

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

# Advocacy Priorities



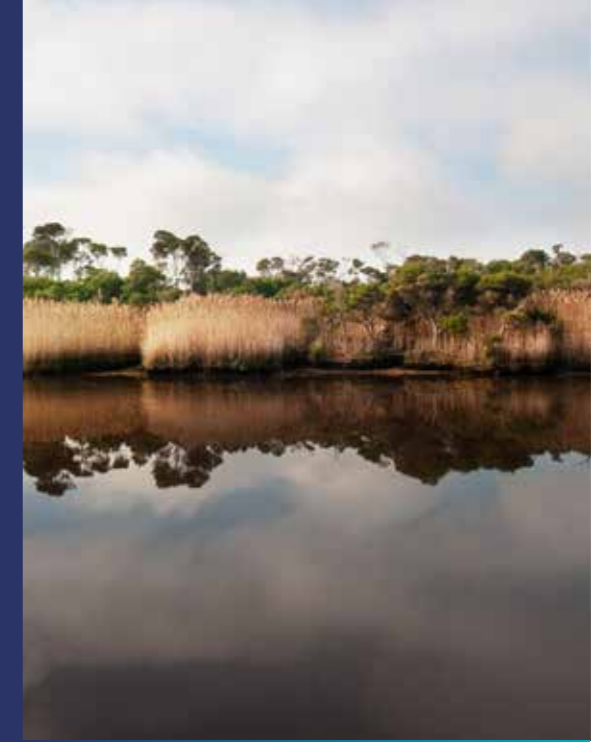
2024

## Purpose of this document

This document features South Gippsland Shire Council's advocacy priorities for 2023/24.

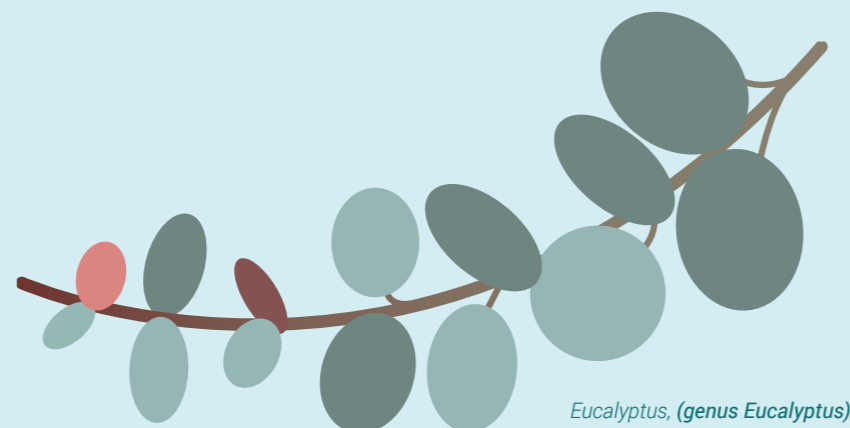
Each of the items were carefully considered by Council prior to being endorsed in October.

We invite you to review our advocacy priorities and contact us if you have any questions.



## Acknowledgment of Country

*We acknowledge the Bunurong and Gunaikurnai people as the Traditional Custodians of South Gippsland and pay respect to their Elders, past, present, and future, for they hold the memories, traditions, culture, and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia.*



*Eucalyptus, (genus Eucalyptus)*

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# About South Gippsland

South Gippsland Shire is located 90 minutes south east of Melbourne on the edge of Melbourne's eastern growth corridor, one of the fastest growing areas in Victoria. Its best known for its rolling green hills, spectacular coastline, traditional country towns and villages and the world famous Wilsons Promontory National Park.

The Shire is home to just over 30,000 people with steady population growth of 1%. Its major towns are Leongatha, Korumburra, Mirboo North and Foster. Other towns include Nyora, Poowong, Loch, Bena, Kongwak, Tarwin Lower, Venus Bay, Koonwarra, Meeniyan, Dumbalk, Fish Creek, Yanakie, Sandy Point, Port Franklin, Toora, Welshpool and Port Welshpool.

