

Report

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SURVEY & BUSINESS GAP ANALYSIS MARCH 2021

Funded by the
NSW Bushfire Community Resilience
& Economic Recovery Fund



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An independent research project was undertaken on behalf of Uralla Shire Council with funding from the NSW Bushfire Community Resilience & Economic Recovery Fund over February and March 2021. All businesses in the Shire were invited to participate in the research.

A representative sample, by industry and geography, of 65 local enterprises contributed and the data collected will provide support to Council's decision making and advocacy.

More than seven in ten businesses (71%) reported their viability had been affected by a cumulative impact of more than one external shock over the last 18 months. Around one in seven businesses surveyed was negatively impacted by all four – drought, COVID-19, arsenic and bushfire – external shocks. Other significant impacts were identified from homeschooling and the border closures, along with a general increase in stress.

One quarter (25%) of respondents advised they had reduced hours, reduced use of casuals and contractors or combined roles during the affected period, clearly impacting local economic activity. In the sample surveyed, one in three businesses (32%) could access and used reduced interest loans, subsidies, grants or rebates and 35% accessed JobKeeper.

Aggregated over the last few years, one in six businesses (17%) surveyed reported increasing their overdraft, 11% took out a business loan, one in three (32%) withdrew savings or investments and 12% deferred payments.

A sample of food and beverage-providing businesses separately surveyed identified the direct and indirect costs which were absorbed during the period of higher arsenic concentration in early 2020. The requirements of operating with COVID-19 restrictions have pushed that period into the background.

A small sample of residents from across the Shire completed a shorter community survey. **Three quarters of respondents reported that less than one quarter of their household spending is undertaken in Uralla Shire.** Surrounding regions are the definite beneficiaries of this expenditure on goods and services.

A gap analysis has identified a number of opportunities for potential new enterprises and activities. **Innovation, quality and customer service were identified as particularly good attributes of current Uralla Shire businesses.**

INTRODUCTION

This research project fulfils the first outcome required to acquit the NSW Bushfire Community Resilience & Economic Recovery Fund (BCRERF) funding received by Uralla Shire Council.

The objectives of the project are to understand the effects on local business due to bushfires, drought, increased levels of arsenic in the Uralla township water (Dec 2019-May 2020) and COVID-19 over the last 18 months and to undertake a Uralla Shire Gap analysis to assist Council with economic development opportunities.

Wixim Consulting was selected to complete the project after responding to a Request for Quotation process in December 2020. Wixim Consulting is a certified Member of The Research Society, the peak body in Australia for research professionals. Based in Tamworth, Wixim Consulting delivers research projects for clients including Austrade and Destination NSW. Research Lead Susan Frater-Sims established Wixim Consulting in 2010 to support regional projects with senior resources. A team of four researchers completed desktop research and almost 80 face-to-face and telephone interviews over February and March 2021.

The scope of works required Wixim Consulting to:

- Design and undertake a Shire-wide survey of businesses, supported by targeted qualitative interviews of at least 10 businesses across the range of business types and locations, to enable a report on the economic effect of the external shocks and
- Undertake a desktop analysis, supported by physical enquiries with key stakeholders, and prepare a report for Council detailing the business and service gaps within the Uralla Shire, relevant to the population of the Shire, to identify services and/or goods that the community have to source from outside the region that could present business opportunities for economic development.

This **Report** fulfils **both** outputs contractually required:

- A report on the survey results on the economic effect on local business due to bushfires, drought, increased levels of arsenic in the Uralla township water and COVID-19 (with a target of 65 survey responses and 10 qualitative interviews) across a range of business types/industries and geographically spread across the Shire, and
- A report for Council detailing the business and service gaps within the Uralla Shire, relevant to the population of the Shire, to identify services and/or goods that could present business opportunities for economic development within the Shire. This information is to be designed to assist with the future preparation of an economic development prospectus for the Shire

A concise presentation was made to Council on 9 March 2021 providing the high-level results of the research, with this report serving to provide further detail.

METHODOLOGY

After desktop and industry research to support the design, a draft business survey was developed by Wixim Consulting in January 2021. The survey was developed to cover both aspects of the research required – to record the effects on local businesses from drought, bushfires, arsenic and COVID-19 and to capture feedback on business and service gaps within Uralla Shire. The draft survey was tested in market and approved for use by Uralla Shire Council. Separately a community survey was developed to capture feedback from individuals not directly involved in business ownership as to business and service gaps.

The objective of adding the gap analysis to the business impacts survey was to hear from as many businesses as possible as to their current and future needs. The outcome of this was a long survey and participating businesses are sincerely thanked for their time and input.

To reach the enterprises forming a representative research sample of the industries, size and geographic locations in Uralla Shire we:

- Contacted targeted businesses by telephone to request appointments using the Uralla Shire Council business directory
- Contacted targeted businesses by telephone to request appointments using the Uralla Chamber of Commerce business directory
- Arranged for the survey to be distributed at a Rotary meeting, requesting the opportunity to survey members
- Presented at a Chamber of Commerce meeting and distributed the survey, requesting the opportunity to survey members
- Had hard copies of the survey available at Uralla Shire Council
- Encouraged 'opting in' via mention of the survey and contact details in Council's newsletter, media release and a media release from Adam Marshall's office
- Advertised the survey in the 8 February edition of the Uralla Wordsworth
- Asked for other's contact details (particularly for farming enterprises) when we completed surveys and
- Held a 'drop in' session at Bundarra School of Arts on 10 February

A shorter and easier survey would have allowed a larger sample to be interviewed and this was anticipated prior to the commencement of the project. However, the length of the survey and requirement to have businesses commit at least half an hour, often longer, reduced the number of businesses who participated. **More than 150 hours of surveying has informed this report.** One business did opt-in by emailing however the bulk of the surveys were completed by directly targeting the industry and location.

BUSINESS SURVEY

A face-to-face survey (COVID-19 allowing) was specifically outlined in the request for quote (RFQ) response in order to achieve the desired outcomes of the project, as opposed to online or postal reach. More costly and time consuming than other types of research, personal engagement was felt to be required in order to capture the detailed and usually private business information being sought. Wixim Consulting's senior team was engaged, staying in Uralla for multiple nights and completing day trips within the Shire during February and March, 2021.

More than 90 businesses were contacted in total. Only a very few declined outright, others declined due to workload or other commitments. Longer meetings were held with identified stakeholders and these are detailed separately.

Surveys were completed by the team travelling to Bundarra, Invergowrie, Rocky River, Kentucky, Uralla, Kingstown, Abington, Arding, Balala, Camerons Creek, Gostwyck, Saumarez Ponds, Torryburn and Wollun, ensuring broad geographic coverage across the Shire.

