

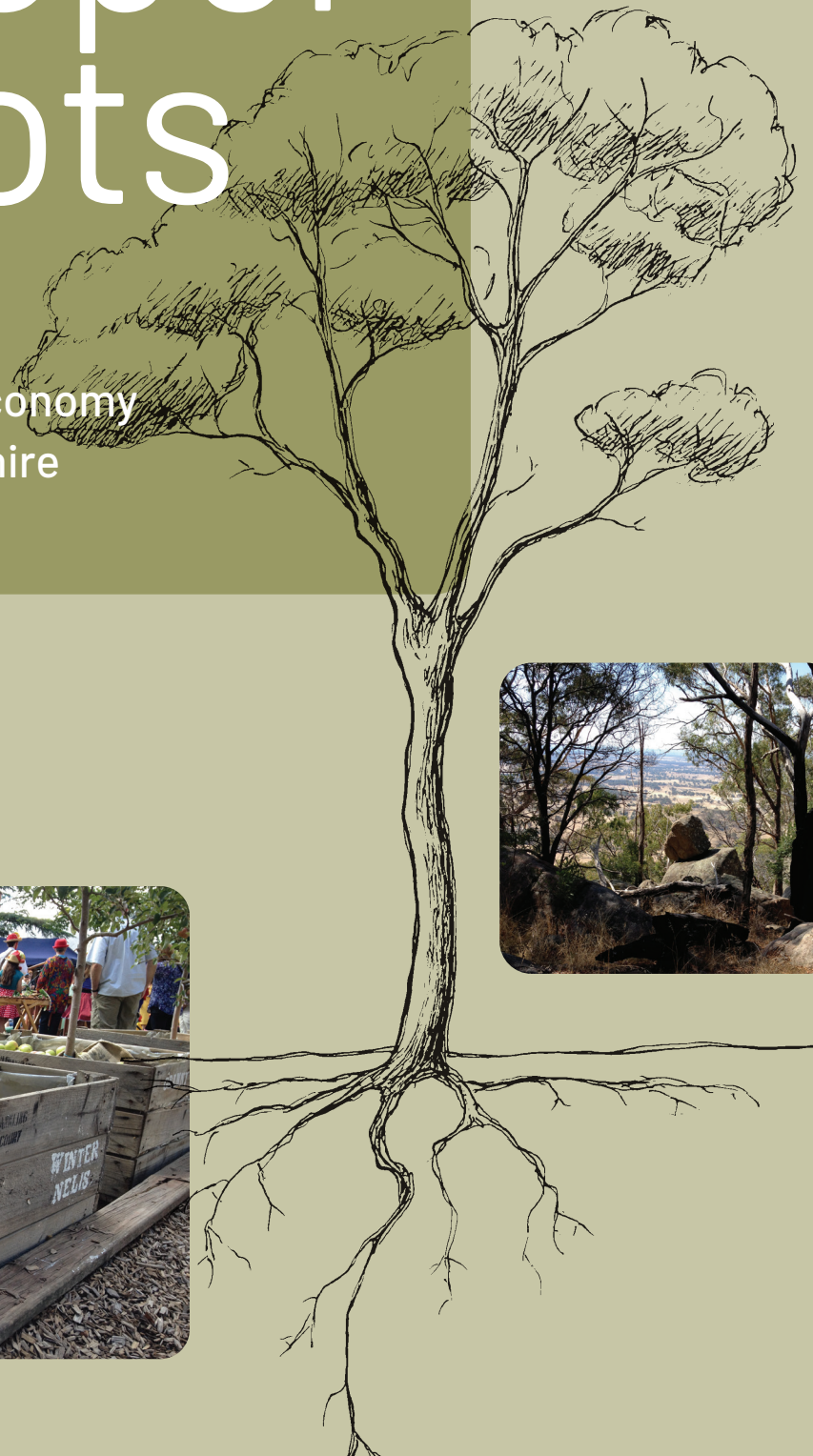


Deeper Roots

TRAIL GUIDE

Towards a wellbeing economy
for Mount Alexander Shire

C. | castlemaine
institute



Acknowledgments

We acknowledge that the Traditional Owners of the lands in Mount Alexander Shire, the Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung peoples, proudly survive, we pay our respect to Elders past, present and future. We acknowledge the continuing stewardship of land, waters, and Culture, and express gratitude for the sharing of knowledge to support our broader community as we find a path forward together to heal ourselves, Country and the economy. We also pay respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living and working with in Mount Alexander Shire

Thank you to the CWE **Advisory Group** Members: Sharon Fraser (lead), Mahesh Kandasamy, Warwick Smith, Melina Chan, Lexi Randall-L'Estrange, Jodi Newcombe, Peggy Ronnau, Anitra Nelson, Melissa Kennedy, Katherine McKinnon, Jacqueline Brodie-Hanns, Bryn Davies, Merryn Tinkler, Sue Race, Lorraine Le Plastrier, Peter Morris, and Nikki Marshall.

