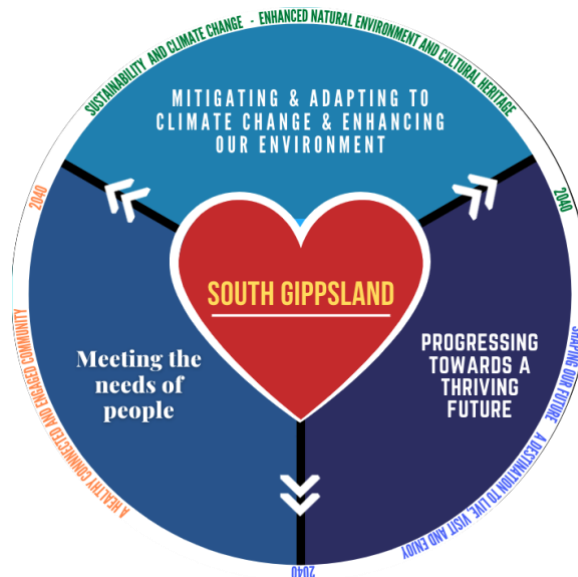




# Just Transition South Gippsland Incorporated Proposal to South Gippsland Shire Council

## Part B

Revised Council Plan 2022-2026  
15 May 2022



## Our Council Plan for a Better Tomorrow

## **A Revised Plan for A Better Tomorrow for South Gippsland**

### **A Plan with a big heart**

At the centre of our Revised Plan is a big heart.

It describes who we are, our vision, strategic direction and the Councillor values that will ensure strong stewardship of the Plan.

In creating this Revised Plan we account for the clearly expressed priorities enunciated by the community in the Community Vision 2040 and the interpretation proffered in the Council Draft Plan.

In order to assist the Council in the Plan's delivery, in our Revised Plan we define just three Strategic Objectives, with 16 Priorities.

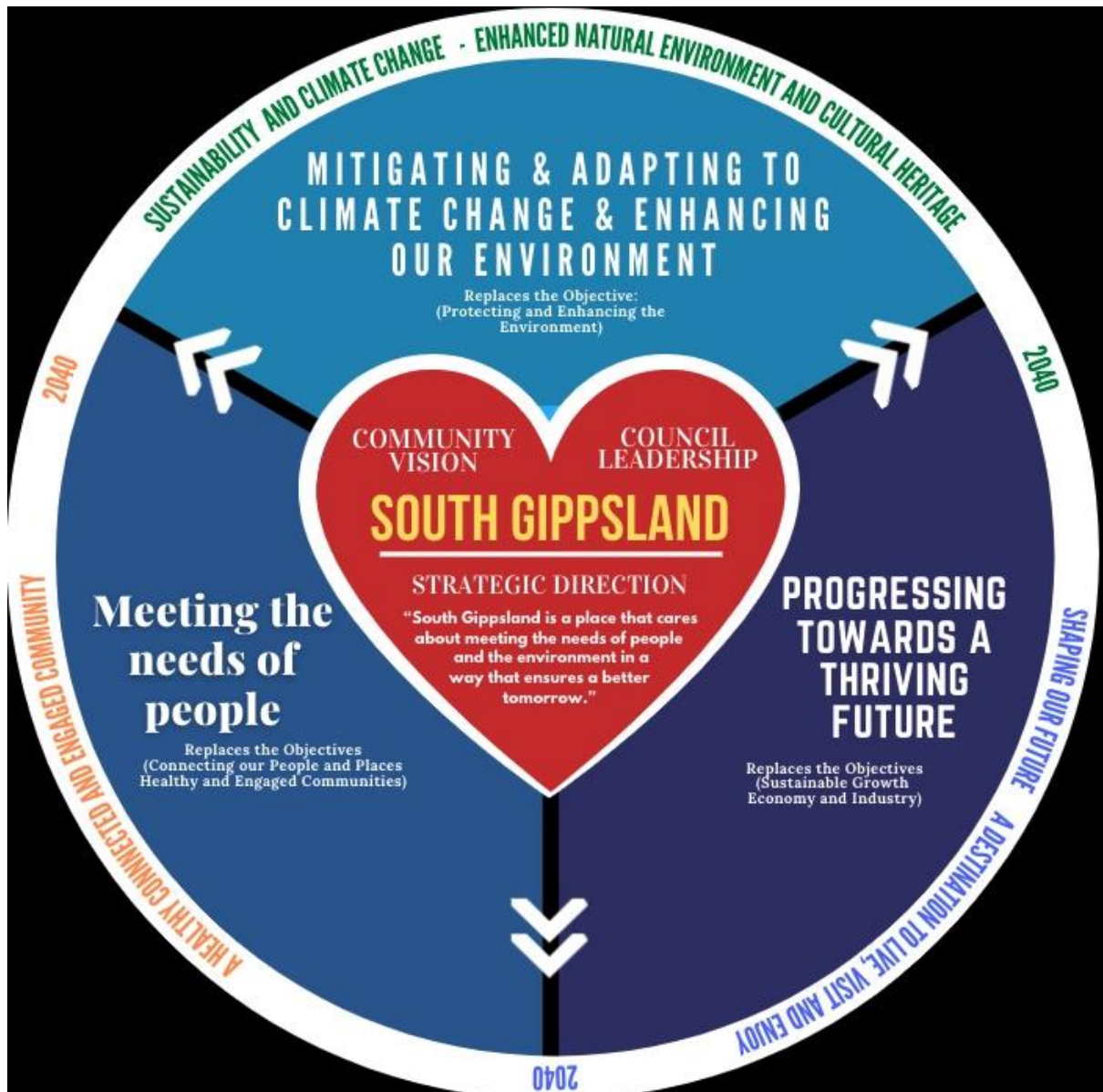
There are a number of items identified in the Draft Plan as Priorities that are BAU service provision items and have been considered accordingly.

