



Voices of Wannon
Participatory Democracy

What Wannon Wants

Community Consultation Report



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

Our Values

We are **Inclusive**

We are **Transparent**

We are **Accountable**

We are **Respectful**

We behave with **Integrity**



Wannon Electorate showing the location of supporters of Voices of Wannon

Who we are

Voices of Wannon are a group of individuals who have come together to help make a meaningful connection between the people of Wannon and our political representatives. We are not a political party.

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

We expect high standards from our political leaders.

We are committed to advocating for representation that is an honest, meaningful and transparent consultative process between the electorate and our elected representatives. To date we have spoken with a proportion of voters in the electorate. Ongoing conversations are required to elicit and understand the views of Wannon voters.



"Democracy is not a spectator sport, it's a participatory event. If we don't participate in it, it ceases to be a democracy" -Michael Moore

Our team

Voices of Wannon is an incorporated association with 45 financial members and over 180 supporters. The group was formed in February 2021 and we are guided by a committee comprised of Genevieve Grant (Rosebrook), Deb Campbell (Deans Marsh), Joy Coulson (Warrnambool), Greg Twitt (Secretary - Warrnambool), Shelly Murrell (Convenor - Allansford), Jim Gifford (Camperdown), June Frost (Warrnambool) and Catherine Jenkins (Treasurer - South Purumbete).



About the electorate of Wannon



Wannon covers over 33,000km² and, following a 2021 redistribution, is comprised of nine different local government areas. Approximately 153,000 people live in the electorate.

Based on the 2016 census we have lower rates of tertiary education than the national average, only 12% of the population holding a bachelor degree or above, compared to the Australian average of 22%.

We are less culturally and linguistically diverse with 83.4% of Wannon's population being born in Australia compared to the Australian average of 66.7%, and not as wealthy - a larger proportion of households in Wannon compared to the national average earn less than \$650 per week.

We have many communities with poor health, with areas of Wannon experiencing high rates of asthma, mental health concerns, alcohol and drug problems, dementia, heart disease, obesity, osteoporosis, arthritis, low birth weights and some of the lowest life expectancies in Victoria.

Wannon also has a larger proportion of families compared to the national average where both parents are unemployed.

Wannon local government areas and largest towns

Ararat Rural City Council

- Ararat

Colac Otway Shire

- Colac

Corangamite Shire

- Camperdown

Glenelg Shire Council

- Portland

Moyne Shire Council

- Port Fairy

Pyrenees Shire Council

(southern part only)

- Beaufort

Southern Grampians Shire Council

- Hamilton

Surf Coast Shire

(western part only)

- Anglesea

Warrnambool City Council

- Warrnambool

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead



About the Report

This report documents the priorities of the people of Wannon. The views of the community were collected by holding Kitchen Table Conversations right across the electorate, from Deans Marsh in the east to Hamilton in the west. Due to restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, we held some conversations online, and also enabled individuals to contribute their views via an online forum.

We held 22 Kitchen Table Conversations (involving over 120 participants) and received online responses from a further 50 community members. Conversation participants and survey respondents were self selecting.

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

- What are the good things about living in Wannon?
- What would your ideal community look and feel like?
- What are your expectations of your local member?
- Do you feel that your values are being well represented by your local member?
- What practical things can we do to improve engagement and trust in democracy?
- What are the most important things (locally, in Australia and the world) that you'd like our local member to address?

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

The consultative process was held to enable Voices of Wannon to share the priorities of the Wannon community with their elected representatives. Our expectation is that our elected representatives use this information to inform their decision making, establish priorities and more fully and effectively represent their community.



Kitchen Table Conversations

The 'Kitchen Table Conversation' (KTC) process is a model where small groups meet and discuss what's important to them.

The purpose is to listen and document the key priorities of the participants.

KTCs are a forum for listening, not for changing the opinions of others.

Participants are included, valued and respected.

All opinions are valid.

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

The conversations use a series of standard questions as conversation starters.



What are the good things

People look at you and smile and say hello; it makes you feel welcome.

Nature is a huge drawcard. The relative cleanliness of the water.

Colac is a great place to live. We have good schools and a good hospital.

