ERG | EASTERN REGION GROUP OF COUNCILS

Annual Report

2025/26

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 and present and value their ongoing contribution to the cultural heritage of the region.

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From the Chair, Cr Linda Hancock

Welcome to the 2026 Annual Report of the Eastern Region Group of Councils.

The ERG comprises the Mayor, another Councillor, and the CEO of each of the five member councils - Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Whitehorse, and Yarra Ranges. Together, we cover an area larger than the Australian Capital Territory and have almost double the population of Canberra. We collaborate on shared priorities to benefit the region's communities through advocacy, integrated planning, shared services, and joint procurement.

This report reflects a significant year for the ERG.

For the first time all ERG Councils included a commitment in their four-year Council Plans 2025-2029 to partner and advocate regionally through the ERG - a reflection of how central this collaboration has become to our region and how we face shared challenges together.

Guided by the ERG 2025-29 Strategic Plan's five priorities, this year saw the launch of the Eastern Region Shared Service (ERSS) initiative. ERG members entered an ERSS Memorandum of Understanding, outlining a four-year commitment to explore over 100 candidate projects, led by Directors from each council.

In its first 6 months, the ERSS has covered substantial ground.

Foundational work was undertaken to support shared service delivery and implementation commenced in January 2026 following two successful pilot projects. The ERSS is both ambitious and innovative. We hope to reduce duplication and improve efficiency and services across our councils. Delivering better value for ratepayers at a time of high cost of living pressures is more important than ever.

More than a dozen candidate projects have been assessed across key service areas; decisions to progress collaborative activity have been made; and stronger cross-council relationships are becoming apparent. Initiatives are progressing in waste management, procurement, human services, and statutory planning, and more. We are encouraged by the commitment from all ERG councils and look forward to reporting on further milestones as the program matures.

With a State Government election in November, our advocacy has continued in earnest.

We launched our Platform: Strong Partnerships - Better Communities in 2025, setting out clear asks across six themes.

We maintained a consistent and united voice on the issues that matter most to our communities - financial sustainability, regional infrastructure, transport connectivity, and the need for investment in community infrastructure to keep pace with housing growth.

We targeted support to member councils through submissions, meetings and action - including state-wide advocacy to review the government requirement for household glass recycling bins.

We initiated a regional Community Safety Framework and Stakeholder Roundtable in July 2025 with Victoria Police and the myriad of community agencies that all play a part.

With The Centre for International Economics we commenced a Community Infrastructure Needs Analysis to quantify the community infrastructure required to maintain service levels while meeting Victorian Government housing targets - this work will be a much needed evidence base to support our calls for funding support.

Thank you to our Mayors, Councillors and officers across all five ERG councils for your ongoing commitment and partnership.

Sincerely

L J Hancock

About the ERG

The ERG is a regional group of five Councils in Melbourne's east: Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Whitehorse and Yarra Ranges.

The ERG is a catalyst for collaboration. We build strong relationships across member councils and with stakeholders to deliver projects and activities that amplify our efforts and deliver better community outcomes.