The survey, generally completed face to face but sometimes via phone, covered both aspects of the research. To measure the effects of the external shocks questions covered changes to employment and finances, any support received and how the business has adapted. The business and services gap analysis asked about procurement policies and practices and local business attributes.

Results from each part of the survey are shown in the following pages. Copies of both surveys are in the Appendices.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

To reach community members who could contribute to the business and services gap analysis but were not current business owners a second, shorter survey was developed. The two-page Community Survey was

- Available at Uralla Shire Council's office
- Available at Kingstown Store
- Available at Invergowrie Store
- Available at Kentucky Store
- Dropped in to school staff at Rocky River
- Distributed to the CWA members at a Bundarra branch meeting
- Available at the Bundarra 'Drop In' session on 10 February and
- Passed on via business owners to retired or interested contacts.

The results from the small sample of 20 responses received from the Community Survey have directly influenced the business and services gap analysis work and recommendations and are detailed below.

FOOD & BEVERAGE BUSINESSES

A Council Resolution required an understanding of the costs incurred during the time businesses had to adapt to the higher levels of arsenic in town water in early 2020.

A separate survey was undertaken with 11 businesses in early 2020. Extrapolating from this, a further nine food and beverage-based businesses in Uralla township were surveyed in March 2021. A copy of the survey undertaken is shown as Appendix 3. The results of this research are provided later in this report.

SUGGESTED REFINEMENTS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Demographically, there could be a more targeted approach in future if warranted:

- With a focus on business owners and professional ethical constraints regarding interviewing younger people, school students and young adults have been underrepresented in the research sample compared to the broader population
- The 2016 Census notes a strong proportion of 506 people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander across the Shire's population of 6,012 people

With regards to survey design, some lessons learned should be noted:

- Question 2c about apprenticeships and trainees should be better worded.
- Question 5, looking at Revenue and Productivity was too complex and did not generate useful data.
- Some details asked were redundant in Question 6 looking at Procurement.
- Combining the economic impacts aspects with the gap analysis did create a long survey. Face to face surveys were the best method of collecting consistent data and should be utilised whenever the budget allows.

Qualitative interviews (as required in the brief) were undertaken with five community leaders before the breadth of the survey research outcomes was reviewed. This report focuses on the outcomes of the formal business and community research which generated statistical decision support.

The three surveys and a copy of the Bundarra Drop In flyer are attached as Appendices.

For further information:

Please contact Susan Frater-Sims at Wixim Consulting via susan.sims@wixim.com.au.

BASE STATISTICS

As at June 2019, the Australian Bureau of Statistics data¹ for Uralla Shire shows a total of 677 businesses registered. Of these, 168 had 1-4 employees, 65 had 5-19 employees, 11 had over 20 employees and 433 businesses were non-employing. The number of businesses by industry, shown below, informed the research to try to match the weighting in responses.

More than one in four employed persons work in Education & Training or Healthcare & Social Assistance and one in six in Agriculture. Council is shown as a major local employer.

Industry	Number of Businesses	Proportion of Employed Persons (%)
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	320	16.3
Mining	3	0.3
Manufacturing	19	3.5
Construction	93	8.1
Wholesale trade	12	2.1
Retail trade	25	8.4
Accommodation and food services	21	6
Transport, postal and warehousing	40	3.1
Information media and telecommunications	3	0.7
Financial and insurance services	18	1.7
Rental, hiring and real estate services	42	1.2
Professional, scientific and technical services	42	4.4
Administrative and support services	8	2.5
Public administration and safety	3	6.9
Education and training	--	14.5
Health care and social assistance	10	11.8
Arts and recreation services	5	0.9
Other services	12	2.8
Unknown	1	3.8
TOTAL	677 businesses	2633 people employed

¹ Source: [ABS Data for Uralla Shire as at June 2019](#)

IMPACT OF EXTERNAL SHOCKS

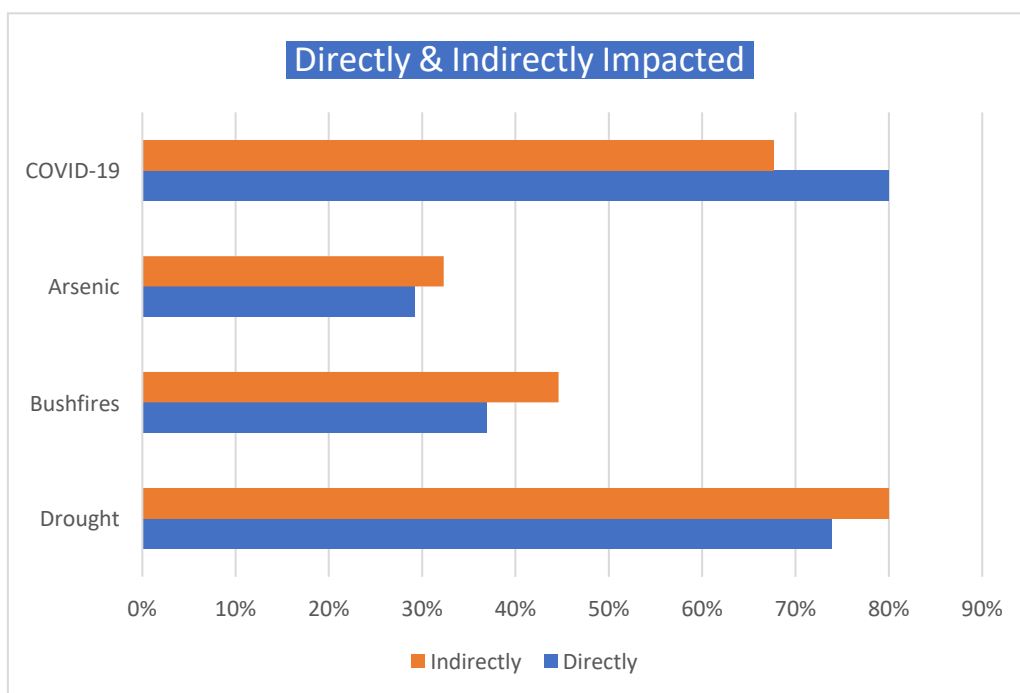
Surveyed business owners were asked if their business viability had been directly impacted by the one or more of the series of identified external shocks – drought, bushfires, arsenic in the town water and COVID-19.

The highest impacting issues, reported by around three quarters of respondents, were COVID-19 (80%) and drought (74%) with bushfires impacting over a third (37%) and arsenic in the town water 29%.

Cumulative impacts were reported by 71% of businesses who were impacted by more than one external shock. For 13% (one in seven businesses surveyed) there was direct impact from all four external shocks.