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Original artwork by the incredible Dr Cassia Read, Castlemaine Institute Principal Ecologist. Thank you for all that you and Ada Nano do to bring light and life to the unheard voices in our fragile ecosystems.



Castlemaine Institute

Castlemaine Institute is a research and learning hub for regenerative economics, community and landscapes.

We exist to support the ongoing transformation and development of individuals, collectives, landscapes, and systems which are evolving to meet the urgent opportunity of our times.

We do this through applying multidisciplinary depth to complex problems, drawing on and developing local wisdom through our work.

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Introduction

The “Deeper Roots” project, supported by WWF and guided by the Castlemaine Institute in partnership with Ethical Fields, sought to articulate the community’s role in fostering a regenerative and inclusive economy for Mount Alexander Shire, along with actionable next steps on this journey. This initiative combined action research within a place-based approach steeped in community voice, aligning with the Mount Alexander Shire Economic Development Strategy under a wellbeing economy framework.

By engaging over 250 local voices, including First Nations perspectives, we envisioned a future economy that prioritises the wellbeing of both people and the planet, and a way forward that uses local strengths and current capacity and capabilities. We also explored the existing initiatives and practices that support wellbeing, social connection, equity, inclusion, biodiversity, resilience, and innovation, and what is needed to ensure these efforts are themselves sustainable and resilient.

The outcome is this Trail Guide, which outlines our present situation, provides principles and strategies for navigating a way forward, and identifies current priority areas needing support and focused effort.

We hope that this work affirms the important and necessary work of caring for ourselves, each other and nature, as our economy evolves to be in service of life, as it was on this Continent before Colonisation. We have taken a deeply local approach, recognising that much of the formal economy is beyond our control. We are heartened to find how much is being done and can be done locally so that the economy is genuinely in service to the needs of people, place and planet.

*This document is
an invitation to
collaborate, share
insights, learn
together, and take
collective action as
we strive towards
a sustainable and
inclusive future.*



The title Deeper Roots is inspired by a reflection of our local ecology as a metaphor for the local economy. When surface water is not available to sustain us, the local plant species have developed deeper (tap) roots to access ground water. This is analogous to our community’s adaptive capacity to access deeper reserves that can sustain us through all economic seasons. This is one of many ways that we can visualise and understand our community and economy as a functioning ecology. There is no one way, one organisation, or one person who can shift a local economy – it requires all of us working together, starting by valuing and seeing all of the components of the systems we are a part of.

Where we are headed

The Project Advisory Group emphasised “visioning” as a *living practice* — an ongoing way for communities to come together, imagine hopeful futures, and align around shared goals. A “story of the future” was developed, drawing on insights from the previous Council Plan and community vision, the Wararack Initiatives consultation, and input from over 250 voices in the Deeper Roots project. Below is an excerpt for our wayfinding.



In 2050 we have a local economy that is focused on serving the needs of people and operating within the limits of the environment.

The people across Mount Alexander Shire are celebrating how far we have come in our local wellbeing economy.

We now have more say than we ever had before, the economy is more inclusive, and we have:





What's happening now

We have heard about incredible strengths and assets to draw from including:

- Many local organisations and initiatives working to adapt and mitigate climate change and care for Country
- Extensive local technical expertise and knowledge to draw upon
- High levels of civic participation and volunteerism
- Deeply, creative communities
- Caring communities
- High capacity and interest in the inclusion of people and nature in decision making.

Alongside this we have heard of the need for rapid change while all our current systems have reached a tipping point, many of which are exacerbated by impacts of COVID19 and the current health and state of the economy.

This is evidenced by:

- Burnout
- Cost of living pressures
- Growing inequality gap locally
- Housing affordability pressures
- Increasing homelessness
- Sole trader and small business viability at risk in current economy
- State government budget cuts impacting broader economy
- Intergenerational impacts of colonisation on the wellbeing of First Nations peoples
- Racism and exclusion
- Increasing natural disasters eg flooding
- Biodiversity loss
- Ageing population undervalued
- Youth mental health challenges
- Pressures on personal, organisational and community resilience

Getting there

We asked ourselves how we could get from *'What's happening now'* towards *'Where we are headed'*. An approach and set of principles were defined and applied to determine the essential elements of our next best moves.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Heal ourselves, our relationships, Country, and the organisations and systems we are part of.

Nurture the people and organisations doing the work of care, justice, and transformation.

