ERG | EASTERN REGION GROUP OF COUNCILS

Annual Report

2024/25

Knox City Council | MANNINGHAM | Maroondah City Council | WHITEHORSE CITY COUNCIL | Yarra Ranges Council

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Acknowledgement of Country

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

Welcome to the 2025 Annual Report of the Eastern Region Group of Councils.

As a group of five Local Government Authorities we share a vision for Melbourne's east, and a commitment to work together to improve outcomes for our communities.

This report provides an update about our activities, working closely with officer groups, other regional alliances, government and stakeholders.

Local government elections in October 2024 saw a new ERG leadership group. Despite significant change to many councils, we enjoyed a smooth transition with nearly all ERG Mayors and Deputy Mayors having had ERG involvement previously.

While we moved quickly to finalise our strategic and advocacy priorities, including the review and development of our next strategic plan, our focus on positioning the region to manage growth and cost of living pressures remained a priority.

The broad ranging State Government planning reforms to implement higher housing growth targets and the high level *Plan for Victoria* bring with them opportunities and risks for our communities. Without a local government 'seat at the table' providing local input and expertise the voice of the community is diminished and decades of local experience managing growth ignored.

Our federal election advocacy focussed on the financial sustainability of councils, regional infrastructure and transport needs, and climate resilience, and will be carried forward with our state election advocacy in 2026.

We continue to demonstrate the collaboration we expect from State and Federal Government so that we can ensure the region not only grows sustainably but thrives.

Thank you all for your hard work and support.

Cr Deirdre Diamante
Chair, Eastern Region Group of Councils
Mayor, Manningham City Council

ERG Leadership group (L-R) - Whitehorse Dep. Mayor, Cr Prue Cutts, Mayor Cr Andrew Davenport, Maroondah Mayor, Cr Kylie Spears (ERG Dep. Chair) Yarra Ranges Mayor, Cr Jim Child, Manningham Mayor, Cr Deirdre Diamante, (ERG Chair), Knox Dep. Mayor, Cr Glen Atwell; Maroondah Dep. Mayor Cr Linda Hancock, Manningham Dep. Mayor Cr Andrew Conlon, Yarra Ranges Dep. Mayor, Cr Richard Higgins, Knox Mayor, Cr Lisa Cooper (absent)

About the ERG

We are a collaboration between five Councils in Melbourne's east: Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Whitehorse and Yarra Ranges.

As a catalyst for collaboration through advocacy, integrated planning and shared services we build strong relationships across member councils and with stakeholders to amplify our efforts and deliver better outcomes of benefit to the region's communities.

Our region

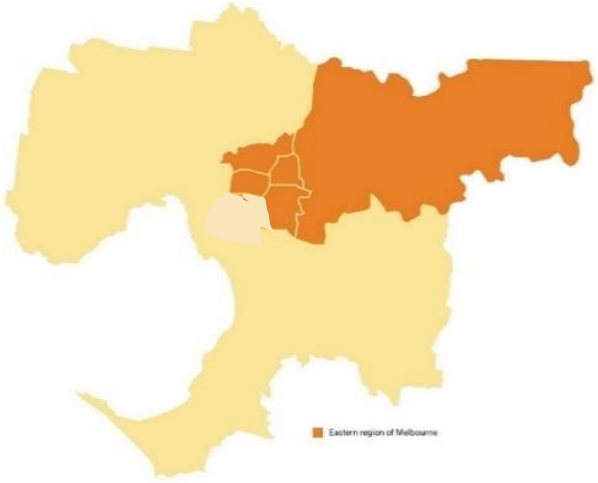
The region is the traditional home of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation and extends from 15km from Melbourne's CBD, eastwards into the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges. It includes well-treed suburbs and urban centres, such as Doncaster, Box Hill, Wantirna and Ringwood, and many townships including Warrandyte, Yarra Junction and Olinda.

The Region is large in the context of the wider Melbourne metropolitan area. Together, ERG Councils host around 750,000 residents and some 300,000 jobs - an urban area equivalent to almost two Canberra's and some 30 per cent of metropolitan Melbourne. The region's population was estimated at 758 016 in 2024[1].

The region's economy is significant, containing 11 per cent of Greater Melbourne's jobs and over $49 billion Gross Regional Product (GRP). The top five employing industries are health care & social assistance; retail trade; education & training; manufacturing; and construction.

Our vision

Our vision is for the region to be connected, healthy, sustainable and prosperous, supported by financially secure, high performing councils. To achieve this, we focus on four strategic pillars:



People: Resilient, cohesive communities who enjoy an improving quality of life, great access to services and better health and wellbeing.

Places: Great places that foster social cohesion, equality of opportunity, are resource efficient and healthy, in a region that's easy to get around by active or public transport for short distances.

