

## Tarwin Lower and Venus Bay Community Questionnaire - StratPlan Report 2005

Report prepared by Ian Try, The Try Consulting Group,  
for the Tarwin Lower Venus Bay Association.

October 2005

### The StratPlan Process

The current community questionnaire was the second phase of a process that commenced with discussions in 2002 and an initial broad survey (Phase one) in early 2003. There was a report back to the community in March 2003.

The trigger for the process was the desire of the local community via the Tarwin Lower Venus Bay Association (TLVBA), to review and update the Strategy Plan (StratPlan) of 1993. The original plan, had been caught up in local government amalgamation, and given the considerable change in the two communities, there was a strong desire to resurvey residents and check the currency of the original 1993 views and recommendations. There was a recognition that the make up of the two communities had changed markedly over those 10 years.

Rather than simply reissue the original 1993 survey as a means of retesting community views, a more strategic approach was taken. The StratPlan Committee developed a broad survey that asked the following very open questions:

- What are the strengths (the things you like) about the Tarwin Lower and Venus Bay district?
- What would you like to see more of in the Tarwin Lower and Venus Bay district?
- What are the weaknesses (the things you don't like and would want to see changed) about the Tarwin Lower and Venus Bay district?
- What would you like to see less of in the Tarwin Lower and Venus Bay district?
- What opportunities can you see over the next 10 years or so for the Tarwin Lower and Venus Bay district?
- Are there any threats or significant challenges that the Tarwin Lower and Venus Bay district could face in the next ten years or so?

The stated purpose was to be able to identify the desires of the community for the future of their two towns and develop a broad direction or future "vision". That process was very successful and a report was developed, with a community feedback session, in March 2003.

Phase two of the process was planned to follow relatively soon afterwards. It was planned to be a questionnaire that would pick up on the broad themes and implied future direction from the initial early 2003 survey as well as re-canvassing a number of the key questions and recommendations from the 1993 process. The questionnaire aimed to check whether a

number of the strong views from 1993 were still current and where community views and aspirations had changed.

At about this time, the TLVBA developed a submission for a community grant to assist in funding the process. They submitted a proposal to the State Government for a grant of \$10,000 from the Community Support fund and were successful. The Association aimed to involve the community in a process to identify their views and future aspirations for Tarwin Lower and Venus Bay.

The grant submission was submitted with the support of South Gippsland Shire Council who were interested in, and supportive of, the process. They also indicated that they were planning to conduct community processes for development of Structure Plans in a number of the local communities, including Tarwin Lower and Venus Bay. The Community Association decided to slow down phase two (the questionnaire) of their process to allow the Council's processes to run. There was a clear indication that the local association was supportive of, and would assist, that process.

Proposed developments in the area were also a topic of community interest and discussion, and the questionnaire was further delayed to ensure that the two issues were not confused.

It became clear that there was a community expectation of the more detailed questionnaire, and the proposal for government grant had identified this second step. In late 2004 the proposed phase two questionnaire process was reconstituted and the early drafts of that questionnaire were refined. This questionnaire was released in late February 2005, with a view that a community report would then be developed. This report and community feedback meeting is the culmination of that process.

The level of response (over 1000 questionnaires!) was outstanding but was clearly going to overwhelm the small committee. A number of dedicated local residents worked on collation of the results over a couple of weekends. Their dedication and effort is gratefully acknowledged. These results were then rechecked to ensure the highest levels of accuracy and collated into a complicated spreadsheet by Matt Cardy. Without his many hours of computer compilation, this report and summary would have been impossible. For these reasons, the feedback stage was delayed.

## **Questionnaire Methodology - Aims and Limitations**

As stated above, the questionnaire's intention was to test the implied future direction and vision from the 2003 survey and very particularly to revisit and test the views and responses to a number of key recommendations from the 1993 questionnaire. A number of the questions, then, were couched in the terms of the original 1993 recommendations and the views that were expressed at that time. The objective was to test whether the views expressed in 1993 were similar, or had changed markedly with the passage of time and the growth in the two towns.