South Gippsland has a strong economy, closely linked to food production with both major agricultural and food manufacturing sectors. It is one of the most important dairy production areas in Australia and is home to 10% of Victoria's dairy farms.

## Population: 30,697

Estimated Resident Population (ABS 2022)



- 49% of the population are aged 50 or over
- 19% born outside of Australia
- 2.3 people (on average) per household
- 47 is the median age of people residing in the Shire
- 5% of the population speak a language other than English at home



## Main population areas:

- Leongatha
- Korumburra
- Mirboo North
- Foster
- Nyora
- Venus Bay



## Major attractions:

- Wilsons Promontory National Park
- Great Southern Rail Trail
- Grand Ridge Rail Trail
- Coal Creek Community Park & Museum
- Art and culture
- Farm fresh produce
- Beach hamlets (Sandy Point, Venus Bay)



# Thank you for your support

South Gippsland Shire Council is fortunate to have had significant success with our advocacy over the past two years, and we would like to take this opportunity to thank the Australian and Victorian Governments for their ongoing support.

We are pleased to note that from our 2022/23 Priority List, the following initiatives were fully or partly funded:

- **Connectivity:** Fibre to the Premises upgrades have been funded in Leongatha, Korumburra and Mirboo North and blackspot improvements have been funded in Walkerville. The Nyora mobile tower has been constructed and is now operational. Fixed wireless NBN towns are also being progressively updated across the Shire.
- **Early Years Infrastructure:** The Victorian Government provided funding for a new Early Learning Centre in Korumburra. Funding (\$150,000) for a planning study for an Early Learning Centre in Mirboo North has also been received.
- **Upgrade of the Leongatha Recreation Reserve Grandstand:** A Building Assessment Report for the Leongatha Recreation Reserve Committee of Management was completed, funded by the Victorian Government.
- **Coastal Protection:** The Australian Government provided funding to support a Coastal Levee (Seawall) review and infrastructure planning. Council also received funding (\$80,000) from the Victorian Government for the development and coordination of a business case to investigate a Venus Bay Salt Marsh Project.
- **Mental Health Care:** The Victorian Government identified Leongatha as a site for a future Mental Health and Wellbeing Centre in the 2023/24 State Budget.

To gain support for these priorities, Councillors and Council's Chief Executive Officer facilitated 19 advocacy meetings with government representatives throughout 2022/23. This significant advocacy commitment involved meetings at Parliament House and Spring Street in addition to on-site meetings held at Council's offices in Leongatha.

Council's advocacy success is also reflected in the 2023 Community Satisfaction Survey results that show Council's lobbying performance has improved two points from 2022. Advocacy is a major initiative in the 2022-26 Council Plan.



Pictured (L to R): Cr Clare Williams (Mayor), CEO Kerry Ellis, Cr Nathan Hersey (Deputy Mayor).



# Economy and Industry

## Renewable Energy Investment: Barry Beach Marine Terminal and Port Anthony

Barry Beach Marine Terminal and Port Anthony are identified by many Gippsland Offshore Wind Energy proponents as their preferred location for operations and maintenance, to service the industry into the future. The ports have been operating for over 50 years, supporting oil and gas industries in Bass Strait and are the only industrial ports within 10 hours sailing time of the Gippsland Offshore Renewable Energy Zone. A large parcel of land surrounding the ports has already been reclassified by Council as level 1 industrial land.

South Gippsland Shire Council is eager to work with Federal and State government to ensure Barry Beach Marine Terminal and Port Anthony can be used to support the renewable offshore energy industry in Gippsland. They are geographically closer than the Hastings Renewable Energy Terminal which presents significant benefits, particularly in relation to reduced freight costs and improved efficiencies.

Appropriate infrastructure, investment attraction, localised services and housing are required to enable the greatest opportunity for sustained success. This will support the anticipated employment and residential growth in the area and provide welcome social and economic benefits to the community. Renewable energy investment offers generational change opportunities for South Gippsland. We are seeking government support to ensure our region can capitalise on the potential investment whilst supporting our local community and preserving township character.



