



Voices of Wannon  
Participatory Democracy

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# What Wannon Wants

*Community Consultation Report*



Voices of Wannon acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land of the electorate of Wannon, and pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

# Our Values

We are **Inclusive**

We are **Transparent**

We are **Accountable**

We are **Respectful**

We behave with **Integrity**



*Voices of Wannon Supporters are located throughout Wannon.*

# Who we are

Voices of Wannon is a group of individuals who have come together to help make a meaningful connection between the people of Wannon and our political representatives.

**We are not a political party.**

We are citizens from a wide range of backgrounds from across the electorate of Wannon who have become disaffected with party politics. Through community consultation, we are gathering the diverse views of the Wannon electorate and advocating to ensure our common values are represented conscientiously in parliament by those we elect.

We expect high standards from our political leaders.

We are committed to advocating for representation that is an honest, meaningful and transparent consultative process between the electorate and our elected representatives.



***"A functioning, robust democracy requires a healthy, educated, participatory followership, and an educated, morally grounded leadership."*** – Chinua Achebe

## Our team

Voices of Wannon is an incorporated association with 99 financial members and over 240 supporters. The group was formed in January 2021 and is guided by a committee comprised of L-R Brian Woodcock - Colac, Martin Slocombe - Hamilton, Susan Hook - Warrnambool, Greg Twitt (Secretary) - Warrnambool, Lorraine Pola (Treasurer) - Warrnambool, Jim Gifford - Camperdown, Shelly Murrell (Convenor) - Allansford, and Genevieve Grant (Deputy Convenor) - Rosebrook. (Not pictured).



# About the electorate of Wannon



Wannon covers over 33,000km<sup>2</sup> and comprises nine local government areas. Approximately 155,000 people live in the electorate.

Based on the 2021 census, we have lower rates of tertiary education than the national average, with only 16.4% of the population holding a bachelor's degree or above, compared to the Victorian average of 29.2% and the Australian average of 26.3%.

We are less culturally and linguistically diverse with 83.9% of Wannon's population being born in Australia compared to the Victorian average of 65% and the Australian average of 66.9%, and not as wealthy - 21.5% of households in Wannon earn less than \$650 per week compared to the Victorian average of 16.4% and the national average of 16.5%.

We have many communities with poor health, with areas of Wannon experiencing higher rates of asthma, mental health concerns, heart disease, and arthritis. Wannon also has a larger proportion of families where both parents are unemployed, in comparison with the national average.

## The Australian Electoral Commission lists the following councils in Wannon:

- Ararat Rural City Council,
- Colac Otway Shire Council,
- Corangamite Shire Council,
- Glenelg Shire Council,
- Moyne Shire Council,
- Southern Grampians Shire Council,
- Warrnambool City Council,
- part of the Pyrenees Shire Council, and
- part of the Surf Coast Shire Council.

***"No matter what people tell you, words and ideas can change the world."***

Robin Williams



# About the Report

This report is the second community consultation report prepared by Voices of Wannon. The 2021 What Wannon Wants Report was shared with all elected representatives in the Wannon community in order for them to utilise it to inform their decision making, establish priorities and more fully and effectively represent their community. We anticipate that this second report will serve the same purpose.

The report documents the priorities of the people of Wannon. The views of the community were collected by holding Kitchen Table Conversations (KTCs) across the electorate, from Coleraine and Portland in the west to Birregurra in the east, and from Ararat in the north to towns along the Great Ocean Road. KTCs were also held in Camperdown, Lake Bolac, Rosebrook, Framlingham, Hamilton, Port Fairy, Colac, Koroit, and Warrnambool. We also enabled individuals to contribute their views via an online survey.

This report gives an overview of what our participants said in response to the questions:

- What are the good things about living in Wannon?
- What would your ideal community look and feel like?
- What are your expectations of your local member?
- What practical things can we do to improve engagement and trust in democracy?
- What are the most important things that you'd like our local member to address?

The comments from all participants were collated by topic and the most frequently mentioned issues identified as priorities.



