

## **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES - THE BAW BAW SOLUTION**

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### **Abstract**

In a rural shire, one of the principal challenges is to ensure that dispersed communities are enlightened, empowered and resourceful in order to make meaningful and sustainable contributions to the council's long term strategies. It is now generally accepted that communities, when engaged and informed, are best placed to determine their objectives and how these might be achieved. Over the last two years, Baw Baw Shire Council has embarked on an extensive and successful community engagement program based on the premise that 'one size does not fit all.' A process has been developed that establishes open and honest communications between council and communities; develops plans that reflect the visions of the communities; and enables communities to own and control the process of defining their priorities and future projects to form part of a sustainable council strategy. In its detail the model is fluid, in order to accommodate the diverse personalities and group aspirations encountered. Council has adopted what is essentially a 'ground-up' approach to community planning and development and provides the facilitation and guidance to enable communities to establish partnerships that can assist them to deliver projects. This paper explores the background and detail of the Baw Baw Community Engagement model and demonstrates how empowering communities with self direction ultimately feeds into a sustainable whole of government approach to issues and priorities raised in community plans.

### **Biography**

Lynn Mizen – BIT (with Distinction), Grad Cert Regional Community Development Lynn Mizen has a strong background in project management and has undertaken work within the private sector in Australia, UK and Singapore, delivering leading edge IT based projects since 1995. Upon returning to Australia, Lynn joined local government at Baw Baw Shire Council in 2005 to project manage the Small Towns Capital Works Program. Lynn experienced initial difficulties in delivering the program because many communities had become disengaged with Council. Based on initial experiences with communities and her knowledge of standard engagement techniques, Lynn developed a flexible community engagement model that has proved to be extremely successful. In 2006, Lynn completed a Graduate Certificate in Regional Community Development at Monash University and is currently studying for a Masters in Regional Community Development.