SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

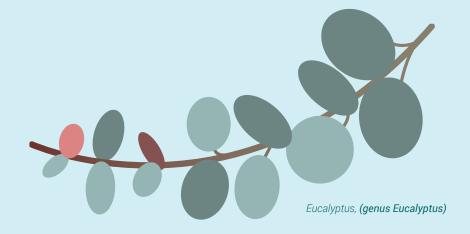
2026 Advocacy Priorities





Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Bunurong and Gunaikurnai people as the Traditional Custodians of South Gippsland and pay respect to their Elders, past, present, and future, for they hold the memories, traditions, culture, and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia.

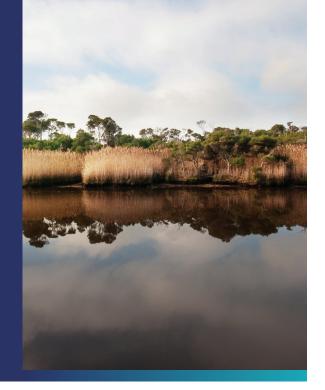


Purpose of this document

This document features South Gippsland Shire Council's advocacy priorities for 2025/26.

Each of the items were carefully considered by Council prior to being endorsed in October 2025.

We invite you to review our advocacy priorities and contact us if you have any questions.



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About South Gippsland

South Gippsland Shire is located 90 minutes southeast of Melbourne, on the edge of the city's rapidly expanding eastern growth corridor. Known for its rolling green hills, stunning coastline, traditional country towns, and the iconic Wilsons Promontory National Park, the region offers a unique blend of natural beauty and rural charm.

Home to just over 30,000 residents, the Shire is experiencing steady population growth of around 1% per year.

South Gippsland has a strong, agriculture-based economy, with major strengths in food production and processing. It is one of Australia's key dairy regions, hosting 10 per cent of Victoria's dairy farms and contributing significantly to the state's food manufacturing industry.

Emerging industries, such as renewable energy and proposed offshore wind, are also anticipated to increase residential and commercial development in South Gippsland.



Main population areas:

- Leongatha
- Korumburra
- Mirboo North
- Foster
- Nyora
- Venus Bay

Major attractions:



- Wilsons Promontory National Park
- Great Southern Rail Trail
- Grand Ridge Rail Trail
- · Art and culture
- Farm fresh produce
- Beach hamlets (Sandy Point, Venus Bay)

Key Figures:



\$5.2 billion annual economic output.



\$2.5 billion gross regional product.



3 per cent unemployment rate. (lower than the Victorian average of 4.5 per cent)



4,000 businesses.

(including more agriculture, forestry and fishing businesses than any local government area in Victoria)



\$337.8 million local consumer spend over the 2024/25 the financial year.



1.1 million visitors per year.

Thank you for your support

South Gippsland Shire Council acknowledges and sincerely thanks the Australian and Victorian Governments for their ongoing support.

We are fortunate to have achieved significant advocacy success in recent years, with several priority projects receiving full or partial funding. This support has delivered tangible benefits to our communities, and we look forward to continuing this strong partnership to address future challenges and opportunities across the region.

1. Increased Road Funding for Rural Councils

- Secured \$3.03 million for bridge replacement and \$2.4 million to realign the Simons Lane intersection with the Bass Highway. These projects were funded via the Australian Government's *Safer Local Roads and Infrastructure Program*.
- Welcomed increased funding for the Roads to Recovery Program to support ongoing local road maintenance.

2. Disaster Recovery Infrastructure and Community Energy Hubs

- Received AusNet funding for a generator and Response Vehicle to support power outages and emergencies. AusNet also provided funding for the establishment of community energy hubs in South Gippsland.
- Partnered with the Mirboo North and District
 Community Foundation to establish a Resilience Hub
 in Mirboo North, funded by the Victorian
 Government's Tiny Towns grant. The hub will offer
 emergency food, charging stations, and
 communication access in emergency events that
 may result in power outages.

3. Early Years Infrastructure

 A new childcare and kindergarten facility for Meeniyan has been announced, set to open in 2026, to support growing demand linked to the expanded three-year-old kinder and pre-prep programs.

4. Coastal Resilience

• Secured \$200,000 from the Victorian Government's Resilient Coasts Grant Program for Coastal Hazard Risk Assessments along key sections of the South Gippsland coastline.

5. Connectivity and Community Transport

- Supported upgrades to broadband and mobile coverage, including:
- Fibre-to-the-Premises rollout in Foster and design planning for Venus Bay.
- NBN fixed wireless upgrades to towers across 22 localities.
- Installation of a new mobile phone tower in Walkerville.

