



Understanding Business in Bass Coast – Business Survey 2022

Results Report

Business Survey 2022 Summary

Bass Coast has 3,200 business ABNs registered employing almost 11,000 people. The aim of this survey was to further understand how these businesses operate, their confidence levels and how we can facilitate growth in the region. The information provided by our local business owners is invaluable and helps Council understand some of the challenges and opportunities for businesses in Bass Coast and better guide the work Council does to facilitate a healthy and sustainable economy. The information gathered helps us to understand business sentiment and identify trends, training gaps, and key issues.

The survey data is key in shaping Council's approach to economic development, including how we attract and facilitate new investment, support our existing businesses, how we better prepare our local workforce and a range of other initiatives that will be considered as part of our Economic Development Framework.

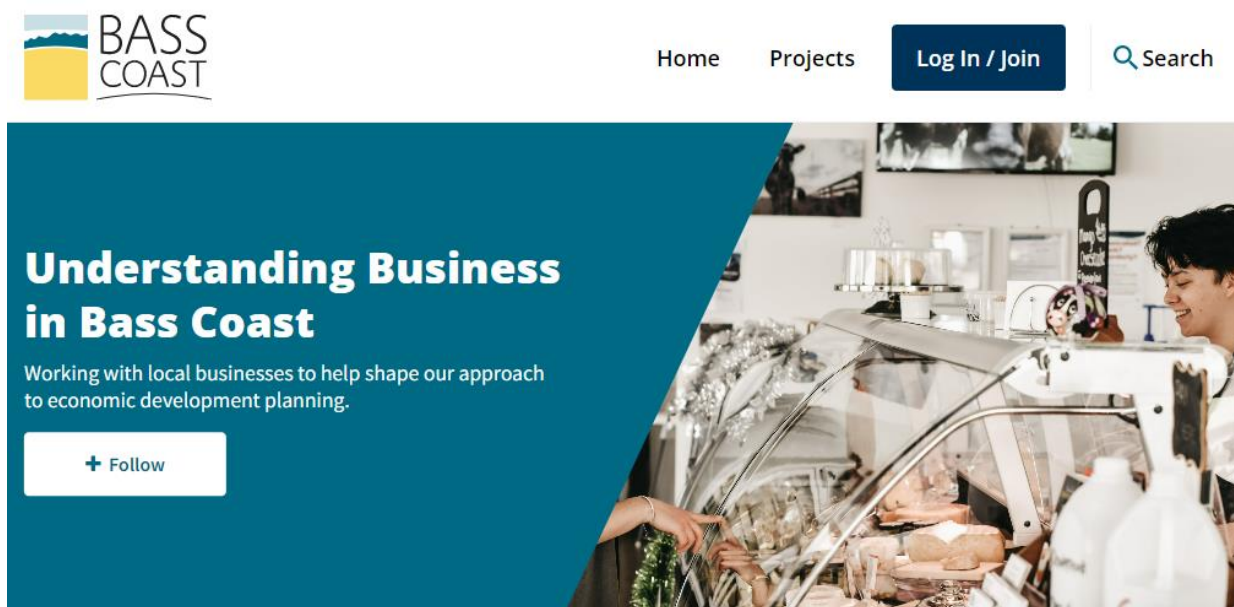
The survey will be conducted every two years to track business trends.

Key takeaways

- Respondents were primarily from retail trade (23%), accommodation and food sector (23%) and health care and social assistance (12%) and primarily work at a permanent business location.
- Development and training needs include marketing (digital, social and general), cash flow, grant writing, business planning and improving energy efficiency.

- More businesses are experiencing challenges recruiting and retaining staff than before the pandemic. Attracting staff was a key issue for approximately a third of respondents.
- Businesses are confident that our economy is improving, are planning to expand their business and increase staff numbers.
- Anticipated challenges for next 12 months include Australians choosing to travel overseas, petrol prices, staff retention and recruitment and managing low tourist numbers without government support.

Project delivery



Council used the [Engage Bass Coast](#) platform to engage our business community and the survey was open from 22 April 2022 to 27 May 2022. This is the second Bass Coast business survey, and these results are compared to results from March 2020. 93 businesses completed the survey and 248 visitors viewed the [project page](#).

