

Strathbogie Shire Council

# Council Meeting Agenda

17 March 2026

# Agenda

## Council Meeting

### 17 March 2026 at 4:00pm

A meeting to be held at the Euroa Community Conference Centre and livestreamed on Council's website

<https://www.strathbogie.vic.gov.au/council/our-council/council-meetings-and-minutes/>

#### Councillors

Mayor Cr Jeffery  
Deputy Mayor Ewart-Kennedy  
Cr Binks  
Cr Carlson  
Cr Halsall  
Cr Holloway  
Cr Stevens

#### Officers

Rachelle Quattrocchi	Chief Executive Officer
Amanda Tingay	Director People and Governance
Gary Van Driel	Interim Director Sustainable Infrastructure
Rachael Frampton	Director Community and Planning
Sharon Rainsbury	Executive Manager Communications, Advocacy and Customer Service
Kerry Lynch	Governance Officer

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# Meeting Procedure

## 1 Welcome

### Councillors Vision

We will be a Councillor group that delivers valuable outcomes for our community through teamwork characterised by:

- respectful debate
- collaboration, and
- the commitment to being inclusive and transparent.

### Councillor Values

- Respect
- Integrity
- Accountability
- Transparency
- Responsiveness

## 2 Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the places we live, work and play.

We recognise and respect the enduring relationship they have with their lands and waters, and we pay respects to the Elders past, present and emerging.

Today we are meeting on the lands of the Taungurung peoples of the Eastern Kulin nation, whose sovereignty here has never been ceded.

## 3 Privacy Notice

This public meeting is being streamed live via our website ([Council Meetings and Minutes | Strathbogie Shire](#)) and made available for public access on our website along with the official Minutes/Decisions of this meeting. All care is taken to maintain your privacy; however, as a visitor in the public gallery, it is assumed that your consent is given in the event that your image is broadcast to the public. It is also assumed that your consent is given to the use and disclosure of any information that you share at the meeting (including personal or sensitive information) to any person who accesses those recordings or Minutes/Decisions.

## 4 Governance Principles

Council considers that the recommendations contained in this Agenda give effect to the overarching governance principles stated in Section 9(2) of the *Local Government Act 2020*. These principles are as follows:

1. Council decisions are to be made and actions taken in accordance with the relevant law
2. priority is to be given to achieving the best outcomes for the municipal community, including future generations
3. the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the municipal district, including mitigation and planning for climate change risks, is to be promoted
4. the municipal community is to be engaged in strategic planning and strategic decision making
5. innovation and continuous improvement are to be pursued
6. collaboration with other Councils and Governments and statutory bodies is to be sought

7. the ongoing financial viability of the Council is to be ensured
8. regional, state and national plans and policies are to be taken into account in strategic planning and decision making
9. the transparency of Council decisions, actions and information is to be ensured.

**5 Apologies/Leave of Absence**

Mayor Cr Scott Jeffery

**6 Disclosure of Conflicts of Interest**

## 7 Confirmation of Minutes/Decisions of Previous Meetings

The minutes have been circulated to Councillors and posted on Council website [Council Meetings and Minutes | Strathbogie Shire](#) pending confirmation at this meeting.

### RECOMMENDATION

**That the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 17 February 2026 be confirmed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.**

## 8 Petitions

Nil

## 9 Mayor and Councillor Reports

### 9.1 Mayor's Report

### 9.2 Councillor Reports

## 10 Public Question Time

### Public Question Time

Questions for the Ordinary Council Meeting can be submitted to be read, and responded to, by the Chair, or a member of Council staff nominated by the Chair, during the Public Question Time. Questions must be submitted 30 hours prior to the Council meeting, by emailing [info@strathbogie.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@strathbogie.vic.gov.au).

Public Question Time will be conducted as per Rule 35 of Strathbogie Shire Council's Governance Rules. The required [form](#) for completion and lodgement, and associated [Procedural Guidelines](#), can be found on Council's website at [www.strathbogie.vic.gov.au](http://www.strathbogie.vic.gov.au).

As the questions are a permanent public record and to meet the requirements of the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*, only the initials of the person asking the question will be used in the Minutes of the meeting, together with a Council reference number.

## 11 Officer Reports

### 11.1 Strategic and Statutory Planning

#### 11.1.1 P2025-089-1554 Merton-Strathbogie Road, Strathbogie

**AUTHOR** Manager Planning and Investment

**RESPONSIBLE DIRECTOR** Director Community and Planning

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A planning permit application has been received for 1554 Merton-Strathbogie Road Strathbogie. The purpose of this report is to provide a recommendation to Council to determine planning application P2025-089.

The application proposes subdivision of the land into two lots to excise the existing dwelling.

The subject land is in the Farming Zone. The application was advertised. No objections were received to date.

The key issues for consideration relate to the impact of the proposal on agricultural land, including the potential loss of productive agricultural land, the proliferation of dwellings within the Farming Zone and the genuine need for the subdivision for agricultural benefits.

The application has been assessed against the Strathbogie Planning Scheme and is considered inappropriate. It is Officers' recommendation that a Notice of Decision to Refuse to Grant a Permit be issued.

The proposal is not in keeping with the purposes of the zone and is inconsistent with the objectives of State and Municipal planning policy. The information submitted with the application does not adequately demonstrate the need for the subdivision resulting in a small agricultural lot or justify the creation of a 40-hectare lot with an as-of-right dwelling entitlement.

#### RECOMMENDATION

**That Council issues a Notice of Decision to Refuse to Grant a Permit P2025-089 under the provisions of the Strathbogie Planning Scheme in respect of the land known as 1554 Merton-Strathbogie Road Strathbogie Vic 3666 (Lot 2 PS416560R), for the subdivision of the land into two lots (dwelling excision) on the following grounds:**

- 1. The proposal is contrary to Clause 02.03-4 (Natural Resource Management) in relation to the protection of agricultural land. The Farm Management Plan lacks context of a broader farming operation and proposes limited activities, which does not justify the need for the subdivision.**
- 2. The proposal is inconsistent with policy for agriculture at Clause 14.01-1S (Protection of agricultural land) and Clause 14.01-1L (Housing and house lot excisions in rural areas), in the following manner:**
  - a) The outcome for the land would be rural- residential in nature and potentially stymie genuine agricultural activities on the surrounding land.**

- b) **The proposal would create the opportunity for another dwelling within the Farming Zone and would encourage the proliferation/spread of dwellings in the rural landscape.**
3. **The proposal is contrary to Clause 16.01-3S (Rural Residential Development) and Clause 16.01-3L (Rural Residential Development) as it results in development outside the existing settlement.**
4. **The proposal is contrary to the purposes and decision guidelines of the Farming Zone as it will exacerbate the fragmentation of existing farming land and holdings; remove land from agricultural use; and facilitate an opportunity of a non-agricultural use (dwelling), that would be incompatible with and adversely affect the adjoining and nearby land uses for agriculture.**

## **PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND**

The purpose of the report is to bring before Council a recommendation in response to an application for the subdivision of the land into two lots (dwelling excision) within the Farming Zone for a decision.

The matter is being presented to Council for a decision in accordance with Council's Planning Permit Applications Referral to Council Policy as it has been 'called in' by a Councillor as it was identified as a matter of strategic significance.

## **ISSUES, OPTIONS AND DISCUSSION**

Council is a Responsible Authority under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987 (the Act)*.

In this role, Council administers the Scheme and, amongst other things, determines planning permit applications made for the use and development of land within the municipality.

Under delegated authority of Council, Council Officers determine some matters. However, this application is being presented to Council for a decision as the matter was 'called in' by Council.

## **EXISTING CONDITIONS AND RELEVANT HISTORY**

### **Subject land and Surrounds**

The subject site comprises 53.71 hectares and is zoned Farming Zone, where the minimum lot size for an as-of right-use for a dwelling is 40 hectares. The site is affected by the Erosion Management Overlay and in part the Bushfire Management Overlay.

The topography is generally flat, containing a mix of cleared pasture and scattered vegetation with two watercourses flowing from the source of the Seven Creeks. The property fronts Merton-Strathbogie Road along its western boundary with access provided from this frontage with perimeter fencing.

Existing improvements include a dwelling, shed and outbuilding, all located in the northern portion of the site which support equine activities. The balance of the land remains largely undeveloped and is utilised for grazing.

Immediate neighbouring properties are used predominantly for agriculture and some feature dwellings. The subject site is located in a rural area of Strathbogie and is approximately 1.7 kilometres southeast of the township of Strathbogie.



Figure 1: Subject Site

**Registered restrictive covenants and/or Section 173 Agreements affecting the site**

The site is not encumbered by any restrictive covenants and/or Section 173 Agreements affecting the site.

**Previous Planning Permit History**

A search of Council's records has found the following permit history:

Permit No.	Description
P2014-092	Development of land for a dwelling extension
P2016-093	Subdivision two (2) lots

**PROPOSAL**

This application proposes subdivision of the land into two lots (dwelling excision). The details of the proposal are as follow:

*Two lot subdivision (Dwelling excision)*

Lot 1 will have an area of 13.71 hectares and will retaining the existing rural infrastructure such as the dwelling, shed, outbuildings and equine training facility.

Lot 2 will have an area of 40 hectares and will be clear of built form. Access is to be provided via Tames Road. The lot will remain vacant with the intended use for wool growing.

An Integrated Land Management Plan has been provided in support of the equine facility.

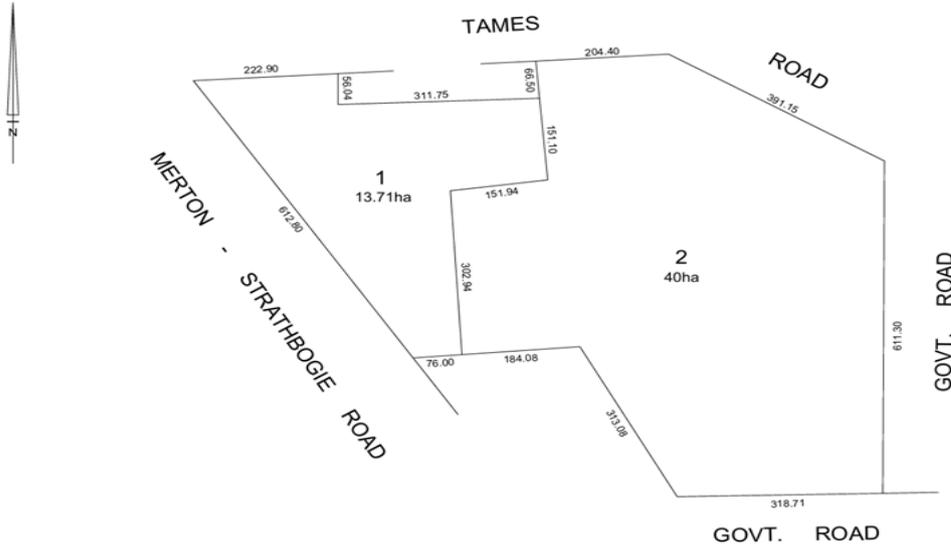


Figure 2: Proposed subdivision layout (Attachment 2)



Figure 3: Proposed development plan

## RELEVANT STRATHBOGIE PLANNING SCHEME CONTROLS

### Municipal Planning Strategy

Clause No.	Clause name
02.01	Context
02.03-4	Natural Resource Management
02.03-6	Housing

### Planning Policy Framework

Clause No.	Clause name
14.01-1S	Protection of agricultural land
14.01-1L	Housing and house lot excisions in rural areas
14.01-2S	Sustainable agricultural land use
16.01-3S	Rural residential development
16.01-3L	Rural residential development

### Zoning

Clause No.	Clause name
35.07	Farming Zone

### Overlay

Clause No.	Clause name
44.01	Erosion Management Overlay
44.06	Bushfire Management Overlay (part)

### Particular Provisions

Clause No.	Clause name
Nil	

### General and Operational Provisions

Clause No.	Clause name
65	Decision Guidelines
66	Referral and Notice Provisions
71.02-3	Integrated decision making

**CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT PLAN ASSESSMENT**

	<b>Assessment criteria</b>	<b>Assessment response</b>
1	Is the subject property within an area of cultural heritage sensitivity as defined within the cultural heritage sensitivity mapping or as defined in Part 2 Division 3 or 4 of the <i>Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018</i> ?	No
2	Does the application proposal include significant ground disturbance as defined in Part 1 Regulation 5 <i>Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018</i> ?	N/A
3	Is the application proposal an exempt activity as defined in Part 2 Division 2 <i>Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018</i> ?	N/A
4	Is the application proposal a high impact activity as defined in Part 2 Division 5 <i>Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018</i> ?	N/A

Based on the above assessment, a Cultural Heritage Management Plan is not required in accordance with Part 2 Division 1 of *Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018*.

**REFERRAL**

<b>Authority (Section 55)</b>	<b>Response</b>
AusNet	Conditional consent
CFA	Consent
GMW	Conditional consent

<b>Authority (Section 52)</b>	<b>Response</b>
Health	No objection.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The application was advertised pursuant to Section 52 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*. No objections have been received.

**OFFICER ASSESSMENT**

Planning Policies seek to support and enhance agricultural pursuits by ensuring future development, particularly residential development and subdivision, do not result in the permanent removal of productive agricultural land or inhibit the continuation and development of existing agricultural uses. These objectives are reiterated in the purpose of the Farming Zone.

The subdivision of land into two lots (house excision) is not considered an appropriate form of development for the site. The proposed subdivision of the land to excise the existing dwelling is not in keeping with the purposes of the zone and is inconsistent with the objectives of Planning Policy. The information submitted with the application does not reasonably demonstrate the need for a subdivision on the site to operate an agricultural use.

## Municipal Planning Strategy

In both direct and indirect references, the Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) and Planning Policy Framework (PPF) strongly discourages fragmentation and loss of productive agricultural land. The policies seek to protect Victoria's agricultural base as an important component of the State's economy. Throughout the MPS and PPF, preventing dispersed settlement in rural areas, limiting or reducing fragmentation of agricultural land, and discouraging incompatible land uses are the predominant themes in relation to agriculture.

Clause 02.03-4 (Natural Resource Management) of the MPS has following strategic directions that are relevant to the proposal:

- *Retain areas of high-quality rural land for farming and agricultural purposes.*
- *Encourage consolidation of small rural lots within the Farming Zone.*
- *Prioritise productive farming development over residential development.*

Clause 02.03-6 (Housing) of the MPS states that urban expansion into agricultural areas can result in conflicts at the urban and rural interface and requires buffers and other measures to protect the amenity of residents and agricultural operations on adjoining land. It has following strategic directions that are relevant to the proposal:

- *Encourage rural residential development that is located and designed to protect existing agricultural uses, the natural environment and townships.*
- *Encourage rural residential development that can be efficiently serviced by social and physical infrastructure.*

It is considered the proposal is contrary to Clause 02.03-4 and Clause 02.03-6 of the MPS in relation to the protection of agricultural land. It will result in residential development as a priority for the land and it will not result in the protection of the agricultural land.

## Planning Policy Framework

Clause 14.01-1S (Protection of agricultural land), relating to the protection of agricultural land aims *"to protect the state's agricultural base by preserving productive farmland."* The clause states that in considering a proposal to develop agricultural land, the following factors must be considered:

- *Desirability and impacts of removing the land from primary production, given its agricultural productivity.*
- *Impacts on the continuation of primary production on adjacent land, with particular regard to land values and the viability of infrastructure for such production.*
- *Compatibility between the proposed or likely development and the existing use of the surrounding land.*
- *Land capability.*

Collectively, these policies place great emphasis on the importance of protecting existing agricultural land from inappropriate development, which will permanently remove the land from agricultural use. Clause 14.01-1S is particularly clear in requiring a nexus between development of farmland and ongoing productive use of agriculture, to protect against loss of agricultural land.

Clause 14.01-1L (Housing and house lot excisions in rural areas) aims *"to discourage proliferation of dwellings on lots less than the minimum lot size specified in the Farming Zone."*

The clause provides with the following strategies while dealing with the applications for subdivisions and dwellings under the Farming Zone:

- *Promote the clustering of co-dependant residential uses.*
- *Discourage dwellings not associated with the agricultural use of the land.*
- *Support the use and development of land for a dwelling where it will result in improved land management or rehabilitation for conservation purposes or improvements to degraded land.*
- *Support the use and development of land for a dwelling where multiple lots in the same ownership will be consolidated.*
- *Discourage non-agricultural uses, including dwellings, from locating or developing in a manner that will compromise the operation of nearby agricultural enterprises.*

### **Excision Strategies**

- *It will support the ongoing viability of the farming enterprise.*
- *The lot size is capable of supporting a dwelling and farming enterprise.*
- *Ensure both lots created under dwelling excision are not able to be further subdivided to create smaller lots for further dwellings.*

Clause 16.01-3S and 16.01-3L (Rural residential development) aims “to identify land suitable for rural residential development.” The relevant strategies associated with this objective also aim to:

- *Manage development in rural areas to protect agriculture and avoid inappropriate rural residential development.*
- *Ensure planning for rural living avoids or significantly reduces adverse economic, social and environmental impacts by:*
  - *Maintaining the long-term sustainable use and management of existing natural resource attributes in activities including agricultural production, water, mineral and energy resources.*
- *Discourage development of small lots in rural zones for residential use or other incompatible uses.*
- *Prevent rural residential subdivision where it would:*
  - *Result in a loss of productive agriculture land.*
  - *Create the expectation of subdivision on adjoining rural land.*
  - *Encircle townships so as to prejudice their future urban growth.*
- *Ensure rural residential development provides a buffer to existing agricultural uses.*
- *Ensure rural residential development protects existing visual and environmental qualities of the area, such as landscape, water quality, native vegetation, habitat and biodiversity.*

The use of the subject site for the subdivision of the land cannot be said to be consistent with the planning policy in relation to rural and regional development, particularly where it is considered that the end result will be one which permanently removes land from agriculture and creates an outcome where the potential for surrounding land for agriculture would become further limited.

It is also the intent of Planning Policy to encourage consolidation of existing rural settlements rather than to facilitate dispersed and isolated development. The associated strategies are intended to protect land for agriculture and ensure that housing development is limited to that which is required to improve agricultural production. The submitted Farm Management Plan is not adequate to justify the need for a subdivision on the site. The proposal does not relate to a genuine need to facilitate agriculture and operation of proposed agricultural use.

The proposal cannot be considered as consistent with or supported by such policy in relation to rural and regional development, particularly where such development is explicitly discouraged. The subject land will result in a permanent change to the land use which will create an additional lot having an as-of-right dwelling use which will limit the ability for agriculture to be facilitated in the context of the wider area. The proposal does not support the general principle to support the consolidation and enhancement of rural land.

Allowing an as of right use for a dwelling on the subdivided lot which is outside the designated township boundary area would result in an increase of land value and thus compromising the affordability and viability of agricultural activities in the Farming Zone.

The proposal (if approved) could encourage development of other vacant allotments, thereby impeding the potential for both the subject allotment and adjoining allotments to be effectively farmed especially as the potential to consolidate allotments would be removed.

The proposal does not demonstrate a nexus between agricultural land use and the necessity of a subdivision. It is considered that the proposal is contrary to the relevant policies and vision within the MPS and PPF relating to protection and sustainable use of agricultural land.

### **Farming Zone**

The purpose of the Farming Zone is to provide land for agriculture, retain productive agricultural land and to ensure non-agricultural uses, including dwellings, do not adversely affect the use of land for agriculture.

The proposed agricultural use does not provide sufficient justification for the subdivision of the land. Fragmenting a viable farming enterprise would undermine the objectives of the Farming Zone by reducing the availability of productive agricultural land. The resulting larger lot could be sold for rural lifestyle purposes, increasing the risk of land use conflicts and reducing overall farm productivity. Importantly, there is no mechanism to ensure the land remains in productive agricultural use into the future.

### **Assessment of the Integrated Land Management Plan (P2025-060)**

While the Integrated Farm Management Plan outlines a framework for ongoing agricultural use on proposed Lot 1, it does not provide sufficient justification for the proposed excision of the dwelling or the subdivision of the land. The plan primarily addresses operational management rather than demonstrating a clear need for additional lots or the separation of the dwelling from the farming enterprise.

Although it is acknowledged that there are some existing dwellings and smaller lots within the local area, it is considered that another excision of the existing dwelling will further contribute to a proliferation of dwellings within the area and will result in a loss of opportunity for smaller parcels to be consolidated with larger parcels. An additional dwelling is also a sensitive use, which may adversely impact the operation of future farming activities within the area. The proposal may result in having two dwellings on the land where the land in its current state only has one dwelling.

The proposal P2025-089 (if approved) could encourage development of other vacant allotments, thereby impeding the potential for both the subject allotment and adjoining allotments to be effectively farmed especially as the potential to consolidate allotments would be removed.

In *Benca v Macedon Ranges Shire Council* [2010] VCAT 470, Member Rundell remarked on setting up a precedent and proliferation of dwellings on existing Farming Zoned lots in the shire:

*“Some lots in the locality do not have dwellings. There also may be many small lots in the Macedon Ranges Farming Zone which do not have dwellings. Planning applications utilise previous decisions. I have no doubt that should planning approval be granted this case, it will be used to support planning applications for a dwelling on other lots less than 40 hectares. An approval in this situation will form part of the long established pattern of small lots being gradually removed from farming on an ad hoc, incremental basis.*

*Whilst each approval may have a minimal impact, over time the cumulative impact of many approvals is that areas once used for farming are no longer used for that purpose and transition to become rural living precincts. Planning policy is clearly indicating that this incremental process needs to cease.”*

### **Subdivision (Dwelling Excision)**

As discussed above no justification has been provided in the Integrated Farm Management Plan in relation to the excision of the dwelling. The excision will result in fragmentation of this land further by removing the dwelling which in its current form can be used for the operations proposed within the Farm Management Plan.

The subdivision component of the proposal will create a lot for ‘rural lifestyle’ purposes. The size of proposed Lot 2 demonstrates that the lot will have entitlement to a ‘as of right use’ for a dwelling and not have an associated farming use. It is considered that the subdivision is not appropriate given the proposed size of the lots and would result in fragmentation of land. The proposal has not demonstrated that the agricultural outcome after the subdivision would improve on the existing agricultural use and management of the land.

Keeping the land in one farming unit provides the best assurance that the subject land continues to provide for agriculture long term as supported by the purpose of the Farming Zone.

In *Niven v Greater Bendigo CC* [2023] VCAT 1133, Senior Member Pots made following comments to refuse a dwelling excision while considering the purpose and decision guidelines of the zone:

*“The policies I have summarised earlier and the purposes and decision guidelines of the FZ all seek to address a mischief that may arise from small lot subdivisions or dwelling excisions. That mischief is the incremental loss of agricultural land, particularly high value land, the potential for sensitive non-farming residential land uses to encroach into such areas and become a source of reverse-amenity conflict. Such outcomes place pressure on valuable and important agricultural activity that supports Victoria’s capability for growing and generating its own food and fibre and the wider economic and social benefit that arise from these activities. The high agricultural capability and value of this land reinforces and supports the need to protect it from such mischief...”*

*On balance, this proposed excision of the dwelling to create a small lot in this district is one that is counter to many of the purposes and objectives of planning and of limited benefit in advancing the agricultural outcomes sought under the planning scheme. I am therefore not persuaded that the granting of a planning permit in these circumstances would achieve an acceptable planning outcome.”*

In *Irrewarra Estate Ltd v Colac-Otway SC* [2021] VCAT 358, Member Djohan made following comments to refuse a dwelling excision in the Farming Zone while considering the policy:

*“The subject land is productive agricultural land to which 14.01-1S applies and seeks to avoid the subdivision of productive agricultural land from diminishing the long term productive capacity of the land. I am not satisfied on the material before me that the excision of proposed Lot 1 containing the existing dwelling will not diminish the long term*

*productive capacity of the land. In my view, as the strategy is directed specifically to the effects of subdivision on productive agricultural land, its object is directed to the effect of the subdivision on something other than merely the agricultural capacity of the soil on the land. As proposed Lot 1 will effectively be an isolated island of land within a balance lot of less than 80 hectares I am of the view that the creation of Lot 1 could make Lot 2 less desirable for agricultural use by anyone other than the respondents.*

*Approval of the proposed subdivision would create a rural lifestyle lot in the Farming Zone which is an outcome not preferred under the planning scheme. While the proposed subdivision will not adversely affect soil quality, it will remove an area of land (proposed Lot 1) permanently from agricultural production and while that area of land is relatively small, its removal constitutes the fragmentation of agricultural land sought to be avoided. Further, there is the potential for the use of proposed Lot 1 as a rural lifestyle block, or predominantly for the use of the dwelling, to limit the operation of nearby agricultural uses. I am not satisfied, given the particular and unavoidable shape and depth of proposed Lot 1, that there would not arise conflict regarding amenity issues between the owners/occupiers of proposed Lot 1 and the continued use of proposed Lot 2 and other nearby land used for agricultural purposes.”*

Previous decisions have consistently articulated that the primary reasons for not supporting dwelling excisions are that such proposals lead to the fragmentation of agricultural land, irrespective of lot size, and give rise to potential land use conflicts and amenity impacts. A further key consideration is that approving such proposals creates expectations for future dwellings on the residual lot. This outcome is evident in the current application, which leaves open the prospect of a dwelling on the remaining lot if approval were granted.

The proposal (P2025-089) would serve to permanently remove land from agricultural use, limit the expansion and operation of adjoining and nearby agricultural uses and is not reasonably required to support and enhance agricultural production. Overall, the proposal does not adequately address the provisions of the Farming Zone, and it is seen that:

- The land will not be primarily used for agriculture as a small-scale agricultural use has been proposed which can be achieved at present without the subdivision.
- The subdivision does not encourage the retention of productive agricultural land. Retaining the land in the larger single lot is a more effective way to achieve the purpose of the zone.
- The proposed subdivision, together with an as-of-right dwelling entitlement, may lead to non-agricultural uses that adversely impact agricultural operations and increase potential land use conflicts.

### **Integrated Decision Making**

Clause 71.02-3 (Integrated Decision Making) states that:

*Society has various needs and expectations such as land for settlement, protection of the environment, economic wellbeing, various social needs, proper management of resources and infrastructure. Planning aims to meet these needs and expectations by addressing aspects of economic, environmental and social wellbeing affected by land use and development.*

*Planning and responsible authorities should endeavour to integrate the range of planning policies relevant to the issues to be determined and balance conflicting objectives in favour of net community benefit and sustainable development for the benefit of present and future generations. However, in bushfire affected areas, planning and responsible authorities must prioritise the protection of human life over all other policy considerations.*

*Planning authorities should identify the potential for regional impacts in their decision making and coordinate strategic planning with their neighbours and other public bodies to achieve sustainable development and effective and efficient use of resources.*

It is considered that the proposal will be unable to balance conflicting objectives and will not result in sustainable development of the land. The objectives in relation to the protection of agricultural land will outweigh the economic development objectives within the planning scheme.

The proposal will also be inconsistent with the objectives of planning in Victoria specified under Section 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* as it will not result in fair, orderly, economic and sustainable use, and development of land by proposing development in Farming Zone which will be unable to protect agricultural land.

## **POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Council Plan**

This report is consistent with the following key strategic focus areas and or actions in the 2021-25 Council Plan:

#### **Objective One: Connect**

We are committed to enhancing access for all residents, promoting healthy living, fostering connections, and providing opportunities to thrive and participate in community life.

