



Photo credit: Jamie Johnson

A new regional association for the communities of our High Country / the Omeo Region

Outcomes of two series of community conversations:

19-21 August 2024 – Swifts Creek, Omeo, Tambo Crossing, Benambra

3-4 October 2024 – Swifts Creek, Benambra, Omeo

About this document

Community conversations took place in Tambo Crossing, Swifts Creek, Benambra and Omeo to test whether an appetite existed for a **new regional community organisation**, and if so, what should it look like, what it should do and how should it operate.

The outcomes of those community conversations, which took place in August and October 2024, are summarised in this Report.

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Communities to be included within a new regional association include:

Anglers Rest, Benambra, Bindi, Bingo Munjie, Brookville, Bundara, Cassilis, Cobungra, Dinner Plain, Doctors Flat, Ensay, Ensay North, Glen Valley, Hinnomunjie, Omeo, Omeo Valley, Reedy Flat, Shannonvale, Swifts Creek, Tambo Crossing, Tongio and Uplands

The communities listed are based on catchment for Omeo Health Service and Swifts Creek Secondary College. This extends across the East Gippsland Shire Council boundary.

This work has been funded by Community Recovery Committee Local Government Association (CRC LGA) funding through ORCRA for future benefit of the communities of the Omeo Region.

Purpose, key objectives and benefits



Association purpose:

To take action to create our own future and better our environment for the wellbeing of our region.

The objectives of a community regional association are to:

1. **Provide collective advocacy** for the prosperity of the region while understanding the nuanced strengths of the various communities,
2. **Coordinate and communicate** so that we work collaboratively across the region to build on opportunities and address challenges, and
3. **Be socially connected and ready** for when, not if, the next natural disaster occurs.

The benefits of a community-based regional association include:

- Providing a genuinely representative voice of the Omeo Region / High Country communities that leads for the **benefit of all areas** within the region
- Developing **community trust** through thorough understanding and truly local knowledge
- Bringing a collective **louder voice** regarding shared experiences and concerns to **all** levels of government and agencies (e.g., DEECA, CFA, SES, VicPol, etc)
- Enabling **self-directed skill development** to be retained and shared within the community
- Building **social capital** across the Omeo Region / High Country communities and strengthening those cross-community relationships

Possible names and logos (to be determined by new committee):

- High Country Regional Association
- Communities of the Omeo Region Association



Acronyms on this page

CFA – Country Fire Authority
DEECA – Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
SES – State Emergency Service
VicPol – Victoria Police

Focus and Values



Key principle: a regionally focused mindset

- It's about the region growing and flourishing. The outcomes are greater if we can work together.
- We may represent our local area, but we **work and act in the interests of the region.**
- We are mindful not to elevate a part of the region at the expense of another.
- Need to take a **systems view** – if one area is doing well in one aspect that flows to other parts of the region.
- Support the whole region and all communities within the region.

Values

- ✓ Positive culture and forward-looking
- ✓ Be open to sharing information (transparency) and listening
- ✓ Learn from one another – everyone brings a different perspective
- ✓ A collaborative approach that is team-based and collegiate in nature

What we are not

- Competitive with other organisations or communities in region
- Accepting of alternative agendas
- A 'single-issues' group – we have agreed priorities that we progress
- Interested in becoming political
- Tolerant of personally-targeted comments

Membership model requirements



Requirements for a membership model

Inclusive and accessible

- includes cross-border or cross-Shire connections
- represents local farming, business and communities
- recognises that many individuals have a lot to contribute
- prioritise those not on any other committee to minimise conflicts of interest, volunteer burn-out and encourage fresh thinking

Balanced and diverse representation is key

- To ensure truly understands local strengths and needs across the region
- Need to have limitations to ensure balanced view, that is, can't have 8 members from one sporting club
- Build social capital through bridging networks

Features

Working Groups are a feature of the model

- Progress priority initiatives
- Formed as required and concluded as goals are achieved
- Minimal restrictions on working group memberships to harness expertise, energy and goodwill

