

Annual Report

2021/22



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Indigenous acknowledgement

The ERG recognises the traditional custodians of the land we call the eastern region. We acknowledge their rich cultural heritage and spiritual connection to the land. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging and value their ongoing contribution to the cultural heritage of the region.

From the Chair

While we started the year with some optimism that the worst of COVID-19 may soon be behind us, the savage storms that swept through Melbourne's outer east in June 2021 left devastating impacts that have continued to challenge our regional communities.

For Yarra Ranges, it was the worst storm in their history, causing more than \$16 million of damage, with tens of thousands of trees damaging hundreds of properties, blocking roads and bringing down power and phone lines. Thousands of people were left without heating and communications for weeks, and for some, months.

The rapid and comprehensive response from ERG councils highlighted the benefits of a regional approach and the inherent strength of the many working relationships that this engenders. ERG councils made staff and resources available to assist with the estimated \$31 million recovery effort, while also continuing to respond to the ongoing challenges being faced by local government.

COVID-19 continued to dominate and challenge local communities, businesses and council organisations, and we quickly came to realise, as have communities and businesses across Melbourne, that there is no quick path back to normal - we all have to continue to adapt as we define our 'new normal'.

That councils have kept their (often virtual) doors open and continued to deliver quality services is extraordinary and something we should all be very proud of. Unlike the private sector who was able to access JobKeeper and other supports, councils have just had to manage. With capped rate budgets and the ever-increasing number of expectations placed on councils, times are challenging.

Our operating environment continues to change - ERG councils have managed the implementation of the new local government act, gender equality act, prepared for the introduction of three-year-old kinder, and a fourth food and garden organics (FOGO) bin - during a time where cost escalations, delays, labour shortages and uncertainty only add to the pressures of project and service delivery.

Our scheduled meeting with then Local Government Minister, the Hon. Shaun Leane was impacted by the Ministerial reshuffle following the retirement of several longer serving MPs ahead of the State election. We would like to acknowledge and thank Minister Leane for his efforts and his support of the ERG.

The year ended on a high point with a Metropolitan Partnerships Development Fund grant to support a Health Innovation & Care Economy - Towards a Regional Investment Strategy project to capitalise on the eastern region's strengths and growing care economy.

For the ERG, strong partnerships with regional groups and government are essential for our mutual success. As we look towards the November State election, we will again advocate for regional priorities that benefit our communities; respond to the strong need to update and improve facilities; address service gaps; and build the regional economy. The pandemic reminded us of the importance of our local communities and neighbourhoods, and the benefits of accessing services and amenities close to home.

Through our regional advocacy and partnership approach, we are determined to seek the best possible outcomes for our region, and to ensure that local knowledge and creativity inform decision making. We remain committed to advocating strongly for the region and to building effective and respectful relationships with all levels of government, especially given the headwinds ahead.

Thank you to my Councillor, CEO and regional colleagues for their support and hard work in what has been another challenging year.



Cr Michelle Kleinert,
Chair, Eastern Region Group of Councils
Mayor, Manningham City Council

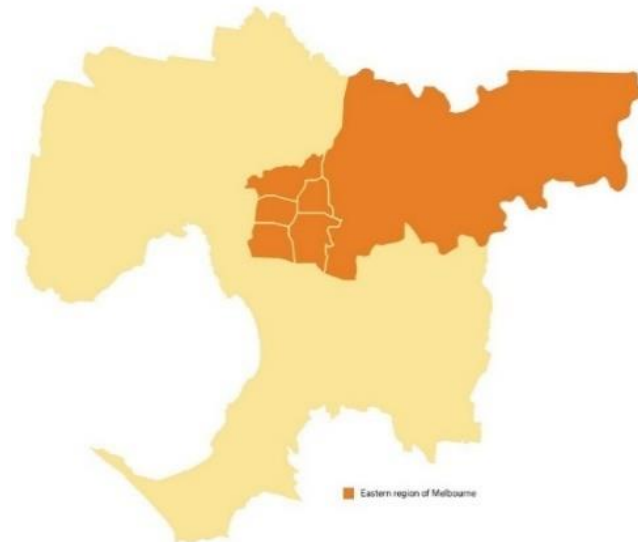


Our region

The eastern region is the traditional home of the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation. The region stretches from middle and outer ring suburbs such as Glen Waverley, Doncaster, Box Hill and Ringwood, to townships like Warrandyte, Yarra Junction and Olinda in the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges.