#### **Objective Two: Sustain**

We aim to collaborate with others to foster a sustainable environment, a thriving economy and resilient communities.

#### **Objective Three: Deliver**

We are committed to delivering quality services and infrastructure that meets the needs of our community. We aim to strengthen the Council's governance and provide improved, customer-focused experiences.

## **RISK CONSIDERATIONS**

This report has identified the following risk(s):

<b>Risk(s)</b>	<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>Consequence</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Mitigation Action</b>
VCAT appeal by objector(s)	Possible	Moderate	Low	A thorough assessment against the planning scheme

## **LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The application has been processed in accordance with the relevant legislation. VCAT is available to the applicant if they are not satisfied with the decision of Council.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION**

No Council officers and/or contractors who have provided advice in relation to this report have declared a general or material conflict of interest regarding the matter under consideration.

**TRANSPARENCY**

In the interests of transparency and open and honest communication with our community this report is presented to a public Council meeting.

**FINANCIAL VIABILITY CONSIDERATIONS**

Future financial costs could be incurred by Council through a VCAT hearing process should the applicant choose to lodge an appeal.

**CONCLUSION**

The protection of agricultural land is of paramount importance to the policy contained within the planning scheme and to the local and wider community. It is considered that this application does not justify a need for a subdivision (house excision) on this site and that the application should be refused.

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Attachment 1 - Integrated Land Management Plan
2. Attachment 2 - Plan of Subdivision



Planography

# Integrated Land Management Plan

1554 Merton-Strathbogie Road, Strathbogie

**Prepared by:**

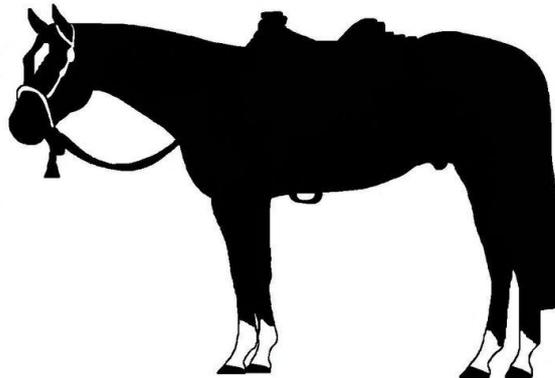
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*Eagle Rise Farm  
Australian Quarterhorses*



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## 1. Introduction

This Integrated Land Management Plan (ILMP) has been prepared in support of the ongoing use and long-term sustainability of a quarter horse stud enterprise known as Eagle Rise Farm Pty Ltd, located at 1554 Merton-Strathbogie Road, Strathbogie. The subject land, identified as Lot 2 on Plan of Subdivision PS416560, is situated on the elevated Strathbogie Plateau at approximately 550 metres above sea level and comprises 13.7 hectares proposed to form Lot 1 under a re-subdivision. The property is within the Shire of Strathbogie and falls within an area mapped as Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC) 23 – Herb-Rich Foothill Forest.

The enterprise is centred on the breeding and training of registered quarter horses, specifically bred for cattle work on farms, stations, and feedlots across regional Australia. The operation supports a maximum of eight adult mares with foaling occurring biennially. The horse training methodology employed is based on natural horsemanship principles, recognised for promoting calm, responsive, and well-adjusted horses suited to working agricultural environments.

The property is fully fenced into rotational horse paddocks, all with reticulated water supplied to troughs, and features maintained pasture that will be assessed to support the required Dry Sheep Equivalent (DSE) carrying capacity for 8 adult horses and accompanying foals. Supporting infrastructure includes an existing dwelling, purpose-built equine shedding, round yard, holding pens, and secure feed storage facilities.

Sales of horses are conducted primarily through online platforms and via established networks within the agricultural sector, particularly among cattle producers and working stations.

To support environmental values and landscape function, this ILMP includes a native vegetation enhancement plan featuring three rows of boundary planting using locally indigenous species from EVC 23. Species selection will reflect those suited to the Strathbogie Plateau and be spaced to achieve both habitat connectivity and wind buffering. Species will be planted at average intervals of 3–5 metres depending on growth form and mature canopy spread.

This ILMP outlines the sustainable land use practices adopted on-site, including grazing management, pasture rotation, vegetation enhancement, and infrastructure maintenance, to ensure that the enterprise remains environmentally and economically viable into the future while supporting the ecological integrity of the site.

### 1.1 Site Location

The subject site is located at 1554 Merton-Strathbogie Road, Strathbogie, within the rural locality of Strathbogie in north-eastern Victoria. The property is formally identified as Lot 2 on Plan of Subdivision PS416560 and is proposed to become Lot 1 for the purposes of the Eagle Rise Farm quarter horse enterprise. The site occupies an area of 13.7 hectares and is situated on the Strathbogie Plateau, a distinctive elevated landscape characterised by rolling granite hills, forested areas, and cool, moist climatic conditions. The property sits at an elevation of approximately 550 metres above sea level.

The site is positioned within a predominantly rural and agricultural setting, surrounded by a mix of grazing properties, remnant native vegetation, and lifestyle farms. Access is provided directly from Merton-Strathbogie Road, a sealed rural arterial road that connects the township of Strathbogie to the surrounding region.

The land has been purposefully developed for equine use, with a network of internal horse paddocks, reticulated water supply to troughs, and existing equine infrastructure including a



dwelling, horse shelters, a round yard, holding pens, and feed storage. The site's soils and topography are well-suited to pasture-based grazing and equine activities, and the climate of the Strathbogie Plateau provides reliable rainfall to support productive grass cover.

### 1.2 Existing Landuse

The subject land is currently used for equine-based agricultural purposes, consistent with its rural zoning and land capability. The property operates as a low-intensity horse breeding and training facility, supporting a small number of quarter horses bred for working cattle in farming and station environments.

The site is fully fenced and divided into multiple well-maintained pasture paddocks, each supplied with reticulated water to troughs. These paddocks are managed rotationally to support pasture health and reduce overgrazing. The property supports a modest carrying capacity that is adequate for up to eight adult horses and their foals, with grazing capacity considered in terms of Dry Sheep Equivalent (DSE) ratings to maintain sustainable pasture use.

Key infrastructure includes:

- An existing dwelling used to support onsite management of the enterprise.
- Equine-specific shedding and shelters for horses.
- A round yard used for natural horsemanship training methods.
- Holding pens for temporary confinement and management of horses.
- Secure feed storage facilities to support supplementary feeding as required.

Pasture across the site is in good condition, with appropriate groundcover and species composition suited to equine grazing. There is no cropping or broadacre livestock activity currently undertaken on the land. The site does not contain any remnant commercial forestry, intensive agriculture, or industrial use.

The existing use aligns with the property's zoning and physical attributes and is integrated with the landscape in a way that supports both productive agricultural use and environmental sustainability. Future land management actions will continue to enhance pasture resilience, protect soil structure, and promote biodiversity in accordance with best practice equine land use.

### 1.3 Purpose of the Integrated Land Management Plan

The Integrated Land Management Plan (ILMP) outlines a strategic approach to sustainable land use and agricultural operations, ensuring that land degradation is prevented, soil and water resources are improved, and defined land management practices are implemented. The following response addresses the key objectives of the ILMP and the specific land management strategies to be employed.

## 2. Environmental Features

### 2.1 Topography

The subject property, *Eagle Rise Farm Pty Ltd*, is located on the Strathbogie Plateau, a distinctive elevated landscape known for its gently undulating to rolling terrain, granite outcrops, and elevated climatic conditions. The site sits at approximately 550 metres above sea level, offering well-drained soils and expansive views across the surrounding rural landscape.



#### Landform and Slope

- The topography is characterised by gentle to moderate slopes, with natural fall primarily oriented toward the north and northwest of the property.
- There are no steep escarpments or highly erodible zones; slope gradients are generally uniform, providing excellent conditions for pasture establishment, grazing, and low-impact infrastructure development.
- Two minor seasonal watercourses traverse the property in low-lying areas, following the natural contours and enhancing drainage.

#### Elevation and Drainage

- The elevation of the site supports a cooler microclimate relative to surrounding lowland areas, favouring persistent groundcover and extended moisture retention in pasture systems.
- Natural drainage follows the contours, with no signs of salinity or waterlogging observed.
- The site's natural slope assists with surface water runoff management, reducing the risk of erosion or accumulation around built infrastructure.

#### Suitability for Land Use

- The relatively even topography enables:
  - Safe and efficient movement of horses and machinery
  - Practical paddock subdivision and fencing
  - Strategic placement of training infrastructure (round yard, feed shed, etc.)
  - Effective rotational grazing and land management
- The landform also facilitates landscape-scale revegetation and erosion control, with boundary planting and watercourse protection aligned with natural contours.

The topography of Eagle Rise Farm supports the sustainable use of the land for equine grazing and breeding, while providing a natural advantage for water movement, pasture performance, and integration of biodiversity corridors.

## 2.2 Soils

The soils at Eagle Rise Farm Pty Ltd are typical of the Strathbogie Plateau, which is underlain by granite geology and shaped by long-term weathering and erosional processes. These soils are a key factor in the productivity and sustainability of the quarter horse breeding enterprise, influencing pasture performance, water retention, and erosion potential.

#### Soil Type and Composition

- The predominant soil type is a granitic-derived loam, with variations across the site from sandy loam to clay loam, depending on slope position and drainage.
- Soils are generally moderately deep, with good friability in the upper profile and moderate permeability, supporting vigorous perennial pasture species suitable for equine grazing.
- Organic matter levels are moderate but can be improved through ongoing manure composting and organic amendments.



### Soil Health and Function

- The soils exhibit:
  - Good structure in areas under pasture, supporting root development and grazing resilience
  - Slight acidity, typical of high rainfall granite zones, with pH values estimated in the range of 5.5 to 6.5
  - Low to moderate fertility, benefiting from supplementary nutrient inputs where required, particularly for phosphorus and potassium
- Soils show low salinity risk, with no indicators of surface crusting or scalding.

### Erosion Risk

- The granitic soils are naturally susceptible to surface erosion if left bare or disturbed due to their fine particle content and moderate slope.
- However, the implementation of rotational grazing, groundcover retention, and vegetative buffers across the site significantly reduces this risk.

### Management Practices

To preserve and enhance soil quality, the following management actions are implemented:

- Rotational grazing to avoid compaction and allow for pasture recovery
- Maintenance of groundcover above 70–80% across all paddocks
- Regular soil testing to inform nutrient planning and pH adjustment (e.g. lime application if needed)
- Manure management through composting and strategic distribution
- Exclusion of stock from vulnerable areas, such as watercourses and revegetation zones, to prevent soil degradation

The soils at Eagle Rise Farm provide a strong foundation for sustainable equine agriculture. Through informed management and continual improvement, soil health will be maintained to support productive pasture systems, protect water quality, and ensure long-term land viability.

### 2.3 Hydrology

The hydrology of *Eagle Rise Farm Pty Ltd* reflects the natural drainage patterns of the Strathbogie Plateau, a high rainfall catchment area that supports both seasonal surface water movement and stable pasture production. Understanding and managing water flow is essential for erosion prevention, water quality protection, and sustainable land use.

### Surface Water Features

- The site contains two seasonal watercourses, both of which follow natural drainage lines across the property and flow during extended rainfall events.
- These watercourses are not located near the proposed equine infrastructure, reducing the risk of direct nutrient or sediment runoff from horse activity.
- The terrain facilitates gradual runoff, with minimal risk of concentrated erosion under current land management practices.



#### Groundwater and Subsurface Hydrology

#### Water Supply Infrastructure

- A reticulated water system delivers water to all horse paddocks via troughs, ensuring livestock do not access natural waterways.
- Rainwater harvesting from roof structures is used to supplement storage for stock water and revegetation activities, particularly during dry periods.

#### Hydrological Management Strategies

- Buffer zones of at least 30 metres are maintained around both watercourses to protect riparian function.
- Vegetated areas intercept overland flow before it reaches waterways, improving infiltration and filtering sediments and nutrients.
- Infrastructure (e.g. yards, sheds, laneways) is placed on elevated, free-draining locations to reduce waterlogging and runoff risk.
- Grazing is excluded from watercourse areas to protect bank stability and riparian vegetation.

#### Catchment Role

- The property contributes to the upper catchment of the Goulburn Broken Basin, and hydrological management aligns with best practice principles to maintain water quality and ecological function downstream.

The hydrological features of *Eagle Rise Farm* are managed to ensure that the horse stud enterprise does not negatively impact local water resources. Through thoughtful design, runoff control, and vegetation buffers, the site contributes positively to catchment health and maintains resilience to seasonal variation in rainfall.

#### 2.4 Vegetation

The site is located within the Herb-Rich Foothill Forest (EVC 23), which is characteristic of the higher elevation foothill landscapes in north-eastern Victoria. This EVC typically features:

- Overstorey species such as *Eucalyptus radiata* (Narrow-leaf Peppermint), *Eucalyptus obliqua* (Messmate Stringybark), and *Eucalyptus rubida* (Candlebark)
- Midstorey shrubs including *Acacia dealbata* (Silver Wattle), *Pomaderris aspera* (Hazel Pomaderris), and *Olearia lirata* (Snowy Daisy-bush)
- Ground layer species such as *Poa labillardierei* (Tussock Grass), *Dianella revoluta* (Black-anther Flax-lily), and native wildflowers and herbs

#### Conservation & Management Priorities

The long-term sustainability of Eagle Rise Farm Pty Ltd is underpinned by a clear set of conservation and land management priorities that integrate agricultural productivity with ecological resilience. The following priorities have been identified to guide ongoing decision-making, planning, and resource allocation across the 13.7-hectare property.



#### Protect and Enhance Native Vegetation:

- Preserve remnant vegetation, particularly paddock trees and drainage line flora, as critical habitat and landscape features.
- Expand native vegetation cover through strategic revegetation using locally indigenous species aligned with EVC 23 – Herb-Rich Foothill Forest.
- Establish and maintain three-row shelterbelts along boundaries and biodiversity corridors to enhance habitat connectivity and wind buffering.

#### Maintain Groundcover and Soil Health:

- Ensure permanent groundcover across all paddocks through rotational grazing and careful stocking aligned with Dry Sheep Equivalent (DSE) capacity.
- Improve soil structure and fertility using organic amendments and composted manure.
- Conduct regular soil testing to guide nutrient and pH management, particularly in high-use paddocks.

#### Prevent Erosion and Protect Waterways:

- Implement erosion control measures, including revegetation of vulnerable areas, surface water dispersal structures, and restricted access to sloped or compacted zones.
- Maintain buffer zones of at least 30 metres around the two seasonal watercourses, ensuring no development, grazing, or runoff intrusion occurs within these sensitive areas.
- Use vegetated swales and pasture filtering to manage overland water flow and protect water quality.

#### Control Pest Plants and Animals:

- Regularly monitor and control invasive weeds such as blackberry, sweet briar, thistle, and Paterson's curse, using a mix of mechanical removal and selective herbicides.
- Participate in regional pest animal control programs targeting rabbits and foxes, particularly around revegetation zones and paddock trees.

#### Support Biodiversity and Habitat:

- Enhance habitat diversity by retaining dead wood, protecting native understorey regeneration, and managing non-cultivated areas as habitat nodes.
- Integrate biodiversity improvement areas into farm design, linking shelterbelts, paddock trees, and watercourses into a connected ecological network.

#### Sustainable Equine Infrastructure and Operations:

- Maintain horse training and handling areas to high environmental standards, with all-weather surfacing and proper drainage to prevent soil degradation.
- Operate with a low-intensity stocking rate (no more than 8 mares and biennial foals) to minimise land pressure.
- Use natural horsemanship methods that reduce stress on animals and land.

#### Monitor, Review, and Adapt:

- Implement an annual review process to assess pasture condition, weed emergence, erosion risks, vegetation health, and water infrastructure.
- Use findings to update the land management plan, adapt practices, and prioritise resource allocation based on seasonal and operational needs.



### 3. Proposed Development

#### 3.1 Subdivision

The proposed development involves the formalisation and ongoing use of a low-intensity quarter horse breeding and training enterprise. The operation is situated on a 13.7-hectare portion of the land (Proposed Lot 1), which is being created from the existing parent title, Lot 2 on Plan of Subdivision PS416560. The enterprise is designed to be environmentally responsible and consistent with the rural zoning and land capability of the Strathbogie Plateau.

The horse stud specialises in the breeding and training of quarter horses for cattle work on farms, stations, and feedlots. The breeding program maintains no more than eight adult mares at any one time, with foaling occurring on a biennial basis to ensure a sustainable stocking rate that aligns with pasture productivity. Natural horsemanship methods are used exclusively for horse training, reflecting a low-stress, ethical, and land-sensitive approach to animal handling. Sales are conducted online and through established agricultural networks, reducing the need for frequent onsite traffic or large-scale operations.

The site already contains all necessary infrastructure to support the enterprise, including a dwelling, equine-specific shedding, a round yard, holding pens, and paddock infrastructure with reticulated water troughs. All paddocks are well-maintained and fenced for rotational grazing. These facilities are located on free-draining elevated ground, away from watercourses and erosion-prone areas, ensuring minimal impact on soil and water quality.

The subdivision creating Proposed Lot 1 is intended to clearly define the area used for the enterprise and ensure its operational and environmental self-sufficiency. The lot size is appropriate for the scale of use and includes sufficient pasture to support the horses under Dry Sheep Equivalent (DSE) assessments. No new buildings or services are required beyond what currently exists on the site.

The development integrates with the surrounding environment and includes conservation measures such as boundary planting with native vegetation from Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC) 23 – Herb-Rich Foothill Forest. These plantings enhance biodiversity, create windbreaks, and reinforce landscape function. Importantly, the proposed horse operation is located well away from the two seasonal watercourses on the property, both of which are protected by wide vegetated buffer zones and are not impacted by day-to-day activities.

#### 3.3 Strathbogie Planning Scheme Requirements

Under Clause 35.07 – Farming Zone (FZ) of the Victoria Planning Provisions, subdivision is regulated to protect agricultural land and avoid the fragmentation of rural holdings. The purpose is to ensure that subdivision supports productive land use, avoids rural residential sprawl, and maintains the long-term viability of agricultural operations. The key requirements for subdivision in the Farming Zone include:

Permit Requirement:

- A planning permit is required to subdivide land in the Farming Zone. All subdivision proposals must demonstrate consistency with the purpose and decision guidelines of the zone.



#### Minimum Lot Size:

- Subdivision must comply with the minimum lot size specified in the schedule to the Farming Zone (commonly 40 hectares or as specified by the local planning scheme).
- A permit may be granted to create a lot smaller than the minimum lot size only if the subdivision is:
  - To excise an existing dwelling, or
  - To realign boundaries in a way that does not increase the number of lots with potential for a dwelling, or
  - For a genuine agricultural or utility purpose and is consistent with the zone's objectives.

#### Agricultural Justification

##### Subdivision must:

- Support and enhance the ongoing use of the land for agriculture.
- Avoid the creation of lots that could be used for non-agricultural or residential lifestyle purposes unless clearly justified.

#### Avoidance of Land Fragmentation

##### The proposal must demonstrate that it will:

- Not lead to the fragmentation of productive agricultural land.
- Avoid the proliferation of small lots that are incapable of supporting viable agricultural use.
- Maintain lot sizes that reflect the operational needs of agricultural enterprises in the area.

#### Infrastructure and Access

##### Each lot must:

- Be provided with legal road access.
- Be capable of supporting on-site wastewater management where necessary.
- Be designed to avoid future conflict with agricultural operations on surrounding land.

#### Consistency with Policy

##### Subdivision must be consistent with the:

- Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) and Planning Policy Framework (PPF), particularly policies that encourage sustainable agriculture, rural land protection, and responsible land use planning.
- Local planning policies regarding rural subdivision, settlement patterns, and environmental protection.

#### Environmental Considerations

##### Subdivision must avoid:

- Areas of environmental sensitivity (e.g. waterways, remnant vegetation, erosion-prone land).
- Impacts on biodiversity and land capability for long-term agricultural use.

#### Response to these points:

#### **Permit Requirement**

A planning permit is being sought for the subdivision of land to create Proposed Lot 1 with an area of 13.7 hectares. This lot will support the existing and ongoing use of the land for a quarter horse breeding and training enterprise. The subdivision does not seek to increase residential development opportunities, and the proposal is aligned with the Farming Zone's intent to support sustainable agricultural use.



### **Minimum Lot Size**

The proposal involves the creation of a lot that is smaller than the minimum lot size specified in the schedule to the Farming Zone. However, the reduced lot size is justified as it reflects an existing, long-established equine use, and the lot contains all necessary infrastructure, pasture, and water supply required for the continued operation of the horse enterprise. No new dwellings are proposed, and the lot is agriculturally self-sufficient. The subdivision does not result in additional fragmentation, and no dwelling entitlement is created on the balance land.

### **Agricultural Justification**

The subdivision directly supports an existing and ongoing agricultural enterprise – the breeding and training of quarter horses for cattle work across farms and feedlots. The business model is low-intensity and land-appropriate, with up to eight adult mares and foaling every two years. The enterprise is recognised as a viable form of extensive animal husbandry and contributes to the agricultural economy of the Strathbogie region. The proposed lot contains infrastructure, paddocks, and pasture sufficient to support the enterprise without reliance on adjoining land.

### **Avoidance of Land Fragmentation**

The subdivision is a boundary reconfiguration that formalises the existing agricultural use and ensures that the land remains a viable, self-contained rural unit. The creation of Proposed Lot 1 does not lead to land fragmentation in the traditional sense; rather, it supports land use consolidation for a specialised agricultural activity. The proposal does not result in rural residential sprawl or isolate productive land from practical agricultural use.

### **Infrastructure and Access**

Proposed Lot 1 is accessed via an existing vehicle crossover from Merton-Strathbogie Road. The lot contains a dwelling, equine infrastructure, and reticulated water supply to all paddocks. There is also sufficient area and capacity for on-site wastewater management, consistent with the current residential use. The layout avoids impacts on watercourses and erosion-prone areas, and all infrastructure is sited appropriately in accordance with land capability.

### **Consistency with Policy**

The proposal is consistent with the Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) and Planning Policy Framework (PPF) objectives that promote rural economic diversification and support agriculture on appropriately managed land. The proposed lot supports a form of agricultural production that is environmentally responsible, economically viable, and operationally independent. The subdivision provides clarity for the ongoing management and investment in the equine enterprise while protecting the broader rural landscape.

### **Environmental Considerations**

The lot layout avoids environmentally sensitive areas, including two seasonal watercourses, which are buffered and not impacted by infrastructure or paddocks. The land has been managed to protect soil and water quality through erosion control, paddock rotation, and revegetation. The subdivision supports the continued implementation of the property's Integrated Land Management Plan, which includes biodiversity improvement areas and long-term habitat enhancement.

4. Farm Management
  - 4.1 Role of the Manager in Business Operations

At Eagle Rise Farm Pty Ltd, the farm manager plays a central role in ensuring the effective and sustainable operation of the quarter horse breeding and training enterprise. The manager is responsible for day-to-day operations, strategic planning, animal welfare, and the implementation of environmental management practices in accordance with the Integrated Land Management Plan.



Key responsibilities include:

**Operational Oversight:**

The manager oversees all aspects of farm operation including grazing schedules, horse training activities, feed management, infrastructure maintenance, and biosecurity compliance. Regular inspections of paddocks, fences, and water systems are conducted to ensure the safety and efficiency of the property.

**Animal Welfare and Training Supervision:**

The manager ensures that all horses are cared for in accordance with best-practice standards, using natural horsemanship methods that prioritise low-stress handling. Breeding schedules, foaling, vaccinations, and veterinary care are coordinated and documented.

**Pasture and Soil Management:**

Soil fertility and pasture productivity are monitored through rotational grazing, soil testing, and organic amendments. The manager is responsible for maintaining groundcover, managing stocking rates, and ensuring that land use remains within sustainable Dry Sheep Equivalent (DSE) limits.

**Environmental Stewardship:**

The manager leads the implementation of environmental objectives, including revegetation of boundary areas, weed and pest control, waterway protection, and erosion prevention. These actions are aligned with EVC 23 planting schedules and broader catchment management principles.

**Compliance and Record-Keeping:**

All activities relevant to planning permits, zoning requirements, and animal husbandry regulations are documented. The manager ensures that business operations remain compliant with local and state planning controls, including the Farming Zone provisions (Clause 35.07).

**Financial and Business Planning:**

The manager contributes to budgeting, supply procurement, and marketing—particularly the sale of horses through online platforms and agricultural networks. They monitor enterprise performance and adapt operations to meet changing environmental and market conditions.

**Risk Management and Safety:**

Emergency procedures (e.g. fire readiness, injury response) are maintained and updated as required. The manager ensures all staff and visitors follow appropriate safety protocols, and that infrastructure meets animal and human safety standards.

The manager's role is fundamental to ensuring the success, productivity, and sustainability of Eagle Rise Farm. By integrating operational efficiency with ecological awareness, the manager supports a business model that is economically viable, environmentally responsible, and aligned with regional rural land use policy.

4.2 Key objectives of the ILMP include:

**Land Degradation Prevention**

Sustainable land management is essential to the long-term productivity and environmental resilience of Eagle Rise Farm. The following land degradation prevention strategies are employed to ensure that the soil, vegetation, and water resources remain viable for continued use as a quarter horse stud:



- **Rotational Grazing:** Paddocks are managed through a rotational grazing system to prevent overgrazing, maintain groundcover, and promote pasture recovery. This minimises soil compaction and erosion.
- **Pasture Management:** Regular pasture assessments are conducted to monitor species composition and biomass. Reseeding and fertilisation are undertaken where required using horse-safe practices to maintain healthy sward cover.
- **Reticulated Watering Systems:** Troughs are used to reduce livestock trampling and erosion around natural water sources. Overflow is managed to prevent waterlogging and surface runoff.
- **Vegetation Buffers and Windbreaks:** Native vegetation, selected from EVC 23 Herb-Rich Foothill Forest, is being planted in three-row shelterbelts along property boundaries. This reduces wind erosion, protects soil structure, and enhances biodiversity.
- **Erosion Control Measures:** Contour fencing and paddock layout align with landform to direct surface water flow and minimise gully formation. Areas susceptible to erosion are stabilised with revegetation.
- **Manure and Waste Management:** Manure is collected and composted to reduce nutrient runoff and maintain soil health. Feed and bedding waste is managed to avoid contamination of grazing areas.
- **Low-Impact Horse Handling:** The natural horsemanship training approach used onsite reduces stress on both animals and landscape, as it avoids high-intensity or repeated trampling in confined zones.

These practices contribute to the prevention of land degradation and ensure the continued viability of the property for equine agriculture while protecting its ecological values.

#### **Soil and Water Improvements**

Effective soil and water management are critical to sustaining the productivity of the horse paddocks at Eagle Rise Farm and maintaining the long-term health of the land. The following strategies are implemented to enhance soil structure, prevent erosion, and protect water resources on the property:

##### Soil Health Management

- **Soil Testing and Monitoring:** Regular soil testing is undertaken to assess nutrient levels, pH, and organic matter. This informs targeted soil amendments to correct imbalances and support productive pasture growth.
- **Organic Matter Enhancement:** Composting of manure and organic waste is conducted onsite and applied to paddocks to build soil organic carbon, improve moisture retention, and promote microbial activity.
- **Pasture Management and Groundcover:** Permanent pasture cover is maintained in all paddocks, with reseeded as necessary to prevent bare soil. Grass species are selected for deep-rooting capacity and suitability to the local conditions on the Strathbogie Plateau.
- **Low-Impact Stocking Density:** Horse numbers are managed to align with the pasture's Dry Sheep Equivalent (DSE) capacity, ensuring the land is not overgrazed and soil compaction is minimised.

