

# ANNUAL REPORT

2024



RURAL  
**BUSINESS &  
COMMUNITY**



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A copy of the Financial Report  
for the year ended 30 June 2024  
is available on our website  
[www.ruralbc.com.au](http://www.ruralbc.com.au)





# OUR STORY

Our organisation began as the Sunraysia Rural Counselling Service, providing support to farmers facing financial hardship.

The Sunraysia region has a proud heritage of food growing. But changing conditions have challenged the survival of many industries. For decades, locals called on our support to navigate difficulties and transitions.

Over time we've seen how high impact issues like the environment, technology and the pandemic have affected individuals, industries and towns. We realised that we could do more than help rural businesses to survive - we want rural towns and communities to thrive.

A few years back, we accessed government funding and began to expand services, to do more collaborative work on the ground to co-design economic and community development programs – workshops for business, online training, revitalisation projects and aerial mapping for strategic planning. In 2021 we changed our name and organisational structure to reflect what's become a broader scope and vision.

Rural Business & Community is a company on a mission to co-write a new narrative with rural towns across north west Victoria and southern New South Wales. The next chapter is all about rural renewal.





# VISION & GOALS

## OUR VISION

### **Our vision is thriving rural towns and communities.**

We leverage the countless possibilities for rural communities.

Bringing resources, research and frameworks to the table, Rural Business & Community collaborates with local people to ignite existing potential, to spark ideas and fire up the future. We facilitate aspirations that are desirable and doable.

Governance is overseen by a credentialed Board. The work is managed and implemented by an experienced team.

Our organisation is underpinned by four pillars:

- High quality and measurable standards;
- Engaged, robust and respectful relationships;
- Clear and transparent communication;
- Possibility, integrity and accountability.

## OUR GOALS

### **1. Our Communities and our People**

Supporting and assisting rural communities through delivery of agreed programs aimed at embracing resilience and supporting sustainability.

### **2. Connection through Creative Conversations**

We will encourage inclusive and creative conversations with rural communities and stakeholders, ensuring we all know and understand who we are, what we do and share possibilities.

### **3. Sustainability**

We will pursue sustainable funding streams that support thriving rural towns and communities.

### **4. Our Staff**

We will value, recognise and invest in our people.

### **5. Build Organisational Compliance**

We will pursue organisational excellence.



# STRUCTURE & MANAGEMENT

## RURAL BUSINESS & COMMUNITY LTD BOARD

Chair	Jack Forbes
Secretary	John Senior
Board Member	Lyn Heaysman
Board Member	Andrew Pickles
Board Member	Leo Tellefson
Board Member	Kylie Zanker

## BOARD EXECUTIVE

Chair	Jack Forbes
Board Member	John Senior
Board Member	Lyn Heaysman

## EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Patrick Timmons

## EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

Lorraine Argus

## PROJECT OFFICER

Jenny Garonne (contract 20/2/23-28/7/23)

## PROGRAM STAFF

- SunRISE MAPPING & RESEARCH

Program Manager	Sue Argus
GIS Project Officer	Julie Hawtin





## OUR BOARD



**Jack Forbes**  
Chair (appointed 24/3/21)

Board member since 2021. Previously served on the Board of Sunraysia Rural Counselling Service for 36 years.

A family background in farming motivates Jack's commitment to rural and farm issues. He is a Member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and has completed financial planning and accounting course segments. Jack has skills in succession planning, retirement planning and aged care issues, superannuation, government assistance programs and rural financial issues through experience as a former Financial Information Service Officer with Centrelink Mildura. Jack is now semi-retired but continuing to pursue his interest in seeing rural Australia grow and flourish.



**John Senior**  
Secretary (appointed 26/1/22)

Board member since 2021. Previously served on the Board of Sunraysia Rural Counselling Service for 13 years.

John has extensive experience in the management of small and medium enterprises, has been a member of boards of management in the business services and aged care sector for over ten years and is currently consulting in the government funded health and community sector. John has a continuing interest in quality assurance and a commitment to the delivery of services in support of health and wellbeing in remote and rural areas of Australia. His qualifications include a Certificate in Management Services and a postgraduate Diploma in Management Studies.



**Lyn Heaysman**  
Board Member

Board member since 2021. Previously served on the Board of Sunraysia Rural Counselling Service for 23 years.

Lyn's interest in agriculture stems from twenty-one years of owning a family vineyard in Sunraysia. She has served on the Australian Dried Fruits Association Board and as a Director of the Victorian Dried Fruits Board, a position she held for ten years. Lyn is currently Chair of Princes Court Homes Board. She has been self-employed in her financial planning business for over twenty-four years. Lyn's qualifications include a Masters in Applied Finance and Certificate in Business Accounting and she is a Member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.





## OUR BOARD



**Andrew Pickles**  
Board Member

Board member since 2021.  
Previously served on the Board of Sunraysia Rural Counselling Service for 5 years.