In the year to June 2021, the region's population dropped 2.2% or 20,866 people to 924,028. Some 365,398 jobs produce an estimated \$129,471M gross regional output.

Source: Remplan - Eastern Metropolitan 2021 R1



About the ERG

The Eastern Region Group of Councils (ERG) is a collaboration between six councils in eastern metropolitan Melbourne: Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Monash, Whitehorse and Yarra Ranges.

We work collaboratively on shared priorities through advocacy, research and integrated planning on behalf of the region's communities. Our vision is to be a connected, healthy, sustainable and prosperous region.

**We work towards our vision
through a focus on four
strategic pillars:
Our communities
Our environment
Our economy
Our buildings and infrastructure**



Communities that are more resilient and cohesive, and who enjoy an improving quality of life, with better health and wellbeing and great access to services



A region known for its **environmental** stewardship and regional responses to sustainability (water, waste, energy and emissions), with space for people & nature, where healthy ecosystems support healthy people & growing economies



Economy: Through diverse local employment opportunities that support an adaptable workforce, the region is ready for the jobs of the future and will enjoy a connected, competitive, diverse & prosperous future.



Buildings & infrastructure that promote social cohesion, equality of opportunity, resource efficiency and health in a region that is easy to get around and where active or public transport is preferred for short distances.

Working in partnership

Our working relationships with regional, government and council officer groups are critical to our success.

This includes regional groups such as the Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance (EAHA); Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (EAGA); Eastern Transport Coalition (ETC); Melbourne East Regional Economic Development Group (MEREDG); Eastern Alliance for Sustainable Learning (EASL); Eastern Metropolitan Partnership (EMP), the Economy and Planning Working Group (EPWG), the Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Charter Group, Outer East Primary Care Partnership, and North-East Local Jobs Network.

We also collaborate with other regional local government groups such as the Northern Councils Alliance, Greater South East Melbourne, LeadWest and the M9.

In 2021/22, the ERG has supported many officer groups from across eastern region councils including:

- Gender Equality
- Reconciliation
- Sport and Recreation
- Procurement
- Communications
- Human Services
- Infrastructure Directors

2021/22 highlights and achievements

Year 1 Strategic Plan update

This year saw the ERG complete its first year of the implementation of its *Strategic Plan 2021-2025*. The Strategic Plan sets out the vision for the ERG and the region, and is framed around ‘four pillars’: Social, Economic, Environmental, and Buildings & Infrastructure. Each pillar is supported by objectives that are being pursued by the region’s councils and through ERG advocacy and projects. The 18 actions identified by the ERG form the basis of our workplan which involves integrated planning, shared services, joint procurement and advocacy, as well as supporting the good governance of the ERG.

In our first year of implementation, achievements include:

- Review and drafting of the *Regional Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2032*.
- Working with the Eastern Region Procurement Network to accelerate joint procurement. This has involved developing a framework for collaboration, a policy template, and, with support of Procurement Australia and SimPLY, the analysis of historical procurement data to assist in identifying opportunities for collaboration and improvement. Regular meetings of the region’s Procurement Managers are also supported by the ERG. The Power BI data cubes developed through this project will be hosted for a 12-month period to enable us to determine their value in supporting smarter use of Council data.
- Advocacy targeted to the May 2022 Federal election. The ERG identified a range of capital works and projects to support our regional communities, grow the regional economy, and sustain our built and natural environment. Media releases, social media and the ERG website were regularly updated with news and information. ERG councils pursued meetings with local members, and the ERG, with the support of regional groups, met with several Federal Ministers and Shadow Ministers to raise the profile of the region and ensure they were aware of ERG priorities.
- Working on the 2022 State election advocacy, with a focus on economic development in the region.
- Reconciliation Advisory Groups and Action Plans - ERG meets regularly with council officers to provide assistance with progressing activities and opportunities regionally, including the potential to create an online indigenous cultural awareness training module tailored for the region.
- Promoting trails for tourism, health and movement in conjunction with the ETC, as well as regional road, rail and bus priorities.
- Understanding the minimum social housing supply needs for the region (undertaken by Knox City Council for all ERG and Charter councils).
- Support to EAGA to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.

