



Underbool and District

COMMUNITY PLAN 2023-2028



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introduction

This is the second community plan for the Underbool and District Community, covering the period of 2023-2028 outlining the community's long-term goals, aspirations and priorities.

vision, mission statement

Our Vision

To make this a connected, progressive and resilient community.

Mission /Purpose Statement

Maximise opportunities to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Underbool and district community by working together.

Values

Our community values include: Integrity, Inclusiveness, Transparency, Respect and Forward-thinking.

Objectives

To maximise opportunities to ensure the sustainability and future development of the Underbool district and to ensure it continues to be a safe, supportive and active community.

Advocacy and partnerships with all levels of government, not-for-profit organisations, local organisations and other bodies, are vital to achieve these objectives.

about underbool

Gateway to the Pink Lakes Country and the Murray-Sunset National Park

History

The Underbool community is situated in the Mallee region, north-west Victoria, on the Mallee Highway approximately 50km from Ouyen. Underbool is 80kms from the South Australian border, 150km from Mildura and 327km from Adelaide. The area was first occupied by the Wergaia people and there is some evidence of Aboriginal settlement from 6000 to 4000BC in close proximity to water soaks in the area. Aboriginal 'middens' have also been discovered in clay soils close to available water sources.ⁱ

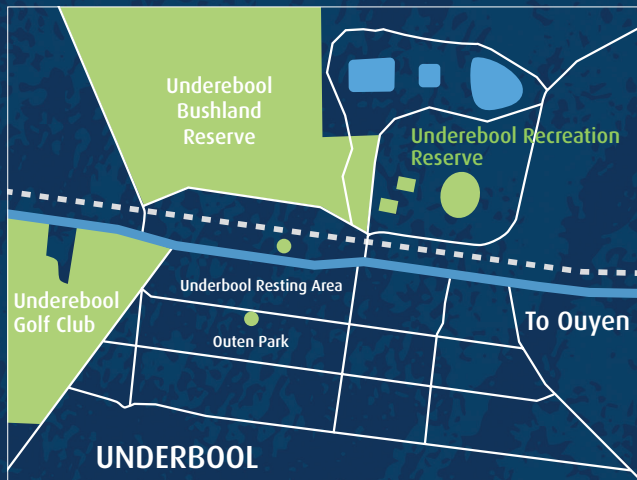
The township was first settled in the early 1900s around the Underbool Railway Station, historically the main economic driver has been agriculture with a particular focus on dryland cropping and prime lamb production. Other major drivers have been small business including, a licenced hotel, accommodation, farming supplies, State Government and automotive car sales and servicing.

In 1885, the Railways Standing Committee considered extending railways into the Mallee and had 'more than paid their way' according to the Railways Commissioner. The Mallee Track communities between Ouyen and Murrayville experienced consolidated growth after

construction of the railway line commenced in 1909, and then opened in 1912.ⁱⁱ In 2021, the Murray Darling Freight Rail Project, which incorporates \$60 million of upgrades to the Ouyen to Murrayville Railway line, is set to stimulate the local economy through direct and indirect employment in Mallee Track townships.

Underbool is the gateway to 'Pink Lakes Country' and the Murray-Sunset National Park with a strong flow of tourism connecting South Australia and NSW via the Mallee Track Highway. Underbool residents travel to Ouyen which is the key main service centre to Mallee Track communities. Underbool has an unique tourism potential from its geographical location and increasing outback recreational activity throughout the National Parks.

Underbool is often home to many travellers who seek to experience the vast Mallee bushland and often enjoy the Wayside stop located on the Mallee Highway adjacent to the business precinct and amenities. Travellers also often camp at the Underbool Recreation Reserve, utilising the local community store, topping up with fuel at the local garage and experiencing the local area.



climate

The mean annual rainfall (1939-2021) is approximately 331mm over a period of 82 days, however this varies widely from year to year. During the drought year of 1982, only 105mm of rain was recorded. Over the summer months of 2010-11 more than 265mm rain was recorded (avg. 490mm across our district).

