

# Annual Report

2022/23



# Table of contents

From the Chair .....	3
About the ERG.....	4
2022/23 highlights and achievements.....	5
Highlights from key regional partnership groups .....	7
Financial Position - 30 June 2023 .....	9
Members & meeting attendance 2022/23 .....	9

## 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

The Eastern Region Group of Councils share a vision for Melbourne's east, and the shared values of collaboration, cooperation and co-investment.

As a group, this enables us to take on shared challenges, support innovation and strengthen our advocacy and leadership on behalf of almost one million residents in Melbourne's east.

This Annual Report provides an update about our activities to the six local government Councils that make up the Eastern Region Group (ERG), our partners and regional stakeholders.



As an alliance, the ERG has met regularly and proactively sought to engage with state and federal counterparts, council officers and other regional groups and agencies.

The past year has been characterised by increased advocacy and engagement with local state and federal candidates and Members of Parliament.

The year commenced with a change of government at the federal level, closely followed by the Victorian state election in November, the federal Aston by-election in April, and ended with the announcement of a further by-election in the state seat of Warrandyte.

Building on our federal advocacy platform, we launched *Growing local jobs for regional recovery - Priorities for Government collaboration* in October. Our advocacy had a strong focus on local economic recovery as cost of living pressures and COVID recovery became more challenging across the region, and continued to advance priorities including mental health, renewable energy, skills and employment, social housing and transport.

ERG members met with local state and federal Members of Parliament in April and June to discuss challenges faced by local communities and the local government sector, present our advocacy priorities, and call for stronger relationships across all levels of government.

We stressed that early engagement and stronger local input to decision making is needed to address regional challenges, such as access to safe and affordable housing, and raised our concerns about threats to council's roles in planning and building and the region's high rate of canopy tree loss.

As well as our engagement with state and federal candidates and MPs across major and minor parties, the Minister for Local Government, the Hon. Melissa Horne MP attended the April ERG meeting where we stressed the challenges to the financial sustainability of the sector that are impacting the capacity of councils to meet community needs.

This uplift in engagement by the ERG, councils and regional groups augers well for more effective partnerships and for further collaboration.

The ERG values its strong collaboration with regional groups, and we have included highlights from them in this report. We are also appreciative of the extensive active engagement by council officers that support our work.

Finally, I would like to thank my ERG colleagues, in particular former Chair, Cr Michelle Kleinert, Manningham Mayor, and Deputy Chair, Cr Tina Liu, Whitehorse Mayor, and the current Deputy Chair, Cr Mark Lane, Mayor of Whitehorse.

We remain determined to seek the best possible outcomes for our region and communities.

Thank you all for your hard work and support.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Rob Steane'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Cr Rob Steane, OAM. Chair, Eastern Region Group of Councils  
Mayor, Maroondah City Council

# About the ERG

The Eastern Region Group of Councils (ERG) is a collaboration between six Councils in Melbourne's east: Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Monash, Whitehorse and Yarra Ranges. We work collaboratively through advocacy, research and integrated planning on behalf of the region's communities - almost 1 in 5 of Greater Melbourne's population. Our vision is to be a connected, healthy, sustainable and prosperous region.

## Our region

The eastern region is the traditional home of the Wurundjeri Woi wurrung 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.

The region's population is estimated at 925,784 in 2022. Some 403,736 jobs produce an estimated \$136,487M in gross regional output, mainly from the manufacturing and construction sectors. Major employers in the region sit within the health care and social assistance; education and training; and retail trade sectors. Source: Remplan - Eastern Metropolitan (2022 R2)

## Our vision

We work towards our vision through a focus on four strategic pillars:  
**Communities, Environment, Economy and Infrastructure.**



## Working in partnership

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

These includes the Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance (EAHA); Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (EAGA); Eastern Transport Coalition (ETC); Melbourne East Regional Economic Development Group (MEREDG); Eastern Metropolitan Partnership (EMP), the Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Charter Group; Outer East Primary Care Partnership; and the North-East Local Jobs Network.

