

## Chapter Two – Our Community

### Mallacoota and District (MAD) Snapshot

In this chapter we paint a broad picture of our community – our history and geography, our demography, our critical infrastructure and services. The table beneath provides a quick summary of MAD statistics and facts.

#### **MAD SNAPSHOT**

##### **We are the most isolated community in Victoria**

##### **The 87,500ha Croajingolong National Park is central to our diverse district.**

The Croajingolong National Park is home to 306 bird species, 52 mammal species and 26 reptile species, some of which are endangered.

**In 1972, the earliest fossil trackways of primitive tetrapods - the first backboned animals on land -were found preserved in the Genoa River Gorge, dating back 350 million years.**

**Gabo Island is the largest known breeding colony of little penguins.**

**We inhabit the indigenous nations of the Bidwal, Gunnaijurnai and Monero (Ngarigo) people.**

##### **We are an aging community**

Nearly half our population (47.1%) is over 60.  
Our median age is 58, the median age of Victorians is 37

##### **We live in a community with many vulnerable people**

One third lives alone  
75% survive on either lowest or medium low income  
22.3% have no internet connection  
5.6% live with a disability  
4.5% have no motor vehicle.

**As a result of the bushfires, around 1/8<sup>th</sup> (12.5%) of our homes were destroyed**

**10% of our potential workforce is unemployed.**

**We have more part time workers (50%) than full time workers (40%)**

**Our three main areas of employment are education (35%), accommodation (31%) and seafood (19%)**

##### **We are a DIY population**

39.9% of our population is involved in volunteer work compared with 19% of Australians

## Location

Situated in the far east of Victoria, our district comprises the townships of Mallacoota and Genoa. Other settlements in our district include Wangarabell, Maramingo Creek and the Wallagaraugh River catchment which lie off the Princes Highway and Gipsy Point.

The Princes Highway passes through Genoa. The main road to Mallacoota is by turn off from the Princes Highway at Genoa albeit there are four-wheel drive tracks from Mallacoota to the west (currently closed due to bushfire damage). A two km road turning off from the Genoa-Mallacoota Road leads to Gipsy Point.

Mallacoota is the most isolated town in the state of Victoria. The nearest large town is Eden in NSW (84km). The nearest Victorian townships are Cann River (71km) and Orbost (145km). Mallacoota is equidistant to Melbourne and Sydney (523 km to Melbourne and 526 km to Sydney via the Princes Highway).

## History and Geography

The 87,500ha Croajingolong National Park is central to our diverse district and one of the most important conservation reserves in Victoria. The Park is home to 306 bird species, 52 mammal species and 26 reptile species, some of which are endangered.

At the north west corner of the Park, the Genoa Peak is 490 metres above sea level at the summit and the view at the top takes in the ocean and the top and bottom lakes, some 40 km away. The Genoa River Gorge contains late non-marine freshwater lake Devonian sediments with many fossils. In 1972, the earliest fossil trackways of primitive tetrapods - the first backboned animals on land - were found preserved in the Gorge, dating back 350 million years.<sup>1</sup>

The southern part of the park comprises wilderness beaches and estuarine lakes and river systems. The Mallacoota Inlet is a submerged river valley formed when sedimentary filling following the end of the last Ice Age formed Bass Strait, flooding river valleys in the process.<sup>2</sup>

Gabo Island is 14 km by sea from Mallacoota and is home to significant sea bird colonies including white-faced storm petrels. Gabo Island is the largest known breeding colony of little penguins.

Our First Nations people have a rich history in this region. Three indigenous nations continue their custodianship of the area now known as East Gippsland. These are the nations of the Bidwal, Gunnaijurnai and Monero (Ngarigo).<sup>3</sup> Census studies from the 1840's indicates the presence of small groups of Maap or Bidawal people in Mallakoter (Mallacoota). Between 1830-1860, there are records of gatherings between the Maap and bordering Gunai and Monero groups.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://museums victoria.com.au/website/melbournemuseum/discoverycentre/600-million-years/videos/fins-to-feet/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ayton.id.au/wiki/doku.php?id=australia:vic:mallacoota>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.geco.org.au/first\\_nations#:~:text=The%20land%20referred%20to%20as,Gunnaikurnai%20and%20Monero%20\(Ngarigo\).](https://www.geco.org.au/first_nations#:~:text=The%20land%20referred%20to%20as,Gunnaikurnai%20and%20Monero%20(Ngarigo).)

<sup>4</sup> <http://savebastionpoint.org/bastion-point/history-of-the-area/>

Sadly, European settlement from the 1840's saw the decline of the Maap population. This decline was a result of conflicts over settlement – our First Nations people never ceded sovereignty – and introduced diseases.

The first European settler in Mallacoota was Captain John Stevenson, a whaler who was granted a pastoral lease in 1841. Other pastoralists took up cattle runs in Mallacoota and Genoa up until the 1870's. Isolation prevented more widespread settlement.

Following the wreck of the Monumental City on Tullaberga Island in 1853, work began on the Gabo Island lighthouse in 1858. At 47m, the pink granite lighthouse is the second tallest lighthouse in Australia. The presence of the lighthouse enabled safer ocean access to the Mallacoota region and more settlers arrived.

In 1882 John Augustus Dorrion established a home, farm and hotel on the original Mallacoota site on the eastern side of the inlet. The Lakeview Hotel was a destination for visitors arriving by sea.

In the 1890's gold was discovered. The rush soon petered out with the only successful mine being the Spotted Dog mine on the eastern side of the inlet.

In 1900, the Mallacoota National Park was established. This land now forms part of the Croajingolong National Park.