In the schematic below we have put South Gippsland, our home, at the heart of the plan. We have identified the Community Vision 2040 and Council Leadership as fundamentally important elements of who we are as a community.

We have critically reviewed the Vision Statement, the Council Vision and the 'Draft Plan' documents. The 'Vision' statement and the Council Vision, except for the last sentence, are just word salads trying to include every possible circumstance and capture every possible feature. Neither are required. A simple Strategic Direction Statement that encapsulates all of the intent, features and circumstances is proposed below.

Building on the Priorities in the Vision, and the Themes and Objectives in the 'Draft Vision' plus the 'We care deeply..' sentiment expressed in the Council Vision, we propose the following Strategic Direction Statement.

***"South Gippsland is a place that cares, meeting the needs of people and the environment in a way that ensures a better tomorrow."***



Revised Council Plan  
Fig 3

### Year 1 - A Year of Appropriation

The Councillors must use the next 12 months to appropriate knowledge and understanding on the key Priorities identified by the Community Vision.

Efforts should be centred around the three Priorities in order to develop impactful, far-reaching strategies and plans, while at the same time making sure existing plans are relevant, aligned and integrated.

### Three Key Strategic Objectives

Radiating from the heart are three key Strategic Objectives that replace the six in the 'Draft Plan'. They are:

Objective 1:

#### **Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change & Enhancing Our Environment**

Incorporates the Objective 'Enhancing the Environment' from the Draft Plan.

Objective 2:

#### **Meeting the Needs of People**

Incorporated into this Objective are the Objectives 'Connecting Our People' and 'Places and Healthy and Engaged Communities.'

Objective 3:

#### **Progressing Towards a Thriving Future**

Incorporated into this Objective are the Objectives 'Sustainable Growth' and 'Economy and Industry.'

The following emphasises the important elements related to Climate Change and the Environment.

#### **Objective 1: Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change & Enhancing Our Environment**

Through the 'Vision', residents of the Shire identified **Climate Change and Sustainability** as its top priority. Independently, the wider community of Gippsland has rated this issue as one of significant concern.

Seventy nine percent (79%) of Australians say that Australia should do much more to reduce its carbon emissions (ABC Vote Compass survey, 2022). This applies to all levels of government and business.

In April 2022, an IPSOS poll found that 83% of Australians are concerned about Climate Change, and 70% consider the country is already being affected by more frequent and extreme natural disaster events.

To improve the Council community engagement score, the Council must substantively address this priority issue identified by the community.

Climate Change is a global issue that knows no boundaries and its impacts are, and will, into the future, be felt locally.

As a reminder of the seriousness of this existential threat, here is a summary of some of the key climate trends for Australia from the latest report from the IPCC, 'Code Red for Humanity'.

- Heat extremes are increasing and cold extremes are decreasing. These trends are projected to continue;

- Heatwaves and droughts will become more frequent and intense;
- Australia is experiencing sea level rises above the global average. Such rises are projected to continue, contributing to increased coastal flooding and shoreline retreat;
- Heavy rainfall and floods are increasing, and are projected to continue to do so;
- The intensity, frequency and duration of fire weather events have already increased, and are projected to increase further, throughout Australia.

