



# **Part A**

## **Response to the South Gippsland Shire Council Draft Council Plan 2022-2026**

### **1.0 Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Draft Council Plan 2022-2026 ('Draft Plan').

Just Transition South Gippsland Inc. is a grassroots community movement of South Gippsland residents vitally concerned about the outlook for our home. We also care deeply about the land and the future for South Gippsland and expect Council, through its Strategic Plan, to adequately address that future.

Just Transition members have actively engaged in the various consultation processes organised and undertaken by the Council that preceded the publication of the Community Vision 2040 ('Vision') and the 'Draft Plan'.

This response focuses principally on the 'Draft Plan'.

Having analysed the 'Vision' and the 'Draft Plan', we believe the 'Draft Plan' fails to adequately address the:

- considerable opportunities that a low carbon economy presents for the Shire and its residents.
- requirements of the Local Government Act 2020.
- intent and priorities embodied in the Community Vision 2040.
- short and medium-term initiatives in a clear and concise manner.
- risks that the Shire, as a business, faces from the impacts of climate change.
- legal and moral obligations Councillors and Council have to the residents of South Gippsland and future generations.

### **2.0 Common Ground**

We are in full agreement with the following matters contained in the 'Draft Plan'.

- "We care deeply about the land and the future of South Gippsland."
- Understanding the "need to act now for future generations."
- Protecting and enhancing the environment.
- Recognition and appreciation for the level of community engagement and contribution.
- Acknowledgement of Country and the desire to engage with First Nations people to develop a Reconciliation Action Plan and the participation of Aboriginal children in the Maternal and Child Health service.
- Recognition of the important role of volunteers within communities.
- The desire to have an integrated planning approach, a clear strategy, objectives and plans against which measurement can be applied and reported.

- The Council Values of being “Community and Outward Focused” and “acting in the interests of the whole Shire”, together with a stated desire for “demonstration of good governance, integrity and accountability through decision making that is ethical, informed and inclusive.”
- Advocacy for public and community transport options.
- Supporting and providing inclusive sporting, cultural and social activities as they relate to building healthy communities.
- Education initiatives that will allow a smooth transition into work and between jobs.

Regretfully, beyond the above, there is little else upon which we agree. Within this response and in the interests of making progress, we offer a critique of the ‘Draft Plan’. In a separate document (Refer Part B) we propose a Revised Plan addressing the issues raised within this document.

### 3.0 Councillors’ and Council’s obligations under the Act

The Councillor Code of Conduct in the Local Government Act 2020 (Div. 1, section 9, subsection 2) specifies in its principles of good governance that:

*A Council must in the performance of its role give effect to the overarching governance principles, including:*

- *priority is to be given to achieving the best outcomes for the municipal community, **including future generations**;*
- *the economic, **social and environmental sustainability** of the municipal district, including **mitigation and planning for climate change risks**, is to be promoted;*

Council has made much of the role played by the community in developing both the council’s vision and its four-year plan. In fact, “Community and Outward Focused” is the first Value of the Council.

The ‘Draft Plan’ stresses that its principal “Objectives aim to align with the overarching themes of the *South Gippsland Community Vision 2040*.”

The ‘Vision’ clearly identified **climate change and sustainability** as the number one priority for this council to address. Yet, the ‘Draft Plan’ barely mentions it.

In the 6,358 words comprising the ‘Draft Plan’, climate change - the most pressing issue facing any and all levels of government and the community - is mentioned once, and not as part of an objective, but rather as a general comment.

Council stresses its commitment to community connection and consultation. Therefore the community has every right to be dismayed at how the primary concern described in the ‘Vision’ has been entirely ignored. Twenty-two of the Vision’s 38 priorities were not addressed at all.

Neighbouring Shires such as Bass Coast and Wellington have addressed these challenges with vigour.

Given the Council’s obligation to future generations we notice that, across all of the objectives of the ‘Draft Plan’, there is very little in the way of forward thinking or useful strategies to build a sustainable, flourishing future for the region. Once again, this is contrary to what has been called for in the ‘Vision’.

By example, recognising the four-year horizon of the plan, none of the Council’s Major Initiatives and New Initiatives extend beyond the next 12 months. This point is further addressed later in this submission.