6. Renewable Energy Investment: Barry Beach Marine Terminal and Port Anthony

• Received \$4.7M in funding via the Australian Government's Regional Precincts and Partnerships Program, in partnership with Wellington Shire Council. The funding will facilitate crucial land use and infrastructure planning for the offshore wind industry, helping to ensure the region is workforce and investment ready.

Request Summary	VICTORIA	AUSTRALIA	ВОТН
PRIORITY: Increase rural road funding			
Provide \$2 million in funding to support the Department of Transport and Planning to conduct a detailed planning study for Stage 2 of the Leongatha Heavy Vehicle Alternate Route.			X
Repair the South Gippsland Highway between Leongatha and Ruby so that the posted speed limit can be returned to 100km/h.	X		
Upgrade and repair sections of the Bass Highway between Inverloch and Leongatha to achieve a 'B' road level of service. This critical route requires targeted improvements to ensure safety, reliability, and support for regional freight and tourism.	X		
Rehabilitate sections of roads that are in poor condition, including: o Inverloch Venus Bay Road between Pound Creek and Venus Bay o Buffalo Tarwin Lower Road o Waratah Road o Lang Lang Poowong Road between Nyora and Poowong o Korumburra Wonthaggi Road between Kongwak and Korumburra o Meeniyan Promontory Road o South Gippsland Highway between Toora and Welshpool o Drouin Korumburra Road	X		
Expand and commit to ongoing funding through the <i>Rural Road</i> support package.	Χ		
Improved roadside vegetation management including clearing drains and verges, managing noxious weeds, and trimming of overhanging and encroaching branches.	Х		
Plan and implement (pre-disaster) betterment to protect road access to vulnerable coastal towns and hamlets.	X		
Commit to ongoing funding of \$500 million per year for the <i>Local Roads and Community Infrastructure</i> program.		X	
PRIORITY: Disaster Recovery Infrastructure Planning			
Simplify and standardise DRFA processes in Victoria—align with other states to improve consistency in eligibility, estimating, certification, and acquittal requirements for councils.			X
Centralise disaster funding under Emergency Recovery Victoria to eliminate third-party assessments and streamline recovery.			X
Enable betterment in funding programs, allowing infrastructure to be rebuilt to higher, more resilient standards.			X
Fast-track the Council Support Fund, ensuring recovery funding is delivered within eight weeks of a declared emergency.	X		
Increase Council's annual <i>Municipal Emergency Resourcing Program</i> funding from \$60,000 to \$120,000 to provide better support to communities impacted by emergencies.	Χ		
PRIORITY: Telecommunications and Transport			
Accommodate bicycles on V/Line buses to and from South Gippsland.	X		
Provide funding to expand community and public transport options in South Gippsland, with a focus on improving routes that connect residents to essential services such as healthcare, education, and social support.	X		
Immediately reclassify telecommunications as an essential service and introduce urgent regulatory changes requiring providers to increase backup power for all phone towers—from 18 to 72 hours—in line with the state's emergency preparedness program, <i>The First 72 Hours</i> .	Χ		
PRIORITY: Support for Community Groups			
Reduce red tape and provide core funding support to volunteer groups by streamlining governance and compliance requirements and covering essential costs such as insurance, to ease the burden on existing volunteers and encourage new participation.	X		
Remove regulatory barriers that prevent volunteers in not-for-profit organisations from engaging in social enterprise activities within Crown Land facilities, allowing them to generate revenue to sustain operations and reinvest in their local communities.		X	

