

THE CONTEMPORARY GROWTH OF MUSLIMS IN REGIONAL VICTORIA

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Abstract: This article examines the growth of Muslims in regional Victoria, measured by numbers of Muslims, registered Muslim community organisations, and cities and towns that provide mosques, prayer facilities and services. There is a dearth of research on Muslims in Australia’s regional areas, even though the first mosque in Victoria was established in the regional town of Shepparton in 1960. This article draws data from several sources, including the ABS census, organisational registries and newspapers.

Twenty Victorian Local Government Areas (LGAs) have a mosque, *musalla* or registered Muslim organisation. Within these LGAs, 27 registered Muslim organisations provide prayer facilities and/or services. The Muslim population has increased each census year from 2006 to 2021 for each LGA. Victoria has 16 mosques, with five opening from 2021. Currently, six organisations are collecting funds to build mosques. All measures examined in this article point to a significant increase of Muslims in regional Victoria, and several important areas of further research have been suggested.

Keywords: *Regional Victoria, Muslims, mosques, musallas, Local Government Areas (LGAs), growth*

INTRODUCTION

This article examines the growth of Muslims in regional Victoria. This growth is measured in terms of the numbers of Muslims living in regional Victoria, registered Muslim community organisations, and cities and towns that provide mosques and prayer facilities. While much has been written about the history and settlement of Muslims in Australia,¹ this research is mostly city-centric, focusing on the Melbourne and Sydney metropolitan areas.² Consequently, there is a dearth of research that centres on Muslims in Australia’s regional areas.

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¹ Salih Yucel and Abu Bakr Sirajuddin Cook, “The History of Islam in Australia: Editors’ Introduction,” *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no. 3 (2018); Kevin Dunn, “Islam in Sydney: Contesting the Discourse of Absence,” *Australian Geographer* 35, no. 3 (2004).

² See, for example, James Forrest et al., “Are Australia’s Suburbs Swamped by Asians and Muslims? Countering Political Claims with Data,” *Australian Geographer* 48, no. 4 (2017); Karien Dekker, “Who is

According to the 2021 ABS census, the population of Muslims living in Victoria (4.1%) is higher than Australia's average (3.2%).³ Muslims have lived and worked in regional Victoria since the early 20th century. In a history of Islam in Australia, Bilal Cleland reported that while the cities of Melbourne and Sydney attracted the most settlement, some 120 Muslim hawkers' licences "...were issued in 1898 by magistrates in the Victorian centres of Ballarat, Bendigo, Echuca, Geelong, Shepparton, Bairnsdale and St Arnaud."⁴ While it is difficult to gauge the extent of these early Muslims' religiosity, in terms of their commitment to Islamic practice and the significance of religion in their lives,⁵ some evidence is provided in historical newspapers that shows Muslims getting together for celebrations and Eid prayers.

In 1901, for example, the *Argus* reported from Bendigo that:

A celebration of the last day of the great feast of Ramadan by the Mohammedans in the city was started in Rosalind Park about 10 o'clock.⁶

The *Argus* also reported another celebration in 1907:

The local Mohammedans celebrated their new year by holding a service in Rosalind Park to-day, in the presence of an interested crowd of spectators. About 20 men took part, the prayers being recited by one of their priests. After the service the Mohammedans, who were gaily dressed in Oriental costume, mounted a drag and were driven through the principal streets. At night they further celebrated the occasion by holding a feast.⁷

Finally, in 1914, a local Shepparton newspaper reported that:

A picturesque spectacle was witnessed near the banks of Goulburn River, at Shepparton, on Friday last, when Moslems engaged in hawking goods about the district assembled to celebrate a Moslem festival. The men were all habited in white, and seated on carpets spread on the ground.⁸

While the focus of this research relates to the growth of the Muslim community in the past two decades, the next part of the article briefly examines the settlement of Muslims in Australia from the 1950s. In terms of Victoria, Muslims have made significant contributions to regional towns from the 1920s. Significantly, the first mosque in Victoria was established in the regional town of Shepparton in 1960, some nine years before Melbourne's first mosque was opened in 1969.⁹

Islamophobic and Why? Explanations of Islamophobia in Two Suburbs with High Muslim Concentrations in Melbourne's North," *Australian Geographer* 51, no. 4 (2020); Halim Rane et al., "Islam in Australia: A National Survey of Muslim Australian Citizens and Permanent Residents," *Religions* 11, no. 8 (2020).

³ See "Population: Census," ABS, June 28, 2022, accessed May 22, 2025, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/population-census/latest-release>.

⁴ Bilal Cleland, *Muslims in Australia: A Brief History (Excerpts)* (Islamic Council of Victoria, 2002).

⁵ Rosalie Atie et al., "Religiosity, Attitudes on Diversity and Belonging among Ordinary Australian Muslims," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2017).

⁶ "A Mohammedan Tribute," *Argus*, January 24, 1901, 7, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/10531343>.

⁷ "Celebration in Bendigo," *Argus*, November 9, 1907, 20.

⁸ "A Moslem Festival," *Yarrowonga Mercury and Southern Riverina Advertiser*, November 3, 1914, 3.

⁹ Cleland, *Muslims in Australia*.

Following this, the article details the method and sources used to collect the data, including that from the ABS census, organisational information and local newspapers. The results are presented in tables, and a section provides a brief overview of the cities and towns in regional Victoria that currently provide a mosque or *musalla* (prayer room or area). The discussion and conclusion section includes some limitations and areas of further research that may be undertaken to examine the religiosity, and ethical, social, political, and theological issues of Muslims living in regional areas.