The progression of a regional economic development and investment attraction strategy has not progressed as planned as COVID necessitated a shift from regional economic development to local business support.

Operational activities, which are ongoing, include bi-monthly ERG and CEO meetings and project support. The ERG aims to foster productive relationships with key stakeholders and communicates regularly through its website, social media (a LinkedIn page was set up in September 2021) and a quarterly ‘ERG Regional Update’ e-newsletter.

COVID-19 continued challenges

Challenges for local government to maintain service delivery continued across the region as councils responded to changing COVID requirements within council workplaces and for communities using council facilities and services. Consistent communication of requirements for staff, businesses and the community was essential as facilities progressively re-opened and staff returned to their workplaces.

Significant efforts were made by councils, residents, businesses, community and sporting groups to ensure relevant COVID-safe practices were in place throughout these times. This included providing COVID-safe marshalls at council venues as required by the State.

Despite direct COVID impacts on council budgets due to reduced revenue and increased costs, councils continued to provide services to a high-quality standard for all residents, businesses and other community members. A strong focus remained on delivering tailored ‘on-the-ground’ initiatives to provide economic stimulus and support to businesses in their recovery across the ERG.

Federal election

In the lead up to the May Federal election, the ERG raised priority issues for the eastern region with local members, Ministers and Shadow Ministers. These included capital works and projects to support communities, grow our economy and sustain our built and natural environments.

Councils met their local MPs to discuss and seek their support for local and regional priority issues. Additional meetings, involving key regional groups, were held with relevant Federal Ministers and Shadow Ministers raising the profile of the ERG and its priorities for the region.

We look forward to working with the new Federal Government and local members to progress these initiatives.

Coming together in times of need

ERG councils came together to support Knox and Yarra Ranges councils in their clean up and recovery challenges after the worst storm in the region's history.

The storm left a trail of destruction and a damage bill for Yarra Ranges Council of more than \$16M. In one night, 177 properties were damaged, 76 deemed uninhabitable, many of which have had to be demolished. Tens of thousands of trees fell, blocking roads and bringing down telephone and power lines, leaving thousands of residents and businesses without power, heat, phone or internet connection for weeks and severely restricting access.

A win for social housing and communities

In March 2022, the ERG joined a chorus of councils and local government bodies in calling for the State Government to drop its proposed exemption for rates on public and community housing.

While the rates exemption was shelved, an on-going funding mechanism was also abandoned by Government. The ERG remains keen to work to secure ongoing funding for a much-needed increase in social housing.

Safe, secure and affordable housing is critical for people's mental health and wellbeing. To address homelessness and increase social housing, the ERG continues to work closely with the EAHA and the Homelessness and Social Housing Charter Group.

Regional Sport and Recreation Strategy

ERG councils have worked with sporting associations to update the *Regional Sport and Recreation Strategy 2022-32* and guide future planning across a range of sporting and recreational activities for the region.



The strategy will assist in advocating for funding for regional priorities and foster collaboration and shared use of facilities.

Government relations

The ERG continues to be supported by The Agenda Group in our advocacy efforts, which had a focus on the 2022 Federal and State elections as well as the importance of strengthened partnerships and timely guidance between all levels of government.

We strengthened relationships with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), Local Government Victoria (LGV) and the Eastern Metropolitan Partnership (EMP) through regular meetings, sharing of information and project activity.

Advocacy and other activities

The ERG participated in and advocated for:

- EOI under the Local Jobs Program for support for sector strategies
- Selection panel for the Outer East Primary Care Partnership Grants
- Keeping local communities safe from alcohol related violence
- Proposed planning reforms
- LGV Councils and Emergencies Project - Phase 3
- New four-bin waste and recycling system
- City Nature Challenge
- Rate capping - need to allow for growth and pandemic recovery
- Proposed exemption for social housing from council rates
- Federal advocacy priorities - mental health, renewable energy, skills and employment, social housing, transport
- Review of MAV Rules - aligning with regions
- COVID Marshalls - Pandemic Open Premises Directive (No. 6)
- Metropolitan Partnerships Development Fund - Health Innovation and Care Economy - Towards a Regional Investment Strategy project funding
- A student placement assisted in the creation of an 'Employment in the East' document, outlining economic trends pre- and post-COVID in the region.

