



# Coonamble Shire Council Community Engagement Report

*Talking from the Mountains to the Marshes*





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# 1 Background

Legislation enacted in October 2009 requires all New South Wales local councils to develop a Community Strategic Plan.

The Plan must:

- have a long-term focus, with a minimum of 10 years;
- address the key issues of social, environmental and economic sustainability, as well as civic leadership;
- address a vision and themes, outcomes and objectives sought, and the actions by which all of these will be achieved;
- be delivered as a partnership between Council, State agencies, community groups and individuals; and
- provide mechanisms for Council to report progress to the community.

To develop the Community Strategic Plan, Coonamble Shire Council undertook a series of communications and engagement activities.

The **communications activities** aimed to raise awareness of the Community Strategic Plan engagement and development process, inform members of the community and stakeholders about the opportunities to participate in the consultation process, and deliver key messages about the development of the Community Strategic Plan.

The **engagement activities** provided active, meaningful and ongoing opportunities for the community to participate in identifying the key issues, challenges and opportunities for the Coonamble LGA, as well as establishing a vision for the area in 15 years time.

This report outlines the approach to, and results of, this consultation with the community. The outcomes of the consultation as detailed in this report provide the basis for the development of a Community Strategic Plan for the Coonamble Shire community.



## 2 Engagement approach

The Coonamble Shire Community Strategic Plan will provide a framework for a more collaborative relationship between community and Council.

The Community Engagement Strategy was designed to engage with all the sectors of the Coonamble Shire community.

To cater to the geographic and demographic diversity of the Coonamble Shire community, the engagement approach was delivered through multiple channels and over a reasonable span of time. Activities were designed to ensure more remote community members, as well as marginalised communities, had the opportunity to participate.

Rather than asking community members to go out of their way to participate, the aim was to offer opportunities to participate as part of their everyday lives. This was achieved by providing consultation opportunities at already-scheduled community and stakeholder meetings and sessions, and talking with community members in the street.

Consultation focussed on five key themes: Our People, Our Economy, Our Infrastructure, Our Environment and Our Leadership.

1. **Our People:** Enhance community wellbeing and quality of life within safe neighbourhoods.
2. **Our Economy:** Achieve long-term economic security and prosperity through the creation of long-term employment options and a diverse population base.
3. **Our Infrastructure:** Maintain and improve infrastructure and services and support Coonamble Shire's environment, ensuring Coonamble Shire continues to be a place where people want to live, work and visit.
4. **Our Environment:** Promote a sustainable balance between development and commercial interests while guarding our natural environment.
5. **Our Civic Leadership:** Strong leadership and governance to ensure community participation in decision making.

In addition, the community was asked to consider Council's current vision, and whether that vision reflected their own thinking about Coonamble Shire's future.

### 2.1 Challenges

The project faced two key challenges:

- The limited, externally determined timeframe meant that engagement activities had to be undertaken at harvest time (last quarter of 2011); and
- previous community consultation exercises had demonstrated the difficulty of engaging with Coonamble Shire's widely dispersed, diverse community.

The engagement strategy used specific processes and approaches to respond to these two key challenges, including the following.

- **To promote engagement with all community members regardless of literacy level**, there was an emphasis on verbal consultation (surveys and general discussion) at community events and through a program of door knocking.
- **To reach all age groups**, specific consultation activities targeted younger community members, including sessions held in schools.
- **To overcome the time and geographical barriers posed by a busy, geographically dispersed population**, consultation activities aimed to reach community members in their homes or in their daily lives. This included attending local meetings, community events such as the NAIDOC event at the Oval, the Strawberry Fair Day and street interviews.
- **To ensure all community members felt comfortable engaging with Council**, door knocking was undertaken by a team which included the Director of Corporate and Community Services and a community representative.



## 3 Engagement summary

### 3.1 Activities

Several hundred Coonamble Shire residents were involved in consultation events and activities, including the following.

- A **Community Reference Group** provided advice and direction to the Delivery Team. This group comprised community members representing different community sectors and groups.
- **Community surveys** were mailed out to all households in the Shire, with hard copies also available at strategic locations such as Council's Administration Centre, local libraries, local shops and at community events. A web-based version was available for those who were unable to attend the community workshops/forums.
- **Individual meetings** with stakeholders.
- **Project stalls** at community functions such as the Strawberry Fair and NAIDOC Day.
- **Workshops** were held on a geographic basis (in Coonamble, Quambone and Gulargambone), with Council staff (outdoor staff, quarry staff and indoor staff), and with the Community Working Party.
- **Focus groups** were held with the Chamber of Commerce, senior citizens and the Community Safety Committee.
- **Youth-focused consultation** included a youth survey, school consultation and youth centre feedback.
- A **community leader's dinner** provided an opportunity for local community leaders to discuss their vision for the future of Coonamble.
- **Street survey** to inform community members about the project, invite comments and feedback and open a dialogue with community members who may otherwise not engage in the project.

