

Our Connected Community Action Plan



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live, work and play.

We pay our respects to Darkinjung country,
and Elders past and present.

We recognise the continued connection
to these lands and waterways and extend
this acknowledgement to the homelands
and stories of those who also call this place
home.

We recognise our future leaders and the
shared responsibility to care for and protect
our place and people.



Definitions

Resilience

According to the Australian Institute Disaster Resilience, resilience is the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions through risk management.

Community resilience

The ability of communities to withstand, adapt, and recover from adversity.

Social cohesion

Social cohesion is the foundation of community resilience. Strong social networks, a sense of belonging and trust enables communities to support one another during challenging times.

Original artworks by
Lucy Ward at Cred Consulting



Introduction

The Yarramalong Valley community has shown great resilience and community spirit amid a long history of natural disasters including floods, bushfires and drought. In recent years we have faced many challenges together, including a global pandemic and increasingly frequent climate-related natural disasters. These successive events have impacted our ability to prepare, adapt and bounce back.

Research tells us that for communities to be resilient in the face of emergencies, they need to be connected with each other, their places, and local services. Knowing our neighbours, having good relationships with friends and family, and being part of a connected community means someone will notice if we're missing, help if we're in trouble, and get us back on our feet after a crisis has passed. Alongside our longstanding residents, we are home to an increasing number of new residents, holidayers and weekenders, which can make connecting harder.

Central Coast Council (Council), with funding from the Australian Government through the NSW Disaster Risk Reduction Fund, has been working with local residents to prepare this Connected Communities Action Plan (this Plan). It aims to build a more socially cohesive and resilient Yarramalong Valley.

Included in this Plan is:

- An overview of our community including what makes Yarramalong Valley unique, who lives here and our strengths.
- Our challenges.
- Our community vision and values.
- Our opportunities for making Yarramalong Valley more socially connected and resilient.



Who is this Plan for?

Community members and groups can use this Plan to take action to improve social cohesion and community resilience. They can also use it to help with grant funding applications.

Council can use this Plan for forward planning and resource allocation for infrastructure, strategic city planning and community development activities. Council can also use this Plan for advocacy, lobbying and promotion of community successes and challenges to industry and all levels of government for funding support or program delivery.

Why was Yarramalong Valley chosen?

Yarramalong Valley was chosen for this Plan because the area shows moderate disaster resilience, with moderate coping capacity and ability to adapt to changes. The community's existing strengths and strong connections make it well-suited to handle and recover from challenges.

This Plan will build on the existing community resilience and connections to make the community even more prepared and connected for future events.

Please see Appendix 1 for more detailed research from the Australian Disaster Resilience Index detailing the area's capacity for disaster resilience.

How this Plan was developed

Everything in this Plan reflects the vision, values, concerns, ideas and priorities of the Yarramalong Valley community. This Plan is rooted in the principle that the people who call Yarramalong Valley home are best positioned to identify opportunities to create a more socially cohesive and resilient community.

Across four events, more than 40 community members from all walks of life contributed to this Plan. Each event lasted approximately 2 hours, with most participants staying for the entire duration to provide in-depth feedback and connect with one another.



Step 1

Gathering ideas and information

In late 2023 a hazard mapping workshop was held to identify key hazards and risks facing the community during fires and floods. This information was used as basis for a pop-up event in February 2024. At this event, community members shared what they love about Yarramalong Valley, the challenges their community experience, and their ideas to strengthen social cohesion and resilience.



Step 2

Truth-testing the draft Plan

A draft Plan was developed based on community input at step 1. At a community event in June 2024 community members provided feedback on the draft Plan and suggested ideas to improve the Plan.



Step 3

Closing the loop

Following community feedback, this Plan was finalised and presented back to the community at a pop-up event held in July 2024. This was also an opportunity for local leaders to connect with the community and for Council to plan next steps in delivering this Plan.



Step 4

Working together to build resilience

Council and community will continue to work together to build resilience in Yarramalong Valley. The opportunities in this Plan will help guide action and priorities going forward.



Our community

Our place

Yarramalong Valley includes the suburbs of Yarramalong, Cedar Brush Creek, Wyong Creek and Ravensdale.

Yarramalong Valley is located on the traditional lands of the Darkinjung people in the western hinterlands of the Central Coast Local Government Area (LGA). Yarramalong Valley is 20km from Wyong and 100km from Sydney.