Some may view this methodology as not rigorously objective, however its aims were very deliberately to refer back to, and test, the 2003 survey themes and the 1993 StratPlan. In terms of the specific and limited objectives of the Strategy Plan process and this questionnaire, the process was quite appropriate. Respondents were also given opportunities to provide additional comments to ensure that the variety of differing views could be identified.

Given the above comments on methodology, it is important to note that the questionnaire results cannot be used as a plebiscite or vote on any specific development proposal or project in the district. It does, however, provide a legitimate indication of broad community thinking

and attitudes on a range of issues, and particularly, provides continuity and links back to the 1993 StratPlan. For many of the questions, the strength of respondent views were clearly indicated by the overwhelming vote in one direction or the other.

This summary report is accompanied by a Questionnaire including the respondent data for each question in percentage form. A spreadsheet summary of all the data is also available for interested parties. The returned questionnaires will be retained by the Association and would be an invaluable source of data for future research.

## Summary of Returns and Demographic Data

Questionnaires Sent out: **2240** Returned: **1016** Percentage return: **45.4%**

Place of residence (Number of respondents):

Venus Bay Permanent **211** Part Time **718**

Tarwin Lower Permanent and Part Time **27**

Unspecified **60**

A questionnaire return of over 45% was an excellent result and indicated a very high level of interest in the process and the issues canvassed, by local residents. A return of greater than 20% is generally considered a positive response for large scale community surveys.

As might be expected, the majority of questionnaires would have been sent to part time (holiday) residents and this is also evident from the returns. It would be an interesting research exercise to compare the full time and part time resident responses for all questions. This is beyond the scope of the report.

## Overview of Questionnaire Results

The scope of the report will not allow all questions to be included in the discussion below, however the key issues or findings are covered. All question numbers below relate to the questionnaire.

### 1 Community Vision for Tarwin Lower and Venus Bay (Q.1 and 2)

The cautions outlined above in relation to interpretation of questionnaire data are particularly relevant to questions 1 and 2. The questions outline two opposite and possibly mutually exclusive future pictures for both towns, and pick up on the key themes identified in the responses to the broad survey of 2005. They were also forced choice questions in that they did not allow respondents to opt for a middle choice. The space for comments did allow for respondents to qualify or further explain their comments.

Vision 1 in each question could be broadly designated as the 'lower growth' scenario, while Vision 2, by comparison, is the 'higher growth' or development option. The responses overwhelmingly favoured the lower growth future scenario; 57% for Tarwin Lower and 78% for Venus Bay. A high 'no response' (19%) for the Tarwin Lower question (Q.1) was possibly related to the fact that the vast majority of respondents indicated Venus Bay as their place of residence and may have been more equivocal about the possible future scenario for Tarwin Lower.

While there were only a small number of Tarwin Lower residents who responded, 56% favoured the higher growth (Vision 2) scenario, compared to 41% favouring Vision 1.

## **2 Built environment and Infrastructure**

### **2.1 Development Between and Within the Two Towns (Q. 3 to 9)**

There is a distinct picture emerging from these questions; a picture that confirmed the general findings of the 1993 questionnaire. A large majority of respondents (84%) agreed with the model of Tarwin Lower as the service centre for the region from Venus Bay to Walkerville and see a strong interrelationship between the two towns (Q. 3). Virtually the same percentage of respondents agreed with the 1993 findings that the freehold land between the two towns should be kept as a buffer area (Q. 4).

An overwhelming majority of respondents would not support township expansion of Venus Bay (Q. 7, 75%) and a lower majority for Tarwin Lower (Q.5, 58%). Again it should be pointed out that the vast majority of respondents were residents of Venus Bay. Respondents to Question 9 clearly indicated that they would not support new developments in designated floodplains (83%), with 6% undecided and 9% in favour. This was also a forced choice question and it could be argued that the results may have been a little different if a range of options were presented. As it stands, the strength of the response provided a very clear indication of the overall preference of those community members who completed the questionnaire.

### **2.2 Building Controls (Q. 10 to 15, and 16)**

Over three quarters (77%) of those responding would not support high density developments in Tarwin Lower (Q. 10), and 83% would not support these developments in Venus Bay (Q. 11); even if waste water issues were resolved. The Tarwin Lower sample was very small, however 59% of those responding indicated their preference against high density development.