We have good community assets that have been built and maintained by the locals.

Warrnambool is a great place to retire to. It hasn't changed much in 40 years. It's a lovely welcoming friendly place. Not really lacking for anything. I haven't had to go to Melbourne to see a doctor or to attend the theatre. There is a good range of eating establishments and I like the town's size, and the range of accommodation it provides. It's a great place.

Community is wonderful - even in places like Lorne there is a great community underneath the "show".

When we moved from Melbourne to Deans Marsh, we found a community that was just about ideal. People from different backgrounds that agreed to get along and work together. It's a great community.

Love the peacefulness of this place, the safety and security, we take that for granted.

I like the focus on pedestrians.

I like the country. It's so lovely and so peaceful although our area is growing fast. Our politicians could get a bit of a shove

Posing a question about what people value about their community tells us what needs to be preserved and enhanced.

but Cudjee is a gorgeous spot. I was born in Wannon 81 years ago. Melbourne is great when you are younger but you can't beat the country.

Connectedness is different here in Port Fairy. You wouldn't find it in some other towns of the same size. Some other local towns have similar local cultures. They have heart.

Hamilton is an appropriately sized community, some degree of anonymity because of the right size but also some degree of accountability.

There are good opportunities for kids, space to run around. The community is involved in revegetation, wildlife corridors from Mt Napier to Mt Rouse are being developed by the community together.

I have the capacity to make a decent living here.

Rural coastal lifestyle, pony clubs, gun clubs, agricultural farm land - sheep and dairying, gas production all co-exist.

I also like the Aboriginal history of this area. It epitomises what has happened in its history. It's a rich environment. The history of this town reminds us that it's people from Terang who have shaped



about living in Wannon?

the history of this place. There doesn't seem to be family trees here. There are family forests; for example people with 85 grandchildren.

Small community. Quietness, part of community, know the others in the community, space to be autonomous, community support if there is an emergency.

Port Fairy is so good I want to keep it to myself. There is easy access to everything we need.

Environment absolutely wonderful. Such gratitude for the natural environment for space, for the emotional support of that space. Extraordinary appreciation of the land that I have access to here.

I grew up here. I find it a thriving regional city, good medical system, transport, tourism, nature - a little piece of everything. I also love Melbourne. I think Warrnambool is a beautiful city.

I second what everyone else says about the natural environment and services. We seem to be economically steady as she goes - no industries which are dying, no climatic issues (e.g. drought), we are growing but not madly like the surf coast - this is good and bad, sometimes I would like more excitement in my life.

My husband's from Sydney, he says it is great that you can walk anywhere in Camperdown and people say hello to you from their gardens. People are really friendly.

I have lived in Camperdown and Warrnambool and work takes me west and north. The diversity of landscape is attractive. Warrnambool's rural setting makes it a great place to live. We probably take it for granted.

I love living in Wannon because there is a really engaged community. There are so many groups that make it an uplifting place to be.

It feels like my country. I grew up here and have always lived here. Life is easy. I can walk to the doctor and the shops.

I like that Moyne Shire has a representative and Councillors who attend residents' group meetings. When you miss out on grants the process means that you can tell where the money goes and it seems to be fair.

A great community. Really quiet. If someone has a crisis people will help, e.g. people have set up a COVID Facebook help page.

Cleanliness - air and water, even roadsides. Victoria seems cleaner than NSW.

Rural aspect and rural values - good community members and community spirit - contributing to CFA, schools etc.



What would your ideal **community look and feel like?**

Need fast rail. Trains to Melbourne have got slower, infrastructure is deteriorating (tracks). It would encourage more day trips to the city without 7.5 hours of travel. Need express services.

Better road repairs.

We could have more diversity – racially and religiously. The lack of diversity is more obvious being stuck here with COVID. Would be good for my kids to see people of other backgrounds. We aren't as inclusive as we think we are.

There are quite a lot of people living in poverty, especially kids. We need to do more about addressing this problem. The problem is hidden but it is getting worse.

Should be more electric vehicle stations. Not expensive. One in every town would be achievable.

Better shops – a bit more variety, more opportunity for small business. Centre of Warrnambool has empty shops due to high rents. Opportunity for inclusiveness – e.g.: local community associations sometimes forget to include people other than the mainstream, but there is potential to get this happening.

