# East Gippsland Shire Council Submission

15 April 2015

The Hon Jaala Pulford MP

Minister for Regional Development

Minister for Agriculture

Level 16, 8 Nicholson Street,

EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Minister

**Regional economic development strategy and service delivery model review**

East Gippsland Shire Council (Council) would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to review the Department of Economic Development regional service delivery model with a view to delivering the best policies to drive economic growth in regional Victoria.

East Gippsland Shire has been a significant benefactor of Victorian Government support and funding for a number of years and without that support, numerous projects within East Gippsland Shire would not have been delivered. East Gippsland Shire has a strong relationship with the Regional Development Victoria (RDV) Gippsland Office as well as well as in Melbourne and looks forward to a continued and strong partnership.

East Gippsland Shire recognises that it has been successful in leveraging Victorian Government funding from a variety of sources due to the resources the government has provided to develop projects that align with both Council plans and Victorian Government policy. The funding made available for feasibility studies and business plans, coupled with the strong partnership approach with the regional office staff, has led to this close alignment of state and local government objectives. Council would like to see the regional office spend more time in this area to ensure the ongoing delivery of good projects for the region. It is considered essential that the regional office work with Council to understand Council’s strategies and partner to develop strong projects in support of the region.

East Gippsland Shire Council is fully supportive of a regional delivery service model and the ongoing work and future plans to undertake joint business engagement to understand business needs and support opportunities presented. It is considered that productive ongoing business engagement can only be achieved with RDV staff working within the region. Without this local engagement and partnership a full understanding of the issues, challenges and opportunities would be lost.

The recent business engagement program RDV has undertaken in partnership with Crowe Horwath has delivered valuable information and Council looks forward to working with RDV to address the opportunities and challenges raised by the business community in East Gippsland. Council is looking to formalise its ongoing business engagement strategy with RDV to ensure the resources of Council and RDV are maximised to deliver the best outcomes for industry and businesses in the region.

Through its Economic Development Strategy Council has identified five strategic directions to support the sustainability and growth of the East Gippsland economy. These five strategic directions are supported by an action plan that Council’s Economic Development Unit will oversee over the next four years:

1. Open for Business
2. Embracing opportunities
3. Infrastructure
4. Marketing
5. Partnerships, Innovation and Leadership

Council is supportive of policy and programs that will drive the growth in jobs for East Gippsland along with the support our workforce needs in order to back our growth industries (agribusiness, manufacturing, health, and tourism) and as well as our strong performing industries of retail and construction.

One of the challenges with the regional delivery model has been the requirement for all decisions related to investment to be made in Melbourne with the regional office having little to no responsibility in this regard. This has led to the reduced authority of the regional office and has increased the timeframes required for decisions to be made.

Council would like to see appropriate decision making responsibility delegated to the Gippsland regional office. It is believed that this will enable the Gippsland regional office to be more responsive based on the understood needs of the region. It would also significantly reduce the timeframes for funding to be approved and made available.

## Policy Considerations

## Regional City

The Gippsland Regional Growth Plancurrently recognises oneregional City in the plan – being Latrobe.Given that Traralgon is between two and five hours drive away for East Gippsland residents, most East Gippslanders either seek these services from Bairnsdale or travel beyond Latrobe to metropolitan areas to access specialists. The Regional Growth Plan does not therefore support East Gippsland’s aspirations and servicing model and ECSC request the recognition and acceptance of Bairnsdale as a regional city.

In addition the sub-regional networks within the plan do not adequately recognise Bairnsdale’s role as the main city service centre for Eastern Gippsland. Within the Gippsland Regional Growth Plan, the Bairnsdale sub-regional network extends only between Bairnsdale and Paynesville. This is despite urging for the Bairnsdale subregional network as the network that incorporates the townships extending from Bairnsdale to Paynesville and to Lakes Entrance.

Bairnsdale serves an immediate catchment of over 30,000 residents and is the core employment and service node for eastern Victoria. Given this function, Bairnsdale’s role as a regional City should be better recognised in the plan.