Andrew's rural background stems from the family farm in north central Victoria. He has recently retired as a partner of law firm Robertson Hyetts Solicitors at Bendigo where he specialised in commercial work and is a former president of the Bendigo Law Association. Andrew was a committee member of a former rural financial counselling service for over ten years and has had extensive community involvements. As well as Arts and Law degrees, Andrew holds mediation accreditation from Bond University and has been appointed an arbiter under the Local Government Act. He has a particular interest in corporate governance in non-profit organisations.



**Leo Tellefson**  
Board Member

Board member since 2021.  
Previously served on the Board of Sunraysia Rural Counselling Service for 9 years.

Leo is involved in rural business and farming through his family farm and also owns the local butcher shop in his home town of Donald. He is currently a Board Member of the Johnson-Goodwin Homes Aged Care Facility in Donald, the Donald Community Centre/Neighbourhood House and Buloke Community Enterprises (Bendigo Community Bank franchise) and a committee member of Donald Racing Club. Leo has previously served as a councillor on Buloke Shire Council including two terms as Mayor and on the Donald Hospital/East Wimmera Health Service Board.



**Kylie Zanker**  
Board Member

Board member since 2021.  
Previously served on the Board of Sunraysia Rural Counselling Service for 8 years.

Kylie is a Member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. She is a Yarriambiack Shire Councillor (elected 2008) and is currently serving her third non-consecutive term as Mayor. Kylie is an Early Childhood Years teacher and has a special interest in children, youth and community-minded projects. In addition to working as a teacher, Early Years program co-ordinator and university lecturer in social sciences, Kylie has worked part-time with the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation's Gamblers Help Program, in the health sector and in project management with the Department of Education & Training and the Department of Justice & Regulation.



# OUR BOARD

## BOARD MEETING REPORT

The meeting attendance by board members during the year 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024 is noted below.

Board Meetings held  
24/8/23, 16/11/23,  
14/3/24 & 13/6/24

Board Executive Meetings held  
20/7/23, 17/8/23, 21/9/23, 19/10/23,  
14/12/23, 11/1/24, 8/2/24, 6/3/24,  
11/4/24, 9/5/24 & 6/6/24

Jack Forbes, Chair	4 of 4
Lyn Heaysman	2 of 4
Andrew Pickles	2 of 4
John Senior	4 of 4
Leo Tellefson	4 of 4
Kylie Zanker	1 of 4

Jack Forbes, Chair	10 of 10
Lyn Heaysman	8 of 10
John Senior	10 of 10

## FINANCIAL REPORT

The General Purpose Financial Statements for the year ended 30 June 2024 are available on our website [www.ruralbc.com.au](http://www.ruralbc.com.au)





# CHAIR & EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT

Since the onset of COVID we have learned the art of remote management and remote meetings (Zoom) which have become commonplace and for Rural Business and Community Ltd (RB&C) these tools continue to be effective in overseeing the organisation's operations and obligations.

Our primary focus remains with the SunRISE Mapping and Research program, recognising that the program regularly "punches above its weight" and continues to fulfil contractual commitments and ongoing requirements.

Over the past twelve months RB&C has continued working with a couple of smaller Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR) grants under the Future Drought Fund – Helping Rural Communities Prepare for Drought: Community Impact Grants. Our projects are focused on establishing a shared shop in Donald and a network of shared shops under the banner of a "Shared Shops Trail". Both of these projects will wind up over the next six months or so.

Thanks to our committed board members who have maintained their support and commitment to RB&C in a significantly downsized operational profile, while continuing to advocate for the organisation's continued purpose of supporting rural towns and rural communities in the north-west of Victoria.

Whilst our staffing profile has reduced to four people, we appreciate their commitment to the organisation and our programs, as well as their flexible approach to work in a climate of part-time and remote management.

Special thanks to all our staff especially Lorraine Argus whose commitment to RB&C is very much appreciated.

We will continue to ensure that the required level of professional management and support is maintained for staff and for board members

**Jack Forbes**  
Chair

**Patrick Timmons**  
Executive Officer





# SHARED SHOP PROJECTS

## PROGRAM REPORT

The Shared Shop initiatives received funding support from the Future Drought Fund: Helping Rural Communities Prepare for Drought: Community Impact Project that is facilitated through the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR) and will continue to be supported through Rural Business & Community Ltd.

The projects are focused on establishing a shared shop in Donald and a network of shared shops under the banner of a "Shared Shop Trail".

The Donald Shared Shop has brought together a variety of small businesses that share the venue costs, rent and overheads as well as the staffing arrangements. Other locals sell their products on consignment through the shop which assists the income bottom line for the participants.

They have also created a confidential and professional office space for hire that provides visiting professionals with a 'hot desk' solution.

Income from the hire of the office will help to support the shop traders with rental obligations and overheads, building sustainability for any difficult times ahead.

The Shared Shop Trail initiative has commenced looking to establish a network and promote an online presence for up to six shared shops in the north west of Victoria. The theme is focused on the shared shops operating "in the shadows" of local silo art.