Our community enjoys the peace and quiet of living in a semi-rural area, while also living close enough to access to shops, services and infrastructure in Sydney.

The area has an abundance of natural areas, including mountains, valleys, rivers and creeks. Wyong River runs from Ravensdale to Wyong Creek, joined by Cedar Brush Creek at Yarramalong. We are also known for fertile farming land.

Yarramalong Valley includes some of the oldest European settlements in the Central Coast. We have a number of heritage buildings, including the Yarramalong Hall that was officially opened in 1904.

Yarramalong Valley is home to a warm, welcoming and inclusive community made up of long-time community members, part-timers and people visiting for the weekend. People of all ages live in our community, and there is a growing number of older residents requiring access to services that meet their needs.

Living in Yarramalong Valley means we experience and adapt to the unique changes each season brings. In recent years we have experienced bushfires, flooding and land slips. Although our roads and telecommunications can often be negatively impacted, our community is prepared, resilient and pulls together to help each other out during these crises.



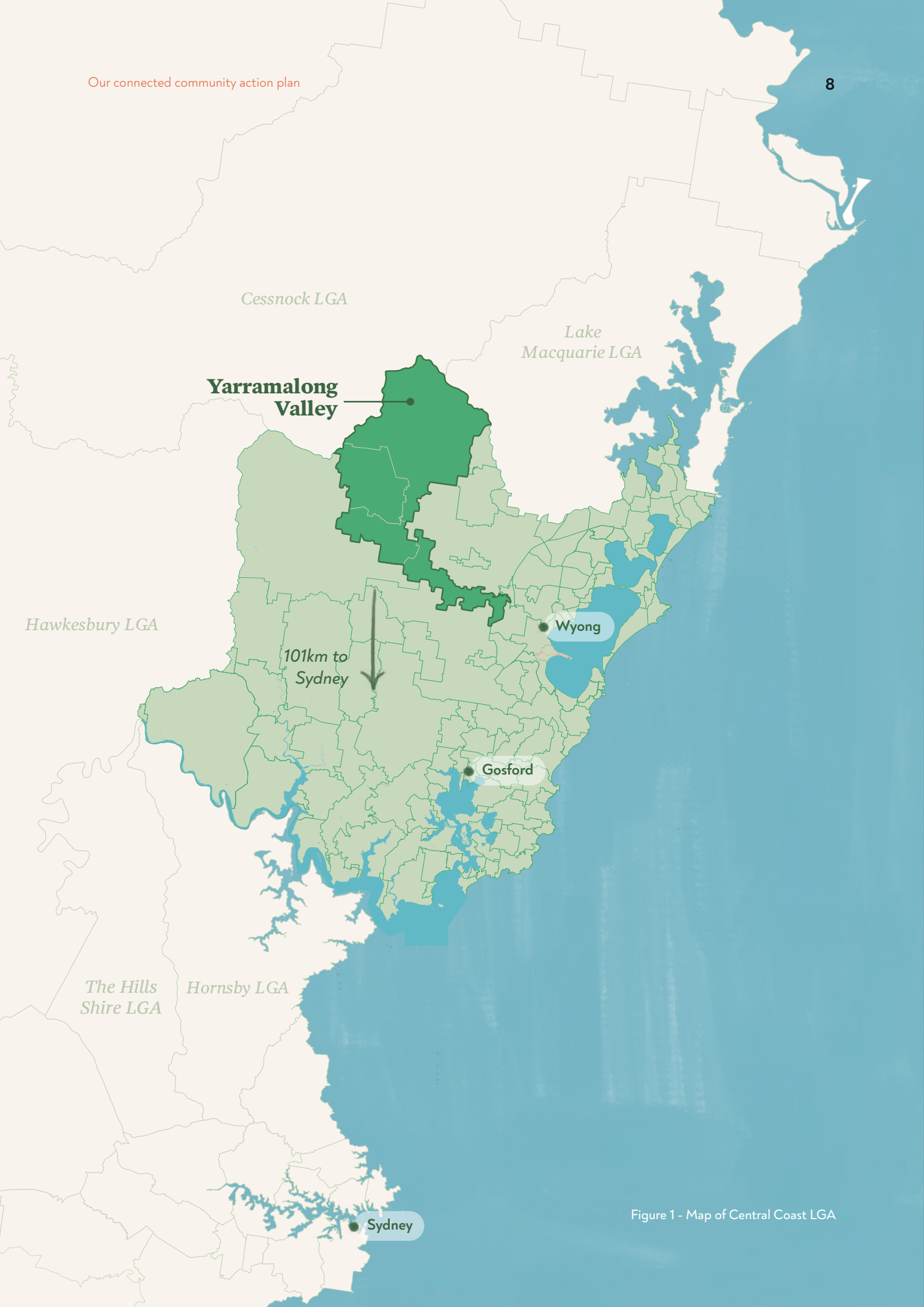


Figure 1 - Map of Central Coast LGA

Our people

At the time of the 2021 Census, there were approximately 1,000 people living in Yarramalong Valley. This includes the suburbs of Yarramalong, Ravensdale, Wyong Creek and Cedar Brush Creek. A comparison of key demographics of Yarramalong Valley, Central Coast LGA and Regional NSW can be found overpage.

We are home to First Nations residents

