Report on the 2021 Mary Valley Survey on Local Services

Mary Valley Chamber of Commerce

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2 INTRODUCTION

The Mary Valley Chamber of Commerce supports and promotes the Mary Valley business community. In mid-2021, the Chamber conducted a survey of Mary Valley residents to gather opinions on service provided by local businesses. The intent of the survey was to provide feedback to local business on how to improve the quality and types of services provided, how to attract local business, and to guide the development of new businesses.

3 METHODOLOGY

An online survey was conducted, using volunteer convenience sampling to target residence of the Mary Valley. Recruitment was completed via Facebook to various local groups and pages as well as posters in venues in the larger towns of the Mary Valley (Imbil, Kandanga & Amamoor).

The survey included both quantitative and qualitative questions. In the quantitative measures, respondents were asked to indicate whether they accesses 40 different service types (in the Mary Valley, outside the Mary Valley, both, or not required). In the qualitative section, the 40 services types were collapsed to 9 industry clusters. Respondents were asked to indicate for each cluster "What would make you more likely to use [industry] in the Mary Valley?" Participants were also asked to identify services that they can't currently access in the Valley but would like to, and to provide one piece of general advice to businesses of the Mary Valley.

Quantitative data was analysed descriptively. Given the semantic nature of the data, qualitative data was analysed using qualitative content analysis.

4 RESULTS

Seventy-three (73) respondents completed all quantitative measures. Based on an estimated population of 7,104, power calculations indicate that the survey achieved a 90% confidence interval and ±10% margin of error. There were 63 complete qualitative responses.

4.1 Everyday living requirements (e.g., groceries, butcher, baker, bottle shop, and/or petrol)

4.1.1 Quantitative data

Sector	% in the Mary Valley	% Both	% Outside the Mary Valley	% Not needed
Bottle shops	19%	61%	11%	8%
Butcher	28%	53%	15%	4%
Groceries	5%	77%	16%	1%
Petrol	26%	56%	18%	0%
Baker	37%	38%	22%	3%

4.1.2 Qualitative data

The predominant feedback was that prices were too high (36 respondents) especially for groceries. Three (3) respondents suggested that a local loyalty / discount card would be well received. Respondents also wanted greater variety (24 respondents), with one participant noting that an IGA would be appropriate while one participant vehemently believed a major chain (e.g., Woolworths, Coles) was not appropriate for the region. One person wanted a major service station. Six (6) participants were looking for more availability, and 6 wanted longer opening hours. Customer service (3 respondents) and local produce (3) were also highly valued. Other feedback included wanting the convenience of picking up everything at one place (2), more health foods (2), gluten free (1), home delivery (1), closer location (1), more organic options (1), and improved presentation (1).

4.2 Retail supplies (e.g., retail, computer/IT)

4.2.1 Quantitative data

Sector	% in the Mary Valley	% Both	% Outside the Mary Valley	% Not needed
IT and computer services	13%	7%	39%	42%
Retail shops (e.g., clothing, shoe, toy, gift, book stores)	3%	42%	56%	0%

4.2.2 Qualitative data

Respondents stated that they would be more likely to access local retail if there was greater availability (24 respondents), variety of goods (17 respondents) and more competitive prices (15 respondents). Three (3) participants noted that there was not enough advertising of current retail options, as well as one participants wanting on “outdoor store” despite an outdoor store already existing. Other responses including longer opening hours (2), better customer service (1), larger shops (1), locally-made goods (1) and physical shopfronts (1).

4.3 BUILDING, GARDEN, AND RURAL SUPPLIES (E.G., HARDWARE, BUILDING, GARDEN, NURSERY, PRODUCE, LIVESTOCK, AND/OR PET)

4.3.1 Quantitative data

Sector	% in the Mary Valley	% Both	% Outside the Mary Valley	% Not needed
Produce, livestock and/or pet supplies	27%	41%	15%	16%
Hardware and building supplies	16%	63%	18%	3%
Garden centre/nursery	18%	51%	25%	6%

4.3.2 Qualitative data

Feedback in this category was primarily around wanting more competitive pricing (19 respondents) and greater variety / choice / range of products (19 responses). Participants also wanted more availability of these services (9), longer opening hours (5), and closer locations (1). One particular issue was wanting products to be more consistently in stock (4 respondents). Other suggestions including free or cheap delivery (1), listing prices on products (1), options for online purchasing (1), improved customer service (1), and greater reliability (1).