Rainfall is essential to the success of farming enterprise and other business in the Mallee district.ⁱⁱⁱ

The community experiences temperature of 25-30°C throughout the year and humidity is generally low, although temperatures can soar well over 40°C in summer. Winter nights are cool and frosty, however the weather is often sunny throughout the day.^{iv}

population

In 2021, Underbool had a population of 215, with 109 females and 111 males, of which, 66 families reside. The median age of residents was 51 years. Linga has a population of 13 people, inclusive of 3 families, inclusive of 42.9% female and 57.1% male.

In 2016, Underbool had a population of 220 people.

The unemployment rate of 7.4% was slightly higher than the State average. 30.3% of people who were employed worked 45 hours or more per week, which is almost double the Victorian State Average.^v

In Underbool, **39.8%** of people participated and /or completed **voluntary work** through an organisation or a group which is almost **triple the state average.**

embracing our mallee heritage

In 2011, the Underbool Centenary Book Committee, under the auspice of the Underbool Progress Group, produced a 265-page detailed publication highlighting 100 years of history called 'Embracing Our Mallee Heritage'. The aim was to celebrate and capture the indomitable spirit of our pioneering

forefathers, and of those who have followed and built upon the foundations laid.^{vi}

The publication is an example of the local commitment to the future of the community, the extensive history and need to 'embrace our heritage'.

birds of the millewa-mallee 'sunrise to sunset'

In 2020, local photographer Pamela McNamara published a 267 page compilation of local birds, capturing 45 years of photography adventures. The concept was to promote interest in local species, the abundance of bird life within our communities

and visitors in the Millewa-Mallee and Murray River regions. The collection of high quality photographs is unique to the Millewa-Mallee region and also includes detailed information on range, habitat, breed and nest.^{vii}



Image courtesy of Pamela McNamara

developing the underbool community plan

The Underbool Progress Group in consultation with the community, developed the first community plan in 2014.

The Community Plan includes the Underbool and surrounding districts, including Linga and has a focus on a number of actions, including maintaining existing assets, making improvements and developing various initiatives in the future.

This is the second community plan for the Underbool and District Community and will cover the period of 2022–2027 with a strong focus on long-term sustainability, long term goals and priorities for the future.

Mildura Rural City Council

In 2021, the Mildura Rural City Council's Community Futures Branch launched a Community Planning Team to assist with the development of a new and innovative plan that would develop existing projects, identify new projects that would enable the community to apply for potential funding opportunities. The Community Plan has a grassroots approach to shaping the future of the community, outlining the long-term goals, aspirations and priorities over the next five years.

The COVID-19 pandemic created a number of consultation challenges and in response Mildura Rural City Council supported the Underbool Progress Group with an extensive media strategy that incorporated various engagement methods. The residents of Underbool and district community participated in a visioning session, completing detailed online and hard copy surveys, phone interviews, video conferencing, email and social media. The residents were highly engaged in issues and demonstrated commitment to the community by completing detailed responses. The survey data was collated, thematically analysed and a draft plan developed for the community to provide feedback on.

The Key Reference Group

The Underbool Progress Group's Key Reference Group (KRG) participated in the community planning process to determine the relevance of previous findings and to determine if there were any new or emerging trends.

In addition, during 2021, data was considered from the Advancing Country Towns project from 2011 to 2017 and Mildura Rural City Council's Imagine 2040 survey data and included online and hard copy surveys, written submissions, community events and various interviews.

About Underbool Progress Group

Underbool Progress Group is a voluntary incorporated community organisation, established on 3 December 1997, represented by community elected individuals who bring a range of views seeking economic and social development for the community of Underbool, similar to the Ouyen Inc. model of operation.^{viii}

The purpose of the Underbool Progress Group is:

- To support other organisations in our community to develop and implement the initiatives contained in this Community Plan
- When required, form partnerships with other organisations in order to achieve community goals
- To promote the Community Plan within the Underbool and district community
- To provide a report to the community to inform them of continuing actions and projects
- Address issues of current and future concern
- Strive to provide opportunities for all residents and visitors.

Membership is open to all members of the Underbool and district community that reside or own property in the Mildura Rural City Council area.