Businesses were also asked if viability had been impacted indirectly – if their customers or suppliers had been affected. In this response, 80% saw impacts of drought and 68% from COVID-19 with 45% impacted by bushfires and 32% from the arsenic. Cumulative impacts were reported to have impacted 82% of customers or suppliers.

The table below graphs the results for ease of comparison.



IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT

HEADCOUNT & STAFFING

To understand the economic effects, businesses were first asked about changes in employment caused by the external factors.

In the sample of businesses surveyed headcount remained steady over the calendar years and has shown signs of growth in 2021.

Headcount	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total in Survey	470	474	477	486

As a major employer, Uralla Shire Council was included in the enterprises surveyed. Council reported their headcount of 180 (equivalent to 132 full time equivalent staff) remained steady over the period but noted there was significant staff turnover.

Retaining headcount notwithstanding, a clear response by businesses was to reduce the hours worked by employees, which may have had an impact on available wages in the economy.

One quarter (25%) of respondents advised they had reduced hours, reduced use of casuals and contractors or combined roles during the affected period. Only two businesses had made staff redundant.

APPRENTICES & TRAINEES

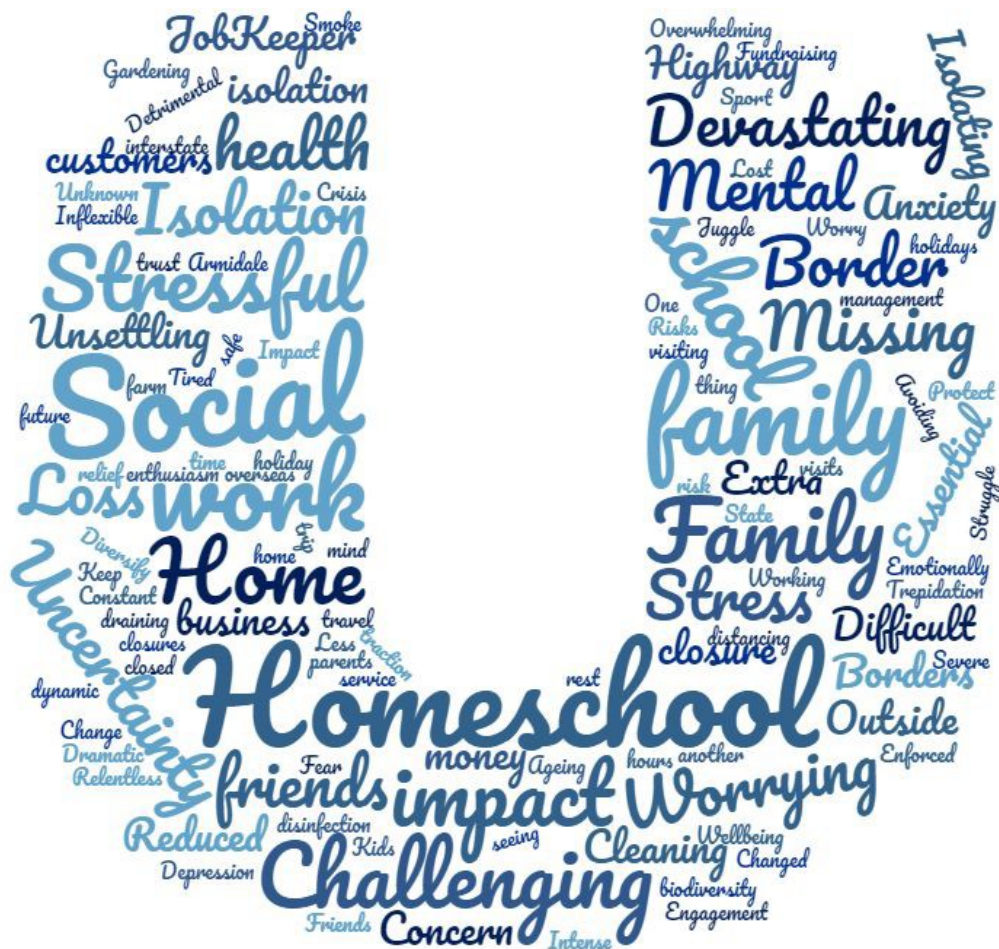
The survey results demonstrated a very low number of apprentices and trainees employed. However, the survey question was ambiguously worded when it asked 'do you normally employ apprentices or trainees'. Future surveys should ask if apprentices (separately) and/or trainees are currently employed or better detail the time period.

The survey did not bring to light any businesses who had to release their apprentices or trainees due to the external shocks. Including Council, three businesses identified current apprentices and three reported current trainees, but this dataset is not robust. Numbers may have been reported by some businesses as technical staff in training (such as undergraduates) not necessarily employed and supported as a trainee.

BUSINESS OWNER IMPACT

Business owners were asked to describe, in a few words, the social, environmental and community impact of the external shocks of 2020 on themselves and their family and the verbatim words and phrases recorded. A list of all the words and phrases was collated and captured in a [U for Uralla] Word Cloud reflecting frequency of use.

As can be seen below, homeschooling and border closures added considerably to the impact of COVID-19 shut downs and isolating. Stressful and challenging also stand out as descriptors.



FINANCIAL IMPACT

The survey asked respondents if they had to increase overdrafts, take out business loans, withdraw savings or investments or defer payments over the four calendar years from 2018 through to 2021.

Agriculturally based businesses were impacted in 2018 and 2019 by drought and anecdotally reported fully withdrawing Farm Management Deposits by 2019. For businesses supporting agriculture the impact was most felt in 2019 and for those impacted by COVID-19 there was more impact in 2020.

Aggregated over the last few years, one in six businesses (17%) reported increasing their overdraft, 11% took out a business loan, one in three (32%) withdrew savings or investments and 12% deferred payments.

For one in six businesses surveyed (17%) all four options for business funding were utilised.

The withdrawal of savings and investments to support businesses through the period has a longer term effect particularly where those savings were in superannuation. This research does not provide detail but media reports² quoting data from the ATO say 3 million Australians withdrew \$30 billion in superannuation over 2020. (Two \$10,000 withdrawals were possible for eligible individuals.) Some respondents confirmed withdrawal of personal superannuation while for others the types of investments drawn down were not specified.

The survey also asked about any changes in payment terms for business cashflow – either receipting or making payments later.

Just eight businesses surveyed (12%) reported they were being paid later by creditors for a period of time, mostly in 2019 which indicates creditor cashflow pressures were drought related. Cashflow management was a focus for businesses surveyed, reporting efforts to reduce their creditor payment terms and in some cases extending the time before they paid bills to suppliers.

Businesses reported carrying nil or negligible debts they do not feel will be paid.