Yarramalong Valley is located on the traditional lands of the Darkinjung people and **4%** of our population are First Nations. This is lower than the Central Coast (5%) and Regional NSW (7%) averages.

We have a higher proportion of children and young people and a lower proportion of older residents

One in four Yarramalong Valley residents are aged under 18 (**24%**). This is higher than both the Central Coast (22%) and Regional NSW (21%) averages.

Although our median age (47) is significantly higher than the Central Coast (43), Yarramalong Valley has a lower proportion of residents aged over 60 (**27%**) compared to the Central Coast (30%) and Regional NSW averages (29%).

We have higher household incomes

On average, households in Yarramalong Valley earn around \$800 more per week (**\$2,326**) compared to the average across the Central Coast (\$1,534), and \$860 more compared to Regional NSW (\$1,466).

We have more family households and fewer people living alone

Yarramalong Valley has a lower proportion of people living alone (**17%** compared to 26% for both Central Coast and Regional NSW), however, we have a higher proportion of family households, including couples with children and couples without children.

We are relatively less culturally diverse compared to the Central Coast

5% of our population speaks a language other than English at home, which is lower compared to the Central Coast (7%) and Regional NSW (7%) averages. Among others, German and Dutch are some of the more common languages we speak.

As diversity grows across Sydney and NSW, it is likely we will become more culturally diverse in the future.