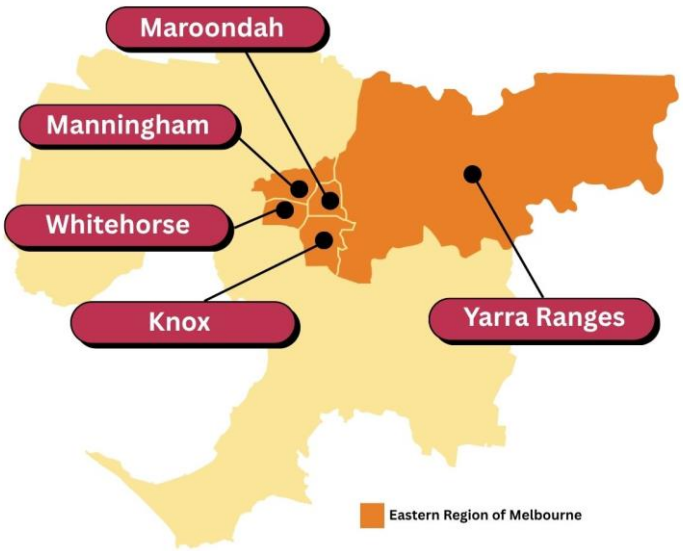
ERG Leadership group (L-R) - Maroondah Cr Kylie Spears; Knox Deputy Mayor Cr Chris Duncan; Knox Mayor, Cr Paige Kennett; Yarra Ranges Mayor, Cr Richard Higgins (ERG Deputy Chair); Maroondah Mayor Cr Linda Hancock (ERG Chair), Manningham Mayor Cr Jim Grivas; Whitehorse Mayor, Cr Kirsten Langford; Manningham Deputy Mayor, Cr Deirdre Diamante; Whitehorse Deputy Mayor, Cr Kieren Simpson. Absent: Yarra Ranges Deputy Mayor, Cr Gareth Ward.

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, urban centres, such as Doncaster, Box Hill, Wantirna and Ringwood, and many townships including Warrandyte, Yarra Junction and Olinda.

The Region is 30 per cent of the Melbourne metropolitan area with a population estimated at 758 016 in 2024[1].

The region's economy is significant, containing 300,000 or 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.



[1] ABS 2024 Estimated Residential Population

Our vision and mission

Our vision for the eastern region is to be a connected, healthy, sustainable and prosperous region. We work towards this vision by focusing on four pillars: People, Places, Economy and Environment.

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

The ERG Strategic Plan supports the good governance of the ERG. The plan was developed following the October 2024 council elections with the new ERG leadership group. It identifies five strategic priorities that focus our work over the 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 initiatives

Highlights

Community Safety Roundtable

In July 2025, the ERG convened a Community Safety Roundtable, bringing together over 60 stakeholders from more than 50 government and community organisations to strengthen community safety across the region.

Assistant Commissioner Russell Barrett APM (Victoria Police) opened with the state-wide policing context, while Anika Dell of Explicability presented a synthesis of regional crime data and research on perceptions of safety. Attendees then discussed factors that most affect community safety, and explored each other's roles, responsibilities and the support needs across sectors including education, health, business, emergency services and local government.

The Roundtable strengthened understanding of the roles different organisations play in community safety, built new and stronger relationships across the sector, and identified the value of clear, coordinated communication following local incidents. It laid the groundwork for a regional "who's who" directory, building on the Roundtable's stakeholder list. Insights from the day directly informed the ERG's *Safer Communities Framework*, released later in 2025.

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 align our advocacy efforts with regional stakeholders and groups, such as EAGA and meet regularly with Communications Managers across the region. Our State Advocacy Platform 2026: Strong partnerships - better communities includes clear 'asks' for the eastern region across six themes.

In addition to our election advocacy and representations to various Ministers and local members, we made submissions regarding Electricity Safety (Electric Line Clearance); the Domestic Animal Regulations; Pet Registration Fees and Penalties among others.

Understanding the impact of rapid growth

The ERG continues to support councils plan for and manage the impacts of the State Government's Housing targets, Big Build projects including the North East Link and Suburban Rail Loop and activity centre planning.

To inform this and support our advocacy the ERG commissioned The Centre for International Economics to undertake a Community Infrastructure Needs Analysis. This will quantify the community infrastructure and open space provision required to maintain service levels while meeting the ambitious housing targets over time.

Eastern Region Shared Services

2026 signified the official launch of the ERG Eastern Region Shared Service (ERSS) initiative.

For the Eastern Region, shared services range from collaborative initiatives to the shared delivery of a service by a separate entity, such as for regional library services.

The ERSS is a structured, four-year collaboration driven by ERG councils to identify, assess and deliver improved collaboration and shared services across the region.

Section 9 of *the Local Government Act 2020* provides overarching principles that include the desire for Councils to collaborate with other Councils, governments and statutory bodies. Guided by the ERG Strategic Plan and underpinned by Council Plan commitments to collaborate, the ERSS MOU guides program delivery and sets out over 100 candidate projects.