##### **Water Resource Protection and Efficiency**

- **Reticulated Watering System:** All paddocks are serviced by troughs connected to a reticulated system, reducing the need for livestock access to natural drainage lines or dams, thus preventing bank erosion and nutrient loading of surface waters.



- **Rainwater Harvesting:** Roof runoff from existing shedding is captured in tanks and used to supplement stock water supply and support revegetation projects during dry periods.
- **Surface Water Flow Management:** Paddocks are contoured where appropriate to follow the natural landform, allowing water to disperse evenly and reducing the risk of concentrated runoff and erosion. Swales or grassed infiltration areas are used in key locations to slow and absorb water movement.
- **Riparian and Drainage Area Protection:** Drainage lines and low-lying areas are protected from livestock through fencing or seasonal exclusion and are enhanced through revegetation with native species to stabilise soil and improve water quality.

#### **Erosion Control**

- **Strategic Paddock Design:** Paddocks are designed with alignment to slope and soil type to avoid erosion-prone zones being overused. Gates and laneways are reinforced with gravel or matting to prevent rutting and sediment loss during wet conditions.
- **Revegetation of Bare or Sensitive Areas:** Native vegetation from EVC 23 is planted along boundaries and in areas identified as erosion-prone, providing long-term root structure and wind protection.

These soil and water improvement practices work in concert to maintain the productive capacity of the land, reduce environmental impacts from the equine enterprise, and enhance the resilience of the property under changing seasonal conditions. They also support the principles of regenerative agriculture and align with best practice land stewardship.

#### **Defined Land Management Uses and Strategies:**

##### **Yards and Handling Area**

The Eagle Rise Farm quarter horse enterprise includes a dedicated yards and handling area that supports the safe, low-stress management and training of horses in accordance with natural horsemanship principles.

The handling infrastructure has been purposefully designed for efficient movement, training, and care of horses and includes the following components:

- **Round Yard:** A centrally located round yard is used for groundwork and behavioural training. This structure facilitates calm handling, lunging, desensitisation, and other key elements of natural horsemanship in a controlled and enclosed environment.
- **Holding Pens:** Adjacent to the round yard are multiple small holding pens, constructed with safe and durable fencing to accommodate horses temporarily during health checks, farrier visits, or segregation. These pens also serve as transfer points when rotating horses between paddocks.
- **Feed and Storage Shed:** A secure shed provides dry, vermin-proof storage for supplementary feed, tack, and veterinary supplies. Its proximity to the yards ensures efficient daily operations.
- **Crush / Vet Bay (if applicable):** If included in your facility, a crush or vet bay can be used for safe and secure treatment of horses during veterinary inspections, floating, or procedures requiring stillness.
- **All-Weather Surface and Drainage:** The yard surfaces are either naturally free-draining or stabilised with gravel, screenings, or rubber matting to prevent mud buildup, minimise hoof damage, and allow year-round usability.



- **Access and Vehicle Movement:** The design provides ample space for float parking and turning areas, with clear access routes between the yards and the paddocks, as well as to the main dwelling and drive.

The location of the yards and handling area has been selected to ensure operational efficiency, minimise erosion, and avoid disturbance to vegetated areas. Their proximity to key infrastructure also ensures ease of observation, animal care, and training integration as part of the broader farm operation.

#### **Biodiversity Improvement Areas**

As part of the broader land stewardship objectives at *Eagle Rise Farm*, designated Biodiversity Improvement Areas have been identified and established to enhance the ecological values of the property while complementing the horse breeding and training enterprise.

These areas are located primarily along property boundaries, within paddock buffer zones, and around existing drainage lines or low-lying terrain. The goal is to protect remnant native vegetation, enhance habitat connectivity, and improve soil and water quality across the site.

##### *Key Features and Actions:*

- **Revegetation with Indigenous Species:** Native species selected from Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC) 23 – Herb-Rich Foothill Forest are planted in three-row shelterbelts along boundaries. These include a mix of:
  - **Overstorey Trees:** e.g. *Eucalyptus radiata* (Narrow-leaf Peppermint) at 8–10m spacing
  - **Midstorey Shrubs:** e.g. *Acacia dealbata* (Silver Wattle) at 4–6m spacing
  - **Groundcovers/Grasses:** e.g. *Poa labillardierei* (Tussock Grass) at 1–2m spacing
- **Habitat Corridors:** Plantings are designed to create linear corridors that support the movement of native fauna and enhance pollinator populations.
- **Weed and Pest Animal Control:** Ongoing management of invasive species such as blackberry, thistle, rabbits, and foxes is undertaken through manual removal, targeted spraying, and coordinated local control programs.
- **Soil Stabilisation and Water Quality:** Biodiversity areas are located to intercept surface runoff, filter nutrients and sediments, and reduce erosion in vulnerable paddocks and drainage paths.
- **Integration with Farm Operations:** These areas are fenced off from horse paddocks where necessary to allow vegetation establishment and protect regenerating flora while maintaining safe buffer distances from equine activities.

#### **Pest Plant Control**

Weed management is critical to maintaining pasture quality and preventing invasive species from spreading. The farm's approach includes:

- Regular weed monitoring to identify and control invasive species early.
- Targeted herbicide application in affected areas while preserving native vegetation.
- Biological control methods, such as introducing competitive native grasses to suppress weed growth.

#### **Pest Animal Control**

Effective pest plant control is a critical component of maintaining pasture quality, supporting native vegetation, and ensuring the ongoing viability of the quarter horse stud enterprise at *Eagle Rise Farm*. Invasive species compete with productive pasture and indigenous flora, reduce biodiversity, and can negatively impact soil and water health. The following management



strategies are implemented to identify, control, and prevent the spread of pest plants across the 13.7-hectare site.

### Target Weed Species

Based on local observations and regional weed threats in the Strathbogie area, the following species are considered priority pest plants on the property:

- *Rubus fruticosus* spp. agg. (Blackberry)
- *Cirsium vulgare* (Spear Thistle)
- *Echium plantagineum* (Paterson's Curse)
- *Rosa rubiginosa* (Sweet Briar)
- *Hypochaeris radicata* (Cat's Ear)
- *Hordeum* spp. (Barley Grass)

These species are commonly found in disturbed areas, along fence lines, drainage paths, and degraded pasture zones.

### Control Methods

A combination of mechanical, chemical, and ecological methods is used to manage pest plants:

- **Manual and Mechanical Control:** Smaller infestations and isolated plants are removed manually or with mechanical equipment. This is particularly effective for thistles and briar rose in sensitive revegetation zones.
- **Targeted Herbicide Application:** Selective spraying is carried out using registered herbicides in accordance with label instructions and seasonal timing. Spot spraying is preferred to minimise damage to pasture and native species.
- **Pasture Management and Competition:** Maintaining dense and healthy pasture cover through rotational grazing, fertilisation, and reseeding discourages weed establishment by outcompeting invasive species.
- **Revegetation and Groundcover:** Areas treated for weeds are often revegetated with native species or deep-rooted perennials to stabilise soil and suppress regrowth.
- **Monitoring and Mapping:** Regular inspections are conducted to identify new outbreaks. Weed locations are mapped and scheduled for treatment based on priority, density, and risk of spread.

### Prevention and Biosecurity

- Machinery and equipment brought onsite are inspected and cleaned to prevent the introduction of new weed seeds.
- Fodder is sourced from certified weed-free suppliers to prevent contamination through feed.
- External contractors and visitors are briefed on biosecurity protocols.

Ongoing pest plant control contributes to the ecological integrity of Eagle Rise Farm and supports its dual goals of high-standard equine production and environmental sustainability. All control activities are carried out in alignment with regional weed management guidelines and in consultation with the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority where appropriate.

### Erosion Control

Soil erosion presents a significant risk to both the productivity and environmental integrity of rural properties, particularly those on elevated terrain such as the Strathbogie Plateau. At Eagle Rise Farm, erosion control is a key land management objective to ensure the long-term health of



pasture, protect water quality, and maintain safe and functional infrastructure for the quarter horse stud enterprise.

### **Erosion Risk Areas**

Erosion is most likely to occur in the following locations:

- Sloped paddocks subject to concentrated runoff
- Bare or overgrazed areas with limited groundcover
- Fence lines and gateways with high livestock traffic
- Around water troughs, laneways, and handling yards
- Low-lying drainage lines lacking vegetation cover

Management Strategies

- **Rotational Grazing and Stocking Control:** Livestock numbers are matched to the pasture's Dry Sheep Equivalent (DSE) capacity, and paddocks are rested between grazing periods to allow groundcover regeneration. This prevents excessive hoof impact and soil compaction.
- **Maintenance of Groundcover:** A minimum of 70–80% groundcover is maintained across all paddocks through careful grazing management and supplementary seeding where required. Permanent pasture species are chosen for deep root systems that stabilise soil.
- **Strategic Paddock Design and Infrastructure:**
  - Paddocks are designed to follow natural contours where possible, minimising water velocity and encouraging infiltration.
  - Laneways and high-traffic zones are stabilised using gravel, geofabric, or vegetative cover.
  - Water troughs are positioned away from drainage lines, with compacted pads or mats underneath to reduce erosion.

### **Revegetation and Shelterbelt Planting**

Three-row native shelterbelts are established along boundaries and in erosion-prone areas using species from EVC 23 – *Herb-Rich Foothill Forest*. These reduce wind erosion, intercept surface runoff, and provide long-term root structure to hold soil in place.

### **Surface Water Control Measures**

- Swales, diversion banks, and infiltration basins are used to slow and disperse surface water runoff.
- Grass filter strips are established along drainage paths to trap sediment and reduce nutrient loss.
- Gully heads and existing erosion features are stabilised with vegetation and rock armouring where necessary.

### **Monitoring and Maintenance**

Regular inspections are conducted following major rainfall events and during seasonal transitions to identify emerging erosion issues. Repairs and vegetation reinforcement are undertaken promptly to prevent minor problems from escalating.

The erosion control measures implemented at *Eagle Rise Farm* ensure the land remains structurally stable, productive, and environmentally resilient. These practices are integrated with



overall pasture management and biodiversity goals, demonstrating a commitment to sustainable equine land use on the Strathbogie Plateau.

#### **Protection of Paddock Trees**

Paddock trees provide shade, shelter, and biodiversity benefits, and their protection is essential. Measures will include:

- Fencing off mature trees to prevent livestock from causing root damage and compaction.
- Supplementary planting of native trees to maintain tree coverage into the future.
- Mulching and soil aeration around tree bases to improve water infiltration.

#### **Waterway Protection**

Two seasonal watercourses traverse Eagle Rise Farm Pty Ltd, situated away from the proposed horse breeding and training facilities. These natural drainage lines form part of the broader catchment hydrology of the Strathbogie Plateau and play an important role in supporting local biodiversity, water filtration, and landscape function. Although not directly impacted by the proposed equine enterprise, their protection is a key element of sustainable land management and is consistent with best practice environmental stewardship.

#### **Watercourse Characteristics**

- The two watercourses are seasonal in nature, typically flowing during periods of sustained rainfall.
- They are vegetated with grasses and scattered shrubs, contributing to water filtration and erosion mitigation.
- Both courses are located down-gradient and well-separated from paddocks, handling areas, and infrastructure associated with the horse enterprise.

Protection Measures

#### **Stock Exclusion**

- Livestock do not have access to the watercourses due to natural topography and fencing arrangements. This prevents trampling, bank destabilisation, and contamination from manure.

#### **Vegetation Buffer Zones**

- Existing vegetation along the banks is retained to act as a riparian buffer, stabilising the soil, intercepting runoff, and maintaining habitat integrity.
- Where gaps in vegetation exist, revegetation with native riparian species will be undertaken to reinforce these natural buffers using plants suitable to EVC 23 – *Herb-Rich Foothill Forest*.

#### **Surface Water Management**

- Paddock layout and training infrastructure are designed to avoid directing runoff toward the watercourses.
- Overland flow is dispersed through maintained pasture and vegetated areas to reduce erosion risk and nutrient loading.

#### **Weed and Pest Control**

- Invasive species (e.g. blackberry, willow saplings) are monitored and managed along the banks using low-impact methods to prevent bank degradation and maintain native flora.

#### **No Development within Buffer Zones**

- A development exclusion zone of at least 30 metres is maintained around both watercourses.



- No buildings, fencing, or earthworks are proposed within these buffer areas, preserving their function and ecological value.

#### **Monitoring and Maintenance**

- Visual inspections of the watercourses are conducted seasonally and after heavy rainfall to identify any signs of erosion, sedimentation, or weed encroachment.
- Any necessary remediation (e.g. planting, bank stabilisation) is carried out in accordance with catchment authority guidelines.

These waterway protection measures ensure that the natural hydrology of *Eagle Rise Farm* remains undisturbed by the proposed horse stud operations and contributes to the broader landscape connectivity and ecological resilience of the Strathbogie region.

#### **Management of Non-Cultivated Areas**

Non-cultivated areas at Eagle Rise Farm Pty Ltd—including boundaries, steep slopes, watercourse buffer zones, shelterbelts, and revegetation sites—play a crucial role in maintaining landscape health, supporting biodiversity, and reducing land degradation. These areas are managed to complement the primary equine enterprise while delivering long-term environmental benefits.

#### Objectives

- Maintain groundcover to reduce erosion and runoff
- Support native biodiversity and habitat values
- Prevent the spread of pest plants and animals
- Enhance visual amenity and wind protection
- Provide ecological corridors across the property

#### Management Strategies

##### **Vegetation Retention and Enhancement**

- Existing native vegetation within non-cultivated areas is retained and enhanced.
- Revegetation is undertaken using species selected from EVC 23 – Herb-Rich Foothill Forest, planted in three-row arrangements along boundaries or degraded areas.

##### **Controlled Grazing or Exclusion**

- These areas are generally excluded from regular grazing to allow natural regeneration.
- In larger or more stable non-cultivated zones, occasional light grazing may be used for fuel load management under a rotational plan that avoids compaction or disturbance.

##### **Weed and Pest Control**

- Targeted weed control is conducted manually or via selective herbicide application to maintain native species dominance.
- Monitoring and trapping for pest animals such as rabbits and foxes is integrated into property-wide management efforts.

##### **Fire Management**

- Vegetation is managed in accordance with CFA guidelines, maintaining a balance between habitat structure and bushfire safety.
- Strategic fuel breaks may be implemented where appropriate, particularly near infrastructure.

##### **Habitat Features and Corridors**

- Non-cultivated areas are used to establish stepping stones and habitat corridors for fauna, linking paddock trees, shelterbelts, and riparian vegetation.
- Dead trees, fallen logs, and rocky outcrops are retained where safe to do so, providing important shelter and foraging sites.



### **Monitoring and Adaptive Management**

- Annual inspections assess groundcover condition, regeneration success, and weed levels.
- Management strategies are adapted based on seasonal conditions, monitoring results, and ecological objectives.

The active management of non-cultivated areas at Eagle Rise Farm supports the farm's sustainability goals, improves ecosystem services, and ensures the productive land use remains environmentally responsible and future-focused.

#### 4.3 Farm – Plan, Actions and Business Outline

The Development Plan and Action Management Matrix, which outline the required tasks and associated timeframes, are provided in Appendices A and B. These documents have been carefully developed based on the operational needs of the agricultural enterprise and the essential land management practices required to establish and sustain a productive and environmentally responsible farming operation on this property. Appendix C is a Business Plan prepared by Eagle Rise Farm.

## 5. Summary and Conclusion

### 5.1 Summary

Eagle Rise Farm Pty Ltd is a small-scale, purpose-driven quarter horse breeding and training enterprise located on a 13.7-hectare parcel of land at 1554 Merton-Strathbogie Road, Strathbogie. The enterprise is dedicated to producing horses specifically suited for cattle work on farms, stations, and feedlots across Australia, using low-impact natural horsemanship methods and sustainable grazing practices.

The property is managed with a clear focus on ecological integrity, agricultural viability, and long-term land stewardship. The land is fully fenced into paddocks with reticulated water supply, high-quality pasture, and existing infrastructure that supports low-density equine operations. Importantly, all development and land use activities avoid sensitive features such as seasonal watercourses and are aligned with land capability and planning policy.

Through the implementation of this Integrated Land Management Plan, the property addresses key rural land management objectives, including:

- Soil and pasture protection
- Erosion control and waterway buffering
- Vegetation enhancement with EVC 23 species
- Pest plant and animal control
- Protection of paddock trees and biodiversity corridors
- Sustainable infrastructure and low stocking rates

The subdivision of the land to create Proposed Lot 1 reflects an existing and well-established agricultural use and does not increase dwelling entitlements or residential development pressure. The proposed lot is of a sufficient size and structure to support the ongoing use of the land for equine-based agriculture, with all services and operational needs contained within the title.

This ILMP confirms that Eagle Rise Farm Pty Ltd meets the objectives and decision guidelines of the Farming Zone (Clause 35.07) and broader environmental and land use policies within the Strathbogie Planning Scheme. The enterprise contributes positively to the rural economy, upholds best-practice animal welfare and land management, and demonstrates a long-term commitment to regenerative and productive land use on the Strathbogie Plateau.



## 5.2 Conclusion

The Integrated Land Management Plan for *Eagle Rise Farm Pty Ltd* outlines a comprehensive and practical framework for the ongoing use and sustainable management of the 13.7-hectare property located at 1554 Merton-Strathbogie Road, Strathbogie. The enterprise—focused on the breeding and training of quarter horses for agricultural work—is an example of low-impact, land-compatible agricultural use that operates in harmony with the environmental characteristics and planning objectives of the Strathbogie Plateau.

The proposed subdivision to formalise Proposed Lot 1 does not introduce additional development pressure but rather reinforces the long-term viability of an existing, agriculturally productive land use. The property is well-equipped with existing infrastructure, managed pastures, and water systems, and is supported by a clearly defined operational model that limits stocking pressure and protects land capability.

Through this ILMP, *Eagle Rise Farm* demonstrates a strong commitment to:

- Protecting natural assets such as paddock trees, seasonal watercourses, and remnant vegetation
- Managing soil, pasture, and water resources effectively
- Enhancing biodiversity through targeted revegetation
- Operating in accordance with Clause 35.07 of the Farming Zone and the broader strategic planning policies of the Strathbogie Planning Scheme

In doing so, the enterprise exemplifies best practice in rural land use—balancing productivity with environmental stewardship. The plan provides confidence that the land will continue to be used responsibly, sustainably, and in a way that contributes to the social, environmental, and economic values of the region.



APPENDIX A – DEVELOPMENT PLAN



**LEGEND**

- N
- Native Vegetation Planting
- Water Troughs
- Fencing
- Dwelling
- Shed
- Roundyard
- Driveway
- P1-P9 Horse Paddocks

Site:	1554 Merton-Strathbogie Road, Strathbogie	Drawing:	24036-1	Project:	24036	Drawn:	TS
Title:	Development Plan	Scale:	1:400	Date:	09/07/2025	Rev:	A
							PLANOGRAPHY PTY LTD 6 Binney St, Euroa VIC 3666 PO Box 366 0437620174 admin@planography.com.au



APPENDIX B – ACTION MANAGEMENT MATRIX

**MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN**

Issue & Location	Course of Action	Who else do I need to consult? eg. contractors, DEECA	When Timeframes	Risks associated with actions	Cost	Completed?
<b>Fencing – Vegetation Protection Area</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fencing out of vegetation protection area/s to exclude livestock</li> <li>▪ Installation of post and 5 x wire fence for areas identified for vegetation protection on Development Plan</li> <li>▪ Record work undertaken for fencing including receipts and labour costs in a Property Book</li> </ul>	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) can supply further information. Local indigenous plant nursery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Install fencing by 1 July 2027</li> <li>▪ Maintain fencing annually</li> </ul>	Personal injury may occur, personal protection equipment (PPE) to be used.	Plant stock labour	Horse exclusion zones will remain as such to enable native vegetation to be protected and improved. The fencing will be completed by 1 July 2027.
<b>Pest Plant Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Bi-annual review of pest plants on the land including recording of weeds within a Property Book</li> <li>▪ Mapping of monitored weeds shown on a plan kept in the Property Book</li> <li>▪ Treatment of weeds using appropriate control methods including herbicide application and hand removal</li> </ul>	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) can supply further information. Local indigenous plant nursery. Landcare group. Quotes from contractors may be obtained.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Establish a Property Book to record Pest Plant and Animal Management and Degraded land management by 1 August 2027</li> <li>▪ Control methods to be commenced by 1 October 2027 and detailed records to be inserted into the Property Book as soon as possible following completion</li> <li>▪ Append receipts for materials, chemicals and labour to the Property Book</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Seed spread</li> <li>▪ Un-seasonal weather</li> <li>▪ Bushfire</li> <li>▪ Drought</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Labour costs</li> <li>▪ Materials</li> <li>▪ Chemicals</li> </ul>	<p>Quarterly review and comment to be entered into Property Book on status of pest plant control program.</p> <p>Ongoing monitoring of property for new infestation.</p>
<b>Pest Animal Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Monitor pest animal presence bi-annually and record findings within a Property Book</li> <li>▪ Log treatment methods used including bait/trapping etc in the Property Book</li> <li>▪ Make comments on success/failures within the Property Book</li> </ul>	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) can supply further information. Local indigenous plant nursery. Neighbours, local Landcare group. Quotes from contractors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Commencement of control measures by 1 August 2027</li> <li>▪ Treatment through regular control measures undertaken quarterly</li> </ul>	Personal injury may occur, personal protection equipment (PPE) to be used.	Contractor	<p>Quarterly review and comment to be entered into Property Book on status of pest animal control program.</p> <p>Ongoing monitoring of property for new infestation.</p>
<b>Operation Risk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prepare a Property Book</li> <li>▪ Include Success and Failure comments and photographs within the Property Book regarding issues, action, timeframes, costs and any other helpful information in addressing unforeseen problems.</li> <li>▪ Maintain property information within a Property Book on a quarterly basis</li> <li>▪ Include chemical usage information</li> </ul>	Risk Assessor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Establish a Property Book to record operational information by 1 July 2027</li> <li>▪ Update Property Book quarterly as a minimum for operation information</li> </ul>	Personal injury may occur, personal protection equipment (PPE) to be used.	Purchase adequate folder and loose leaf paper to develop a Property Book Plastic Pockets Labels Dividers	Prepare Property Book by 1 July 2027 to accommodate operation risk matters and maintain the book on an ongoing basis.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Include equipment hire or purchase for pest plant and animal control and land degradation management</li> </ul>					
<b>Native Vegetation Planting and Maintenance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Plant a variety of indigenous plant species in accordance with Development Plan in accordance with the species identified within the ILMP</li> </ul>	Landowner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Commence planting by 1 July 2026</li> <li>▪ Establish a Property Book to record operational information by 1 July 2027</li> <li>▪ Update Property Book quarterly as a minimum for operation information</li> </ul>	N/A	Labour	Prepare Property Book by 1 July 2027 and document planting of vegetation commencing by 1 July 2027 and having it completed by 1 July 2029.



APPENDIX C – BUSINESS PLAN

**Business Plan****Eagle Rise Quarter Horses  
Strathbogie Plateau, Victoria****Executive Summary**

This business plan outlines the development of Eagle Rise Quarter Horses, a specialist Quarter Horse breeding and training facility producing elite progeny for cattle stations, feedlots, and working horse competition circuits such as campdrafting and cutting. Located on a 13.7-hectare freehold property on the Strathbogie Plateau, the enterprise will run 4–6 premium mares in rotation with a resident stallion, generating 2–4 high-value foals annually. Horses will be trained from weaning to saddle, tailored to agricultural working conditions. The farm is divided into 9 dedicated rotational paddocks, providing optimal pasture recovery, stocking flexibility, and animal welfare.

**Mission Statement**

To produce elite, reliable and well-trained Quarter Horses with proven ability in cattle work and performance settings, serving Australia's livestock and equestrian industries.

**Vision Statement**

To be recognised as a premium supplier of cattle-ready and competition-quality Quarter Horses in Victoria through excellence in breeding, training, and sustainable land use.

**Unique Selling Proposition (USP)**

Purpose-Bred. Performance-Trained. Paddock-Ready.

Eagle Rise horses are selected for intelligence, temperament, and athleticism, with every foal raised and trained in conditions that mirror real agricultural demands.

### **Growth Objectives**

- Breeding Herd – Sustain 4–6 mares and a stallion on a biennial breeding cycle.
- Horse Sales – Reach consistent annual sales of \$80,000–\$100,000 by Year 4 through exclusive progeny.
- Facility Development – Complete 9 rotational paddocks, foaling yards, round yard, and feed shed by Year 2.
- Reputation Building – Establish presence in regional competition circuits and develop industry client relationships.

### **Site Overview**

- Location: Strathbogie Plateau (Shire of Strathbogie)
- Area: 13.7 ha (Farming Zone)
- Bioregion / EVC: Northern Inland Slopes – Herb-Rich Foothill Forest (EVC 23)
- Topography & Soils: Loamy soil with gentle undulating terrain; suitable for pasture grazing.
- Key Assets:
  - 9 fenced rotational horse paddocks (approx. 1.2–1.5 ha each)
  - Central sand arena and round yard
  - Stable and tie-up area
  - Machinery/feed shed
  - Two 20,000L rainwater tanks and gravity-fed trough system
  - Dedicated foaling and weaning yards

**Market Overview**

Demand is growing across regional Australia for strong, trainable, and dependable Quarter Horses suited for stock work in stations, feedlots and mustering operations. With the phasing out of quad bikes and increased focus on low-stress livestock handling, cattle producers are returning to the value of good horses. Additionally, the rural competition sector (campdrafting, cutting) continues to expand, seeking bloodlines with cow sense, agility, and endurance.

**Operational Plan**

- Carrying Capacity: 110 DSE – aligned with 8 DSE/ha capability and rotational grazing. Stock mix includes mares, foals, stallion, and one light-work gelding.
- Breeding Program: 4–6 mares bred biennially with foals retained for training and sale at 2–3 years.
- Grazing System: 9 rotational paddocks managed for pasture regeneration, seasonal rest, and parasite control.
- Training Approach: Foals halter trained at weaning; exposed to cattle and groundwork by 12 months; saddle-started from 2 years.
- Facilities: Sand arena, round yard, tack and feed room, stables, foaling yard, mobile shelter.
- Pasture & Soil Care: Annual soil testing; targeted fertiliser application; oversowing with cocksfoot, clover and native perennials.
- Water & Infrastructure: Dam-fed and tank-stored troughs to each paddock; fencing suitable for horses; dry lot for wet-season rest.

**Financial Projections (Year 4 steady-state)**

- Trained foals sold: 4 – \$100,000 (avg \$25k)
- Direct costs (feed, vet, marketing): (\$35,000)
- Overheads (utilities, maintenance): (\$15,000)

- Net Operating Surplus: \$50,000

### **Marketing & Networking Strategy**

- Industry Access – Direct outreach to stations, contractors, and feedlots through livestock agents and rural networks.
- Brand Building – Showcase training milestones and competition results on a professional website and social media.
- Event Presence – Attend regional horse and livestock shows, campdrafts, and working stockhorse displays.
- Word-of-Mouth – Build trust through client referrals, offering post-sale support and handling demonstrations.