Underbool Progress Group works closely with many stakeholders including Mildura Rural City Council, State and Federal Government to achieve actions and outcomes for the community.



our 10 key themes

1. Our Values
2. Our Vision
3. Community Wellbeing
4. Protecting our Natural Environment
5. Building a Strong Local Economy
6. Connecting our Region
7. Leadership and Governance
8. Protecting our Culture and History
9. Our Concerns
10. Project Action Plan



Image courtesy of Kerren Miles

achievements to date

The Underbool community has achieved the following:

- Outen Park War Memorial Gate, Pillars and Garden (WW1)
- Mallee Highway History display and shelters
- Underbool Swimming Pool Solar Blankets
- Establishment of Community 'Pink Lakes Pantry'
- Published book 'Birds of Millewa - Mallee, Sunrise to Sunset
- Mallee Minors Childcare and Kindergarten extension and upgrades^{ix}
- Production of YouTube Community Videos – Underbool Community and Outen Park
- Underbool Primary School building, playground and landscaping upgrades
- Underbool – Linga Memorial Hall Portable Audio Equipment
- Community Christmas Lighting Installation
- Underbool Rural Outreach Library Service
- Underbool defibrillators at Bush Nurse Centre, Wayside Stop, Underbool Recreation Reserve and Fire Truck
- Underbool Water Treatment Upgrades
- Solar Power for Underbool Recreation Reserve Complex

Events

- Australia Day
- Anzac Day
- Underbool Primary School Market Day

- Underbool Primary School Annual Christmas Concert
- Underbool and District Swimming Sports
- Underbool Christmas Eve Community Santa visit
- 'Loop the Lake' Cancer Fundraiser
- Girls Night In Cancer Research Fundraisers
- Open Garden Day
- Messy Church

Community Assets and Services

The Underbool and District community is home to a number of community facilities, groups and services that include:

- Visiting Library Service
- Rural Landfill and Transfer Station
- Parks Victoria
- Linga Airbase
- GWM Water Reservoir and Treatment Plant
- Underbool Senior Citizens
- Underbool-Linga Memorial Hall
- Uniting/Anglican Cooperative Parish
- Underbool Press
- Country Party Room
- Underbool Cemetery
- Outen Park
- Wayside Stop
- Telstra Exchange

Community Groups

- Underbool Progress Group
- Underbool Recreation Reserve
- Underbool Cemetery Trust
- Underbool Community Events Facebook Group
- Underbool - Linga Hall Committee
- Weeah Landcare Group Inc

- Underbool Bowls Club Inc
- Underbool Swimming Pool Advisory Group
- Underbool Tennis Club
- Underbool Press Committee
- Uniting/Anglican Cooperative Parish
- Catholic Church

Emergency Services

- Country Fire Authority (CFA)
- Victoria Police

Sporting Groups

- Underbool Recreation Reserve
- Underbool Bowls Club
- Underbool Golf Club
- Underbool Tennis Club
- Underbool Swimming Pool
- Ouyen United Kangas Football and Netball Club Inc.

Education and Learning

- Mallee Minors Child Care and Early Learning Centre
- Underbool Primary School

Health and Wellbeing

- Mallee Border Health Centre
- Mallee Track Health and Community Service Bush Nurse Centre
- Maternal Child Health Outreach Service

Businesses

- A.J Gloster and Sons
- Corbett Rural Supplies
- Pink Lakes Pantry
- Underbool Post Office
- GrainCorp
- Spilt Milk
- Mallee Tours



Image courtesy of Robert Klarich



Image courtesy of Cassey Gloster

our priorities

1. Our Values

Underbool is a connected, welcoming, inclusive, diverse and family-friendly community.