Regional groups - Partners' highlights

Officer networks and regional groups are a significant factor in the success of the region. Highlights for the key local government regional groups in 2021/22 include:



Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance

The appointment of a new Lead Officer to the EAHA in February

2022 created the opportunity for an extensive review of EAHA's role, impact and purpose. This process reaffirmed EAHA's value in strengthening advocacy, leveraging regional partnerships, and building the capacity of its member councils to improve social and affordable housing outcomes for the region.

EAHA has renewed its Memorandum of Understanding and developed a Strategic Plan 2022-2026 supported by an Annual Implementation Plan.

With the May Federal Election and the upcoming State Election a key focus, EAHA has reviewed its advocacy platform, building the capacity of members to advocate for regional and local affordable housing needs.

EAHA contributed to submissions led by the Regional Homelessness and Social Housing Charter Group and was successful in securing an \$180,000 grant to conduct an active research project on preventing homelessness for women over 55, through the EMP Development Fund. The project will be delivered from July 2022 and is expected to be completed by October 2023.



Eastern Transport Coalition

The ETC, who advocates for sustainable, active and integrated transport for the million people in Melbourne's east, has prioritised the consideration of improvements to the bus network over the past year. This work has been informed by both the State Government's release of the Victorian Bus Plan and the upcoming November 2022 State election.

A Bus Network Review Working Group, comprising officers from each of the seven ETC member councils, completed significant work to identify shortcomings and opportunities to improve the bus network and supporting infrastructure throughout the east.

This work has been shared with the Minister for Public Transport and his office, as well as with senior bureaucrats in the Department of Transport, and key recommended initiatives will be reinforced by the ETC's election advocacy.

Election advocacy will also include the ETC policy platform which covers rail, active transport and road projects.

Further advocacy activity is taking place with other stakeholders, including Monash University, to support the call for State and Federal governments to work together on a business case for the Caulfield to Rowville Trackless Rapid Transport proposal.



Melbourne's Eastern Region Economic Development Group

COVID relief and recovery initiatives that emerged through the height of the pandemic and were delivered by local government have largely become embedded as business as usual with accompanying resourcing and budget implications for councils' economic development units.

With more workers seeking flexibility closer to home, there has been a regional focus on co-working, supported by Flexible Workspace Australia and the State Government. This enabled collaborative spaces to be introduced to small and micro businesses who may have previously been unaware of the benefits of co-working and has encouraged MEREDG to further explore opportunities for an eastern co-working cluster.

Three MEREDG councils partner on the Bayswater Business Precinct (BPP) Project and are moving forward with the development of a business case for a proof-of-concept for an Advanced Manufacturing Enterprise Hub. This action is one of the four key themes emerging from the BBP Transformation Strategy.

MEREDG is keen to undertake advocacy to support an investment attraction strategy for the region, addressing competitive advantage as a basis for investment attraction, development and job creation in Melbourne's east.

Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action

EAGA continues its active leadership, advocacy and support to local government to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions and to build climate resilience.

EAGA and its partners won an LGPro award for the Victorian Energy Collaboration - a sector-leading renewable energy deal that includes 50 councils across the state. It also secured \$70,000 in funding from DELWP to undertake an economic analysis of the impact of climate change on community assets and infrastructure across greater Melbourne.

After sustained advocacy by EAGA and its partners over many years, the State Government announced it would no longer mandate new developments to be connected to the gas network.

Other initiatives include:

- Electric vehicle transition plans for council fleets, including detailed cost benefit analyses and capacity building for fleet managers
- A detailed feasibility study to assess costs and emissions savings for increasing recycled content in council buildings and infrastructure. This will assist councils in better understanding the recycled materials market and make changes to procurement practices to drive further uptake of low impact materials.

These initiatives and more were discussed by 340-plus officers and Councillors from across the state at the Victorian Greenhouse Alliance Conference. The event, at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre, made a welcome and successful return after a three-year hiatus.



Regional Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Charter

The Charter Group comprises 13 councils working to increase the supply of affordable housing and improve the homelessness support system.