### **Risk Management**

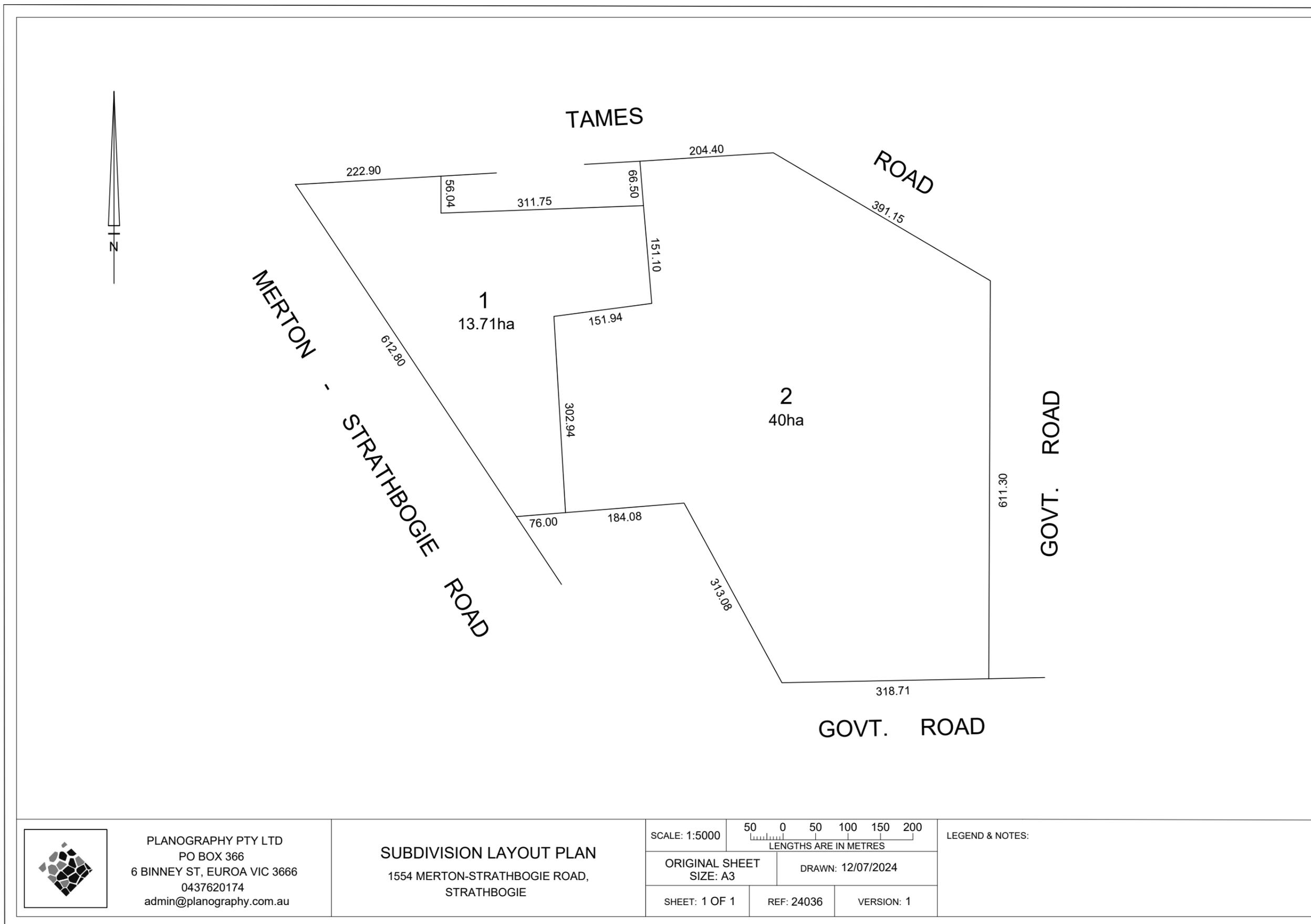
- Injury/disease: Regular vet checks, parasite control, secure paddock fencing.
- Breeding failure: Use of AI and vet-monitored cycles; replace open mares.
- Climate stress: Winter hay reserves; shade and shelter belts; drought management plan.
- Market fluctuation: Diversify outlets (contractors, events, direct station sales).
- Security/theft: Locked infrastructure, secure fencing, GPS trackers, and on-site presence.

### **Alignment with Planning Controls**

The facility meets the purpose of the Farming Zone by supporting primary production and maintaining agricultural land use. The rotational paddock system, limited stocking intensity, and integrated land management practices ensure environmental protection and ongoing land capability. An agricultural nexus exists between the dwelling and equine operations, requiring daily livestock supervision.

### **Conclusion**

Eagle Rise Quarter Horses will offer a sustainable, high-performance equine enterprise tailored to the real demands of Australia's agricultural and competition sectors. With a foundation of best-practice breeding, land management, and training, supported by a 9-paddock rotational system, the business will deliver value through both environmental stewardship and premium horse production.



## 11.2 Community

### 11.2.1 Animal Registration Fees

**AUTHOR** Manager Community Safety

**RESPONSIBLE DIRECTOR** Director Community and Planning

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Longwood Berrys Lane Fire has significantly impacted residents across parts of the Strathbogie Shire, resulting in property loss, displacement, and financial hardship. As part of Council's recovery support measures, it is proposed that Council waive domestic animal registration fees due on 9 April 2026 for residents with registered animals located within the defined fire-affected area.

A review of Council's records has identified 132 registered domestic animals within the affected area. The total foregone registration revenue would be \$5,403, of which \$612.48 represents the statutory levy payable to the State Government under the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*, administered through Agriculture Victoria.

Council officers are advocating to the Victorian Government to waive this statutory levy component; however, should this not occur, the cost for the statutory levy component of the 2026 registration period will be required to be absorbed within the existing Community Safety budget (estimated cost \$612.48).

It is recommended that the proposed waiver apply to the 2026 animal registration period only.

This waiver is considered a practical and compassionate measure that aligns with Council's recovery objectives, provides modest but meaningful financial relief to affected residents, and demonstrates Council's ongoing support for the community following the recent bushfire.

#### RECOMMENDATION

##### That Council:

1. **Approve a waiver of domestic animal registration fees due on 9 April 2026 for residents with registered animals located within the defined fire-affected area**
2. **Support continued advocacy to the Victorian Government to waive the statutory levy component for affected residents due on 9 April 2026**
3. **Note that the waiver applies to the 2026 Animal Registration period only.**

#### PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

To seek Council approval to waive the 2026 animal registration renewal fee (due 9 April 2026) for owners of registered domestic animals within the defined fire-affected area, in recognition of hardship resulting from recent bushfires.

#### ISSUES, OPTIONS AND DISCUSSION

The Longwood Berrys Lane Fire has resulted in significant impacts to residents in Strathbogie Shire, and as part of Council's recovery support measures, officers have reviewed opportunities to provide practical financial relief to affected residents. Animal registration

renewal fees are due on 9 April 2026, and it is proposed that Council waive these fees for residents within the defined fire-affected area.

In accordance with the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*, Council is responsible for administering animal registrations and collecting statutory levies on behalf of the State via Agriculture Victoria.

A review of Council’s animal registration database has identified:

- 132 registered domestic animals within the fire-affected area
- Total registration revenue forgone: \$5,403.

Of this amount:

- Statutory levy payable to State Government: \$612.48
- Council fee component: \$4,790.52

Council officers are advocating for the State Government to waive the statutory levy component. However, if this is not approved, the financial impact for 2026 is modest and can be absorbed within existing Compliance and Local Laws operational budgets.

It is recommended that the exemption apply to the 2026 registration period only, unless Council resolves otherwise in future.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

No external community consultation was undertaken to inform this report.

**POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

**Council Plan**

This report is consistent with the following Objectives and or actions in the 2025-2029 Council Plan:

**Objective Two: Sustain**

We aim to collaborate with others to foster a sustainable environment, a thriving economy and resilient communities.

**Regional, State and National Plans, Policies and Legislation**

This report is aligned with the following legislation, council policies and key strategic documents:

- *Domestic Animal Act 1994*
- Council Plan 2025-2029

**RISK CONSIDERATIONS**

This report has identified the following risk(s):

Risk(s)	Likelihood	Consequence	Rating	Mitigation Action
Missing affected properties.	Unlikely	Moderate	Medium	Carefully review secondary impact

				assessment data and ensure consistent use across Rates and Animals.
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**LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

There are no significant legal considerations associated with this report. However, to enact this waiver, a resolution of Council is required.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION**

No Council officers and/or contractors who have provided advice in relation to this report have declared a general or material conflict of interest regarding the matter under consideration.

**TRANSPARENCY**

In the interests of transparency and open and honest communication with our community this report is presented to a public Council meeting.

**FINANCIAL VIABILITY CONSIDERATIONS**

Council officers are advocating for the State Government to waive the statutory levy component. However, if this is not approved, the financial impact for 2026 is modest and can be absorbed within existing Compliance and Local Laws operational budgets.

Item	Amount
Estimate of the number of affected registered animals	132
Total council revenue forgone	\$4,790.52
Statutory levy component	\$612.48
<b>Net Council cost</b>	<b>\$5403.00</b>

**COLLABORATION**

No formal collaboration was undertaken to inform this report.

**HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS**

The recommendation does not limit any human rights under the Victorian *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

**CONCLUSION**

Waiving domestic animal registration fees for residents affected by the Longwood Berrys Lane Fire is a practical and compassionate measure that is a trauma informed response, supports community recovery, and with minimal financial impact to Council for the 2026 animal registration period.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Nil

## 11.2.2 Variations and Grants Approved Under CEO Delegation February 2026

**AUTHOR** Manager Community and Culture

**RESPONSIBLE DIRECTOR** Director Community and Planning

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to inform Council and the community of community grants or variations approved under delegation by the Chief Executive Officer or relevant Director, for the period 1 February to 28 February 2026.

The 2025-2026 Community Funding Model and associated Grant Guidelines provides authorisation for the Chief Executive Officer to determine and award Community Grants and Event Grants under delegation, following a robust eligibility and assessment process, and subject to budget availability.

Variations to Community Grants and Event Grants can also be approved by the Chief Executive Officer and/or the Director Community and Planning.

This report provides transparency to the community for decisions being made under delegation relating to the Community Funding Model 2025-2026.

### RECOMMENDATION

#### That Council:

1. Note that there were four Quick Response Grants awarded to the total value of \$3,449 by the Chief Executive Officer between 1 February to 28 February 2026.
2. Note that there was one Event Grant awarded to the total value of \$4,754 by the Chief Executive Officer between 1 February to 28 February 2026.

### PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this report is to inform Council and the community of community grants or variations approved under delegation by the Chief Executive Officer or relevant Director, as per Council's Community Funding Model, for the period 1 February to 28 February 2026.

### ISSUES, OPTIONS AND DISCUSSION

In line with Council's commitment to transparency and good governance, a report on grants awarded and variations approved under delegation will be tabled for information at each Council Meeting where such decisions occurred during the reporting period.

This report details any grant variations approved, or grants awarded under delegated authority by the Chief Executive Officer or grant variations approved by the Director Community and Planning, within their approved financial threshold and in accordance with Council's 2025-26 Community Funding Model.

### Grants Awarded Under Delegation

Grant	Applicant	Project	Brief Description	Amount
Quick Response	Euroa Junior Football Netball Club	Shipping container storage	With over 150 kids in the club, storage of equipment has become an issue. This grant plus an Inland Rail \$4,000 grant will allow the purchase of a shipping container for secure storage.	\$1,000
Quick Response	Longwood East Landcare Group	Old Longwood Toll Gate Restoration	The project intends to restore and position one of the original toll gates acquired by LEL in the vicinity of the information board, along with additional information relating to the toll process and relevant history	\$984
Quick Response	Euroa District Pickleball Group	Establish Pickleball in Euroa and surrounding towns	The project will support the establishment of pickleball in Euroa and surrounding towns through the purchase of essential equipment - four nets and six paddles	\$992
Quick Response	Nagambie RSL sub branch	First aid readiness at Nagambie RSL	The purchase of a compliant wall mounted first aid kit and consumables for AED which will be added to the Ambulance Victoria webpage.	\$473
Event Grant	Longwood Football Netball Club	Longwood For the Love of Ale	To support the delivery of the event including traffic management, and equipment hire for enabling infrastructure.	\$4,754

In line with the 2025–26 Community Funding Model and Grant Guidelines, applications were reviewed for eligibility and assessed through a comprehensive process, with recommendations provided to the Chief Executive Officer to determine grant outcomes and recipients.

Applications for the 2025-2026 Quick Response Grants opened on 1 July 2025 and remain open until 31 May 2026 or until such time as funds are exhausted.

Following the award of the Quick Response Grant, the remaining funds in the Quick Response Grant budget is \$591.

Applications for the 2025-2026 Event Grants opened on 1 June 2025 and are open until 1 June 2026 or until such time as funds are exhausted.

Following the award of this Event Grant, the remaining funds in the Event Grant Budget is \$11,267.

### Variations Awarded under delegation

Nil.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Inform - To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions.

**POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

**Council Plan**

This report is consistent with the following key strategic objectives and or actions in the 2025-29 Council Plan:

- Objective One:** Connect
- Objective Two:** Sustain
- Objective Three:** Deliver

**Regional, State and National Plans, Policies and Legislation**

- Community Funding Model and Grant Guidelines 2025-26
- Council Plan 2025-2029

**RISK CONSIDERATIONS**

This report has identified the following risk(s):

<b>Risk(s)</b>	<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>Consequence</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Mitigation Action</b>
Lack of transparency with community	Unlikely	Moderate	Low	Regular reporting to Council and the community on grants awarded under delegation
Without grants being awarded under delegation, delays are caused, resulting in community not being able to deliver projects in a timely manner	Possible	Moderate	Low	Delegations in place and regular reporting to Council and the community on grants and variations awarded under delegation.

**LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

There are no legal considerations associated with this report.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION**

No Council officers and/or contractors who have provided advice in relation to this report have declared a general or material conflict of interest regarding the matter under consideration.

**TRANSPARENCY**

In the interests of transparency and open and honest communication with our community, this report is presented to a public Council meeting.

## **FINANCIAL VIABILITY CONSIDERATIONS**

The Grants awarded were within the total budget allocation of \$10,000 for Quick Response Grants, and \$75,000 for Event Grants contained in the Council's Budget 2025-2026 and were awarded within the relevant financial delegations.

## **SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Economic**

Community Funding supports economic growth across the Shire. Local businesses benefit from an increased visitor economy with projects and events assisting in an increase in visitors as well as an increase in the average length of stay of those visitors. Applicants are also encouraged to buy from local suppliers where possible.

### **Social**

The Community Funding Model encourages projects and events that demonstrate significant social benefits, that will support building a vibrant, inclusive and connected community.

### **Environmental**

Environmental sustainability is promoted at various stages of the grants process. Impacts of projects and events on the natural environment will be assessed in the assessment process and mitigation strategies included in funding agreements.

### **Climate Change**

Community Grant and Event Grant applications must also consider climate change including minimising waste going to landfill and ensure that their project or event is minimising harmful impacts on our natural environment. Event Grant recipients must complete a Waste Wise Plan.

## **INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

The chance to award all grants under CEO delegation in the 2025-2026 community funding model demonstrates continuous improvement by streamlining the process for applicants, reducing administration time and incorporating the findings from the VAGO Fraud Control over Local Government Grants Report 2022.

## **COLLABORATION**

No formal collaboration was involved in the preparation of this report.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS**

There are no significant implications for human rights arising from this report.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is important that decisions and actions taken under delegation be properly documented and transparent. This report advises Council of any grants or variations awarded under Chief Executive Officer or Director delegation in accordance with Council's Community Funding Model and Grant Guidelines 2025-26.

There were four Quick Response Grants, and one Event Grant awarded under CEO delegation during the reporting period from 1 February to 28 February 2026.

**11.3 Infrastructure**

Nil Reports

## 11.4 Corporate

### 11.4.1 Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) State Council Motions

**AUTHOR** Director People and Governance

**RESPONSIBLE DIRECTOR** Director People and Governance

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report seeks Council's endorsement for the submission of five motions to the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) State Council meeting scheduled for Friday 29 May 2026.

The MAV is a membership association and the legislated peak body for local government in Victoria. The State Council is the governing body and is made up of delegates from each member council, including delegates from Strathbogie Shire Council.

Councils are encouraged to submit motions of strategic relevance to the MAV or significance to local government that align with the ten enabling priorities in the MAV Strategy 2024-2027.

#### RECOMMENDATION

**That Council:**

- (1) Endorse the following five motions (under the following heading and as detailed in the report) for submission to the 29 May 2026 Municipal Association of Victoria State Council meeting:**
  - Motion 1: National Disaster Recovery Funding Reform Disaster Funding arrangements**
  - Motion 2: Coordination of Physical Donations During Disaster Events**
  - Motion 3: Biodiversity Strategies Including Weed and Pest Management**
  - Motion 4: Embedding Community Resilience**
  - Motion 5: Shared Resources Across the Local Government Sector**
- (2) Authorise officers to submit the Motions to the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) for consideration at the MAV State Council Meeting scheduled for 29 May 2026**
- (3) Authorise the Chief Executive Officer to make any necessary minor administrative amendments to the motions to comply with MAV requirements.**
- (4) Should either the MAV delegate or substitute delegate be unable to attend the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) State Council Meeting scheduled for 29 May 2026, authorise Councillor Halsall to attend as delegate.**

## PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

This report seeks Council's endorsement for the submission of five motions to the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) State Council meeting scheduled for Friday 29 May 2026.

## ISSUES, OPTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) State Council meetings are an opportunity to debate motions put forward by member councils. As the MAV is the state peak body, motions give a mandate for MAV leadership and advocacy on issues of importance to the sector. This benefits council by advancing our advocacy priorities and promoting the role of local government.

The proposed five motions to be submitted are:

### MOTION ONE

#### **Motion title: National Disaster Recovery Funding Reform Disaster Funding arrangements**

**Motion:** That the MAV writes to the Hon. Vicki Ward MP, Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery and Federal Minister for Emergency Management the Hon Kristy McBain MP to undertake a review of disaster funding programs, ensuring they are designed for rural communities, recognising the compounding effects of consecutive disasters and a changing climate on rural and regional communities which includes but is not limited to:

1. Expanding funding allocations to address the unique costs faced by rural local governments, including emergency response, relief efforts, and rebuilding essential community assets such as roads, water infrastructure, and public facilities.
2. Funding and claims processes focused on enhancing long-term community resilience, including opportunities for betterment and improvements to infrastructure to withstand future disasters and reducing long term costs to State and Federal Government.
3. A streamlined, evidence-based claims process tailored for small rural councils, reducing administrative burden and supporting communities with limited resources while ensuring access to timely and effective relief.

**Rationale:** Rural communities face unique challenges during disasters, including geographic isolation, limited resources, and infrastructure that is often more vulnerable to extreme events. Consecutive or compounding disasters place significant strain on small councils, which must manage both emergency response and rebuilding critical community assets.

A tailored disaster funding program for rural areas is essential to ensure timely, effective support. Expanding funding to cover response, relief, and rebuilding, while prioritising community resilience and betterment, helps communities not just recover, but strengthen against future events. Simplifying evidence-based claims processes reduces administrative burdens on small councils, ensuring a greater focus on recovery.

### MOTION TWO

#### **Motion title: Coordination of Physical Donations During Disaster Events**

**Motion:** That the MAV write to the Hon Danny Pearson, Minister for Government Services to determine a framework and responsible agency for managing physical donations during a disaster.

**Rationale:** During and after emergencies, there is an immediate and critical need to coordinate community donations in a structured and well-resourced way. Uncoordinated donations of

materials can unintentionally create stress for already impacted communities, leading to confusion, duplication of efforts, or unmet needs.

By establishing clear systems and dedicated support for managing physical donations, community can be confident that assistance is delivered efficiently, appropriately, and to those who need it most. This structured approach not only maximises the benefit of community generosity but also reduces the emotional and logistical burden on affected residents, allowing them to focus on recovery and rebuilding with greater security and peace of mind.

### **MOTION THREE**

#### **Motion title: Biodiversity Strategies Including Weed and Pest Management**

**Motion:** That the MAV in collaboration Strathbogie Shire Council meet with the Premier of Victoria to gain a commitment from the Government to:

1. Facilitate backburning in line with the 2009 Black Saturday Royal Commission recommendations
2. Provide local governments, as existing Crown Land Managers, an initial \$1million per annum over the next four years to:
  - Revegetate and manage weed infestation in burnt areas
  - Map and manage local roadside vegetation and reserves
  - Manage Crown reserves, including the management of fire affected and hazardous trees and risks to public safety associated with bushfire impacts.
3. Funding for pest plant and pest animal management to be significantly increased and an ongoing commitment made to the funding to enable proactive weed and pest management to reduce future fuel loads and biodiversity issues.

**Rationale:** Fuel loads across Victoria remain unacceptably high, despite the clear recommendations of the Black Saturday Royal Commission. Inconsistent prescribed burning and inadequate management of roadside and boundary vegetation continue to increase the speed and intensity of bushfires, placing communities and critical evacuation routes at serious risk.

Roads and corridors should function as strategic fuel breaks, protecting lives and supporting firefighting operations. Instead, unmanaged roadside vegetation often acts as a fire accelerant, undermining bushfire prevention efforts and threatening public safety.

Local governments, as Crown land managers, play a vital role in fuel reduction, post-fire recovery, and the management of hazardous trees, weeds, and pest animals. However, without sustained and adequate funding, councils cannot meet these responsibilities or effectively manage escalating bushfire risks.

The measures proposed expanded prescribed burning, targeted roadside fuel reduction, improved inter-agency coordination, and long-term funding support are proven, preventative actions that reduce bushfire risk and save lives. Immediate government commitment is required to address these long-standing gaps in Victoria's fire prevention strategy.

### **MOTION FOUR**

#### **Motion title: Embedding Community Resilience**

**Motion:** That the MAV writes to the Minister for Emergency Services, Vicki Ward MP, requesting a sustainable model to community resilience ensuring support services are in place for as long as they are required, long term.

**Rationale:** Major bushfire events have long-lasting impacts on individuals, families, and communities, particularly in relation to mental health and overall wellbeing. However, current government funding arrangements typically provide recovery support for only two to three years following a major event.

This timeframe does not align with the reality of long-term recovery, where trauma, grief, and cumulative stress often emerge or persist well beyond the initial response period. To enable meaningful recovery and strengthen community resilience, the Victorian and Australian governments should commit to funding bushfire recovery support services for a minimum of five years after a major event.

This commitment places a strong emphasis on wellbeing-focused services, including accessible and ongoing mental health support. Long-term, stable funding is essential to ensure communities receive sustained assistance for as long as it is needed, rather than withdrawing support before recovery is complete.

## **MOTION FIVE**

**Motion title:** Shared Resources Across the Local Government Sector

**Motion:** That the MAV develop and maintain a shared resources portal/program to support capacity building for rural shires, available at all times, not only during disaster events.

**Rationale:** Rural councils often operate with single points of dependency, where critical knowledge and responsibilities sit with one individual or a very small team. Limited staffing capacity means there is often no ability to backfill roles when staff take leave or during periods of increased demand. As a result, essential tasks are delayed or redistributed informally, increasing workload pressure and contributing to staff fatigue and burnout.

To address this risk, there is a need for a shared resource framework that enables less-resourced rural councils to access temporary staffing support from other councils.

Establishing a clear, pre-agreed process including governance arrangements, role definitions, and deployment mechanisms would allow councils to share/second skilled staff when needed. This would develop professional relationships and skills development, strengthen workforce resilience (particularly when resources would come from large metropolitan or regional Councils), and reduce reliance on single points of failure.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

No external community consultation was necessary.

## **POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Council Plan**

This report is consistent with the following objectives and or actions in the 2025-2029 Council Plan:

#### **Objective One: Connect**

We are committed to enhancing access for all residents, promoting healthy living, fostering connections, and providing opportunities to thrive and participate in community life.

**Objective Two: Sustain**

We aim to collaborate with others to foster a sustainable environment, a thriving economy and resilient communities.

**Objective Three: Deliver**

We are committed to delivering quality services and infrastructure that meets the needs of our community. We aim to strengthen the Council’s governance and provide improved, customer-focused experiences.

**Regional, State and National Plans, Policies and Legislation**

This report is aligned with the following legislation, council policies and key strategic documents:

- Municipal Association Victoria Strategy 2024-27
- Council Plan 2025-2029

**RISK CONSIDERATIONS**

This report has identified the following risk(s):

Risk(s)	Likelihood	Consequence	Rating	Mitigation Action
Missed opportunity for advocacy	Unlikely	Moderate	Medium	Submit actions to the MAV State Council. Major platform for Councils to raise issues and advocate to State and Federal Government

**LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The Municipal Association of Victoria Rules 2022 require motions to be of strategic relevance to the MAV or of such significance to local government that they ought to be considered by State Council.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION**

Amanda Tingay, Director People and Governance has a conflict in relation to Motion Three. Director Tingay did not initiate Motion Three.

**TRANSPARENCY**

In the interests of transparency and open and honest communication with our community this report is presented to a public Council meeting.

**FINANCIAL VIABILITY CONSIDERATIONS**

Being financially responsible, achieving the greatest possible community benefit from the programs, initiatives and services we fund will be more sustainable and viable if Council is ensured of equitable and consistent funding streams.

## **SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS**

The measures proposed in MAV Motion Three, Biodiversity Strategies including Weed And Pest Management, and including prescribed burning and targeted roadside fuel reduction, are proven, preventative actions that reduce bushfire risk and are aligned to the strategic objectives set out in the 2025-2029 Council Plan, and Council's overarching strategic risks.

## **INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

It is anticipated that the motions to MAV should initiate discussions between the State and Local Government bodies and support the strategic plan for sustainable and resilient local government councils.

## **COLLABORATION**

The submission of motions to the MAV State Council provides the opportunity for Council's to collectively collaborate about like issues, and for the MAV to advocate on behalf of Council's to the State Government and other peak industry bodies.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS**

The recommendation does not limit any human rights under the Victorian *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

## **CONCLUSION**

This report seeks Council's endorsement for the submission of five motions to the Municipal Association of Victoria State Council meeting scheduled for Friday 29 May 2026.

The MAV is a membership association and the legislated peak body for local government in Victoria. The State Council is the governing body and is made up of delegates from each member council, including delegates from Strathbogie Shire Council.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Nil

## 11.4.2 Parliamentary Inquiry into 2026 Summer Fires Across Victoria

**AUTHOR** Director People and Governance

**RESPONSIBLE DIRECTOR** Director People and Governance

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 4 February 2026, the Legislative Council agreed that the Environment and Planning Committee inquire into the 2026 Victorian Bush Fires.

The Committee will inquire into the 2026 summer fires across Victoria including preparation and planning by Government, emergency services agencies, causes and circumstances of the bushfires, funding equipment and appliances for the CFA, the emergency responses, resilience of critical services and infrastructure, the impact on community business and agriculture, the impact on the environment, the impacts of climate change, the impact of misinformation, interjurisdictional support and lessons from previous inquiries, report and Royal Commissions.

The purpose of this report is to endorse the submission that has been prepared by Strathbogie Shire Council to the Inquiry.