## Our Request

### South Gippsland Shire Council is seeking:

- Australian and Victorian Government policy support, and investment, to realise this once in a generation opportunity for South Gippsland.
- Support to plan and prepare for the activation of industrial and residential land to ensure commercial investment attraction, industry development and workforce accommodation in South Gippsland.

## Connectivity: NBN upgrades, minimise telephone black spots and increase community transport options

South Gippsland has telecommunications challenges due to highly undulating topography, heavy vegetation and a large number of small and dispersed communities. As a result, many households have unreliable internet connections and sporadic mobile coverage.

With increasing numbers of people now working and studying from home, the need for secure and stable telecommunications in South Gippsland is more important than ever. Connectivity issues also impact our local industry, in particular our agricultural sector who are unable to access innovative new technologies, and small businesses who need reliable connectivity for simple essential business needs like EFTPOS machines and point of sale systems.

Reliable connectivity is also critical in an emergency. Telecommunications must be recognised as an essential service and providers should be required to meet service continuity standards. This is required to prevent significant, prolonged and widespread outages during natural disasters.

Over recent years South Gippsland has welcomed Federal investment in NBN and mobile upgrades, however additional support is still required. Currently 5G is not available anywhere in South Gippsland and many of our large towns are still reliant on Fibre to the Node and Fixed Wireless technology.

Our region needs the certainty of committed, ongoing, funding programs to build our community capacity and connectivity.

### Public Transport

People without a vehicle and driver's licence are significantly disadvantaged in South Gippsland. The low level of community transport and limited public transport connections with Melbourne and across our region, make it almost impossible for these people to independently access work, education and social opportunities as well as essential services like health, shopping, and public services. This low level of community transport paired with inconsistent telecommunications and internet connectivity create significant vulnerabilities in our community.

## Our Request

### South Gippsland Shire Council is seeking:

- A commitment to continue the Federal Government's Regional Connectivity Program and the Mobile Black Spot Program and explore innovative technology solutions.
- Funding support to increase community transport options across South Gippsland, particularly linking people to essential services such as health, education and social services.
- To fund fibre to premises technology in Foster, which has not yet been identified for upgrade.

# Sustainable Growth

## Resilient Coastal Communities

South Gippsland Shire Council's *Coastal Strategy*, the *Kompas Report* and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action's *Cape to Cape Resilience Project (RaSP)* all identify future challenges for coastal townships in South Gippsland.

Additionally, in 2021 following volatile weather that resulting in storm surge, two of our communities – Tarwin Lower and Venus Bay – were left disconnected when the main road was flooded.

It is clear that strong and decisive action needs to be undertaken to support our coastal communities.

In October 2023, at the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) State Council, South Gippsland Shire Council put forward the following Motion that was unanimously accepted:

That the MAV call on the Victorian Government to *“fund and implement a state-led process to modify the Victorian Planning Scheme to amend, strengthen and protect the Land Subject to Inundation Overlay to manage risks in areas that are vulnerable to climate change inclusive of all affected coastal and riverine areas.”*

Council proposed this motion to provide additional clarity for people currently living, or looking to purchase, within these areas.

As part of the recently adopted *Coastal Strategy*, Council is also proposing to:

a) *remove all coastal township greenfield residential growth areas from the planning scheme framework plan maps, and retain the township boundaries consistent with the current application of each township's urban land zoning.*

b) *Explore the strategic justification for Council to restrict or discourage the development of more than one dwelling per lot and the subdivision of land which increases dwelling development potential.*