Kitchen Table Conversation, Lake Bolac

## Kitchen Table Conversations

The KTC process is a model where small groups meet and discuss what's important to them.

The purpose is to listen and document the key priorities of the participants. KTCs are a forum for listening, not for changing the opinions of others.

Participants are included, valued and respected. All opinions are valid.

Conversations are run by a facilitator and comprehensive notes taken by a scribe.

The conversations use a series of standard questions, relevant to the topic at hand, as 'starters' to help get the conversation going.



# What are the good things

**Posing a question about what people value about their community tells us what needs to be preserved and enhanced. Overwhelmingly, people appreciate the natural beauty of the area and their access to nature - the ocean, mountains, forests and plains.**

- For First Nations people it is their connection to their country and their culture.
- Family friendly and a great place to raise kids.
- People - the sense of community, history, services and safety.
- They like the connection with and availability of the arts and sports.

The landscape is amazing. The Grampians, Otways, Great Ocean Road, volcanic plains. We need to make sure it is looked after.

**From a young age, I've always loved western Victoria for the consistent 'gum-tree dappled' landscape. It's not as strong down here as it is a little further north, but it's still purely beautiful.**

I love how the half an hour it takes to drive to work is a journey through beautiful country.

I love this area because we belong there. We have all our people buried here. We have the environment. We have the beauty here. I love it. The forests, the rivers, the gullies, the sea.

The Hopkins River used to provide a great source of food for our people. We used to have fish traps down here. They are thousands of years old and we just add a bit to them and we can still use them.

Love that we're regional for our kids to grow up knowing how farming works, feel safe and have space to grow.



# about living in Wannoon?

Beautiful part of the world. I love living by the ocean. Lots of open spaces. Great people. Lots of opportunities. Wonderful place to raise a family.

I love the fact that there are a lot of drawcards that bring a lot of interesting people to Port Fairy. There is always something happening - marathons, festivals. There is a huge amount of engagement and involvement. 160 volunteers at the marathon and 80 runners.

The historical significance of the region, both the white-settler history and Indigenous history...The Camperdown Botanic Gardens and the fine building stock in our townships. The remnant stone walls. That every town has a public swimming pool - the number of bike and walking paths. The Camperdown and Noorat Agricultural Shows.

Birregurra is friendly, accepting and forward-looking.

I live in Warrnambool - it has great services, a university, a beautiful coast, a wonderful community garden and other active community groups doing great things like F Project, WCLN, Beach Patrol, etc where you can find your tribe and community connection.

**There is freedom to follow unconventional ideas and dreams. In the Hamilton area, people had achieved their dream of owning a camel.**

A vibrant arts community is really important. Art, music theatre. Far enough from Melbourne that we don't have to deal with craziness.

The sporting clubs are great here for children to find their place. We are blessed with a very vibrant sporting community.



# What would your ideal community look and feel like?

**Peoples responses when they are asked to list their aspirations for their individual community, informs us of their key community enhancement priorities.**

- Ideal communities were described as ones that look after their people and their environment.
- They are diverse and respectful of differing views.
- They acknowledge their First Peoples and the history of the land on when the communities are built.

I feel privileged to be on land that has a long Indigenous history and has a connection to the Gunditjmarra people. We need people to have more access to information about Indigenous history.

**Increased awareness that we all benefit from Aboriginal land.**

One with people of compassion, where there was no racism... where the history of this country was recognised and acknowledged, where the people respected the environment, where there was no greed and where people are accepted for who they are, not what someone thinks they should be. A community where the future was positive and climate change was actively addressed.

My ideal community would be more diverse, greener, and better at planning - both short-term and long-term.

Changing people's beliefs about "other" people (other races, LGBTIQ+) was hard several years ago; increasing diversity helps to reduce these barriers.



**More inclusivity and access to opportunities, as currently there is too much social divide, for example, housing affordability. Difficulties in renting and housing impact all areas of health and well-being for all of us.**



***These communities have access to services, focus on equity as well as equality and are safe.***



Housing and Transport links in Warrnambool.