### RECOMMENDATION

- 1. That Council endorse the submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into 2026 Summer Bushfires in Victoria**
- 2. Authorise the Chief Executive Officer to make any necessary minor administrative amendments to the submission prior to the due date on 19 April 2026.**

### PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this report is to endorse Council's submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the 2026 Victorian Bush Fires. The submission is due on 19 April 2026.

### ISSUES, OPTIONS AND DISCUSSION

On 4 February 2026, the Legislative Council agreed to the following motion:  
That the Environment and Planning Committee inquire into, consider and report, by 1 June 2026, on –

- (1) the preparation and planning by government, emergency services agencies and the community ahead of the fire season, including management of public and private land and roadsides
- (2) the causes and circumstances of the bushfires, including climate change and the adequacy of the Government's climate policies and actions, forecasts, warnings and public education on bushfire threats
- (3) funding, equipment and appliances for the Country Fire Authority (CFA), Fire Rescue Victoria and Forest Fire Management Victoria, and recruitment and retention of CFA volunteers

- (4) the emergency responses to control and contain the fires, including adequacy of resources and communications
- (5) resilience of critical services and infrastructure such as electricity, water and telecommunications during and after the fires
- (6) the impact on the community, business and agriculture and efforts to aid in recovery
- (7) the impact on the environment, including native wildlife, and any measures to better protect native forests, including technology for early detection and firefighting in remote locations
- (8) the impacts of climate change on the natural environment, which has resulted in more frequent and intense bushfires occurring in Victoria
- (9) the prevalence and impact of misinformation leading into and during the fire season
- (10) the interjurisdictional support into and out of Victoria leading into and during the fire season, including interstate and international deployments, Commonwealth support and relief efforts
- (11) lessons from and progress on the implementation of recommendations from previous inquiries, reports and Royal Commissions

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Following the Longwood Berrys Lane Fire, the Mayor, Councillors, the Chief Executive Officer and Council's Recovery Team have spent time in the fire impacted areas, working with, listening to and assessing community needs to determine a strategic approach forward.

This collaboration includes (but not limited to):

- Meeting with affected individuals
- Meetings with the CFA and other emergency and recovery agencies
- Meetings with Federal and State Parliamentarians
- Interaction with Community Action Groups
- Working with other local councils

Much of the feedback received from these interactions has been incorporated into the submission.

## **POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Council Plan**

This report is consistent with the following objectives and or actions in the 2025-2029 Council Plan:

#### **Objective One: Connect**

We are committed to enhancing access for all residents, promoting healthy living, fostering connections, and providing opportunities to thrive and participate in community life.

#### **Objective Two: Sustain**

We aim to collaborate with others to foster a sustainable environment, a thriving economy

and resilient communities.

### **Objective Three: Deliver**

We are committed to delivering quality services and infrastructure that meets the needs of our community. We aim to strengthen the Council's governance and provide improved, customer-focused experiences.

### **Regional, State and National Plans, Policies and Legislation**

This report is aligned with the following legislation, council policies and key strategic documents:

- Council Plan 2025-2029

### **RISK CONSIDERATIONS**

This report has identified the following risk(s):

<b>Risk(s)</b>	<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>Consequence</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Mitigation Action</b>
Missed opportunity for advocacy	Unlikely	Moderate	Medium	Submit actions to the Parliamentary Inquiry. Opportunity for Councils to raise issues and advocate to State Government

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION**

No Council officers and/or contractors who have provided advice in relation to this report have declared a general or material conflict of interest regarding the matter under consideration.

### **HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS**

The recommendation does not limit any human rights under the Victorian *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

### **CONCLUSION**

Making a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry is vital because it allows the Council to directly influence policy development and government accountability relating to future bushfire management.

The Submission also support Council's Advocacy Strategy 2025-2029 in terms of working with our community to identify problems or needs, research relevant issues, act and evaluate outcomes.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

1. 20260315 Submission Parliamentary Inquiry into 2026 Summer Bushfires (2)

OFFICIAL: Sensitive



13 March 2026

Mr Ryan Batchelor  
Chair, Legislative Council Environment And Planning Committee  
Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Via: Parliament of Victoria Website

Dear Mr Batchelor

### **Inquiry into the 2026 Summer Fires Across Victoria**

We welcome the Parliamentary Inquiry into the 2026 Summer Fires Across Victoria and thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission.

Strathbogie Shire Council is a small rural Council in Victoria, with a limited rate base and modest administrative capacity, that is located approximately two hours north of the Melbourne CBD, and borders with seven other Victorian municipalities.

It has a municipal area of 3,303 sq km, a population of just over 11,500 people (2021 census), and a road network of over 2,200 kms. As a comparison, Kingston City Council has a municipal area of 91 sq km, a population of 167,228 and a road network of 619 kms. We have 3.6 times more roads than Kingston and less than half the budget to maintain.

The January 2026 Longwood Berrys Lane Fire, which commenced on 7 January 2026 in our municipality, caused widespread and significant loss and damage across our community.

The event has and will continue to have profound, far-reaching, and enduring impacts on individuals, families, and communities, as well as on livelihoods, natural and agricultural landscapes, significant loss of cultural sites, critical infrastructure, and local and regional economies.

Beyond the immediate destruction, the effects of the fire have disrupted social, environmental, and economic systems that underpin community wellbeing. The consequences of this disaster will continue to be felt for many years, where recovery can be inherently complex, multi-staged, and resource-intensive, requiring sustained effort, coordination, and long-term commitment from all levels of government and the community.

While the full devastation of the event is still to be realised, the initial impact assessments indicate that at least 520 properties (equating to approximately 12% of our municipal area) within the Strathbogie Shire Council area have been impacted.

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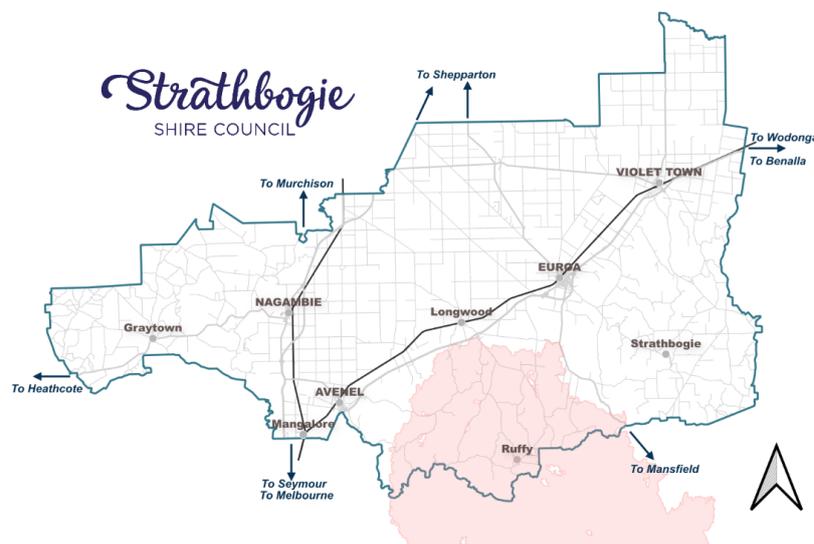
Euroa VIC 3666

**Customer Service Centres**

109A Binney Street Euroa VIC 3666

352 High Street Nagambie VIC 3608

OFFICIAL: Sensitive



Source: Near Real-Time Bushfire Extents: © Commonwealth of Australia (Geoscience Australia) Map created 02/02/2026

More than 100 dwellings have been destroyed and damage to 294 other structures. Agriculture Victoria also notes the following losses to date:

- 29,593 hectares of land impacted
- 165 hectares of grape vines lost
- 25,177 hectares of grazing pasture impacted
- 88 hectares of private business impacted
- 11,821 tonnes hay/silage lost
- 2.21 tonnes stored grain lost
- Upwards of 2,291 kilometres of fencing destroyed
- Significant livestock lost including sheep, cattle, pigs, goats, horses, chickens and other domestic animals.

Sources: Fire Rescue Victoria and Agriculture Victoria

The devastation experienced by affected communities has been significant and deeply felt.

Homes, businesses, farms, and treasured landscapes were lost or damaged, and many residents continue to face significant emotional, social, and economic hardship that will last for years.

The Longwood Berrys Lane bushfire has profoundly and enduringly changed the landscape and communities of Creighton’s Creek, Gooram, Longwood East, Ruffy, Tarcombe, and Upton Hill.

We mourn the loss of life, homes, properties, businesses, and livestock, as well as the wider impact on our community and local economy during what should have been a peak tourism period. Economic impacts include immediate direct losses and long-term disruption to supply chains, particularly in an economy underpinned by agriculture and visitation.

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OFFICIAL: Sensitive



Strathbogie Shire Council provides the following responses to the eleven areas as detailed in the terms of reference:

- (1) the preparation and planning by government, emergency services agencies and the community ahead of the fire season, including management of public and private land and roadsides

Council manages approximately 4,500 kilometres of roadsides double the length of the road network representing a significant and ongoing operational responsibility. This work, along with management of Crown land, requires substantial investment in personnel, contractors, equipment, training, and funding.

Key challenges and considerations include:

- **Balancing bushfire risk and biodiversity:** Roadsides serve as transport corridors and vital ecological reserves. Over 50% of Council-managed roadsides have High or Very High conservation value, limiting vegetation removal, while almost the entire municipality falls under a Bushfire Management Overlay.
- **Scale and funding constraints:** The Shire's size and bushfire risk far exceed its rateable base, making State and Federal funding essential. Current funding supports boom spraying along 900 km of roadsides and provides \$67,000 annually for roadside weed and pest control, which can also reduce fire fuel loads, but overall resources remain limited.
- **Early warning system limitations:** Effective bushfire preparedness depends on reliable telecommunications, power supply, and generator fuel, particularly in rural areas. Without these, warnings are less effective.
- **Emergency coordination:** The Municipal Emergency Management Plan proved invaluable for supporting cross-sector agency coordination across mitigation, response, and recovery.
- **Legislative review needed:** State and federal legislation should be reviewed to better balance human life protection with habitat and biodiversity conservation.

**Recommendation: A commitment from the Government to:**

- 1. Provide Local Governments, as existing Crown Land Managers, an initial \$1million per annum over the next four years to:**
  - **Revegetate and manage weed infestation in burnt areas**
  - **Map and manage local roadside vegetation and reserves**
  - **Manage Crown Reserves, including the management of fire affected and hazardous trees and risks to public safety associated with bushfire impacts.**
- 2. Funding for pest plant and pest animal management to be significantly increased and an ongoing commitment made to the funding to enable proactive weed and pest management to reduce future fuel loads and biodiversity issues**
- 3. Funding for State agencies to better manage their land responsibilities - an example is the extreme risks present within the Shire from Hume Highway corridor fires where build-up of fuel loads exacerbate fires starting.**

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OFFICIAL: Sensitive



- (2) the causes and circumstances of the bushfires, including climate change and the adequacy of the Government's climate policies and actions, forecasts, warnings and public education on bushfire threats

Current climate conditions including drought, declining rainfall, and increasing extreme heat days are driving more intense bushfires. While the fire began on Wednesday, 7 January, catastrophic conditions on Friday, 9 January, greatly intensified its behaviour and rate of spread.

Key points:

- Forecasting and warnings:
  - Council relies on CFA and Bureau of Meteorology fire weather warnings; forecasting has improved significantly since 2009
  - Community access strengthened via VicEmergency app/website, broadcasts, text alerts, and social media.
- Community understanding gaps:
  - Confusion persists around Bushfire Places of Last Resort and Emergency Relief Centres, including their purpose, available support, and decision-making for relocations
  - Statewide messaging requires clearer communication; improved in-app VicEmergency messaging and consistent event/warning colour coding are needed.
- Long-term planning and preparedness:
  - Regular climate risk and fuel load assessments could strengthen forecasting, with additional funding required
  - Better access to satellite data would improve planning and preparedness
  - More comprehensive community education programs needed to address knowledge gaps and clarify emergency processes
  - Planning, location, and communication of Emergency Relief Centres require greater attention to support communities effectively.
- Infrastructure vulnerabilities:
  - Widespread power outages caused gaps in emergency warnings due to concurrent loss of telecommunications.
  - The increased hazards identified from the endless lengths of wire rope and guardrail barriers erected to save lives but instead increases difficulty in firefighting capability
  - The installation of the cabling has resulted in significant financial loss to individuals, governments, community agencies, and service providers, as it limited efforts to fight the fire and contributed to the resulting damage.

**Recommendation:**

- 1. A commitment from the Government to improve in-app messaging through VicEmergency to enable safe access to Emergency Relief Centres, specifying safe detour routes**
- 2. Reviewing location of wire rope and guardrail installations subject to a risk assessment that considers the impact that the wire rope and guardrails had on the inability to effectively access to fight the fire.**

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- (3) funding, equipment and appliances for the Country Fire Authority (CFA), Fire Rescue Victoria and Forest Fire Management Victoria, and recruitment and retention of CFA volunteers

Ongoing feedback highlights concerns about a disconnect between volunteer and career personnel within the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and Fire Rescue Victoria, particularly around respect for the chain of command. Clear leadership and strong collaboration are essential to an effective response.

Volunteers play a vital and highly valued role in supporting operations, and maintaining strong working relationships is essential. Broader concerns have been raised about gaps in coordination, resourcing and ongoing engagement across volunteer agencies. There has also been consistent feedback from CFA volunteers about challenges with resource allocation, including requests for resources not being met.

Feedback from CFA Group Officers indicates limited access to community leadership and capability-building programs, as well as ongoing equipment and resource shortfalls. Collectively, these issues highlight the need for clearer communication, stronger support pathways, and greater investment in volunteer capability and community leadership development.

**Recommendation:**

**That the appropriate ranks within the Country Fire Authority and Fire Rescue Victoria ensure a clear chain of command is maintained, consistent with relevant operating procedures, Acts and legislation, to support authorised and coordinated communication with local government during the response phase of an incident.**

- (4) the emergency responses to control and contain the fires, including adequacy of resources and communications

Concerns have been raised regarding vegetation management along the Hume Highway and other major roads. With north winds and approximately 13,000 vehicles travelling through the region each day, unmanaged fuel loads present a significant fire risk. The current freeway safety barriers also restrict CFA access, limiting both firefighting efforts and the ability to undertake preventative works. Additional crossovers and breaks in the barriers are needed to enable effective fire response and fuel management.

There are also concerns about interagency coordination, including inefficiencies in communication and a lack of integration of local knowledge when the Incident Control Centre (ICC) was established. Reports indicate that a local community member attempted to call 000 between 20 and 30 times without success, raising serious concerns about emergency call access.

Further issues include limitations in redeploying resources from other areas and an apparent lack of understanding of the differing behaviour and response requirements of fires on flat terrain compared to those in the hills.

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Concerns have been raised by the Country Fire Authority and other emergency services about understanding Council's emergency management responsibilities and how they align with the statutory roles of emergency response agencies. Council plays a key role in preparedness, relief and recovery, including resilience building, municipal emergency management planning, relief coordination and multi-agency arrangements. Where these roles are not clearly understood by volunteers, emergency personnel or community stakeholders, duplication of effort and service gaps can occur during emergency events.

Discussions with the Country Fire Authority indicate that available plant, equipment, crews and firefighting units were insufficient to contain the incident. The scale and intensity exceeded resources, limiting timely response and placing significant pressure on crews. This highlights the need for greater surge capacity, improved resource allocation, and stronger volunteer recruitment and retention to support future emergencies.

It is understood that there were instances where established command structures and operational protocols were not followed. In some cases, personnel and equipment were deployed outside agreed inter-agency arrangements, creating potential safety risks. Strict adherence to command and deployment procedures is essential for safety and operational effectiveness.

Overall resources were insufficient to support the response, with greater access to heavy plant such as bulldozers, graders and water tankers needed to strengthen containment and enhance operational capability during major fires.

Council has heard concerns from Group Officers about the CFA's internal communication, including inconsistent information sharing, debriefing and capture of operational lessons, limiting continuous improvement opportunities and contributing to misunderstandings across teams and brigades.

Issues were identified during the bushfires with VicEmergency and VicTraffic road closure information and Google Maps updates. Delays in updating official road closure data meant information was not always current, and Google Maps did not reflect changes in a timely way. As a result, some drivers were redirected away from the Shire when it was safe to return.

These discrepancies between verified emergency information and third-party navigation platforms created confusion and, at times, potential safety risks. Automated data sharing between agencies and mapping services is needed to ensure the public receives accurate, real-time road information during emergencies.

#### **Recommendation:**

**The Government should review freeway safety barriers to provide additional crossovers and access points, enabling effective firefighting operations and the implementation of fire prevention measures.**

- (5) resilience of critical services and infrastructure such as electricity, water and telecommunications during and after the fires

Power supply to the area is inadequate, and the BN11 line (Benalla to Locksley) is in urgent need of upgrade to improve reliability and capacity. The community experienced widespread power outages, resulting in a gap in emergency warnings due to the concurrent loss of telecommunications. During the fire event, water infrastructure in some locations was

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compromised, resulting in a loss of water supply where assets had been damaged or destroyed. In addition, mobile telephone facilities were unavailable, as they had been impacted by the fire.

Key gaps in essential services and infrastructure threaten emergency resilience:

- Many Telecom towers lack backup power, leaving communities vulnerable
- Critical infrastructure shows limited resilience amid increasingly severe weather
- Investment in power upgrades, redundancy, and resilient essential services is needed to protect community safety.

Strathbogie Shire Council continues to advocate strongly to state and federal governments, energy providers, and telecommunications operators for urgent upgrades to the BN11 line, improved network resilience, and the installation of reliable backup power at critical sites.

As part of this work, Council has also provided formal advocacy to the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) in support of the proposed \$41 million investment to upgrade the BN11 line, ensuring the project is prioritised and funded. Council's continued advocacy aims to ensure that communities across the municipality are better protected, better connected, and more resilient in the face of future emergencies.

#### Recommendation:

1. **Victorian Government advocate to the Australian Energy Regulator in support of the proposed \$41million investment to upgrade BN11 (powerline that supplies from Benalla- Locksley) and constructs the alternate BN11 Express Feeder**
2. **Telecommunications providers ensure emergency power supply through adequate battery and generator capacity is available to safeguard essential telecommunication functions that protect our community, investment in this should be prioritised in line with the level of emergency risk for rural communities.**

(6) the impact on the community, business and agriculture and efforts to aid in recovery

#### Community

Volunteers are the heartbeat of Strathbogie Shire, and faced with significant devastation, the community mobilised quickly and with remarkable generosity. People stepped into both formal and informal volunteer structures, providing meals, organising donations, supporting clean-up efforts, and checking in on neighbours. This immediate and compassionate response demonstrated the strength and resilience of our community spirit.

Internally displaced people following the bushfires face significant, long-term impacts that include (but not limited to):

- severe psychological distress
- economic strain
- social isolation
- complex rebuilding challenges.

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The fire's impact has been profound. In our municipality, over 100 homes were destroyed and tens of thousands of hectares, mostly agricultural land were burnt, with the full effects still unfolding. For many families, these properties represent generations of farming, hard work, and personal history. For some, the loss may mean they cannot return or rebuild, with lasting consequences for livelihoods and family legacies. The destruction was widespread, affecting intergenerational homes, second dwellings, and vital community facilities central to local identity and connection.

Concerns also exist over divisions between insured, underinsured, and uninsured residents, causing unequal access to services and community tension.

### **Agriculture (incorporating business)**

Agriculture, the region's primary industry, has been hardest hit. Losses of productive land, livestock, fencing, equipment, and infrastructure have immediate financial impacts on farmers and agribusinesses, with broader flow-on effects across the local economy, supply chains, contractors, retailers, and service providers. Reduced tourism due to perceptions that visitors should avoid the region has further compounded the economic strain.

Focusing on livestock welfare and survival immediately after a bushfire is critical for affected landholders because it directly impacts the humanitarian, economic, and emotional recovery of the farming business. Beyond minimising the suffering of animals, this focus is crucial for:

- preventing long-term productivity losses and protecting livelihoods
- maintaining biosecurity
- providing psychological hope to farmers who have lost infrastructure and land

Recovery programs will provide important support; however, there is a strong sentiment within the community that initial processes have been too slow, with people seeking more timely and visible action. Agriculture Victoria's Advisory Service was stood up too late with farmers having to undertake the heartbreaking task of destroying their livestock without support or clear guidelines on how to undertake safely to minimise biosecurity risks. This process has caused significant trauma for our farming communities and support to undertake euthanising or disposing of stock needs to be delivered early in the response phase.

Escorts from emergency services to take Agricultural Victoria personnel safely on to properties to enable farmers to administer timely animal welfare support would have assisted in reducing stock losses and prolonged biosecurity risks.

### **Housing and Accommodation**

Delays in securing temporary and long-term housing highlights the need for more temporary accommodation options. While flexible emergency programs are valued, slow case management, clean-up, and on-ground support have adversely affected health and wellbeing. Timely, coordinated recovery support is critical for long-term community resilience.

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### Economy/Business

Spendmapp data for January 2026 shows total local spend in Strathbogie Shire was \$13.2 million, a 3.96% decrease compared to January 2025. This year-on-year decline coincided with the January 2026 bushfires, which disrupted travel, business operations and consumer confidence during what is typically a peak visitor period.

Visitor Local Spend fell by 6.85% year-on-year to \$9.8 million, reflecting reduced visitation and shortened stays as a result of road closures, smoke impacts, emergency warnings and cancellations. This decline in visitor expenditure was the primary contributor to the overall reduction in total local spend. An economic impact assessment will be undertaken in due course to understand the impacts further.

The Catastrophic Fire Danger rating saw accommodation providers evacuate, and then subsequently townships, due to increased risk. This included the township of Euroa, which is traditionally a busy holiday destination in the second week of January. Visitation was also impacted in Nagambie by association, and as it falls within the Strathbogie Shire whilst the Hume Freeway was closed for an extended period of time.

Prolonged and repeated power outages during this time also impacted the economy of the Shire with significant losses reported by traders and reimbursement claims made to AusNet.

#### Recommendation: That the Government commit to:

1. **Expanding funding allocations to address the unique costs faced by rural local governments, including emergency response, relief efforts, and rebuilding essential community assets such as roads, water infrastructure, and public facilities.**
  2. **Funding and claims processes focused on enhancing long-term community resilience, including opportunities for betterment and improvements to infrastructure to withstand future disasters and reducing long term costs to State and Federal Government.**
  3. **A streamlined, evidence-based claims process tailored for small rural councils, reducing administrative burden and supporting communities with limited resources while ensuring access to timely and effective relief.**
  4. **Escorts from emergency services to take Agricultural Victoria personnel safely on to properties to enable farmers to administer timely animal welfare support.**
- (7) the impact on the environment, including native wildlife, and any measures to better protect native forests, including technology for early detection and firefighting in remote locations

Satellite technology can enhance bushfire management by tracking and monitoring vegetation fuel loads and moisture. Improving access to this data would better inform local decision-making and risk mitigation.

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Council conducts periodic Roadside Assessment Valuation studies, most recently in 2017-2018, with an update due within 12 months. About 4,500 km of roadside were assessed, 55% of which have High or Very High Conservation Value. Roadside management must comply with the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*, requiring consideration of native flora, fauna, and habitats. At the same time, the Victorian Planning Scheme allows exemptions for bushfire mitigation on all roads and enabling risk reduction including those with high-conservation value.

Council considers bushfire risk in roadside management but must also maintain awareness of endangered wildlife. It relies on the Statewide Integrated Flora and Fauna Team (SWIFT) and the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority for updates on threatened species. Funding should be allocated to support a dedicated Sustainability Officer to embed environmental considerations in Council strategy and operations.

Post-bushfire roadside management is challenging. Fallen timber can aid wildlife habitat recovery, but clear guidelines are lacking. Council has received support from local environmental groups for clean-up and habitat restoration, yet community awareness of wildlife recovery remains limited.

Council is drafting a Roadside Vegetation Management Plan to assist in managing vegetation along roadside reserves. Council also runs a periodic Habitat Inspection Program and offers a rate incentive program with Trust for Nature to encourage permanent habitat protection on private land. These initiatives aim to balance bushfire risk and biodiversity conservation and long-term environmental resilience.

#### **Recommendation:**

**That the Government commit to funding technology improvements to enhance bushfire management by tracking and monitoring vegetation fuel loads and moisture.**

- (8) the impacts of climate change on the natural environment, which has resulted in more frequent and intense bushfires occurring in Victoria

The intensity of the Longwood Berrys Lane fire was compounded by:

- Fuel loads across Victoria remain unacceptably high, despite the clear recommendations of the Black Saturday Fire Royal Commission.
- Inconsistent prescribed burning and poor roadside and boundary vegetation management increase bushfire intensity and threaten communities and key evacuation routes.
- Roads and corridors with unmanaged roadside vegetation fuelling fires, undermining prevention and endangering public safety
- Lack of funding for Local Governments to manage fuel reduction, post-fire recovery, and noxious vegetation and pests
- Some in the community feel biodiversity is prioritised over human life. Further work is needed to achieve a balanced approach.
- Late seasonal conditions created a lot of dry, combustible fuel
- With likely ongoing impact from continuing climate change there are heightened risks relating to increased road surfacing costs i.e. increased road sealing due to bituminous deterioration due to more extreme temperatures.

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In 2025–26, Council, in partnership with the Goulburn Murray Climate Alliance, was unsuccessful in obtaining funding through the Emergency Management Victoria's Disaster Ready Fund to support regional risk reduction initiatives.

To strengthen climate resilience across the region, the following actions are required:

- Dedicated funding for comprehensive climate change risk assessments and initiatives that build community resilience
- Amendments to Victorian Planning Schemes to embed stronger sustainability and climate resilience outcomes within the built environment across the state.

Expanding prescribed burning, targeted roadside fuel reduction, stronger inter-agency coordination, and secure long-term funding are proven ways to reduce bushfire intensity and save lives, and while we cannot control drought or extreme heat, managing fuel loads, preparedness, and resourcing can lower preventable risks, protect communities, and limit the devastating long-term impacts of catastrophic fires. Alongside these measures, considering both adaptation and emissions reduction actions can support long-term resilience to increasingly hot and dry conditions.

#### **Recommendation:**

##### **The Government to commit to the continuation of the Disaster Ready Fund.**

(9) the prevalence and impact of misinformation leading into and during the fire season

While community visits from elected officials were appreciated, some residents felt they brought little tangible support, and sometimes causing frustration.

Although the information shared was generally considered clear and helpful, concerns were also raised about uncoordinated entry onto private property and that organisational presence or media attention sometimes distracted from urgent recovery needs.

Greater clarity and education are needed on key emergency terms, including Bushfire Places of Last Resort, Emergency Relief Centres, and Evacuation Warnings versus Orders as highlighted above.

#### **Recommendation:**

##### **Continuation of community education materials**

(10) the interjurisdictional support into and out of Victoria leading into and during the fire season, including interstate and international deployments, Commonwealth support and relief efforts

The community raised concerns about the level of recovery support and long-term assistance following the bushfires:

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- ADF support: lack of Australian Defence Force deployment to assist during clean-up, particularly for removing and burying deceased livestock, delaying hazard reduction and increasing biosecurity risks
- Regulatory confusion: Uncertainty around compliance requirements and potential prosecutions added stress during recovery
- Mental health impacts: Long-term bushfire recovery significantly affects community wellbeing, yet government support typically lasts only two–three years
- Need for sustained funding: Victorian and Australian governments should fund recovery and mental health services for at least five years, or provide permanent support where needed, to strengthen long-term resilience.