4.4 Trade and maintenance services (e.g., builder, plumber, electrician, handyman, mechanic, pest control, gardeners, car wash)

4.4.1 Quantitative data

Sector	% in the Mary Valley	% Both	% Outside the Mary Valley	% Not needed
Trades (e.g., plumber, electrician, handyman)	60%	24%	13%	4%
Builders	34%	13%	23%	31%
Pest control	27%	4%	32%	37%
Car wash	10%	8%	36%	47%
Mechanic	30%	27%	38%	4%

4.4.2 Qualitative data

Respondents noted a lack of availability of many of these providers in the region (16 responses). While price was somewhat of an issue (8 responses), this was less notable than in other industry clusters. Standout issues that could be addressed to attract customers to local businesses include customer service more broadly (4 responses), and specifically answering the phone or calling back (5 responses), reliability (i.e., turning up when they say they will) (4 responses) and prompt service (1). This was reflected in respondents wanting more competition between local providers (2 respondents). Other factors considered included advertising (1), less excessive travelling fees (1), more highly qualified persons (1), quality of work (1) and materials (1), reputation (1) and word of mouth (1), and using small business (1).

4.5 Financial, legal, and business services (e.g., bank, financial advisor, accountant, marketing, lawyer, real estate, celebrant)

4.5.1 Quantitative data

Sector	% in the Mary Valley	% Both	% Outside the Mary Valley	% Not needed
Real estate	28%	8%	8%	55%
Celebrant (e.g., marriage, funeral)	4%	6%	10%	80%
Marketing	6%	13%	17%	64%
Financial services (e.g., accountant, financial planners)	10%	7%	60%	24%
Lawyers	4%	3%	61%	32%
Banks	12%	15%	66%	7%

4.5.2 Qualitative data

Financial, legal and business services was an area where respondents felt there was a significant lack of availability (19 responses), especially of banks, with one participant wanting a local ATM. Two participant mentioned a lack of knowledge of these services, suggesting a need for advertising. There were a number of participants who stated that they wouldn't use local services as they had a long-trusted professional outside of the valley. This element of trust in this industry cluster is reflected in other responses such as wanting services with a good reputation (3), more choice of providers (3), personally recommended (1), and maintaining privacy in a small town (1). Other responses included more competitive pricing (2), better customer service (2), reliability (1), shop frontage (1), qualifications (1), and longer opening hours (1).

4.6 HEALTH SERVICES (E.G., GENERAL PRACTITIONER, PSYCHOLOGY, ALLIED HEALTH, PHARMACY, NATURAL THERAPIES, VETERINARIAN)

4.6.1 Quantitative data

Sector	% in the Mary Valley	% Both	% Outside the Mary Valley	% Not needed
Natural therapies (e.g., massage)	18%	24%	22%	36%
Pharmacies	25%	47%	27%	1%
Allied health services (e.g., physiotherapy, occ therapy)	14%	28%	28%	30%
General practitioner	43%	19%	35%	3%
Psychology or other mental health services	10%	1%	36%	53%
Veterinarian	41%	6%	36%	17%

4.6.2 Qualitative data

Participants noted predominantly a lack of services in the valley (22 responses). There were some participants who weren't aware of what was available or wanted clearer advertising regarding availability, services, and prices (3). Competitive pricing was also a consideration (5). There was a desire for improved opening (4), including longer opening hours for pharmacy services, and after hours and weekend medical services. Waiting times to access services was an issue for some respondents (4). Participants stated that they would choose to use local services based on reputation (3), having established practitioners who were willing to stay in the region (2), consistency of care (1), reliability (2), quality (1), professionalism (1), and more highly qualified providers (1). Two (2) participants wanted to be able to access natural therapies. Participants wanted greater variety and choice between providers (2) and locations closer to them (1).

4.7 EDUCATION SERVICES (E.G., SCHOOLS, UNIVERSITIES, DAYCARE)

4.7.1 Quantitative data

Sector	% in the Mary Valley	% Both	% Outside the Mary Valley	% Not needed
Daycare	21%	0%	7%	73%
Schools	18%	4%	16%	62%
Universities	0%	3%	25%	72%

4.7.2 Qualitative data

Respondents noted a lack of availability of these services in the region (2), especially lack of university or higher education providers (4). One suggested night classes. Two (2) participants noted a lack of choice, primarily of daycare with the perception that there was only one provider in the valley. With regards to schooling, participants wanted higher standards (2), more offerings of subjects and years (2), coordination or collapsing in to one larger school (1), community spirit (1), and closer locations (1). Other considerations were price (1) and quality (1).

4.8 Food and entertainment services (e.g., restaurants, cafes, pubs, clubs, sports, hobbies, shows, concerts)

4.8.1 Quantitative data

Sector	% in the Mary Valley	% Both	% Outside the Mary Valley	% Not needed
Cafes	12%	78%	7%	3%
Pubs or clubs	21%	58%	10%	12%
Hobbies (e.g., choir, writers' groups, yoga)	25%	16%	15%	44%
Restaurants	5%	62%	23%	10%
Sports (e.g., gyms, pools)	14%	17%	24%	46%
Entertainment (e.g., movies, concerts, shows, theatre)	4%	39%	39%	18%

4.8.2 Qualitative data

The predominant feedback in this industry cluster was wanting more variety (14), options (5) and availability (10). Participants often noted that the entertainment opportunities were limited and that they wanted access to nice restaurants that provide alternatives to pub-food. Interesting vegan (1) and vegetarian (1) options were wanted. Family-friendly was also desired (2). Considerations of specific venues including quality (7), price (4), presentation (3), customer service (2), hygiene (1), COVID-19 safeness (1), and suitable venues (1). Opening hours of food venues was also a consideration (2) and participants wanted more hobby options on weeknights and weekends (2). One (1) participant mentioned that a courtesy bus would be useful.