### 3.2 Outcomes

The consultation process highlighted a number of key themes that reflected what is special about Coonamble Shire. These themes received almost unanimous support.

**A strong sense of community** was identified by every age and geographic group as a key feature of Coonamble district. This included the way people look out for one another and the success of the Shire's community groups.

**Sport and outdoor activities** are seen as a key part of the Coonamble Shire lifestyle that should be enhanced over the coming years.

**Crime levels** were a universal concern, particularly juvenile break and enters. These were commonly attributed to a lack of respect between generations, as well as economic factors.

**A diverse and robust economy** with employment opportunities for all was seen as important. This is linked to the need for improved local education opportunities.

**Local infrastructure** needs to be improved, especially road maintenance and water quality. There is a call for diversification of community facilities to include more cultural options.

The vision for Coonamble Shire needs to include cradle-to-grave thinking. Coonamble Shire needs to have the size, the services and the opportunities to enhance its way of life and so entice people to move here or stay here throughout their entire lives.

When asked how this can be achieved, most people identified a number of key factors, all of which centred on sharing responsibility across all areas of the community.

- All people should take responsibility for making this happen.
- Government should take the lead now in facilitating connections between people and organisations.
- All voices should be valued – young and older.



## 4 Detailed outcomes

### 4.1 Community events and individual stakeholder meetings

Community members and leaders were encouraged to discuss things which are working well and things which aren't working well. Community members were also asked to identify any additional goals they had for the future.

#### Things which are working well

- The community spirit of the local people was identified as one of Coonamble Shire's greatest assets. In particular, respondents noted that people pull together in times of sickness or hardship, there is a high level of generosity within each township, and community groups are working well. People value their relationships and friends highly.
- The community values and participates in active, outdoor activities: skate park, access to river for swimming and fishing, sports groups, the pool and youth centre.
- Many people identified local health services as working well. This area was identified as having improved significantly in the last 15 years, particularly the Coonamble Aboriginal Medical Service.
- Events such as the rodeo and Moorambilla Festival, Gold Cup Race Day.
- Council's community focus – starting to be active within local community services.
- The community appreciates the high quality maintenance of open spaces by the council and other landholders – parks, gardens etc.

#### Things which aren't working well

- Excessive use and abuse of drugs and alcohol was consistently identified as a destructive force in the community.
- Crime was identified as major issue in Coonamble Shire, particularly breaking and entering and antisocial behaviour.
- Coonamble Shire residents want to see significant improvements to local infrastructure. This includes transport, improved bus services to Dubbo, repairs to the roads damaged by extreme weather and improved water quality.
- Lack of employment opportunities and lack of employment diversity.
- Retail issues include empty shopfronts, not enough shops and not enough variety of shops.
- Connecting community groups and organisations (working together more efficiently).
- Increasing employment opportunities for young people and adults.
- Building a positive work ethic in our young people (and adults).
- Improving our water quality.
- Servicing community needs with limited funds re: social issues.
- Eliminating the "hand out" attitude – "get people to get off their bums and stop waiting for other people to do things for them".
- Declining population
- Ageing population
- Welfare dependent population
- Mainstreet shops empty – reflection on the local economy

#### Goals for the future

- Attract community services and maintain continuity of workers.
- More, improved childcare services.
- More employment opportunities as well as building a strong work ethic throughout the community.
- More education opportunities to attract and keep population.



- Entertainment: picture theatre, skate park could be better, longer pool hours.
- Better quality water
- Alternative energy sources – self sufficiency/sustainability

### **Coonamble Shire residents would like to see the following changes in their Shire**

- An increased shopping precinct, including greater diversity, competition and quality of retail offering and improved aesthetic of shopping main street.
- Improved water quality.
- Increased job opportunities, including greater diversity of available employment.
- Improved open spaces, such as parks and skate park.
- Having a community of people who work together.

### **The Vision for 2026**

- A place for all ages – including the services and opportunities necessary to entice and retain a healthy population.
  - Ageing in place – quality services for aged people.
  - All people at all ages are valued.
  - Hospital where surgery and maternity is provided, so people don't need to go away to get medical care or have babies.
  - High quality education (all levels) and employment pathways.
  - Lifelong learning is valued and provided.
- All community members feel safe in their homes and in public areas
- Fresh water
- Quality shopping centres
- Retain country lifestyle: open spaces, fresh air, healthy environment (soils, plants, animals)
- All people are valued (from cradle to grave)
- Child friendly communities: children valued, safe and developed into leaders
- Young people are leading the way with innovative ideas about how to grow the community
- Economic prosperity (business and work incentives not necessary)
- People are connected, diversity is valued.