Micro grids for power – these have been trialled in Western Australia to good success. A similar thing could be trialled in relevant communities in Wannon.

It would be great to have a community that looks after newcomers – particularly given that we are likely to have more refugees in future. Colac has a good reputation of welcoming refugees and new migrants.





People's responses when they are asked to list their aspirations for their individual community informs us their key community enhancement priorities.



Penshurst

All the new developments are really difficult to see. Needs to be more parks and bike paths to enable people to walk or cycle through the park to the city for community and recreation.

Good transport - current road network needs to improve.

Public transport to accommodate growing areas and encourage use of these services.

An ideal community would be able to offer employment, good opportunities for young people and school leavers. There is a gap there in Wannon. My ideal community would be a bit larger than Warrnambool to create more opportunities for people - more people creates more jobs and supports more businesses and leads to more need for tertiary education and training. More shops would be great. The ideal size is about 50K people. Geelong is too big.

Caring for the marginalised - aged, homeless, different cultures, people who don't always get a voice.

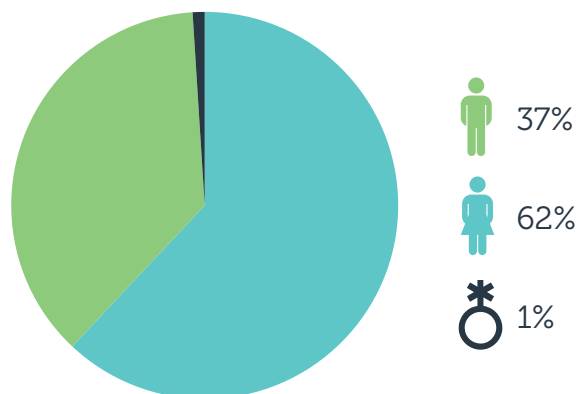
Opportunities for higher education - Deakin has a limited range of courses. We need to keep young people in the area.

Warrnambool is expanding very quickly but the government is not reacting quickly enough for the growth, especially with schools both primary and secondary.

We need better access to information and resources via IT. There are areas in our region without telephone coverage. It doesn't make sense.

Responses by gender

62% of participants were female, 37% were male, 1% did not state their gender.



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

Participants by Local Government Area



The proportion of participants (n=174) by each area, as compared to the population of the electorate of Wannon living in each area.

What priorities were raised most often in Kitchen Table Conversations

Conversation participants raised over 130 priorities when asked "What are the most important things that you'd like our local member to address".

This report highlights the five highest priorities that were raised during the consultative process. While this was a difficult decision as all of the community priorities raised were valid and compelling, the top five priorities were exceptionally clear.

This report also includes information about three other frequently mentioned priorities.

A full transcript of all the issues raised is included at <https://www.voicesofwannon.net/>

Real and urgent action on climate change

Doing something about climate change...
Urgently.

My top priority is for the Federal Government to take more action on climate change.

Commit to net zero carbon emissions by mid-century and implement a credible plan now.

We need to dramatically improve our response to climate change. We are so held back by our large deposits of gas and iron ore. We need to place more emphasis on renewables.

Climate change. We need to get in step with the rest of the world.

The Liberal Party needs to take action on climate change especially with regard to farmers and the viability of the agricultural industry and preventing bush fires.

We live in an area with a lot of diverse farming – it strikes me that one thing they should be doing in Canberra is providing farmers with practical things they can do to address climate change. It shouldn't be either/or. There should be more focus from Canberra on getting solutions to climate change into the economy.

Genuine action on climate change. Seize the opportunity.

We must have a cohesive plan on climate change and reducing emissions.

Australia's current position on climate change is embarrassing.

We must recognise you cannot escape the climate (go to Mars as the rich are

planning to do). We should be focussing on climate change.

Address population control and overconsumption problems - both these issues are driving climate change. Fast action on this or our civilisation will collapse - needs to be addressed soon.

Action on climate change is the highest priority. The Great Barrier Reef, forest, mangrove swamps, Kakadu and being lost to the gas and coal industry.