The Council will be required to manage damage to its own assets and infrastructure from increased temperatures, sea level rises, shifting rainfall patterns and increasing frequent and or severe extreme weather events, as well as the additional demands placed upon it via damage to private property in the community. (Department of Environment Climate Change Presentation to Victorian Councils, 2020)

As climate impacts escalate, communities will increasingly approach Council for help in responding to and managing such events and associated risks.

The impacts and changes South Gippsland residents are already experiencing are:

- serious localised dislocation with two serious weather events within a six-month period closing roads, energy and telecommunications.
- vulnerabilities with flooding and sea level rises placing over 10% of households at risk.
- Out of our control, we are facing escalating food costs as climate change is dramatically affecting our other food bowls.
- We are experiencing a biodiversity crisis with our wildlife and biodiversity in decline.
- Farmers are facing the impacts of changing weather patterns and the prospects of a carbon tariff if they do not transition to low-carbon farming.

As the level of government closest to the community, the council must show leadership and be at the heart of responding to climate change. The Council must play a critical role in communication with the communities to explain climate impacts and solutions.

**The nexus between greater expenditure on roads, rates, rubbish and a warming planet is incontrovertible.**

Without the Council adopting a mitigation and adaptation climate change strategy, even the most hard-nosed financial management will see Council rates increase due to litigation costs, disappearing land, changes in land values and higher insurance premiums (possibly unaffordable).

Some of these matters will occur within the scope of this current Council Plan.

Climate impacts will affect workers in a range of ways. Council staff are no exception. In particular, heat waves can push the physical and mental capacity of workers beyond what is safe, with outdoor workers and those in environments with poor climate control particularly at risk.

The mental and physical health and safety of council staff, exposed to external conditions and bearing the brunt of climate-induced weather events impacting the community should be a concern to Council.

Road conditions will be impacted by changing and more intense weather events and roads will deteriorate at a faster rate across the Shire requiring increased budgetary expenditure. Road infrastructure, including drainage, landslide mitigation, bridges and road safety structures will also be adversely impacted.

Rubbish will increasingly become a greater and more costly burden. When disasters strike, as experienced by the Council and citizens last year, the Council works closely with communities to cope and respond. The Council was also left with the task of cleaning up the rubbish, and paying for the mess (net \$1.4million 20/21), while delivering the essential services that residents rely on.

Coastal areas are at high risk from climate change with coastline vulnerable to erosion from rising sea levels, and around Australia an estimated 226 billion worth of infrastructure and homes are at risk from coastal inundation at a sea level rise of 1.1 metres. Through strong advocacy and a well-defined Plan, Bass Coast Shire Council has secured a \$12M funding grant to help 'fix' their coast.

Sea-level rise, associated erosion and inundation due to storm surges pose significant challenges to the Council, and these challenges will continue to accelerate.

There are around 1200 to 1500 homes (770 identified by council as potentially subject to sea level rise and tidal surges and another 500 or more potentially subject to riverine inundation (Venus Bay, Port Franklin, Waratah Bay). The Insurance Council of Australia's scientific advisors are already increasing the cost of insurance due to growing climate change risks. Many homes in northern Australia and many homes in towns on riverine systems (Lismore etc) and along the east coast of Australia are subject to increasing chances of having no cost-effective insurance premiums over \$30,000. The 'Draft Plan' is silent on these concerns.

Implementing coastal adaptation measures and policies requires reconciling competing social values, including economic development, scenic amenity, public health and safety, and preservation of natural resources. We note the lack of connection and detail of the Initiatives in relation to this critical matter.

Worsening extreme weather, because of climate change, will incur higher costs for the Council, including the cost of damage to Council infrastructure, rising insurance premiums and increasing liability risks.

This will adversely impact the 'Draft Plan' and Financial plan.

### **Indirect risks and associated costs impacting rates**

The impacts of climate change may cause knock-on, or indirect risk to Council through the decisions or actions of secondary parties. For instance, as risk profiles rise due to climate change, insurers may raise premiums to unaffordable levels or even refuse cover.

For instance, without consistent planning legislation and well-defined roles and responsibilities, councils may find it difficult to refuse maladaptive developments, exposing them to increased litigation.

The types of council assets at risk of climate damage are as diverse as the extreme weather events that threaten them. In addition, the Council manages buildings such as community houses, libraries, town and public halls, transport infrastructure and land that makes up open public spaces such as

foreshores, beaches and parks. Critical infrastructure such as drains and footpaths also fall within the council's responsibility.

Some of the damage to council assets comes not just from the results of disasters, but from responding to them. Roads can be damaged not only as a result of the bushfires, or flooding, but also from firefighting and recovery efforts. Large vehicles, excavators and other equipment used in the firefighting and storm recovery works, driven on unsuitable roads can cause significant damage.