In 1909 the journalist and poet Edwin James Brady established a writers' and artists' camp at Captain Stevenson's Point. The camp was attended by the poet Henry Lawson, author Katharine Susannah Prichard and playwright Louis Esson. The EJ Brady short story competition - the biggest short story competition in East Gippsland - is testimony, attracting writers from all around the world.

Access to our region was mostly by sea until an access road was built between Genoa and Mallacoota West (now the current site of Mallacoota) in 1918.

During WW11, the RAAF set up an underground bunker coastal surveillance system at Mallacoota. One of the remaining bunkers is now a popular museum. A third bunker was discovered following the 2019-20 bushfires.

A Navy War Signal Station was established on Gabo Island with the main function of coastal surveillance. This was followed in 1942 by the RAAF No. 16 Radar Station, one of only five radar stations constructed in Victoria during WW11. The Radar Station was an important part of a chain of measures designed to protect a critical shipping route.

From early European settlement until now, tourism has been a mainstay of the MAD economy. Another mainstay is the abalone industry which began in 1964.

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## Demography

While the accuracy of ABS data relies on the quality of input and is therefore not immutable, census statistics are one of the few ways we have for describing our demography. ABS statistics from the period 2006-16 are used to paint a baseline picture of our community.<sup>5</sup>

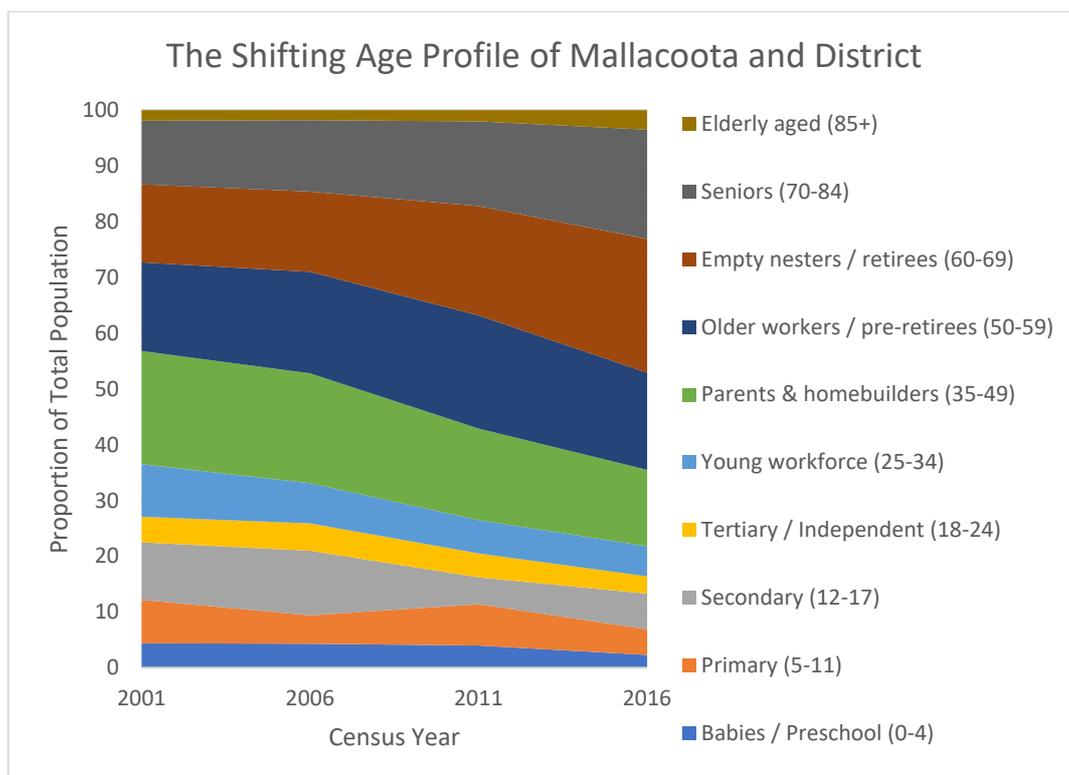
The next ABS census is in due in 2021. The 2021 census will also give some insight into how the 2019-20 bushfires, COVID-19 and related issues have altered our demography. By way of a baseline, the 2016 census shows the population of MAD as 1137.<sup>6</sup>

Tricia Hiley (community member and learner at large) provided the graphs and analysis pertaining to age profiles, household types, income and vulnerability. We thank Tricia for her passion, insight and the powerful visual depiction of our circumstances.

## An Aging Population

We are an aging population. We are also one of the oldest communities in Victoria – the median of Victorians in 2016 was 37; at the same time the median age of our community was 58. In 2016, nearly half (47.1 per cent) of our total population was over 60.

The 2021 census may substantiate anecdotal evidence of a reversal to this trend. (In addition to a reported increase in young families, there may well be a COVID-19 lockdown baby boom.....)



**Figure 2** The Shifting Age Profile and Mallacoota and District

<sup>5</sup> Up until 2016, Genoa and Gipsy Point were combined in census statistics.

<sup>6</sup>Mallacoota 1063, Genoa 55 and Gipsy Point 19.