Climate catastrophe management - look at wind and solar generation and reduce coal and gas, offshore drilling and fracking.

Climate change, real and forward thinking targets, support for technologies and jobs in this field that will help e.g. renewable energies, solar batteries, electric cars. We have so much possibility in this area.

Immediate urgent climate action at every level (household, local, state, national).

If politicians admitted climate change is real and did something to lessen the impacts we would all have much more hope of a secure future.

We should be moving towards green energy as quickly as possible with no new coal or gas.

Environmental protection and climate change action are the most important things.

Climate crisis - immediate commitment to net zero by 2035 or similar.

Improve integrity and transparency in government



We need to address the power of lobbyists and the disguising of electoral donations. Do our politicians just serve those who give them the money?

A Federal ICAC with teeth.

Trust in government.

Waste and corruption at state and federal level (there is currently no federal IBAC).

Politicians need to adhere to their Code of Ethics. There needs to be repercussions if people don't listen to the Speaker. Accountability for decisions?

An independent entity to determine infrastructure spending and grants not pork-barrelling MPs.

Transparency in decision making. Secrecy of decisions.

Sports Rorts should be addressed.

More integrity in government as it feels both parties are corrupted by processes.

Anti-corruption body federally that includes MPs.

List who the donors are immediately rather than months after the fact.

Generally politicians seem to be lying in a way they haven't been in the past. Lies about how capitalism is good for us. It feels to me that we need to say "Please be rational." There is no sense that people will have any impact if they lie. We need to trust our politicians to be honest.

Integrity and compassion.

The lack of ethics in politicians' behaviour.

The major problem with politics in Australia is that the Government is bowing to big business. We need to get the country more independent to get away from the big money controlling our representatives.

Governments need to follow up more on the recommendations from findings of experts. They seem to ignore the experts. Why can't they listen to the experts?





Treat refugees and people **seeking asylum with compassion**

We need to show more compassion for refugees and follow the old Australian values of caring for our neighbours, whoever that may be.

It is appalling that refugees are left in remote places. It's inhumane and appalling.

More humane and timely response to refugees and asylum seekers (end indefinite detention). Create more efficient asylum seeker processing facilities.

We need far more humane/welcoming refugee policies.

I am ashamed of our country's treatment of refugees.

Welcome and support for asylum seekers.

We need to stop the cruel treatment of asylum seekers.

Rescind 'turning back the boats' policy. Increase immigration. Stop all off shore detention. Give temporary visa holders full status, particularly Afghans.

We need to improve the way we treat refugees and those seeking asylum.

Treat refugees humanely instead of putting them on visas allowing them to temporarily stay in this country without work or benefits and no assurance for the future. Surely the Sri Lankan couple and their daughters being held in Perth deserve to stay in Australia and return to their home in Queensland. They will be welcomed with open arms and make a genuine contribution to the community. Why do we have to be so pig-headed just to prove a political point?

Reversal of mandatory offshore detention policy for people seeking asylum.

Push the incumbent government to a commitment to comply fully with the UNHCR convention.

Call for Royal Commission into mandatory immigration detention and operation of the Immigration Department.

Increase the availability of affordable and social housing

There are low levels of unemployment in the region and lots of jobs so new people are attracted to the region but there is not enough housing so people can't move here.

DHHS -Social housing, emergency accommodation.

Clients that fall through the cracks are middle aged men in trouble with an injury. So difficult to get housing. People move from Warrnambool to Penshurst for housing.

Affordable housing, and cost of living in general. Need to have affordable rental properties.

Houses in Warrnambool are lasting a week on the market and are worth over \$100k more than a year ago.

We need more social housing.

We need more affordable housing to attract young families.

Affordable housing. \$25,000 stimulus just bumped up house prices.

I also think we need affordable housing. If you don't have an address, you don't get benefits. It's a problem.

Unaffordability of housing for the younger generation.

Children need to have housing security for the future. We need affordable housing.

Affordable housing is a priority.

Growing inequality between people in housing especially. It's obscene.

A reduction in tax incentives that drive up house prices; improve housing availability and affordability for those on low incomes.