4.9 Personal services (e.g., beauty, hairdressing, barber, cleaner, ironing, dry cleaning, florist)

4.9.1 Quantitative data

Sector	% in the Mary Valley	% Both	% Outside the Mary Valley	% Not needed
Cleaning (e.g., home, ironing, dry cleaning)	18%	3%	7%	72%
Gardeners and landscaping	26%	8%	14%	51%
Florist	15%	14%	21%	49%
Hairdresser / barber and beauty	37%	21%	35%	7%

4.9.2 Qualitative data

Availability (10) and competitive pricing (8) were two key considerations for personal services within the valley. Other considerations included better customer service (3), more variety (3), advertising these services (2), longer opening hours (2), quality (2), reputation (2), competence (1), having a physical shopfront that was not a house (1), and trust in hairdressers (1).

4.10 Desired services

Toward the end of the survey, participant were asked to indicate what services they would like to be able to access in the Mary Valley that they currently can't. Responses that were received from more than one respondent included;

1. Food suppliers (14 responses) that stocked health / or whole foods (4), fresh produce (4), local produce (2), organic foods (2), and deli goods (4). This was described as like a 'Farmer & Sun' (i.e., an existing outlet in Gympie) or an 'IGA'.
2. A good restaurant (7 responses), especially a Thai (3) or Chinese (2) restaurant.
3. Increased availability / opening hours (5 responses), especially coffee after 3 or 4pm.
4. Mid-range clothing stores (4 responses) including kids (1) and County & Western (1) options.
5. Gym or fitness centre. The Imbil Community & Sports Club was suggested as a venue.
6. Quality fabric store (2).

4.11 Overall feedback

Participants were asked "what is one piece of advice that you'd like to give to make Mary Valley business better. The following responses were received.

Response	**Frequency**
Better customer service	16
Lower prices (esp. groceries)	8
Better marketing (social media, websites, menus / product lists)	6
Longer / flexible hours	5
Maintain customer service	4
Presentation / cleanliness	3
Quality	3
Faster response	3
Better variety	3
Follow through	2
COVID compliance	1
Join the Chamber	1
No dogs in cafes / restaurants	1
Original	1
Stock availability	1
Understanding your customers' needs	1
Up front pricing	1
Use local food in menus	1

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the survey the following recommendations are made.

5.1 ATTRACT DESIRED BUSINESSES TO THE MARY VALLEY

While participants often accessed businesses outside of the valley due to a lack of availability in the valley, they were realistic that the population of the region was not large enough to support a complete variety of services. This was reflected in the realistic and narrow list of service that people desired (section 3.10).

It is recommended that persons looking to establish businesses in the Mary Valley consider respondent feedback, especially need for a new style of grocery / food outlet ('Farmer & Sun' or "IGA' style), family-friendly restaurant with a non-pub menu (e.g., Thai, Chinese) and quality vegan or vegetarian options, a café open after 4pm, and a gym or fitness centre. There may be synergy for 2 or more of these to be established together (e.g., gym/café, food outlet/café).

5.2 CONSIDER PRICING

Pricing was a consistent consideration across industries. While it was typically not the primary consideration, pricing is important for Mary Valley residents. This reflects that the Gympie region, of which much of the Mary Valley is within, has a lower than average Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA), including being in the 3rd decile for socioeconomic advantage, 5th decile for economic resources, and 2nd decile for education and occupation.

While pricing is often dictated by the existing business model, there may be opportunities for Mary Valley businesses to explore improved pricing options. For example, this may be through economies of scale (e.g., having local shopfronts as well as online offerings to expand customer base), establish more efficient production chains for goods and services with local partnerships, or offering local discount cards that differentiate local and visitor pricings.

5.3 IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE

Customer service was that most notable feedback in the general question and consistent across industry clusters. While some examples of excellent customer service were provided (e.g., Kandanga Farm Store, Mary Valley Traders), most of the feedback encouraged improved customer service. While customer service is the responsibility of individual businesses, the Mary Valley Chamber of Commerce may be able to upskill business owners in how to facilitate good customer service.

5.4 ENCOURAGE COLLABORATION BETWEEN BUSINESSES IN INDUSTRY CLUSTERS

There were notable differences in local business utilisation and qualitative feedback between industry clusters. For example, with trades there were notable issues with responsiveness (e.g., answering phone calls or calling back). Armed with this feedback, it may be useful for businesses within these industry clusters to collaborate to identify solutions. Other members of the Mary Valley Chamber of Commerce may also be able to assist with strategic planning.

6 CONTACT

For queries regard this survey please contact Kieran Broome at vicepresident@mvcoc.com.au