² <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-16/coronavirus-super-early-withdrawals-near-30-billion-dollars/12459648>

SUPPORT RECEIVED

The survey asked if the business qualified or received any assistance in any of the four years (2018-2021) from four suggested sources. Respondents could comment or explain their answers or describe other sources of support received. Only one business surveyed reported a reduction in rent, while 15% reported receiving some kind of donation whether a payment, voucher or hamper.

In the sample surveyed, one in three businesses (32%) accessed reduced interest loans, subsidies, grants or rebates. While the quantitative survey was designed to record a yes/no response, the face-to-face interviews provided an opportunity for considerable discussion. Rural based businesses were able to access the NSW Government's 50% transport rebate for fodder and stock movements as part of their drought response. Rebates, for water infrastructure in particular were also accessed. Low interest loans and grants had more limited accessibility but were recorded. Business owners commented on disappointment if they were ineligible for grants. The Small Business Cashflow Boost funding for eligible employers and businesses, received as credits when lodging business activity statements, was especially noted as being of value.

More than one in three businesses surveyed (34%) received JobKeeper for at least part of 2020, with some businesses still accessing it in 2021. This is consistent with Treasury³ reporting of JobKeeper for the region, although they report data by postcode, problematic when Kentucky has the same postcode as Walcha. In September 2020 196 businesses [162 businesses in 2358 (Uralla) and 34 in 2359 (Bundarra)] were recorded as accessing JobKeeper. The postcode for Walcha and Kentucky 2354 recorded 303 businesses accessing JobKeeper for the same period.

Number of Businesses Accessing JobKeeper in 2020 by Month				
Postcode	Location	June	September	December
2358	Uralla	154	162	93
2359	Bundarra	32	34	14
2354	Walcha, Kentucky	310	303	154
2360	Inverell	513	475	201
2350	Armidale	916	877	400

Of note, in the December quarter the number of businesses on JobKeeper halved compared to the September quarter in Bundarra, Walcha (Kentucky), Armidale and Inverell – but around 60% of businesses in Uralla were still eligible, showing a lag in recovery.

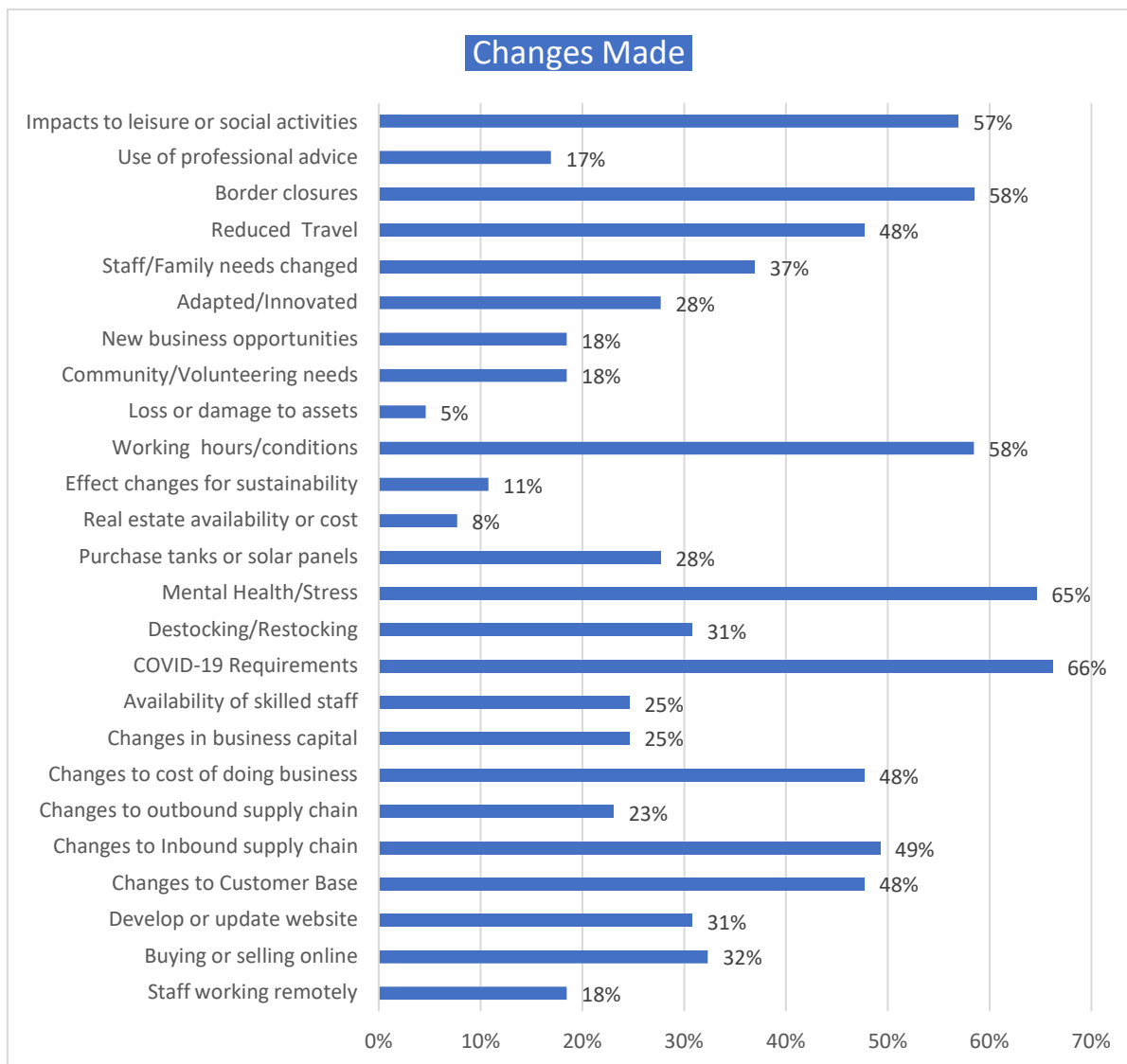
The survey demonstrated the benefits of JobKeeper however, it also identified anecdotal reports that businesses that were in drought in 2019 and could not demonstrate a 30% loss in income in January 2020 over the prior year believed they were not eligible for JobKeeper. The research did not confirm the actual impact of this and whether professional advice was sought (as there were drought exemptions available).

³ <https://treasury.gov.au/coronavirus/jobkeeper/data>

ADAPTATION

The final question in the first part of the survey,(Question 5b) asked businesses to select from a list of potential changes which may have been incorporated into their business over the last few years.

This representative data sample provides some highlights for future use. More than one in three businesses surveyed are now buying and selling online and almost one in five have identified new business opportunities.



IMPACT OF ARSENIC CONCENTRATION

In February 2020 following a Council resolution requesting information, a pilot survey was undertaken with 11 businesses in Uralla to ask about the impact of not being able to use town water. Copies of these initial surveys have been used to inform the 2021 research.

