

## MELBOURNE EAST REGIONAL SPORT AND RECREATION STRATEGY UPDATE 2022-2032

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Report Author: Coordinator - Sport  
Responsible Officer: Director Built Environment & Infrastructure  
Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

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*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 Melbourne East Regional Sport and Recreation Strategy (MERSRS) was developed in 2016, to provide the eastern region Councils with a collaborative approach to regional facility provision for sport and recreation. The 2016 MERSRS resulted in several key projects being delivered for Yarra Ranges including the development of the AFL Centre of Excellence at Kilsyth Recreation Reserve, planning and development of the Warburton Mountain Bike Destination project, as well as the development of the Eastern Region Trails Strategy.

A review of the MERSRS has been undertaken to ensure it remains contemporary and responds to the ever-changing sport and recreation landscape.

The reviewed MERSRS highlights key opportunities for Yarra Ranges including:

- The delivery of the Warburton Mountain Bike Destination project;
- Consideration of an Urban Aquatics Facility;
- Support and advocate for the Yarra Ranges Regional Equestrian Park proposed by a third party (or private consortium); and
- Consideration of a regional sports precinct to cater for a number of sports including multiple cycling disciplines.

The MERSRS also provides direction for regional level planning, collaboration, club development and advocacy.

The MERSRS has been presented to, and endorsed by, the Eastern Region Group of Council's, and this report seeks Council endorsement.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

***That Council adopt the Melbourne East Regional Sport and Recreation Strategy 2022-2032.***

## **RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS**

2016 - Council endorsed Melbourne East Regional Sport and Recreation Strategy 2016.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Melbourne East Region**

Population growth across the region consists of new residential development and increasing urban density. Major urban development projects such as the North East Link, Suburban Rail Loop, transport connection corridors and employment precincts are providing a more connected and economically prosperous region.

This level of growth and development across the region is placing additional pressure on existing sport and recreation facilities and open space. Careful planning and advocacy for investment into regional infrastructure is required to support communities to lead active and healthy lives.

Trends in community sport and recreation are changing, with a higher focus on flexible and social activity and active recreation, and growing professionalism within talent pathways and regional events. While trends in physical activity are changing towards active recreation at the local level, facilities for organised sport continue to be a focus of this strategy given their regional catchment, growth in female participation and ability to host regional, state and national competitions and events.

The unprecedented impact of COVID-19 during 2020 and 2021 created challenges across all aspects of life, with sport and recreation not immune from the effects of the pandemic. Sport and recreation clubs and associations are now rebounding from restricted activity during 2020 and 2021, but ongoing support is required to ensure participation returns to previous levels.

The updated MERSRS prioritises a network approach to collaboration within the region, with the establishment of four strategic priorities:

1. A balanced network of regional sport and recreation facilities;
2. Knowing and understanding the region;
3. A collaborative approach to regional planning, policy development and advocacy; and
4. Shared resources and support for regional sport and recreation.

The strategic priorities aim to build on the success of the MERSRS developed in 2016 (progress outlined in appendix 1, attachment 1), while further embedding the collaborative approach to planning and development.

The MERSRS also discusses key regional influences including:

- Population Growth;
- Demographic Profile;
- Urban Density;
- COVID-19;
- Partnerships & Advocacy;
- Changing Participation Trends;
- Open Space Provision;
- Budgets & Funding;
- Urban Development; and
- Climate Change.

Also included in the MERSRS is a planning framework to support Councils and other regional stakeholders to prioritise, plan and deliver regional facilities and shared trails collaboratively and effectively.

The MERSRS is supported by the background, research and consultation reports (Preliminary Situational Analysis and Key Findings Report and the State Sporting Association Consultation Findings Report).

### ***Purpose and Background***

The 2016 MERSRS established the region's first coordinated and collaborative approach to sport and recreation planning.

While this collaborative approach remains as important now as it did in 2016, the trends and issues that shape planning for regional sport and recreation have continued to evolve.

This review and update of the MERSRS seeks to build on the foundation provided by the original strategy, while acknowledging the emergence of new trends and issues across the region.

The seven local government authorities that comprise the Eastern region include Boroondara, Manningham, Monash, Maroondah, Whitehorse, Knox and the Yarra Ranges Councils. The strategic directions and recommendations within the updated MERSRS have been shaped through engagement with the local government

authorities and state sporting associations, as well as the analysis of updated participation data.

The purpose of the MERSRS is to undertake a regional planning approach that supports the development of both current and new sport and recreation infrastructure for the Melbourne East Region for the next 10-20 years.

The MERSRS was presented to the Eastern Region Group (ERG) of Councils on Friday 21 October 2022 where an overview of the process, key regional trends and priority themes and next steps were discussed. The presentation was well received by the Mayors and CEO's with only minor changes recommended. Below is a summary of the questions/comments that were received:

- How are emerging sports being considered in the strategy;
- How accurate is the data in the strategy and why is participation still low when we are hearing from groups/associations that they need more facilities (i.e. Netball);
- There were also some comments relating to the increase in active recreation (e.g. walking, cycling), but we have noted that this is generally led at a local level with the exception of regional trails; and
- How do we get government engaged with the strategy and particularly around school access and joint partnerships.

For the most part, the questions and comments (above) are considered in the MERSRS, but it was acknowledged that they could be emphasised more strongly in an edited executive summary.