One where people give a damn about one another. One that is welcoming. One that is inclusive. One that encourages participation. One that does not ruin the natural environment for commercial gain. One that embraces and encourages joy and happiness.

One that looks after its people and environment. This includes supported housing, job security, and access to good healthcare and education. Not just looking after the natural environment but employing sustainable farming practices, good planning for future infrastructure and safety for all to enjoy.

**Accessible, affordable health care.**

Rehab services for alcohol and drug addiction.

A region with more reliable public transport, more mental health services and treatment options for those with alcohol and other drug addictions.

A more proactive community in regards to exploring housing options for all, especially renters, the long-term unemployed and those on the disability support pension.

**The ideal community has incentives to encourage young people to remain.**

Young people will have opportunities here and they want to stay.

Young people driving community initiatives that deliver real lasting outcomes.

**Honesty in politics and media is essential in an ideal community**

A community that was not vulnerable to the poisoning effects of negative, political opportunism as seen in media and social media.

**Truth in politics, more truth in political advertising, less lies, disinformation and misinformation.**

Better transparency especially during election advertising. Better control of social media so that misinformation is reduced.

Once you gaoel a person in our society it destroys our society. Restorative justice will help our people live a better lifestyle.

# What are your expectations of your local member?

**The Wannon community has clear expectations of how they would like their Federal member to represent them. The key expectations included in the mix are honesty, integrity, listening to and working with the community, and representing the whole community.**

Be open and transparent about decision making including listening to the views of the electorate, seeking expert advice, and explaining why they took a particular position.

The local MP should genuinely engage with the community. They need to be prepared to cross the floor, they need to remember that they are representing an electorate and the best interests of their constituents.

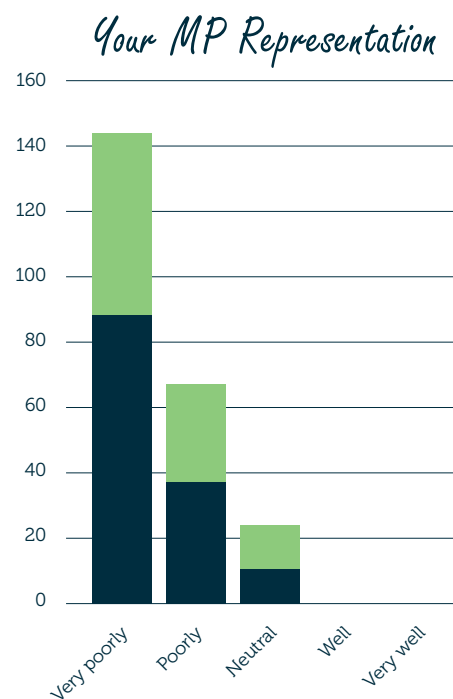
To act with integrity, be truthful, act for the short, medium and long-term benefit of our community based on rigorously assessed and factual information.

They need to be accessible and responsive. They need to be available to listen to your views even if they don't believe in them.

Have a true sense of fairness, decency and compassion.

To represent our community with kindness, empathy and honesty. Ensure people from all backgrounds receive equal representation and opportunities.

**The majority of participants do not feel their local federal MP represents them.**



Kitchen Table Conversation, Camperdown

# What practical things can we do to improve engagement and trust in democracy?

**Improving our democratic process is a key motivation for the formation of Voices of Wannon. These suggestions can give an insight to a better way forward.**

- Participation, transparency accountability.
- Education and truth in campaigns and media.
- Politics needs to be less combative.
- We need to engage young people
- There were real concerns about the retreat of democracy.

- Having conversations like this! Asking people what they want.
- Kitchen table conversations, not just before elections, ongoing genuine engagement.
- It's good to have a way to express my thoughts and opinions to a group that is passionate about positive change.
- **Capped and fully transparent political party donations.**
- Encourage transparency in political parties about donations, lobbyists and processes.

**We need to have accountability. People need to be held responsible for their decisions, for example, Robodebt. The politicians in charge need to be held to account.**

- Most Australians are not involved in politics. The research suggests that when people are deciding how to vote, they will listen to a trusted community member. Where the community member has a strong social media

following, they can promote positive messages around the democratic process.