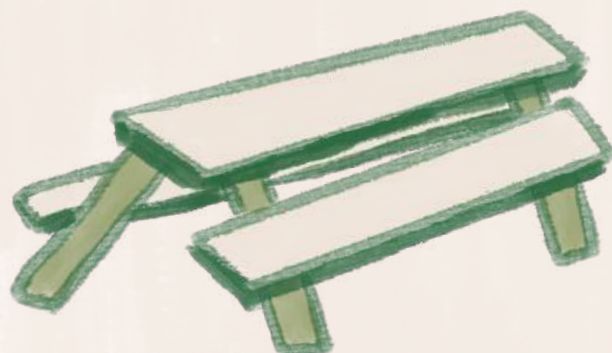
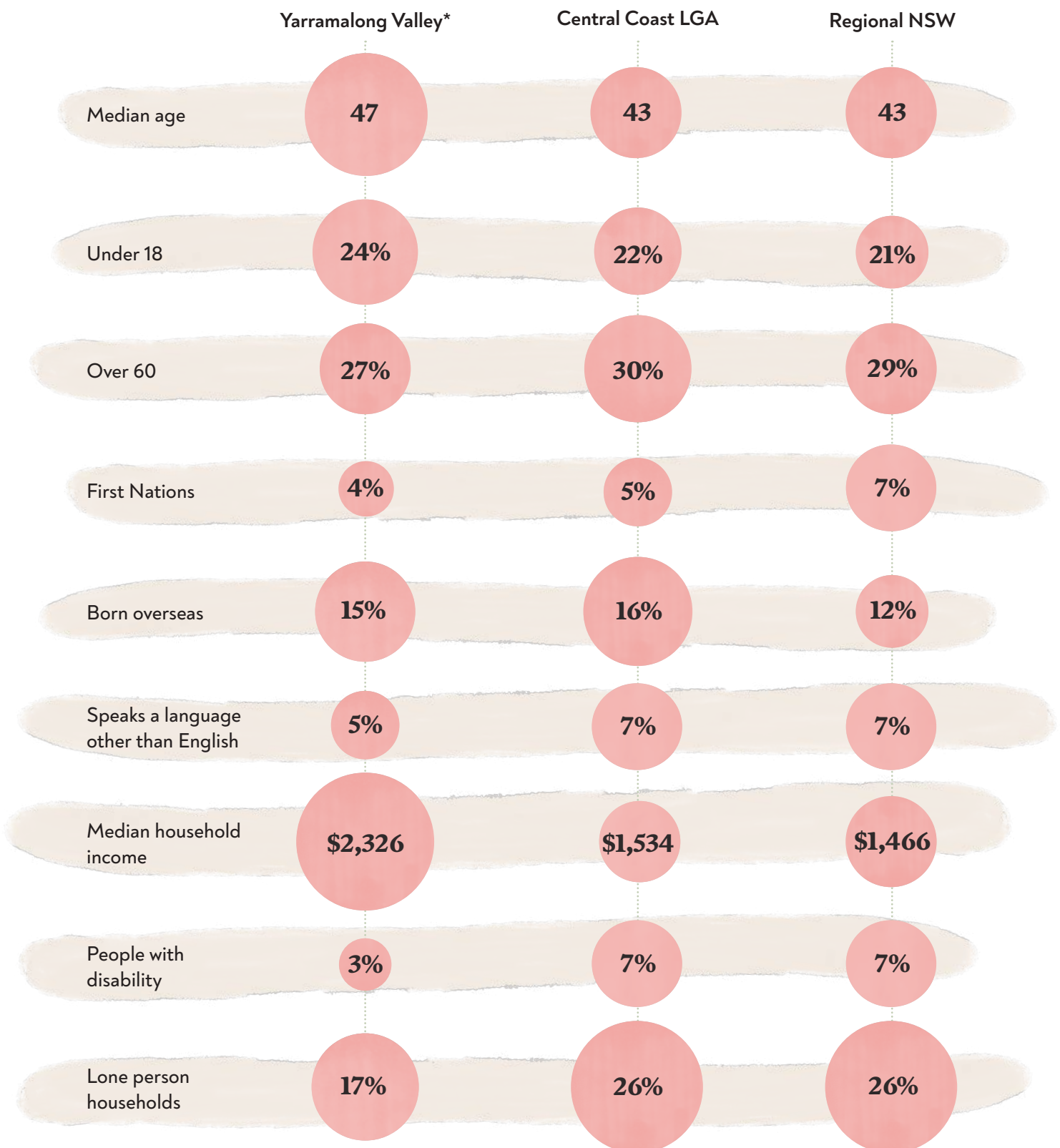


Figure 2 - Yarramalong Valley demographic comparison to Central Coast LGA and Regional NSW (Source: ABS Census 2021)



* **Note** Yarramalong Valley includes the suburbs of Yarramalong, Ravensdale, Wyong Creek and Cedar Brush Creek.



“There are a lot of people who want to participate in the community but don’t know what to do. Fundraisers can generate local funds and bring people together.”



Our strengths

The Yarramalong Valley community has many strengths that we can draw on together when faced with challenges.

The map overpage shows a selection of the places identified as important by our community.



We have **dedicated local leaders and volunteers** who guide us in emergency preparedness and response. For example Yarramalong RFS works closely with the SES to save lives and properties during disasters.

We have a number of **local community groups** including youth groups, yarn groups, exercise groups and social groups. These groups provide us with the opportunity to connect with our community, learn new skills and be active.



We have **important spaces and places** that connect us through events and act as safe spaces during disasters. This includes Yarramalong Community Centre, that regularly holds markets and live music, Yarramalong Hall, and our local schools.

We are part of the **annual Harvest Festival event trail** which brings visitors to local farms to sample our produce. We also host live music and dance events. In 2023, the Yarramalong School of Arts Hall hosted a bush dance as part of this festival.



We have **local businesses** that provide spaces for connection and boost our local economy. This includes the local cafe, along with agricultural businesses such as horse studs and farms.

We have **strong communications networks**. Our local Facebook pages allow us to share information and connect both during disasters and in day-to-day life.



We are a **resilient and cohesive community** that has a lot of experience in responding to and bouncing back after disasters.