### **The community identified the following ways of making their vision a reality**

- Support and nurture the drivers/ leaders in our communities.
- Buy locally
- Insist that agency managed organisations support the local economy eg. Gularganbone hospital buy locally and be allowed, as a community member, to accept local produce
- Assist each other to see the value in holistic approaches.
- Build trust within the community by following through on actions.
- People take responsibility for themselves.
  - The community also takes responsibility for issues around drugs and alcohol (pubs/ gambling etc).
- Taking a collective approach to supporting healthy and successful young people.
  - “Community accepts the adage, It takes a village to raise a child”.

## **4.2 Workshops**

A number of workshops were held in different geographic locations and for the staff of the Council.



Participants at the workshops were asked to define the changes that had occurred in Coonamble and Australian society more generally over the past 15 years. This framed discussion for imagining Coonamble 15 years into the future.

The results of each workshop are outlined below.

#### 4.2.1 Geographic workshops

- **Coonamble**

Community discussion highlighted the following themes as significant for Coonamble's future.

Employment needs to be diversified. Organisations need to take responsibility for community involvement/resilience.

Shire infrastructure needs to be improved. This will also help with employment. For example, road works give local men gainful employment in work they are qualified to do, which can help grow self esteem

Protection of the environment is a concern, particularly since the departure of DPI has removed the "knowledge bank". The rural lands/protective board has no local presence. Farming management is not as informed as it could be and there has been a degradation of resources. It is important to retain current services – fight to keep what we have, in particular rural financial counselling which has recently been reduced.

Connecting people is important, both those who want to stay and those who go away (and might one day return). Team activities outside school are important; we need to go further by encouraging sporting involvement and engaging young people through other community groups. There should also be opportunities for other incidental play, e.g. skate parks

Safety is an essential element of a community. This needs to be a high priority for all community members and agencies. Consider local policing policies appropriate to the Coonamble district community.

High quality education (pre school through to tertiary opportunities including a broad scope of TAFE courses offered locally, and employment pathways).

- **Quambone**

"A community with respectful members" is important to Quambone residents. This is currently represented by the town's family based community, the post office, the pool and tennis court and the school.

A unique point of interest was seen as important: perhaps an event, a family-friendly social venue, arts or culture centre, or a service centre providing required services to surrounding suburbs. The community could further develop its positioning as the Gateway to the Marshes with an information centre which would include Aboriginal heritage.

Specifically, development of the Quambone Country Club (resident owned/managed), a fuel/roadhouse, caravan park and/or a 'work together shed' (based on the Men's Shed model), were seen as desirable.

Engaging young people was seen as a goal. Young people who demonstrated respect and direction would reduce vandalism, crime, theft and drug use, improving safety and security.

A more active economy with opportunities for local employment was important, even though Quambone residents don't envisage much population growth. They would like to see well stocked shops that cater for local needs.

Local community should be the priority, particularly community transport and medical services.



- **Gulargambone**

The concerns of Gulargambone residents echoed those of Quambone residents.

Providing key services and opportunities in the right place for the right stage of life was seen as the optimum outcome. While ideally there would be enough for everyone at every stage of life, residents realised that with limited resources, trade-offs are often required.

Although young people may go away to seek other opportunities, there should be sufficient services and opportunities to draw them back, particularly in later life.

Residents felt that 15 years ago, there were more local sporting activities, people were more self-sufficient and responsible and the economy was more diverse. Service providers such as teachers and policemen lived in town.

They seek a united /inclusive community with shared values for the future. A key driver in achieving this is recognition and respect for leadership roles and a nurturing of community pride.

The community needs to feel that they 'own the streets'. This can be done by building strong ties with young people and a strong local economy with local employment.

A number of strategies and actions were suggested at the workshop. Ideas included the following.

- Creating identities for the village
- Look at army reservists and activities for young people
- Youth centre – promote, diversify, extra opening
- Access and interest for 'grey nomad' visitors and residents
- Gathering points
- Explore the potential for new development
- Create a domestic animal policy that allows keeping chickens
- Protect the rural feel of the area

Improved physical and social infrastructure was also seen as important. This includes better road and footpath maintenance, better access to chemist, trades, mental health, improved waste management including water, and improved water delivery (full renewal and local green electricity generation).

A number of additional stakeholder meetings were held at Gulargambone. The findings from these discussions reflected those outlined above.

The existing youth centre, movie nights, new petrol depot and swimming club were identified as valuable aspects of village life.