When assets are damaged, or extreme weather events disrupt activities, Council operations can be affected. Moreover, Council's responsibility to the community means that extreme weather events trigger additional operational responsibilities on top of the Council's core service delivery.

### **The rising costs of maintaining council assets and the impact on people.**

Healthy and engaged communities is a key strategic objective in the 'Draft Plan' and being outdoors and engaging in sporting activities is an important objective. This ambition also requires the Council to consider changing weather patterns of the region. Extreme weather can significantly affect the maintenance costs and lifespan of the Council-owned assets and infrastructure.

Droughts and storms can have a particular severe impact on assets such as sports fields. Drought and associated extreme heat can lead to the compaction of playing fields resulting in an increased incident of injuries.

Council staff are frequently required to undertake emergency management roles on top of their normal functions during periods of severe weather events. This stretches Council resources to their limit.

### **Exposure to increased litigation risks**

Council may be exposed to increased litigation from the community if climate risks have not properly been considered in Council decision making.

Council (and in turn the Shire residents), are potentially exposed to liability if the Council fails to consider the likely effects of the climate crisis when exercising a range of statutory responsibilities. Including, across land use planning, development approvals, management of public infrastructure such as drains and roads, management of public lands such as foreshores and parks, management of community facilities, libraries and sporting facilities, public health, water and sewerage services, and emergency planning.

Council is also exposed to potential liability if it fails to disclose information about climate change risks or if it shares incorrect information.

Climate change-related litigation affecting councils is likely to arise under either administrative or tort law.

For an increasing number of more informed people, we as a community are already facing a growing epidemic of despair. Local medical and mental health professionals report an increase in people - including, concerningly, young people - despairing about the situation we find ourselves in. They know the serious risks but deeply fear intransigence and poor leadership will prevail against the science and longer-term interests and imperatives.

This matter is addressable through leadership and demonstrable strong action on climate change.

### **New Major Council Initiative**

Supporting the first objective, **Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change & Enhancing Our Environment**, should be the following Major Council Initiative.

**Create a strategy, framework and database of key information and engage with the local community to, in partnership, build a Community Climate and Environment Action Plan, commencing in 2023-2024.**

The scope of the initiative would include eight of the 10 Priorities currently listed in the 'Draft Plan'. The two remaining initiatives, 'pets and jet skis', should be handled as service operations matters.

In addition, the initiative currently within the Sustainable Growth Objective, "Support our coastal communities to respond to existing and emerging risks to their livability and environmental health." would be included under the new Objective 1.

In order to be fully informed and capable of supporting the above Initiative the Council must:

- have appropriate talent to manage the growing obligations and actions related to Climate Change and the Environment.
- Join the Victorian Climate Resilient Councils Program. (A coordinated state-wide program of support for councils to strengthen their knowledge skills and capacity to embed effective adaptation responses).
- Clear structured process of practical steps.
- Guidance to conduct risk and vulnerability assessments.
- Communities of practice.
- Curated resources and materials and case studies.
- Monitoring evaluation and reporting tool.
- Implement the "How Well Are We Adapting? Tool

(Adaptive capacity is the ability of a system to adjust to climate change to moderate potential damages, take advantage of opportunities and cope with consequences. Organisations with greater adaptive capacity will be better placed to manage the risks and uncertainties posed by climate change and successfully adapt to future challenges)

- Carry out a capacity scan using the [Adaptive Capacity Checklist](#).

(This tool was developed and tailored specifically for the Australian local government sector. It enables Councils to conduct a quick adaptive capacity scan to understand their organisational strengths, opportunities and priorities)

Such engagements will help deliver the highest quality Community Climate and Environment Action Plan.

There are major opportunities for Biodiversity restoration through the adoption for regenerative farming and rewilding of wildlife corridors throughout the Shire. Actions identified by the Council related to the Enhancing the Environment are inexplicably linked to climate change. Therefore, from a holistic perspective, the integration of climate change and the environment is important now and will become increasingly more relevant in the future.



## Objective 2: Meeting the Needs of People

Consolidated under this new Objective are **‘Connecting Our People and Places’** and **‘Healthy and Engaged Communities’**

By example, the current six Priorities related to **‘Connecting Our People and Places’** should be rationalised to two, namely:

- ***Improve the safe and efficient mobility of people, goods and services to, from and around the Shire.***
- ***Advocate for the whole of Shire digital telecommunications coverage and emergency backup planning.***

The Healthy and Engaged Communities could be reduced to four priorities.

The Objective of Connecting People and Places principally focuses on roads. It places great weight on improvement. Critical Council infrastructure, particularly roads and drainage, is and will increasingly be damaged by more frequent and/or severe weather, with state and federal assistance not meeting the rising costs.