Request Summary	VICTORIA	AUSTRALIA	ВОТН
PRIORITY: Coastal Resilience			
Work with councils to ensure flood hazard controls within the Victorian Planning Provisions are accurate, current, and fit for purpose.	Χ		
Coordinate a state-wide process to update coastal hazard mapping, strengthen the Land Subject to Inundation Overlay, and incorporate these updates into Victorian Planning Schemes.	X		
Support Council's proposed Planning Scheme Amendments to limit multi-dwelling developments and subdivisions in vulnerable coastal areas.	X		
Provide funding for climate adaptation planning and directly facilitate evidence-based community engagement to support informed local decision-making.	Χ		
PRIORITY: Support for Local Industry			
Establish a clear, transparent, and enforceable community benefits framework that guarantees direct investment into communities located in the vicinity of offshore wind projects. These communities must receive tangible social and economic benefits in recognition of their role in hosting and supporting this critical infrastructure.		X	
Strengthen the Victorian Planning Scheme to enhance protections for land within farming zones, helping to safeguard vital agricultural land and support the long-term viability of the agriculture industry.	X		
PRIORITY: Community Facility Upgrades			
Invest in the upgrade of community assets located on Crown Land, managed by volunteer Committees of Management, including: - Walter J Tuck changerooms (estimated cost \$5M) - Nyora Public Hall - Mirboo North Grain Store - Nyora Recreation Reserve - Tarwin Lower Recreation Reserve - Tarwin Lower Mechanics Institute - Leongatha Recreation Reserve - Koonwarra Recreation Reserve - Meeniyan Recreation Reserve These upgrades would support increased community use, including events such as the Festival of Small Halls and sporting functions, and improve safety, accessibility, and functionality.	X		
Provide additional funding and support for Crown Land Committees of Management. These volunteer committees require dedicated resources to plan and deliver essential upgrades that bring ageing community facilities up to modern standards.			Χ
Reinvest waste levy funds into the municipalities where they are collected to support local waste management initiatives and infrastructure. This will enable councils to deliver meaningful sustainability improvements and drive better environmental outcomes at the local level.			Χ
Provide a clean streamlined process to facilitate both the voluntary handback of Crown land and assets from councils to the State, and the transfer of Crown land to councils where it supports strategic growth and the delivery of community services.	X		
PRIORITY: Improved Access to Mental Health Services			
Fund and deliver a new Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub in Leongatha, as committed in the 2023/24 Victorian State Budget.	X		
PRIORITY: Early Years Infrastructure			
Provide funding to replace ageing Early Childhood Education and Care Centres that have reached end of life and require extensive maintenance.	Χ		
Provide funding to support the ongoing maintenance of buildings from which Victorian Government early years programs are delivered.	Χ		
Establish Early Years Learning Centres in Tarwin Lower/Venus Bay, Nyora and Mirboo North to ensure equitable access for children in these geographically isolated communities.	Χ		
Fund long day care infrastructure in rural areas where the demand for service is high, but not high enough to be profitable for private child care providers.		X	



Increase rural road funding

South Gippsland Shire Council is seeking increased funding to maintain its extensive local road network, stronger Victorian Government investment in arterial road maintenance and support for a planning study for Stage 2 of the Leongatha Heavy Vehicle Alternate Route.

South Gippsland Shire Council is responsible for maintaining over 2,100 kilometres of local roads—critical infrastructure that supports community connectivity, safety, and the region's \$1.3 billion economy. These roads underpin nationally significant agricultural production, including one of Australia's highest concentrations of dairy farms, as well as a thriving tourism sector.

However, rural councils like South Gippsland face a growing infrastructure burden. Limited rate revenue, rising construction costs, frequent severe weather events, and rate capping are widening the road asset renewal gap—making it increasingly difficult to maintain safe and reliable networks.

Leongatha, the region's primary service hub, sits at the intersection of three major highways and is experiencing rising freight volumes, safety risks, and congestion. This is being driven by the relocation of the Pakenham livestock exchange, growing tourism, and future demand from the offshore wind sector and port development at Barry Beach.

To address these challenges, Stage Two of the Leongatha Heavy Vehicle Alternate Route must be delivered as a priority. This project is critical to easing congestion, improving safety, and supporting South Gippsland's long-term economic growth. It is endorsed by One Gippsland and identified in the *Gippsland Freight Master Plan*.

Request

Victorian Government

Council calls on the Victorian Government to:

- Repair the South Gippsland Highway between Leongatha and Ruby so that the posted speed limit can be returned to 100km/h.
- Bass Highway Inverloch to Leongatha repair sections and improve to "B" road level of service.
- Rehabilitate sections of roads that are in poor condition, including:
 - o Inverloch Venus Bay Road between Pound Creek and Venus Bay
 - o Buffalo Tarwin Lower Road
 - o Waratah Road
 - o Lang Lang Poowong Road between Nyora and Poowong
 - o Korumburra Wonthaggi Road between Kongwak and Korumburra
 - o Meeniyan Promontory Road
 - o South Gippsland Highway between Toora and Welshpool
 - o Drouin Korumburra Road
- Improved roadside vegetation management including clearing drains and verges, managing noxious weeds, and trimming of overhanging and encroaching branches.
- To plan and implement (pre-disaster) betterment to protect road access to vulnerable coastal towns and hamlets.