A BRIEF REVIEW FROM THE 1950S

The number of Muslims in Australia at the end of World War II was small. Between 1947 and 1971, the Muslim population of Australia increased from 2,704 to 22,311.¹⁰ The new wave of post-war migrants into Australia included Turks, Cypriots, Bosnians, and Lebanese, which created a demand for Islamic centres, mosques and schools in capital cities, particularly in Sydney and Melbourne, which were the focus of settlement of Muslim migrants.¹¹ These post-war arrivals, however, encountered “an almost complete absence of Islamic Infrastructure.”¹²

In the 1950s before mosques were built in Melbourne, Friday prayers were held in people’s homes in suburban Carlton, while public halls in Collingwood and Richmond were used for Eid prayers. In 1957, the Islamic Society of Victoria was formed. Muslims who were in Melbourne had to travel to the only mosque in Shepparton for Eid celebrations or *janaza* (funeral) services. “This long distance prompted them to build a mosque in Melbourne.”¹³ The first *masjid* in Melbourne was a house in Carlton, which was purchased in 1961.¹⁴

Like Melbourne, in the 1950s, small groups of Muslims in Sydney would rent community and town halls for Eid festivals. These people “were able to purchase residential properties for their community to use for congregational prayer and meetings.”¹⁵ The concentration of Muslim communities in the cities led to the development of many mosques and Islamic schools in the 1970s and 1980s, which meant that Muslims had “begun to take their place in Australian society.”¹⁶

In the 30 years after 1971, there was a more than 10-fold increase in the number of Australian Muslims. Between 1991 and 1996 alone, the number of Muslims grew 36% to

¹⁰ Rane et al., “Islam in Australia”; Bilal Cleland, *The Muslims in Australia: A Brief History* (Islamic Human Rights Commission, 2000), accessed July 25, 2024, <https://www.ihrc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2000/07/A-History-of-the-Muslims-in-Australia.pdf>.

¹¹ Abdul Malik Mirza and Abdel Karim Halabi, “Islamic Banking in Australia: Challenges and Opportunities,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 23, no. 2 (2003); Abdul Malik Mirza and Abdel Karim Halabi, “Islamic Banking and Australian Muslim Community,” *Accounting, Commerce & Finance: The Islamic Perspective Journal*, 6 no. 1 & 2 (2002); Dunn, “Islam in Sydney.”

¹² Dzavid Haveric, “Muslim Minorities in Victoria: Building Communities and Interfaith Relations from the 1950s to the 1980s,” *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 2, no.3 (2017): 27.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁴ Cleland, *The Muslims in Australia*.

¹⁵ Dunn, “Islam in Sydney,” 338.

¹⁶ Bilal Cleland, *A History of Islam in Australia*, Mission Islam, n.d., accessed July 25, 2024, <https://www.missionislam.com/knowledge/islamhistoryaus.htm>.

200,900.¹⁷ This “migration-led growth in Islam has been a rapid and recent phenomenon. This migration, and an expanding second generation, culminated in an urgent need for the building of mosques and Islamic schools in Australia during the 1980s and 1990s.”¹⁸

The result of this early migration of Muslims into urban areas is noticeable in recent ABS statistics. Today, the cities of Melbourne and Sydney are where the majority of Muslims have settled. In 2011, Sydney had four neighbourhood areas where Muslims comprised over 70% of the population, while Melbourne had one.¹⁹ The focus of most research on Muslims in Australia, therefore, is city-centric, because of this high concentration of Muslims in some suburbs (such as Lakemba in Sydney and Broadmeadows in Melbourne),²⁰ and “Muslims are widely scattered through Australia’s urban fabric.”²¹ As further evidence of research on Muslims from urban areas, in a national survey on Islam in Australia, qualitative responses of Muslim Australian citizens and permanent residents were drawn from “Brisbane, Logan, Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Adelaide, and Perth.”²²

While many early Muslims in regional Victoria – such as those living in Colac and Bendigo – in the 1980s relocated to Melbourne due to little or “no Muslim community in the area,”²³ others remained and played a foundational role in shaping the Muslim presence across country Victoria. The Albanian community, for instance, began arriving in Shepparton in the 1920s to work in the region’s growing agricultural sector. Over time, they established permanent roots and went on to build Victoria’s first mosque, a landmark that continues to be a religious, cultural, and social hub for the region. Similarly, Lebanese families who settled in the state’s north-east as early as the 1950s chose to remain in rural towns rather than move to Melbourne, contributing to a small yet enduring Muslim population that maintained its traditions while integrating into local communities.²⁴ Collectively, these early groups and others laid important foundations for today’s diverse and expanding Muslim communities throughout regional Victoria.

METHOD

This article draws on ABS census data and qualitative secondary data obtained from newspapers to examine the growth of Muslims in regional Victoria from 2006 to 2021.²⁵

¹⁷ Ashraf Kazi and Abdel Karim Halabi, “The Influence of Quran and Islamic Financial Transactions and Banking,” *Arab Law Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (2006).

¹⁸ Dunn, “Islam in Sydney,” 340.

¹⁹ Forrest et al., “Are Australia’s Suburbs Swamped?”

²⁰ Dekker, “Who is Islamophobic and Why?”

²¹ Forrest et al., “Are Australia’s Suburbs Swamped,” 469.

²² Rane et al., “Islam in Australia,” 5.

²³ Haveric, “Muslim Minorities,” 21.

²⁴ Dzavid Haveric, “Ahmed & Houda Halabi, Lebanese Migrants, 1951 & 1958,” Museums Victoria Collections, 2025, accessed November 10, 2025, <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/17874>.

²⁵ This data is the most up-to-date and available from <https://www.abs.gov.au/census>.