There is a recognition that increased cooperation and coordination between services will be needed. Anti-social behaviour must be defined as unacceptable, community segregation should be avoided, school staff and community relationships need to be strengthened. Ideally, population numbers need to increase.

Restored and beautified main street shops, houses and public buildings would help with community pride, as would a community space or facility at the old service station.

Key initiatives suggested for the future include the following.

- Meaningful employment for young people.
- More shops in main street.
- Community transport.
- Full time police located at Gulargambone.
- Easy and consistent access to medical services.



## 4.2.2 Staff workshops

The outdoor staff would like to see an involved, connected community of individuals taking personal and shared responsibility. This will be a safe, respectful community, an economy with work opportunities for everyone, and support for local business. There would be more sport, education and social opportunities for young people and a drug free environment.

Medical services that meet community needs are important, as are a commercial air service, well maintained shire roads and edges.

Strategies that might achieve this future include conscription opportunities, stop jobs disappearing, re-open shops and cafes, community events such as dinner dances and picnic days, reestablishment of family authority, identification of new economic opportunities, improved medical access, suitable services to recognise number of retirees returning and a focus on mutual respect.

- **Quarry Staff**

The quarry staff envisages a future characterised by a high employment rate with varied employment opportunities in a vibrant, diversified economy.

They would like to see Coonamble aiming for a culture which is 'proactive' and 'innovative'.

To achieve this, new opportunities need to be created for young people (eg Council traineeships), there should be less of a main street monopoly, commercial flights, more diverse local food production (including fresh bread), local training and education for support staff and trades, active community groups such as Lions and Rotary, and vibrant, active and involved community leadership.

Law and order, authority and parental responsibility issues all need to be tackled. One way to achieve this would be by further developing the sporting culture supported by an involved community.

- **Indoor staff**

The indoor staff values Coonamble Shire's quiet lifestyle, its sense of community which ensures good support when things do happen, the sporting culture (around tennis and netball) and the variety of activities.

The strong local focus should be continued in the future, services provided locally, and people understanding the consequences of their actions. A better future would involve a reduction in crime & bad roads, and active, engaged community leaders.

This local focus would be led by Council and community leaders with a view to the greater good. The community would be characterised by support for local business, involved and engaged young people with positive attitudes, responsible parents and family groups, more diverse economy with employment opportunities, access to arts and culture experiences and strong, appealing and well patronised local education.

Key actions could include the following.

- Access to fresh food such as local meat
- Touring events and features.
- Stronger TAFE to provide broader and quality education
- Options for 'lifestyle blocks' to minimise cost of rent
- More choice of shops and restaurants
- Multipurpose sports facility including Arts facilities
- Community bus
- Better resourced police force which is responsive to community needs
- Rail line
- Developing the weir as a diverse social space



- Charter/commercial air service
- More diverse night time economy

### 4.2.3 Interagency

Facilitated by the Director Corporate & Community Services, Coonamble Shire Council, Interagency members were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with different aspects of the community. A tool called the WHEEL OF FEEL was used to explore participant experiences in a broad range of areas including environment, safety, civic leadership & community.

*Statements (and responses) within these themes were as follows:*

Statement	Majority response	☺	~	☹	~	⊗
There are good role models available for community members	Strongly disagree	0	0	1	0	7
Community members take opportunities to lead others in their community	Strongly disagree	0	0	1	0	7
Community members can buy the things they need locally	Strongly disagree-disagree	0	0	1	2	6
Community members can afford to buy what they need	Disagreed - strongly disagreed	0	0	0	4	4
Community has access to good natural social spaces (river, bush etc)	Agreed – strongly agreed	2	6	0	0	0
Community has access to a healthy natural environment (air, water, plants, soil etc)	Agreed – strongly agreed	1	7	0	0	0
Community feels safe	Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	1	7
Community members have positive connections with a range of people	Undecided	0	1	6	0	1

The themes that resulted in the strongest negative response were safety, community and economy. Positive responses were received for environment. These themes were discussed in more detail with the following issues raised:

- Young people not connected to school as recognition has little value to them (ie: gaining a year 10 or 12 certificate is not valuable to them – learning more practical life skills are).
- Local shopping more expensive than Dubbo prices (supermarket etc)
- Meals on Wheels prices have risen from \$6 odd to \$12 odd, excluding many people from accessing the service.
- Safety issues are real and distressing to majority of agency's target group
- Cross cultural understanding seems to have declined over the past 20 years.
- Difficult to get and develop community leaders.
- High level of teenage pregnancies.

