

# Annual Report

2019/20



# From the Chair



On behalf of the Eastern Region Group of Councils (ERG) I am pleased to present our 2019/20 Annual Report. As a coalition of six local governments in Melbourne’s east, we work together on shared priorities for the benefit of our communities, our environment, our local economies and councils.

Our advocacy for the May 2019 Federal election provided a strong direction for our work this year. Many regional priorities, such as Headspace services, Homes for Homes, bike and walking trails and commuter carparks were funded. Our internal review confirmed the importance of a strong evidence base and partnerships for success. With this in mind we improved our communication and increased our collaboration with key regional groups, to leverage their specialized knowledge and better support joint advocacy. Significant planning and preparation towards a whole of region stakeholder workshop was quickly overtaken by the emerging coronavirus crisis, with the event delayed then cancelled.

**While our work is guided by our strategic plan, there is no doubt that 2020 will be remembered for the disruption of the summer bushfire events, followed closely by the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic.**

Council staff adapted quickly to new ways of working and the social distancing requirements of COVID-19 and to minimise impacts on essential council services. For our communities, and particularly for local businesses, the implications are far reaching and will shape ERG action for many years to come. Working regionally, I am confident Councils are more effective in tackling the challenges that our communities, businesses and staff face.

These are challenging times. I want to acknowledge the strong leadership and support of ERG members - the Mayors, Councillors and CEOs from Knox, Maroondah, Manningham, Monash, Whitehorse and Yarra Ranges, supported by our EO, Claire Anderson who we farewelled in August, prior to welcoming Liz Johnstone to the role.

I look forward to building on this year’s work and hope to be able to meet face to face with regional colleagues in the not too distant future.

Cr Sharon Ellis, Mayor, Whitehorse Council  
Chair, Eastern Region Group of Councils

**Our Strategic Plan sets our direction, goals & priorities for the current year and for the future.**



# 2019/20 achievements

The eastern region is the traditional home of the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people of the Kulin Nations.

**We strive to support nearly 1 million residents, and 400,000 jobs producing \$57M in gross regional product in 2019**

The region stretches from middle and outer ring suburbs, such as Glen Waverley, Doncaster, Box Hill and Ringwood, to townships like Yarra Junction and Olinda in the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges.

## Working in partnership

We have strengthened our working relationships with regional groups and council officers across the east, including:

- Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance (EAHA)
- Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (EAGA)
- Eastern Transport Coalition (ETC)
- Melbourne East Region Economic Development Group (MEREDG)
- Eastern Alliance for Sustainable Learning (EASL)
- Eastern Metropolitan Partnership (EMP) and the Economy and Planning Working Group (EPWG).

We worked closely with council staff networks, such as Communications Managers and Procurement Managers, and with other regional local government groups. These include the Local Government Homelessness & Social Housing Charter Working Group, Northern Councils Alliance, Inner Melbourne Action Plan and LeadWest.

## About the region

We initiated seasonal updates, 'About the Region' to improve communication, and cooperated with key groups to profile their activities to the ERG. We held policy workshops on regional, longer-term issues and gathered data to build a regional picture.



**EAHA** aims to address the shortfall in social and affordable housing in the region, so that the most disadvantaged people can access safe and secure housing, with a view towards better health outcomes and a higher quality of

life. EAHA [advocacy priorities for the Federal election 2019](#) included tax reform, gap funding for Housing Associations and the appointment of a Housing Minister to drive change.

A consistent methodology to understanding housing needs was explored through expanding Knox's methodology region-wide, using Housing.id data for monitoring.

ERG strongly supported the Regional Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Charter to progress EAHA priorities relating to Inclusionary Zoning and land availability data.

EAHA is preparing for a 10-year performance review, working to ensure local communities benefit from COVID stimulus packages, and will be supporting the Charter implementation in the year ahead.



**EAGA** delivers innovative climate change mitigation and adaptation projects, influences policy and

programs through advocacy and builds the capacity of its members and stakeholders across the region.

EAGA progressed the 10-year renewable energy Local Government Power Purchase Agreement with 47 councils and other joint initiatives to deliver economies of scale and facilitate initiatives typically beyond the reach of individual councils.