#### 4.0 Incoherent process related to the Draft Plan’s development, missing leadership and the lost future

Section 90 of the Local Government Act 2020 states in relation to the Council Plan that:

- (1) A Council must prepare and adopt a Council Plan for a period of at least the next 4 financial years after a general election in accordance with its deliberative engagement practices.
- (2) A Council Plan must include the following—
  - (a) **the strategic direction** of the Council;
  - (b) **strategic objectives** for achieving the strategic direction;
  - (c) **strategies** for achieving the objectives **for a period of at least the next 4 financial years**;
  - (d) **strategic indicators** for monitoring the achievement of the objectives;
  - (e) **a description of the Council's initiatives and priorities for services, infrastructure and amenity**;
  - (f) any other matters prescribed by the regulations.

The Council Plan, being part of a strategic planning process, must address strategic objectives, strategies, initiatives and priorities, that are additional to the normal service requirement obligations of the Council, as may be modified by such strategic initiatives and actions.

As in the Act, the ‘Draft Plan’ states the “Purpose of this document... is to set out the strategic directions and priorities of the South Gippsland Shire **for the next four years.**” The ‘Draft Plan’ provides details for **2022-2023 only**.

The Council ran concurrent consultation processes around the ‘Vision’ and the ‘Draft Plan’ development. The failure to give opportunity to community representative panel members to consider additional survey material brings into question the integrity of the process as it relates to the ‘Vision’ development and the ‘Draft Plan’s’ integration with the ‘Vision’.

We fail to understand how the ‘Vision’ and the ‘Draft Plan’ can be described as integrated when there is no coherence between the Priorities within the ‘Vision’ and the Strategic Objectives within the ‘Draft Plan’.

There is a failure to clearly and explicitly state a Strategic Direction. Nowhere in the Act is the Council required to define a “Council Vision”. As an “outward focused” Council as described in the “Our Values” section, a clear and concise Strategic Direction based upon the Community vision should be provided, rather than a Council Vision.

None of the listed “Adopted Plans and Strategies” are detailed by version or date, making referencing, currency of the plans and strategies, and their applicability questionable.

While not expressly required under the Act, we would expect that the Council, demonstrating leadership, would have considered existential threats and risks. Such threats and risks may not be either known by or understood by residents and/or Councillors. As noted, the Councillor Code of Conduct in the Local Government Act 2020 requires that “...mitigation and planning for climate change risks, is to be promoted”. This implies that climate change risks must be identified and assessed.

Threats and weaknesses to the community and region come from, but are not limited to:

- global warming and extreme weather events.
- the impacts on Council of possible government legislation, State or Federal over the next four years. (e.g. Victorian Government Response to the Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities, 2021).
- carbon emission targets that are likely to become mandatory before 2030.
- the reluctance of lenders to provide finance to businesses that are not adequately monitoring their climate risks.

We understand that councils in neighbouring shires were offered, as part of incoming councillor inductions, briefings on the critical matter of climate change and its likely impacts on LGAs and residents. We have to wonder whether SGSC Councillors have taken up this opportunity as part of their own induction. If not, it represents a serious oversight and may, in part, explain why climate, despite being identified as a top issue by the community, does not feature with any prominence in the 'Draft Plan'.

The need for expert advice and networking in specific relevant forums is critical for the appropriation of knowledge and expertise enabling the production of high quality specific actionable plans. The evidence suggests this has not been done. By example, spending \$100K to undertake a feasibility study for future pedestrian and bike paths in Venus Bay and Sandy Point, when the Council is already aware (Refer Ordinary Meeting of Council No. 441 - 18 December 2019) of the immediate and future risks of sea inundation, is counter intuitive. Undertaking such a study, while in the same year preparing a Coastal Strategy, suggests a lack of rigour to any form of sequencing or critical path objectives management.

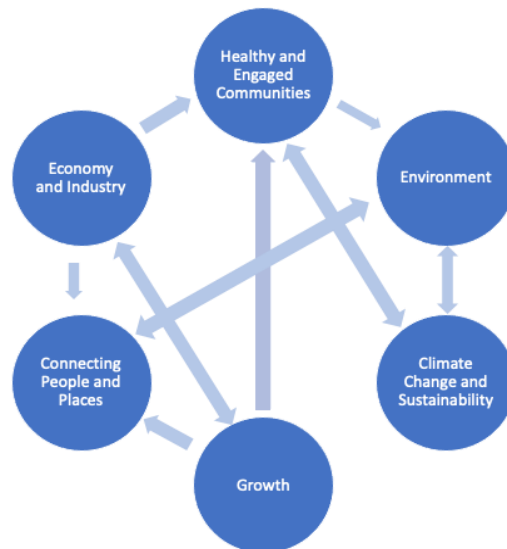
### **Interdependencies of the Priorities**

Detailing objectives and priorities in a linear manner as single items or lists overlooks the critical interdependencies and relationships of these issues.