Cessnock
LGA

Lake
Macquarie
LGA

Ravensdale

Cedar Brush
Creek

Brush Creek Rd

Ravensdale Rd

Yarramalong

St Barnabus Church

Old shop

Yarramalong Hall

Yarramalong RFS

Hotel and restaurant

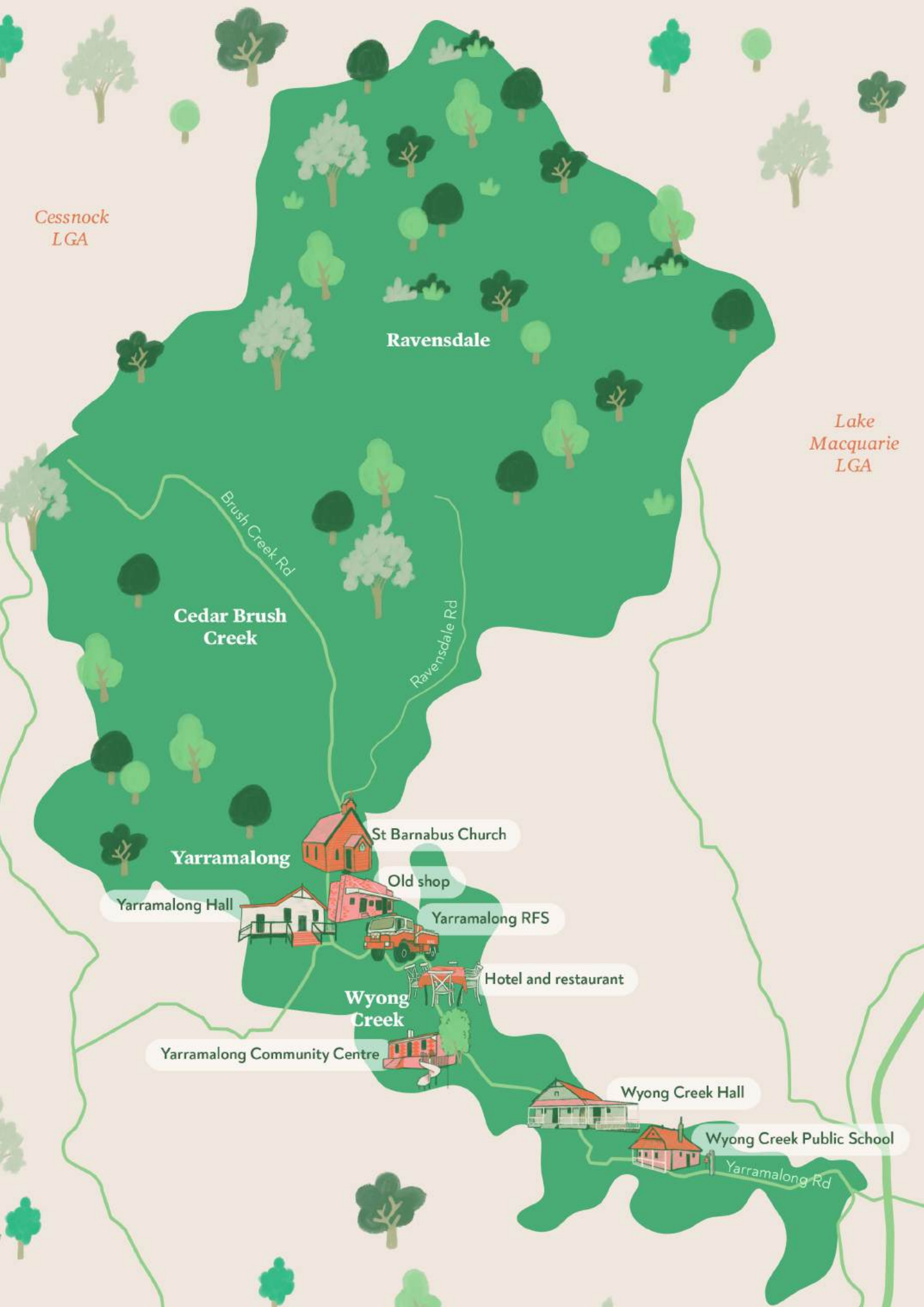
Wyong
Creek

Yarramalong Community Centre

Wyong Creek Hall

Wyong Creek Public School

Yarramalong Rd



Our challenges

We experience some challenges living in Yarramalong Valley. This section outlines challenges we face under the following themes: social, built environment, economic and natural environment.

Our social challenges

We have an ageing community with a need for age-appropriate health, housing and recreation services.

New residents and a growing number of people staying in Airbnbs for the weekend are less connected and prepared for disasters.

Community groups have differing priorities and interests which can make it hard to work together.

Our mental health is negatively impacted by ongoing disasters.

We have an over-reliance on social media as a communication tool, which leads to people being excluded from accessing important information.

We want more community events and spaces where we can connect, particularly for children and young people.