Newspapers have been successfully used when researching a range of issues in Islam and are a verifiable data source reflecting contemporary social, cultural, and political perspectives.²⁶

The article also lists the registered regional Muslim organisations that have established a mosque or prayer facilities for their local communities. These can be in a mosque (also called a *masjid*) or *musalla*. In terms of distinction, a mosque is a formally established and consecrated permanent house of worship that carries a recognised legal and religious status within Islamic jurisprudence. It typically includes permanent infrastructure such as a prayer hall, ablution facilities, and architectural elements that denote its role as a central site of communal religious life.²⁷ By contrast, a *musalla* is “a place where prayer is performed,”²⁸ and commonly established in multipurpose venues such as community centres, rented halls or dedicated rooms within workplaces. *Musallas* are often early-stage prayer facilities before the establishment of permanent mosques.

Data on registered regional Muslim organisations was obtained from several sources, including the organisations’ websites, the Victorian Consumer Affairs registry,²⁹ Australian Business Number (ABN) searches,³⁰ the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission (ACNC),³¹ and the Australian Securities and Investment Council (ASIC).³² The information is analysed based on Local Government Areas (LGAs), then cities and towns.

ANALYSIS

ABS Census Data

According to the 2021 ABS census data, Australia’s population is 25,422,788, of whom 3.2% (813,392) report as Muslims. In Victoria, the total population is 6,503,491, of whom 4.1% (273,028) are Muslims.³³

In terms of administrative divisions, LGAs are responsible for managing local services and planning for regional communities. Victoria has 79 LGAs, of which 48 are regional. Of these 48 LGAs, 20 have a mosque, *musalla* or local registered Muslim organisation. Table 1 details

²⁶ Jacqui Ewart et al., “News Media Coverage of Islam and Muslims in Australia: An Opinion Survey among Australian Muslims,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 37, no. 2 (2017); Nahid Kabir, “Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Australian Media, 2001–2005,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 26, no. 3 (2006); Anum Sikandar, “Analysing ‘Jihad’ Rhetoric in the Australian Context,” *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 9, no. 1 (2024); Salma Umber and Muhammad Junaid Ghauri, “Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Australian Newspapers: Exploring the Predominant Discourses,” *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 10, no. 2 (2020); Kevin Dunn, “Representations of Islam in the Politics of Mosque Development in Sydney,” *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 92, no. 3 (2001).

²⁷ Andrew Petersen, *Dictionary of Islamic Architecture* (Routledge, 2002).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁹ See <https://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/>.

³⁰ See <https://abr.business.gov.au/>.

³¹ See <https://www.acnc.gov.au/>.

³² See <https://www.asic.gov.au/>.

³³ See ABS, “Population: Census.”

the number of Muslims who reside in these 20 LGAs from 2006–2021 according to the ABS census data.

Table 1: Number of Muslims in 20 Victorian LGAs 2006–2021

LGA	2021	2016	2011	2006
Ararat	79	50	38	20
Ballarat	765	425	336	133
Baw Baw	192	83	61	35
Bass Coast	72	45	54	24
Benalla	56	29	13	21
Colac Otway	91	117	44	17
East Gippsland	114	40	34	40
Greater Bendigo	759	460	200	136
Greater Geelong	4,020	2,529	1,579	1,069
Greater Shepparton	4,350	3,522	2,977	2,190
Horsham	76	77	82	52
Latrobe	581	323	275	224
Mildura	1,171	944	912	831
Mitchell	801	367	216	131
Moira	216	187	275	241
Southern Grampians	31	14	15	8
Swan Hill	635	328	188	135
Wangaratta	72	60	38	66
Warrnambool	118	86	64	67
Wodonga	161	129	81	81
Total (all of Victoria)	273,028	197,029	152,779	109,369

Source: 2006–2021 ABS census TableBuilder
(<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/tablebuilder>)

Table 1 shows the highest number of Muslims in regional Victoria's LGAs is found in Greater Shepparton, followed by Greater Geelong. The smallest number is found in the Southern Grampians. Across all 20 LGAs (except for Moira), the population of Muslims between 2006 and 2021 has grown. With only a few exceptions (e.g. Wangaratta, Benalla and Moira in 2011; and Horsham and Bass Coast in 2016), all LGAs have increased during the census years.³⁴ The population of Muslims in 13 of these LGAs has at least doubled over the period (Ararat, Ballarat, Baw Baw, Bass Coast, Benalla, Colac Otway, East Gippsland, Greater

³⁴ The overall number of Muslims in Moira fell from 2006 to 2021.

Bendigo, Greater Geelong, Latrobe; Mitchell, Southern Grampians and Swan Hill).³⁵ The total population of Muslims in all Victoria rose from 109,369 in 2006 to 273,028 in 2021.

Registered Islamic Organisations offering Prayer Facilities and Services

Table 2 lists the registered Islamic/Muslim organisations offering prayer facilities and services in regional Victoria, by city or town within the LGA, and the year when these organisations were registered.³⁶

Table 2: Registered Islamic/Muslim organisations offering prayer facilities and services in regional Victoria, by town within the LGA

City/town	Organisation	LGA	Year registered
Ararat	Ararat Islamic Welfare Association	Ararat	2009
Ballarat	Islamic Society of Ballarat Inc	Ballarat	2009
Warragul	Baw Baw Islamic Network Inc	Baw Baw	2024
Benalla	Benalla Multicultural Association Inc	Benalla	2024
Colac	Colac Otway Muslim Community Inc	Colac Otway	2018
Bairnsdale	Bairnsdale Sadaqah Foundation Inc	East Gippsland	2024
Bendigo	Bendigo Islamic Association Inc	Greater Bendigo	2010
Geelong	Islamic Society of Geelong Inc	Greater Geelong	2001
Geelong	Geelong Islamic Community Centre Inc	Greater Geelong	2020
Shepparton	Albanian Moslem Society Shepparton Inc	Greater Shepparton	1999
Shepparton	Nabi Akram Mosque Inc	Greater Shepparton	2010
Shepparton	Imam Kazim Centre Mosque Inc	Greater Shepparton	2015
Mooroopna	Goulburn Valley Turkish Islamic & Cultural Society	Greater Shepparton	2002
Horsham	Horsham Islamic Welfare Association Inc	Horsham	2008
Churchill	United Muslim Sisters of Latrobe Valley Inc	Latrobe	2013
Morwell	Light of Hidayah Organisation Inc	Latrobe	2017
Traralgon	Gippsland Australian Muslim Community Inc	Latrobe	2013
Yallourn North	Islamic Society of Gippsland	Latrobe	Unknown
Mildura	Turkish Islamic Society Mildura Inc	Mildura	2007
Kilmore	Kilmore Islamic and Community Centre	Mitchell	2025
Cobram	Cobram Islamic Association Inc	Moira	2020
Hamilton	Greater Hamilton Islamic Welfare Centre	Southern Grampians	Unknown
Swan Hill	Swan Hill Muslim Association Inc	Swan Hill	2007
Wangaratta	Wangaratta Islamic Cultural and Community Association Inc	Wangaratta	2024