An **Independent Chair** who

- Facilitates a balanced discussion
- Role models the agreed values
- Advocates for the prosperity of the region with objectivity

Membership model – a skills/geography matrix



The **skills / geography matrix** is tailored to meet the needs of the region to ensure a balanced and diverse mix of skills, experience and interests across the local areas:

- Skills include community engagement, governance, creative, business, agriculture, communications and advocacy and project / program management.
- The geographical community dimension seeks 2-3 members to be drawn from each of four local areas:
 - Doctors Flat, Ensay, Ensay North, Reedy Flat, Tambo Crossing
 - Bindi, Brookville, Cassilis, Swifts Creek, Tongio
 - Anglers Rest, Bundara, Cobungra, Dinner Plain, Omeo, Omeo Valley
 - Benambra, Glen Valley, Hinnomunjie.

Benefits

- Diversity of thinking – ensures the committee can bring multiple perspectives into the discussion and mitigate the risk of group-think
- Reflects contemporary governance practice
- Succession planning requirements are clear

Risks

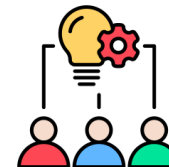
- May preclude emerging talent, should a nominee not be perceived as ‘qualified’ in a skill/experience area

Fig. 1. Sample skills/experience matrix

Community	Doctors Flat, Ensay, Ensay North, Reedy Flat, Tambo Crossing	Bindi, Brookville, Cassilis, Swifts Creek, Tongio	Anglers Rest, Bundara, Cobungra, Dinner Plain, Omeo	Benambra, Glen Valley, Hinnomunjie, Omeo Valley
Skill / Experience				
Community engagement	Teal	Grey	Grey	Grey
Governance	Light Blue	Teal	Teal	Light Blue
Creative industries	Teal	Grey	Grey	Grey
Business	Light Blue	Light Blue	Teal	Teal
Agriculture / farming	Teal	Teal	Teal	Grey
Communications / advocacy	Light Blue	Teal	Teal	Teal
Program / project management	Teal	Teal	Grey	Grey



Skills, experience and resources



Skills and experience

Skills required (not necessarily all in the one person)

- **Project management skills** to 'get stuff done'. Need to achieve outcomes.
- **Governance skills** to be effective and productive in meetings and be accountable to values and the communities of the Omeo Region / High Country.
- **Socially connected and politically aware** to access and better lobby local members (state and federal) and mayors, e.g. establish networks, know how to compose a letter to address local concerns
- **Local knowledge**, that is, come from the area

Other desirable skills and experience on the committee

- Community engagement
- Business / agricultural / creative
- Communications

Available resources

- Governance skills for Community Directors - see [Institute of Community Directors Australia](#) (ICDA) – regional committee members are encouraged to undertake governance training
- Access **free community resources** via [ourcommunity.com.au](#) (e.g. policies, templates, funding opportunities)
- Free legal support for Not for Profits (via [Justice Connect](#))
- Online volunteer marketplaces: Reach out to skilled volunteers (marketing, accounting, website building, etc) through [vollie.com.au](#) or [probonoaustralia](#)
- **Committee Handbook and Volunteer Manual** by Happy Changemakers. Available as templates in October 2024 onwards. See Jodie Willmer
- [Community Recovery Toolbox](#) - created for groups who want to establish a community recovery committee (or ones that expand to provide this function)