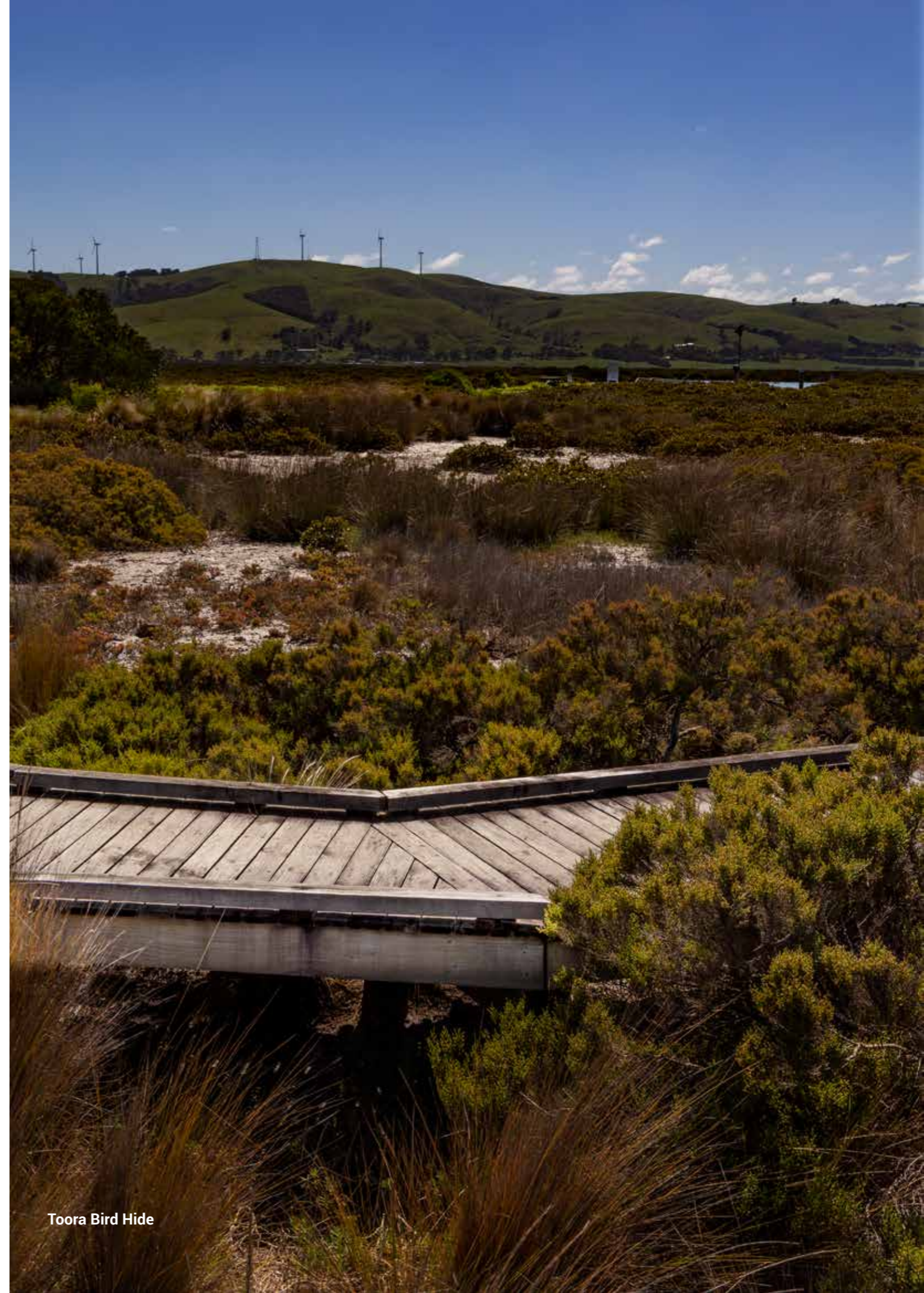
In order to achieve these objectives modification to the Victorian Planning provisions will be required.



## Our Request

### South Gippsland Shire Council is calling on the Victorian Government to:

- Support the MAV Motion to fund and implement a state-led process to modify the Victorian Planning Scheme to amend, strengthen and protect the Land Subject to Inundation Overlay.
- Implement a state-led process for ensuring flood mapping is up-to-date and incorporated into planning schemes.
- Work with councils to ensure that flood hazard controls within the Victorian Planning Provisions are fit for purpose.
- Fund and facilitate conversations with South Gippsland's coastal communities that:
  - are evidenced-based using the most up-to-date coastal/flooding data
  - encourage community buy-in regarding future challenges and possible solutions.