Through these, EAGA enables sustainable, resilient, low carbon communities and adds value to councils.

This year, with Victorian Greenhouse Alliances, EAGA has led a sector-wide advocacy response to the Electricity Distribution Price Review seeking \$15M in cost savings for councils over the next five years. Solar Savers continues, installing 186 systems and over 960KW of renewable energy across the region's households.

Next year will focus on business engagement, resilient emergency relief centres, and integrating a low carbon, climate resilient future into pandemic recovery.



ETC is the primary advocate for improving the transport network in Melbourne’s east. They represent seven municipalities and over

one million people and advocate for accessible and integrated transport to improve liveability and reduce car dependency.

ETC led a ‘Commuters Count’ campaign and have consistently called for a bus network review, with a policy document garnering strong stakeholders support across the sector and across Melbourne. This provides a basis for developing stronger relationships with the Department of Transport and other key partners necessary for improved bus services.

A technical working group is demonstrating the justification for specific proposals across the region. With 20-minute neighbourhoods and the constraints of COVID-19 local bus services will become increasingly important for local communities.

### Advocacy & government relations

Advocacy is an important part of what we do. We retain The Agenda Group to support positive ERG government relations. Feedback from MPs and bureaucrats following the Federal Election reinforced the importance of robust data or business cases, demonstrated stakeholder support and of working with backbenchers as local champions.

COVID-19 has substantially changed the environment for all levels of government. The financial and operational impacts on ERG councils is often poorly understood. Through submissions, correspondence, meetings and discussion we work to inform and influence decision making for the region.

This year we met with:

- The Hon Tim Smith, Shadow Minister for Planning, Local Government, Housing & Pop’n.
- The Hon Adem Somyurek, Minister for Local Government
- Ms Sonia Terpstra, MLC Eastern Metropolitan
- Mr Matt Fregon, MLA for Mount Waverley
- Mr Paul Hamer, MLA for Box Hill
- Mr Shaun Leane, MLC for Eastern Metropolitan
- Mr Jackson Taylor, MLA for Bayswater
- Mr Will Fowles, MLA for Burwood
- Senator Raff Ciccone, Senator for Victoria

We supported submissions by regional groups of council officers and made a submission to the Skills for Victoria Inquiry. In addition to supporting advocacy by EAGA, EAHA and MEREDG, we wrote letters to:

- Emergency Management Comm’r, Andrew Crisp
- Prime Minister Scott Morrison
- Premier Daniel Andrews
- Ministers for Local Government, Adem Somyurek and Shaun Leane

As we move towards local government elections in 2020, and with the Federal and State Government elections over 2021 /2022, we will continue to work with council staff, regional groups and strategic partners to support a cohesive, sustainable and prosperous region.



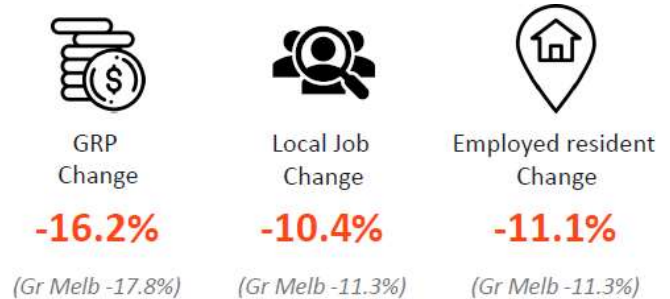
MEREDG comprises ERG economic development managers who support and promote local businesses through place management, events, training, investment attraction and campaigns to strengthen the region's

economy. The ERG supported a workshop for MEREDG to identify their common priorities which are to support Industry and business to be innovative, place based, and to build local networks and skills.

These networks came to the fore as the ERG developed a funding application to support stronger local careers pathways under the National Careers Institute Program, where we would work with key sectors and government to strengthen relationships with industry and its future workforce.

With most businesses in the east being small to medium sized enterprises, the early outreach by MEREDG to local businesses has enabled them to play a pivotal role in business support.