- I'd love to see schools offer children options about clear and critical thinking and intelligent use of the media, how to identify the difference between truth and lies and how the media can manipulate views.
- There should be more literacy about the political system and how it functions. People are susceptible to misinformation if they are not educated.
- Better media standards and independent media and calling out of mistruths.
- Truth in political advertising and statements by politicians.
- We need to have independent media, instead of most media being controlled by a few powerful people.

The way the media portrays particular things is very problematic. They are addicted to wow moments and grabs and no deeper analysis.

- I think people would be more engaged with democracy and politics if it were less aggressive, pessimistic and constantly polarised by political parties.
- Too much political point-scoring.
- I would like to see optional voting for 16 and 17-year-olds.
- Increased access by young people to political processes, such as youth parliaments. Local members should also engage more with young people - visit schools, town hall-style meetings and actual campaigning even for people not yet able to vote.
- When young people are offered the respect of being listened to, they are more likely to engage with the political future of the electorate.

# What are the most important things *that you'd like our local member to address?*

KTC participants identified multiple issues that are important to them at the local, national and international levels.

**The top four issues identified are:**

- 1. Climate change and the environment**
- 2. Housing, homelessness and social inequality**
- 3. Accessible health care**
- 4. Increased investment in public education.**





# Accessible health care

Increase funding for Medicare, it is a basic human right.

Health, making it affordable. Some people who need bulk billing should be able to access doctors and not be put off because their rents have gone up but their salary hasn't.

The provision of basic GP healthcare to smaller centres, Coleraine and Casterton do not currently have a GP and consequently health care needs are not being met. The federal and state governments need to work together to fix this.

**Access to all in society for good health coverage, that is, protect Medicare and the NDIS.**

Our hospital in Portland has been allowed to run down. They are downgrading the health facilities.

You can't get a dermatologist or a women's health clinic. In some local clinics, the books are closed, and some don't have

female doctors. My daughter is having to travel to Hamilton to see a female GP. There is no federally funded women's health clinic in the region.

We need to be training our own medical and health staff in cities and regional areas.

**Access to quality mental health care.**

Local and regional alcohol and other drug residential services.

Treat drug use as a health issue instead of a legal problem. Put dental care in Medicare.



# Climate change *and the*

Weather-related disaster events are going to mean people cannot get insurance. We won't be able to afford to rebuild. Every year that we delay is going to make the next decade so much harder. Politicians must stop being so timid and need to address this urgently.

**Addressing climate change is incredibly urgent. We are not prepared for it environmentally, socially, or economically.**

Climate change, habitat destruction, housing, health, feral animals in regional areas, urbanisation – I could go on. We look to our elected representatives to act on these things, and they consistently fail.

Climate change - urgently address the

need to reduce emissions and restrict warming to 1.5 deg. This requires no new fossil fuel projects and the rapid scaling down of those existing. There is huge potential for Australia to benefit from a rapid transition to zero emissions.

The environment should be valued for its intrinsic value.

We also need to urgently prioritise the protection of biodiversity. The current government has made some commitments here but I don't feel confident that they will address this.

The key issue in my mind is climate change and the implications of environmental degradation on human health and relationships.

Warrnambool foreshore



# environment

The continuing decline of native species, restoration of natural places and biodiversity, corridors and connections for wildlife, climate change mitigation.

**Environmental issues should be considered before any new development with protecting land, water and biodiversity critical.**

Accelerate the energy transition to lower carbon emissions in line with international guidelines.

Ensure the Australian Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act actually protects our natural environments, biodiversity, wildlife, habits and threatened species, and that all States

and Territories do significantly better at this as well, in particular in stopping native and especially old growth logging, massively increasing marine parks and protecting our oceans properly.

Carbon accounting in agriculture, current methodologies are prejudiced against livestock farming and do not recognise the biodiversity services farmers provide by retaining native vegetation.