Australian Government

Council calls on the Australian Government to:

• Commit to ongoing funding of \$500 million per year for the *Local Roads and Community Infrastructure* program.

Victorian or Australian Government

Council calls on Australian or Victorian Governments to:

 Provide \$2 million in funding to support the Department of Transport and Planning to conduct a detailed planning study for Stage 2 of the Leongatha Heavy Vehicle Alternate Route.

Disaster Recovery Infrastructure Funding

South Gippsland Shire Council is calling for urgent reform of Victoria's Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA).

South Gippsland Shire Council is calling for urgent reform of Victoria's Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA).

Current processes are overly complex and bureaucratic, placing unnecessary strain on local councils and delaying recovery efforts for disaster impacted communities.

Council urges the consolidation of DRFA administration under Emergency Recovery Victoria to streamline processes, improve efficiency, and support faster, more effective local responses.

We also strongly advocate for the inclusion of betterment—rebuilding infrastructure to a more resilient standard—to reduce repeat damage, lower long-term costs, and ease the burden on affected communities.

With natural disasters increasing in frequency and severity, a simplified, future-focused approach is essential to protect and strengthen Victoria's regional communities.



Request

Victorian or Australian Government

Council calls on Australian or Victorian Governments to:

- Simplify and standardise DRFA processes in Victoria—align with other states to improve consistency in eligibility, estimating, certification, and acquittal requirements for councils.
- Centralise disaster funding under Emergency Recovery Victoria to eliminate third-party assessments and streamline recovery.
- Enable betterment in funding programs, allowing infrastructure to be rebuilt to higher, more resilient standards.

Request

Victorian Government

Council calls on the Victorian Government to:

- Increase Council's annual *Municipal Emergency Resourcing Program* funding from \$60,000 to \$120,000 to provide better support to communities impacted by emergencies.
- Fast-track the Council Support Fund, ensuring recovery funding is delivered within eight weeks of a declared emergency.

Telecommunications and Transport

South Gippsland Shire Council is seeking improved transport and telecommunications infrastructure to enhance accessibility, sustainability, and emergency resilience for the community.

South Gippsland Shire Council is calling for enhanced transport and telecommunications infrastructure to better meet the needs of its community.

Council requests that bicycles be accommodated on V/Line buses servicing South Gippsland to improve sustainable travel options. Further, Council seeks increased funding to expand community and public transport services, with a particular focus on improving routes that connect residents to vital services such as healthcare, education, and social support, ensuring greater accessibility for all.

On telecommunications, Council urges the immediate reclassification of telecommunications as an essential service, accompanied by urgent regulatory reforms. These reforms should require service providers to increase backup power capacity for all phone towers from the current 18 hours to 72 hours, in line with Victoria's emergency preparedness program, *The First 72 Hours*, to ensure communication resilience during emergencies.

Request

Victorian Government

Council calls on the Victorian Government to:

- Accommodate bicycles on V/Line buses to and from South Gippsland.
- Provide funding to expand community and public transport options in South Gippsland, with a focus on improving routes that connect residents to essential services such as healthcare, education, and social support.
- Immediately reclassify telecommunications as an essential service and introduce urgent regulatory changes requiring providers to increase backup power for all phone towers—from 18 to 72 hours—in line with the state's emergency preparedness program, *The First 72 Hours*.



Support for Community Groups

South Gippsland Shire Council is seeking Victorian Government investment in programs and policy reforms to support and sustain regional volunteerism.

South Gippsland has a strong tradition of volunteerism, with 22 per cent of residents volunteering—well above the Victorian average of 14 per cent, according to Census data.

Despite this proud history, volunteer participation is declining Since COVID-19, the number of active volunteers has dropped, even as community reliance on them continues to grow.

In regional areas like South Gippsland, volunteers play a critical role in emergency response, community services, and local events. However, the volunteer pool is shrinking, and many older volunteers are not being replaced. This trend is already affecting the viability of some community groups, with several going into hiatus due to lack of participation.

For those still operating, volunteers are increasingly burdened by rising costs, complex regulations, and administrative red tape. Without action, this could lead to significant service gaps—particularly impacting vulnerable residents.

Request

Victorian Government

Council calls on the Victorian Governments to:

- Reduce red tape and provide core funding support to volunteer groups by streamlining governance and compliance requirements and covering essential costs such as insurance, to ease the burden on existing volunteers and encourage new participation.
- Remove regulatory barriers that prevent volunteers in not-for-profit organisations from engaging in social enterprise activities within Crown Land facilities, allowing them to generate revenue to sustain operations and reinvest in their local communities.