In March 2021 the Wixim Consulting team spoke directly to nine **additional** food and beverage supplying businesses in Uralla township to revisit the direct costs and impacts.

The identified costs were

- Adaption of coffee or kitchen equipment to use bottled or bulk water
- Loss of food prepared on the day the alert was issued
- Additional time taken to collect water and recycle containers across each week
- Additional time taken to prepare food over the five month period each day
- Loss of external trade for an estimated two months where tourism was severely affected and is attributed to poor media coverage of Uralla
- Additional costs to buy water initially and ice for the duration as plumbed ice machines could not be used
- Loss of profit from post-mix sales as cans and bottles had to replace
- Cumulative impact of drought, bushfires and arsenic concentration on businesses which were then impacted by COVID-19 from March 2021

Our survey found six businesses who incurred a direct cost to adapt plumbing for coffee machines (variously adding pumps, filters and/or new water supplies) of between \$250 and \$450. This happened quickly and coffee machines were back in business within a week. Of the other three businesses, one mothballed the coffee machine for the duration and two do not have a coffee machine.

For some period of time water had to be purchased (before it was available without charge) and the recorded cost for two businesses was \$150. When the water was available without charge staff were dispatched to collect 10L bottles of water and this time was absorbed into the business. From the sample, the additional costs absorbed per business ranged but at an average 4 hours per week over 16 weeks the wages estimate is circa \$2,000 per business.

Two food preparing businesses incurred a loss on the first day of between \$500 and \$1000 (retail value) of food that had been prepared earlier using town water and had been advised by a Council representative it had to be thrown out. Other food preparing businesses surveyed did not receive that advice. Purchase of ice for one business was 20 bags at \$2.50 (\$50) per week so \$800 over the 16 weeks (taking into consideration the COVID-19 shutdown period.)

An additional cost of wages was noted for food preparing businesses who had to take more time to prepare food using bottled/containerised water. Staff had to lift 10L water containers to sinks to enable salad washing for example. While this was absorbed into the business, a similar estimate of \$2,000 in labour costs over 16 weeks was identified by one business.

Businesses surveyed generally noted that revenue and foot traffic had been down year on year due to drought and bushfires leading up to Christmas 2019 and could not truly separate the impact of the town water issue on their business. However two businesses with more sophisticated point of sale retail records both separately identified a period of eight weeks of dramatic loss of sales which they attribute to the media coverage of Uralla's town water problems. In the gap between the bushfires closing the highway and the COVID-19 shutdown tourism was recovering as the media coverage faded from people's minds. It is possible that the green shoots of drought recovery were supporting this return by late February.

The overwhelming feedback from businesses surveyed for this report was that compared to COVID-19 impositions the higher concentration of arsenic in Uralla town water and requirement to source water had faded from memories. Businesses have successfully changed hands in the interim. When asked how long they received bottled water the business owners could generally not remember in detail – and the answers ranged from three months to eight months. Managing the collection and use of bottled water was 'just another thing to do,' it 'took extra time' and was 'inconvenient.'

It is noted that between the two surveys (in February 2020 and March 2021) the information is consistent about costs incurred and the impact felt by businesses – the second survey closing out the pilot survey has meant **over 20 businesses in Uralla township were directly engaged for feedback**. Council can note for future use that direct costs of circa \$3,000 per business were absorbed. Business owners also had to spend time that they do not record on seeking and implementing information.

Business owners reported concerns with communication and consistent information at the time, noting the crisis was unprecedented (at the time) and had an immediate and concerning impact. It is clear from the sample that business owners do not use Council's website as a source of information now and it is recommended the benefits of doing so be re-communicated.

Lost revenue was noted by all businesses but not able to be attributed with certainty only to the town water issues. Of note, none of the nine food and beverage businesses surveyed in 2021 reported having business interruption insurance that was able to be called upon in 2020.

SUMMARY OF EFFECTS

The cumulative impacts of recent years on the community and economy of Uralla Shire have been shown by this research to be statistically significant. To summarise:

- Primary producers and businesses supporting agriculture have endured financial losses and stock losses
- People relying on town water had to quickly adapt to using bottled water for drinking and cooking
- Truckloads of water had to be brought in for home, farm and business use when tanks ran dry
- Savings and investments have been run down
- Equity may have been reduced as loans increased increasing business and personal stress
- Social distancing requirements due to COVID-19 impacted community events which would have supported businesses and residents
- Smoke from frightening bushfires blanketed homes and businesses, power was lost for days and there were disrupting road closures across the Shire
- Border closures impacted families and businesses more than probably anticipated
- Inequity of telecommunications and information technology, such as access to computers at home were highlighted during the fires and COVID-19
- The New England Highway creates both a lifeline and a barrier with highway closures impacting businesses but visitors seen as bringing the risk of COVID-19
- Supporting children during home schooling was a challenging time for everyone
- Reduced leisure, travel and social activities affects health and wellbeing
- An anxiety persists about what will happen next, with fatigue and stress remaining

However, there were some cushioning effects which have worked in Uralla's favour including:

- Over 30% of people employed work in education, health care or local government, all of which retained wages into the economy
- Essential services jobs were maintained and those wages retained during COVID-19 shutdowns
- Uralla Shire Council's capital budget was doubled, almost tripled by government grants to support works in the Shire and staff, contractors and suppliers
- These capital works will have long term benefits for residents as they have brought forward improvements and amenity
- More than one in three businesses received JobKeeper in Uralla Shire, and examples were found of people who worked outside the Shire but live in Uralla who received JobKeeper so that income stayed in the region
- Businesses have adapted, moving online and making changes for sustainability
- Very few businesses had assets damaged or lost especially when compared to other bushfire impacted Shires
- Due to the geography of Uralla Shire, the strengths of the region e.g. Walcha, Armidale and Inverell, have a flow on effect to local businesses and residents
- Regional living, a 'tree change', is now more of an option to attract new businesses and residents

BUSINESS & SERVICES GAP ANALYSIS

The second part of the business survey was related to current purchasing patterns to help develop a picture of opportunities in business and services.

Survey responses note there is desire for a 'buy local' approach, but pragmatic Uralla Shire businesses purchase where it is convenient, cheapest or stock preferred brands. Very few businesses identified having implemented any formal procurement policies.

Armidale and Inverell businesses were identified as key suppliers of goods and services to Uralla businesses with significant items also being purchased in Tamworth. Given the ease of highway access, products are sourced from Brisbane and also Sydney with online purchasing growing for both regular and one-off requirements. Online grocery orders are able to be delivered in Uralla from Tamworth.