I am concerned about possible disruption to sea life and sea country from offshore wind farms. We don't know what impact these could have. There needs to be an assessment of the impacts. The blue whale comes here to feed during the Bonney Upwelling.

Timboon Rail Trail



# Housing, homelessness and social inequality

- Public and affordable housing, well-designed medium-density residential buildings close to town centres.
- Housing affordability - scrap negative gearing (I don't pay enough tax). More land released, or high-density housing.
- Increase social housing. Locally there are two low-cost houses within a whole new development. There should have been a commitment to include a certain percentage of low-cost housing.
- Short-term rentals are a big problem as they take away housing stock from long-term rentals.
- **Intergenerational equity, especially in the areas of climate risk and housing affordability.**
- Increased disparity between rich and poor, homeowners and non-homeowners.
- **Address the inequality and growing disparity. A measure of a society is how well it looks after its most vulnerable and least well-off.**
- Better support for low-income families both financially and access to health and education services.
- People are not achieving their potential due to systemic inequalities.
- Addressing inequality but cracking down on tax evasion by billionaires & corporations.



# *Increased* investment in public education

Education for our young people in the state system seems to be undervalued.

Inequality between the public and private school systems - parents feel obliged to send their children away to private schools if they have a good year on the farm leading to unsustainable enrolment numbers in district secondary schools. An example was given of only one girl in year 7 at Lake Bolac last year.

**Clear lack of equity in education in Australia. Not a single government school in Australia receives their full government funding.**

We need to stop directing funding to private schools so that public schools don't suffer.

There needs to be better opportunities for regional and rural areas for education – the possibilities with technology are great if you can get a reliable internet connection.

The inability to recruit teachers to our area is severely affecting the curriculum of our kids.

**More funding for public schools and reduced funding for private schools, the inequities are awful.**

HECS debts should be abolished. There should be financial assistance to help with the cost of educating country kids at tertiary institutions in cities. Free tertiary education. Studentships to help students stay in rural areas.

Colac library visit





## Other Frequently Raised Concerns

### **Recognise and respect our First Nations peoples**

We need to provide recognition and representation for our Indigenous peoples. There should be a treaty and truth-telling.

Reconciliation with local Indigenous peoples.

Equality, especially for Indigenous people after the failed voice referendum.

Greater recognition and celebration of First Nations peoples and culture.

Must address the number of Indigenous kids in custody.

Set up an education campaign on a treaty with First Nations people. Don't announce a referendum and then not support it.

### **Treat refugees and asylum seekers with humanity**

Our stance on refugees is immoral. People are still locked up or have no access to citizenship or work rights.

Do something about the situation for the refugees still suffering under Operation Sovereign Border. They have no access to Medicare, they are often now mentally unwell, and they often are not able to gain employment. They should be granted full citizenship. They continue to suffer. It is inhumane.

Australia needs to get away from the shameful treatment of refugees. Oppose offshore detention and support humane policies.

The ongoing politicisation of refugee arrivals - treating victims of life as criminals to make a political case.

## **Transport, roads and rail**

Fix Wannon's roads!

State of rural roads in Victoria, everything is Melbourne-centred. Country roads/people do not matter.

Road infrastructure, roads built for small farm trucks are now being used for heavy haulage.

We need a national rail system. There is too much freight on roads.

Try to improve the train line to make it faster, more regular, and more extensive.

A fast train to Melbourne would be the best thing ever.

## **Violence against women and children**

There is great poverty and domestic violence in Port Fairy. Police used to be available 24/7. Now they need to travel. It can be 3 hours by the time the police come. This is shameful for a town of 3,500 people.

Domestic violence and associated housing insecurity.

Address the crisis we are experiencing concerning violence against women and children.

Respect for women and the end of violence against women.

## **Political integrity**

To have politicians behave ethically, and transparently and with integrity.

Integrity in Parliament, better control and transparency of lobby groups and donations.

The integrity of our politicians: ensuring that this Federal Government follows through on an integrity commission. End lying in political campaigns.