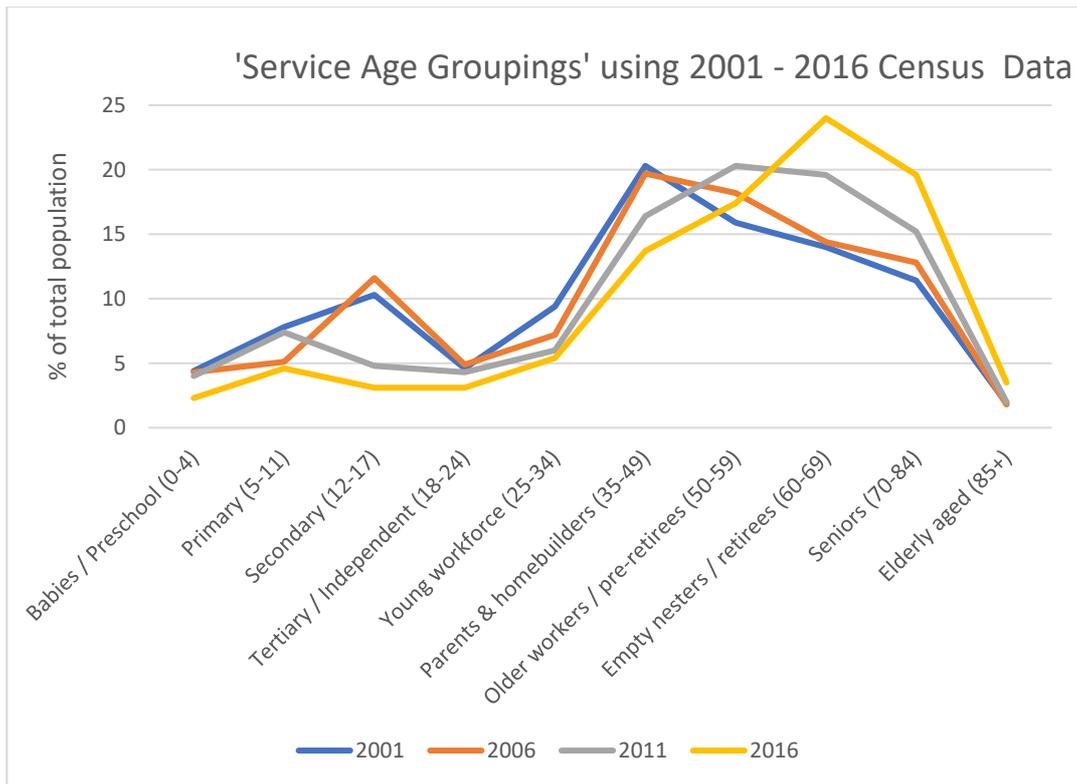


Figure 3 'Service Age Groupings' using 201-16 Census Data

A Vulnerable Population  
 We are a vulnerable population.

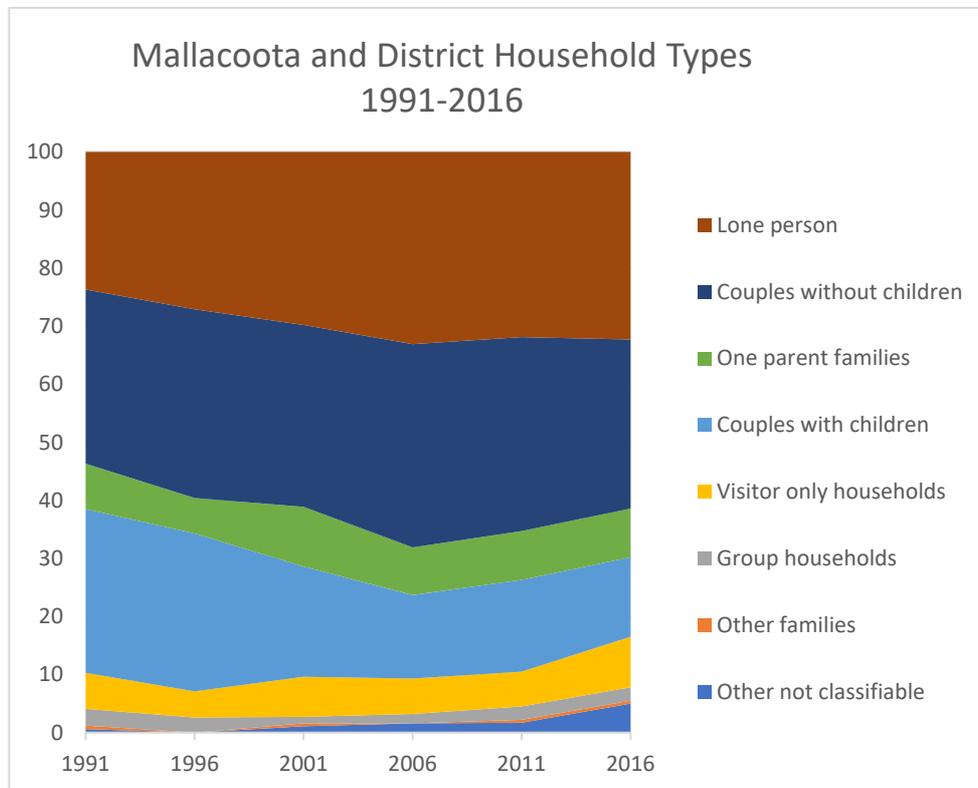
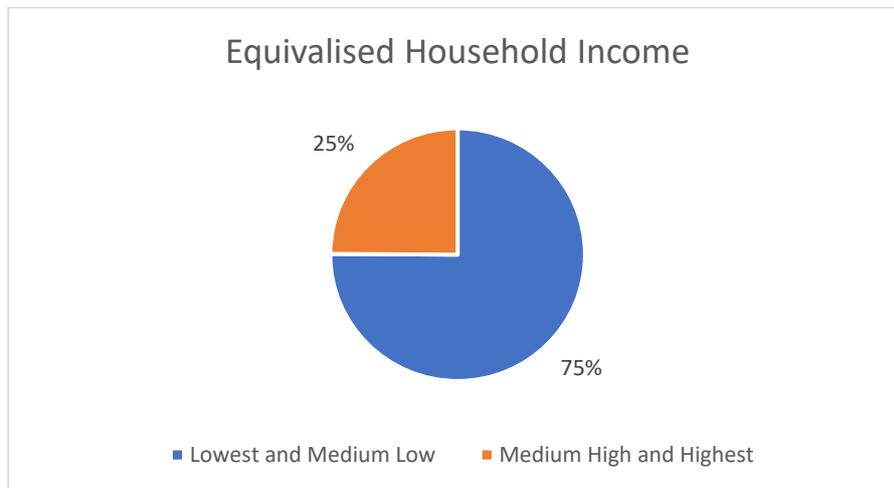