³⁵ Greater Shepparton and Wodonga increased by 99%.

³⁶ The “year registered” indicates the year the organisation was registered with Consumer Affairs Victoria, obtained an ABN, received charity status with the ACNC, or registered with ASIC. For organisations with multiple affiliations, the earliest one is recorded.

City/town	Organisation	LGA	Year registered
Warrnambool	Warrnambool Islamic Society	Warrnambool	2009
Wodonga	Islamic Society of Albury/Wodonga	Wodonga	2012
Wallan	The North United Muslim Association Inc	Mitchell	2020

Of the 27 organisations shown in Table 2, four are from two LGAs – Greater Shepparton and Latrobe. Two organisations are in the Greater Geelong and Mitchell LGA, while all other organisations cover one LGA.

Table 2 also shows that all organisations (except the Albanian Moslem Society Shepparton Inc) were registered from 2001 onwards. Of the remaining, ten were registered in 2001–2010; nine between 2011 and 2020, and five were registered between 2021 and 2025.³⁷

Mosques in Regional Victoria

Table 3 highlights the cities and towns (in alphabetical order) that have mosques in regional Victoria and the years these were opened.

Table 3: Mosques in regional Victoria and year opened

City/town	Year mosque opened
Ararat	2024
Ballarat	2015
Bendigo	2026
Cobram	2022
Geelong (Islamic Society of Geelong Inc)	1993
Horsham	2014
Mildura	2015
Mooroopna	1988
Morwell	2018
Seymour	2019
Shepparton (Albanian Mosque)	1960
Shepparton (Nabi Akram)	2015
Shepparton (Imam Kadhim)	2000
Warragul	2025
Wodonga (Albury/Wodonga)	2021
Yallourn North	1997

³⁷ Searches of all databases from Consumer Affairs Victoria, ABN Lookup, ACNC and ASIC revealed no current record for the Greater Hamilton Islamic Welfare Centre or Islamic Society of Gippsland.

Table 3 shows that regional Victoria has 16 mosques. The first mosque (Shepparton Albanian) was opened in 1960, followed by the Mooroopna mosque in 1988. Since 2015, 10 mosques have opened, with five opening since 2021 (Albury/Wodonga, Cobram, Ararat, Warragul, and Bendigo).

In addition to the established mosques, 13 towns and cities in regional Victoria offer regular prayer in a *musalla*, as shown in Table 4 (in alphabetical order). Table 4 also shows that six of these regional cities and towns are presently working towards establishing a mosque. The organisations in these cities and towns have fully purchased land (and/or buildings), paid a deposit, or are actively raising funds within the community for a permanent mosque.³⁸

Table 4: Musalla facilities in Regional Victoria

City/town offering a <i>musalla</i>	Actively raising mosque funds
Benalla	Yes
Bairnsdale	Yes
Colac	
Geelong (Geelong Islamic Community Centre)	Yes
Hamilton	
Kilmore	Yes
Swan Hill	
Traralgon	
Wallan	Yes
Wangaratta	
Warrnambool	Yes
Wodonga ³⁹	
Wonthaggi	

CITIES AND TOWNS WITH A MOSQUE OR *MUSALLA*

The next section provides a brief overview of the cities and towns in regional Victoria that currently provide a mosque or *musalla*. Populations are provided as per the 2021 census and comprise the LGA, city, or town, as indicated.⁴⁰

Ararat (LGA Population 11,880)

Ararat Mosque held its official opening in December 2024. The mosque had been under construction for several years.⁴¹ Prior to this, the local Muslim community would pray in a

³⁸ The formal LGA council approval for a mosque in these cities and towns is unknown.

³⁹ See more information in the “Wodonga” section.

⁴⁰ Cities and towns are described as a “suburb” by the ABS.

⁴¹ Islamic Council of Victoria, *ICV Annual Report 2019-2020* (Islamic Council of Victoria, 2020), 19; Islamic Council of Victoria, *ICV Annual Report 2021-2022* (Islamic Council of Victoria, 2022), 19–20; Islamic Council of Victoria, *ICV Annual Report 2022-2023* (Islamic Council of Victoria, 2023), 21–23.

“tiny brick building” next to the town’s train station, which was provided by the local council.⁴² The Ararat Islamic Welfare Association Inc was established in 2009.

Ballarat (LGA Population 113,763)

The historical city of Ballarat has had its mosque, called Masjid Abu Bakr Siddiq, since 2015. Land was purchased and council approved its construction in 2014. Before the mosque was opened, Ballarat Muslims celebrated their Friday prayers and holy festivals at the University of Ballarat (now called Federation University) in the prayer room or function rooms.⁴³ The Islamic Society of Ballarat has been formally established since 2009.

Bairnsdale (City Population 7,905)

The Bairnsdale Sadaqah Foundation was established in 2024. It is raising funds to build a mosque because “the local Bairnsdale community has seen an influx of Muslim residents over the last few years” and “an increased demand for a functional place of worship.”⁴⁴ Currently, the community prays in a government-owned space.