Many people have found themselves ineligible for Commonwealth and State funding due to strict, narrow eligibility criteria that focus on immediate, direct, and severe impacts, such as the total destruction of a primary residence and weighed heavily to the uninsured or underinsured.

The primary reasons for ineligibility include:

- **Evacuation Requirements:** For the Victorian Government's Personal Hardship Assistance Program (PHAP), eligibility often required residents to have evacuated. Those who stayed to defend their properties have reported being deemed ineligible for relief payments, leading to significant frustration.
- **"Principal Place of Residence" Rule:** Support, particularly the Emergency Re-establishment Payment and access to the state clean up program, is generally restricted to an individual's main home. This excludes holiday homes, sheds, or secondary properties, even if they were destroyed.
- **Definition of "Major Damage":** To qualify for the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment (AGDRP), homes must have sustained "major damage" (e.g., structural failure, interior exposed to elements) or become uninhabitable. Minor damage or loss of amenity often does not qualify.
- **Insurance Status:** Many, but not all, grants are targeted at uninsured or underinsured individuals. If a person has comprehensive insurance, they are often ineligible for government assistance, even if the insurance payout is slow or insufficient to cover all costs.
- **Specific Location Requirements:** Disaster assistance is activated only for specific Local Government Areas that meet damage thresholds. People outside these designated areas may not be eligible, even if they are close by and impacted.
- **Asset Value Thresholds:** For some assistance, damage to assets must meet a high combined market value threshold (e.g., \$20,000) to be considered.

#### Recommendation:

**That the Government commit to a review of the available funding and ensure that it is accessible to all.**

- (11) lessons from and progress on the implementation of recommendations from previous inquiries, reports and Royal Commissions

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There are practical and financial limits to implementing some Royal Commission recommendations locally. Large-scale vegetation clearing is often unaffordable and inappropriate in high-conservation areas. More funding is needed for planned and controlled burns, as current resources don't allow enough fuel reduction. There is also an opportunity to partner more closely with Traditional Owners to expand cultural (cool) burning in environmentally sensitive ways.

Several key lessons have been identified to strengthen future preparedness and response:

- Communication was generally clear, but delays in operational response and decision-making hindered recovery
- Early recognition of agricultural impacts was limited, prolonging risks to livestock, landholders, and the environment
- Early and ongoing local representation (utilising local community knowledge) in the Incident Control Centre will improve coordination, response, and recovery
- Greater community education on emergency messaging and terminology is needed.
- Increased investment in local government emergency management is essential; current funding is insufficient and disproportionately lower (for rural councils) than metropolitan councils
- Despite challenges and lack of immediate external support, the community showed strong resilience, initiative, and collaboration, with landholders, volunteers, and locals actively supporting response and recovery.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission. We welcome the opportunity to verbally present to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Scott Jeffery  
Mayor  
Strathbogie Shire Council

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### 11.4.3 Quarter Two Finance Report and Mid-Year Budget Review 2025-26

**AUTHOR** Chief Financial Officer

**RESPONSIBLE DIRECTOR** Director People and Governance

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A mid-year budget review for the 2025-26 financial year has been undertaken as a means of tracking where the delivery of the operating budget and capital works program is to the end of 31 December 2025, and also to better inform the development of the 2026-27 budget and review of Council's 2025-26 to 2034-35 Long Term Financial Plan.

The year to date (YTD) actuals for the first two quarters of the 2025-26 financial year shows a negative YTD variance against YTD budget for the operating result of \$433,626, and lower than expected capital expenditure of \$1,792,681 (for which the operating result variance is mainly due to lower capital grants received, offset by year to date staff vacancies impacting employee costs).

The mid-year budget review for the 2025-26 financial year shows a forecast deterioration of the operating result by \$3,944,878 and decreased capital expenditure of \$1,735,169 (which is largely offset by grant income or expenditure requirements carried forward from prior years, and higher depreciation expense from asset revaluations at the end of the 2024-25 financial year) when compared to the adopted Budget. The 2025-26 quarter two and mid-year budget review financial statements are contained in Attachment B to this report.

Included in the mid-year budget review financial statements are the current estimates of the impacts of the Longwood Berrys Lane Fire, which started on 7 January 2026, and had significant impacts on some parts of the Strathbogie Shire municipality and community.

Although this event did not impact actuals up to 31 December 2026, there will be impacts in the second half of the 2025-26 financial year. Where impacts are known or can be estimated, these have been reflected in the forecast mid-year review financial statements and have effects on the forecasts contained in the comprehensive impact statement, balance sheet and statement of cashflows.

The mid-year review and associated financial statements for the quarter two Finance Report, as included in Attachment B, are presented to Council for noting.

#### RECOMMENDATION

##### That Council:

1. **Note the quarter two Financial Report and the Mid-Year Review of the Financial Statements for the period ending 30 June 2026**
2. **Note the statement by the Chief Executive Officer in attachment B that a revised budget is not required for the period ending 30 June 2026**
3. **Note that the Mid-Year Review Financial Statements forecasts include current estimates for the impacts of the Longwood Berrys Lane Fire.**

## **PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND**

The 2025-26 Budget was prepared in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) and was formally adopted at the Council meeting held on 17 June 2025 after community engagement and input.

Under Sections 96 and 97 of the Act, Council must establish and maintain a budgeting and reporting framework that is consistent with the principles of sound financial management and prepare a quarterly budget report.

Undertaking a mid-year review to assess where the budget is currently at, and how this may impact the need for a revised budget in 2025-26 and the development of the 2026-27 budget, satisfies these requirements.

## **ISSUES, OPTIONS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Process**

As part of the mid-year budget process, all operating income, expense line items and capital projects were reviewed by each department manager to identify potential changes to the adopted budget.

Spending priorities were assessed based on various factors such as already committed work, grant funding agreement commitments and prioritising natural disaster recovery initiatives.

These changes were assessed and approved by the Executive Leadership Team for the consideration and adoption by the Council.

### **Factors Informing the Mid-Year Review**

The following factors were considered during the mid-year review:

- Macro-economic factors affecting Council operations – increased costs due to inflationary pressures, labour and material shortages, shortage of contractors and high interest rates were considered during the mid-year budget review. Capacity constraints in the economy are now evident, particularly in the construction industry because of significant public and private investments in the economy resulting in increased competition for resources
- Our capacity to deliver – the organisation's capacity to deliver capital projects depends upon various factors including availability of contractors and materials, weather, and availability of in-house project officers to manage capital projects
- Natural disasters – there has been prior year grant funded natural disaster related expenditure carried forward and included in 2025-26 mid-year budget. There has also been estimates for additional income and expenditure (and related balance sheet effects) included as a result of the Longwood Berrys Lane Fire.

These micro and macro-economic factors affect Council operations both in short term and longer term.

The major variations made to our financial statements as a result of the mid-year review are:

### **Positive**

- Grant funding – a higher Victorian Grants Commission allocation

- Lower employee costs, due to staff vacancies across the year
- Higher developer contributions

### Negative

- Committed expenditure from 2025-26, which is mostly related to completed projects for specific tied grants
- Increased material and services costs, some of which offsets the lower employee costs or relates to additional income received by Council, natural disaster related recovery expenditure – including an estimated \$3,000,000 of additional expenditure in the current year due to the January 2026 bushfire (for which offsetting recoveries is also expected to be received or owed). There are also effects on expected rate recoveries by 30 June 2026, and some of the grant funding for Council's bushfire recovery expenditure will be a receivable at 30 June 2026 – as there is often a lag between Council incurring the eligible expenditure and the resultant claim being assessed and paid to Council.
  - Council's forecast comprehensive income statement, prior to the inclusion of the January 2026 bushfire event estimates is included in Attachment A
- There will only be an effect on rates revenue as a result of the January 2026 bushfire, however, that cannot currently be reliably estimated, so has not been adjusted at this time.

In relation to the current year, the forecasted operating surplus in the comprehensive income statement at the end of the financial period ending 30 June 2026 is \$1,257,332. This is a negative variance of \$3,944,878 compared to the adopted budget operating surplus of \$5,202,210.

Of this variance amount, \$1,516,622 is related to committed projects and activities from prior years, \$1,781,464 is higher depreciation expense due to asset revaluation and \$1,188,000 is due to lower capital grants to be received which will lead to lower capital works expenditure. After these impacts, the remaining forecast operating result is forecast to be positive by \$541k compared to budget (which is around 1% of combined expenditure).

Some of the key year to date and mid-year budget review forecast variances are:

- Employee Costs – a positive variance of \$30,899 is forecast (Attachment B). This is represented by a positive variance of \$431,899 from usual operations (Attachment A), due to the effect of staff vacancies across the year, offset by forecast expenses of \$401,000 from the bushfire event.
- Materials and Services – an overall negative variance of \$4,346,623 is forecast (Attachment B). This is represented by a negative variance of -\$1,747,623 from usual operations (Attachment A), mainly due to projects and activities carried forward from a previous financial year (\$1,516,222) that mostly have grant funding and conditions attached (\$1,300,222), as well forecast expenses of \$2,599,000 from the bushfire (which is expected to be funded by additional grant funding - with an additional \$3,000,000 included in the current year forecast for operating grants).

Further explanatory notes on the major line item variances in the comprehensive income statement are included in Attachment B.

Capital works expenditure for 2025-26 is expected to be \$12,556,501 including committed works. There is an overall decrease in capital expenditure by \$1,735,169 when compared to the adopted Budget. This is made up of:

<b>Adopted Capital Budget 2024-26</b>	<b>\$14,291,670</b>
Capital projects committed from prior year (additional to the 2025/26 Budget document)	2,032,388
Reduced project expenditure due to changes in Capital Grants	(1,188,000)
Mid-year Budget adjustments	425,483
Projects committed to be delivered in future years	(3,000,040)
<b>Mid-year capital budget 2025-26</b>	<b>\$12,561,501</b>

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

A significant amount of community engagement and participation was undertaken in the development of the 2025-26 budget, and the other strategic documents required to be prepared by Council at the start of each Council term.

There has been no consultation for the mid-year review, which is an internal assessment as to the progress of the budget’s implementation and progress and recognising unexpected or unknown factors at the time of budget development that need to be reflected in Council’s forecast financial statements. This includes the current forecasts for expenditures and recoveries related to the Council response to the Longwood Berrys Lane Fire that commenced on 7 January 2026.

Council’s Audit and Risk Committee have not had the opportunity to review the quarter two mid-year review financial statements; however, they will be presented to the Committee for noting at the Committee’s meeting in April 2026 in line with existing practice.

**POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

**Council Plan**

This report is consistent with the following objectives and or actions in the 2025-2029 Council Plan:

**Objective One: Connect**

We are committed to enhancing access for all residents, promoting healthy living, fostering connections, and providing opportunities to thrive and participate in community life.

**Objective Two: Sustain**

We aim to collaborate with others to foster a sustainable environment, a thriving economy, and resilient communities.

**Objective Three: Deliver**

We are committed to delivering quality services and infrastructure that meets the needs of our community. We aim to strengthen the Council’s governance and provide improved, customer-focused experiences.

**Regional, State and National Plans, Policies and Legislation**

This report to Council and the attached quarter two financial statements ensures Council meets its requirements under Part 4 – Planning and financial management of the *Local Government Act 2020*.

## RISK CONSIDERATIONS

This report has identified the following risk(s):

Risk(s)	Likelihood	Consequence	Rating	Mitigation Action
Not achieving budgeted income	Low	Deterioration of financial result and lower cash position	Low	Constant budget monitoring and follow up
Spending over the budgeted amount	Low	Deterioration of financial result and lower cash position	Low	Constant budget monitoring and follow up
Not delivering budgeted capital projects	Medium	Projects carry forward to next year	Medium	Constant budget monitoring and follow up
Lower cash position at the year end	Medium	Impact on financial sustainability	Low	Constant budget monitoring and follow up

## LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are no legal considerations associated with this report.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

No Council officers and/or contractors who have provided advice in relation to this report have declared a general or material conflict of interest regarding the matter under consideration.

## TRANSPARENCY

This report continues to demonstrate that the Council is being transparent in its position in relation to all applications received and determined by the Council.

## SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

### Economic

The mid-year budget report provides updated details on how the Council generates income and spends funds during the financial year. Our report is intended to inform the community of the wider financial and economic impact of council activities.

### Social

Council, in partnership with other levels of government, is responsible for aspects of everyday life that our community value – from our public open space to accessible libraries, to strong local business and employment opportunities.

Effective planning and reporting by councils is essential for ensuring transparency and accountability to the community and other levels of government as to how public money is being spent and the quality of services delivered.

The mid-year budget review provides an insight into how the council will spend its funds during 2025-26, including current forecasts for expenditures and recoveries from activities and Council's responses to the Longwood Berrys Lane 2026 Fire. This has required current estimates of forecast outcomes to be included in the forecasted comprehensive income statement, balance sheet and statement of cashflows to 30 June 2026.

### **Environmental**

There are no adverse effects on environmental initiatives from the mid-year budget changes.

### **Climate Change**

There are no adverse effects on climate change from the mid-year budget changes.

### **INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

Council continues to refine its budget, and the proposed changes in the mid-year budget will better reflect the forecast of Council's actual expenditure and income by the end of the current financial year.

### **HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS**

There are no significant human rights implications arising from this report.

### **CONCLUSION**

That following a comprehensive internal review of the revenue, expenditure and capital works items that the mid-year budget review for the period ending 30 June 2026, along with the quarter two financial statements included as Attachment B be noted.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Attachment A Actual and Forecast Comprehensive Impact Statement prior to 2026 Bushfire Event Impacts
2. Attachmant B 2025-26 Quarter Two and Mid- Year Budget Review Financial Statements

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Attachment A

Council's Actual and Forecast Comprehensive Income Statement – from Business as Usual (BAU)– Prior to the impacts of the January 2026 Bushfire Event

Strathbogie Shire Council						
Mid-year budget review – 2025/26						
Comprehensive Income Statement						
	Period ended 31 December 2025			Budget 2025/26		
	Budget YTD \$ Dec 2025	Actual YTD \$ Dec 2025	Variance YTD \$ Dec 2025	Adopted Budget \$	Mid Year Review \$	Variance \$ Notes
<b>Income</b>						
Rates and charges	23,974,781	24,070,745	95,964	24,051,080	24,053,004	1,924
Statutory fees and fines	377,658	396,823	19,165	688,010	686,010	(2,000)
User fees	426,305	487,679	61,374	954,860	954,860	-
Grants - operating	2,353,193	2,326,022	(27,171)	9,776,809	10,194,895	418,086
Grants - capital	886,800	87,953	(798,847)	6,604,296	5,166,296	(1,438,000)
Contributions - monetary	128,802	489,086	360,284	257,600	521,000	263,400
Contributions - non monetary			-		-	-
Net gain (or loss) on disposal of PPE & infrastructure	25,000	(30,269)	(55,269)	50,000	50,000	-
Fair value adjustments for investment property			-		-	-
Share of net profits (or loss) of associates and joint ventures			-		-	-
Other income	449,618	431,234	(18,384)	1,001,700	938,600	(63,100)
<b>Total income</b>	<b>28,622,157</b>	<b>28,259,271</b>	<b>(362,886)</b>	<b>43,384,355</b>	<b>42,564,665</b>	<b>(819,690)</b>
<b>Expenses</b>						
Employee costs	7,800,682	7,441,019	(359,663)	15,378,402	14,946,503	(431,899)
Materials and services	8,555,519	8,735,639	180,120	15,030,376	16,777,999	1,747,623
Depreciation	3,548,430	3,783,615	235,185	6,944,151	8,725,615	1,781,464
Amortisation - intangible assets			-	81,000	81,000	-
Amortisation - right of use assets			-	71,729	71,729	-
Allowance for impairment losses	252	5,020	4,768	500	500	-
Borrowing costs	81,407	78,918	(2,489)	155,608	155,608	-
Net gain (or loss) on disposal of property, infrastructure, plant and equipment			-		-	-
Share of net profits (or loss) of associates and joint ventures			-		-	-
Finance costs - leases			-	5,310	5,310	-
Other expenses	195,030	207,849	12,819	515,069	543,069	28,000
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>20,181,320</b>	<b>20,252,060</b>	<b>70,740</b>	<b>38,182,145</b>	<b>41,307,333</b>	<b>3,125,188</b>
<b>Surplus/(deficit) for the period</b>	<b>8,440,837</b>	<b>8,007,211</b>	<b>(433,626)</b>	<b>5,202,210</b>	<b>1,257,332</b>	<b>3,944,878</b>
				Carry forwards from 24/25		(1,516,222)
				Extra depreciation		(1,781,464)
				Lower Capital Grants/CWP		(1,188,000)
				<b>Adjusted Variance</b>		<b>(540,808)</b>

# **Strathbogie Shire Council Mid-year Budget Review & Quarter 2 Financial Statements**

**2025 - 2026**



*Strathbogie*  
SHIRE COUNCIL

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**Strathbogie Shire Council  
Mid-year budget review – 2025/26  
Comprehensive Income Statement**

	Period ended 31 December 2025			Budget 2025/26			Notes
	Budget YTD \$ Dec 2025	Actual YTD \$ Dec 2025	Variance YTD \$ Dec 2025	Adopted Budget \$	Mid Year Review \$	Variance \$	
<b>Income</b>							
Rates and charges	23,974,781	24,070,745	95,964	24,051,080	24,053,004	1,924	
Statutory fees and fines	377,658	396,823	19,165	688,010	686,010	(2,000)	
User fees	426,305	487,679	61,374	954,860	954,860	-	
Grants - operating	2,353,193	2,326,022	(27,171)	9,776,809	13,194,895	3,418,086	1
Grants - capital	886,800	87,953	(798,847)	6,604,296	5,166,296	(1,438,000)	2
Contributions - monetary	128,802	489,086	360,284	257,600	521,000	263,400	3
Contributions - non monetary	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Net gain (or loss) on disposal of PPE & infrastructure	25,000	(30,269)	(55,269)	50,000	50,000	-	
Fair value adjustments for investment property	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Share of net profits (or loss) of associates and joint ventures	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Other income	449,618	431,234	(18,384)	1,001,700	938,600	(63,100)	4
<b>Total income</b>	<b>28,622,157</b>	<b>28,259,271</b>	<b>(362,886)</b>	<b>43,384,355</b>	<b>45,564,665</b>	<b>2,180,310</b>	
<b>Expenses</b>							
Employee costs	7,800,682	7,441,019	(359,663)	15,378,402	15,347,503	(30,899)	5
Materials and services	8,555,519	8,735,639	180,120	15,030,376	19,376,999	4,346,623	6
Depreciation	3,548,430	3,783,615	235,185	6,944,151	8,725,615	1,781,464	7
Amortisation - intangible assets	-	-	-	81,000	81,000	-	
Amortisation - right of use assets	-	-	-	71,729	71,729	-	
Allowance for impairment losses	252	5,020	4,768	500	500	-	
Borrowing costs	81,407	78,918	(2,489)	155,608	155,608	-	
Net gain (or loss) on disposal of property, infrastructure, plant and equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Share of net profits (or loss) of associates and joint ventures	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Finance costs - leases	-	-	-	5,310	5,310	-	
Other expenses	195,030	207,849	12,819	515,069	543,069	28,000	8
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>20,181,320</b>	<b>20,252,060</b>	<b>70,740</b>	<b>38,182,145</b>	<b>44,307,333</b>	<b>6,125,188</b>	
<b>Surplus/(deficit) for the period</b>	<b>8,440,837</b>	<b>8,007,211</b>	<b>(433,626)</b>	<b>5,202,210</b>	<b>1,257,332</b>	<b>3,944,878</b>	
				Carry forwards from 24/25		(1,516,222)	
				Extra depreciation		(1,781,464)	
				Lower Capital Grants/CWP		(1,188,000)	
				<b>Adjusted Variance</b>		<b>(540,808)</b>	

**Mid-year budget - Financial Performance Overview**

**Income**

- Note 1** - Increase in operating grant forecast is mainly due to January 2026 Fire event grant (\$3,000,000), increased Grant Commission Financial Assistance grant (\$329,583) and additional grant from state government for managing fire service levy (\$50,000).
- Note 2** - Decrease in capital grant is due to unsuccessful grant request for Euroa Friendlies (\$1,000,000), reduced TAC grant (\$188,000) and a general grant estiamte which is unlikely to be received (\$250,000).
- Note 3** - Increase in monetary contribution is due to increased public open space developer contributions (\$263,400).
- Note 4** - Decrease in other income is mainly due to lower interest income (\$60,000) from investments.

**Expense**

- Note 5** - Decrease in salary expense is due to savings from staff vacancies which is partly offset by increased expense on disaster recovery related salary expense (\$401,000).
- Note 6** - Increase in materials and services mainly include,
  - Unspent grant funded projects carry forward from 2024/25; October 2022 flood recovery related grants (\$737,567), Nagambie Employment Precinct project (\$183,543), Youth and Early Years related grants (\$123,877) and Victorian Health Promotion grant (\$87,796).
  - Unspent projects carried forward from prior year – Kirwans Bridge work (\$100,000) and sport strategy and master planning expenses (\$100,000).
  - grant funded January 2026 Fire Event related expenses (\$2,599,000).
  - Euroa railway precinct expenses which are funded from contributions by the Inland Rail Project.
- Note 7** - Increase in depreciation expense in line with assets revaluation outcome during the finalisation of the 2024/25 financial year process.
- Note 8** - Increase in other expenses is due to carried forward election expenses and increased external auditors remuneration.

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**Strathbogie Shire Council**  
**Mid-year budget review – 2025/26**  
**Balance Sheet**

	Period ended 31 December 2025			Budget 2025/26		
	Budget YTD \$	Actual YTD \$	Variance YTD \$	Adopted Budget	Mid Year Review	Variance
	Dec 2025	Dec 2025	Dec 2025	\$	\$	\$
<b>Assets</b>						
<b>Current assets</b>						
Cash and cash equivalents	3,442,593	10,105,682	6,663,089	3,645,966	10,113,848	6,467,882
Trade and other receivables	15,530,000	16,760,014	1,230,014	3,335,180	4,778,552	1,443,372
Other financial assets	-	-	-	-	-	-
Prepayments	531,432	6,533	-	531,432	531,432	-
Non-current assets classified as held for sale	-	-	-	-	-	-
Contract assets	-	1,641,262	1,641,262	-	750,000	750,000
Other assets	15,016	67,460	52,444	15,016	15,340	324
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>19,519,041</b>	<b>28,580,951</b>	<b>9,061,910</b>	<b>7,527,594</b>	<b>16,189,172</b>	<b>8,661,578</b>
<b>Non-current assets</b>						
Trade and other receivables	-	10,791	10,791	12,426	12,426	-
Other financial assets	2,032	2,032	-	2,032	2,032	-
Investments in associates, joint arrangements and subsidiaries	260,487	270,925	10,438	260,487	270,925	10,438
Property, infrastructure, plant and equipment	391,816,028	468,619,090	76,803,062	401,304,367	473,248,377	71,944,010
Right-of-use assets	-	-	-	71,294	71,294	-
Intangible assets	-	-	-	228,812	228,812	-
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	<b>392,078,547</b>	<b>468,902,837</b>	<b>76,824,290</b>	<b>401,879,418</b>	<b>473,833,866</b>	<b>71,954,448</b>
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>411,597,588</b>	<b>497,483,789</b>	<b>85,886,201</b>	<b>409,407,012</b>	<b>490,023,038</b>	<b>80,616,026</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>						
<b>Current liabilities</b>						
Trade and other payables	1,076,000	2,153,910	1,077,910	3,515,057	2,760,426	(754,631)
Trust funds and deposits	2,592,680	1,626,789	(965,891)	1,057,889	1,033,482	(24,407)
Contract and other liabilities	-	881,689	881,689	-	-	-
Provisions	2,915,009	2,646,009	(269,000)	2,915,009	2,915,009	-
Interest-bearing liabilities	77,435	89,759	12,324	186,427	186,427	-
Lease liabilities	78,618	154,212	75,594	72,432	72,432	-
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	<b>6,739,742</b>	<b>7,552,367</b>	<b>812,625</b>	<b>7,746,814</b>	<b>6,967,776</b>	<b>(779,038)</b>
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>						
Trust funds and deposits	-	34,791	34,791	34,791	34,791	-
Provisions	1,407,391	1,353,437	(53,954)	1,407,392	1,407,392	-
Interest-bearing liabilities	2,805,633	2,993,765	188,132	2,805,633	2,807,339	1,706
Lease liabilities	-	-	-	6,186	6,186	-
<b>Total non-current liabilities</b>	<b>4,213,024</b>	<b>4,381,992</b>	<b>168,968</b>	<b>4,254,002</b>	<b>4,255,708</b>	<b>1,706</b>
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>10,952,766</b>	<b>11,934,359</b>	<b>981,593</b>	<b>12,000,816</b>	<b>11,223,484</b>	<b>(777,332)</b>
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>400,644,822</b>	<b>485,549,430</b>	<b>84,904,608</b>	<b>397,406,196</b>	<b>478,799,554</b>	<b>81,393,358</b>
<b>Equity</b>						
Accumulated surplus	131,859,607	136,468,671	4,609,064	128,620,981	129,718,793	1,097,812
Reserves	268,785,215	349,080,759	80,295,544	268,785,215	349,080,761	80,295,546
<b>Total Equity</b>	<b>400,644,822</b>	<b>485,549,430</b>	<b>84,904,608</b>	<b>397,406,196</b>	<b>478,799,554</b>	<b>81,393,358</b>

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**Strathbogie Shire Council**  
**Mid-year budget review – 2025/26**  
**Statement of Cash Flows**

	Period ended 31 December 2025			Budget 2025/26		
	Budget	Actual	Variance	Adopted	Mid Year	Variance
	YTD \$ Dec 2025	YTD \$ Dec 2025	YTD \$ Dec 2025	Budget \$	Review \$	\$
<b>Cash flows from operating activities</b>						
Rates and charges	13,496,092	12,974,352	(521,740)	24,347,558	24,383,100	35,542
Statutory fees and fines	344,005	225,974	(118,031)	688,010	748,410	60,400
User fees	477,430	487,860	10,430	954,860	735,712	(219,148)
Grants - operating	2,353,193	3,300,655	947,462	9,776,809	12,118,781	2,341,972
Grants - capital	886,800	87,953	(798,847)	6,604,296	6,369,966	(234,330)
Contributions - monetary	128,800	464,264	335,464	257,600	1,343,663	1,086,063
Interest received	207,500	287,072	79,572	415,000	346,000	(69,000)
Other receipts	300,850	149,685	(151,165)	601,700	612,199	10,499
Net GST refund/payment	708,728	203,379	(505,348)	1,417,455	1,430,131	12,676
Employee costs	(7,681,701)	(7,406,807)	274,894	(15,363,402)	(15,058,457)	304,945
Materials and services	(7,162,842)	(8,622,317)	(1,459,475)	(14,325,684)	(19,300,074)	(4,974,390)
Trust funds and deposits collected/(paid)	-	392,414	392,414	-	98,311	98,311
Other payments	(257,785)	(64,830)	192,955	(515,569)	(367,331)	148,238
<b>Net cash provided by/(used in) operating activities</b>	<b>3,801,070</b>	<b>2,479,656</b>	<b>(1,321,414)</b>	<b>14,858,633</b>	<b>13,460,411</b>	<b>(1,398,222)</b>
<b>Cash flows from investing activities</b>						
Payments for property, infrastructure, plant and equipment	(4,953,548)	(2,981,598)	1,971,949	(15,720,837)	(13,812,151)	1,908,686
Proceeds from sale of property, infrastructure, plant & equipment	120,000	134,684	14,684	240,000	240,000	-
<b>Net cash provided by/(used in) investing activities</b>	<b>(4,833,548)</b>	<b>(2,846,914)</b>	<b>1,986,633</b>	<b>(15,480,837)</b>	<b>(13,572,151)</b>	<b>1,908,686</b>
<b>Cash flows from financing activities</b>						
Finance costs	(77,804)	(39,459)	38,345	(155,608)	(155,608)	-
Repayment of borrowings	(88,646)	(87,533)	1,113	(177,291)	(177,291)	-
Interest paid - lease liability	(2,655)	(6,500)	(3,845)	(5,310)	(5,310)	-
Repayment of lease liabilities	(37,797)	(32,959)	4,838	(75,593)	(75,593)	-
<b>Net cash provided by/(used in) financing activities</b>	<b>(206,901)</b>	<b>(166,450)</b>	<b>40,451</b>	<b>(413,802)</b>	<b>(413,802)</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Net increase (decrease) in cash and cash equivalents</b>	<b>(1,239,379)</b>	<b>(533,709)</b>	<b>705,670</b>	<b>(1,036,006)</b>	<b>(525,542)</b>	<b>510,464</b>
<b>Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the period</b>	<b>4,681,972</b>	<b>10,639,390</b>	<b>5,957,418</b>	<b>4,681,972</b>	<b>10,639,390</b>	<b>5,957,418</b>
<b>Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the period*</b>	<b>3,442,593</b>	<b>10,105,681</b>	<b>6,663,088</b>	<b>3,645,966</b>	<b>10,113,848</b>	<b>6,467,882</b>

\*Note: Cash and cash equivalents - YTD actual excludes term deposits with original maturity over 90 days. Council held total of \$8.95m in term deposits as at 31 December 2025.

