mildura Rural City Council Urban Tree Strategy 2021-2026

Mildura Rural City Council Youth Engagement Strategy 2020-2023

Mt Alexander Shire Council Annual Report 2022 - 2023

Mt Alexander Shire Council Annual Report 2021 - 2022

Regional Arts Victoria, South West Creative Industries Strategy 2020 - 2024