As a community we value:

- A sense of community and belonging
- Peaceful, quiet and relaxing lifestyle
- Inclusive and friendly people
- Diversity of people and interests
- The local historical aspects of the town
- Locally delivered goods and services
- Safety and security
- Dedicated volunteers
- Natural landscapes, bushland and parks

2. Our Vision

The community sees Underbool as a place which supports:

- A clean and tidy town appearance
- Improvements to existing facilities to increase opportunities for community
- Integrated, innovative and local health, wellbeing and community services
- Shop buildings are occupied and local business are supported
- Promotion of tourism opportunities that attract visitors, that connect us to the region and that encourage local spending

- New industry
- Advocacy for Local, State and Federal funding grants to support local businesses and facilities
- Further outreach services to meet the needs of the community
- High speed phone and internet connectivity
- Local employment and education opportunities
- Attract new families to the community
- New and existing volunteers
- Long-term sustainability

3. Community Wellbeing

Activities and initiatives that produce a vibrant township with a safe and healthy community.

This includes a focus on:

- A range of recreational and social development opportunities
- Clean, safe community and public amenities
- Access to health and wellbeing services
- Access to high quality early, primary and secondary education
- Trained and experienced volunteer emergency services (CFA)
- Access to recreation facilities. i.e. Tennis, Golf, Bowls, Netball, Football and exercise groups
- Swimming pool for training, lap swimming, water safety, school carnivals and competitions

- Well maintained parks and gardens
- Access to multipurpose Underbool - Linga Hall
- Continuation of Outreach Library Service
- Heritage preservation

4. Protecting Our Natural Environment

Working towards conserving and promoting the natural element of our community.

This includes a focus on:

- Protecting, sustaining and maintaining our bushland, parks, streetscapes and reserves
- Beautification of our town entrances and streetscapes
- Quality residential water supply
- Improved drainage management
- Environmental initiatives
- Energy efficiency through innovative practices
- Waste and recycling facilities and services
- Biodiversity and natural heritage
- Managing noxious weeds
- Animal, plant and pest control



Image courtesy of Kerren Miles

5. Building a Strong Local Economy

Supporting the development of the local economy through employment opportunity, growth and capturing tourism opportunities.

This includes a focus on:

- Maintaining business viability and supporting new services
- Diverse economic infrastructure
- Place based investment
- Creating, developing and capturing tourism opportunities
- Marketing and promotion

- Building partnerships with outlying communities
- Advocacy for quality local services
- Employment, education and skill development opportunities
- Recruiting and mentoring new volunteers
- Attracting new residents
- Meaningful community events

6. Connecting Our Region

Linking our towns and connecting our region.

This includes a focus on:

- Building partnerships with neighbouring communities and other Local Government Areas (LGA) ^x

- Placed-based projects funded and supported by Local, State and Federal Governments
- Local transport services for students attending Murrayville Community College.
- Access to transport services, including Mallee Track Health and Community Services Community Car
- Locally delivered and visiting outreach services
- Higher quality and fast speed communication networks
- Support and advocate for the rural rail network
- New and improved Township Entrance Signage

7. Leadership and Governance

Ensuring strong leadership and meaningful governance for community.

This includes a focus on:

- Strong partnerships with Government and neighbouring communities
- Advocacy for public participation and engagement through Underbool Press, Underbool website, community noticeboard, North West Express and Social Media
- Expertise for delivery of initiatives and projects
- Support, access and prioritisation of grant funding
- Participation in Council decision-making

8. Protecting Our Culture and History

Preserving our culture and local heritage.

This includes a focus on:

- Supporting access to quality arts and library services
- Building partnerships with Mildura Arts Centre and relevant organisations to deliver a diverse range of arts and cultural experiences
- Expanding Outen Park War Memorial
- Protecting local heritage and culture

9. Our Concerns

The community identified a number of concerns and challenges.