A majority of respondents (59%) believed the community should again (as in 1993) recommend to the Council to reconsider strategies and financial incentives to encourage block consolidation (Q. 12). It should be noted that 16% of people were undecided and 23% were against this proposal.

A large majority (89%) supported a height restriction of two stories for buildings ((Q. 13); a similar trend to the 1993 results. Respondents were evenly divided in their response to controls on residential buildings and fencing with 42% for controls and 44% against, with 13% undecided. The results for control of commercial buildings (Q. 15) were less equivocal, with 59% for controls, 29% against and 11% undecided.

### **2.3 Water and Waste Management (Q. 17 and 18)**

Question 17 and 18 focussed on the complex and somewhat contentious issue of provision of reticulated water and sewerage. A range of information was provided outlining two alternative approaches, making this a forced choice question between reticulated or alternative systems. A greater number (58%) favoured alternative systems, as defined in the questionnaire, with 21% of respondents favouring reticulated water and sewerage. Many found this difficult to respond to, and there was a relatively large number who were undecided (18%).

Of those who responded to question 18, a slight majority (34%) would accept reticulated systems if they believed the alternatives had been fully investigated and proved unsuitable; 38% would not accept them.

## **2.4 Infrastructure (Q. 19 to 24)**

The sealing of private roads was a key issue in the 1993 survey and again the majority of respondents (64%) indicated they would not support sealing of private roads in Venus Bay, with 26% supporting and 9% undecided (Q. 19). Only a slight majority of those supporting sealing indicated that they would be prepared to make a financial contribution to road sealing (17% willing versus 15% unwilling).

Question 22 provided respondents with an opportunity to rate the current standard of maintenance for a range of local infrastructure. The rating options were *excellent*, *adequate* or *poor*. Experience shows that respondent to community surveys rarely give very high ratings to the maintenance of local infrastructure and assets, therefore the level of *excellent* and *adequate* responses provide an indication of those who were generally positive with the maintenance of those assets. They will generally have no hesitation giving a poor rating if they have any negative views of those community assets. For this reason, the level of negative or *poor* ratings is of most interest.

The areas of infrastructure with the lowest level of negative responses, that is, those with a much lower level of community concern, were:

- roundabouts (12%),
- local 'feeder' roads (17%), and
- signage (19%).

By definition, there is a higher level of community 'comfort' with those asset areas.

Those areas of infrastructure with the highest level of negative rating, that is, those with a higher level of community concern, were:

- rubbish bins/litter control (41%),
- tourist information (34%),
- transfer station/recycling (33%), and
- public toilets (32%).

An overwhelming level of respondents (90%) would like to see the introduction of free transfer station vouchers (Q. 23) – not an unexpected ratepayer response.

## **3 Natural Environment (Q. 25 to 30)**

Question 25 asked respondents about the level of importance of the natural environment to their household, with 83% rating it as extremely important and 14% rating it as moderately important. This was also an expected result. Many respondents in the broad survey of 2003 identified the natural environment as one of the key attractions of Venus Bay and Tarwin

Lower and a major reason they bought property in the area. Comments in this questionnaire also supported this view.

Respondents overwhelmingly viewed the surrounding environment as 'very important' to the future prosperity and sustainability of the two townships (Q. 28, 93%). They would also support community, local and state government initiatives to improve the environmental quality of the area (Q. 29, 85%).

A majority of respondents supported greater access to the coastal park (Q.26), but also indicated that the care and management was at best only adequate in a number of areas (Q. 25). The areas given the highest level of 'poor' ratings were:

- access, fences, steps, tracks (28%), and
- weed and pest control (28%).

#### **4 Economy (Q. 31 to 36)**

A majority of respondents supported the promotion of tourism in the two towns, with 53% supporting, 30% not supporting and 16% undecided (Q. 31). There was relatively equal support (Q. 32) for 'green' or eco tourism initiatives or options that blended eco tourism initiatives with more commercial options. Respondent choices for additional accommodation (Q. 33) were relatively equally spread across motels, caravan park/camping, cabins/units and bed & breakfast.