Benalla (LGA Population 14,528)

The Benalla Multicultural Association Inc was formed in 2024 and is currently collecting money to build a mosque. It has purchased a commercial residence and is fundraising to pay the balance. It has been supported in its fundraising by many mosques and Islamic organisations from across Victoria.

Bendigo (LGA Population 121,470)

The Bendigo Islamic Association is currently building a mosque and the first section was officially opened in April 2026.⁴⁵ The mosque, which began construction in 2019, will be “a community hub for Bendigo’s growing multicultural population.”⁴⁶ Before this, the community had been using prayer facilities at the Latrobe University Bendigo campus for many years. The Bendigo Mosque project and planning process resulted in several violent demonstrations and a High Court challenge by right-wing groups from 2016.⁴⁷ Protests against the Bendigo

⁴² Margaret Burin, “This is our Islam: Ararat Muslims Reveal what it is like to be a Religious Minority in a Country Town,” *ABC News*, May 7, 2015, accessed May 22, 2024, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-07/this-is-our-islam-ararat-muslim-community/6449580>.

⁴³ Alex Hamer, “Ballarat’s Islamic Mosque Open for All to See,” *The Courier*, April 15, 2016, 1.

⁴⁴ Muslim community Bairnsdale and Surroundings, “Hi, We would really appreciate it if you could share or donate to this GoFundMe campaign.*Bairnsdale Project Mosque*,” Facebook, April 5, 2024, https://www.facebook.com/story.php/?story_fbid=746806370915502&id=100067584385209.

⁴⁵ Adam Carswell, “Mosque Officially opens after Decade-long Wait,” *Bendigo Times*, April 17, 2026, accessed May 5, 2026, <https://timesnewsgroup.com.au/bendigotimes/news/mosque-officially-opens-after-decade-long-wait/>.

⁴⁶ Emily Pavlich, “Bendigo Mosque set to Open 10 Years on from Hostile Protests,” *ABC News*, September 29, 2025, accessed October 7, 2025, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-09-29/mosque-opening-protest-anniversary-bendigo-/105693360>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Mosque also occurred at Bendigo City Council meetings, where local councillors had to be escorted by police.⁴⁸ A countermovement group called “Believe in Bendigo” included local residents who supported the mosque’s construction.⁴⁹

Cobram (Town Population 6,465)

Cobram has been a home for the Muslim community since the late 1990s, then made up mainly of Iraqis Afghan Hazara.⁵⁰ Today, the community largely comprises Malaysian and Indonesian professionals, business owners and those who work in the agricultural sector and their families. The Cobram Islamic Association Inc was established in 2020 and opened Cobram Mosque in 2023.⁵¹ Previous to that, Muslims would pray in a local house and community building.

Colac (Town Population 9,243)

In Colac, the Muslim community currently does not have a mosque, but offers prayers at the Colac Neighbourhood House. The Colac Otway Muslim Community Inc was formed in 2018 and is hopeful of finding a more permanent space for future religious gatherings and celebrations due to a growing population of Muslims.⁵²

Geelong (LGA Population 271,057)

The city of Geelong is the largest regional town in Victoria. The Islamic Society of Geelong Inc is the longest serving Muslim organisation, having been formed in 1991 (ABN registered in 2001). Geelong Mosque is a heritage-listed building that was originally a Uniting Church. The church was decommissioned, sold and has been used as a mosque since 1993. In 2016, a fire destroyed the mosque, and it took two years to rebuild at a cost of \$1 million.⁵³

In 2020, a new Islamic society called the Geelong Islamic Community Centre, offering Jummah (Friday) prayers, educational programs and community events, was formed. This previously operated out of rented facilities, but since 2024 has had a permanent place to offer daily prayers and social functions. It is fundraising to secure a place of worship.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ “Bendigo Councillors Leave Meeting under Police Escort after Anti-Mosque Meeting Erupts,” *ABC News*, September 16, 2015, accessed October 7, 2024, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-16/police-called-in-to-control-public-at-bendigo-council-meeting/6781712>.

⁴⁹ Pavlich, “Bendigo Mosque set to Open.”

⁵⁰ Rachel Woodlock et al., *Social Integration of Muslim Settlers in Cobram* (Centre for Muslim Minorities and Islam Policy Studies, Monash University, 2006).

⁵¹ Owen Sinclair, “Building a Community,” *The Cobram Courier*, February 21, 2025, 3.

⁵² Zachary Cuthbertson, “Muslim Community Hopes for Colac Hub,” *Colac Herald*, April 14, 2024, accessed October 7, 2024, <https://colacherald.com.au/2024/04/muslim-community-hopes-for-colac-hub/>.

⁵³ “Geelong Mosque Destroyed by Suspicious Fire: Islam Not the Target Police Say,” *ABC News*, May 18, 2016, accessed December 22, 2024, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-05-18/geelong-mosque-destroyed-in-suspicious-fire/7423724>; Tamara McDonald, “Geelong Mosque Restored after Deliberately Lit Fire Devastated Building,” *Geelong Advertiser*, March 23, 2018, accessed May 22, 2024, <https://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/news/geelong/geelong-mosque-restored-after-deliberately-lit-fire-devastated-building/news-story/76b12fe8c0a8c4720cc4542b3520102d>.

⁵⁴ Geelong Islamic Community Centre, “Home Page,” accessed August 13, 2025, <https://gicc.org.au/>.

Hamilton (Town Population 10,346)

Hamilton Muslims have a *musalla* at a community centre. The centre offers daily prayers, as well as Jummah. The organisation serving the Muslims is the Greater Hamilton Islamic Welfare Centre.