Coastal Resilience

South Gippsland Shire Council is calling on the Victorian Government to strengthen coastal protection through a consistent, state-led approach to managing coastal and flood inundation risks.

South Gippsland's coastal communities face increasing risks from sea level rise, coastal inundation, and flooding. Council also acknowledges the broader impacts of climate change—including bushfire and drought—and is responding through dedicated strategies.

South Gippsland Shire Council has successfully secured endorsement of motions at the Municipal Association of Victoria State Council, calling for a consistent, state-led approach to managing coastal and flood risks.

To support long-term resilience, Council is also proposing planning reforms to reduce development pressure in high-risk coastal areas. This includes removing certain greenfield growth areas and introducing limits on multi-dwelling developments and subdivisions that would increase residential density.

Request

Victorian Government

Council calls on the Victorian Government to:

- Work with councils to ensure flood hazard controls within the Victorian Planning Provisions are accurate, current, and fit for purpose.
- Coordinate a state-wide process to update coastal hazard mapping, strengthen the Land Subject to Inundation Overlay, and incorporate these updates into Victorian Planning Schemes.
- .• Support Council's proposed Planning Scheme Amendments to limit multi-dwelling developments and subdivisions in vulnerable coastal areas.
- Provide funding for climate adaptation planning and directly facilitate evidence-based community engagement to support informed local decision-making.



Support for local industry

South Gippsland Shire Council seeks government support to foster emerging industries like offshore wind development while protecting its largest and most valuable existing industry—agriculture.

As South Gippsland navigates new economic opportunities through offshore wind, it is essential that regional communities hosting related infrastructure—including ports and workforce accommodation—receive clear and lasting benefits. Council calls for the development of a consistent, enforceable community benefits framework that includes local employment, training, and procurement opportunities; directs investment into infrastructure, housing, and essential services; and supports social and community development. This framework must also preserve the liveability, character, and long-term sustainability of regional towns.

At the same time, it is critical to strengthen the Victorian Planning Scheme to enhance protections for land within farming zones, safeguarding vital agricultural land and supporting the continued viability of South Gippsland's agriculture industry, which remains the backbone of the local economy.

Balanced government support is needed to ensure emerging industries can thrive without compromising the health and sustainability of established sectors. A coordinated approach is vital to achieving a fair, inclusive, and regionally balanced transition that benefits all parts of the community.

Request

Australian Government

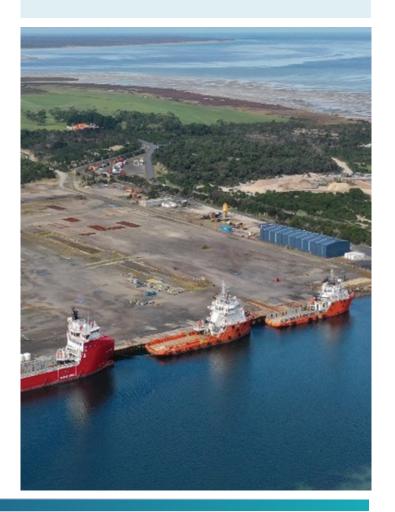
Council calls on the Australian Government to:

• Establish a clear, transparent, and enforceable community benefits framework that guarantees direct investment into communities located in the vicinity of offshore wind projects. These communities must receive tangible social and economic benefits in recognition of their role in hosting and supporting this critical infrastructure.

Victorian Government

Council calls on the Victorian Government to:

• Strengthen the Victorian Planning Scheme to enhance protections for land within farming zones, helping to safeguard vital agricultural land and support the long-term viability of the agriculture industry.





Community Facility Upgrades

South Gippsland Shire Council is seeking funding to upgrade ageing community infrastructure to ensure facilities remain safe, inclusive, and meet the needs of a growing population.

Community infrastructure is essential to the health, wellbeing, and social connection of residents. In South Gippsland, over 60% of children aged 5–17 participate in organised sport, 32% use leisure centres or swimming pools, and 23% attend community or sporting events as spectators.

However, many facilities—particularly those on Crown Land—are ageing and no longer meet modern standards. Priority locations for upgrades include Nyora, Tarwin Lower, Koonwarra, Leongatha, and Mirboo North. Some projects have progressed to concept design, while others remain in early planning stages.

Council is grateful for previous support from Sport and Recreation Victoria. However, the pace of infrastructure deterioration now exceeds Council's capacity to keep up.