A large majority of respondents (78%) indicated they do not want a light industrial zone in Venus Bay (Q. 36). The results for question 35 were more equivocal with 38% responding that it was required in Tarwin Lower, with 29% undecided and 29% against a light industrial zone in Tarwin Lower. The 'yes' response for Tarwin Lower respondents was slightly higher for a light industrial zone in their town (48%), with 30% against.

#### **5 Human Services (Welfare) (Q. 37 to 40)**

Respondents were asked in Question 37 to rate a range of facilities and services that they had used. There was a high level of 'no response' to these options given that part time residents would not have utilised many of the welfare or community services. Child care, aged care and youth care had the highest level of 'no response' – again not surprising given the high percentage of part time respondents.

For reasons outlined earlier, the *excellent* and *adequate* ratings can be combined to indicate those with a generally positive view of the services. The highest 'positive' ratings were for the Venus Bay Community Centre (74%) and the Tarwin Lower Medical Centre (55%) while the largest *poor* ratings were for Youth Services (28%) and Aged Care (25%).

Almost half of the respondents to Question 40 believed there was a need for a part time local Range for By-laws enforcement with 23% indicating that a full time officer was required. It should be noted that 21% indicated they did not believe a local Ranger is required.

## **Summary and Key Themes from Respondent Comments**

The following comments attempt to sum up the key themes and trends from the large number of comments provided by respondents to the questions.

The vast majority of the comments were an affirmation of their 'ticked' responses. Comments such as "keep it as is"; "retain sleepy village atmosphere"; "we bought here for the beauty – the natural environment", and so on, sum up the predominant theme.

Many comments were used to qualify their ticked response - to place their position between two extremes or to add another aspect to the question. An example that is representative of many of the comments is "some new development should be encouraged but not to create a Surf Coast".

Those who had generally 'ticked' following a lower development, environmentally sensitive, or sustainable theme tended to be more prolific in affirming this with added comments. Those responding to the questions favouring a higher development scenario tended to comment less but the predominant theme of their comments could be summed up with "progress and development is inevitable – it should be properly managed".

While rates was not a theme of any question, comments related to the perception of high rates was mentioned many times, particularly in relation to road maintenance and tip charges (prompted by question 23 – tip vouchers). Most comments suggested part time respondents believed they do not receive real value from the 'high' rates when compared to their other place of residence.

The following is a list of the most common comments which identified new issues not particularly covered by survey questions. These are approximately in descending order of frequency.

- Retain natural beauty
- Limit commercial development (particularly Venus Bay)
- Extend walking/bike tracks
- Support for alternate waste systems
- Sewerage a decision already made for us
- Improve beach access/parking
- More sporting facilities
  - 18 hole golf course - Tarwin Lower
  - Tennis courts – Venus Bay
  - Basket ball court
  - Improved boating/fishing facilities/access
- More activities and entertainment (recreational and educational) for children/teenagers
- Public transport – between Tarwin Lower & Venus Bay and to major centres.
- Better medical support – visiting doctors, chemist etc
- Areas allocated (particularly beach) for leash free dog walking
- Better maintenance of public toilets
- Better signage (including beach safety signs)
- Extended tip times.
- Disabled access to beaches, parks etc
- Need for fire plan and safe areas
- Need for ranger – greater police presence
- Domestic animal control
- Broadband needed – better mobile coverage
- Local area bus service.

## Summary

Clearly, with over one thousand returns, there were a broad range of views and opinions expressed by those community members who responded to the questionnaire. The nature and make up of the two communities has changed over the twelve years since the 1993 StratPlan was presented. There were however, some remarkably consistent themes running through both set of survey findings.

The majority favour a lower development, environmentally sensitive and sustainable future for the two towns. Many realise that change is inevitable, however desire that the factors that brought them to the towns are not lost in the future, and that it does not become a 'Noosa' style region with future development. They do want the Shire and Government Departments and Authorities to maintain and improve the level of services and the pristine nature of the Coastal Park and surroundings of the towns.

This report and the Questionnaire summary will be presented to the South Gippsland Shire Council with the desire that it be tabled and ratified as an advisory document, in the same way as the 1993 StratPlan. It will also be sent to the Department of Sustainability and Environment, and other bodies such as Water Authorities, the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, and the appropriate Power Utility.