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**Strathbogie Shire Council  
Mid-year budget review – 2025/26  
Statement of Capital Works**

	Period ended 31 December 2025			Budget 2025/26		
	Budget YTD \$ Dec 2025	Actual YTD \$ Dec 2025	Variance YTD \$ Dec 2025	Adopted Budget \$	Mid Year Review \$	Variance \$
<b>Property</b>						
Buildings	358,000	332,547	(25,453)	1,885,000	640,311	(1,244,689)
<b>Total property</b>	<b>358,000</b>	<b>332,547</b>	<b>(25,453)</b>	<b>1,885,000</b>	<b>640,311</b>	<b>(1,244,689)</b>
<b>Plant and equipment</b>						
Plant, machinery and equipment	769,000	584,637	(184,363)	1,299,000	1,725,190	426,190
Computers and telecommunications	496,800	671,146	174,346	721,283	871,251	149,968
<b>Total plant and equipment</b>	<b>1,265,800</b>	<b>1,255,783</b>	<b>(10,017)</b>	<b>2,020,283</b>	<b>2,596,441</b>	<b>576,158</b>
<b>Infrastructure</b>						
Roads	1,099,744	461,045	(638,699)	6,535,890	6,208,178	(327,712)
Bridges	220,000	227,431	7,431	1,680,291	1,224,804	(455,487)
Footpaths and cycleways	123,575	158,102	34,527	287,000	506,935	219,935
Drainage	422,000	30,400	(391,600)	599,100	308,200	(290,900)
Recreational, leisure and community facilities	975,000	245,236	(729,764)	1,195,000	1,021,632	(173,368)
Waste management	-	-	-	-	-	-
Parks, open space and streetscapes	39,106	-	(39,106)	89,106	50,000	(39,106)
<b>Total infrastructure</b>	<b>2,879,425</b>	<b>1,122,214</b>	<b>(1,757,211)</b>	<b>10,386,387</b>	<b>9,319,749</b>	<b>(1,066,638)</b>
<b>Total capital works expenditure</b>	<b>4,503,225</b>	<b>2,710,544</b>	<b>(1,792,681)</b>	<b>14,291,670</b>	<b>12,556,501</b>	<b>(1,735,169)</b>
<b>Represented by:</b>						
New asset expenditure	461,800	713,100	251,300	610,000	1,204,962	594,962
Asset renewal expenditure	3,130,319	1,926,235	(1,204,084)	11,093,464	10,902,530	(190,934)
Asset expansion expenditure	75,000	40,809	(34,191)	75,000	40,809	(34,191)
Asset upgrade expenditure	836,106	30,400	(805,706)	2,513,206	408,200	(2,105,006)
<b>Total capital works expenditure</b>	<b>4,503,225</b>	<b>2,710,544</b>	<b>(1,792,681)</b>	<b>14,291,670</b>	<b>12,556,501</b>	<b>(1,735,169)</b>
<b>Funding sources represented by:</b>						
Grants				6,604,296	5,166,296	(1,438,000)
Contributions				240,000	240,000	-
Council cash				7,447,374	7,150,205	(297,169)
Borrowings				-	-	-
<b>Total capital works expenditure</b>				<b>14,291,670</b>	<b>12,556,501</b>	<b>(1,735,169)</b>

In accordance with Section 97(3) of the Local Government Act 2020, it is the view of the Chief Executive Officer that a revised budget for 2025/26 will not be required by Strathbogie Shire Council.

.....  
Rachelle Quattrocchi - Chief Executive Officer

#### **11.4.4 Record of Informal Meeting of Councillors February 2026**

**AUTHOR** Governance Officer

**RESPONSIBLE DIRECTOR** Director People and Governance

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In accordance with Section (114) of the Strathbogie Shire Council Governance Rules, if there is a meeting of Councillors that:

- is scheduled or planned for the purpose of discussing the business of Council or briefing Councillors
- is attended by at least one member of Council staff, and
- is not a Council meeting, Delegated Committee meeting or Community Asset Committee meeting; these are known as Informal Meetings of Councillors.

The Chief Executive Officer must ensure that a summary of the matters discussed at the meeting are:

- tabled at the next convenient Council meeting
- recorded in the minutes of that Council meeting.

The details of the Record of Informal Meetings of Councillors for the period 1 February 2026 to 28 February 2026 are attached to this report.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

**That Council note the Record of Informal Meetings of Councillors from 1 February 2026 to 28 February 2026**

#### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION**

No Council officers and/or contractors who have provided advice in relation to this report have declared a general or material conflict of interest regarding the matter under consideration.

#### **TRANSPARENCY**

In the interests of transparency and open and honest communication with our community, this report is presented to a public Council meeting.

#### **ATTACHMENTS**

1. 20260203 Record of Informal Meetings of Councillors
2. 20260210 Record of Informal Meetings of Councillors
3. 20260217 Record of Informal Meetings of Councillors

Staff Only

## Record of Informal Meetings of Councillors

<b>Meeting Details</b>	<b>Title</b>	Councillor Briefing	
	<b>Date</b>	3 February 2026 at 9:00 am	
	<b>Location</b>	Euroa Community Conference Centre	
<b>Present</b>	<b>Councillors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cr Jeffery</li> <li>Cr Ewart-Kennedy</li> <li>Cr Carlson</li> <li>Cr Binks (Online)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cr Holloway</li> <li>Cr Stevens</li> <li>Cr Halsall</li> </ul>
	<b>Officers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rachelle Quattrocchi – Chief Executive Officer</li> <li>Amanda Tingay – Director People and Governance</li> <li>Rachael Frampton – Director Community and Planning</li> <li>Gary Van Driel – Director Sustainable Infrastructure</li> <li>Sharon Rainsbury – Executive Manager Communications, Advocacy and Customer Service</li> <li>Awais Sadiq – Manager Planning and Investment</li> <li>Barbara Taylor – Town Planner</li> <li>Nick Maple – Manager Capital Infrastructure and Strategic Projects</li> <li>Kate McKernan – Manager Fire Recovery</li> <li>Kerry Lynch – Governance Officer</li> </ul>	
	<b>Guest Speakers</b>		
	<b>Apologies</b>		

### Disclosures of Conflict of Interests

Disclosure of Interests are to be made immediately prior to any relevant item being discussed  
(Local Government Act 2020 - Section 131)

Matters Considered		Disclosures and Comments
1	Longwood Berry Lane Fire Management Update	None
2	MAV State Council Priorities and Motions	Director Tingay
3	ALGA National General Assembly Priorities and Motions	None
4	MOU – Strathbogie, Mitchell, Mansfield and Murrindindi Shires 2026 Bushfire Recovery	None
5	Statutory Planning Applications	None
6	Capital Works Update	None
7	Review (first) draft Agenda Council Meeting 17 February 2026	Cr Binks 11.1.1 Quarterly Report Statutory Planning

The meeting concluded at 4:00 pm

Staff Only

<b>Record completed by</b>	<b>Officer Name - Officer Title</b>	Kerry Lynch – Governance Officer
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Staff Only

## Record of Informal Meetings of Councillors

<b>Meeting Details</b>	<b>Title</b>	Councillor Briefing	
	<b>Date</b>	10 February 2026 at 9:00 am	
	<b>Location</b>	Euroa Community Conference Centre	
<b>Present</b>	<b>Councillors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cr Jeffery</li> <li>Cr Ewart-Kennedy</li> <li>Cr Carlson</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cr Holloway</li> <li>Cr Stevens (Online)</li> <li>Cr Halsall</li> </ul>
	<b>Officers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rachelle Quattrocchi – Chief Executive Officer</li> <li>Amanda Tingay – Director People and Governance</li> <li>Rachael Frampton – Director Community and Planning</li> <li>Gary Van Driel – Director Sustainable Infrastructure</li> <li>Sharon Rainsbury – Executive Manager Communications, Advocacy and Customer Service</li> <li>Awais Sadiq – Manager Planning and Investment</li> <li>Barbara Taylor – Town Planner</li> <li>Nick Maple – Manager Capital Infrastructure and Strategic Projects</li> <li>Kate McKernan – Manager Fire Recovery</li> <li>Kerry Lynch – Governance Officer</li> </ul>	
	<b>Guest Speakers</b>		
	<b>Apologies</b>	Cr Binks	

### Disclosures of Conflict of Interests

Disclosure of Interests are to be made immediately prior to any relevant item being discussed  
(Local Government Act 2020 - Section 131)

Matters Considered		Disclosures and Comments
1	Longwood Berry Lane Fire Management Update	None
2	MAV State Council Priorities and Motions	Director Tingay
3	ALGA National General Assembly Priorities and Motions	None
4	Firewood Collection Update	None
5	2026-27 Community Funding Model	None
6	Review (second) draft Agenda Council Meeting 17 February 2026	Cr Binks 11.1.1 Quarterly Report Statutory Planning

The meeting concluded at 4:00 pm

<b>Record completed by</b>	<b>Officer Name - Officer Title</b>	Kerry Lynch – Governance Officer
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Staff Only

## Record of Informal Meetings of Councillors

<b>Meeting Details</b>	<b>Title</b>	Councillor Briefing	
	<b>Date</b>	17 February 2026 at 9:00 am	
<b>Present</b>	<b>Location</b>	Euroa Community Conference Centre	
	<b>Councillors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cr Jeffery</li> <li>Cr Ewart-Kennedy</li> <li>Cr Carlson</li> <li>Cr Binks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cr Holloway</li> <li>Cr Stevens</li> <li>Cr Halsall</li> </ul>
	<b>Officers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rachelle Quattrocchi – Chief Executive Officer</li> <li>Amanda Tingay – Director People and Governance</li> <li>Rachael Frampton – Director Community and Planning</li> <li>Gary Van Driel – Director Sustainable Infrastructure</li> <li>Sharon Rainsbury – Executive Manager Communications, Advocacy and Customer Service</li> <li>Awais Sadiq – Manager Planning and Investment</li> <li>Jack Francis – Senior Planner</li> <li>Nick Maple – Manager Capital Infrastructure and Strategic Projects</li> <li>Kate McKernan – Manager Fire Recovery</li> <li>Kerry Lynch – Governance Officer</li> </ul>	
	<b>Guest Speakers</b>	Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) Representatives Inland Rail – Russell Hamilton-Acting Project Director, Caitlin Riley – Project Manager, Mona Amini, Senior Project Engineer, Adam Wiseman – Stakeholder Engagement Lead	
	<b>Apologies</b>	MAV Session – Cr Holloway, Cr Ewart-Kennedy, Cr Stevens	

### Disclosures of Conflict of Interests

Disclosure of Interests are to be made immediately prior to any relevant item being discussed  
(*Local Government Act 2020* - Section 131)

Matters Considered		Disclosures and Comments
1	Longwood Berry Lane Fire Management Update	None
2	MAV Councillor Wellbeing and Welfare Session	None
3	Inland Rail Update	None
4	Planning Briefing P2024-080, 3 Saleyard Avenel	None
5	Meeting Procedure Refresh	None
6	Review Agenda Council Meeting 17 February 2026	Cr Binks 11.1.1 Quarterly Report Statutory Planning

The meeting concluded at 4:00 pm

<b>Record completed by</b>	<b>Officer Name - Officer Title</b>	Kerry Lynch – Governance Officer
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## 11.5 Communications, Advocacy and Customer Service

### 11.5.1 Customer Service Charter

**AUTHOR** Customer Service Coordinator

**RESPONSIBLE DIRECTOR** Executive Manager Communications, Advocacy and Customer Service

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Providing high quality customer service is fundamental to building trust, transparency, and satisfaction between Council and the community it serves. As the primary point of contact for many residents, businesses, and stakeholders, our customer service approach reflects the values, professionalism and responsiveness of our organisation.

A Customer Service Charter has been developed based on feedback received from recent community engagement, benchmarking with other councils, community satisfaction survey results and internal department engagement.

A contemporary, customer-focus Charter will provide clearer expectations, foster accountability and ensure that all Council staff are empowered to deliver services that are inclusive, accessible and of a consistent high standard.

The draft Charter was released for community consultation on 27 October 2025, with eight submissions received by the closing date on 24 November 2025. The feedback received was valuable and elements have been incorporated into the final version.

#### RECOMMENDATION

##### That Council:

1. **Adopt the Customer Service Charter**
2. **Authorise Council Officers to place the Customer Service Charter on Council's website, along with the publication of a notice in Council's weekly newspaper column and social media pages informing the community of the charter.**

#### PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this report is to adopt the Customer Service Charter.

#### ISSUES, OPTIONS AND DISCUSSION

The Customer Service Charter outlines Council's commitment to delivering high-quality customer service, acknowledging this as a whole-of-organisation responsibility. It clearly sets out what customers can expect when contacting Council, including standards of service, response timeframes and mutual obligations around respectful conduct and behaviour.

Response times are provided for various methods of communication including:

- email and online forms
- phone

- in-person contact
- written requests
- Freedom of Information requests.

The Charter also outlines Council’s privacy commitments and provides suggestions on the type of information customers should have ready to assist in processing requests efficiently. In addition, it references the complaints-handling process, detailing available methods for lodging complaints and how they are managed.

Once adopted, the Charter will be promoted externally on the website, via social media and in local media. Internal communications will be used to inform staff about the new target response times. Customer service performance results will be published quarterly.

A copy of the final version is attached to this report.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

As part of the "Our Community, Our Voice" engagement process to inform the development of Council’s key strategic documents, residents were asked:

*“What does great customer service from Council look like to you?”*

Consistent themes emerged from the feedback highlighting:

- receiving responses within reasonable timeframes
- clear and transparent communication about requests and ongoing Council work
- follow-through on commitments and undertakings
- timely follow-up especially regarding service requests,
- respectful contact and accessible services, staff, and communication channels.

The draft Customer Service Charter was put out for public consultation from 27 October 2025 to 24 November 2025, and the following submissions were received:

Submission	Points Raised
<p><b>Submission 1</b></p>	<p>Issue reference number for phone calls so queries can be tracked as easily as emailed questions.</p> <p>Ensure accessibility. Not all members of the community have full access to Council Services when Council relies so heavily on Share Strathbogie to gather feedback on its activities. Many residents are older and/or not experienced or confident using online systems. Some residents do not have access to a computer and find it difficult to provide considered feedback via a mobile phone.</p> <p>Many residents are time-poor and do not have capacity to monitor Share Strathbogie, social media or local newspapers for consultations.</p> <p>We would welcome a more regular, scheduled presence of Council officers in Avenel (at the market and/ or the Library) to conduct council consultations and printed copies of surveys and consultation documents should always be made available in each township.</p> <p>When printed copies of surveys and consultation documents are made available it is often only at Euroa and Nagambie Council service centres. All Share Strathbogie consultation documents should be made available at Council's survey station at the Avenel Community Hub and Library,</p>

	rather than a specific request having to be made each time by Avenel Active, the Jubilee Park Committee and/or residents		
<b>Submission 2</b>	<p>Submitter recommended:  <i>Embed the Charter into Council Decision-Making and Consultation, Linking the Customer Service Charter to Council Practice via proposed matrix (below)</i></p> <p>Submitter also provided a <i>one-pager accessible example of what may assist the community to engage with the charter (below)</i></p>		
<b>Charter Commitment</b>	<b>Application in Decision-Making</b>	<b>Application in Communication</b>	<b>Application in Community Consultation</b>
<b>Respect and Courtesy</b>	Ensure respectful treatment of community submissions and lived experience in Council deliberations	Use plain language, avoid jargon, and acknowledge community voices in public updates	Create safe, inclusive spaces for dialogue, especially for marginalised groups
<b>Timely Response</b>	Set clear timelines for decisions affecting community wellbeing and communicate delays transparently	Respond to public queries and submissions within stated timeframes	Provide advance notice of consultations and follow up with outcomes
<b>Active Listening</b>	Incorporate community feedback into policy reviews and planning documents	Acknowledge concerns raised and explain how they are being addressed	Use surveys, forums, and lived experience documentation to shape priorities
<b>Accessibility</b>	Ensure decision-making processes are inclusive of people with disabilities, CALD communities, and rural residents	Offer multiple formats (written, verbal, visual) for communication	Provide interpreters, easy-read materials, and digital access for consultations
<b>Continuous Improvement</b>	Review community feedback annually to refine service standards and Council practices	Share performance data publicly and invite scrutiny	Co-design consultation methods with community members to improve engagement

<b>Submission</b>	<b>Points Raised</b>
<b>Submission 3</b>	<p>In Target Response Time grid:                      Separate Postal and eMail correspondence types.</p> <p>Suggested change:</p> <p><i>Maximum time to acknowledge written correspondence sent by mail (excludes postal time) three days</i></p> <p><i>Maximum time to acknowledge emailed correspondence - three working days</i></p> <p><i>Also "point out that a request for a phone call response would be quicker than a written response"</i></p>
<b>Submission 4</b>	Suggestion that each Shire rate notice include two free passes – valid for the transfer station or the pools.
<b>Submission 5</b>	Typo noted in phone number on back of charter.
<b>Submission 6</b>	It is important that Shire customers / ratepayers are reminded that their staff deserve respect and are not 'punching bags' (verbal or physical) for ratepayers unhappy with particular State Government

	<p>(eg Fire Services Levy) or Shire decisions or processes. Great that this is highlighted.</p> <p>Just wondering if the Shire has Employee Assistance counselling available for Shire staff (I assume it has) or, relevant in a small community such as ours, perhaps even for the family of Shire staff who can also be impacted?</p> <p>'Service Targets' - think they're all very timely / appropriate.</p> <p>Just wanted to add that, as a local ratepayer for 25 years, I've always (with just one exception many years ago!) been very happy with the level of service and speed of reply from Shire staff and Councillors.</p>
<p><b>Response 7</b></p>	<p>Plain Language Use Suggestions</p> <p>Within our communities meeting the needs of all is essential. Less words, more visual communication can achieve this. For many folks within our community documents may not be accessible or engaging. By changing formatting and design it may greatly increase the chances of communicating your message.</p> <p>Does the current draft meet the standards for plain language? Is there an easy read version? Will final document be inclusive and include visual information such as iconography and images?</p>
<p><b>Response 8</b></p>	<p>I find the long preamble when currently ringing on the phone is unnecessary and wasteful of my time.</p> <p>I have found that contact with the Shire by letter or email requires a long time for a response. I believe that the goal of two days is too short and will be too difficult to achieve.</p> <p>The auto response when sending an email should not in any way be used as a reply.</p> <p>The front counter staff has always been excellent in response. It is the other technical staff where improvements are required.</p> <p>This is a good step forward and a great step forward from the time when no reply was the order of the day.</p>

The feedback received was valuable and elements have been incorporated into the final version of the charter. The Target Response Time section has been amended to differentiate between email and written correspondence, and the maximum time to acknowledge written correspondence sent by email or post will be three days.

The feedback about plain language was constructive and the document has been edited and the design updated to make the information more accessible.

**POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

**Council Plan**

The development of a Customer Service Charter is linked to the Council Plan 2025-2029 and specifically to the Annual Action Plan 2025–2026 year, under the direction “Deliver”.

This report is consistent with the following objectives and or actions in the 2025-2029 Council Plan.

### **Objective One: Connect**

We are committed to enhancing access for all residents, promoting healthy living, fostering connections, and providing opportunities to thrive and participate in community life.

### **Objective Two: Sustain**

We aim to collaborate with others to foster a sustainable environment, a thriving economy and resilient communities.

### **Objective Three: Deliver**

We are committed to delivering quality services and infrastructure that meets the needs of our community. We aim to strengthen the Council’s governance and provide improved, customer-focused experiences.

## **RISK CONSIDERATIONS**

This report has identified the following risk(s):

<b>Risk(s)</b>	<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>Consequence</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Mitigation Action</b>
Lack of service standards	Possible	Moderate	Medium	Charter provides a service standard levels and expectations
Customer dissatisfaction	Possible	Moderate	Medium	Clearly defined procedures for handling complaints and unresolved issues

## **LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

There are no legal considerations associated with this report.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION**

No Council officers who have provided advice in relation to this report have declared a general or material conflict of interest regarding the matter under consideration.

## **TRANSPARENCY**

In the interests of transparency and open and honest communication with our community, this report is presented to a public Council meeting.

## **FINANCIAL VIABILITY CONSIDERATIONS**

The review and development of the customer service charter have been undertaken using existing resources.

## **SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS**

## **Economic**

A customer service charter offers economic value by increasing customer retention, streamlining service delivery, and reducing complaints and disputes. It enhances brand reputation and trust, drives word-of-mouth growth, and improves staff productivity and morale.

## **Social**

A customer service charter promotes fairness, accountability, and transparency, helping build trust between an organisation and the community. It ensures customers are treated with respect and consistency, supports inclusion by setting clear expectations, and encourages a culture of service and responsibility contributing to stronger social relationships and community confidence.

## **Environmental and Climate Change**

A customer service charter can support climate and environmental goals by promoting responsible practices, such as reducing paper use, encouraging digital communication, and committing to sustainable service delivery, helping minimise the organisation's environmental footprint.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS**

This report does not limit any human rights under the Victorian *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

## **CONCLUSION**

Council is committed to delivering high-quality customer service.

In line with the Council Plan 2025-29, a Customer Service Charter has been developed committing Council to deliver quality services and infrastructure that meets the needs of our community.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Customer Service Charter
2. Customer Service Charter Poster

# Customer Service Charter



## Our vision

*Our vision is to deliver a customer-focused service across all functions of our organisation to support and empower a thriving community.*



## Our promise to you

We promise to place our customers at the heart of everything we do.

We will continually review and enhance our service delivery to ensure it's meeting community expectation.

We will empower our staff to champion initiatives that enhance the customer experience.

We will build a culture that recognises and values excellence in customer service.

### When you contact Council, we will:

- greet you politely and identify ourselves by first name
- treat you with respect and courtesy
- listen carefully so we can understand your needs and respond appropriately
- be clear and concise
- assist you to the best of our ability
- ensure you have choice in how you contact us
- respond within two business days for in-person or phone queries and 10 business days for written or emailed requests
- keep you informed as to the progress of your inquiry
- contact you once it's complete
- prioritise any emergency that may pose a risk to the community.



## Help us to help you

### When you contact Council, please:

- treat us with courtesy and respect – we're here to help
- provide all relevant information to help us better assist you
- for complex matters, provide full details in writing
- let us know if things change, including your contact details.

Abusive behaviour towards our staff will not be tolerated.

To ensure your request is properly recorded and directed to the most appropriate Officer, please contact Council by:

**Email:** [info@strathbogie.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@strathbogie.vic.gov.au)

**Telephone business hours:**  
1800 065 993 or 03 5795 0000

**Telephone after hours:** 1800 065 993

**Mail:** PO Box 177, Euroa VIC 3666

**Web form:** [strathbogie.vic.gov.au](http://strathbogie.vic.gov.au) and selecting "Submit a Request"

### Visit us in person at:

**Euroa** 109A Binney Street.  
Open from 9am - 5pm weekdays

**Nagambie** 352 High Street.  
Open from 9am - 4pm weekdays

**Snap Send Solve:** Download the app to lodge queries via your mobile device.



## Accessibility

We are committed to ensuring all members of the community have access to Council Services.

Please tell us if you have communication needs or barriers so that we can assist you with:

- an interpreter or TTY
- talking to you if you have difficulties with reading or writing
- speaking to a person acting on your behalf.



## Service targets

We measure our performance against clear service standards that reflect customer expectations and our regulatory obligations. Our performance will be reported quarterly to the Council.

Service type	Response time
Enquiries resolved at first contact with a Customer Service Centre	80%
Average wait times for calls to the Customer Service Centres	60 seconds
Maximum time to acknowledge a phone message	3 working days
Maximum time to acknowledge written correspondence sent by mail (excludes postal time)	3 working days
Maximum time to acknowledge emailed correspondence	3 working days
Maximum time to acknowledge receipt of a complaint*	2 working days
Maximum time to reply to an escalated complaint*	10 working days
Community Satisfaction Survey – Customer Service performance	70%

\*In accordance with Council's Complaints Policy.



## Feedback & complaints

Your feedback is important to us. It helps us understand your needs and improve the way we serve the community. You can contact us in person at one of our offices, via email or phone.

If you feel the service you received does not meet the standards outlined in this Charter, you may lodge a complaint in accordance with our Complaints Policy, which is available on the website.

Complaints can be submitted via one of the contact methods listed above left.

All complaints will be treated as a priority and we aim to acknowledge you within 10 business days. If we are unable to meet this timeframe, we will contact you to advise when you should expect a response. Our aim is to resolve all complaints within 30 business days.



## Respecting your privacy

We are committed to safeguarding your privacy and will endeavour to take all reasonable steps to keep your information secure.

Strathbogie Shire Council employees are obliged to respect the confidentiality of any personal information held and not to disclose that unless required to do so by law.

Your Personal Data will be managed in line with Council's Privacy and Data Protection Policy, in accordance with the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014. You can access this policy on our website. You can access your personal information by contacting Council's Privacy Officer on 1800 065 993.



## Our vision

*Our vision is to deliver a customer-focused service across all functions of our organisation to support and empower a thriving community.*



## Service targets

We measure our performance against clear service standards that reflect customer expectations and our regulatory obligations. Our performance will be reported quarterly to the Council.