Toora Bird Hide

# Healthy and Engaged Communities

## Disaster Recovery Infrastructure Funding and Emergency Training

Existing arrangements under the Natural Disaster Financial Assistance program are inefficient and place significant administrative burdens on councils and communities impacted by emergencies. With significant weather events and natural disasters becoming more frequent, it is critical that this process be improved so that Council can quickly and efficiently support community recovery.

It is also critical that betterment to damaged infrastructure is allowed so that it can be upgraded in readiness for future disaster events. The recent announcement stating that State and Federal Government were coming together to deliver a Council Priority Betterment Program is welcome, however an expansion to the program to include all councils and a more permanent betterment fund is needed.

Additionally, South Gippsland Shire Council believes there is an opportunity for Australian and Victorian governments to clarify and resource the role of local government in emergency management, as outlined

and supported by the MAV position paper *'The Role of Local Government in Emergency Management'*.

For example, the current Municipal Emergency Resourcing Program (MERP) funding is inadequate to support the ongoing role of emergency management, particularly in small regional councils with a limited budget. The MERP allocation has not increased in over a decade and has failed to keep up with the evolving role of local government in emergency management.

In addition, local government statutory and key support roles have weak and inconsistent training or accreditation opportunities. Training opportunities made available for local government emergency management staff are available through external consultants and providers and some agencies such as the CFA, but at a considerable cost.

## Our Request

### South Gippsland Shire Council is calling on the Australian and Victorian Governments to:

- Simplify the methodology and data inputs required in Victoria to prove Council's eligibility for Disaster Recovery Funding, bringing it in line with other States and ahead of any national unification of claims processes.
- Financially support Local Government to ensure post disaster funding programs enable betterment to improve assets beyond the 'previous condition' to provide resilience against future damage resulting from disaster events.
- Support a Victorian led training or accreditation program would provide consistency and efficiencies across the state, allowing for greater resource sharing in times of emergency and growing our capacity as an emergency management network.
- Support local communities to establish Community Energy Hubs in isolated townships through funding support to upgrade appropriate infrastructure and establish reliable access to essential services.



## Community Energy Support Hubs

South Gippsland Shire features a collection of small townships with unique geographical features. This includes townships that are located on peninsulas such as Tarwin Lower, Venus Bay and Sandy Point. As a result of this geographic positioning, these communities are quite isolated and can only be accessed by a single road in and out, this presents some unique challenges and a heavily reliance on existing electricity and telecommunications services. South Gippsland Shire Council is supportive of the establishment of energy support hubs in these isolated communities.

The centres would not be Bushfire Places of Last Resort or relief centres, but rather a dedicated place in where people can access a reliable energy supply and communication support during a significant event, such as a long-term power outage or a flooded road that restricts egress. Community members would be reminded that the community energy hubs are not a substitute for individual emergency planning, but rather an additional support for people who need to access an energy supply. The hubs encourage community continuity through the efficient and effective use of existing assets.

# Healthy and Engaged Communities

## Early Years Infrastructure

South Gippsland welcomes the extended three-year-old kinder and pre-prep programs, but would like to ensure the roll-out is supported by appropriate infrastructure, workforce investment and ongoing maintenance support.

Due to the popularity of the programs, and regional population increases, Early Years Centres in South Gippsland are struggling to meet the demand for their services. Additionally, many of our Early Years Centres are located in old buildings that are no longer fit for purpose. Additional infrastructure support and investment is required to ensure country kids are provided with education opportunities that are equal to those who live in metropolitan areas.

Council's recently drafted Children and Families Plan states that parts of South Gippsland are effectively a 'desert' for childcare and early years services. The townships of Tarwin Lower, Venus Bay, Fish Creek, Toora, Welshpool and Nyora are all geographically isolated from early years services with travel distances to kindergarten or childcare often exceeding 30km (one-way).