Environmental stewardship and regional responses to sustainability, with spaces for people and nature where healthy ecosystems support healthy people & growing economies

Economy: Local employment opportunities support a diverse and adaptable workforce who enjoy a connected, competitive, and prosperous future.

Our priorities:

In 2024/25 we identified five strategic priorities that are our focus for working together over the next four years. They are:

1. Build shared services and increase joint procurement
2. Enhance regional infrastructure initiative
3. Transform movement in the east
4. Support community safety
5. Develop local employment

[1] ABS 2024 Estimated Residential Population

Achievements in 2024/25

2024/25 saw the approval of the next 4-year ERG Strategic Plan 2025-29.

The ERG Strategic Plan supports the good governance of the ERG, with 18 actions informing our annual workplan. The focus for the final year of the 2021-25 Plan was the 2024 council elections and new ERG leadership group, new Council Plans and the development of the new ERG Strategic Plan.

Implementation highlights include:

- **Strong advocacy** to the State Government regarding the *Housing Statement*, *Plan for Victoria*, and a series of planning reforms to the Victoria Planning Provisions and Planning Schemes. A Regional Planning Navigator was prepared to assist community understanding of the reforms and to frame advocacy efforts. The Federal Election provided the opportunity to articulate and present eastern region priorities to the Commonwealth Government. Other advocacy focussed on the financial sustainability of councils, regional infrastructure needs and social and affordable housing.
- We inducted a **new ERG membership** following the 2024 council elections. This included governance processes such as the election of the Chair and Deputy Chair.
- We developed a new **Strategic Plan for 2025-2029**, consulting widely with member councils and partners. For the first time, this also involved a Council Plan working group resulting in member councils referencing the Plan in their Council Plans and committing to collaborative efforts with the ERG.
- We continue to support the Eastern Region Procurement Network (ERPN) to **accelerate joint procurement** as a first step toward shared services**.** This has involved developing a Regional Procurement Policy Framework, data analysis and the preparation of a Regional Roadmap. Opportunities are now being realised as part of a regional pipeline and through early market engagement.
- Ongoing operational support to deliver bi-monthly ERG and CEO meetings, as well as direct project delivery and regular **communication** to members.
- Productive relationships with key stakeholders through our website, social media (LinkedIn page) and e-newsletter and meeting regularly with Council Communications teams.

Responding to planning policy & reform

Major changes to planning strategies, policies, planning provisions and processes occurred during 2024/25 in response to the *Victorian Housing Statement* and *Plan for Victoria*, all of which will have impact on the scale and location of development, and on how decisions are made.

The State introduced a housing capacity target for each council and the region and nominated specific centres for accelerated growth.

Building on the SGS Economics & Planning advice to the ERG, *Plan East*, about what infrastructure investment, risk mitigation, and planning policy would be required in response, we identified those issues for continued advocacy throughout the year:

- fund and better coordinate the planning and delivery of major infrastructure
- improve accessibility and productivity by increasing sustainable integrated transport options and reducing car dependency
- protect the character and amenity of the region, including through (blue and green) infrastructure that works with the natural environment
- promote sequenced infill housing development in the region that incorporates activity centres and growth corridors, Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) precincts, and areas for greyfield housing.

The State Government also introduced changes to reduce timeframes for assessing multi-dwelling development applications. The ERG has been very concerned that together, these changes have unintended consequences, exclude people from decision making processes, do not enable community infrastructure to keep pace with growth and undermine the integrity and transparency of the planning system.

We developed a *Regional Planning Navigator* to assist advocacy efforts and help the community to understand the changes.

Fostering effective government relations

To strengthen and build effective partnerships we continue to engage with and provide information to Ministers, local Members of Parliament, and peak bodies such as the Municipal Association of Victoria.

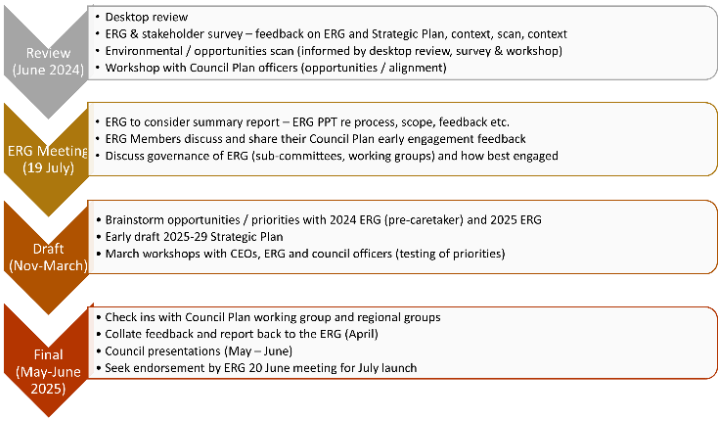
We aim to align our advocacy efforts with other regional groups, such as EAGA, and meet regularly with Communications Managers across the region.

