

Attn: Mayor and Councillors
City of Greater Geelong
PO BOX 104
GEELONG VIC 3220

22 May 2024

Dear Mayor and Councillors,

Submission re: City of Greater Geelong Proposed Budget Report 2024-25 to 2027-28

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

Geelong Sustainability is a not-for-profit community organisation and registered charity that supports residents of Geelong and surrounding regions to be more sustainable in their everyday lives. Since our establishment in 2007, Geelong Sustainability has become the region's leading sustainability group with extensive networks in community, government and business throughout Geelong and the Barwon region. We are recognised for our evidence-based innovative projects, which educate and support our community's transition to a net zero, circular economy. Since our inception, we have facilitated \$9.3M of renewable energy investment in the community which has helped mitigate over 120,000 Tonnes of cumulative Carbon Dioxide emission.

On behalf of our 240 members and our broader base of 20,000 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, while there are some wins in the 2024-25 to 2027-28 budget, there is simply not enough funding being directed towards climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Council's draft budget once again largely ignores the need to take urgent action on climate change. Based 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 wellbeing and that of future generations. The budget is off track for tackling the emergency, and if it's not adjusted, the region will continue to face significant risk, both environmentally and economically.

Council, community, and businesses must work together to achieve the region's Net Zero target; it is a shared responsibility. Our requests of Council (page 3) include a request for an additional \$1M of resourcing which will enable Council to take ownership of their part of the climate responsibility and commitment, instead of placing significant onus onto not-for-profit organisations via grants, as is currently the case.

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.

The budget's biggest structural flaw from our perspective is that the expenditure around climate and sustainability is currently categorised under 'Environment & Waste Services'. As such, it is unclear to the public how much of the allocated total (\$17M) is being put towards climate and sustainability initiatives, as the majority of this allocation is very likely to be waste services and other environmental services. We request that Council clarifies these budget allocations, providing the public information that clearly delineates between Environment and Waste Services budgets.

There are parts of the budget which we commend. We congratulate the City on rejoining the G21 - Geelong Region Alliance. This will allow the Geelong region to continue to benefit from important collaboration, joint advocacy and planning to support a more prosperous connected region into the future.

We also welcome the additional \$50,000 towards Climate Change Partnership Grants, and acknowledge that this will go a long way towards helping community organisations lead projects that support the community towards net zero emissions. As an example, the recently delivered Geelong Sustainability 2023 [Electric Homes Program](#) generated significant outcomes under this grant. Stimulating over \$2 million of investment in renewable energy and efficient electric appliances. Program participants are estimated to save \$214,366 annually on energy

bills, along with an environmental impact of 770 tons of CO₂ reduced per year which is equivalent to taking 183 cars off the road. This equates to \$40 of value for every \$1 of Council funding. Programs like this could achieve significant progress for the community given adequate funding support to scale up.

However, we note that the Environmental Sustainability Grants pool has decreased by \$20,000. This is removing valuable community projects from groups like Bellarine Catchment Network, Transition Streets Geelong and Little River Community Landcare.

In a comparatively similar Council, Melton City, there is a dedicated budget to “City Environment & Sustainability: Provision of environmental planning and administering Council’s Environmental Enhancement Program. Creating, maintaining and implementing Council’s environment, climate change, sustainability and integrated water management policies and plans. Delivery of Council’s environmental outreach activities to the community.” During Financial Year 2022-2023, Melton spent \$1,435,000 on these activities.

While we accept the need for financial sustainability as stated throughout the budget, we do not think the City is adequately prioritising the environment and the imperative for deep, rapid and sustained climate action. The draft 2024-25 to 2027-28 budget is shortsighted and ignores the longer term costs of not acting on climate change.

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
- Clarify exactly how much of the budget is being allocated to implementing the City’s Climate Change Response Plan
- Implement a \$1M increase of resourcing allocated towards internal resourcing staff and internal activities for Environment, Sustainability and Climate
- Develop a separate, dedicated Climate and Sustainability Team if this is not already in place
- Agree to proactively working more 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
- 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

Local government is best placed to manage localised climate impacts. We know the costs of adapting civil infrastructure to manage locked-in climate change are likely to be in the order of hundreds of millions nationally. However, the return on this investment is significant; the Insurance Council of Australia estimates that resilience funding could provide returns of \$8.10 by 2050 for every \$1 invested under a scenario where global temperatures remain at current levels.¹

We are in a Climate Emergency. This is the critical decade to act. Council needs to take its responsibility for Climate Change seriously and adequately fund climate change mitigation and adaptation in its budget to ensure that the region is doing everything in its power to avoid future climate risks and costs.

Yours sincerely,

David Spear
Chairperson

Dan Cowdell
CEO

¹ https://insurancecouncil.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/R_ICA_Resilience_Final_220218.pdf