Online Voices of Warrnambool meeting



Kitchen Table Conversation, Hamilton



Improve access to health services

We need to have better services that go out into the back blocks and do outreach: mental health for farmers, support for Aboriginal communities etc. Town centres are doing well, but they are surrounded by a sea of disadvantage.

There are families with drug issues and lots of other issues. Mortlake is really having a hard time. Not enough government services, like only one psychologist currently available.

It is easy as middle class people to think that we have pretty good services. An ideal community would have far better access to public and private mental health services. We miss the paediatric child mental health services now they are no longer available. We can't get the occupational therapists, speech therapists, psychologists, obstetricians and other allied health professionals. People have closed their books. A massive shortage of nurses here at the moment.

Having worked as a teacher in Melbourne and here, there is so much more poverty and disadvantage here. Here if a child has a speech issue in prep, they may not be able to see a speech pathologist until years 2 or 3.

Hamilton needs greater access to allied health for early childhood services.

The Warrnambool Base Hospital is not expanding quickly enough to accommodate increasing population - code yellows. Staff at wits end.

We need improved mental health resources.

We need more doctors in Portland - GPs and specialists, there is a shortage and emergency at the hospital are seeing more patients because they are unable to get in to a GP.

No more GP's surgeries are bulk billing anymore in Portland, meaning some people are unable to afford to go and see a doctor.

COVID has created a big burden on mental health services and lots of other health issues that have not been addressed. Waiting lists for public health services are currently too long.

It would be good to have more specialist medical services locally, instead of having to go to Melbourne.

Family violence services based in Camperdown so women don't have to wait in hospital or in the community for services to respond.

Improved access to health care such as psychiatric services.

Other Frequently Raised Concerns

Address Social Inequality

On the surface we look OK, but I hear that under the surface there is domestic violence, homelessness, some children are being disadvantaged because their parents are not being supported. There is disparity even between different schools in Warrnambool.

Address increasing social inequality. It's becoming structural. Very bad for people themselves and bad for our society. We need to look closer at any legislation and question what is the social impact? Some countries in the world do this very well and it makes people happier and healthier.

Increased Investment in Public Education

The lack of funding for our public education system is a huge and devastating issue. I know that by working in schools that the money is not there to assist children who are struggling. You shouldn't have to pay to attend kindergarten.

Access to university education for kids from regional areas - more scholarships for regional kids.

Higher emphasis on the funding of higher education and research and development. Address dumbing down of Australia - 'Brain Drain'. Education is too vocationally based.

Need more financial support for universities including Deakin University.

Inequality of money spent on private schools in comparison to public schools. It's disgraceful and contributes to inequality.

Care for the Environment

We have glossy environmental statements, but they don't seem to take account of farming practices - there is not enough support for farmers to plant trees/ create wildlife corridors.

Need to stop wrecking nature. Stop logging old growth forest, stop clear felling, protect our ocean environments and marine species. Protect whale nurseries.

The issue of the old landfill at East Beach in Port Fairy is a real time bomb.

Address land clearing and habitat loss. Incentives for tree planting.

Invest more in alternate power sources - e.g. hydrogen - and renewable energy projects.

Climate change and environment. First Nations people should have a voice over the resource extraction on their land. Greater access of Indigenous people to land.

Taking care of our environment, looking at ways to radically increase sustainable practices, and maintain the ecological health of our planet.

What are your expectations of your local member?

I'd like them to show professionalism and integrity.

They need to be more upfront. Have meetings open to the public.

An Independent is more willing to listen and to change view. There is a responsiveness to their community.

We need a representative with a van saying for example at 10am they will be in Terang, at 12noon in Camperdown. They should drive the van to each community on a regular basis. The van should be distinctive, and they need to be very accessible so we can speak directly to our representative.

I want my local member to be contactable. They need to be recognisable and willing to accept both conservative and progressive opinions.

The communication issue is important. You go and see someone and you get a stock standard answer. It would be good to have a mechanism where they can understand what the local people see as important.

Politicians need to be prepared to say sorry when they make a mistake.

An Independent would be more likely to represent what the community believes in.

After writing letters to local member, I felt like I was being fobbed off. I did not feel like the representative had integrity about listening to my concerns.

They attend launches, but you don't see them otherwise.