We also collaborate with other regional local government groups such as the Municipal Association of Victoria, LGPro, Northern Councils Alliance, Greater South East Melbourne, LeadWest and the M9. We support and contribute to a range of officer networks and project groups including:

- Gender Equality
- Reconciliation
- Sport and Recreation
- People & Culture
- Learning & Development
- Planning & Building
- Procurement
- Communications



# 2022/23 highlights and achievements

## ERG Strategic Plan update

**The ERG continued to implement its *Strategic Plan 2021-2025*, which sets out a vision for the ERG and the region. The Plan is framed around ‘four pillars’: Social, Economic, Environmental, and Infrastructure & Buildings, with each pillar supported by a series of objectives that are being pursued by the region’s Councils, regional groups and through ERG advocacy and projects.**

The plan identifies 18 actions which form the basis of our workplan and involve integrated planning, shared services, joint procurement and advocacy, as well as supporting the good governance of the ERG.

As well as preparing for a mid-term review, in the second year of implementation highlights include:

- Advocacy priorities were targeted towards the need for better collaboration between all levels of government to achieve better outcomes for communities in the east. Meetings were held with the Minister for Local Government, the Hon. Melissa Horne MP as well as local state and federal Members of Parliament to discuss local challenges and opportunities to work together and contribute to decision making on shared regional priorities.
- Completion of the *Regional Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2032*.
- Commencement and completion of Stage 1 of the Health Innovation and Care Economy project in conjunction with the Eastern Metropolitan Partnership, following a grant from the State Government’s Metropolitan Partnerships Development Fund. The project explores opportunities to strengthen this sector in the east and involves comprehensive research and stakeholder engagement.
- Working with the Eastern Region Procurement Network to accelerate joint procurement and create a Memorandum of Understanding to underpin regional collaboration. With the support of Procurement Australia and SimPLY, this work has included the analysis of historical procurement data to identify opportunities for collaboration. Regular meetings of Procurement Managers were also supported by the ERG throughout the year.
- Regular support to several council officer groups, including the areas of reconciliation and gender equality, to assist and progress opportunities regionally.
- Working with EAHA and the Charter Group of Councils to understand and address the minimum social housing supply needs for the region, as calculated by Knox City Council for all ERG and Charter Councils.
- Inaugural annual member and stakeholder survey to inform how we work and communicate to raise awareness of the ERG’s role and the range of collaborative activities being undertaken and opportunities across the east.
- Continued to support to EAGA to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.
- Ongoing operational support to deliver bi-monthly ERG and CEO meetings, as well as project support.
- Regular communication to members and to foster productive relationships with key stakeholders through our website, social media (LinkedIn page) and quarterly e-newsletter.



## Delivering the Health Innovation and Care Economy project

**The region's health innovation and care economy plays a critical role in our liveability, COVID recovery and economic growth - as well as supporting Melbourne's internationally recognised MedTech ecosystem.**

The \$198,000 *Health Innovation and Care Economy – Towards a Regional Investment Strategy* is being led by the ERG and funded by the State Government's Metropolitan Partnerships Development Fund.

The project aims to build on the region's strengths and identify shared priorities that support economic growth, job creation and business innovation. Consultants, SGS Economics & Planning, have been engaged to work with stakeholders to develop the strategy containing advice to government through region-wide research and engagement.

Stage 1 was completed in May and delivered five background papers. The region has well-established medical and academic institutions, a highly skilled labour force, and enjoys significant exports of health care services and medical product manufacturing:

- Health care services is the fourth largest export sub-industry (out of 114) in the region exporting 27% of its production, valued at \$1.2 billion.
- Human pharmaceutical and medicinal product manufacturing is fifth largest, exporting 81% of its production, valued at \$1 billion.
- Both have supply chains in the region that contribute \$866 million and \$312 million of goods and services purchasing flows respectively

Stage 2 has commenced, with the project expected to be completed by October 2023.