The survey was promoted via several marketing and communications channels. This included:

- Direct emails to current ABN holders in Bass Coast (2,289 recipients)
- Inclusion in three eNewsletters [Business Survey open](#) (796 opens, 30 clicks to survey), [May update](#) (742 opens, 17 clicks to survey), [Business Survey reminder](#) (652 opens, 52 clicks to survey)
- Organic social media on Business in Bass Coast Instagram and Facebook feeds (2x Instagram feed, 1x Instagram story, 3x Facebook feed)
- Paid social media campaign (3,844 engagements, 22 link clicks, \$91.61 spend)
- Media release [Business survey now open](#)
- Direct emails to business enquiries during the open period

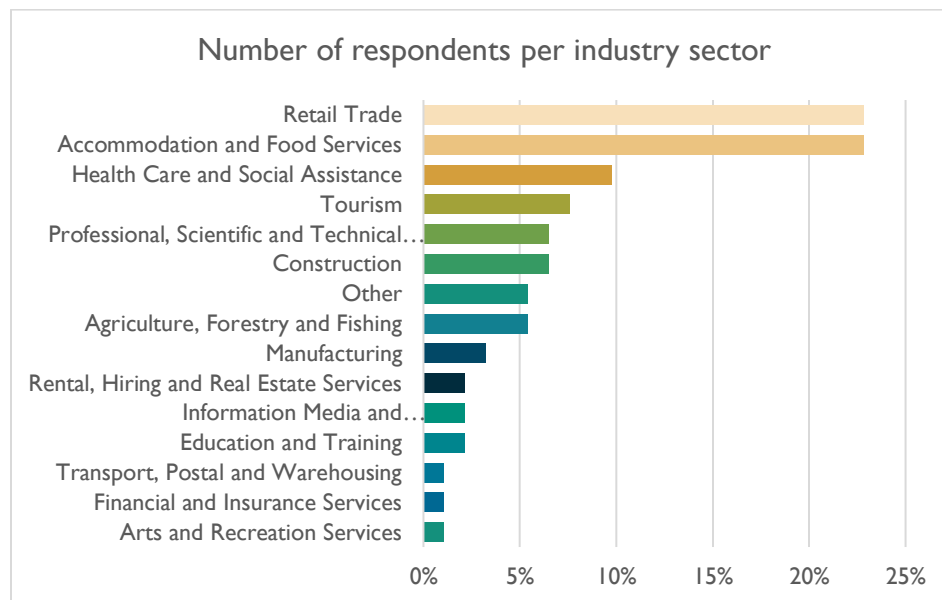
- Shared with local business and tourism associations to share with members
- Email campaign on Engage Bass Coast for followers of business projects (28 recipients, 21.43% click through).