In response to the Mayor and CEO's feedback, the following improvements have been made to the MERSRS:

- Further emphasis on the desire to provide facilities that are either co-located, cross-subsidised and/or multi use as strategies to minimise operating, duplication and capital costs; and
- Sport and Recreation Victoria aims to ensure that they get a return on investment (ROI) on State Government funded projects. They do not want to fund facilities in each municipality if they can provide them across Council's or more broadly regionally. This has been made more explicit as a shared principle.

A final MERSRS is presented in Attachment 1: MERSRS from Council consideration and endorsement.

### ***Yarra Ranges Priorities***

The MERSRS identifies priorities across four key strategic pillars which include:

5. A balanced network of regional sport and recreation facilities;
6. Knowing and understanding the Region;
7. A collaborative approach to regional planning, policy development and advocacy; and
8. Shared resources and support for regional sport and recreation.

Through the development of the revised MERSRS, Yarra Ranges identified key projects that had a regional significance for inclusion in the MERSRS. They include:

- Consideration of the establishment of a multi-disciplinary cycling facility within a green-field site in Yarra Ranges Council in the medium-to-long term;
- Establishing a plan for the provision of multi-discipline cycling facilities across the region, including BMX tracks, pump tracks and mountain bike facilities in addition to the current planning for trails;
- New Yarra Ranges Urban Aquatic Facility;
- Warburton Mountain Bike Destination Planning and Development; and
- Support and Advocate for the Yarra Valley Regional Equestrian Park by a third party or private consortium.

In addition to this, the MERSRS commits Councils to continue to work together to identify localised priorities for high ball sports (volleyball, basketball, netball), soccer and bowls to ensure that the planning and delivery of infrastructure across these activities are undertaken in a collaborative manner.

### ***Options considered***

Not applicable.

### ***Recommended option and justification***

Not applicable.

## **FINANCIAL ANALYSIS**

The review of the MERSRS was delivered within existing operational budgets.

Given the nature of the MERSRS, funding for implementation will be required to invest in capital works, planning and strategy development. This funding will be sought through individual Council's annual budget process when required and potential external funding.

The nature of a regional strategy gives the opportunity to partner with other Councils, other sectors (e.g. education) and external funding bodies.

## **APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES**

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

- High Quality Infrastructure: Quality facilities and infrastructure meets current and future needs. Places are well planned hubs of activity that foster wellbeing, creativity and innovation; and
- High Performing Organisation: An innovative, responsive organisation that listens and delivers quality, value for money services to our community.

### ***Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025:***

- Priority 4 - Increase physical activity: People have capacity to walk and be physically active in an inclusive culture; and
- Priority 5 – Improve mental wellbeing and social connections.

### ***Recreation and Open Space Strategy (2013 - 2023)***

The Yarra Ranges' Recreation and Open Space Strategy 2013-2023, supports the management of sustainable aquatic and recreational facilities in Yarra Ranges.

### ***Asset Management Policy 2022-2032***

Sound asset management is necessary to enable the Council to meet its responsibilities by planning to provide services to the current and future communities, encouraging and supporting the economic, environmental, social and cultural development of the municipality, providing high quality community infrastructure as an integral factor in providing liveable places that support community connection and developing assets that are responsive to the changing environment in which we live.

Eight principles are identified in this policy to guide decisions on how Council invests in the assets that support services. These are:

1. Evidence based
2. Appropriate Quality
3. Sustainability
4. Community Vision
5. Fairness
6. Health and Wellbeing
7. Safety and Resilience; and
8. Continuous Improvement.

## **RELEVANT LAW**

Not Applicable

## **SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

### ***Economic Implications***

The MERSRS provides a sustainable financial model for the collective investment in high-cost priority infrastructure with a focus on collaboration across the region. In the long-term delivery of the MERSRS, this will result in a lower individual capital and operational cost to Council's as well as ensuring that any economic benefits based on municipal visitation for specific activities are not diluted by a saturation across the local market for activities such as mountain biking etc.

### ***Social Implications***

There are strong links to social and community impacts resulting from the development and improvement of community sport and recreation facilities and strategies, which include:

1. Enhanced community access to infrastructure that encourages alternative health and wellbeing outcomes;
2. Revitalisation of local communities;
3. Reduction of social isolation;
4. Increased visitor footprint; and
5. Increased female participation in active recreation.

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy identifies high levels of obesity, dementia, and poor mental health as significant issues for our community. Provision of sport, play and recreation opportunities are important contributors to improved health and intergenerational interactions.

### ***Environmental Implications***

Environmental implications will be considered in the development of individual projects. The report acknowledges in its "Key Regional Influences" (page 9) the on-going impacts of climate change continuing to increase, placing additional pressure on infrastructure and reliance on natural resources.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Community engagement will be undertaken in the development of both local strategies to deliver on infrastructure and priorities for Yarra Ranges as well as during the scoping and delivery of individual projects.

## **COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

The MERSRS provides a core basis for the collaboration between Eastern Melbourne Councils with a key outcome being innovative infrastructure provision across the region that reduces the overall resource impact to individual Councils. The MERSRS also provides a consolidated approach to State and Federal Government with priorities and funding requirements across the proposed MERSRS.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

The primary risk associated with the MERSRS is continuing collaboration of the regional Councils involved during the delivery of its outcomes. This risk is mitigated through the collaboration of the member Councils at the Eastern Regional Groups of Councils Meeting (The Mayor and CEO) and at an officer level through the MERSRS steering group (Manager and technical specialists).

Yarra Ranges involvement in proposed priority projects will be further assessed during the development of the Yarra Ranges Recreation and Open Space Strategy.

## **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. The Melbourne East Regional Sport and Recreation Strategy 2022-2032.