Activities include:

- Meetings and CEO Forum with Housing Agencies
- Webinars on the minimum supply of social housing tool led by Knox Council, and the Homes for Homes approach taken by Bayside Council
- Support to the Community Housing Industry Association/MAV Affordable Housing Reference Group developing guidance materials
- Promoting the Practice Guide and a Functional Zero approach in Homelessness Week
- Assessing the minimum supply of social housing required for the region
- Advocacy and submissions to the Federal House of Representatives inquiry into homelessness in Australia; the Review of the National Homelessness and Housing Agreement; and Homes Victoria's 10-year strategy, Compact, and the removal of rate income and planning authority for social housing.

Key outcomes are:

- 100% of Charter councils have integrated social and affordable housing objectives in key council plans
- Increased engagement with the homelessness service sector and community housing providers
- Improved guidance and support for councils' homelessness responses
- better understanding of regional housing need.



Financial Position - 30 June 2022

	2021 (\$)	2022 (\$)
Income		
Annual ERG Council member contributions	210,000	210,000
Carry forward surplus	111,850	192,535
Total funds	\$ 321,850	\$ 402,535
Expenditure		
Salaries	87,854	118,731
Travel / Phones / Sundries	2,158	2,807
Consultancies	39,303	60,930
- Graphic design and website	2,519	3,730
- Strategic Advocacy Plan development	15,000	0
- Workshop facilitation	784	0
- Regional economic and demographic data	6,000	6,000
- Government relations advice	15,000	15,000
- Melbourne East Regional Sport and Recreation Strategy update	0	17,000
- Procurement review*	0	19,200*
Total expenditure	\$ 129,315	\$ 182,468
Surplus (Deficit)* Procurement Project \$28,800 committed for finalisation in FY23	\$ 192,535	\$ 220,067

Members & meeting attendance 2021/22

The ERG comprises the Mayor, Deputy Mayor (or Councillor) and CEO (or their delegate). Membership is renewed after the annual Mayoral election in December, when the ERG elect the Chair and Deputy Chair. The ERG generally meets every two months.

July - November 2021*		December 2021 - June 2022**	
Knox		Knox	
Cr Lisa Cooper, Mayor	2	Cr Susan Laukens, Mayor	3
Cr Susan Laukens, Deputy Mayor	2	Cr Nicole Seymour, Deputy Mayor	3
Ian Bell, Acting CEO / Bruce Dobson, CEO	6	Bruce Dobson, CEO	6
Manningham		Manningham	
Cr Andrew Conlon, Mayor	2	Cr Michelle Kleinert, Mayor (ERG Chair 21/22)	3
Cr Anna Chen, Deputy Mayor	2	Cr Deidre Diamante, Deputy Mayor	1
Andrew Day, CEO	6	Andrew Day, CEO	6
Maroondah		Maroondah	
Cr Kylie Spears, Mayor (ERG Chair 20/21)	2	Cr Mike Symon, Mayor	3
Cr Nora Lamont, Deputy Mayor	2	Cr Rob Steane, Deputy Mayor	3
Steve Kozlowski, CEO	6	Steve Kozlowski, CEO	6
Monash		Monash	
Cr Brian Little, Mayor	2	Cr Stuart James, Mayor	3
Cr Rebecca Paterson (ERG Deputy Chair 20/21)	1	Cr Rebecca Paterson	1
Dr Andi Diamond, CEO	6	Dr Andi Diamond, CEO	6
Whitehorse		Whitehorse	
Cr Andrew Munroe, Mayor	2	Cr Tina Liu, Mayor (ERG Deputy Chair 21/22)	3
Cr Raylene Carr, Deputy Mayor	2	Cr Denise Massoud, Deputy Mayor	3
Simon McMillan, CEO	5	Simon McMillan, CEO	6
Yarra Ranges		Yarra Ranges	
Cr Fiona McAllister, Mayor	2	Cr Jim Child, Mayor	3
Cr David Eastham Deputy Mayor	2	Cr Joanna Skelton, Deputy Mayor	3
Tammi Rose, CEO	6	Tammi Rose, CEO	6
*2 ERG Meetings + 4 CEO Meetings		**3 ERG + 3 CEO meetings (1 ERG meeting cancelled)	

Melbourne's eastern region. One united voice.

Contact

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