## Regional Sport and Recreation Strategy

The *Regional Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2032* was finalised and endorsed by all ERG Councils. With increased demand on limited open space from a widening range of uses, growing female

participation, and the need for inclusion of all-abilities, the strategy will support and guide eastern regional councils and stakeholders in the future planning and delivery of regional level sport and recreation facilities and shared recreation trails.

## Accelerating joint procurement

The ERG works with Procurement Managers across seven councils to foster and support collaboration and knowledge sharing. A roadmap, governance framework and Heads of Agreement was established to accelerate joint procurement and shared service delivery across these councils, following extensive data analysis and review of contract renewals and opportunities.

## Fostering effective government relations

With a focus on greater collaboration and more effective partnerships between levels of government, the ERG has strengthened our relationship with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV).

The MAV review of regional boundaries saw their Eastern Metropolitan Region align with the ERG area and more regular meetings have been initiated.

We continue regular sharing of information and project activity with Local Government Victoria (LGV) and the Eastern Metropolitan Partnership (EMP) and include government officials in many of our projects and meetings.

The Agenda Group continues to support our government relations and advocacy efforts.

## Advocacy and other activities

The need for effective partnerships with both State and Federal Governments underpinned our election advocacy: *Growing local jobs for regional recovery - Priorities for Government collaboration*, launched in October 2022 in the lead up to the 2022 State election.

We continued to advance our federal advocacy priorities, including mental health, renewable energy, skills and employment, social housing and transport following the May 2022 change of government.

Our advocacy included:

- The financial sustainability of the sector impacted by shifting costs and risks to councils from additional service delivery, as well as rate capping failing to allow for growth and pandemic recovery
- Impacts of expanded 3-year-old kinder services
- Affordable housing supply in conjunction with EAHA
- Proposed planning and building reforms and major project impacts, such as SRL, NEL and LXRA
- Proposed exemption for social housing from rates
- MAV boundary review to align with the region.

# Highlights from key regional partners

Collaboration and alignment to support regional groups is a significant factor for success. Some highlights for the key local government groups active in the eastern region in 2022/23 include:

## Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance



2022/23 proved a particularly busy year for EAHA given the advocacy opportunities around the Federal and State Government elections and the increased focus on the lack of affordable housing as cost-of-living pressures rose sharply.

EAHA progressed an action research project with funding from the Victorian Government's Metropolitan Partnerships fund. The project will build understanding of the extent and factors leading to homelessness for older women in Melbourne's eastern region. This will then inform and recommend ways to intervene early to assist to prevent this growing problem.

EAHA collaborated with Monash University's XYZ Lab, Schored Projects and the Planning Institute of Australia to deliver the 'Making It Home' event in March 2023. Chaired by Jane Caro AM, the event attracted over 200 people including representatives from more than 20 service providers and stakeholder organisations and featured a screening of the film *Under Cover*, followed by a compelling expert panel discussion. The panel featured film writer/director Sue Thomson, researcher Dr Kate Raynor, award winning architect and author of the Design Guide for Older Women's Housing, Architect Sophie Dyring, and activist Diane Thompson who shared their perspectives on housing solutions for older women.

EAHA was an active contributor to the Regional Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Charter Group, the MAV Inter-Council Affordable Housing Forum and also participated in the Community Housing Industry Association (Vic) Local Government Reference Group.

Through these forums there has been greater cross-collaboration on projects, advocacy submissions and improved information exchange across sector stakeholders.

The region farewelled EAHA Lead Joanna - Stubbings, wishing her well in her new role in the NSW Department of Planning and Environment.

## Eastern Transport Coalition



Advocacy focussed on the November 2022 State election formed a major part of the Eastern Transport Coalition's (ETC) 2022-23 activities, with post-election follow up on key initiatives.

This saw the ETC working closely with stakeholder partners to sustain advocacy and ensure State and Federal Government commitments are delivered.

Years of sustained ETC advocacy and a clear [Plan for Better Bus Services](#) saw a major review of Melbourne's north and north-eastern bus networks (including Manningham) announced and reforms proposed to the planning and delivery of bus routes and services.