Strengthen resilience, wellbeing, and equity in place through localised approaches.

Transform economic systems using wellbeing economy principles and frameworks, which understand the economy to be nested within society and the environment.

Pursue intergenerational justice (ecological, social, and cultural) in all we do.

AN APPROACH

By drawing on our strengths and assets

Working collaboratively

Continuously visioning together and finding shared purpose

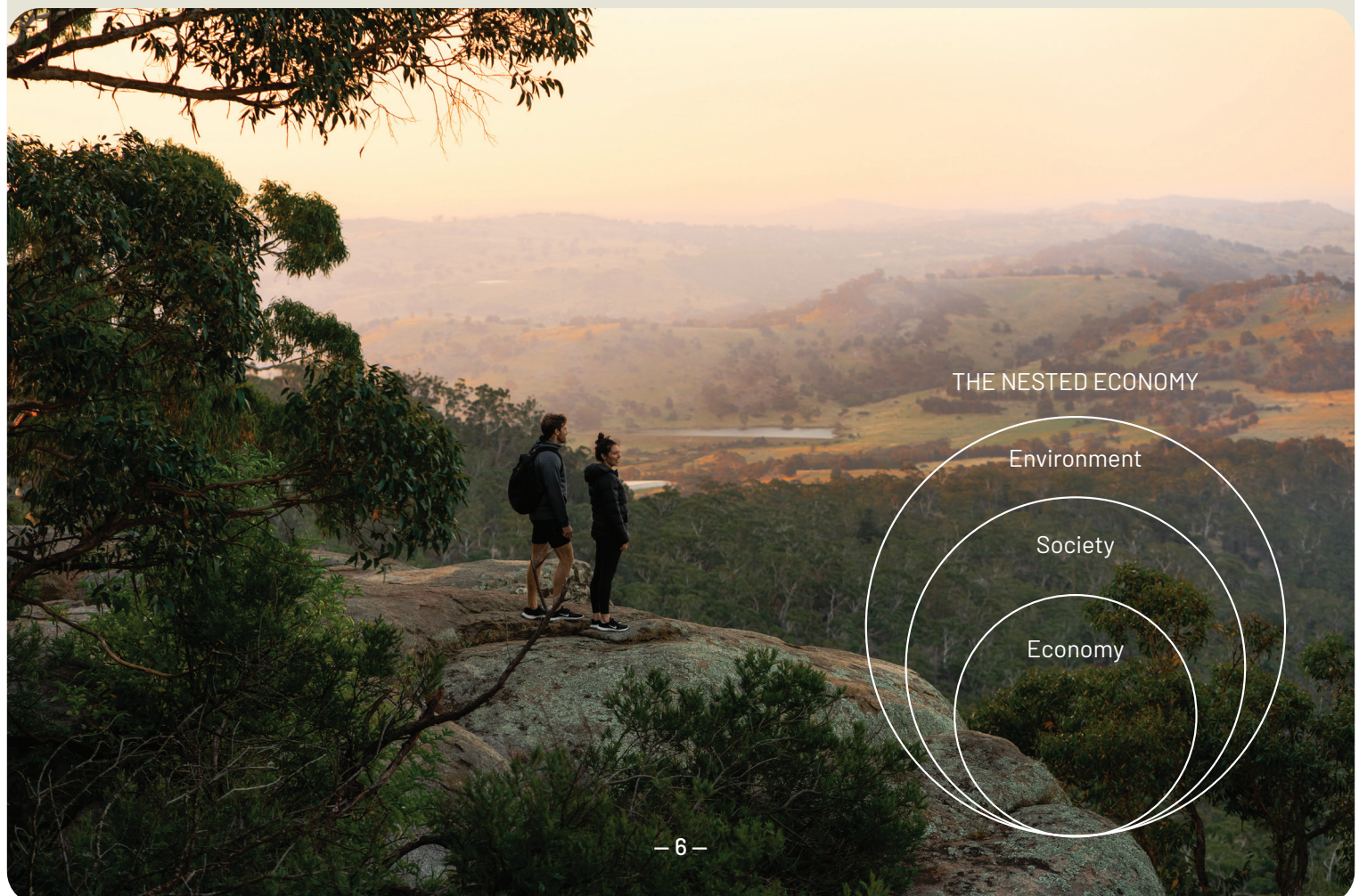
Identifying small steps we can start with now

Asking for help from within and outside our community to tackle the big shifts we need to undertake

All while:

