

EASTERN REGION GROUP OF COUNCILS (ERG) - STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2029

Report Author: Executive Strategic Advisor

Responsible Officer: Chief Executive Officer

Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

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 public Council meeting.

SUMMARY

The Eastern Region Group of Councils (ERG) is a collaborative network of councils proximal to Yarra Ranges Council.

The ERG Strategic Plan for 2025-2029 (Draft) was endorsed by the ERG at its meeting on 16 April 2025.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council notes the Eastern Region Group of Councils' Strategic Plan 2025-2029.

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

Council noted the ERG Strategic Plan 2021-2025 at its Council Meeting on 12 October 2021.

DISCUSSION

Purpose and Background

The ERG comprises five local government authorities of outer eastern Melbourne – Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Whitehorse and Yarra Ranges. The ERG recognises that collective advocacy and partnership approaches are key to addressing regional challenges. ERG Councils collaborate and partner on shared

priorities through advocacy, integrated planning, shared services and joint procurement to benefit the communities of the region.

With the conclusion of the current Strategic Plan in 2025, the ERG member council representatives have worked together to develop a strategic plan for the 2025-2029 period on major issues of mutual benefit and/or regional need.

Key partners involved in the development of the Strategic Plan have included Mayors, Councillors and CEOs of the member councils, together with Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action, the Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance, the Eastern Transport Coalition, Melbourne's Eastern Region Economic Development Group as well as key council officers.

The intent of the ERG Strategic Plan is to:

- amplify each council's voice and impact,
- improve each council's efficiency and effectiveness, and
- improve community access to infrastructure and services across the region.

The Plan identifies five key priorities to be delivered through 14 strategic initiatives, summarised on page 10 of the attached document.

This ERG Strategic Plan continues to advocate for known community issues that have regional impacts and has an additional emphasis on joint procurement and shared service provision across member councils. While Council's participation in any opportunities will be assessed on its merits and progress through appropriate governance pathways, this Plan outlines a commitment to:

- explore, develop and implement appropriate shared services with ERG partner councils with short-, medium- and longer-term objectives;
- explore options for innovation, entrepreneurship, direct service provision, partnered services with other agencies or outsourced service provision;
- establish appropriate governance arrangements to facilitate shared services outcomes; and
- assist in the development of a regional shared services best practice model as an exemplar for the local government sector more broadly.

This innovative approach to regional collaboration has the potential to create new efficiencies within the organisation and community facing services in the region.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

Yarra Ranges Council pays an annual contribution of \$35,000 to be a member of ERG as part of its Advocacy Program. This funds administration of the group and delivery of the strategic plan outcomes, as well as providing support to deliver

Council's own Advocacy Agenda. Expenditure is within current budget, and participation in ERG is achieved within existing resources.

APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES

This report contributes to the following Council Plan action:

- Consolidate and strengthen advocacy through evidence and stronger relationships to ensure other levels of government are effectively and efficiently engaged to support local services and programs.

RELEVANT LAW

Section 9 of the *Local Government Act 2020* outlines overarching principles, including the expectation that councils seek to collaborate with other councils, government entities and statutory bodies.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic Implications

There are possible cost savings to Yarra Ranges Council of shared procurement, IT integration and shared services that are a key priority in the ERG Strategic Plan.

Social Implications

With 79 councils in Victoria, advocacy can be enhanced with regional representation which actively amplifies the community needs of a single council.

Environmental Implications

A key initiative in the ERG plan is integrated transport, which has strong alignment with Council's *Integrated Transport Strategy* and *Liveable Climate Plan*. As the outermost Council in ERG, Yarra Ranges has the most to gain from enhanced transport corridors.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No direct community engagement has been undertaken for this piece of work. However, the plan reflects a range of community issues that impact at a regional level, including enhanced transport and council financial efficiency.

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

By engaging in regional collaboration, councils can more effectively advocate for local priorities. The ERG provides an active and collaborative forum to raise and address community issues with our neighbouring councils.

RISK ASSESSMENT

There are no identified risks to noting the ERG Strategic Plan.

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. ERG Draft Strategic Plan 2025-2029