Because of low population figures in some of our towns, it is not viable to attract investment from private enterprise, and also difficult to generate government funding. However, Council and our community are passionate that our children deserve the same standard as centres in larger communities.

Last year, Council was pleased to see Early Years investment in our communities. In particular, we were pleased to welcome new infrastructure in Leongatha and in Korumburra, where a new facility was installed co-located on the existing primary school site.

We support this concept and are thankful for the investment. However, additional support is required.

## Our Request

### South Gippsland Shire Council is calling on the Victorian Government to:

- Provide funding for the maintenance of buildings on Victorian Department of Education land.
- Establish state-owned and operated Early Years Learning Centres in the townships of Tarwin Lower/ Venus Bay and Toora/Welshpool. The selection of these locations would help to ensure equitable access for children in these geographically isolated communities.
- Provide funding to replace infrastructure that has reached its end of life and is no longer fit for purpose. Council currently maintains many Early Years buildings that are old and require extensive maintenance. Financial support is required to progressively replace this infrastructure to ensure Early Years services can continue to be provided.

### South Gippsland Shire Council is calling on the Australian Government to:

Fund long day care infrastructure in rural areas where the demand for service is high, but not high enough to be profitable for private child care providers. The provision of long day care in these communities is essential in ensuring rural communities can continue to attract new residents and remain economically viable.





# Healthy and Engaged Communities

## Supporting volunteers and community Groups in South Gippsland

South Gippsland has long, rich history, of volunteerism within our local communities. This is supported by Census data which shows that the proportion of the population who volunteer is higher in South Gippsland than both the regional or state-wide average.

In Victoria 14 per cent of people volunteer, but in South Gippsland that figure is an impressive 22 per cent.

**However, similar to other areas, our volunteer figures are declining.**

Since COVID 19 the incidence of volunteering in South Gippsland has fallen, while our region's reliance on volunteers has never been stronger.

In regional areas volunteers are relied upon to perform a variety of key functions such as emergency response, community support and event facilitation, but the pool of volunteers is shrinking and older volunteers are not being replaced.

In time, this is likely to create shortfalls in our communities that could impact our most vulnerable residents.

In many towns, community groups have fallen into a hiatus due to lack of numbers and in those that are still operating, many of the many of the volunteers are aging and are drowning in increased costs, regulation and red tape.



## Our Request

**South Gippsland Shire Council is calling on the Victorian Government to:**

- Review and reduce the governance requirements for volunteer groups to help cut through the red tape which is onerous for existing volunteers and a deterrent to attracting new volunteers.
- Provide funding support to volunteer groups to cover core overheads such as insurance. The recent increase to \$20M public liability coverage has proved expensive for many community organisations.
- Undertake a sustained state-wide volunteer recruitment campaign that highlights the benefits of volunteering.

## Upgrade of South Gippsland sporting facilities (including the Leongatha Recreation Reserve Grandstand)

Sport is incredibly popular in South Gippsland. More than six in ten children aged 5-17 play organised sport, 32 per cent of residents participate in leisure centre or swimming pool based activities and 23 per cent of residents attend sports venues as spectators.

Despite these figures, South Gippsland's sporting facilities are falling into disrepair with building improvements required in:

Nyora, Stony Creek, Tarwin Lower, Koonwarra, Leongatha, Fish Creek and Mirboo North.

Some of these projects, such as a new toilet/change room facility in Tarwin Lower, have already had concept designs prepared while others are in the initial design stage, however all are in need of funding.

South Gippsland Shire Council is appreciative of the funding we received from Sport and Recreation Victoria over the years, however the buildings at our sports grounds are unfortunately failing faster than we can repair them. Additional support is needed to ensure local sporting facilities are fit for purpose and can support our active, and growing, sporting community.

## Our Request

**South Gippsland Shire Council is calling on the Victorian Government to:**

- Provide additional funding and support for crown land committees to plan and deliver building improvements to bring the facilities up to modern standards.
- Provide funding to deliver the recommendations of the Building Assessment Report for repairs to the Leongatha Grandstand.