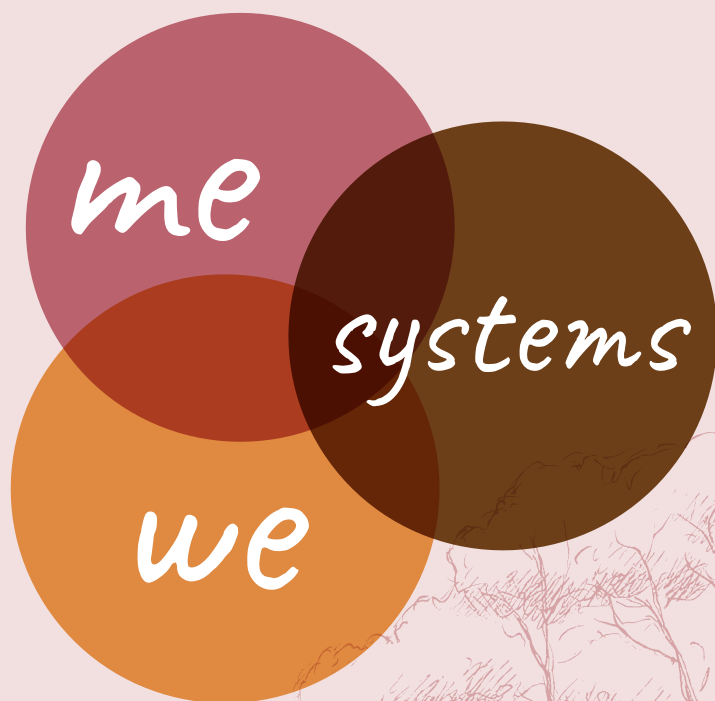
Nurturing a culture of care, healing, respect, and hopeful action

Moving at the pace of wellbeing and capacity of our people and organisations



Hopeful action across me, we, systems

Action, through relationships, at the right scale to heal ourselves and Country.



me

What we need at an individual level to create and sustain change, rebalance, and regenerate

we

Joining, fostering and leading collective action at the right scale. Deciding together when to compost, pivot, collaborate, when to rest and when to catalyse.

systems

Transforming relationships, resources, and power to achieve long term ecological, social and cultural justice. This includes reshaping the dynamics between people, assets, land use, workplaces, democracy, and the environment

Healing ourselves, Healing relationships, Healing Country



Castlemaine Institute guided a process with community members to determine the next best moves needed to shift our economy towards wellbeing, and the story of the future we want.

Next best moves

We acknowledge that the place to start is what is already here, including identifying what needs nurturing, support and capacity (see elements 1-3) as well as what might be missing now to achieve the shift we need (element 4).

Working within the capacity of people, place and planet is both a 'how we must proceed', as well as what we are hoping the future economy ensures for all people and ecosystems, for current and future generations.

1. Nurturing our current efforts

Our communities are already doing so much to support wellbeing within our economy, and we don't want to lose these important efforts. We need to make visible what is here, what is under threat, and how people, funders and organisations can contribute.

2. Nurturing collective stewardship

Anchor organisations and initiatives in local communities need a seat at the table for economic transition yet are often chronically undervalued and under funded. We need a model to ensure anchor organisations have sufficient capacity for their core business, and on top of this, are funded to collaborate, learn and adapt together.

3. Supporting existing economy innovation

Nurture current community assets and strengths and remove barriers for the existing innovation in our emerging wellbeing economy.

4. Bravery pieces

Despite our current capacity and challenges, there are necessary next steps we have to take to shift the dial. These priority issues were identified as:

- Individuals and organisations trust, support and actively listen to First Nations Elders, knowledge holders and organisations.
- Anti-racism and truth telling is everyone's business for a healthy and cohesive community. The work starts with self-reflection, learning our shared histories, and leads to action.
- Support and strengthen individual, family, and organisation financial wellbeing, with a focus on equity.
- Ecosystem repair and biodiversity is a principle in all the work.
- Measuring and learning together using the Deeper Roots Trail Guide to enable collective action.

What now? What next?

Share and reflect

Share your reflections on this Trail Guide with your workplace, school, community group, and/or elected local, State and Federal representatives. What does it mean to you, your organisation and community? What next steps are you encouraged to make and how can others support you?

Rest and connect

Take time to rest, connect with your neighbours and community, spend moments in nature, and keep learning with others about how we can transform our economy – together – for the wellbeing of ourselves, each other, and the ecosystems we belong to.



The Castlemaine Institute has taken a next step in forming the Wellbeing Economy Learning Circle project. Through this we aim to illustrate the principles and pathways in this Trail Guide through examples of initiatives that support and embody the Wellbeing Economy locally, and seed a community of practice that is supported to evolve.

We are now seeking to connect to other communities, economic transformation leaders, and funders to deepen our learning and amplify our work.

To learn more about the work visit ci.org.au/wellbeing-economy



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