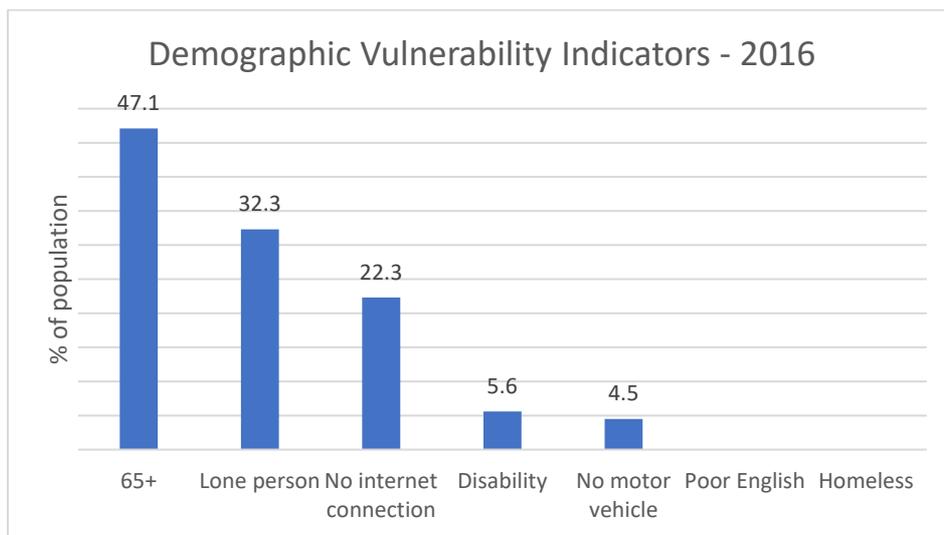
Figure 4 Mallacoota and District Household Types 1991-2016

The majority of our population either lives alone (32.3%) or as a couple with no children (29.1%). In total, 61.6% of our total population in 2016 were in a household without children.



**Figure 5** Equivalised Household Income.

75% of our total population survives on either lowest or medium low income.<sup>7</sup>



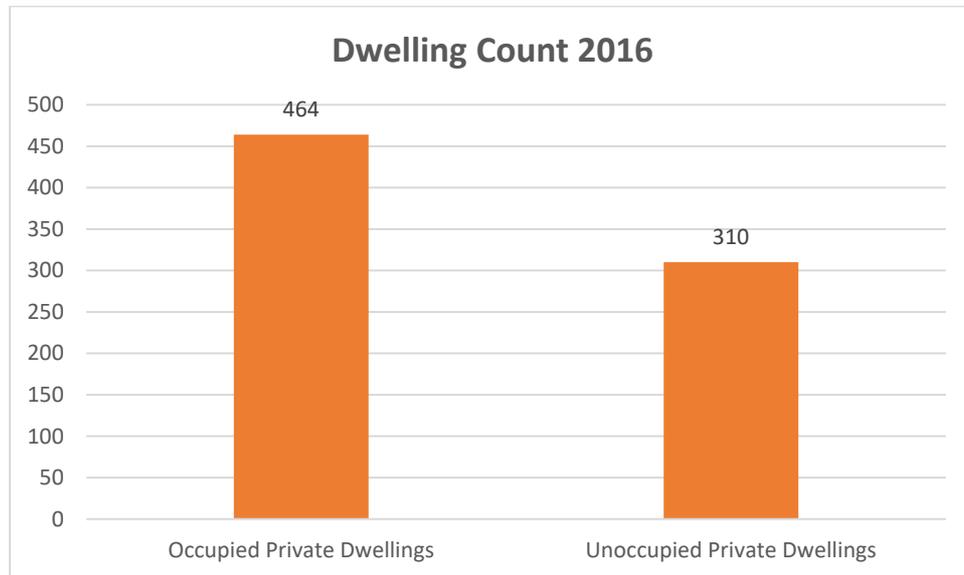
**Figure 6** Demographic Vulnerability Indicators 2016

<sup>7</sup> 'Equivalised Household Income puts all households on an equal footing independent of household size and composition to enable a true comparison between areas and over time. It is an indicator of the income resource available to a household of standard size and is the best measure of the changing economic fortunes of households living in Mallacoota.' Cited on <https://profile.id.com.au/east-gippsland/equivalised-household-income-quartiles?BMID=50&WebID=160&EndYear=2006&DataType=EN> 25/06/2020.