Ongoing investment is essential to ensure South Gippsland's community facilities are safe, accessible, and able to support active and connected communities into the future.



Request

Victorian Government

Council calls on the Victorian Government to:

- Invest in the upgrade of community assets located on Crown Land, managed by volunteer Committees of Management, including:
 - Walter J Tuck Reserve (Mirboo North)
- Nyora Public Hall
- Mirboo North Grain Store
- Nyora Recreation Reserve
- Tarwin Lower Recreation Reserve
- Tarwin Lower Mechanics Institute
- Leongatha Recreation Reserve
- Koonwarra Recreation Reserve
- Meeniyan Recreation Reserve

These upgrades would support increased community use, including events such as the Festival of Small Halls and sporting functions, and improve safety, accessibility, and functionality.

- Provide additional funding and support for Crown Land Committees of Management. These volunteer committees require dedicated resources to plan and deliver essential upgrades that bring ageing community facilities up to modern standards.
- Reinvest waste levy funds into the municipalities
 where they are collected to support local waste
 management initiatives and infrastructure. This will
 enable councils to deliver meaningful sustainability
 improvements and drive better environmental
 outcomes at the local level.
- Provide a clean streamlined process to facilitate both the voluntary handback of Crown land and assets from councils to the State, and the transfer of Crown land to councils where it supports strategic growth and the delivery of community services.

Improved access to Mental Health Services

South Gippsland Shire Council is asking the Victorian Government to fund and deliver the Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub in Leongatha, as committed in the 2023/24 State Budget.

Population Health Planning Data (2024) highlights significant and growing mental health challenges in South Gippsland:

- 13.7 per cent of residents report low or medium life satisfaction.
- 17.6 per cent sought professional mental health support in the past year.
- 9.7 per cent have a diagnosed mental health condition.
- 8.9 per cent experience high or very high psychological distress.

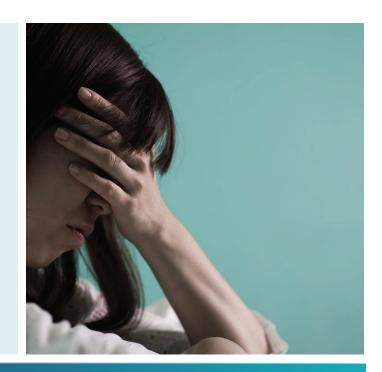
Despite this demand, access remains a critical barrier. As of 2025, South Gippsland has just 28 psychologists per 100,000 people, compared to the state average of 117—making timely care especially difficult in rural areas.

Council is seeking urgent investment in locally accessible, affordable, and community-based mental health services. Strengthening local access is essential to improve wellbeing, reduce crisis presentations, and ensure residents receive the support they need—when and where they need it.

RequestVictorian Government

Council calls on the Victorian Government to:

 Fund and deliver a new Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub in Leongatha, as committed in the 2023/24 Victorian State Budget.



Early Years Infrastructure

South Gippsland Shire Council is seeking additional investment in early years infrastructure, workforce, and ongoing maintenance in South Gippsland.

South Gippsland Shire Council supports the rollout of three-year-old kindergarten and expanded pre-prep programs, and welcomes recent infrastructure investments in Leongatha, Korumburra, and Meeniyan.

However, further investment is needed in infrastructure, workforce, and ongoing maintenance—particularly in rural areas—to ensure the effective delivery of these programs.

Demand for early years services is increasing due to population growth and strong program uptake. Many centres operate in ageing facilities that limit their capacity to meet current and future needs.

Council's *Children and Families Plan* identifies several townships—such as Tarwin Lower, Venus Bay, Mirboo North, and Nyora—as having little or no access to childcare. Families often travel over 30 km one way to access services. These smaller communities rarely attract private providers and are often ineligible under existing funding models, despite clear demand.

Council is seeking additional government support to upgrade early years infrastructure and ensure all children in South Gippsland have equitable access to high-quality early education—regardless of where they live.

Request

Victorian Government

Council calls on the Victorian Government to:

- Provide funding to replace ageing Early Childhood Education and Care Centres that have reached end of life and require extensive maintenance.
- Provide funding to support the ongoing maintenance of buildings from which Victorian Government early years programs are delivered.
- Establish Early Years Learning Centres in Tarwin Lower/Venus Bay, Nyora and Mirboo North to ensure equitable access for children in these geographically isolated communities.

Request

Australian Government

Council calls on the Australian Government to:

• Fund long day care infrastructure in rural areas where the demand for service is high, but not high enough to be profitable for private child care providers.





SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

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