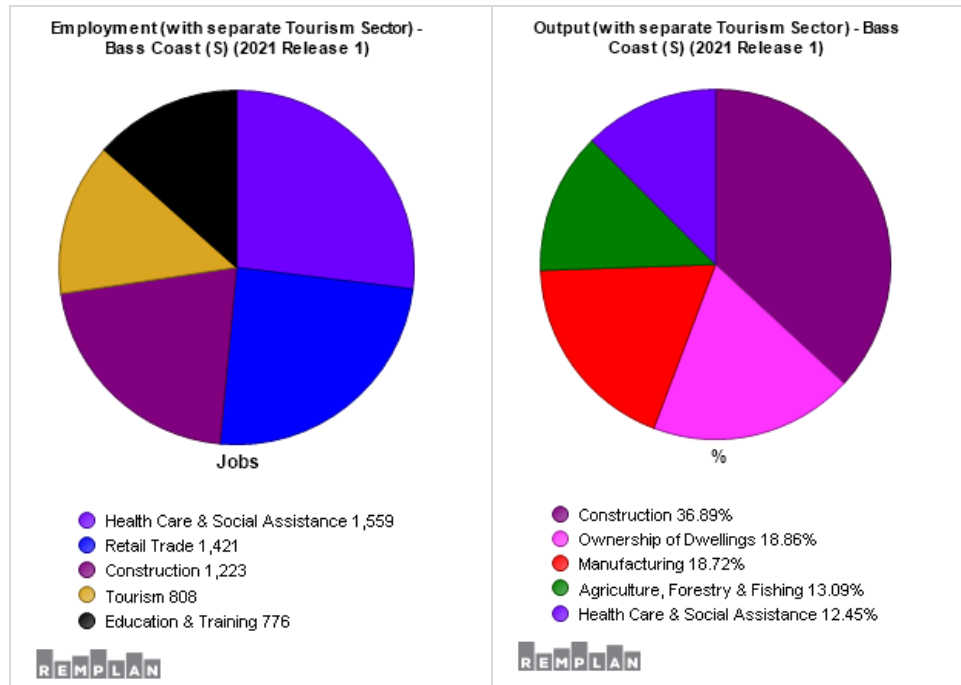
Survey results and discussion

Business

Respondents were primarily from retail trade (23%), accommodation and food sector (23%), health care and social assistance (10%) and tourism (8%). The survey results represented three of the top five key employment sectors in Bass Coast (Remplan 2021 Release 1).

There is an opportunity to increase the response rate from the construction, education and training, agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors.





The key reasons that businesses choose to operate in Bass Coast include development opportunities, safety, friendly locals, wanting to live here, action-oriented council and perfect place for tourism. Respondents primarily work at a permanent business location and 8% of respondents are utilising multiple locations to operate their business (two or more operating locations).

Workforce

39% of respondents' experience difficulties with recruiting and/or retaining staff. This has increased from 28% in March 2020. Of those experiencing these challenges, recruiting is the most significant challenge (97%). 47% experience challenges retaining staff. Reasons for these challenges include:

- Lack of applicants with specialised qualifications
- Lack of qualified staff
- No immigration or 457 visa holders
- Inability to offer consistent or regular hours
- Cost of rent and living expenses
- Retirement pension policies

Word of mouth and social media are the primarily methods for recruitment success.

30% of respondents noted access to housing as a barrier to recruiting and retaining employees. Seven businesses offered some form of housing support for employees, this included onsite accommodation, leasing a property on their behalf, temporary accommodation for new

employees or employees in acute rental distress. Most respondents employ local residents with only two respondents acquiring more than 50% of their employees from outside of Bass Coast.