We question whether the council, with its agenda to improve rather than ‘maintain’ roads, is being realistic and upfront with the community.

As climate impacts - including coastal erosion, flooding, bushfire and landslip risks, and extreme storms - continue to accelerate, the risks to roads, Council infrastructure and services also increase, as do community needs.

Climate change has been described as the greatest threat to health of the 21st century, while tackling climate change has also been described as the greatest global health opportunity. Council plays a critical role in reducing emissions and supporting communities to adapt to the impacts of climate change, such as increased exposure to bushfire smoke.

Climate Change Act 2017 Section 17 of the Climate Change Act requires certain decision makers to have regard to climate change (listed in Schedule 1 of the Act.4). From the legislation listed in Schedule 1, the only specified decision or action that creates an explicit obligation for local government is the preparation of an MPHWP by a Council under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act.

In the document ‘Tackling climate change and its impacts on health through municipal public health and wellbeing planning, Guidance for local government, 2020’, the Victorian Government outlines actions councils should be taking in relation to their communities’ health.

The ‘tackling climate change and its impact on health’ priority aims to achieve:

- resilient and safe communities that are adapting to the public health impacts of climate change.
- decreased health impacts associated with climate change.
- increased action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and realise health co-benefits.

It outlines the strategic actions Councils should be taking for this priority which are:

- continued emphasis on understanding the science of climate change and assessing the risks of climate change to public health.
- promoting community adaptation to the public health risks associated with climate change.
- assessing the health co-benefits of measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

A Community Climate and Environment Action Plan would be instrumental in helping to deliver on this obligation.

### **Objective 3: Progressing Towards a Thriving Future**

Consolidated under this new Objective are **'Sustainable Growth and Economy and Industry'**

Rewiring Australia reports on the benefits of home electrification for the Monash electorate. Their research shows that Australia, including South Gippsland, can lead the world by electrifying our homes and vehicles and powering them with renewable energy. This is a critical step to a thriving low carbon economy and a thriving future for our region.

Specifically, the benefits to people living within the Monash electorate are:

- \$4,980 - average 2030 household savings per year on energy and vehicle costs
- \$323,000,000 - Total money saved per year (2030) in the community
- 1980 jobs - Direct and indirect jobs created from community savings and installation work.
- 100% reduction in household energy emissions.

Strategies must be developed to capitalise on climate-secure farming, with Southern Gippsland having some 30% of climate-secure farmland in mainland Australia, when the Murray Darling Basin is facing dramatic 40-50% reduction of inflows.

Expansion of small-scale organic farming of vegetables with 2000 small allotments in rural areas.

Promotion of food security through local food production systems including Prom Coast Food Collective and Grow Lightly

Expansion of small-scale organic farming of vegetables with 2000 small allotments in rural areas.

### **Community Engagement**

Considerable work has been undertaken by Just Transition South Gippsland to better define and rationalise the Council Draft Plan into a new proposed Plan. In fact, too much work to detail here.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our proposal in more detail with the Council.

**Just Transition South Gippsland**

**May 15, 2022**

## References

- [Australia in 2030: Possible Alternative Futures](#) by Climate and Health Alliance
- [Climate Ready Victoria - Gippsland](#) by Vic Gov
- [Victoria's path to a net-zero emissions and climate resilient future](#) by Vic Gov
- [The economic impact of heatwaves in Victoria](#) by Vic Gov
- [Protecting Victoria's Coastal Assets](#) by Vic Gov
- [Southern Gippsland Renewable Energy Roadmap](#) by Vic Gov
- [Report Victorians' Perceptions of Climate change](#) by Sustainability Victoria
- [Victoria's Future Climate Tool](#) by Vic Gov
- [Gippsland Climate Change Adaptation: Projects update](#) by DELWP
- [Adapting now creates economic opportunities and stronger communities](#) by Vic Gov
- [Australia's clean economy future: costs and benefits](#) by University of Melbourne
- [Healthy, regenerative and just: Framework for a national strategy on climate, health and well-being for Australia](#) by Climate and Health Alliance
- [Here Comes The Future](#): grade 5-6 and year 7-10 students working on their ideas for climate adaptation in Gippsland supported by Federation University, Gippsland Climate Change Network and DELWP
- [Aim High Go Fast, why emissions need to plummet this decade](#) by Climate Council (especially page 40)
- [What is a Just Transition](#) by Global Citizen
- [See what 3 degrees of warming looks like](#) by The Economist
- [Extreme Weather Communication](#) by Climate Council