### **Where do we want to be? (Coonamble 2026)**

A brainstorming session produced the following:

- Full employment
- Zero crime
- Thriving business (around as big as Gilgandra)
- Education – young people engaged to finish school
- Full range of education facilities – uni/ tafe/ alternative learning centres
- Education meeting needs of learners and providing pathways to meaningful local education
- High community connectedness



- No discrimination
- Cross cultural understanding
- Co ordinated service deliver (true interdisciplinary approach to community issues)
- Range of leisure and recreational facilities / activities available
- Healthy and informed community
- Intergenerational respect
- Children and young people are valued and able to experience a healthy childhood
- Access to all health & allied health services available locally
- Green / clean environment – high water quality

### **How do we get there?**

Two groups looked at what needed to happen to get to the Coonamble 2026 envisaged:

#### **Group 1:**

##### *Full employment*

- Need incentives for business to open and incentives for people to come here with new ideas and to stay.
- More courses at TAFE to facilitate training for apprenticeships etc
- Education about incentives to employ trainees – what's available / subsidies etc.

##### *Engaging Education*

- Re-engagement Centre for kids who are suspended or not in mainstream education (school hours)
- TAFE Higher education – more variety of courses
- Options of learning eg: video conferencing

##### *Zero Crime*

- Break down social barriers: cross cultural training
- Employment & education

#### **Group 2:**

##### *Education*

- Access to alternative learning centre that is creative & responsive to needs.
- Target education at skill level not academics
- Recognition should be of value to young people (ie: yr 12 certificate holds no value to them).
- Education reflecting lifestyle (skill based and practical)
- Utilise community strengths to teach life based skills (eg: men's group)
- Education more closely linked to actual employment opportunities for young people who are not academic

##### *Crime*

- In many cases incarceration is more appealing than our community. Basic needs being met in jail (food, shelter, work, safety and friends) which are not being met in the community. Need to address this as a whole of community response.

### **4.2.4 Community Working Party Workshop**

Discussion with the Community Working Party took place during a visiting State agency workshop. Due to time constraints, discussion focused on clarifying key issues and getting feedback on the community vision statements that had arisen during the agency workshop process.

The CWP aspiration for Coonamble Shire, is for a community where:

- there are strong leaders and mentors;
- people are valued and respect for who they are, not judged by the family they are from;
- there is connected service delivery in response to community need;
- there is local service delivery (not part time delivery/visiting from Dubbo);
- there are larger businesses and more economic competition;



- resources are available locally;
- there are strong, respectful, resilient young people;
- community members take personal responsibility;
- community connection with culture includes elders connecting with youth;
- young people are engaged with education and have local employment options that reflect their skills/aspirations;
- agencies and community work together to support families;
- community members see value in work/ employment;
- authorities have appropriate power to carry out day to day activities;
- local Aboriginal people have equity in employment;
- there is appropriate sentencing of offenders;
- employment reflects the diversity of the town (eg Aboriginal people employed in main street shops);
- diverse employment opportunities exist for Aboriginal people; and
- the CWP's active members are supported by agencies and the broader community in their decision making.

### 4.3 Focus groups

Focus group discussions were undertaken with members of the **Chamber of Commerce, Senior Citizens** group and the **Community Safety Committee**.

#### Strengths

Members of the Chamber of Commerce identified the Moorambilla Festival and the Streets Ahead Committee as forces for community and economic development in Coonamble Shire, bringing people, activities and money into the community.

Senior citizens identified the following strengths of the Coonamble Shire:

- community networks and friends;
- support from people during times of adversity;
- open spaces and relaxed lifestyle;
- medical services (greatly improved over the last decade).

#### Key issues

- Every voice should be heard and valued.
- Need for community role models for young people, in the family and more broadly.
- Lack of parental control leading to anti social behaviour and young people not attending school. Parents' role in encouraging children to go to school, stay in school and promote positive role modelling.
- Crime, particularly break and enter and assault.
- Lack of role models for young people.
- Lack of coordinated services responding to community issues.
- Lack of innovative, responsive solutions.
- Attracting community services and maintaining continuity of workers (DOCS, DoH etc).

All focus groups had a strong interest in building the community by supporting and nurturing young people in the community. This included the following.

- Growing our young people and young adults into responsible citizens.
- Providing activities and appropriate avenues for young people to be engaged.
- Providing different types of learning for young people who don't want to be at school (e.g. practical vocational education, hands on, thinking outside the square, include TAFE and alternative learning providers.)



- Make the system fit young people rather than vice versa.
- Active university with a pathway for jobs for all people (eg: study a degree and be able to secure a related job in the district).
- Through doing the above, reducing current rates of crime and anti social behaviour.

It was believed that catering for younger people would also help combat population decline by encouraging young people to stay, with parents choosing to remain near their adult children.