Horsham (Town Population 10,346)

Horsham Mosque was established in 2014 by the Horsham Islamic Welfare Association Inc.⁵⁵ The mosque is the same house that had been previously used for prayer.⁵⁶ It was noted then by the president that having a mosque would “help to attract some skilled professionals” to the area.⁵⁷ In 2021, the association received a state government infrastructure grant to upgrade the facilities.⁵⁸

Kilmore (Town Population 9,207)

Muslims living around Kilmore under the organisation of the Kilmore Islamic and Community Centre purchased a historic Uniting Church in 2023 in the town’s main street, which it will convert into a mosque. The Turkish community is largely behind the new mosque, which will also be a community centre. Construction is described as a “community driven initiative”⁵⁹ and the group is actively fundraising. In March 2026, a suspicious fire burnt down part of the building.⁶⁰

Mildura (City Population 56,976)

Mildura Mosque was established in 2015 by the Turkish community, which migrated there in the 1970s for employment in the agricultural sector. A prayer room was established in the town in 1984. The Turkish Islamic Society Mildura Inc was formally established in 2007, and today Mildura is home to a growing population of Muslims from Malaysia, Bangladesh and Pakistan.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Lauren Henry, “Mosque Open House,” *The Weekly Advertiser*, October 1, 2014, 1.

⁵⁶ “Planning Underway for Horsham Mosque,” *ABC News*, June 1, 2012, accessed October 5, 2024, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-06-01/planning-underway-for-horsham-mosque/4047318>.

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ “Project Money for Wimmera-Multicultural Organisations,” *The Weekly Advertiser*, January 13, 2021, accessed October 5, 2024, <https://www.theweeklyadvertiser.com.au/articles/project-money-for-wimmera-multicultural-organisations/>.

⁵⁹ Kilmore Islamic and Community Centre, “Profile,” Facebook, accessed September 1, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/KilmoreMosque/>.

⁶⁰ “Police Investigate Suspicious Fire at Heritage-listed Kilmore Church being Converted into a Mosque,” *ABC News*, March 25, 2026, accessed April 25, 2026, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-03-25/suspicious-fire-at-proposed-kilmore-mosque/106494320>.

⁶¹ Tim Clark, “Ramadan Festivities Bring Cultures Together at Regional Victorian Mosque,” *ABC News*, April 14, 2023, accessed July 26, 2024, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-04-14/mosque-diverse-communities-regional-victoria-ramadan/102212898>.

Mooroopna (Town Population 8,312)

Mooroopna is a neighbouring town to Shepparton and home to the Goulburn Valley Turkish Islamic & Cultural Society's mosque. The town became a significant settlement area for the Turkish community in the 1960s and 70s after the Australian federal government negotiated an immigration deal with the Turkish government.⁶² The Turkish community initially used the Albanian Mosque in Shepparton until they began building their own mosque in 1986, which opened in 1988.

Morwell (Town Population 14,389)

Morwell Mosque was opened in 2018, which was largely funded by the Burmese Muslim community, who had moved to the town as refugees.⁶³ The mosque was previously a medical practice, but was extensively renovated in 2017. It is called the "Light of the Hidayah," a Burmese term for guidance. While established by the Burmese community, the mosque is a place of worship and community gathering for Muslims across the Gippsland area, including those from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Morocco, Iraq and Libya.⁶⁴

Seymour (Town Population 6,569)

The mosque in Seymour, called "Masjid Al-Sahabah," was established in 2019. Before its opening, there were several council and VCAT (Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal) disputes dating to 2011. There is no established Islamic organisation in Seymour; rather, the mosque is uniquely run privately. It is described as a beautiful and convenient stopping place for people travelling between Melbourne and Canberra.⁶⁵

Shepparton (LGA Population 68,409)

The city of Shepparton is home to three established mosques. The Albanian mosque, owned by the Shepparton Albanian Moslem Society, which was established in 1955, was the first in the state.⁶⁶ The Albanian community began moving to the Shepparton area for agricultural purposes in the mid-1920s and for years would pray in people's rented homes. The foundation stone for the mosque was laid in 1956, and the mosque was built and in operation by 1960.⁶⁷

Shepparton is also home to Nabi Akram Mosque, also known as the Shepparton Afghani Community Mosque. Construction began in 2013 and it was used as a mosque from 2015. The

⁶² Cleland, *A History of Islam in Australia*.

⁶³ Cher Jimenez, "Mosque Celebrates Peace," *Latrobe Valley Express*, May 8, 2018, accessed May 22, 2025, <https://latrobevalleyexpress.com.au/uncategorized/2018/08/05/mosque-celebrates-peace/>.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Cameron MacGillivray, "Seymour Sign Stoush on Islamic Prayer Room," *The North Central Review*, March 2, 2021, accessed December 22, 2024, <https://ncreview.com.au/2021/03/02/seymour-sign-stoush-on-islamic-prayer-room/>.

⁶⁶ Now called the Albanian Moslem Society Shepparton Inc. The ABN was registered in 1999. See Victorian Heritage Register, "Albanian Mosque Shepparton," Victorian Heritage Database Report, 2022, accessed May 22, 2025, <https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/208862/download-report>.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Afghani community in Shepparton started to develop from around 2005, when many moved there for work.

In another first for Shepparton, the town established the first Shiaa mosque in Victoria, known as Imam Kadhim Mosque. The mosque was opened in 2000 by the Iraqi community.

Swan Hill (LGA Population 21,403)

The Muslim community in Swan Hill has been renting rooms behind the Uniting Church and using this as a prayer space since 2005.⁶⁸ People from different and diverse ethnic backgrounds like Malaysia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, and Morocco make up the small Muslim community.⁶⁹ The Swan Hill Muslim Association was incorporated in 2007 and uses other places in Swan Hill for regular functions.