Donations to political parties from corporations: "legal bribery", and the funding of election campaigns



## Other Frequently Raised Concerns – continued

### Taxation

I would like our taxation system overhauled to ensure we get the best possible economic outcome from our resources while they are needed and with that windfall, education funding inequality dealt with, university education revamped and investment pumped into future-focused industries.

Housing vacancy rates, investment properties, and negative gearing need addressing.

Increase the tax on multiple house ownership as everyone should have access to housing, not just the wealthy. It's a basic human right.

Get rid of tax perks for investors - negative gearing etc.

Reform taxation to make it more equitable.

There's something wrong with our financial system that sees corporations deliver multi-million dollar profits on an annual basis, but we have such disparate distribution of wealth in this country.

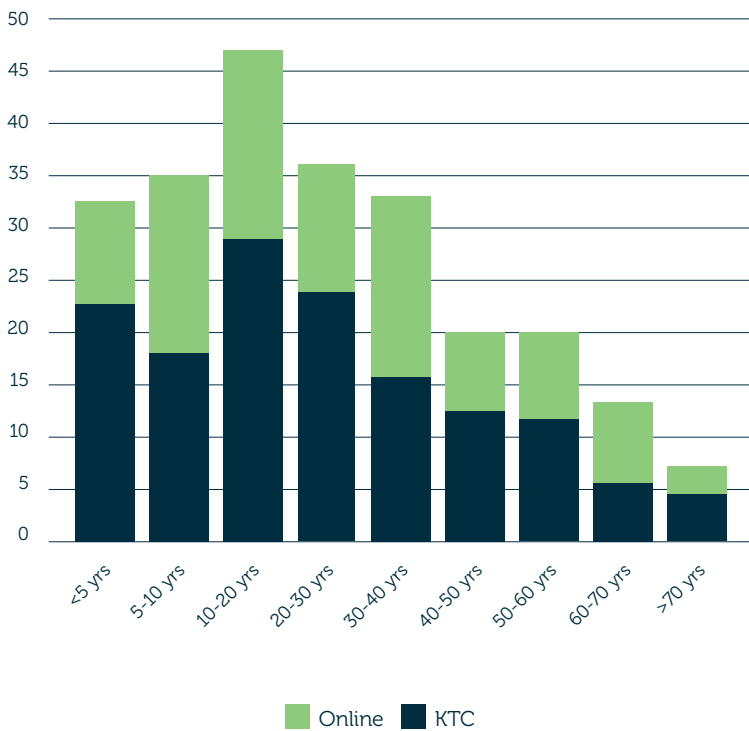
More taxation is needed to get us the services we need. Taxation is a good thing. Have more public awareness about how beneficial adequate taxation is to our society.



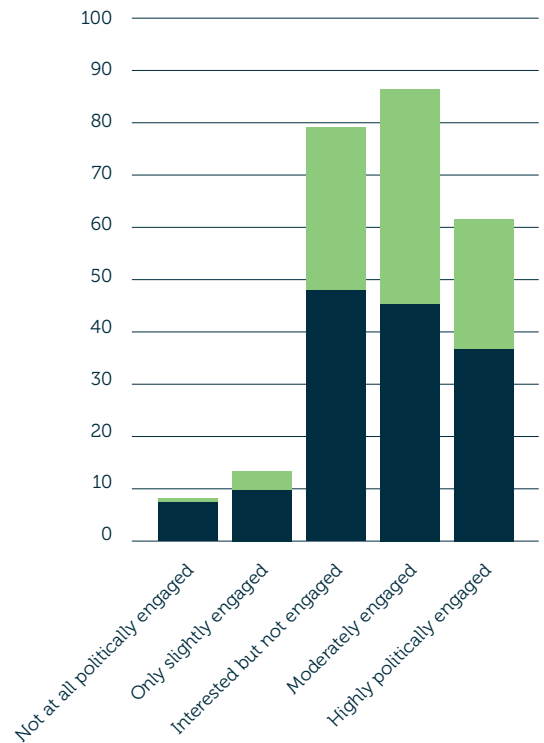
# How we engaged with the community

Voices of Wannon held 26 kitchen table conversations including over 150 participants and received online responses from a further 100 community members. KTC participants and survey respondents were self selecting. 2.4% of participants identified as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