The senior citizens and Chamber of Commerce focus groups in particular had a strong interest in improving retail offerings in town centres. They want to see a diversity of shops, including a supermarket, and healthy competition between retailers.

They envisage a reinvigorated main street, with fully occupied shopfronts where businesses take responsibility for themselves. This includes keeping their shop frontage tidy, actively sourcing ways to improve service and actively engaging in improving economic development of Coonamble Shire.

Water quality was also identified as an issue, as it deteriorates appliances over time.

### **A Vision for Coonamble Shire**

The vision for Coonamble which emerged from the focus groups included the following.

- A vibrant main street – full of shops, including arcades, with exciting and diverse options.
- A place where people take responsibility for the success of the community.
- Retain the country lifestyle: open spaces, fresh air, clean fresh water, healthy environment (soils, plants, animals).
- Environmentally sustainable: alternative energy sources to achieve self sufficiency, Council leading the way with a green focus, no coal seam gas.
- Pride of place: young people growing into leaders.
- All voices valued – young and older.

### **Finding a way forward**

#### Chamber of Commerce

Local strategies should be developed in response to issues, with Government support.

#### Safety Committee

Coonamble Shire should learn lessons from other LGAs' successes, rather than complaining to local members or waiting for government to fix the problems.

#### Senior Citizens

While the Government should take the lead in facilitating connections between people and organisations, all people need to take responsibility for making the best possible future for Coonamble.

### **4.3.1 Grandparents Day event**

A focus group was also held at the Grandparents Day event at Coonamble Library. Participant responses included:

#### **Something that is working well in the community?**

Friends, family connections, people assisting each other

#### **What are the main issues or challenges?**

- Health – no mental health support, limited service provision at Hospital.



- Crime – break and enters, anti-social behaviour.
- Drugs & Alcohol – was not a problem in older generations. Some of the thoughts about why drug & alcohol is an issue in this generation in Coonamble:
  - People not able to entertain themselves without drugs and alcohol.
  - Learned behaviour. An entrenched part of our culture where every celebration we have must involve alcohol, therefore we teach our children from babies that having fun involves drinking alcohol.
  - Easier access to alcohol and information about drugs etc.
- Education system – particularly kids sent home (suspended) for swearing.

#### **What would you like to change about your community? What needs to be done about above?**

- Have supported mental health and Domestic violence workers and service (not travelling in from Dubbo). Mental health services available for people early, not only responding to crisis.
- Provide young people with diverse activities – many don't use the youth centre and there are no other supported alternatives. Sports is fine but the kids who need to be "kept on track" often don't have parental support / funds to participate in sports.
- Provide youth "street workers", that go out on the streets with young people to connect at their level and move them onto other things (not just take policing role but assist young people).
- *"Whatever it is we are doing with kids now, we need to do it different.... Otherwise – we get the same things happening"*.
- Criminal Justice system needs to be harder – on both youth & adults.
- Harsher penalties for drug dealers.

#### **What does Coonamble Shire 2026 look like? How can we work together to make this a reality?**

- Health system that is high quality, accessible and locally based.
- Young people who are healthy, happy and respectful.
- Parents take responsibility for their children's futures.
- Schools have found ways to engage kids at school. Kids happy to go to school.
- Nobody is "left out" or pushed aside. We include each other all of the time, not just when people get sick/ die.
- Our town is green & clean.
- People are proud to live here, they pick up rubbish from the street, they open doors for each other.
- Water is clean – no rust in pipes.
- Airport is functional – we can fly to Sydney or Brisbane.
- Train is functional – we can travel to Dubbo by train.
- Communities share responsibility for raising children "it takes a village to raise a child" mentality.
- People walk around the streets at night safely.
- There is no crime (theft or assault) in Coonamble Shire.

## **4.4 Community leaders dinner**

Participants focused on the Coonamble they would like to build by 2026. Their Vision for Coonamble Shire included the following.

- No intergeneration unemployment.
- More employment opportunities.
- Strong tourism – from the Mountains to the Marshes.
- A safe community.
- A place led by dynamic leaders.
- A community of people who take responsibility for themselves and their community.



- Improved infrastructure, particularly rail.
- A place with sustainable industry.

They identified a range of strategies to achieve this vision, including the following.

- Industry programs.
- State government involvement, including parent education.
- Accountability for parents.
- Develop town pride.
- Recognize the district potential: look for new industry (perhaps technology, manufacturing, tourism).
- Training should be included in any new industry initiatives.
- Coordination/support for creating town pride.
  - Support sport initiatives, police, services clubs and community development programs in schools.
- Develop a culture of community responsibility, including an acceptance of shared responsibility
- Broader economy - not just based on agriculture. While there are many opportunities for young people interested in agriculture, there is a need to diversify employment opportunities.