It can be hard to access timely and accurate information.

Our built environment challenges

Pedestrian safety is a challenge, and we need to build more footpaths and address speeding.

Our telecommunications system is poor which makes it hard to access information during disasters.

Our roads are poorly maintained and dangerous, particularly after floods, and we only have one evacuation route in a crisis.

Our drainage system is poor which exacerbates the impacts of rain and flooding.

We don't have access to enough public or community transport services.

Our economic challenges

Our service station closed down which has impacted our ability to access petrol and groceries.

We find it hard to access affordable and timely tradespeople.

Many of us do not have property insurance.

Our natural environment challenges

Our location means we experience and adapt to the unique changes each season brings including fires, floods and landslips.

Flooding

In July 2022, we experienced significant flooding, which added to the challenges from previous floods in 2020 and 2021. These floods compounded issues around road maintenance, and caused further isolation for outlying communities.

Our community experiences various challenges during flooding events, including road closures, poor telecommunications coverage and power outages. This impacts our ability to access emergency information or evacuate to safer spaces, and can sometimes leave community members isolated for extended periods. After the 2022 floods, some Yarramalong Valley residents were reliant on emergency services delivering food and medication for weeks.

The effects of flooding can last after the waters subside. Navigating insurance claims and dealing with government processes require time and effort, which can affect the mental, physical and financial wellbeing of our community.

Fires

The 2019-2020 bushfire season was one of the worst Australia has ever seen.

During bushfires, we face similar challenges to those experienced by floods such as road closures, lack of telecommunications coverage and power outages. This can lead to isolation and limited access to important information.

The impacts of bushfires on our community can be long-lasting, affecting the mental, physical, social and financial wellbeing of our residents.





“This Plan will give us actions that are achievable and can help build Yarramalong.”



“This Plan will help us get to know new people in the community and give them information on emergencies.”

Our vision and values for the future

Our vision for a connected community

We will continue to be a small, warm and welcoming community that supports one another and pulls together in times of disaster.

We will have strong communications networks that allow us to stay connected, both digitally and in person. Our local leaders will also continue to promote community resilience and share information.

Heritage and culture will remain at the heart of Yarramalong Valley. We will continue to support our local businesses and creative communities, while growing other industries like ecotourism and entertainment.

Our infrastructure will be resilient to floods, fires and heat. There will be safer roads and walking and cycling infrastructure that improves our connectivity.

We will better use our existing places, such as our community hall and school grounds, and have more diverse opportunities for social connection, like a skate park, mobile libraries and community events.

We want to work in partnership with local businesses, community groups and Council to bring our beautiful place to life.



Our values



Our culture and heritage



Connecting with nature



**Strong local leadership and
community collaboration**



**Spaces and places for
social connection**



Resilient local economy



Strong communications networks



**A warm and welcoming community
that supports one another**



**Active community groups and
volunteerism**

Our opportunities

There are a number of opportunities for our community to improve community resilience. Some of these are short term opportunities we can implement in the next year, while others may take us a bit longer. Some of these we can do on our own, and others might require partnerships or funding from Central Coast Council or the NSW Government.

This section provides an overview of the key opportunities we have identified for community resilience in Yarramalong Valley, including:

- Develop a “Living in our area” manual and contact tree.
- Host more community events.
- Upgrade the Yarramalong Hall to make it accessible and include features of a resilience hub.

There are also a number of opportunities for us to advocate to local, state and federal government for better resilience outcomes, including around:

- Safer streets for people, cyclists and vehicles.
- Improved mobile coverage.



1

Develop a “Living in our area” manual and contact tree

New residents moving to Yarramalong Valley are often not fully aware of local hazards and the importance of emergency preparedness. Developing a “Living in Our Area” manual and contact tree will provide essential information to assist newcomers in understanding potential risks and ensuring they are prepared for floods. It will also ensure residents know who to contact in different emergency scenarios.

Information we need in this manual:

- A map of Yarramalong Valley.
- Emergency planning (e.g. what level the local road gets blocked at)
- Advice on generators, fire pumps and other aids.
- Where to buy fuel.
- Common scenarios and how to respond. (e.g. a cow on the road)
- Contact information for local contacts, Council, RFS and SES.
- Information on the CB radio network.

Who should create this manual?

There are many stakeholders that could take ownership over developing the manual and contact tree. This includes Council, RFS or the SES.

What format should this manual be in?