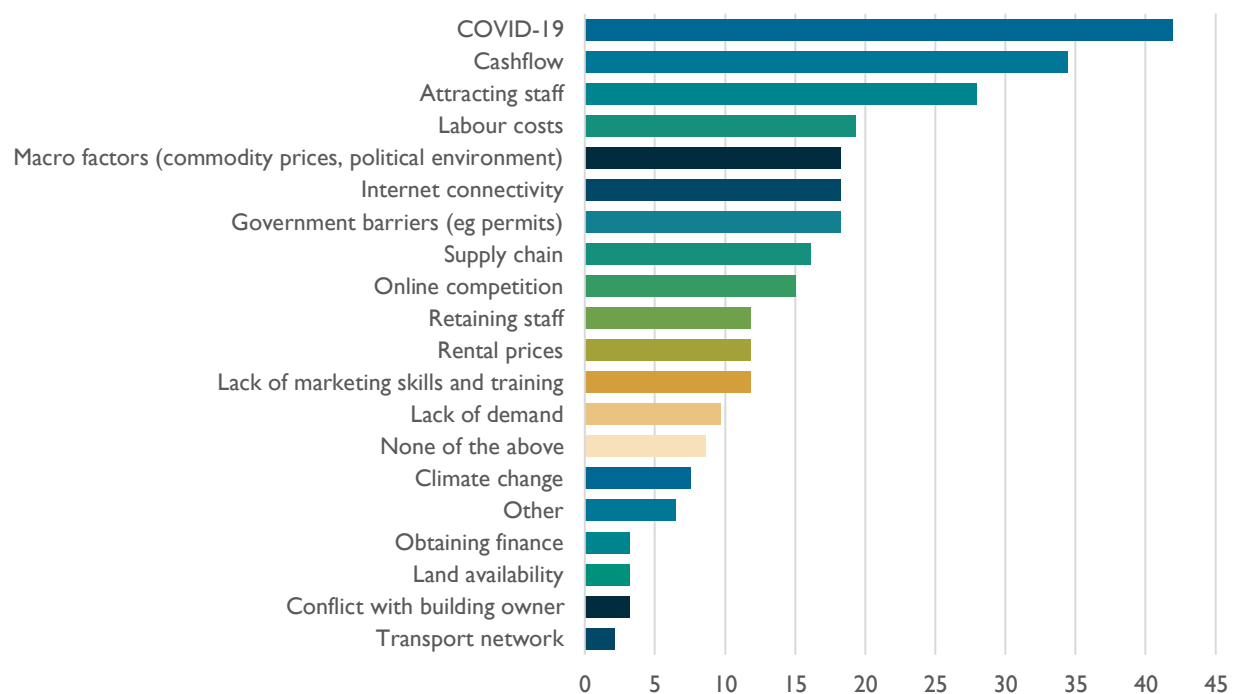
Business challenges and outlook

Covid-19 is the key challenge businesses are facing, with cashflow and attracting staff the next top issues. This has changed since the 2020 survey where labour costs, local economic conditions and lack of marketing skills were the key challenges.

Covid-19 continued to have impacts for businesses during this year's Omicron outbreak this summer with staff shortages due to isolation or illness and reduced patronage being significant challenges. Other impacts included limitations caused by capacity limits, extra cleaning requirements, vaccination regulations, and changes to refund policies.

Despite these challenges, respondents feel optimistic, 50% believe our local economy will improve in next 12 months, 46% are looking to expand business in next 12 months and 40% are looking to increase their staff numbers.

What are the key challenges you face in your business?

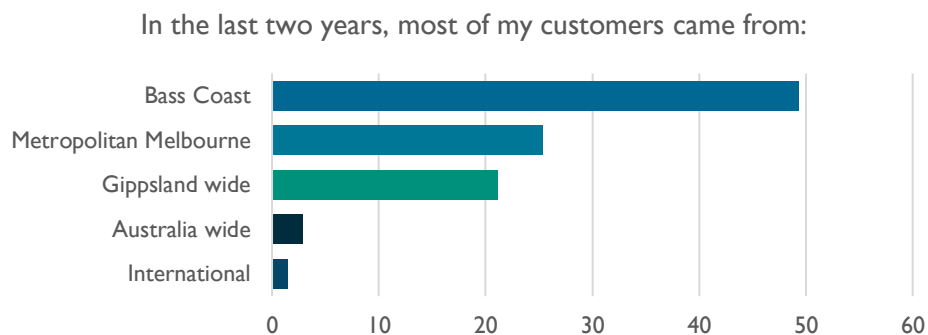


Sales and Marketing

Word of mouth, organic social media posts, business websites and signage are the most common forms of marketing. Word of mouth, Instagram, signage and third-party websites like Booking.com were listed as the most successful marketing channels.

Most sales transactions are taking place in person, 64 respondents reported that less than 20% of their sales took place online while only nine sold more than 80% of their stock online.

The key customer base continues to be Bass Coast with an increase of 3% from 2020. Metropolitan Melbourne has overtaken Gippsland as the second largest customer base for Bass Coast businesses. Respondents are primarily conducting business direct to customers (86%), followed by with other businesses (13%) and only a few are working with government (1%). Businesses primarily conduct business within Australia, with 4% currently exporting and 3% interested in exploring export. The countries listed for export included Netherlands, Switzerland, New Zealand, USA, Japan, and Germany.



Almost half of respondents (48%) are members of a local business or industry association. This included a mix of local business associations, tourism boards and industry specific networks.

Reasons for not choosing to join include:

- Lack of time
- Don't see the value or relevance
- Lack of awareness of what is available or how to join
- Feeling that some business associations are tired
- Too expensive following pandemic
- Belief that it is only for tourism industry
- Inability to join online

Economic Development Priorities

Marketing (including digital, social media and general marketing) was reported as the top learning opportunity for Bass Coast Businesses. Grant writing, business planning and improving energy efficiency were also key learning areas.

This information will be used to plan the 2022-23 business development and training calendar.