It allows for simple answers, avoids systems thinking, and settles for single definitions of success. It avoids having to deal with complexity, which is the reality.

For example, growth objectives, as defined in the plan, are incompatible with sustainability and enhancing the environment and will compound the climate crisis.

Using the words "Sustainable Growth" as one of the Objectives is an oxymoron. On a planet with finite resources it is not possible to have sustained year-on-year growth without ecological catastrophe.



Interdependencies of the Objectives  
Fig2

## 5.0 A Plan for the Future?

This is a business-as-usual plan that fails to acknowledge the huge challenges and opportunities that present themselves to our community. Transitioning to a zero-carbon future is inevitable and must be addressed immediately. The 'Vision' demands something bold, innovative and inspiring.

Building from the 'Vision' priorities, the strategic objectives should capitalise on the strengths and opportunities we have within the Shire. Some are available to us now and others require careful consideration and the laying of important foundational steps, the benefits of which may never be seen by this council or the next, but are legacy creating.

Putting aside the plethora of Adopted Plans and Strategies listed in the document, in the 'Draft Plan' there are **89 Priorities, Major and New Initiatives** detailed.

The number of initiatives and actions challenges the very condition of what is important, and therefore a priority.

It is hard to conceive how such an extensive list can be managed, actioned and achieved in 2022-2023, while the Council still maintains its day-to-day service obligations. The prioritisation of initiatives should be revisited to ensure the list of priorities is achievable within the nominated timeframe. In our Revised Plan (Ref Part B) we recommend three Strategic Objectives and a substantial reduction and realignment of the Priorities.

In the majority of cases there is a lack of transparency on targets and timing and there is no baseline to measure progress. In the interests of understanding how and when the particular initiative will be actioned, greater detail should be provided upon which a fair and transparent assessment can be made against outcomes, by the community.

The Integrated reporting framework diagram detailed on page 8 properly identifies, in our view, the correct placement of the Leading with Integrity objective, as the final or foundational objective that underpins the others.

However, we respectfully suggest that the Objective: Leading with Integrity should be removed. Defining "Leading with Integrity" as the number one (of six) Council Plan strategic objectives is puzzling. Integrity is a leadership value, not an objective. We have suggested an appropriate place for the notion of Leadership in our Revised Plan (Refer Part B).

### **Additional Matters to be addressed**

Declutter the 'Draft Plan' by removing all the marketing periphery, such as messages from the Mayor and CEO, the Council Vision and values, and the 'Why this Plan'.

For each strategic objective, provide an action plan, year-by-year, for the next four years, identifying the initiatives and actions to be taken to deliver the relevant Objective. Make the actions in year two to year four visible.

Demonstrate the sequencing of initiatives.

Provide detailed baselines and clear yearly incremental targets.

Take a holistic approach to Council actions by incorporating into the 'Draft Plan' the key initiatives from the various 'Adopted Plans and Strategies' which are currently shown as attachments.

### **6.0 Conclusion**

We recognise that this plan has been framed, with the best of intentions, by a group of largely inexperienced councillors. We would encourage them to lean more heavily on the expertise of their CEO and Municipal Monitor to ensure that their statutory obligations, framed in the Local Government Act 2020, are observed.

That the 'Draft Plan' is effectively silent on the issue of Climate Change and Sustainability is an abrogation of social, financial and moral responsibility.

At the very time when the situation demands that people in leadership positions demonstrate their courage and commitment to those they lead, the Council has ignored the voice of its constituents on the climate crisis.

Councillors should recognise that addressing climate change requires a sustained collective effort. Individuals, households, businesses, industries and the community must work together so that we can prepare, mitigate and adapt to the challenges we face. This work is a priority and it has to start now.

Without strong and rapid intervention there is a significant risk that climate change will undermine our Shire's prosperity, health, stability and way of life.

To minimise this risk, we must decarbonise our economy and move to clean energy sources by 2030. This means carbon emissions must peak within the next few years and then strongly decline. The longer we wait to start reducing carbon emissions, the more difficult and costly these reductions become.

The proposed Revised Plan (Part B) would address this coherently and impactfully.

This decade is critical.

The Council plays a key role in reducing emissions and supporting the community to adapt to the impacts of climate change (Climate Commission, 2014). Unless effective action is taken, the climate may be so irreversibly altered we will struggle to maintain our present way of life.

The choices we make within this decade will shape the long-term future for our children and grandchildren.

**Just Transition South Gippsland**

**15 May 2022**