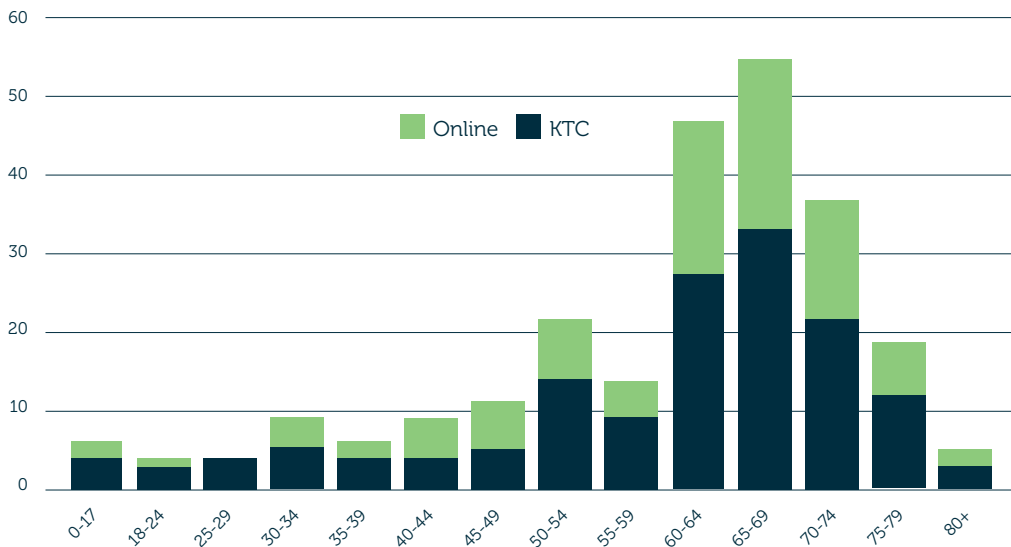
*Length of Time in Wannon*



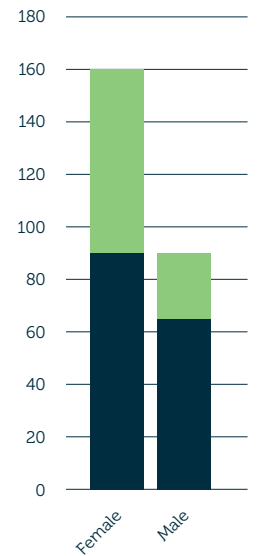
*Political Engagement*



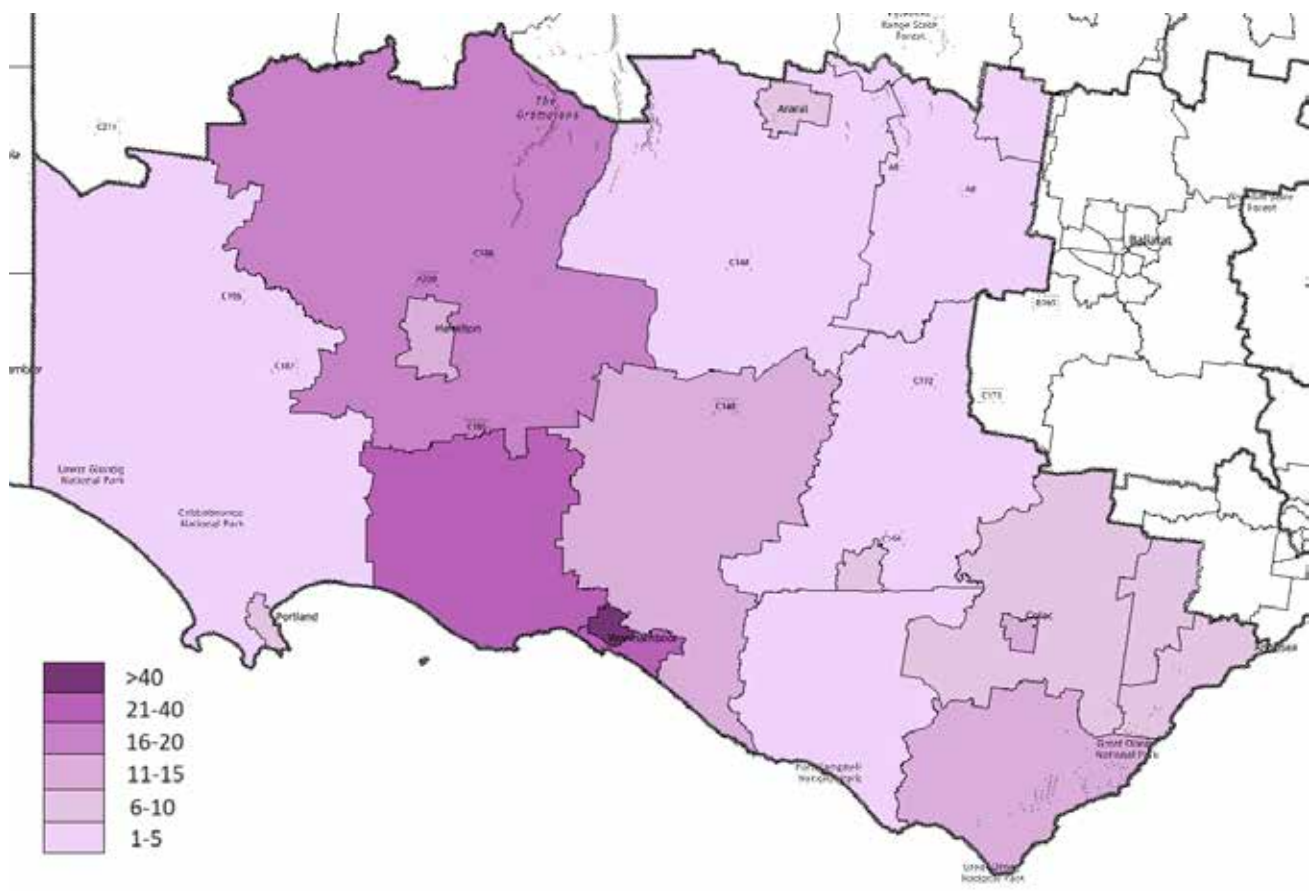
*Age of Respondents*



*Gender of Respondents*



# Respondents by Area



# In Summary



Our Kitchen Table Conversation process showcased a community that is proud of its natural environment, its sense of community, its history - both First Nations and white-settler, its peacefulness, its increasingly diverse population, and the availability of great education and health services.

While people in Wannon love their communities, they acknowledge there is room for improvement, particularly in support for vulnerable people, having greater recognition of local Indigenous communities, being more welcoming of people from diverse backgrounds, having better roads and public transport services, having greater opportunities for young people, and greater accountability of both politicians and media.

Our community consultation process found the following issues to be of the highest concern:

- Climate change and the environment
- Housing, homelessness and social inequality
- Accessible health care
- Increased investment in public education

These main priorities were only some of the dozens of issues raised during the KTCs and via our online survey. Other issues that were raised frequently included improving political integrity, fixing our roads, respect for women and recognition and respect for our First Nations people.

An overwhelming majority of people did not feel that they are being well represented by their local federal member of parliament. People wanted to have their concerns listened to and respected, and for their local member to be more present in the community and to advocate for the community in Canberra. There was strong support for greater transparency of political donations and accountability of politicians for the decisions they make.

This report shows that the people of Wannon need their local member to better represent their key concerns, and to do so with integrity, honesty, transparency and accountability.

Great Ocean Walk



## Acknowledgements

Map of the electorate of Wannon from the Australian Electoral Commission, sourced from:

<https://www.aec.gov.au/profiles/vic/wannon.htm>

Census data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Wannon 2021 Census All persons QuickStats.

Voices of Wannon acknowledge the contribution of the Victorian Women's Trust, the Voices 4 Indi, and other Voices community groups in shaping our Kitchen Table Conversation process and report.

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