Respondents were asked to rank six economic development priorities for Council to see what was most important to them. All six were seen as important and ranked above 3/5 in the following order:

1. Developing Infrastructure and services (3.90)
2. Supporting economic recovery (3.89)
3. Growing visitor economy (3.67)
4. Attracting new business and investment (3.61)
5. Workforce development (3.46)
6. Business networking (3.32)

Programs and projects were suggested when asked for further comments including tighter regulation for short stay accommodation, climate change adaptation, reduced focus on peak holidays, increase skilled workforce, address the housing crisis for marginalised communities and improving internet connectivity.

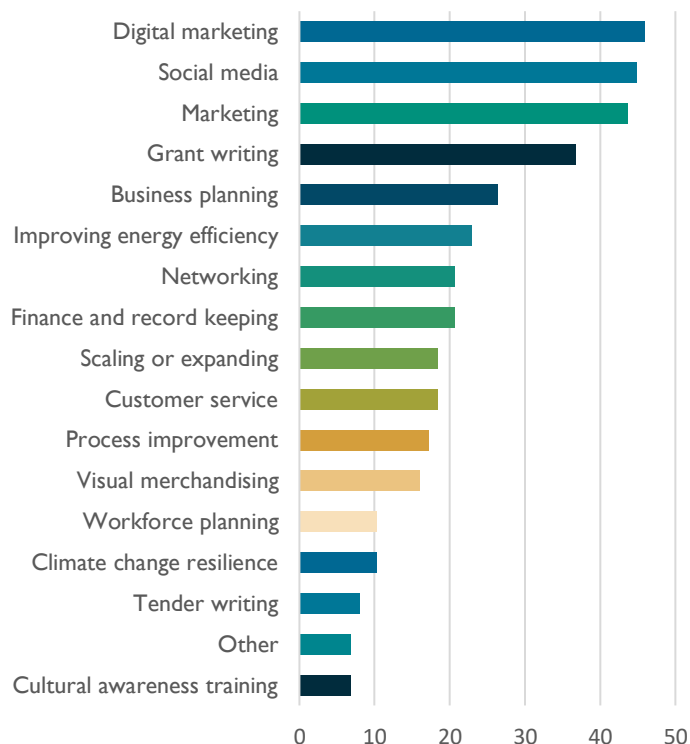
Business Support

One third of respondents had engaged with Bass Coast prior to completing this survey and 20% did not know that Council had a business support team. We see this as an opportunity for outreach and will connect directly with the businesses that asked to be contacted by Council for support (24 contact requests).

Businesses had the opportunity to add any further comments to their submission. Some of the key themes identified were:

- Support for small business
- Need for enhanced digital connectivity
- Short-stay accommodation providers and challenges associated with them

Please select the learning opportunities that would be beneficial to your business and employees.



- Challenge of keeping services up to growing population
- Need to build in climate adaptation for business
- Challenges with current housing supply
- Opportunity for culture development
- Key projects to be completed

Next steps

Development Area	Action	Channel	Expected completion
Business and Industry Engagement	Contact businesses that requested contact from business support team in business survey.	As requested in survey (visit, phone, email)	July 2022
Training and Development	Incorporate learning opportunities (marketing, grant writing, cashflow, business planning and improving energy efficiency) into the annual business support development and training calendar.	Industry development calendar	August 2022
Business Operations	Investigate opportunities to support staff recruitment and retention across all industries. Particularly focusing on summer recruitment challenges.	To be defined	November 2022
Business and Industry Engagement	Investigate ways to engage with construction industry.	Industry events, business and industry associations	April 2023
Business and Industry Engagement	Continue to develop relationships with Chisholm TAFE, Country Universities Centre and Federation University to increase engagement with education and training sector.	Industry events, direct outreach	April 2023
Economic Development Framework	Consider survey results in development of Councils Economic Development Framework.	Economic Development Framework	TBC
Training and Development	Promote workshops, grants, share tools and templates and link businesses to mentoring and local programs.	Newsletters, social media, direct contact	Ongoing
Business and Industry Engagement	Promote Council programs that relate to industry concerns (i.e. action on climate change, changes	Newsletter, social media	Ongoing

	to Local Law regarding short stay accommodation).		
Business and Industry Engagement	Engage with local businesses to increase their knowledge of business support services.	Vacancy mapping, business visits, attending and running networking events	Ongoing