

RURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE REVIEW

Report Author: Manager - Economic Development & Investment
Responsible Officer: Director Communities
Ward(s) affected: All

The author(s) of this report and the Responsible Officer consider that the report complies with the overarching governance principles and supporting principles set out in the Local Government Act 2020.

CONFIDENTIALITY

This item is to be considered at a Council meeting that is open to the public.

SUMMARY

The Yarra Ranges Rural Advisory Committee (RAC) is Council's advisory group on issues and initiatives relevant to the rural sector in Yarra Ranges.

The RAC has undertaken a review of the role, function, membership and productivity of the committee to ensure currency, effectiveness and stakeholder engagement.

An updated Terms of Reference (ToR) has been drafted to align with the Yarra Ranges Council (YRC) governance framework for Advisory Committees and to ensure they remain relevant to the sector.

This report highlights the achievements of the RAC and provides updated ToR including opening all rural sector membership positions to expressions of interest.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council

- 1. Note the outcomes of the review of the Rural Advisory Committee.***
- 2. Endorse the revised Terms of Reference for the Rural Advisory Committee inclusive of all rural sector membership positions on the Committee being open to an expression of interest process.***
- 3. Note the contribution of the Rural Advisory Committee and its members since it was last reviewed in 2019.***

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

At the Council meeting held 26 February 2019, Council

- endorsed the revised ToR of the RAC,
- formally appointed Len Rayner of Rayner's Orchard as a member of Council's RAC,
- noted the outcomes of the review of the RAC, and
- acknowledged the contribution of the RAC since its inception in 2016.

DISCUSSION

Purpose and Background

This report presents an updated draft ToR for the RAC. This is to align the RAC with the YRC governance framework for Advisory Committees and ensures the committee remains contemporary with the sector.

The RAC has been in operation since 2016 and consists of 12 permanent members from sectors within the agricultural industry and associated agencies. The RAC's ToR note that "a review of the role, function, membership and productivity of the Committee will be conducted every 18 months to ensure currency, effectiveness and stakeholder engagement".

In August 2018 the RAC undertook a review of its performance against the purpose, role, and tasks of the group, as set in the ToR. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and major weather events, the latest review has been delayed.

A review of the RAC's provision of advice and knowledge on topics that relate to the rural sector between 2018 to 2023 has been undertaken. Attachment 1 outlines the invaluable contribution of the RAC on Council strategies, plans and advocacy.

The ToR 2018 have been reviewed and redrafted – refer Attachment 2.

A summary of the changes made to the ToR are:

- Addition of a mission statement for the new committee members to update;
- Addition of agency representatives from Landcare and allied trades with the option for further additions to be made on a case-by-case basis;
- Re-wording the sectors represented based on The Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification coding. This brings the industry classifications in line with the Australian Bureau of Statistics;

- Expansion of committee members to be representative of the rural community regarding ability, age, gender and gender identification, cultural background, and socio-economic status;
- Extension of the term length from two to four years;
- Addition of a clause that members may serve more than two consecutive terms if no expressions of interest are received or due to exceptional circumstances, at the discretion of the chair;
- Addition of an induction workshop;
- Addition of a code of conduct for members;
- Expansion of the conflict-of-interest guidelines;
- Expansion and clarification of nomination and appointment of members;
- Clarification regarding voting members;
- Clarification regarding reporting;
- Addition of optional leave of absence;
- Addition of an annual report to be presented to Council;
- Addition of confidentiality and privacy terms; and
- Extension to review of the ToR from every 18 months to four years.

All current sitting positions have exceeded the current two-year term, with seven members having sat on the committee since 2016. All positions are therefore due to be opened to an Expression of Interest (Eoi) process.

Options considered

- Option 1: RAC ToR and members remain unchanged and vacant positions are opened to an Eoi process; or
- Option 2: RAC ToR are updated to align with YRC governance framework for Advisory Committees, and to remain relevant to the sector. All committee positions are open through an Eoi process.

Recommended option and justification

Option 2 is the recommended option as it ensures:

- The RAC aligns with the governance framework for Council's Advisory Committees;
- An open and transparent appointment of members to the RAC; and

- The RAC remains relevant in being an important voice to Council for rural communities and industries in the rural sector as it continues to adapt.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

The costs associated with the RAC are funded through Council's operational budget.

APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES

This report contributes to the following strategic objective(s) in the Council Plan:

- Protected & Enhanced Natural Environment, and
- Vibrant Economy, Agriculture and Tourism.

The report also contributes to meeting the objectives of the:

- Economic Development Strategy 2022-2032 – Towards a regenerative Yarra Ranges,
- Liveable Climate Action Plan 2020-2030, and
- Community Volunteer Participation Policy.

RELEVANT LAW

Not applicable.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic Implications

Agriculture in the Yarra Ranges is the fourth highest industry in terms of economic output, with gross sales of \$769 million annually. The sector provides direct employment to more than 2,450 people. It is essential that Yarra Ranges Council promotes and protects this industry to ensure its viability, sustainability and growth. An advisory committee of industry professionals will enhance Council's ability to do this.

Social Implications

The RAC is representative of people in the rural sector and those agencies who provide a service to the agricultural industry. These representatives provide Council with insights into local social impacts and issues for rural businesses and those connected to these businesses.

Environmental Implications

The RAC provides advice to Council that may impact the use, development and management of agricultural and rural land and environment.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

RAC members have been engaged as part of the review.

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

YRC's Governance, Risk and Compliance Department as well as advisory committees to Council have been consulted including:

- Disability Advisory Committee,
- Indigenous Advisory Committee,
- Environmental Advisory Committee, and
- Health and Wellbeing Advisory Committee.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Option	Associated risk
Option 1: The RAC ToR and membership remain unchanged. Any vacant positions are opened to Expression of Interest.	<p>The RAC is incongruent with Council's governance framework for Advisory Committees.</p> <p>Community perceptions regarding the transparency of committee appointments.</p> <p>Council is not being informed, via the RAC, with a broad range of business opinions, knowledge, and advice.</p> <p>Minimal interest by the Rural Sector in filling vacant positions.</p>
Option 2: Update the RAC, opening all membership representation to an Expression of Interest.	<p>Minimal interest by the Rural Sector in joining the RAC.</p> <p>Lack of continuity of existing members in the RAC, should members not be eligible to reapply.</p> <p>Positions could be at risk of being left vacant.</p>

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No officers and/or delegates acting on behalf of the Council through the Instrument of Delegation and involved in the preparation and/or authorisation of this report have any general or material conflict of interest as defined within the Local Government Act 2020.

ATTACHMENTS TO THE REPORT

1. Rural Advisory Committee Productivity and Achievements 2019 to 2023
2. Rural Advisory Committee Draft Terms of Reference 2023