

Attn: Mayor and Councillors

City of Greater Geelong
PO BOX 104
GEELONG VIC 3220

Submitted online

24 May 2023

Dear Mayor and Councillors,

Submission re. City of Greater Geelong Proposed Budget 2023-24

Geelong Sustainability appreciates the opportunity to provide this written submission regarding the City's Proposed 2023-24 Budget.

As a CoGG Vision Partner, Geelong Sustainability continues to be an active contributor to the City's clever and creative vision. Geelong Sustainability is a reliable future-focused change agent in our community. Our activities are aligned to four strategic pillars: 1) Climate Action, 2) Renewable Energy, 3) Circular Economy and 4) Sustainable Cities.

On behalf of our members (224 individual/family members and 48 businesses members) and our broader base of over 18,000 supporters we advocate for urgent action on Climate Change and the bold transformative action required for Geelong to become a zero carbon city region.

In 2021 when Council adopted its municipal target of net zero by 2035, Geelong Sustainability was delighted and relieved that it would step up to its claim of wanting to lead effective action. However once again Council's draft budget largely ignores the need to take urgent action on climate change.

Judged on its draft budget, Council is not taking Climate Change seriously and is not providing adequate funding in the budget to respond to this immense threat to our community's well being and that of future generations. Sadly, this 2023-24 draft budget is also a step towards a far more inwardly focused Council with the withdrawal from and defunding of collaborative community partnerships that take action on Climate Change. Geelong Sustainability is greatly concerned with this fact.

The City is not on track to fulfil its aspiration to become a zero-emissions, climate-ready city and region. The window of opportunity to stabilise our climate is closing. All levels of government must develop and implement practical policies to drive down carbon emissions.

All Councils are required to adhere to overarching governance principles set out in Section 9 of the Local Government Act 2020. Under Section 9(2)(c), Councils are obligated to promote "the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of the municipal district, including mitigation and planning for climate change risks". Under Section 9(2)(b) Councils are required to give "priority to achieving the best outcomes for the municipal community, including future generations."

We express our serious concern that under this proposed budget Council is failing to meet its civic leadership responsibility under Section 9 (2)(b) and (c) of the Local Government Act 2020.

While we accept the need for financial sustainability, we do not think the City is adequately prioritising the environment and the imperative for “deep, rapid and sustained” climate action. The draft 2023-24 budget is shortsighted and ignores the longer term costs of not acting on climate change.

“Without rapid and significant climate action, over the next 10 years the loss to Australia's economy could reach \$150 billion (present value terms). This cost gets worse overtime with each year of inaction. Growing to a staggering \$1 trillion over the next 30 years to 2050 (present value terms).” Deloitte Access Economics, 2022 ¹

Our specific feedback regarding the budget is as follows:

- The Proposed Budget does not provide enough funding for environment and sustainability, including the delivery of the Climate Change Response Plan. This budget ignores the need for urgent climate change action whereas over \$616m is allocated to capital works projects.
- Environmental Sustainability Community Grants have been cut by \$60,000 down to \$90,000. Overall Climate Change and Environment Sustainability Grants receive only 5% of the total Community Grants budget of \$3,997,500.
- It's concerning to see Council withdraw from important community funding partnerships like Geelong Sustainable House Day and Friends of Buckley Falls. These cost only \$15,000 each, yet partnerships for sporting clubs have been retained costing the City \$334,065.
 - Sustainable House Day has been delivered by Geelong Sustainability in partnership with Council for 14 consecutive years, providing invaluable information to tens of thousands of residents. Geelong Sustainable House Day in 2022 alone engaged over 1,864 event attendees and reached over 64,192 on social media. Without Council funding Sustainable House Day won't be able to run, this comes at a time when residents need help more than ever to reduce costs of living and tackle emissions.
 - Refer to the attached *Sustainable House Day 2022 Stakeholder Report* for further community outcome details.
- Climate Change Partnerships (\$130,000) and Environment Sustainability Grants (\$90,000) receive only 5% of the total Community Grants budget of \$3,997,500. These grant streams must be prioritised with greater allocation of funding.
- Climate Change Partnership Grants increased by \$30,000 to \$130,000. This is a welcomed increase, however it is the only funds earmarked for the implementation of

¹ Jan 2022, Deloitte Access Economics, Economic reality check Adapting Australia for climate-resilient growth, page 2.

the City's Climate Emergency Response Plan, this amount is still inadequate for its effective delivery.

- The reduction and eventual withdrawal from the G21 Regional Alliance partnership is a huge disappointment. G21 has prioritised climate change and all other aspects of the clean energy transition in its advocacy to the Federal and State Government. The G21 Sustainability Pillar is our region's most effective chance to build a coalition of organisations dedicated towards reaching net-zero emissions by 2035.

We make the following requests of City of Greater Geelong Councillors:

- Fulfil your obligations under Section 9(2)(c) of the Local Government Act 2020
- Agree to work collaboratively with community, businesses and state and federal governments to reach Net Zero by 2035
- Engage with and assist the community to adequately respond to climate change risks
- Publicly commit to properly fund the implementation of the Climate Change Response Plan including staff resourcing and project funding
- Reinstate grants and partnerships and boost funding that support climate action, environment and sustainability
- Reverse the decision to withdraw from the G21 Geelong Regional Alliance
- Adopt a best practice model for climate change council-community collaboration similar to those used by Merri-bek City Council or the City of Darebin
- Advocate strongly with the community and business for climate action funding to the state and federal governments.

Supporting environmental outcomes isn't an optional budget item that can be cut, and the tendency towards more inward focus and withdrawal from involvement in community partnerships that help address climate change is extremely concerning. We need everyone working together to address this issue and civic leadership that is willing to get involved and work with us towards solutions that create real impact.

Yours sincerely,

David Spear
Chairperson

Dan Cowdell
CEO

Enclosed - Sustainable House Day 2022 Stakeholder Report