## 4.5 Community survey

The community survey attracted a total of 83 responses. This included responses from 52 females and 25 males. Three respondents did not give their gender. Two surveys included joint answers from a male and a female or mixed household.

Eighty-one respondents gave their age. Ten per cent of these were aged under 25. Twelve per cent were aged between 26 and 35, and 17% were between 36 and 50. More than 40% were between 51 and 65, and just over 20% were over 65.

Sixty-one per cent of respondents identified themselves as non-indigenous, with 27 per cent identifying themselves as indigenous. Thirty-three per cent of respondents did not identify their ethnicity.

The quality of responses was exceptional, with the majority of respondents providing considered, thoughtful and in depth comments.

A summary of survey responses is outlined below.

### **The strengths of the community were seen as:**

- the friendliness of the citizens, knowing people, and the sense of community;
- the rural lifestyle, fresh air, landscape and climate;
- Moorambilla festival, plus sports and greyhound racing;
- the rodeo was mentioned by indigenous and non-indigenous alike as part of their shared community identity; and
- volunteering and clubs thriving.

### **The key issues and challenges facing the community included the following.**

- Lack of employment opportunities.
- Safety concerns (particularly for very old and young) due to high levels of juvenile crime, particularly breaking and entering, vandalism and drug use.
- Infrastructure: roads in need of repair, flood and levee management, cleanliness of streets, rivers and public parks. Also disabled access to shops, and accessibility of specialized medical services within town.
- Council not representative of the community (particularly Aboriginal representation).
- More youth engagement programs needed; parents and schools need to work together to keep children and young adults in school/work/training.
- Stimulate tourism by developing and marketing Coonamble's cultural heritage and history.



### **The Vision for Coonamble Shire included the following elements.**

- Increased community cohesion and integration, working together toward a more democratic decision making process.
- Businesses and jobs developed within the area.
- Working together with adjoining towns (eg Coonabarabran and Gilgandra).
- Beautification of town centre.

### **A number of ways were identified for the community to work together to achieve this vision.**

- Keeping children in school and more usefully engaged, breaking the welfare cycle.
- More democratic decision processes.
- Tougher penalties on crime.
- Increase the population to develop more amenities.

## **4.6 Young people**

### **4.6.1 Youth survey**

A total of 44 responses were received to the youth survey, all in hard copy. Responses were received from 22 females and 22 males.

More than half the respondents (59%) were under the age of 10, with 36% of respondents aged 10 to 15 years. Only one respondent was aged between 16 and 25.

The weighting towards a younger demographic may be explained by the fact that youth surveys conducted at events such as the NAIDOC day were facilitated by Council staff with younger participants and that some 16 to 25 year olds filled in the general community survey, independently.

Eighty-four per cent of respondents identified themselves as indigenous, while 9% identified themselves as non-indigenous. Five per cent preferred not to answer.

A summary of survey responses is detailed below.

#### **The most popular activities identified by young people were:**

- spending time or playing with friends and family;
- outdoor activities such as skating at the skate park, swimming at the pool, playing football; and
- going to school.

#### **Young people dislike:**

- fighting and violence; and
- drug use by the people around them and in their town.

Many respondents did not have any dislikes about the Shire.

#### **Young people thought the following things were okay but could be better:**

- parks and skate park;
- the swimming pool, in particular, longer opening times, opening during winter, and the addition of a heated pool; and
- more shops, including supermarkets.

#### **Their vision for Coonamble Shire in 2026 included:**

- more shops;
- cleaner township; and
- more people living in Coonamble Shire.



**Young people identified the following ways for the community to work together to achieve this vision.**

- Building shops/houses.
- Be nicer to one another, more participation in community events or activities.
- Clean up and pick up rubbish.

#### **4.6.2 Youth Centre Feedback**

The Director of Corporate and Community services received feedback from the Gulargambone youth centre coordinator about issues young people had been raising at the youth meetings.

Young people valued the visits from the culturally diverse church-based youth workers from Sydney.

They like the river and fishing. They feel disconnected from their culture, and feel pressure to “step up” as Aboriginal people, without knowing how to do this.

Suggested changes include more activities at the youth centre, more movie nights, and sealing the road to the cemetery and youth centre. They would also like to see community transport, a skate park and a male Aboriginal education assistant for the school.

#### **4.6.3 School consultation**

**Coonamble Primary School hosted consultations in October 2011.**

Young people from kindergarten to Year 6 were consulted in their class groups. In total, seven groups (176 children) were conducted, including the Special Support class. Approximately 30% of children were Indigenous.

Children were asked how they feel about living in their community now, and their vision for the future. Depending on the age group, the visioning exercise involved either brainstorming a collective drawing or asking the children to draw or write their vision.