Given the leakage from Uralla Shire to surrounding regions is so significant there are some opportunities to work with this rather than necessarily fight it:

- Develop processes to support and recognise suppliers to Uralla Shire from surrounding towns to ensure those goods and services remain available to residents and businesses (as an example, recent store closures in Armidale now mean people are travelling to Tamworth – does Armidale Regional Council or Chamber of Commerce call on Uralla Shire Council for support in those instances?)
- Work with transport companies to consolidate freight loads and reduce freight costs to Uralla Shire businesses (as an example, a centralised point of sharing information)
- Develop regional partnerships for localised baskets of goods and services – provide links and cross-sell products benefiting the region (an example here could be shared office space use by professionals)
- Allow local suppliers in any tender process additional weighting, including allowance for higher pricing in a trade-off for local economic benefits

Small businesses, employing 1-19 people, even micro businesses with just one or two employees, are the mainstay of the Uralla Shire economy.

Businesses and services looking to grow or relocate to Uralla Shire could be supported by a specific Economic Development Officer role at Council. This role could report on new residents and businesses in the region, encouraging optimism. A list of opportunities, tabled below, has been identified in feedback from businesses.

The research identified gaps in telecommunications service across the Shire as a business limiting factor.

INDUSTRY	SUGGESTIONS/IDEAS
Tourism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Heritage strengths ▪ 'Stop and spend' opportunities 	Experiences focus e.g. 'Winter on the Tablelands' Fossicking Caravan parking options in Uralla Caravan sites in Bundarra Hospitality workers Teahouse Leverage Thunderbolts Way for grey nomads and motorbike riders – create reasons to stop, spend and stay Leverage Copeton Dam more especially in Bundarra – bait & tackle, boating equipment Kayaking/Canoeing at Bundarra
Aged Care, Home Care	As the population ages, demand for aged care and home care services is increasing Nurses (are locals being trained?) AIN
Support for businesses	Recruitment support Virtual administrators Storage units
Retail	Fresh produce Newsagent 24/7 fuel in Bundarra Takeaway shop in Bundarra Hairdressing Carpets, blinds & curtains – cleaning, supply Hub for sole traders, creatives Shared office space Hardware

INDUSTRY	SUGGESTIONS/IDEAS
Manufacturing	Lamb abattoir
Community	More activities for children Year round pool use opportunities Walk/bike path along the river at Bundarra Kayaking/canoeing at Bundarra
Events	Horse events at Bundarra – campdrafting, horse trails could be leveraged

BUSINESS ATTRIBUTES

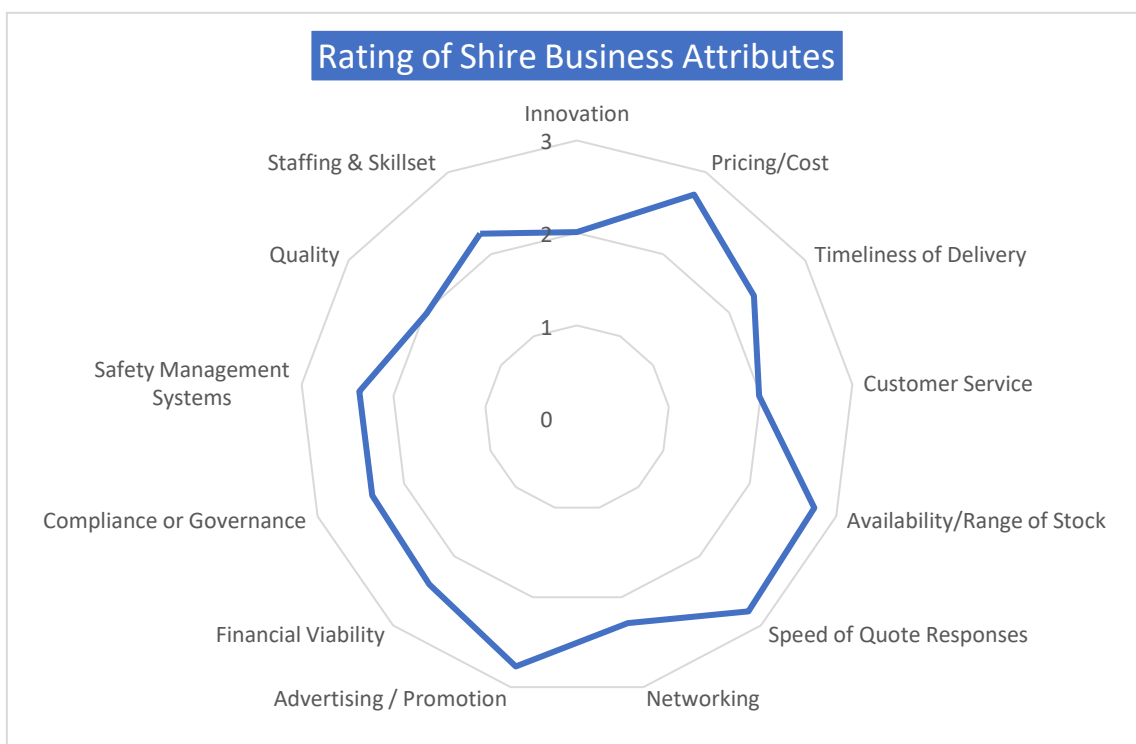
As part of the business and services gap analysis work, participating businesses were asked to rate local businesses based on their experiences with key attributes. Responses were given on a scale of 1 to 5, (1. Outstanding 2. Good 3. Neutral 4. Poor 5. Needs Significant Improvement. A response to each attribute was not always provided.

The same list of attributes has been used in other regional centres generating a broader range of results with overall less satisfaction. Uralla Shire businesses are clearly supportive of each other where possible.

The blue line in the graph links the aggregated responses which have been scored out of 5. A perfect score would have been a round circle at the 1 mark – all attributes rated as outstanding. [The lower the score the better the attribute is rated.]

The resulting graph shape has identified just a few potential areas for improvement – scoring between 2 (good) and 3 (neutral) – at the points further away from the centre. More advertising and promotion of local businesses, speedier responses to requests for quotes, increased availability or range of stock and improved pricing (of course) would improve ranking of those attributes.

This is a very positive outcome to highlight to potential new businesses in a future prospectus, with innovation, quality and customer service seen as particularly strong attributes.