Community Priorities



New committee to determine top 3-4 priorities

Priorities need to evolve, adapt and reflect community interest

- Mental health
 - smoke in the air can be triggering
 - services/supports are disappearing
- Bushfire
 - community safety
 - environmental awareness and biodiversity
 - fuel management
- Promotion of social connection and more youth activities
 - need to further engage youth on a range of interests, in addition to sporting interests such as football/netball
- To enable 'us'/the region to ramp up quickly when another disaster occurs
 - Look after or review ORCRA documents – to 'be ready' for next disaster re needs/priorities of the community
 - Able to identify and form a Community Recovery Committee (CRC)
- Projects ready to go when funding opportunities arise (e.g. creative productions, events, infrastructure, etc)
- Build the prosperity of the region, including promoting tourism
- Topical challenges – e.g. postcode issue for temporary workers (to attract staff with working visas)
- New residents – difficult to break into community
- What is required to be a destination community?
 - i. More housing** – while supporting the visitor economy, Airbnb has diluted available housing to longer term residents
 - ii. More childcare** – enables parents to live and work in the area
 - iii. Greater employment opportunities** – attracts people to live in the area
 - Noting the shrinking opportunities – Hospital, DEECA, Forestry and Agriculture challenging for young people due to land prices

The way we work together



Governance

- Between **9-11 committee members** with a quorum of 5
- **Limited tenure**, e.g. maximum 3 x 2-year terms to encourage committee renewal and fresh thinking
 - Rolling terms – first year appoint half with 12-month term and the other half with 24-month term
- **Succession planning** and support, e.g. assistant secretary role for a year, then secretary
- Need to declare **conflicts of interest** (perceived or real) and maintain conflicts register
- **Use of Working Groups** to progress committee priorities and initiatives between committee meetings (not intended to be permanent sub-committees)
- Require **Terms of Reference (ToR)** for Committee and Working Groups to provide parameters for how the group will meet, work together, timelines and any decision-making responsibilities
- **Committee induction** - Committee Handbook and Volunteer Manual by Happy Changemakers. Available as templates in October 2024 onwards. See Jodie Willmer

Member election/appointment process

- Call for member nominations through an EOI process
- Office-bearing roles: Chair, Treasurer and Secretary
- Merit-based assessment without being exclusive
- Committee members to elect a member to be the Independent Chair
- Preference for applicants who have not been on other community associations to minimise conflicts, volunteer burn-out and encourage fresh thinking
- All roles are voluntary roles to ensure parity between members

Meeting mechanics

- Need to work innovatively – use Zoom / Teams / cloud technology so people can attend in several formats and share working documents
- Use a combination of in person and online meetings, and in person meetings rotate between the four areas to foster the informal connections, build trust and rapport
- Clear scope for what the association will advocate for
- Items must be on the agenda, otherwise they are tabled for the following meeting
- Role of Independent Chair is to:
 - encourage all committee members to provide views
 - not influence the outcome of discussion
 - call out behaviours that fall short of agreed values
- Require a strategic action plan or roadmap – outlining plan for first 3 months, 6 months, 12 months, and so on
- Committee provides **backbone** support for Working Group initiatives – see [Collective Impact theory](#) resources

Proposed legal structure



Organisation structure requirements

- **Separate legal entity** from its members. Provides ability to:
 - enter into contracts, take out insurance
 - apply for and receive funding
 - organisation structure survives tenure of its members
- Organisation purpose is consistent with a **locally focused not-for-profit community group** that operates **wholly within Victoria**
- **Limited capacity** to meet extensive reporting obligations and costs of a complex legal structure
- Envisage **more than 5 members** to meet objective of **regional coordination** across the many and diverse local areas of the region
- Option to register as a charity if seeking DGR status (need to determine if this is required)
 - Note. [FRRR](#) could auspice DGR funding status to new regional body

Proposed structure: Incorporated Association

- Adopt model rules
- Comply with state-based regulations of Consumer Affairs Victoria. Noting that incorporated associations have numerous responsibilities, such as, keeping appropriate financial records, following their rules and holding annual general meetings.
- Simple and inexpensive to establish
- Not suitable if less than 5 members
- Report annually to ACNC (if registered as a charity) via Annual Information Statement

Acronyms on this page

ACNC – Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission

DGR – Deductible Gift Recipient

FRRR – Foundation for Rural Regional Renewal

NFP – Not for Profit

Reference: Justice Connect [Which incorporated legal structure should you choose?](#) Legal information for Victorian community organisations



Photo credit: John O'Neill, Big River at Bundara picnic area, north of Angler's Rest