Our election advocacy and representation to various Ministers and local members, included:

- Minister for Planning - ResCode changes
- Minister for Energy - tree canopy / line clearances
- Minister for Environment - contaminated land
- submitted to Plan for Victoria; Upper House Parliamentary Inquiry into Planning Reforms, Infrastructure Victoria's 30-year strategy review
- agreed region-wide transport advocacy priorities

A new strategic plan

The 2025-29 Strategic Plan was prepared on the premise that 'we are a collective of Councils with common interests and we can do more together'. The process for preparing the Plan was extensive and involved the following steps:



The consultation process confirmed our vision for a connected, healthy, sustainable and prosperous region, but recognised the pressures on councils to do this. While the ERG acts as a catalyst for collaboration and as a trusted voice on regionally significant matters, increasingly our focus is to create an enabling operating environment and support councils to be more efficient and effective.

This means we will continue to work closely with the local government sector at both officer and elected representative level and with other regional groups.

The new Strategic Plan will guide our future activities and advocacy with projects and actions identified for each of the five strategic priorities.

Other activity

The ERG continues to support **ERPN Procurement** Managers (including Monash and Boroondara representatives) to meet regularly to pursue joint procurement and improvement opportunities.

Council Plan officers**, Governance** Managers, **MEREDG** (Economic Development) and **MERSRS** (Melbourne East Regional Sport and Recreational Strategy Group among other officer groups continue to meet regularly.

Financial Position - 30 June 2025

Income	2023/2024 ($)	2024/2025 ($)
Annual ERG Council member contributions	175,000	175,000
Carry forward surplus[#]	372,317	235,463
Reimbursement (Monash)		391
Total funds	**$547,317**	**$410,854**
Expenditure		
Salaries	**139,774**	**133,617**
Travel / Phones / Sundries	**7,664**	**1,913**
Catering	[##]	**8,686**
Consultancies - total, comprising:	**164,416**	**15, 760**
- Graphic design and website / comms	3,000	4,127
- Regional economic and demographic data	13,200*	0
- Government relations advice	5,000	0
- Health Innovation and Care Economy project	105,316	0
- Plan East	37,900	0
- Other consultancies	[##]	11,178
- Training / events	[##]	455
Total expenditure	**$311,854**	**$159,975**
Surplus - carry fwd (Deficit)	**$235,463**	**$250,879**

*[#]incl external project funding. *2024-25 Remplan subscription paid in 2023-24 to obtain a discount. [##]not previously itemised*

Members & meeting attendance 2024/25

The ERG comprises the Mayor, Deputy Mayor (or Councillor) and CEO (or their delegate). Membership is renewed annually following Council mayoral elections in November. The Chair and Deputy Chair are elected at the December meeting. The ERG meets at least every two months except during the caretaker period.

Dec 23 - Nov 24 (3 ERG + 7 CEO mtgs)

Knox	
Cr Jude Dwight, Mayor (ERG Chair)	3
Cr Sorina Grasso, Deputy Mayor	2
Bruce Dobson, CEO	9
Manningham	
Cr Carli Lange, Mayor	3
Cr Laura Mayne, Deputy Mayor	2
Andrew Day, CEO	9
Maroondah	
Cr Kylie Spears, Mayor (ERG Deputy Chair)	3
Cr Paul McDonald, Deputy Mayor	3
Steve Kozlowski, CEO	9
Whitehorse	
Cr Denise Masoud, Mayor	3
Cr Mark Lane, Former Mayor	3
Simon McMillan, CEO	9
Yarra Ranges	
Cr Sophie Todorov, Mayor	3
Cr David Eastham, Deputy Mayor	0
Tammi Rose, CEO	10

Dec 24 - June 2025 (5 ERG + 6 CEO mtgs)

Knox	
Cr Lisa Cooper, Mayor	2
Cr Glen Atwell, Deputy Mayor	2
Bruce Dobson, CEO	9
Manningham	
Cr Deirdre Diamante, Mayor (ERG Chair)	5
Cr Andrew Conlon, Deputy Mayor	4
Andrew Day, CEO	10
Maroondah	
Cr Kylie Spears, Mayor (ERG Deputy Chair)	5
Cr Linda Hancock, Deputy Mayor	5
Steve Kozlowski, CEO	10
Whitehorse	
Cr Andrew Davenport, Mayor	3
Cr Prue Cutts, Deputy Mayor	5
Simon McMillan, CEO	10
Yarra Ranges	
Cr Jim Child, Mayor	4
Cr Richard Higgins, Deputy Mayor	5
Tammi Rose, CEO	10