COMMUNITY SURVEY

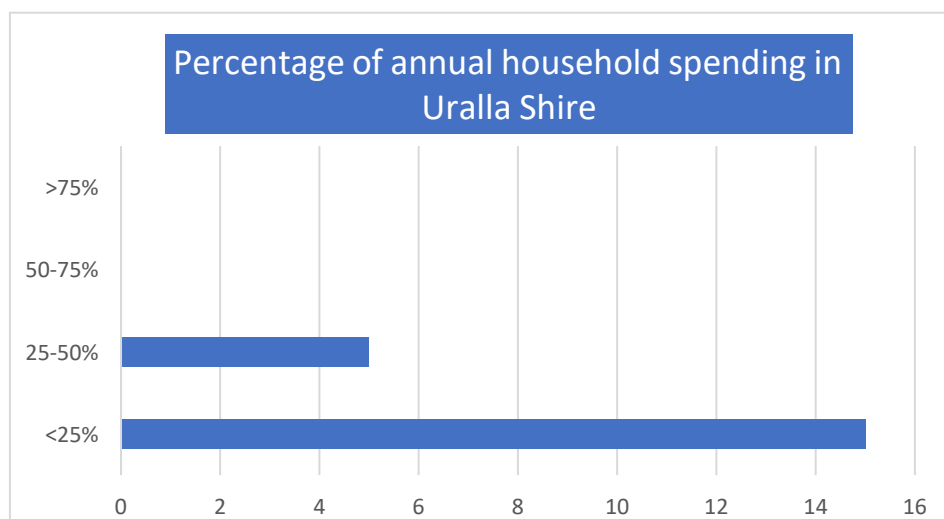
A short, two-page survey was designed to allow interested community members who are not business owners to participate in the research project.

The survey was made available to the public at Uralla Shire Council, Invergowrie Store, Kentucky Store, Kingstown Store and at the Bundarra drop-in session. A sample of just a few members of Bundarra CWA kindly completed the survey during a monthly meeting.

Only a small cohort of 20 residents completed the survey but the results are so similar the sample was not deemed necessary to expand. Residents completing the survey were located in Arding, Bundarra, Kentucky, Invergowrie and Uralla, providing a representative coverage of the Shire.

The survey asked for demographic information including age range (Under 18, 18-35, 36-65 and over 65), town or locality of residence and how many years the person had lived in the Shire.

The survey then asked – what percentage of your annual household spending do you estimate you spend in Uralla Shire? **Three quarters of respondents replied they spend less than one quarter of their household spending in the Shire.** No respondent estimated they spend more than 50% of their household spending in Uralla Shire.



The second page of the survey asked what was purchased outside Uralla Shire and where. This information was designed to support the gap analysis work in the main business survey.

The table below summarises the general unprompted responses. We know from the business survey that the unprompted responses are not exhaustive. The items within each list were mentioned at least once but generally frequently.

There was discussion of the branded stores availability e.g. going to Tamworth for Target as Armidale Target was converted to a Kmart, going to Armidale for Priceline or Dan Murphys. Sydney was not identified as major source of goods and services. Bundarra residents surveyed advised they do not travel to Uralla for shopping or services with Inverell and Armidale preferred depending on the activity or services required.

Source of Goods & Services	Types of Goods & Services Purchased
ARMIDALE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Arts & crafts supplies ▪ Beautician ▪ Building Materials ▪ Carpets ▪ Clothes ▪ Dental ▪ Electrical and white goods ▪ Farming & Agricultural supplies ▪ Fuel ▪ Furniture ▪ Groceries ▪ Hairdressing ▪ Hardware ▪ Hospital ▪ Insurance broker ▪ IT Equipment ▪ Library ▪ Manchester, Beds & bedding ▪ Medical – Doctors, Specialists ▪ Pharmacy ▪ Shoes ▪ Sporting equipment ▪ Swimming lessons ▪ Tyres ▪ Vehicle servicing and parts ▪ Vehicles
TAMWORTH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clothes ▪ Electrical goods ▪ Farming & Agricultural supplies ▪ Furniture

Source of Goods & Services	Types of Goods & Services Purchased
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hardware and tools ▪ Medical – Doctors, Specialists ▪ Motorbike servicing ▪ Sewing needs ▪ Vehicle Servicing and parts
BRISBANE/QUEENSLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clothing ▪ Doctors and Specialists in Toowoomba ▪ Farming & Agricultural supplies ▪ Furniture ▪ Household items ▪ Shoes
INVERELL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Brew supplies ▪ Electrician ▪ Groceries ▪ Pharmacy ▪ RMS, Service NSW, Centrelink ▪ Rural supplies ▪ Vehicle registration ▪ Vehicle repairs ▪ Work clothes ▪ Work equipment
ONLINE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Animal supplies ▪ Beauty and Health products ▪ Books ▪ Clothes / Fashion items ▪ Gifts ▪ Groceries ▪ Hardware ▪ Homewares ▪ Insurance ▪ IT equipment ▪ Office supplies ▪ Outdoor items ▪ Shoes ▪ Sporting equipment ▪ Tools ▪ Toys ▪ Travel bookings

ENDS.

APPENDICES

1. Business Survey
2. Community Survey
3. Food & Beverage Business Survey
4. Bundarra Drop In Flyer



Introduction

This detailed research project is being undertaken on behalf of Uralla Shire Council with funding from the **NSW Bushfire Community Resilience & Economic Recovery Fund (BCR&ERF)**. Wixim Consulting is a Tamworth based stakeholder engagement specialist, adhering to the National Privacy Principles and Code of Professional Behaviour of The Research Society, Australia’s national research industry body.

The objectives of the project are to:

1. understand the effects on local business due to bushfires, drought, increased levels of arsenic in the Uralla township water (Dec 2019 – May 2020) and COVID 19 over the last 18 months; and
2. undertake a Uralla Shire business gap analysis to assist Council with economic development opportunities.

Participation in this research is voluntary and businesses declining to participate are not recorded. The survey is open to all Uralla Shire businesses. Direct approaches are being made to ensure broad industry coverage. Contact details are being recorded to provide to Uralla Shire Council but all survey data will be de-identified. Please tick this box if contact details are **not** to be supplied to Council for future use.

Business Contact Details

Company / Business Name	
Contact Name & Role	
Contact Number	
Contact Email	

Impacts / External Shocks

Over the last few years, has your business viability been impacted by *(Please tick to select)*

External Shock	Directly Impacted	Indirectly Impacted (Customers or Suppliers Impacted)
Drought		
Bushfires		
Arsenic		
COVID-19		
Other _____		

Team Notes



1. Background

1a. ABS Industry Designation *(Please tick one industry description for your business)*

Agriculture, forestry and fishing	
Mining	
Manufacturing	
Construction	
Wholesale trade	
Retail trade	
Accommodation and food services	
Transport, postal and warehousing	
Information media and telecommunications	
Financial and insurance services	
Rental, hiring and real estate services	
Professional, scientific and technical services	
Administrative and support services	
Public administration and safety	
Education and training	
Health care and social assistance	
Arts and recreation services	
Other services	

1b. What year was business established _____

2. Measure of Economic Impact – Employment

2a. In each calendar year how many Uralla Shire based staff did your business typically employ and/or contract

(Headcount is the total of the other two columns)

Calendar Year	Headcount	Fulltime/Parttime	Casual/Contractor
2018			
2019			
2020			
2021			

Comments/Explanation



2b. If applicable, how did you reduce staffing levels (Please tick all relevant options)

Not replaced when resigned	
Made redundant	
Reduced hours	
Reduced use of casuals and contractors	
Other (<i>Please describe</i>)	
Combined roles / Self or staff took on more work	

Comments/Explanation

2c. Employment of apprentices & trainees

Do you normally employ apprentices or trainees Yes / No

If Yes, how have your apprentices and trainees been impacted over recent years? (Please tick)

Impact	2018	2019	2020	2021
Not replaced when resigned				
Made redundant				
Reduced hours				
Not taken on new apprentices or trainees				
Other				

Comments/Explanation

2d. Business Owner Impact

In a few words how would you describe the social, environmental and community impact of the external shocks of 2020 on you and your family?



