

Conclusions

Major trends in farm productivity, amenity migration, demographic transitions and changes in community values are leading to the development of four distinct social landscapes within rural Victoria. These landscapes, Production, Amenity, Transition and Irrigation, set quite different challenges for the Department of Primary Industries and for the Victorian Government. It is not the aim of the authors of this report to explore these challenges in any depth. That is a task being undertaken by others. As a conclusion, we offer some simple thoughts on the implications for policy within these four landscapes.

In the production landscape, the never-ending quest for productivity improvement in agriculture will continue to dominate the evolution of the landscape. For the Department of Primary Industry, the traditional role of supporting increased productivity of agricultural industries will not change. But the cumulative social impacts of improved agricultural productivity on small towns and on farm families must be recognised as an inevitable outcome of success in the productivity race.

remains, particularly in the production landscape. The question of whether small towns in this landscape can be sustained in the long term will remain a challenge for all future governments. Two potential futures for small towns seem to be emerging. One is a trajectory of slow population decline and increasing structural ageing. This pathway will have significant implications for human service delivery. Another future is one of slower population decline as housing stock is progressively filled by migrants attracted by cheap housing. This future offers the challenge of community building in towns with a more diverse cultural base.

In the amenity landscape, the potential for economic growth through increased farm productivity is limited by social transformation of the landscape. Farm business strategies based upon extensification will be increasingly irrelevant. The future landscape will be composed of a mix of rural retreats, small farms, more intensive horticultural development, and farm businesses built upon commodification of the landscape. There will remain a role for some forms of productivity investment. But there will be increasingly a need to invest in programs to protect agricultural market reputation, manage invasive species, protect amenity and perhaps develop environmental services.

In the transitional zone, the challenges of both the production and amenity zones can be found. Improving agricultural productivity will remain important. The focus of this research will need to be directed increasingly towards new land uses, and also the wider social concerns over land use impacts on the environment and landscape amenity. In towns and rural communities, the challenge of community building will be complicated by an increasingly divergent community views about the appropriate use of landscapes. This can be seen in the current conflicts over plantation forestry and wind farm development.

The irrigation landscape encompasses elements of the production, transition and amenity landscapes. What sets it apart is the potential for rapid changes within the region under the increasingly active trade in water entitlements. There is a role for research to explore the potential impacts of water reform, both intended and unintended, and to assist with the development of implementation strategies that minimise third party impacts.

APPENDIX

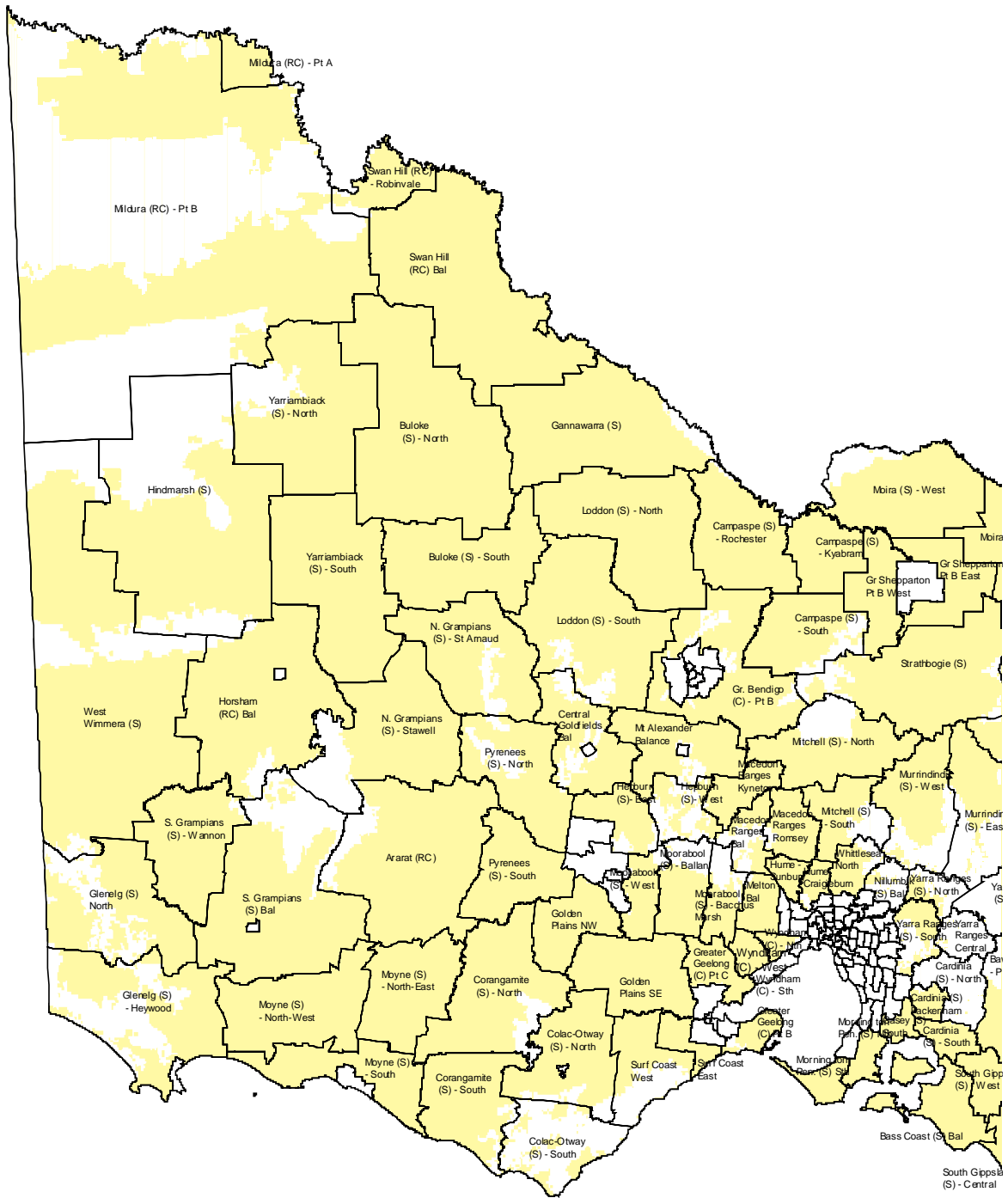


Figure 1 Names of selected rural west Victorian Statistical Local Areas