Service type	Response time
Enquiries resolved at first contact with a Customer Service Centre	80%
Average wait times for calls to the Customer Service Centres	60 seconds
Maximum time to acknowledge a phone message	3 working days
Maximum time to acknowledge written correspondence sent by mail (excludes postal time)	3 working days
Maximum time to acknowledge emailed correspondence	3 working days
Maximum time to acknowledge receipt of a complaint*	2 working days
Maximum time to reply to an escalated complaint*	10 working days
Community Satisfaction Survey – Customer Service performance	70%

\*In accordance with Council's Complaints Policy.

## 11.5.2 Advocacy Update

**AUTHOR** Executive Manager Communications, Advocacy and Customer Service

**RESPONSIBLE DIRECTOR** Chief Executive Officer

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report seeks Council's acceptance and endorsement of the Disaster Advocacy Strategy 2026, which has been drafted following the Longwood Berrys Lane Fire, which impacted Strathbogie in January 2026.

The Disaster Advocacy Strategy will be an addition to Council's Advocacy Strategy 2025-2029, which was adopted in September 2025.

The Strategy is informed by Councillor feedback captured during a workshop on 10 March 2026. This process was intended to understand alignment with the current thinking compared with the earlier prepared Advocacy Strategy and to identify any emerging/new disaster-related priorities.

### RECOMMENDATION

#### That Council:

- 1. Adopt the Disaster Advocacy Strategy 2026**
- 2. Authorise Officers to make updates to the Advocacy Priority Items to ensure they stay current**
- 3. Note that the Disaster Advocacy Strategy 2026 will guide Council's advocacy efforts from March 2026 onward.**

### PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The 2026 Longwood Berrys Lane bushfire represents one of the most significant natural disasters in Strathbogie Shire's modern history. Igniting on 7 January 2026 on the Hume Freeway near Longwood, the fire spread rapidly under catastrophic weather conditions, moving across Strathbogie, Murrindindi, Mitchell and Mansfield Shires, and burning approximately 138,000 hectares of land.

The scale of the fire was unprecedented with a burn area equivalent to 55% of Greater Melbourne. It marked the Shire's most severe disaster since the 1965 Longwood fire, which killed nine people and burned more than 40,000 hectares. Communities, businesses, and primary producers have sustained significant losses, and the declaration of a State of Disaster reflects the severity and ongoing nature of this emergency.

Given the scale and impact of the bushfire, and the wide range of recovery needs identified, it is appropriate for Council to review its advocacy priorities to ensure they are still relevant and will best support impacted communities as they start on the long road to recovery.

The State Government has indicated its willingness to support communities in their recovery, so Council may have an opportunity in the coming months to advance key projects that will have long-term benefits for impacted communities.

## **ISSUES, OPTIONS AND DISCUSSION**

In September 2025, Councillors adopted Strathbogie's first advocacy strategy that identified Council's priorities, strengthened its advocacy voice and reflected the needs of the community.

Advocacy is a key function of local government - influencing decisions, securing funding and achieving positive outcomes for the community.

Given increasing community needs and limited resources, Council determined a strategic approach was required to:

- identify priorities requiring sustained, top-level advocacy
- determine issues suited to partnership or opportunistic advocacy approaches
- ensure effective resource allocation across advocacy efforts.

The Advocacy Strategy 2025-2029 set out a clear, prioritised agenda to guide Council's advocacy efforts. Key elements include long-term, complex priorities and local, immediate priorities raised by the community.

These are:

- Connecting Communities: Bridges and Drainage Infrastructure Renewal Program
- Equitable Digital and Telecommunications Infrastructure
- Euroa Railway Precinct Masterplan
- Greening Euroa – Recycling Water, Revitalising Community Spaces
- The Nagambie Freight and Industry Connector
- Reliable Power Supply Infrastructure
- Kirwans Bridge Restoration
- Avenel Pedestrian Rail Crossing

The advocacy strategy was used as the basis for discussions with State and Federal Ministers, Parliamentarians and Advisers since it was adopted, and has also been given to all Parliamentarians who have visited the Shire in the wake of the bushfires.

At the workshop, Council endorsed the original advocacy priorities while identifying five new disaster-related priority areas for ongoing advocacy focus.

These are:

- community resilience package
- economic business recovery package
- planning and housing
- tourism, agriculture, viticulture and equine sector recovery
- community projects.

The Chief Executive Officers of Strathbogie, Mitchell, Murrindindi and Mansfield Shires collaborated to develop a comprehensive Bushfire Local Government Relief and Recovery Funding Package proposal, which positions Council to support recovery efforts and rebuilding over the next three years.

This is a living document that is designed to adapt as community priorities shift, funding opportunities arise, or major announcements are made.

Updates will be guided by ongoing engagement, evidence-based decision-making, and a commitment to transparency.

## **POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Council Plan**

This report is consistent with the following objectives and or actions in the 2025-2029 Council Plan:

#### **Objective One: Connect**

We are committed to enhancing access for all residents, promoting healthy living, fostering connections, and providing opportunities to thrive and participate in community life.

#### **Objective Two: Sustain**

We aim to collaborate with others to foster a sustainable environment, a thriving economy and resilient communities.

#### **Objective Three: Deliver**

We are committed to delivering quality services and infrastructure that meets the needs of our community. We aim to strengthen the Council's governance and provide improved, customer-focused experiences.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION**

No Council officers and/or contractors who have provided advice in relation to this report have declared a general or material conflict of interest regarding the matter under consideration.

## **TRANSPARENCY**

In line with Council's commitment to transparency and accountability, this report including the Disaster Advocacy Strategy Priorities are presented to an open Council meeting.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Disaster Advocacy Strategy 2026 includes Council's key priorities for supporting impacted communities following the Longwood Berrys Lane Fire.

It is recommended that the Disaster Advocacy Strategy Priorities 2026 are adopted noting that strategies may change in the future based on relevant community needs and expectations.

## **ATTACHMENT**

Disaster Advocacy Strategy 2026

# Disaster Advocacy Strategy 2026

*Strathbogie*  
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# Overview



## The Longwood Berrys Lane bushfires

The Longwood Berrys Lane fires of January 2026 have had a lasting impact on communities across Strathbogie Shire.

The fires burned approximately 138,000 hectares, destroying more than 100 homes and 294 other structures, with major losses across farming, viticulture, equine industries and tourism.

Even in areas where homes remained intact, extended isolation, prolonged service outages and exposed vulnerabilities in telecommunications and electricity networks have placed considerable strain on families, businesses and emergency response systems.

The damage to essential infrastructure - including hundreds of kilometres of roads, bridges, culverts and community assets - combined with ongoing disruptions to agriculture, viticulture, equine industries and tourism, clearly demonstrates the long-term economic and social impacts these bushfires will have across the region.

Full recovery will take years, and smaller regional councils, with limited rate bases, are unable to meet these rebuilding costs alone.

While the immediate emergency response has concluded, the recovery journey is ongoing.

Residents are rebuilding homes, businesses and farms while also navigating the social, emotional and economic impacts of the disaster.

Supporting community recovery is a long-term process. It requires sustained coordination, accessible services and local leadership to ensure communities can recover and rebuild with confidence.

Strathbogie Shire Council is working closely with residents, community groups and government partners to support recovery.

However, to meet the scale of need across the Shire, continued government investment in recovery services and infrastructure is essential.

## Advocacy Priority: Community recovery and resilience



### The problem

Disaster recovery in rural communities does not occur quickly. Many impacts emerge months or years after the event, particularly for people experiencing financial strain, housing challenges or ongoing emotional stress.

Councils play a critical role in coordinating recovery efforts, supporting residents to access services and ensuring community voices are heard in recovery planning. However, delivering this work requires dedicated resources, specialised staff and ongoing operational support. Without sufficient funding, there is a risk that critical recovery services will be reduced before communities have fully recovered.

For smaller rural councils such as Strathbogie Shire, the cost of maintaining recovery hubs, outreach services and dedicated recovery staff places significant pressure on existing council resources.

### The solution

A coordinated, locally led recovery model supported by sustained government funding will ensure communities receive the support they need throughout the recovery period.

Maintaining a dedicated recovery team, community recovery hub and outreach services allows residents to access practical assistance, information and support close to home. It also ensures recovery programs remain responsive to local needs as they evolve over time.

This approach aligns with best practice disaster recovery, which recognises that community recovery typically extends for several years following major events.

### The ask

Strathbogie Shire Council is seeking \$2.8 million in recovery funding over three years to maintain essential recovery services and coordination across the municipality.

**Recovery funding already committed: \$750,000**

#### Additional funding requested:

**2025-26 – \$950,000**

Funding to support the establishment and operation of recovery services, including:

- Fire Recovery Manager and Community Recovery Officer – \$300,000
- Planning and Building Recovery Officer – \$120,000
- Lease of motor vehicle for outreach services – \$20,000
- Recovery Hub operational costs – \$130,000
- Community-led relief and recovery centre costs – \$50,000
- Community recovery initiatives – \$100,000
- Recovery Projects Officer to deliver replacement of essential council assets damaged during the fire – \$120,000

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- Waste management, polytank recycling, wood fire management and distribution – \$100,000

**2026-27 – \$950,000**

Continuation of the recovery program, including recovery coordination, hub operations, outreach services and community recovery initiatives.

**2027-28 – \$900,000**

Ongoing recovery coordination and support services to ensure the community continues to receive assistance as recovery needs evolve.

**Total funding request: \$2,800,000**

**The benefit**

Investing in locally delivered recovery coordination will:

- ensure communities have ongoing access to practical support and information
- strengthen coordination between government agencies and local services
- support residents navigating rebuilding, insurance and financial challenges
- enable outreach services to reach smaller and more remote communities
- support community-led initiatives that rebuild connection and resilience
- ensure recovery efforts remain responsive to emerging community needs.

Sustained funding will also allow Council to continue playing its essential role in coordinating recovery across the municipality. Improving bridge infrastructure helps reduce isolation, enhances liveability, and increases equity for smaller, remote communities.

**Conclusion**

The Longwood Berrys Lane fires have significantly affected the people of Strathbogie Shire. While the emergency response has ended, the recovery journey is still underway.

Ensuring communities have the support they need in the months and years ahead is critical to long-term recovery.

Strathbogie Shire Council seeks the Victorian Government’s continued partnership through a \$2.8 million recovery funding package to maintain essential recovery services and ensure our communities are supported both in the short term and throughout the longer recovery process.

## Advocacy Priority: **Community resilience projects**

### **The problem**

Rural communities rely heavily on local infrastructure during emergencies. In many cases, halls and pavilions become the de facto meeting points for relief efforts, community briefings and support services.

However, many of these facilities were not designed with disaster resilience in mind. Limitations include:

- limited backup power and energy security
- ageing amenities and infrastructure
- insufficient capacity to host emergency services or outreach support
- limited ability to operate during extended outages or disruptions.

During the recent fires, communities showed remarkable resilience and supported each other in practical ways. But the experience also highlighted gaps in local infrastructure that need to be addressed if communities are to respond effectively to future emergencies.

Investing in resilient community infrastructure will ensure towns have safe, functional and well-equipped places to gather, access services and support each other when it matters most.

### **The solution**

Strathbogie Shire Council proposes a staged program of upgrades to key community facilities across the Shire. These projects will strengthen local capacity to respond to emergencies while also supporting everyday community life.

Upgrades will focus on practical resilience measures such as:

- Upgrades will focus on practical resilience measures such as:
- backup power through generators and community batteries
  - improved amenities and accessible facilities
  - enhanced lighting and safety infrastructure
  - flexible indoor and outdoor spaces to host services, briefings and community gatherings.

In addition to fixed infrastructure, a mobile outreach capability will enable services to reach smaller and more remote communities during recovery and future emergencies.

### **The ask**

Strathbogie Shire Council is seeking \$12.9 million in targeted investment over three years to deliver the following community resilience initiatives.

#### **2025-26**

#### **\$500,000 - Multi-purpose Resilience, Relief and Recovery Mobile Hub**

A mobile outreach service that can deliver support, information and services directly to communities during emergencies and recovery periods.

#### **2026-27**

#### **\$3,000,000 - Ruffy Hall and Community Resilience Centre**

Development of a new community resilience hub and play space to replace ageing assets including the Tableland Community Centre. The facility will include backup power, a community battery and generator to support emergency response and recovery activities.

Advocacy Priorities



**2027-28**

**\$2,000,000 - Longwood Pavilion: Upgrading for a Resilient Future**

Installation of community battery, generator, improved amenities and lighting to support community use and emergency response.

**\$2,000,000 - Violet Town Pavilion: Upgrading for a Resilient Future**

Infrastructure upgrades including community battery, generator, lighting and improved amenities.

**\$2,500,000 - Euroa Friendlies Pavilion: Upgrading for a Resilient Future**

Expanded amenities, upgraded kitchen facilities, generator and community battery to enable the site to support large-scale community gatherings and recovery activities.

**\$1,000,000 - Strathbogie and Gooram Halls: Upgrading for a Resilient Future**

Resilience upgrades including backup power and improved infrastructure to support emergency operations and community use.

**\$440,000 - Euroa Cattle Saleyards: Upgrading for a Resilient Future**

Improvements to amenities and installation of charging infrastructure to support emergency logistics and agricultural operations.

Total funding request: \$12,940,000

**The benefit**

This investment will deliver long-term benefits for the region by:

- strengthening community preparedness and response capacity
- providing safe, reliable places for people to gather during emergencies
- supporting delivery of relief and recovery services closer to communities
- improving everyday community facilities used for sport, events and local activities
- strengthening social connection and wellbeing following disasters
- supporting local economies by protecting critical community infrastructure.

Importantly, resilient facilities will ensure communities are better prepared for future emergencies, reducing recovery times and improving coordination between agencies and local residents.

**Conclusion**

The Longwood Berrys Lane fires showed just how strong and resilient the communities of Strathbogie Shire truly are. People stepped up for one another, opening their halls and facilities, offering support, and working side by side with emergency services to protect their towns.

With the right investment, these same community assets can be strengthened so they continue to support everyday community life while also improving our preparedness for future emergencies.

Strathbogie Shire Council is seeking the Victorian Government's partnership to deliver this \$12.9 million community resilience program, helping ensure our towns are better prepared, better connected and more resilient in the years ahead.

## Advocacy Priority: **Economic business recovery package**

### **The problem**

The local economy is built on small and medium-sized businesses, primary producers and family-run operations. Many operate on tight margins even in stable seasons.

The fires have resulted in:

- loss of livestock, fencing, pasture and on-farm infrastructure
- damage to vineyards and equine facilities
- disruption to tourism visitation and event cancellations
- reduced trade for hospitality and retail businesses
- complex and time-consuming insurance processes
- emotional and financial strain across farming families and business owners.

While government recovery programs are available, navigating them can be complex. Businesses are often required to engage with multiple agencies, funding streams and regulatory processes at the same time.

Without coordinated and targeted support, there is a risk of prolonged disruption, business closures and long-term economic decline in affected communities.

### **The solution**

Economic recovery will be strongest when support is coordinated, locally delivered and informed by a clear understanding of the impacts on rural economies.

A structured recovery framework led by the Victorian Government, working closely with local government and industry, would enable practical support to reach businesses and primary producers more efficiently.

Key elements of this approach include improved coordination between agencies, locally embedded business recovery expertise, and targeted financial and advisory support to help businesses stabilise and rebuild.

### **The ask**

To support economic recovery across Strathbogie Shire, Council requests the Victorian Government:

#### **Establish a coordinated business and agricultural recovery framework**

A whole-of-government approach tailored to heavily impacted rural municipalities.

#### **Undertake a comprehensive economic impact assessment**

Led jointly by Regional Development Victoria (RDV) and the Department of Agriculture to quantify losses across businesses, primary producers and supply chains.

#### **Deploy business recovery specialists locally**

RDV-supported advisers embedded within the Recovery Centre in Euroa to support agricultural enterprises, commercial businesses and sole traders.

#### **Provide insurance navigation and claims support**

Dedicated guidance to help residents and businesses manage complex claims processes.

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**Provide activation grants (not loans) for essential business equipment**

Small-to-medium grants to replace operational items such as laptops, phones and connectivity equipment often excluded from existing programs.

**Expand agricultural recovery assistance**

Increased freight subsidies, feed assistance and fencing support to meet regional demand.

**Strengthen AgBiz Assist and rural financial counselling services**

Additional rural financial counsellors and integrated mental health supports for primary producers.

**Expand local mental health and wellbeing services**

Outreach and case management services embedded within a coordinated recovery structure, particularly for remote farming communities.

**Provide clear and timely communication on recovery programs**

Regular updates on state and federal recovery initiatives to support planning and business confidence.

**The benefit**

A coordinated and locally embedded recovery response will:

- stabilise businesses and protect local employment
- accelerate recovery for agriculture and primary production supporting delivery of relief and recovery services closer to communities
- support tourism, viticulture and equine industries that underpin the regional economy providing safe, reliable places for people to gather during emergencies
- reduce long-term economic and social impacts of the fires
- strengthen confidence for businesses considering reinvestment
- support the wellbeing of business owners, farmers and workers.

Importantly, it will ensure government investment is targeted, effective and aligned with the real needs of rural communities.

**Conclusion**

Strathbogie Shire is resilient. Communities, farmers and businesses have demonstrated extraordinary generosity, determination and leadership in the face of the Longwood Berrys Lane fires.

However, local resilience must be matched with coordinated government support.

Strathbogie Shire Council is seeking the Victorian Government's partnership in delivering a practical, locally embedded recovery response that protects businesses, supports primary producers and secures the long-term economic future of our region.

# Advocacy Priority: Tourism, agriculture, viticulture and equine sector recovery



## The problem

The fires have had severe and far-reaching impacts.

### Tourism

Widespread cancellations, reduced visitation, lost seasonal income and reputational impacts threaten the region's visitor economy. Tourism is critical to long-term economic recovery, and delayed support risks prolonged downturns.

### Agriculture and viticulture

Many primary producers have lost buildings, fencing, pastures, irrigation infrastructure, machinery, stock and feed, creating multi-year financial pressures.

### Equine sector

Breeders face displaced animals, damaged facilities, pasture loss and rising operational costs, threatening one of the region's major economic contributors.

Without immediate, coordinated support, these sectors face prolonged financial stress, slowed recovery, and reduced regional economic activity.

## The solution

We call on the Victorian Government to implement a coordinated recovery approach with practical, locally embedded measures:

### Dedicated recovery packages

Tailored programs for agriculture, viticulture and equine industries addressing sector-specific needs.

### Direct financial assistance

Support to manage immediate cashflow challenges, repair or replace critical infrastructure, and restore land and assets.

### Specialist disaster advisory services

Access to expert advice on pasture recovery, veterinary and biosecurity support, and guidance for developing and implementing disaster preparedness and recovery plans.

### Enhanced freight and feed support

Subsidies to assist livestock and high-value breeding operations maintain continuity and minimise financial losses.

### Tourism and event stimulus funding

Investment in festivals, cellar doors, equine sales, regional events and visitor activations to rebuild demand and create economic multipliers in rural communities.

### Accelerated approvals and streamlined regulations

Faster permitting and simplified regulatory processes to enable producers to rebuild essential infrastructure quickly and efficiently.

### Investment in regional infrastructure and visitor economy

Support for initiatives such as:

- \$15 million Harvest Hub – Agri Food, Wine and Equine Centre in Nagambie for tourism and investment attraction, promoting the region and supporting local economic development
- \$1 million Visitor Economy Stimulus through Goulburn Regional Tourism (GRT) for concerts, event activations and initiatives that strengthen the visitor economy

**Total proposed funding package: \$16 million.**

Advocacy Priorities



**The ask**

To support tourism, agriculture, viticulture and equine recovery effectively, we request:

- immediate funding and financial assistance for businesses and producers to restore cashflow, replace critical infrastructure and repair damaged assets.
- sector-specific recovery packages for agriculture, viticulture and equine industries that reflect the unique operational and economic challenges of each sector.
- deployment of specialist disaster advisors to provide pasture, veterinary, biosecurity and business planning support across affected regions. reduce long-term economic and social impacts of the fires
- expanded freight and feed subsidies to support livestock and high-value breeding operations
- targeted stimulus for tourism and events including festivals, cellar doors, equine sales and other visitor activations to drive local economic recovery.
- accelerated approvals and streamlined regulatory processes to allow rapid rebuilding of essential infrastructure.
- investment in regional devel-

opment and visitor economy projects, specifically the Harvest Hub

- clear, timely communication of recovery programs and progress updates to ensure businesses and producers can plan and act confidently.

**The benefit**

Targeted support will:

- stabilise businesses and protect employment across key sectors
- restore confidence in the visitor economy and regional events
- support multi-year recovery for agriculture, viticulture and equine industries
- reduce long-term economic and social impacts of the fires
- strengthen community resilience and preparedness for future disasters
- maximise economic multipliers through tourism, events and regional promotion initiatives.

A coordinated, sector-specific approach ensures that public investment achieves the greatest impact and supports sustainable, long-term recovery.

**Conclusion**

The Longwood Berrys Lane fires have tested the resilience of Strathbogie Shire’s industries. Our community has shown determination and commitment, but government support is critical to turn recovery into renewal.

We urge the Victorian Government to partner with our Shire by delivering practical, targeted, and timely recovery programs. This will protect our industries, safeguard jobs, and ensure our region emerges stronger and more resilient from the 2026 fires.

## Advocacy Priority: Housing and planning support

### The problem

The scale and urgency of the rebuilding effort required demands additional statutory flexibility, planning system support and targeted infrastructure investment.

To ensure reconstruction can proceed quickly, safely and consistently, Council is seeking the Victorian Government's support through a coordinated package of planning system relief, ministerial intervention and strategic infrastructure investment.

Rebuilding after bushfires is never straightforward. Residents, farmers and businesses are navigating insurance processes, construction industry shortages, infrastructure repairs and regulatory approvals at the same time.

The existing planning system, while designed to ensure good planning outcomes, can become complex and slow when applied to large-scale disaster recovery. For communities trying to rebuild homes, agricultural infrastructure and businesses, delays in planning approvals can create significant financial and emotional strain.

For a small rural council such as Strathbogie, the volume and complexity of recovery-related planning matters places significant

pressure on limited planning staff and resources. Without additional support and targeted regulatory flexibility, there is a real risk that the planning system may unintentionally slow down recovery.

A coordinated State response is needed to ensure the planning framework supports, rather than hinders, the rebuilding of homes, farms and businesses.

### The solution

Strathbogie Shire Council proposes a coordinated recovery planning framework supported by the Victorian Government that provides temporary statutory flexibility while maintaining appropriate planning safeguards.

This framework would introduce targeted recovery measures to streamline approvals, reduce unnecessary administrative requirements and provide greater certainty for residents, businesses and industry during the rebuilding process.

At the same time, longer-term planning and infrastructure investment is required to ensure rebuilding supports safer and more resilient communities in the future.

### The ask

To support efficient and coordinated recovery, Strathbogie Shire Council requests the Victorian Government's assistance with the following measures.

#### Bushfire recovery-specific planning scheme amendment

Preparation and fast-tracked approval of a recovery-specific Planning Scheme Amendment for fire-affected municipalities that:

- enables rapid rebuilding and reinstatement
- removes duplicative or non-essential requirements
- introduces deemed-to-comply pathways and exemptions
- standardises recovery controls across affected councils
- provides certainty for communities, councils and industry.

Key measures could include streamlined approvals for agricultural infrastructure and outbuildings, simplified overlay triggers, reduced third-party processes and time-limited recovery planning controls.

#### Extension of Clause 52.07 timeframes

The current requirement to com-

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Advocacy Priorities



plete replacement accommodation within 18 months is no longer realistic given:

- construction industry capacity constraints
- insurance assessment and dispute delays
- infrastructure restoration timelines
- workforce shortages and financial pressures.

Council requests this timeframe be extended to five years from the date of the damaging event to reflect contemporary disaster recovery conditions.

**Emergency septic and wastewater policy position**

Council seeks a temporary State-supported policy approach that allows:

- streamlined approval pathways for temporary and replacement septic systems
- greater flexibility on constrained or fire-affected sites
- faster decision-making to support reinstatement of habitable dwellings.

Delays in septic approvals are currently preventing some residents from rebuilding homes.

**Temporary use of land for recovery purposes**

Ministerial authorisation to allow the temporary use of Council and private land, without rezoning or permits, for recovery-related purposes such as:

- temporary accommodation
- recovery hubs and community support facilities
- worker accommodation
- storage, logistics and plant operations.

This flexibility would significantly assist recovery operations across the shire.

**Fast-tracked planning pathways for rural businesses**

Council requests accelerated approval pathways for businesses critical to the regional economy, including:

- primary production
- agricultural infrastructure and processing
- tourism-related businesses
- rural industry and employment-generating uses

Additional recovery support measures could include:

- temporary relaxation of parking, access and signage requirements for relocated businesses
- rapid approvals for temporary structures such as machinery sheds, storage or

produce facilities

- simplified change-of-use approvals for temporary business operations
- exemptions for like-for-like replacement of agricultural and commercial buildings.

Economic recovery is closely linked to community recovery. Supporting businesses to reopen quickly is critical for local employment and economic stability.

**State-supported planning recovery hub**

Council seeks State support for a Planning Recovery Hub supported by:

- two dedicated planning officers for Strathbogie Shire
- case management support for complex rebuilding applications
- fast-tracked assessment of recovery-related planning matters
- assistance for displaced residents and businesses navigating planning processes.

This would ensure timely decision-making while maintaining planning integrity.

Advocacy Priorities



**Strategic planning and infrastructure investment**

In addition to short-term recovery measures, Council seeks support for longer-term planning work to strengthen resilience and guide future growth.

**Shire-wide bushfire study and planning scheme amendment**

State funding and technical support to deliver:

- a comprehensive bushfire hazard and risk assessment
- updated bushfire mapping and planning controls
- improved settlement planning guidance
- long-term resilience measures.

**Urban growth strategy and rural land use planning**

Support to complete strategic planning work including:

- an Urban Growth Strategy
- a Rural Residential and Land Use Strategy.

These strategies will guide housing supply, settlement planning and long-term land use decisions.

**Housing-enabling infrastructure investment**

Targeted State investment in critical enabling infrastructure including:

- water, sewer and drainage services
- road access and transport connections
- power and telecommunications
- bushfire resilience and evacuation infrastructure.

Without these services, planning approvals alone cannot deliver new housing.

**Industrial land servicing and infrastructure**

Support to service and activate industrial land across the Shire to enable:

- business relocation following fire impacts
- local employment opportunities
- long-term economic resilience.

This includes upgrades to power supply, road access, drainage and essential utilities.

**The benefit**

A coordinated package of planning system relief and infrastructure investment will:

- accelerate rebuilding of homes, farms and businesses
- reduce delays and uncertainty for residents and investors

- support economic recovery and job creation
- strengthen long-term community resilience
- ensure planning decisions support safer settlements in the future.

**Conclusion**

Strathbogie Shire Council is ready to work closely with the Victorian Government to deliver these measures in a way that is practical, transparent and community-focused.

With targeted State support, we can ensure rebuilding happens quickly, safely and in a way that strengthens the long-term resilience of our communities.

**12 Notice of Motion**

Nil

**13 Notice of Rescission**

Nil

**14 Confidential Business**

Nil

**15 Urgent Business**

Nil

**16 Next Meeting**

The next meeting of Strathbogie Shire Council will be held on 21 April 2026 commencing at 4:00 pm at Euroa Community Conference Centre.

**17 Closure of Meeting**

There being no further business the meeting closed at .....pm.