The manual and contact tree should be available in both hard and soft copy. As it will be a live document that needs updating, the soft copy could be a Google Drive document or an app.

How should this manual be promoted?

The manual and contact tree can be promoted in many ways, including:

- Facebook.
- Letter box drops.
- Email.
- Welcome packs by real estate agents or churches.
- Information sessions.

Timing

Short term (Less than 1 year)

Research from the Foundation for Rural Regional Renewal found that meaningful locally generated information provides more robust protections against misinformation than generic and reductive messages framing communities as passive recipients.

Research from the Minderoo Foundation highlights the importance of tailoring resilience building information and resources to a local context.

“The most important thing is people know where their nearest contact point is and who they are.”

- Yarramalong Valley community member

Howard, A., Rawsthorne, M., Sampson, D. & Katrak, M. (2020) Supporting community led approaches to disaster preparedness: learnings from three pilot locations. Evaluation of the Get Ready Disaster Resilient: Future Ready pilots for the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal and Resilience NSW; University of Sydney and University of Newcastle.

Minderoo Foundation (2022) Resilient Communities Framework, available at: <https://cdn.minderoo.org/content/uploads/2022/05/25130720/FFR-Resilient-Communities-Framework.pdf>

2

Host more community events

We love our local community events including the Yarramalong Bush Dance, local exercise groups and the discontinued talent show. These events bring us closer together, reduce isolation and create a strong sense of belonging. We want to see more events where we can meet our community and make connections. Events are also a great way to welcome new community members to Yarramalong Valley..

Events we want in Yarramalong Valley:

- Community BBQs.
- A twice yearly Bush Dance,
- Talent show.
- Local market days.
- Dances.
- Meet your neighbour evenings.
- Picnics in the park.
- Outdoor movie nights.
- Dances.
- Live music.
- Cricket games.
- Car/boat sale day.
- Community meetings to talk about emergency preparedness.
- Caring for wildlife.

Typically we want these events to be hosted on the weekends.

Who should organise these events?

There are many stakeholders that could organise and host events, including the Yarramalong Hall Committee, Council and local community groups and volunteers.

“The yearly bush dance is always packed it would be great to do this more often, maybe twice a year.”

- Yarramalong Valley community member

Where should these events be hosted?

Community events can be hosted in a range of locations in Yarramalong Valley including Yarramalong Hall, Yarramalong School, Angel Sussuri and Jack Gear Reserve.

How should these events be promoted?

Our community events can be promoted in a number of ways, including:

- Facebook.
- Email.
- Letter box drops.
- Radio.
- Local community news.

How can we fund these events?

Funding of these events could come through paid events or Council grants

Timing

Medium term (1-3 years)

“We need more events so we can meet people. A few evens have stopped in recent years. Events on Friday nights to bring people together would be great.”

- Yarramalong Valley community member

3

Upgrade Yarramalong Hall to make it an accessible resilience hub

Upgrading the Yarramalong Hall to include a generator, showers and solar power will provide the our community a space to access vital resources and information during emergencies. The Hall can also be used as a recovery centre during recovery. Unlike traditional emergency shelters, the Yarramalong Hall also provides an everyday space for the community to meet and socialise at. By transforming our local Hall into an accessible resilience hub, we can support our emergency preparedness and everyday community activities.

What accessible resilience hub features Yarramalong Hall needs:

- Generator.
- Showers.
- Phones.
- Satellite internet.
- Charging station.
- Accessible toilets.
- Solar power.
- Storage.
- Radios.
- Heating and cooling.
- Sound speakers.
- Projectors.

Timing

Long term (3-5 years)

Although this is a long-term and costly opportunity, we can explore grant opportunities to fund this project.

Since 2015, the Mount Barker Showground has served as a refuge for local residents during fires. The Mount Barker District Council makes sure the toilets are accessible, while community members manage the collection of donations such as fodder, buckets, and rope.

The Council aims to assist residents by maintaining the site and its facilities while still enhancing community self-reliance and support.

Helpful resources on community resilience hubs:

[Hawke's Bay Emergency Management Group](#)

[Community support hub guide, Local Government Association South Australia](#)

[Wellington Region Emergency Management Office](#)

Other opportunities

Advocate for safer streets for people, cyclists and vehicles

There are no footpaths in Yarramalong, meaning pedestrians and cyclists have to share the road with drivers. The lack of safe crossings and presence of speeding cars makes walking in Yarramalong unsafe and scary.