During the first activity, a high proportion of children stated that they have friends (69.8%) and have fun things to do (78.9%).

The only statement that resulted in a higher proportion of disagrees (38%) than agrees (35.2%) was, “People in my community think I am important”.

All the children who agreed with this statement said their families thought they were important. Most of them said their teachers thought they were important, but none of them said strangers (or people in the street) thought that they were important.

Twenty-five per cent of respondents said they don't have many places to explore and discover new things in Coonamble.

The second activity, which involved drawing or writing their vision for Coonamble Shire, produced a widely varied range of results. Popular responses included the following.

- Happy, smiling people.
- A range of shops including clothes, toys, supermarkets, fast food, pet shop.
  - Cheaper shopping.
- More buildings.
- A range of recreational activities including movies, bowling, horse riding.
- Improved sporting facilities and sports available all year around.
- More safety, including more police, no bullying.
- Bigger hospital, with more staff.
- No littering, cleaner town.



- Clean river.
- More animals, including farm animals, domestic animals and zoo animals.
  - Pet shop.
  - A zoo.
- Amusement parks, particularly water theme parks with waterslides, Disneyland.
- A beach.
- Flying cars.

### **Youth Focus Group Coonamble High School October 2011**

#### **Valued**

- Skate Park
- Friends
- Sports
- Pool
- Coonamble Show
- Christmas events (eg: Christmas Carnavale)

#### **Issues**

- Drugs and alcohol in the community
- Crime and feeling unsafe
- Not enough to do after school

#### **Change**

- Shades for parks
- Seats at the oval need repair and maintenance
- Dogs on the street

#### **Actions**

- Plant more trees
- Build more shade with seating
- Have a community cleanup with a fun event afterwards
- Have more (and frequent) activities that divert young people from anti-social activities (eg: fishing competitions, movie nights)
- Start a youth group where young people can have a say about what they think

### **4.6.4 Gulargambone Young People & Adults**

#### **Young people**

##### **Keep**

- Visits from Youth Workers from Sydney – regular visits from very culturally diverse group of church based youth workers.
- River / fishing

##### **Change**

- Youth centre – more activities needed
- 2828 – more movie nights wanted
- Road to cemetery and youth centre needs sealing – too boggy.

##### **Toss**

- Disconnection to culture – young people feel pressure that they need to “step up” as Aboriginal people but don’t know what/how ? etc.

##### **New**

- Community transport
- Skate park
- Male Aboriginal Education Assistant at school





## Adults

### Keep

- Youth Centre
- Self Serve petrol depot
- Swimming Club

### Change:

- Community services work together – increase coordination
- Main street shops – restore/ beautify
- Houses & public buildings – beautify/ tidy up/ maintain
- School staff & community relationships – strengthen
- School – increase numbers / decrease kids going to out of area schools
- Department of Community Services – higher profile in community
- Movie nights at 2828 – need more

### Toss:

- Anti social behaviour
- Replace old service station (cnr of main street & highway) with some community space/facility rather than leave this vacant
- Community segregation

### New:

- Meaningful employment for young people.
- More shops in main street
- Community transport
- Full time police located at Gularganbone
- Easy and consistent access to medical services (Doctor available 1 day a week in Gularganbone and travel to Gilgandra or Coonamble required otherwise: no community/public transport available).

## 4.7 Street survey

In place of the program of doorknocking that was proposed in the Communication and Engagement Plan, two street surveys were held: one in front of the IGA in Coonamble and one in front of the IGA in Gularganbone. This was an opportunity to engage with people who may not otherwise have been involved in the program of events. All respondents identified as Indigenous.

Total responses: 51

### What do you like about living in Coonamble Shire?

Youth centre – 4  
Family/friends/people – 11  
Clubs – 4  
Sports/fitness (incl football field, skate park, netball) – 3  
Pool - 4  
CDEP – 3  
River – 3

### What are the issues?

More/cheaper/fresher produce in shops – 4  
Employment/jobs – 4  
Activities for young people – 9  
Youth education/discipline – 4  
Crime/sentencing – 3

### What would you like Coonamble Shire to be like in 20 years?

No crime – 11  
No drugs/alcohol – 9  
No youth problems – 3



No vandalism – 5  
No segregation or “cliques” – 4  
No buildings in need of repair/standing empty - 4

**What has to happen for us to get there?**

Transport – 5  
Jobs for young people – 3  
Jobs for indigenous young people - 3  
Better cultural education/”old ways” – 6  
More activities - 12  
(suggestions: skate park (3), fishing competitions, weekend basketball, activity park at Quambone, social barbecues, community dances, free after school activities)