<sup>8</sup> 'This (graph) selects seven measures ... used to define 'vulnerable people' in our work and shows the percentage of the population in your Local Government Area that would meet each of the seven criteria. This basic-level of analysis will help anyone understand which demographic characteristics most contribute to the overall vulnerability of your community.' Cited 25/06/2020 on <https://blog.id.com.au/2020/population/demographic-trends/interactive-chart-is-your-community-demographically-vulnerable/>

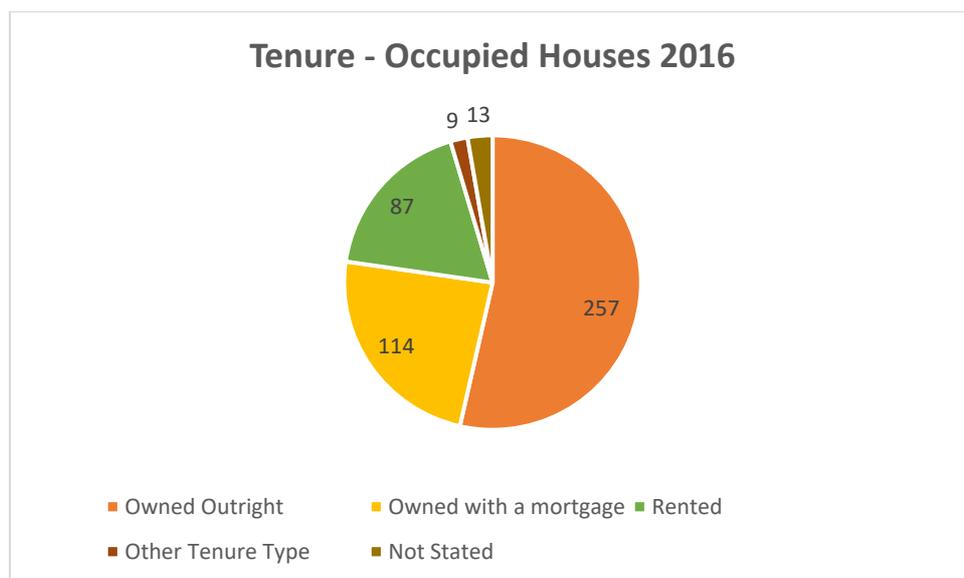
In a world increasingly reliant on electronic means of communication, just over one fifth (22.3%) of our population has no internet connection. 5.6% of our population live with a disability and 4.5% has no motor vehicle.

### Housing



**Figure 7** Dwelling Count 2016

In 2016, the total number of private dwellings in Mallacoota was 774, of which 464 (56.9%) were occupied and 310 (40.1%) not occupied. The 2016 census records 59 homes in Genoa and 29 homes in Gipsy Point but not occupation level. The total of homes in MAD in 2016 was 862. 123 homes were lost in Mallacoota and our outlying districts as a result of the bushfires. The total number of homes constructed since 2016 is not known. A conservative estimate of the loss is 1/8<sup>th</sup> (12.5%) of houses.



**Figure 8** Tenure Occupied Houses 2016

In 2016, of all occupied private dwellings in Mallacoota, 53.5% were owned outright, 23.8% were owned with a mortgage and 18.1% were rented. The statistics were Genoa and Gipsy Point do not show this breakdown.

### Education

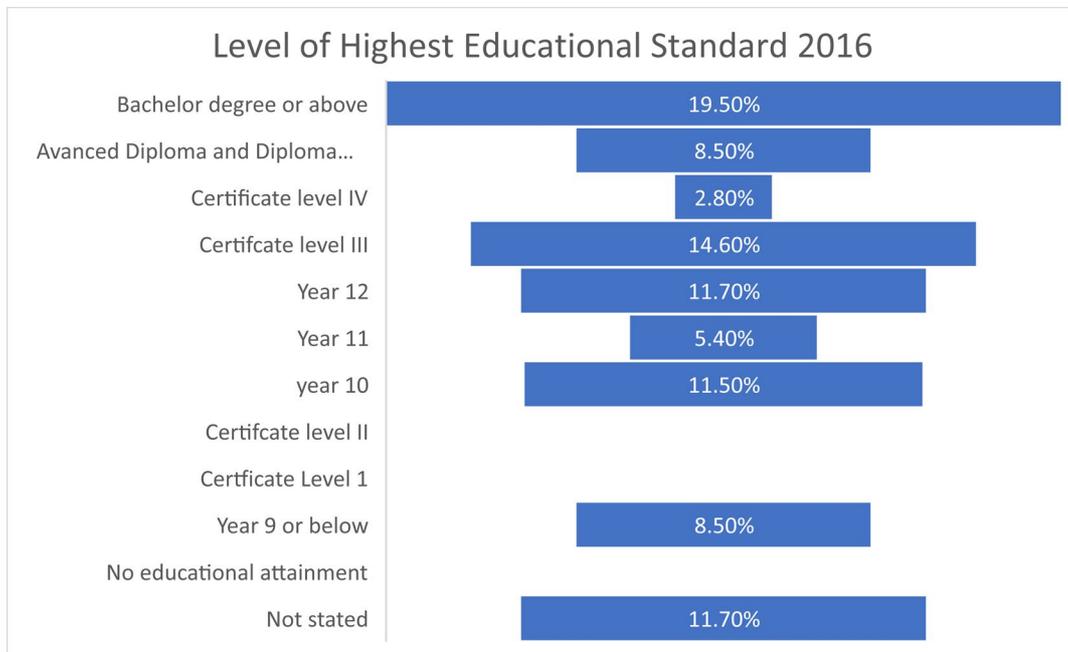
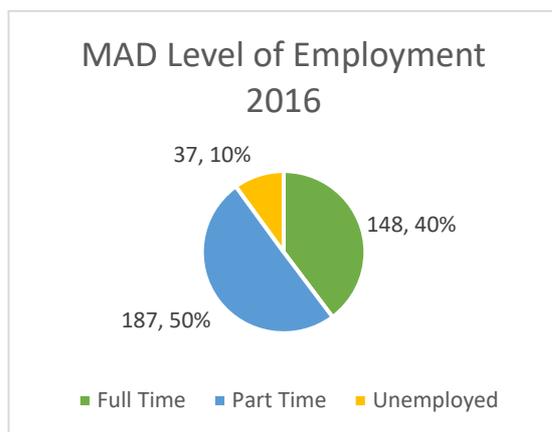


Figure 9 Level of Highest Educational Standard 2016

We have a good mix of higher education levels and skills attainment. Nearly one fifth (19.5%) of our population has a university degree. Over a quarter of our population (25.9%) has a qualification at Certificate III level or above.