Donald Shared Shop, 81 Woods Street, Donald & Shop Traders





## PROGRAM REPORT

### Key activities and projects

In 2023-24, the focus for the SunRISE team was to update its mapping of irrigated horticulture for the 2024 season (July 2023 to June 2024). Updating of the mapping has been undertaken every three years since 1997 and is based on high resolution aerial photography, irrigator and industry input and field surveys.

### Acquisition of 2024 aerial photography

Acquisition of high resolution aerial imagery was project managed by the **Co-ordinated Imagery Program, Department of Transport and Planning, Victoria**. Funding partners included **Lower Murray Water, Mallee Catchment Management Authority, Murray Darling Basin Authority, Rural Business & Community, Wentworth**

### Shire Council, Western Murray Irrigation and the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, NSW.

The fly-over commenced in December 2023 and was completed by late January 2024. The main areas flown covered irrigated permanent plantings along lower Murray-Darling rivers in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales; from Torrumbarry in Victoria to Waikerie in South Australia.

Outputs from the photography included colour infrared (CIR) and natural colour imagery. The CIR image highlights biomass and canopy condition which assisted the SunRISE team with rapid visual interpretation of irrigation status. This was especially useful at a time when many wine grape plantings were being dried off.



*High resolution aerial photography flown January 2024, in colour infrared and natural colour*



# SunRISE MAPPING & RESEARCH

## PROGRAM REPORT continued

### Mapping of irrigated horticulture

The mapping of irrigated horticulture provides accurate information on the area of each of the region's horticultural crop types, and changes and trends in irrigation development over time. It is maintained by SunRISE on an ongoing basis in collaboration with irrigators, industry groups, service providers, and land and water management agencies.

SunRISE primarily uses high resolution aerial imagery captured in summer months to map permanent plantings. Satellite imagery is used to map irrigated crops that are active at other times of the year (such as broad acre field crops and vegetables). The 2024 mapping of irrigated areas, from the Barmah Choke to the Murray Mouth, will be completed late 2024.

Analysis of the mapping and databases will then be

undertaken to produce information and reports on changes and trends in irrigated horticulture to 2024. In particular, the report

*'Irrigated crop area data for the Lower Murray-Darling 2003 to 2021 - including analysis of the Edward/Kooley and Wakool river system'*

will be updated for the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA). The report is expected to be publicly available in 2025.



January 2024 aerial photography with 2024 irrigated crops mapping

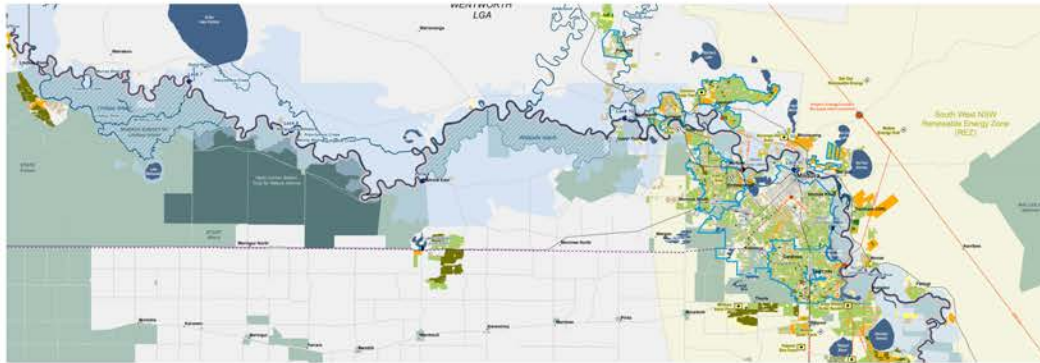




## PROGRAM REPORT continued

### Customised regional maps

Regional maps were customised for a range of clients including Regional Development Victoria and the Mallee Regional Innovation Centre.



*Map of the Mildura region with solar sites and Renewable Energy Zones (REZ)*

### Property and crop maps

Maps for over 50 properties were prepared in 2023-24. The maps were customised and supplied in hard copy and digital formats depending on client needs which included:

- digital mapping for soil surveys and/or irrigation design purposes;
- crop maps for wine grape growers participating in the Murray Valley Winegrowers benchmarking project;
- crop maps for Dried Fruits Australia growers;
- farm infrastructure maps for Freshcare compliance;
- maps for planning and management of irrigation development or redevelopment;
- crop maps for export market registration; and
- land feature maps for mine extraction and rehabilitation.



*Section of a property map*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Rural Business & Community Ltd wishes to acknowledge and sincerely thank the following organisations for their funding, contributions and support during the 2023-24 financial year:

## GRANTS

Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal  
Future Drought Fund's Helping Regional Communities Prepare for Drought  
- Community Impact Program funding for

- Victorian Shared Shop Initiative
- Shared Shops Trail Project

## CASH CONTRIBUTIONS TO SunRISE MAPPING & RESEARCH

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment & Water  
TASCO Petroleum  
Wentworth Shire Council  
Western Murray Irrigation

## REPORT DESIGN

Kylie Norton Design

## PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES

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