Shared services present opportunities to maintain and improve council services in a rate-capped, fiscally constrained environment. Shared services involve two or more councils collaborating to deliver back-office functions (like HR, payroll or IT) or external services (like libraries or waste collection) to achieve cost savings, improve efficiency, and enhance service quality.

The ERG supported the design of the assessment methodology with initiatives progressing in waste management, procurement, human services and statutory planning among others.

Benefits expected include economies of scale, reduced duplication and higher quality, more consistent service delivery.

The ERSS is a scalable best practice model for impactful collaboration and shared service delivery for local government. The standardised methodology and delivery framework includes tools and templates set out in the ERSS Playbook; an implementation plan that is reviewed 6-monthly; and tiered governance arrangements that leverage existing decision-making forums.

We greatly appreciate the leadership provided by the ERG Members, and the significant effort that participating councils have made to this initiative.

Financial Position - 30 June 2026

Income	2024/2025 ($)	2025/2026 ($)
Annual ERG Council member contributions	175,000	**175,000**
Carry forward surplus[#]	235,463	**241,543**
Reimbursement (Monash)	391	**0**
Total funds	**$410,854**	**$416,543**
Expenditure		
Salaries (incl. On costs)	135,674[#]	**125,151**
Travel / Phones / Sundries / Printing / Subscriptions	1,173	**331**
Catering	8,911	**9,486**
Regional economic and demographic data	*	**6760**
Consultancies - total, comprising:	**23,553**	**56,410**
- Website / comms	3,589	4,400
- Plan implementation / Projects	18,351	52,010
- Training/events	1,613	0
Total expenditure[#]	**$169,311**	**$198,138**
Surplus - carry fwd	**$241,543**	**$218,406**

**2024-25 Remplan subscription paid in 2023-24 to obtain discount. [#]Adjusted $9,335 due to timing of invoices*

Members & meeting attendance 2025/26

The ERG comprises the Mayor, another Councillor and CEO (or their delegate). Membership is renewed following mayoral elections each November. The Chair and Deputy Chair are elected at the December meeting. The ERG generally meets every two months.

July 25 - Nov 25 (2 ERG + 6 CEO mtgs)

Knox

Cr Lisa Cooper, Mayor	2
Cr Glen Atwell, Deputy Mayor	0
Bruce Dobson, CEO	8

Manningham

Cr Deidre Diamante, Mayor (ERG Chair)	2
Cr Andrew Conlon, Deputy Mayor	2
Andrew Day, CEO	7

Maroondah

Cr Kylie Spears, Mayor (ERG Deputy Chair)	2
Cr Linda Hancock, Deputy Mayor	2
Steve Kozlowski, CEO	8

Whitehorse

Cr Andrew Davenport, Mayor	2
Cr Prue Cutts, Deputy Mayor	1
Simon McMillan, CEO	6

Yarra Ranges

Cr Jim Child, Mayor	1
Cr Richard Higgins, Deputy Mayor	1
Tammi Rose, CEO	8

Dec 25 - June 2026 (5 ERG + 5 CEO mtgs)

Knox

Cr Paige Kennett, Mayor	5
Cr Chris Duncan, Deputy Mayor	5
Bruce Dobson, CEO	10

Manningham

Cr Jim Grivas, Mayor	5
Cr Deirdre Diamante, Deputy Mayor	5
Andrew Day, CEO	9

Maroondah

Cr Linda Hancock, Mayor (ERG Chair)	5
Cr Kylie Spears, ERG Representative	4
Steve Kozlowski, CEO	10

Whitehorse

Cr Kirsten Langford, Mayor	5
Cr Keiran Simpson, Deputy Mayor	5
Simon McMillan, CEO	9

Yarra Ranges

Cr Richard Higgins, Mayor (ERG Deputy Chair)	3
Cr Gareth Ward, Deputy Mayor	3
Tammi Rose, CEO	7