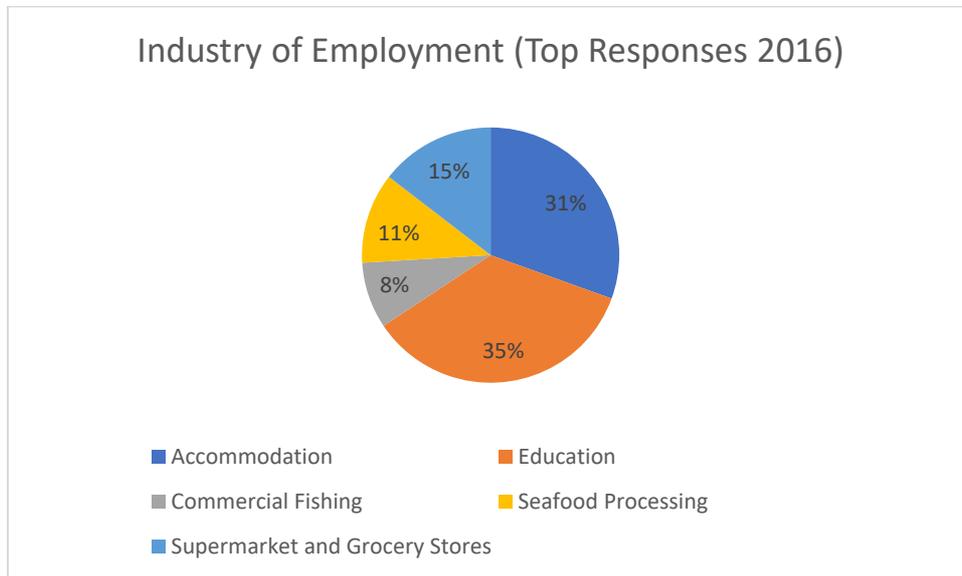
### Employment



Figures 10 & 11 Employment levels MAD and Victoria

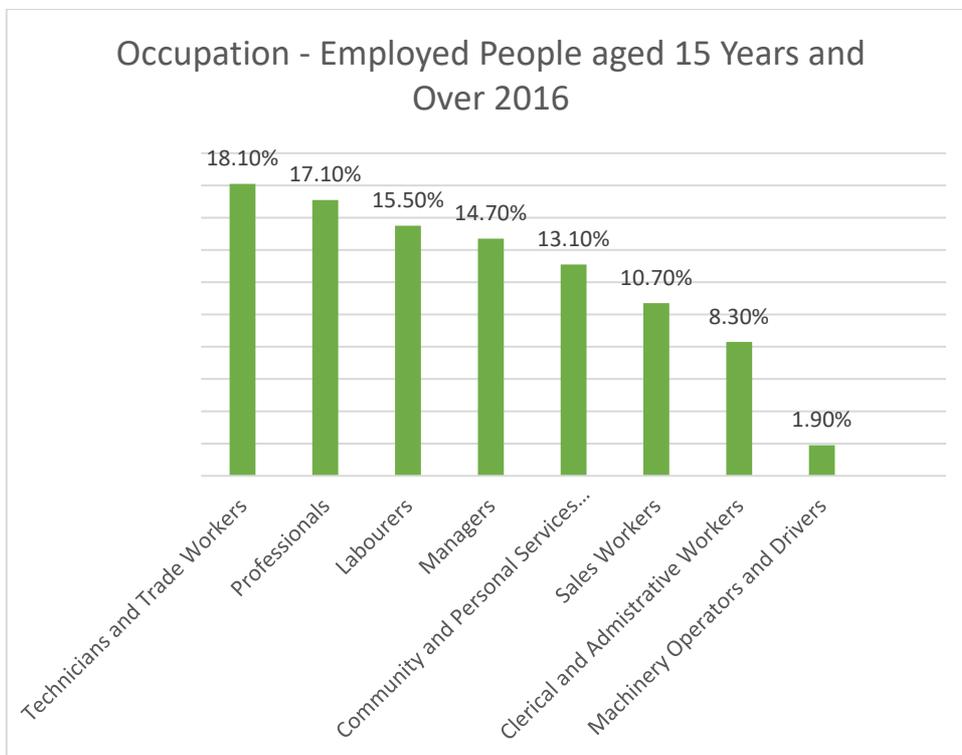
We have a higher rate of unemployment (10%) compared with the rest of Victoria (7%). Underemployment is potentially an issue – 50% of our population works part time

compared with 33% of Victorians. What the statistics do not show is the degree to which casual and seasonal work is a feature of our social and economic circumstances. The statistics also do not reveal the extent to which part time work is by choice or because of a lack of full-time opportunities.