**Caulfield-Rowville Trackless Rapid Transit project:** Knox and Monash Councils, Monash University and Vicinity Centres have worked successfully with the ETC to ensure the State and Federal Governments' fund and prepare the promised business case. This process has now commenced with preliminary results expected by the end of 2023. In anticipation of a positive outcome, the ETC and partners are preparing for the next stage of advocacy for government funding to design and construct this much needed transport link.

**Eastern Region Trails Strategy:** Following the State election the ETC has worked with the Eastern Region Trails working group to review its advocacy priorities and approach. This has prompted an update to refine priority projects which will each have a tailored advocacy strategy developed to maximise their chances of receiving government support.

To improve local safety and access, ETC member Councils have identified their priority pedestrian crossing projects so that they form part of advocacy efforts in the lead up to the 2024/25 state and federal budgets.



## Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action



Significant progress to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and facilitate climate change adaptation was made by EAGA in 2022/23 through leading regional local government programs.

**Adaptive Community Assets project:** EAGA has completed the second phase and released the project report. This phase developed financial estimates of the costs of climate change impacts on each asset class for all participating councils. This 'baseline' is a critical first step in a cost-benefit analysis framework for assets and assists councils to understand their assets' risk exposure without climate change adaptation. The project's outputs are important for councils seeking to address climate change risk as outlined in the Local Government Act 2020.

**Business Renewable Buying Group - pilot completion:** In June, businesses participating in the pilot Business Renewables Buying Group (BRBG) signed contracts for 100% renewable energy for the next five years. EAGA member councils supported the BRBG pilot, which aimed to accelerate 100% renewable electricity supply for the business community. In total, these businesses will contract over 20GWh, saving more than 16,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> - the equivalent of shifting about 4,000 Victorian homes to 100% renewable energy. Based on the success of the pilot, planning to replicate and expand the project is underway, with the aim of running multiple larger group buys over an additional two years.

**Community Net Zero Analysis - findings:** EAGA undertook a technical project to analyse and quantify the lowest cost emissions reduction opportunities across municipalities in Melbourne's east. The report examined various interventions that councils can undertake to unlock these opportunities and demonstrated that the region can save \$3-5 billion by transitioning to net zero emissions by 2030. The report identified that councils can unlock up to 15% of this potential through a range of different interventions, but all sectors of the community have a important role to play in decarbonisation.

## Melbourne's Eastern Region Economic Development Group



In 2022/23 MEREDG has focussed on a number of initiatives to foster business growth and support local employment.

Led by Maroondah City Council in partnership with the Department of Treasury & Finance and Service Victoria, a Business Customer Relationship Management Platform has received \$363,000 in funding through the Business Accelerator Fund to deliver streamlined methods for business permits.

The project aims to support business growth and boost productivity by streamlining compliance and approvals activities for businesses operating across multiple councils, allowing for faster and easier approvals so that businesses can get on with business sooner.

Councils have all undertaken activities to address workforce shortages in the region, working with key State and Federal Government programs and employment facilitators and networks - such as the Adult Community Further Education (ACFE) Learn Local Network and the NorthEast Local Jobs taskforce and network. To help local people navigate various pathways and support services, and help find a job closer to home, Yarra Ranges Council has set up [Yarra Ranges Joblink](#) that will also assist fill data gaps and build knowledge.



## Regional Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Charter

The ERG participates in the Charter Group - 13 councils working to increase the supply of social housing and improve the homelessness support system. Key activities included webinars on the role of land use planning and submissions, including to:

- Australian Productivity Commission review of the Housing and Homelessness Agreement
- MAV Housing Statement
- Homes Victoria Compact