Concerns that were highlighted included:


- An aging and declining population
- Geographical isolation and distance from larger cities
- Limited access to essential food, medical, specialist, health and wellbeing services
- Limited access to public transport

- Limited employment and educational opportunities
- Volunteer fatigue and changing patterns of volunteerism ^{xi}
- Lack of independent living accommodation for the elderly
- Lack of investment from Government and service coordination to meet local priorities
- Limited access to entertainment, sporting, non-sporting activities
- Need to maintain high quality roads, footpaths and upgrade lane-ways that are in poor condition.
- Poor and unreliable phone and internet services
- Fear of increasing externally delivered services that will encourage money being spent outside of the community
- The future of Pink Lakes Pantry
- The gap between rural community and urban policy (red tape)
- Safety perception due to insufficient street lighting in some areas
- Vacant and unused buildings
- Neighbouring State border closures disrupting various industries

10. Project Action Plan

Below is a list of the projects that the community identified as part of the planning process.

| Project Description | Next steps | Partners |
|---|--|--|
| Infrastructure | | |
| Underbool Community Swimming Pool upgrade | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with stakeholders and key partners • Investigate replacement or upgrade of toddler, main swimming pool, installation of diving blocks and shade sails • Explore funding opportunities and develop a funding strategy. | Underbool Progress Group Underbool Swimming Pool Advisory Group Mildura Rural City Council |
| Underbool Bowls Club Synthetic Green and Building upgrade project | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activate funding strategy • Explore funding opportunities | Underbool Bowls Club Underbool Progress Group Mildura Rural City Council |
| Outen Park WW11 War Memorial Project | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with stakeholders and key partners • Research project scope, objectives and budget • Explore funding opportunities | Underbool Progress Group Mildura Rural City Council Community |
| Outen Park Shelter Upgrade | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with stakeholders and key partners • Research project scope, objectives and budget • Explore funding opportunities | Underbool Progress Group Mildura Rural City Council Community |
| Underbool World War Memorial Online Digitisation Project | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community consultation with stakeholders and key partners • Research project scope, objectives and budget • Explore funding opportunities | Underbool Progress Group Mildura Rural City Council Community |
| Upgrade Wayside Stop Amenities Block Upgrade | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate to Council to investigate project scope, budget and implementation | Underbool Progress Group Mildura Rural City Council |



| Project Description | Next steps | Partners |
|---|---|--|
| Infrastructure | | |
| Outen Park Toilet Project | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate to Council to review project scope, objectives, budget and implementation • Consider prior research and solutions | Underbool Progress Group Outen Park Committee Mildura Rural City Council |
| Underbool-Linga Memorial Hall Shade Installation and refurbishment of rear store room | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek quotations • Explore funding opportunities | Underbool-Linga Memorial Hall Committee Mildura Rural City Council |
| Upgrade street furniture - picnic tables, BBQ and seating areas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community consultation with stakeholders and key partners • Research project scope, objectives and budget • Explore funding opportunities | Underbool Progress Group Mildura Rural City Council |
| Underbool Recreation Reserve improvements | Explore project scope, budget and funding opportunity for the following; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New or upgrades female netball change rooms and shower facilities • New Play equipment • Larger amenities block • Additional seating surrounding netball courts • Shade structure between existing buildings | Underbool Rec Reserve Committee Mildura Rural City Council DEWLP |
| Opportunity for recreational activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate opportunities to develop sporting and recreational activities i.e. walking track, skate park, park gym equipment | Underbool Progress Group Mildura Rural City Council |

| Project Description | Next steps | Partners |
|--|--|---|
| Infrastructure | | |
| Underbool Cemetery improvements | • Investigate opportunities to improve the site. | Underbool Cemetery Trust |
| Country Party Room | • Investigate building preservation and potential museum type history display | Community |
| Industry and Economics | | |
| Local business support | • Continue to advocate and support small local businesses | Local businesses |
| Rail upgrades Murray Darling Rail Project | • Support improvements to passenger and freight rural rail network | VLine VicTrack |
| Pink Lakes Pantry | • Explore disability access to building • Explore funding options for future sustainability | Underbool Progress Group Pink Lakes Pantry Committee |
| Emergency, Safety and Access | | |
| Improve internet coverage in outlying areas and connection speed | • Form partnerships with neighboring communities and advocate for better connectivity and internet speed | Underbool Progress Group Mallee Track Communities Service providers |
| Street lighting improvements | • Explore need for additional and improved street lighting in parks, recreational areas and streets | Underbool Progress Group Mildura Rural City Council Powercor |