**Figure 12** Industry of Employment Top Responses 2016

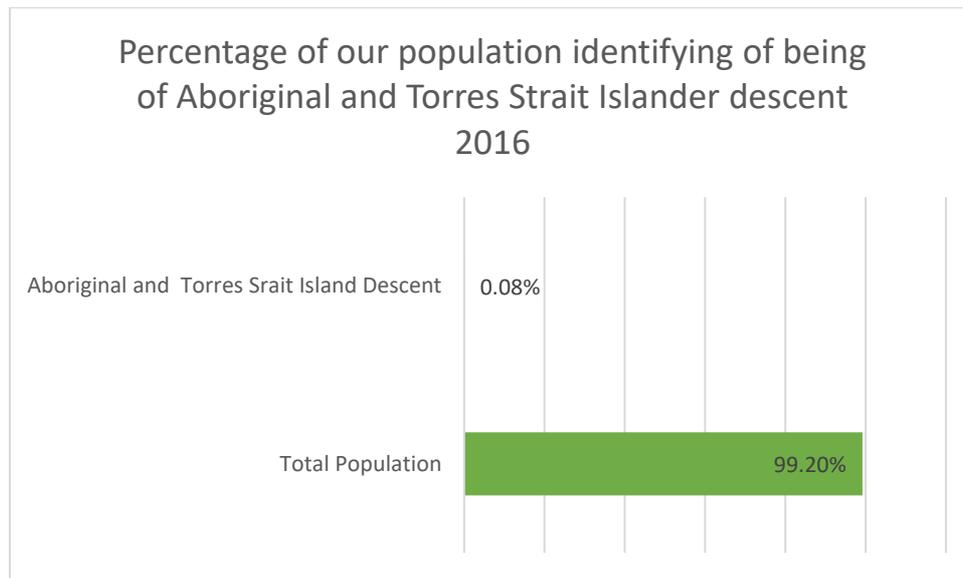
Our main areas of employment are education (35%) and accommodation (31%). The sea is the source of our third main area of employment with 19% of our population working in the fields of commercial fishing and seafood processing.



**Figure 13** Occupation Employed People aged 15 years and over 2016



## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Descent



**Figure 15** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent 2016

In 2006 no people identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent increasing to 8 in 2016.

### Our Values

#### 2007 Vision – Mallacoota Urban Design Framework

The 2007 Mallacoota Urban Design Framework<sup>10</sup> outlines a Vision for Mallacoota to be realised over the following 15-20 years:

‘Mallacoota will remain a peaceful town connected to the surrounding natural environment, including the inlet and National Parks.

It will have a lively, walkable community centre, linking activity to the foreshore and wharf area. There will be sufficient community facilities for resident and visitor needs and pedestrian and bicycle links will enhance access throughout the town.

Building design, materials and appropriate planting will reflect the coast character of the town’s setting. Mallacoota’s setting within a wilderness area will be recognised and the town’s environmental tourism role will further develop in a sustainable manner.

Coastal related industries will be encouraged to support the town’s economy.’

#### April 2020 Snapshot Survey.

In April 2020, the Thinking Group conducted a snapshot survey to understand community values and priorities post the bushfires. 66 people responded to the survey. A summary of survey results of the survey is at [Appendix D](#).

<sup>10</sup> Available at [https://www.eastgippsland.vic.gov.au/Community/Plans\\_and\\_Projects/Mallacoota\\_and\\_District](https://www.eastgippsland.vic.gov.au/Community/Plans_and_Projects/Mallacoota_and_District)

Key findings are:

- A love of our diverse, unspoilt wilderness landscape.
- An appreciation of our small, supportive communities.
- Collective post bushfire trauma exacerbated by individual and collective loss of homes, amenities and infrastructure.
- The importance of social connections and community get-togethers to restore a sense of community.
- Understanding tensions exist within our communities which will need to be taken into account in the recovery process.
- A need for funding support for both individuals and businesses to turn around the local economy and make good economic losses.
- A desire for greater economic diversity, including a desire to balance tourism with the wishes of permanent residents.
- The need for a master plan to manage our natural environment which balances maximising biodiversity and enhancing fire safety.
- The importance of rebuilding homes to appropriate standards and the interim need for comfortable accommodation for the displaced.
- The need for a strategic approach to rebuilding and extending community infrastructure including communications (internet), emergency facilities, energy, water, recreational, sporting, educational and aged care facilities.
- A recognition of the amplifying effects of COVID-19 on top of bushfire trauma and the need for safe ways to connect and communicate.
- A recognition of adverse economic impact of COVID-19 on both individuals and businesses.

## Critical Infrastructure and Services

### Emergency Services

Mallacoota has the following volunteer Emergency Services organisations:

- CFA
- SES
- Ambulance Victoria (AV) comprising Ambulance Community Officers (ACOs) who act as first responders and a Paramedic Community Support Coordinator.
- Australian Red Cross (to cease mid 2021?)
- Coastguard
- Mallacoota Surf Life Saving Club Inc.

During the fires the CFA, SES, AV and Red Cross organisations were supplemented by external permanent and volunteer staff from those organisations, together with additional vehicles and other resources.

### Health Services

#### *Mallacoota and District Health and Health Support Service*

MDHSS is a charitable not-for-profit health service which offers a range of services including allied health, district nurse and other services. During the bushfires, the District Health

Centre transformed to a relief and recovery centre<sup>11</sup> maintaining existing services and hosting visiting agencies, such the DHHS. MDHSS holds a list of vulnerable people.

#### *Mallacoota Medical Centre*

The Mallacoota Medical Centre is a privately-owned medical practice which offers both medical and nursing services, health planning and care advice.<sup>12</sup> The practice has two doctors.

#### *Aerodrome*

Mallacoota has a public airport (IATA: XMC, ICAO: YMCO) which has both gravel and asphalt runways. The primary sealed runway 18/36 has Low Intensity Runway Lighting (LIRL) with Pilot Activated Lighting (PAL) and is 1,028 metres long and 18 metres wide. Additional facilities on the Airport include a terminal building, 3 privately owned hangars, a historic wartime bunker museum, and a Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) Airbase.