## Financial Position - 30 June 2023

	2022 (\$)	2023 (\$)
<b>Income</b>		
Annual ERG Council member contributions	210,000	228,000
Carry forward surplus	192,535	220,067
<b>Total funds</b>	<b>\$ 402,535</b>	<b>\$448,067</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Salaries	118,731	132,893
Travel / Phones / Sundries	2,807	4,833
Consultancies	60,930	102,524
- Graphic design and website	3,730	4,855
- Regional economic and demographic data	6,000	6,600
- Government relations advice	15,000	15,000
- Melbourne East Regional Sport and Recreation Strategy update	17,000	0
- Procurement review	19,200	32,300
- Health Innovation and Care Economy project	0	36,769
- Contact mapping	0	7,000
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>\$ 182,468</b>	<b>\$240,250</b>
<b>Surplus (Deficit)</b> *incl HICE project funding of \$154,000 committed for expenditure in 23/24	<b>\$ 220,067</b>	<b>\$ 207,777*</b>

## Members & meeting attendance 2022/23

The ERG comprises the Mayor, Deputy Mayor (or Councillor) and the CEO (or delegate).

Membership is renewed annually following Council mayoral elections in November. The ERG elect their Chair and Deputy Chair at the December meeting. The ERG generally meet every two months.

July - November 2022*		December 2022 - June 2023**	
<b>Knox</b>		<b>Knox</b>	
Cr Susan Laukens, Mayor	3	Cr Marcia Timmers-Leitch, Mayor	3
Cr Nicole Seymour, Deputy Mayor	2	Cr Jude Dwight, Deputy Mayor	3
Bruce Dobson, CEO	6	Bruce Dobson, CEO	7
<b>Manningham</b>		<b>Manningham</b>	
Cr Michelle Kleinert, Mayor (ERG Chair 21/22)	3	Cr Deidre Diamante, Mayor	3
Cr Deidre Diamante, Deputy Mayor	3	Cr Tomas Lightbody, Deputy Mayor	1
Andrew Day, CEO	6	Andrew Day, CEO	7
<b>Maroondah</b>		<b>Maroondah</b>	
Cr Mike Symon, Mayor	3	Cr Rob Steane, Mayor (ERG Chair 22/23)	3
Cr Rob Steane, Deputy Mayor	1	Cr Tasa Damante, Deputy Mayor	3
Steve Kozlowski, CEO	6	Steve Kozlowski, CEO	7
<b>Monash</b>		<b>Monash</b>	
Cr Stuart James, Mayor* attended by Cr Tina Samardzija	2	Cr Tina Samardzija, Mayor	3
Cr Rebecca Paterson	3	Cr Nicky Luo, Deputy Mayor	1
Dr Andi Diamond, CEO	6	Dr Andi Diamond, CEO	7
<b>Whitehorse</b>		<b>Whitehorse</b>	
Cr Tina Liu, Mayor (ERG Deputy Chair 21/22)	3	Cr Mark Lane, Mayor (ERG Deputy Chair 22/23)	3
Cr Denise Massoud Deputy Mayor	3	Cr Prue Cutts, Deputy Mayor	3
Simon McMillan, CEO	6	Simon McMillan, CEO	7
<b>Yarra Ranges</b>		<b>Yarra Ranges</b>	
Cr Jim Child, Mayor	2	Cr Jim Child, Mayor	2
Cr Johanna Skelton, Deputy Mayor	3	Cr Sophie Todorov, Deputy Mayor	1
Tammi Rose, CEO	6	Tammi Rose, CEO	7
<b>*3 ERG Meetings + 3 CEO Meetings</b>		<b>**3 ERG + 4 CEO meetings</b>	

# Melbourne's eastern region. One united voice.

## Contact

Liz Johnstone, Executive Officer. ERG  
0412 135 350  
[elizabeth.johnstone@maroondah.vic.gov.au](mailto:elizabeth.johnstone@maroondah.vic.gov.au)

Realm, 179 Maroondah Hwy  
Ringwood 3134  
Victoria, Australia

[info@easternregiongroup.org.au](mailto:info@easternregiongroup.org.au)  
[easternregiongroup.org.au](http://easternregiongroup.org.au)  
LinkedIn: [www.linkedin.com/company/eastern-region-group-of-councils](https://www.linkedin.com/company/eastern-region-group-of-councils)