Early estimates of the impact of COVID on the local economy are:



## ERG Financial Position - at 30 June 2020

|  | 30 June 2019 (\$) | 30 June 2020 (\$) |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Income</b>  |                   |                   |
| Annual ERG Council member contributions                                | 157,500           | 210,000           |
| Project contributions: Regional Libraries Stage 1 & Strategic Advocacy | 45,680            | 0                 |
| Carry forward (surplus) from 2017/18                                   | 121,927           | 65,775            |
| <b>Total income</b>  | <b>\$ 325,107</b> | <b>\$ 275,775</b> |
| <b>Expenditure</b>   |                   |                   |
| Salaries   | 121,626           | 114,482           |
| Travel / Phones / sundries   | 3,844             | 3,868             |
| Consultancies  | <b>133,862</b>    | <b>45,171</b>     |
| - Graphic design and website   | 23,352            | 4,213             |
| - Regional Library Project / Strategic Advocacy Plan development       | 81,100            | 0                 |
| - Workshop facilitation  | 6,205             | 9,758             |
| - Regional economic and demographic data                               | 7,705             | 6,000             |
| - Government relations advice  | 12,500            | 24,500            |
| - Legal fees   | 3,000             | 700               |
| <b>Total expenditure</b>   | <b>\$ 259,332</b> | <b>\$ 163,521</b> |
| <b>Surplus / (Deficit)</b>   | <b>\$ 65,775</b>  | <b>\$ 112,254</b> |

## ERG members & meeting attendance 2019/20

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

| July - November 2019*                     |   | December 2019 - June 2020**               |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| <b>Knox</b>                               |   |   |   |
| Cr Jake Keogh, Mayor (Chair ERG 2018/19)  | 2 | Cr Nicole Seymour, Mayor                  | 4 |
| Cr Peter Lockwood, Deputy Mayor           | 1 | Cr Marcia Timmers-Leitch, Deputy Mayor    | 4 |
| Tony Doyle, CEO                           | 0 | Tony Doyle, CEO                           | 3 |
| <b>Manningham</b>                         |   |   |   |
| Cr Paula Piccinini, Mayor                 | 2 | Cr Paul McLeish, Mayor                    | 4 |
| Cr Anna Chen, Deputy Mayor                | 2 | Cr Mike Zafiroopoulos AM, Deputy Mayor    | 4 |
| Andrew Day, CEO                           | 2 | Andrew Day, CEO                           | 4 |
| <b>Maroondah</b>                          |   |   |   |
| Cr Rob Steane, Mayor                      | 1 | Cr Mike Symon, Mayor, ERG Deputy Chair    | 4 |
| Cr Kylie Spears, Deputy Mayor             | 1 | Cr Marijke Graham, Deputy Mayor           | 4 |
| Steve Kozlowski, CEO                      | 2 | Steve Kozlowski, CEO                      | 4 |
| <b>Monash</b>                             |   |   |   |
| Cr Shane McCluskey, Mayor                 | 2 | Cr Stuart James, Mayor                    | 4 |
| Cr Rebecca Paterson                       | 1 | Cr Rebecca Paterson (maternity leave)     | 1 |
| Dr Andi Diamond, CEO                      | 2 | Dr Andi Diamond, CEO                      | 4 |
| <b>Whitehorse</b>                         |   |   |   |
| Cr Bill Bennett, Mayor                    | 1 | Cr Sharon Ellis, Mayor (ERG Chair)        | 4 |
| Cr Sharon Ellis                           | 1 | Cr Denise Massoud                         | 4 |
| Simon McMillan (from September) CEO       | 2 | Simon McMillan, CEO                       | 4 |
| <b>Yarra Ranges</b>                       |   |   |   |
| Cr Tony Stevenson, Mayor                  | 1 | Cr Richard Higgins, Mayor                 | 3 |
| Cr Richard Higgins, Dep. Mayor            | 1 | Cr Len Cox, Deputy Mayor                  | 2 |
| Tammi Rose, CEO                           | 1 | Tammi Rose, CEO (Mark Vermalis A/CEO Feb) | 4 |
| <b>*1 Meeting &amp; 1 Special meeting</b> |   | <b>**4 Meetings</b>                       |   |

## Contact

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# Melbourne's eastern region. One united voice.

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