The Airport operates within uncontrolled Class G airspace and has a number of Published IFR routes based on these aids connect Mallacoota with Devonport, Flinders Island, St Helens, East Sale, Melbourne, Cooma, Merimbula and other airports in south-eastern Australia.

The refuelling facilities provide 24/7 self-service Avgas and Jet A1 fuel with credit card payment options. The fuel facility is operated by Aero Refuellers. (East Gippsland Shire Council )

#### *The Port of Mallacoota*

The Port of Mallacoota<sup>13</sup> is a small waterway adjacent to the small township of Mallacoota, with an entrance to Bass Strait. The entrance closes from time to time. The entrance has had to be opened by bulldozer twice in recent times.

The Port of Mallacoota includes the waters of Mallacoota Inlet and stretches upstream to the Genoa and Wallagaraugh Rivers and is enclosed by the Croajingalong National Park. The port waters also extend into Bass Strait to the tip of Bastion Point.

In 2015 East Gippsland Shire completed the construction of new dual lane boat ramp and breakwater at Bastion Point and along with associated aids to navigation to provide a safer and more sheltered vessels launch area.

Navigational Information: VOZR (Vessel Operating and Zoning Rules) Schedule 109 Local Port of Mallacoota Inlet

The entrance channel leading into the inlet changes in position and depth and its navigation is dangerous without local knowledge. Notices to Mariners (NTMs) state extreme caution

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.mallacoota.org.au/about-mdhss/>

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.mallacootamedicalcentre.com.au/?page\\_id=971](http://www.mallacootamedicalcentre.com.au/?page_id=971)

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gippslandports.vic.gov.au/ports-and-waterways/ports-and-waterways/mallacoota-inlet/>

should be exercised from Captains Point to the Entrance. This vicinity is extremely shallow even at high water, with large sand banks and weed areas. Vessel operators are advised to proceed at a slow speed during daylight hours only and remain observant.

The Bastion Point boat ramp provides direct access to Bass Strait. Mariners must exercise due diligence in using this launching facility and plan their departure and return to coincide with favourable conditions. A webcam is accessible from the Mallacoota Webcam page located on the Gippsland Ports website<sup>14</sup> during daylight hours. At the time of writing, the webcam is not in operation.

The Bastion Point boat ramp was used to ferry people and goods during the bushfires and thereafter as the entrance to the Port of Mallacoota was closed.

EGSC manages the Bastion Point ramp and jetty, the Mallacoota township boat ramp, the Gipsy Point boat ramp and jetty and the Karbeethong boat ramp and floating jetty.

Responsibility for all in water and on land navigation aids, tide and compass piles, all swing mooring areas, the Mallacoota boat ramp floating jetty, Mallacoota wharf, Mallacoota slipway and jetty, Gipsy Point jetty and Karbeethong jetty rests with Gippsland Ports.

Parks Victoria manages the jetties located at: Cemetery Bight, Kingfish Point, The Narrows, South West Arm, Goanna Bay, Allan Head, Captain Creek, Cape Horn, Genoa River and Gravelly Point.

#### Emergency Generator

AusNet is in the process of installing a one-megawatt battery with a backup diesel generator in Mallacoota, at a site near the water treatment plant. The installation is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2020.

#### Water Supply

East Gippsland Water sources drinking water for Mallacoota from the Betka River and ground water bores. The Mallacoota Water Treatment Plant came into operation in 1997 and is able to treat up to 1.2 million litres of water per day the equivalent of water held by 1.2 Olympic sized swimming pools. The off-season population of Mallacoota is roughly 1,100 people, but this can increase up to 10,000 people during the peak summer season. In 2011, two new production bores were installed to supplement the town's drinking water supply. Water is pumped from the Betka River via a pipeline in to a 41 million litre raw water storage basin. During times of low river flow, groundwater is accessed from the two bores and added to the raw water basin.<sup>15</sup>

#### 3MGB/Victorian Integrated Warnings System

A learning from the 1983 bush fires was the need for better communications to keep everyone up to date in emergency situations. The community decided the best solution

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.gippslandports.vic.gov.au/boating/webcams/mallacoota/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.egwater.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/MCootaWTP2017.pdf#:~:text=East%20Gippsland%20Water%20sources%20drinking%20water%20for%20Mallacoota,water%20held%20by%201.2%20Olympic%20sized%20swimming%20pools.>

was to establish a local radio station. In 1992, 3MGB received a community broadcasting licence for Mallacoota and Genoa.

The Victorian government has formal arrangements in place with media outlets to broadcast emergency warnings and information to the community in a standardised and structured way. In 2016, 3MGB was successful in gaining the status of Emergency Services Victoria (EMV) emergency broadcaster.

Emergency broadcasters must meet a range of criteria before qualifying for this role and presenters are required to undergo training. In particular, emergency broadcasters are required to interrupt normal programming to announce emergency warnings and provide timely and consistent information updates. 3MGB acted as an emergency broadcaster during the 2019-20 bushfires.

Technology has moved on now and the need for 3MGB to act as an emergency broadcaster has lessened. With the experience of the 2019-20 fires, the significant impost on volunteer time and wellbeing, the situation where only 2 out of 14 trained volunteers were able to attend the studio in the 24 hours before the fire front hit, Mallacoota Genoa Broadcasting Association has withdrawn its services as an EMV emergency broadcaster. However, 3MGB will continue to broadcast emergency information from all credible sources to its listeners during times of emergency.

Victoria has an integrated warnings system to provide the community with access to timely information for a number of emergencies across multiple channels. In addition to the emergency broadcasters, this includes the Vic Emergency website [www.emergency.vic.gov.au](http://www.emergency.vic.gov.au), the VicEmergency app and social media channels as well as the VicEmergencyHotline 1800 226 226.