Traralgon (Town Population 26,907)

The Gippsland Australian Muslim Community Inc (GAMCI) was established in 2013 and is responsible for offering Friday prayers in Traralgon. GAMCI also organised prayers at the former Monash University Gippsland Campus (now Federation University Gippsland Campus) since its formation. GAMCI holds several social functions for Muslims in the area and advocates at local and state political levels for the community. GAMCI assisted the Light of the Hidayah (Morwell Mosque) and the Baw Baw Islamic Network Inc when these groups were establishing their mosques.⁷⁰ GAMCI also established an Islamic burial site at Traralgon cemetery in 2017.⁷¹

Wallan (Town Population 15,004)

Wallan is the closest regional town to Melbourne city, 45km north of Melbourne's central business district. It is within the broader farming country of north-central Victoria. The LGA of Mitchell is one of the five fastest growing in regional Victoria.⁷² Wallan also has a growing Muslim community, and is served by the Wallan *musalla*, which offers five daily prayers and activities. The North United Muslim Association Inc was formed in 2020. In 2024, the organisation launched a project to raise \$1.5 million to build a mosque and community centre.⁷³

⁶⁸ Sunehra Ahmed, "Muslims of Swan Hill Unite for Eid," *The Guardian*, April 12, 2024, accessed December 8, 2024, <https://theguardian.com.au/community/2024/04/12/muslims-of-swan-hill-unite-for-eid/>.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ "Prayer Group Welcome," *The Gazette*, October 14, 2022, accessed May 22, 2023, <https://www.the-gazette.com.au/news/prayer-group-welcome>.

⁷¹ "Site Set for Islamic Burials," *Latrobe Valley Express*, November 19, 2017, accessed May 22, 2023, <https://latrobevalleyexpress.com.au/news/2017/11/19/site-set-for-islamic-burials/>.

⁷² Gemma Grant, "This is Melbourne's 'New Growth Front.' So where are the Facilities?" *The Age*, May 1, 2026, accessed May 17, 2026, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/this-is-melbourne-s-new-growth-front-so-where-are-the-facilities-20260430-p5zsl4.html>.

⁷³ NUMA, "Home Page," accessed May 22, 2024, <https://numa.org.au/>.

Wangaratta (LGA Population 29,808)

The Muslim community in Wangaratta has been using prayer facilities at the North East Multicultural Association since 2022. The Wangaratta Islamic Cultural and Community Association Inc was formed in 2024 and is registered with the Victorian Consumer Affairs. This group has offered regular daily prayers and other community events at the shared facilities.

Warragul (Town Population 19,856)

Warragul Mosque, operated by the Baw Baw Islamic Network Inc (BINAI), was officially opened in February 2025. Prior to that, prayers were held in a neighbourhood community house, where under 10 people began praying, but this number quickly grew.⁷⁴ The expanding Muslim community was the fourth-fastest growing faith in the area.⁷⁵ BINAI currently rent the premises and is fundraising to permanently secure the former church building.

Warrnambool (LGA Population 35,406)

The Muslim community in Warrnambool is increasing, having grown from two people in 1998 to now having over 200 members in the Warrnambool Islamic Society Inc.⁷⁶ The community has now also registered the Warrnambool Islamic Community Centre Ltd as a public company for the purposes of building a mosque. This mosque has been described as a “dream” of some long-time Muslim residents who have been there since 1998.⁷⁷ Currently, the community in Warrnambool has been praying in a room in an industrial estate.

Wodonga (LGA Population 43,253)

The Islamic Society of Albury/Wodonga Inc (ISAW) was established in 1999.⁷⁸ ISAW represents the major border towns of Albury (NSW) and Wodonga (Victoria), and smaller surrounding areas. Approval to construct a mosque in Albury (NSW) was granted in 2015. Before that, prayer sessions were held at the same location, which had been described as “a rundown two-bedroom weatherboard property.”⁷⁹ The new mosque was formally opened in 2021, with the aim of making the cities a more desirable place to move to for Muslims.⁸⁰ Because of the distance between Albury and Wodonga, and to accommodate the growing number of Muslims, ISAW also offers Jummah facilities at Wodonga.

⁷⁴ “Prayer Group Welcome,” *The Gazette*.

⁷⁵ Danielle Kutchel, “New Warragul Mosque Elevates Belonging for Muslim Community,” *ABC News*, March 18, 2025, accessed May 22, 2025, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-03-18/new-warragul-mosque-elevates-belonging-for-muslim-community/105056396>.

⁷⁶ Sophia Baker, “Late Businessman’s Act,” *The Standard*, November 1, 2024, 5.

⁷⁷ Sophia Baker, “‘Everybody’s Welcome’: Growing,” *The Standard*, March 4, 2025, 1.

⁷⁸ Islamic Society of Albury Wodonga, “About Us,” accessed October 5, 2025, <https://isawmasjid.com/about-us/>.

⁷⁹ Anthony Bunn, “Lack of ‘Interest’ hits Start for New Mosque,” *The Border Mail*, October 29, 2016, 1.

⁸⁰ Anthony Bunn, “Now Feeling Right at Home,” *The Border Mail*, June 23, 2021, 5; Beau Greenway, “Muslim Leader wishing to Dispel Myths,” *The Border Mail*, July 16, 2021, 6.

Wonthaggi (LGA Population 40,789)

A small group of Muslims in the South Gippsland township of Wonthaggi has been meeting weekly since March 2026 to offer Friday prayers in the local Scout Hall. Prior to this, Wonthaggi Hospital offered a room for visiting medical staff.

Yallourn North (town population 1,511)

Yallourn North Mosque was opened in 1997 and has been operated by the Islamic Society of Gippsland. The mosque was a former residence that was donated “to serve as a central area where Muslims in the Latrobe Valley could gather for Friday midday prayer.”⁸¹ While the interiors were redesigned for prayers, the exterior remains much like a normal house.⁸² The mosque initially attracted Muslims of Bosnian, Moroccan, and Algerian descent.