We have an opportunity to run a community meeting to discuss pedestrian and road safety in Yarramalong. We can then advocate to relevant agencies for traffic calming measures such as speed bumps, footpaths and safe crossings.

Advocate for improved mobile coverage

We do not have reliable access to mobile coverage. This affects our ability to connect with friends and family, access online services and access important emergency information. We need to advocate and collaborate with local telecommunications providers, State and Federal governments for improved telecommunications infrastructure in Yarramalong Valley.

Other opportunities

- A mobile-recovery van so people can access recovery services in Yarramalong Valley.
- Investigate opportunities for a mobile playground to connect young families living in Yarramalong Valley.



Appendix 1: Disaster Resilience Index

Disaster resilience capacity

Disaster resilience is the capacity for communities to prepare for, absorb and recover from natural hazard events and to learn, adapt and transform in the face of future events. Below is an overall measure of disaster resilience formed from coping and adaptive capacity. The index values range from 0 to 1, where 1 indicates the highest capacity for resilience, and 0 represents the lowest.

Yarramalong - .6307

This area is assessed as having moderate capacity for disaster resilience.

Communities in areas of moderate disaster resilience have some capacity to use available resources to cope with adverse events, and some capacity to adjust to change through learning, adaptation and transformation.

Moderate disaster resilience is generally contributed by moderate levels of coping and adaptive capacity, which in turn are associated with moderate levels of economic capital, moderate provision of and access to services, moderate community cohesion and variable encouragement for adaptive learning and problem solving.

Coping capacity index

Coping capacity is the means by which communities or organisations can use available resources and abilities to face adverse consequences. The coping capacity index also ranges from 0 to 1, with 1 being the highest capacity to cope.

Yarramalong- .5638

This area is assessed as having moderate Coping Capacity.

Communities in areas of moderate Coping Capacity have some capacity to use available resources to cope with adverse events and to prepare for, absorb and recover from a natural hazard.

Adaptive capacity index

Adaptive capacity is the arrangements and processes that enable adjustment through learning, adaptation and transformation. The index ranges from 0 to 1, with 1 representing the highest adaptive capacity.

Jilliby – Yarramalong- .6397

This area is assessed as having moderate Adaptive Capacity.

Communities in areas of moderate Adaptive Capacity have some capacity to adjust to change through learning, adaptation and transformation.

Disaster resilience factors

Social character

The social and demographic characteristics of the community. Factors such as household and family composition, age, sex, education, employment, disability, language, and length of residence have well-known influences on capacity to prepare for, respond to and recover from natural hazards.

Economic capital

The economic characteristics of the community. Economic capital can contribute to the reduction of losses from natural hazard events through improved mitigation and risk management, individual flexibility and adaptation, enhanced recovery, market continuity and business continuity.

Emergency services

The presence and resourcing of emergency services. Emergency management is a core government service and is integral to natural hazard preparation, response and recovery. Emergency services undertake a range of activities to assist communities before, during and after natural hazards.

Planning and the built environment

The presence of legislation, plans, structures or codes to protect communities and their built environment. Land use planning articulates and regulates relationships between development and hazards. Planning reduces current and future risk and enhances the readiness and capacity of organisations to respond to events.

Community capital

The cohesion and connectedness of the community. Social capital is a resource that facilitates collective action for mutual benefit. Sense of community fosters participation,

community competency, pro-social behaviour and preparedness through working with others to solve shared local problems.

Information access

The potential for communities to engage with natural hazard information. Telecommunication and internet access is vital to information sharing before, during and after natural hazard events. Community engagement activities benefit communities through capacity building, social connectedness, self-reliance, training, awareness of risk and psycho-social preparation.

Governance and leadership

The capacity within organisations to adaptively learn, review and adjust policies and procedures, or to transform organisational practices. Adaptive institutions have conditions suited to the development of the skills, knowledge and culture for managing complex change. They have flexibility and can learn from experience, innovate and adjust.

Social and community engagement

The capacity within communities to adaptively learn and transform in the face of complex change. Adaptive communities have support and resources to manage complex change and to renew for mutual benefit. Characteristics of adaptive communities include social engagement, trust, cooperation, learning and wellbeing.

The identified communities possess the above strengths and have the common barrier of:

Information access

The potential for communities to engage with natural hazard information. Telecommunication and internet access is vital to information sharing before, during and after natural hazard events. Community engagement activities benefit communities through capacity building, social connectedness, self-reliance, training, awareness of risk and psycho-social preparation.