**South Gippsland sporting infrastructure that has been identified as needing replacement:**

Walter J Tuck Reserve (Mirboo North): Change rooms

Nyora Recreation Reserve: Change rooms

Tarwin Lower Recreation Reserve: Change rooms

Leongatha Recreation Reserve: Grand Stand and pavilion redevelopment

Fish Creek Recreation Reserve: New change and social rooms

Koonwarra Recreation Reserve: New toilets

Stony Creek Racecourse: Change rooms



# Connecting our People and Places

## Increase road funding to rural councils

South Gippsland has an extensive road network which is relied upon for transport, tourism and freight. We have over 800km of sealed roads that are managed by Council – equivalent to the distance between Melbourne to Sydney - and over 1300km of unsealed roads which is the distance between Leongatha and Port Augusta. This doesn't include roads such as the South Gippsland Highway or the Bass Highway which are managed by Regional Roads Victoria.

As well as everyone's right to safe travel on roads that meet our communities needs, our roads also play an integral role in the economic prosperity of our region and are pivotal for our agriculture and tourism sectors. In fact, South Gippsland is a key part of Australia's food production system and relies heavily on our local road network to service a wide variety of farms including around 400 dairy farms, one of the highest concentrations in Australia and a critical part of the nation's export economy.

Unfortunately, the relationship between rural councils' rate base and road responsibilities is unbalanced, and the asset renewal gap is continuing to grow. This disparity was highlighted in the *'Potholes and Pitfalls: How to Fix Local Roads'* report recently released by the Grattan Institute.

On top of this, the speed of asset deterioration is accelerated by severe weather events. In South Gippsland this includes more regular and violent storms and tidal surges, which are impacting our roads. Council also faces the challenges of rapidly increasing material costs within a rate-capped environment. The ability to do more with less is simply not possible when it comes to maintaining our roads.

Improving our roads is a top priority for our community. We recently asked our community *'What would make South Gippsland a better place to live, work and play?'* and 31% of respondents said road improvements. A further 23% ranked roads as their number one priority for South Gippsland.

Council understands the important role our roads play in our community. Each year around \$16.5M is allocated to road renewal and maintenance in Council's budget. However, this is simply not enough.

## Our Request

### South Gippsland Shire Council is calling on the Australian Government to:

- Commit to \$500 million per year in funding (ongoing) for the *Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program*.
- Restore Financial Assistance Grants to at least one percent of Commonwealth taxation revenue.

### We are also calling on the Victorian Government to:

- Expand and commit to ongoing funding through the *Rural Roads* support package.
- Re-instate the *Fixing Country Roads* program.

## Leongatha Heavy Vehicle Route

Leongatha is South Gippsland's largest town and a major industrial, government, medical, retail, and service centre. It contributes \$1.3 billion to the regional economy and provides over 4,000 jobs. South Gippsland's three highways intersect in Leongatha connecting South Gippsland with Melbourne, the Latrobe Valley and Bass Coast.

Due to significant traffic congestion and safety issues, the South Gippsland Highway was redirected away from the town's commercial centre in 2016. This was the first stage of the Leongatha Heavy Vehicle Route. A highly praised pedestrian friendly redevelopment was then completed in Leongatha's central business district in 2021, leveraging off the reconfigured highway route.

The current route has two uncontrolled intersections which are causing congestion and delays. There are also increased safety concerns related to the recent extension of the Great Southern Rail Trail between Leongatha and Korumburra.

The extension has increased usage and highlighted the need for improved pedestrian and cyclist access across the highway. The second stage of the Heavy Vehicle Route is now needed to resolve traffic and safety issues.

## Our Request

### South Gippsland Shire Council is seeking:

- \$2 million in funding support from the Australian or Victorian Governments to support the Department of Transport and Planning to conduct a detailed planning study for Stage 2 of the Leongatha Heavy Vehicle Alternate Route.

Stage two of the Leongatha Heavy Vehicle Route is a priority project endorsed by One Gippsland.



## SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

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Shire Council