| Project Description | Next steps | Partners |
|--|---|--|
| Infrastructure | | |
| Improve footpath safety | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and lobby for better maintained or new footpaths • Remove or repair derelict or dangerous structures, buildings and trees | Underbool Progress Group |
| Review access to immediate emergency resources (Defibrillators, oxygen) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review local emergency resources and advocate for locally accessible resources | Mallee Track Health and Community Service Emergency Services Community Groups |
| Underbool Fire Station (CFA) improvements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate opportunity for a new fire station and improved BBQ area | Underbool Fire Brigade Country Fire Authority |
| Forward control firefighter vehicle Purpose built firefighter trailer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate suitable options for community • Explore funding opportunities | Underbool Fire Station |
| Promotion | | |
| Promote community assets, national parks and tourism opportunities that incorporates a collaborative online presence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form partnerships with other local communities to develop a Mallee Track Tourism Strategy or Plan • Develop a tourism strategy for Underbool and district communities to highlight offerings | Underbool Progress Group Mallee Track Communities Mildura Regional Development |



| Project Description | Next steps | Partners |
|--|---|--|
| Promotion | | |
| Promote community assets, national parks and tourism opportunities that incorporates a collaborative online presence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form partnerships with other local communities to develop a Mallee Track Tourism Strategy or Plan • Develop a tourism strategy for Underbool and district communities to highlight offerings | Underbool Progress Group Mallee Track Communities Mildura Regional Development |
| Town Entrance Signage Review | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form partnerships with authorities • Review and conduct a township signage audit • Investigate new signage options and funding strategy | Underbool Progress Group Mildura Rural City Council Regional Roads Victoria |
| Community events to enhance social connection i.e Australia Day, Anzac Day, Christmas Eve etc | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing consultation with community groups to ensure funding opportunities are available and suitable strategic planning is provided to support township | Underbool Progress Group Community |

other projects and initiatives

Below is a list of the other projects and initiatives that the community identified:

- Explore new local industry opportunities
- Link business to tourism opportunities
- Improve and upskill community groups in applying for grants
- Support Recreation Reserve Committee in long term options for site use
- Beautify access points to town
- Investigate transfer station hours of operation and if they meet the needs of the community
- Explore opportunity for installation of a Electric Vehicle (EV) Fast Charger



Image courtesy of Kerren Miles

References

- i aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia and 'Aboriginal Languages and Clans - Ian D Clark 1990 Monash Publications.
- ii 'Mildura Former Shire of Walpeup Heritage Study Stage 2 Volume '2 Key Findings and Recommendations 2013', pg 1.
- iii Bureau of Meteorology, rainfall average
- iv Australia Government Bureau of Meteorology Climate Statistics, Walpeup Research Station, Summary Statistics
- v 'Census Quickstats 2021', Census Data Australian Bureau of Statistics
- vi 'Embracing Our Mallee Heritage, Underbool Progress Group', 2011
- vii Birds of the Millewa-Mallee, Sunrise to Sunset, Pam McNamara, 2020
- viii 'Ouyen Inc Business and Strategic Plan 2011-2015', pg 7
- ix 'Kinder Upgrade, www.markgepp.com.au/kinder-upgrade-support-underbool-families/
- x 'Ouyen Community Plan', Ouyen Inc 2020
- xi 'Resilient Service Project', 2014

acknowledgments

The Underbool and District Community Plan was developed by the Underbool Progress Group in collaboration with Cassey Gloster and Geoff Burr from Mildura Rural City Council. Thank-you to committee members Fran Lynch and Sonia McVicar for working closely with the community in the development of this plan.

The Underbool and District Community Plan 2023-2028 was endorsed by Mildura Rural City Council on the 22 December 2022.

Contact us

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For speech or hearing impaired:

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This community plan was developed by the community of Underbool in collaboration with Mildura Rural City Council:

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Underbool Progress Group and Mildura Rural City Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land, which now comprises the Mildura Rural City municipality. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and celebrate and respect their continuing cultures and acknowledge the memories of their ancestors.



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UNDERBOOL PROGRESS GROUP



Mildura Rural City Council