3. Measure of Economic Impact – Debt, Use of savings, Asset values

3a. In each year, did you have to increase your overdraft, take out a business loan, withdraw FMD/Savings/Investments or defer payments (Please tick where applicable)

Calendar Year	Increase/Use Overdraft	Business Loan	Draw on Savings or Investments	Defer Payments (e.g. loans, dividends, ATO)
2018				
2019				
2020				
2021				

3b. Effect on Payment Terms

Have you noticed a change in payment times for your business cashflow (Please tick to select)

Year	Business being paid later	Business paying bills later
2018		
2019		
2020		
2021		

3c. What are your general payment terms _____ ?

3d. Are you currently carrying debts you do not feel will be paid Yes / No

3e. Have you seen any changes to asset values in your business over 2020 Yes / No

Comment/Explanation _____

3f. Can you name any businesses/types of business that have closed down in the past year Yes / No



4. Measure of Economic Impact – Support Received

4a. In any of the years did your business qualify for or receive any assistance (Please tick)

Year	Reduced Interest Loans, Subsidies, Grants, Rebates	Donations (Vouchers, Payments)	JobKeeper	Reduced Rents
2018				
2019				
2020				
2021				

Comments/Explanation

5. Measure of Economic Impact – Revenue & Productivity

5a. How has your business been affected over recent years – Please tick to select (Dec BAS if possible)

Year	Revenue Up Year on Year	Revenue Down Year on Year	Costs Up Year on Year	Costs Down Year on Year
2018				
2019				
2020				
2021				

5b. What changes has your business had to adapt to over the last few years?

Changes	Please tick to select	Comment/Impact
Staff working remotely		
Buying or selling products online		
Develop or update a website		



Changes	Please tick to select	Comment/Impact
Changes to customer base		
Changes in inbound supply chain		
Changes to outbound supply chain		
Changes to the cost of doing business		
Changes in business capital		
Availability of skilled staff		
COVID-19 Requirements		
Destocking/Restocking		
Mental Health/Stress		
Purchase tanks or solar panels		
Real estate availability/cost		
Effect changes for sustainability		
Working hours/conditions		
Loss or damage to assets		
Community/Volunteering Needs		
New Business Opportunities		
Adapted / Innovated		
Staff/Family Needs		
Reduced Travel		
Border Closures		
Use of Professional Advice		
Impacts to leisure or social activities		



6. Procurement Policy

6a. Do you have a formal 'buy local' procurement policy Yes / No

6b. How do you rank local options against outside quotes (Please circle one)

Buy lowest price Mix of local service and price Buy quickest solution Buy preferred brands

6c. Is the person responsible for your business procurement based in Uralla Shire Yes/ No

6d. Does 'Head Office' coordinate or manage any central purchasing Yes / No

6e. Please list example items you may purchase from other regions

Armidale	
Tamworth	
Brisbane	
Sydney	
Online	
Other?	



6f. On a scale of 1 – 5 (1. Outstanding 2. Good 3. Neutral 4. Poor 5. Needs Significant Improvement) how do you rate Uralla Shire businesses for

Attribute	On a Scale of 1-5
Innovation	
Pricing/Cost	
Timeliness of Delivery	
Customer Service	
Availability/Range of Stock	
Speed of Quote Responses	
Networking	
Advertising/Promotion	
Financial Viability	
Compliance or Governance	
Safety Management Systems	
Quality	
Staffing & Skillset	
Other _____	

6g. Where do you see opportunities for local businesses

6h. Any final comments/thoughts/anything we've missed?

THANK YOU.

*Please return the completed survey:
 By hand via the Wixim Consulting Research Team
 Via email research@wixim.com.au
 Call to arrange pickup on 0419 703 454
 Drop off in a sealed envelope to Customer Service at Uralla Shire Council*



Introduction

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The objective of this survey is to undertake a Uralla Shire business gap analysis to assist Council with economic development opportunities.

Participation in this research is voluntary. The survey is open to all residents of Uralla Shire. Contact details are not being recorded but demographic details would be appreciated.

Your Details

Your Age Range (please circle)	Under 18	18 – 35	36 – 65	Over 65
Your Town/Locality				
How many years have you lived in Uralla Shire?				
What percentage of your annual household spending do you estimate you spend in Uralla Shire (please circle)	Less than 25%	25 – 50 %	50- 75 %	More than 75%



Outside Uralla Shire Purchases

We are interested in what you buy outside Uralla Shire – what gaps there are in what you need or want that you cannot buy locally.

Would you please think about what you buy in the cities listed below and what you buy online – because you can’t buy it locally – just list everything you think of.

Buy from	Products and Services
Armidale	
Tamworth	
Brisbane	
Sydney	
Online	
Other?	

THANK YOU.

*Please return the completed survey:
 By hand via the Wixim Consulting Research Team
 Via email research@wixim.com.au
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The objective of this survey is to understand the financial costs incurred by food and beverage businesses to switch to new water sources due to arsenic levels in the town water supply in early 2020. A small pilot survey was completed by some businesses at the time – we are completing that work today.

Participation in this research is voluntary. Information will be aggregated and no personal information shared.

Business Name	
Person Interviewed – Name & Role	
If not available – Best Contact Person and Best Time to Call	
Were you solely reliant on town water for the business in January/February 2020	
Did you incur any costs during the period of time that potable water was being supplied?	
What were those costs?	
Does your business have Business Interruption Insurance and were you required to use it at the time?	
Comments/Questions	



Please join us

BUNDARRA COMMUNITY DROP IN SESSION

<p>WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 10th FROM 2PM - 6PM</p>	<p>SCHOOL OF ARTS HALL</p> <p>Community invited to drop in during the afternoon to complete a short survey about business impacts and ideas.</p>
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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT
RESEARCH@WIXIM.COM.AU OR 0419 703 454