Our local member needs to be known by the local community, they need to be seen. The best thing that they can do is to listen.

The Wannon community has clear expectations of how they would like their Federal member to represent them.

How well our MP represents us, as rated by our online survey respondents



Very poorly represented	54%
Poorly represented	26%
Neutral	18%
Well represented	0%
Very well represented	2%



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

Cancel all large donations to political parties or politicians. Finance elections from the public purse.

Have a weekly advertisement in the local paper listing how our Local government, State government and Federal government representatives vote on issues.

Open regular meetings of the electorate where the Member comes and listens to issues, and there is follow up of actions by the Member at future meetings.

I would like politicians to answer the question, instead of giving their talking points.

Reduce the level of secrecy about the basis upon which decisions are made, and the influence of lobbyists.

More women representing us and people of different ethnicity and cultural backgrounds.

Need less career politicians and more

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

with grassroots life experience.

There should be an International Council of Grandmothers (selected from respected elders across the globe) sitting above all governments.

Political decisions need to be supported by documented informed reasoning.

We need an independent public service. They need to be able to give free and impartial advice.

Short election cycles lead to no long term planning.

The Voices model and what they are putting forward and legislation to keep the government honest. The Voices group does seem to be on the right path.



In Summary

Our Kitchen Table Conversation process showcased a community that is proud of its natural environment, its welcoming community spirit, its peacefulness, its diverse economic sector, and the availability of great education and health services.

While people in Wannon love their communities, they acknowledge there is room for improvement, particularly in support for the disadvantaged, being more welcoming of people from diverse backgrounds, better roads and public transport services, and greater opportunities for young people.

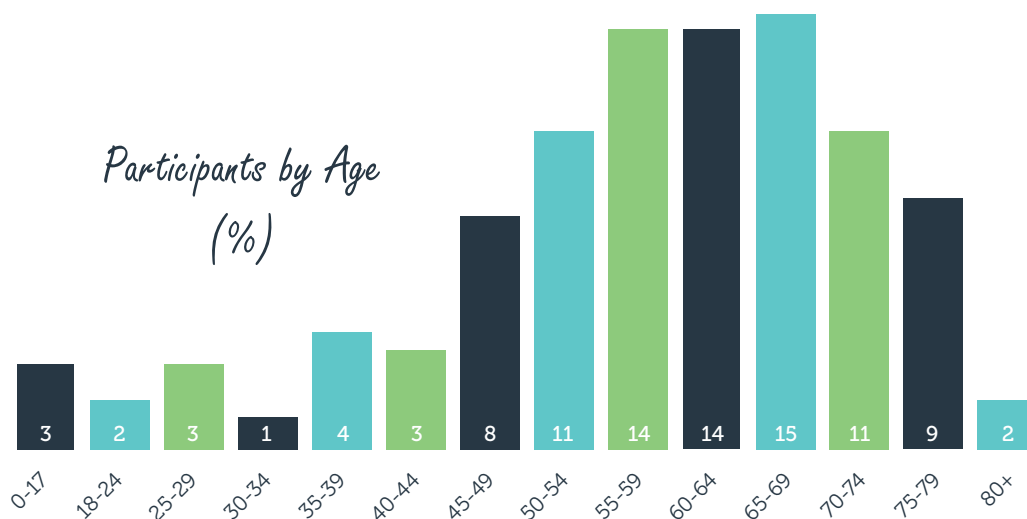
Our community consultation process found the following issues to be of the highest concern:

- **Real and urgent action on climate change**
- **Improving integrity and transparency in government**
- **Treating refugees and people seeking asylum with compassion**
- **Increasing the availability of affordable and social housing**
- **Improving access to health services, in particular mental health services**

These main priorities were only some of the dozens of issues raised during Kitchen Table Conversations and via our online survey. Other issues that were raised frequently included caring for and restoring our natural environment, addressing social inequality, and improved support for public education.

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

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



Acknowledgements

Cover photograph provided by Suzan Muir.

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

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

Voices of Wannon acknowledge the contribution of the Victorian Women's Trust, and the Voices 4 Indi and Voices 4 Cowper organisations, in shaping our Kitchen Table Conversation process.

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