Finally, while not responsible for providing prayer services, the United Muslim Sisters of the Latrobe Valley (UMSLV) (see Table 2) formed in 2013 with the aim to “address the needs of Muslim women, children and families living in the region.”⁸³ UMSLV has held many social and welfare programs throughout the Latrobe LGA to raise awareness for Muslim women and children. These have included embedding a new cultural awareness program in schools, an Understanding Scarves event, Eid festivals, and workshops designed to empower women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.⁸⁴

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article has highlighted that 20 LGAs in Victoria have a mosque, *musalla* and/or registered Muslim organisation. Some LGAs have more than one Muslim organisation formally registered (with an ABN through Consumer Affairs Victoria, ACNC or ASIC). Greater Shepparton and Latrobe have four organisations. In total, 27 registered Muslim organisations provide prayer facilities and/or services in Victoria (see Table 2), and apart from one, all were registered after 2001.

In terms of population growth, Table 1 highlights that, apart from a few exceptions, within each of these 20 LGAs, the Muslim population has increased each census year from 2006 to 2021. The population of Muslims has at least doubled in the majority of the LGAs. The LGAs

⁸¹ Cher Jimenez, “A Home for Prayer,” *Latrobe Valley Express*, September 7, 2014, accessed May 22, 2025, <https://latrobevalleyexpress.com.au/news/2014/07/09/a-home-for-prayer/>.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ United Muslim Sisters of Latrobe Valley, *Newsletter 1*, May 25, 2013, accessed October 7, 2024, <https://umslv.com/cms/content/uploads/2018/09/umslv-newsletter-1.pdf>.

⁸⁴ “Women United,” *Latrobe Valley Express*, November 9, 2014, accessed April 15, 2024, <https://latrobevalleyexpress.com.au/news/2014/11/09/women-united/>; “Story to Spread Across Gippsland,” *Latrobe Valley Express*, March 19, 2017, accessed October 7, 2023, <https://latrobevalleyexpress.com.au/news/2017/03/19/story-to-spread-across-gippsland/>; “Empowering Workshops,” *Latrobe Valley Express*, July 16, 2018, accessed October 5, 2023, <https://latrobevalleyexpress.com.au/news/2018/07/16/empowering-workshops/>; Aidan Knight, “Festival of Culture and Connection,” *Latrobe Valley Express*, May 5, 2026, accessed May 10, 2026, <https://latrobevalleyexpress.com.au/community/2026/05/05/festival-of-culture-and-connection/>.

with the highest number of Muslims have historically been Greater Shepparton and Greater Geelong. Overall, there are 16 mosques in Victoria (Table 3), with 10 opening from 2015, and five from 2021. Currently, six organisations are collecting funds to build a mosque in regional Victoria (Table 4).

Based on all measures examined in this article, there has been a significant increase in Muslims living in regional Victoria. As further evidence of the impact of the growing Muslim community in 2018, the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV), the peak body representing the state's Muslim community, established a portfolio on the Executive Committee dedicated to the needs and responsibilities of those residing in regional Victoria.⁸⁵

While this article has found significant growth of Muslims in regional Victoria, there are many opportunities to extend research into other areas. First, the increase in Muslim population, mosques and Muslim organisations, as noted in this paper, may not necessarily mean a growth in Islam. Future research may be undertaken on Muslims in regional Victoria, or regional Australia, to determine respondents' religiosity and religious affiliation. Rane et al. found that an overwhelming majority of respondents (86.6%) in their study "publicly/openly identify as a Muslim," with a large majority (77.1%) noting they prayed "daily."⁸⁶ The present study did not count the number of people who now go to the mosques or *musallas* in regional Victoria, even though in describing each city or town there is newspaper evidence that the number of Muslim attendants has increased since the mosques or regular prayers have been established.⁸⁷

Using another research methodology, such as qualitative interviews or focus groups (as done by Rane et al.⁸⁸) may also provide more information as to individual religiosity, and the ethical, social, political, and theological issues faced by Muslims moving to regional Victoria.

This article also has not focused on the challenges that building a mosque has presented in the LGAs, considering that in many parts of Australia mosque applications have been opposed by local communities or declined by local councils.⁸⁹ Bendigo Mosque (formally known as the Bendigo Islamic Community Centre), for instance, was first proposed in 2014 and, after years of protests, legal challenges, and community debate, finally opened in 2026 as a symbol of social tension and interfaith resilience.⁹⁰ Further research could involve a similar study to examine the role of urban planning policies in determining the location, architectural form, and use of mosques, and their impact on the local community, such as Masjid Al Farooq in South-East Queensland, including the services now requested by local Muslims.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Islamic Council of Victoria, *ICV Annual Report 2019-2020*.

⁸⁶ Rane et al., "Islam in Australia."

⁸⁷ See, for example, Baker, "Late Businessman's Act"; Bunn, "Now Feeling Right at Home."

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Yasmeen Vahed and Goolam Vahed, "The Development Impact of Mosque Location on Land Use in Australia: A Case Study of Masjid al Farooq in Brisbane," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 34, no. 1 (2014).

⁹⁰ Carswell, "Mosque Officially Opens."

⁹¹ Vahed and Vahed, "The Development Impact of Mosque Location."

Finally, further research may also examine if Muslims living in regional Victoria find it easier or more difficult to feel they belong in Australia. For example, are regional Muslims more resilient when it comes to contemporary social issues than those in urban areas?⁹²

The research in this article reinforces that regional Victoria remains an important part of the history of Muslims in Australia and part of the ongoing narrative. Regional Victoria not only established the first mosque in the state, but Muslims have continued to make an impact in their local communities.⁹³ The strength and growth of the Muslim community has not been confined to Melbourne or Sydney, and this is particularly the case in regional Victoria since 2001.

⁹² Atie et al., “Religiosity, Attitudes on Diversity.”

⁹³ Haveric, “Muslim Minorities.”

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