As both State and Commonwealth policy seems to be drifting towards regional cities infrastructure and funding preference, it is imperative that Bairnsdale is recognised by both catchment and geography as one of Victoria’s regional cities.

## Climate Change Adaption

As a rural and regional community with major communities and infrastructure along a vast coastline, East Gippsland has had considerable opportunity to examine the complexities of climate change adaptation. Council seeks support from Government to work closely in the development of a range of public/private and broad community partnerships that address innovative approaches to adaptation and mitigation of the effects of climate change. Council believes that Government can provide significant assistance in driving sustainable economic growth through strengthening the planning and delivery of adaptive infrastructure projects and spurring the development of new technologies and markets.

Although an Australian Government area of responsibility, the issue of insurance is critical to the adaptive capacity and resilience of those East Gippsland communities most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Innovative opportunities to provide improved information, planning and exploration of shared risk strategies will assist with both business continuity and forward thinking economic development.

Within a more highly developed systems approach to service delivery, an East Gippsland with a heightened capacity to adapt to climate change, fostered through innovation, broad engagement and participation has much to offer across a broad economic and social landscape, one that will benefit not only its own communities but also others across Victoria.

## Education

East Gippsland recognises that Education is one of the foundations of community wellbeing and economic prosperity. Education is a major driver for any region, for so many different areas of the community.

East Gippsland has developed a “2022 Vision for Education in East Gippsland”. The vision statement and the values and pillars that underpin it represent East Gippsland’s commitment to provide the education foundations that will deliver the region’s aspirations. The region’s key stakeholders commit to advocate strongly on behalf of the region and to actively facilitate regional, cross sectoral connections and educational partnerships to deliver the expressed vision.

This vision statement demonstrates East Gippsland’s collective commitment to advancing education to achieve economic development, community well-being and personal achievement outcomes.

Through the commitment to and delivery of the education vision East Gippsland will be recognised as a region that champions leadership and the role that education plays in attracting and retaining business, families, individuals and industry to the region and supporting their endeavours.

The vision will underpin planning, partnerships, pathways and participation resulting in coordinated action across and through all our education sectors - early years, middle years, later years, transition beyond school into vocational training or tertiary education and lifelong learning – and with the business and community sectors across East Gippsland.

A key plank of the vision is the need for the East Gippsland community to broaden and raise the educational aspirations of our young people in order to achieve our long term education vision.

East Gippsland school leavers have one of the lowest rates of participation in higher education in Victoria at 22% in 2014. The East Gippsland Higher Education focus group, brokered by the LLEN, aims to increase participation in higher education.

This group has identified that lack of aspiration and for many of those with the aspiration the financial inability to take up their university offer as key barriers.

Although our youth unemployment consistently remains on par with the state average, it is of concern that nearly 22% of our young people who completed Year 12 in 2013 were in part-time employment (On Track 2014). This is neither a successful nor sustainable destination outcome. Many of these will be deferees trying to earn enough to meet the eligibility criteria for Independent Youth Allowance, which will be unachievable unless the young person has more than one job. Also of concern is the lack of vocational pathway opportunities associated with part-time employment such as traineeships.

Principals and Careers Practitioners across our region are concerned about the lack of breadth of educational aspiration in our students, their families and our broader community which may be contributing to these post-school transition outcomes of our young people. This is coupled with the lack of role models in some communities across the East Gippsland region.

Although there is acknowledgement of the value of existing interventions and programs available to students in their later years, the lack of a coordinated approach across the region translates into failure to make the best use of scarce resources for our smallest and remotest schools. Many educators and community leaders are raising the concern that interventions to build aspiration may be more effective if the interventions are targeted earlier and engage families more.

Council would like to advocate for policy to strengthen the collaboration and the service delivery model to ensure the educational outcomes in the region do not continue to fall behind other large regional communities. Greater investment in regional and rural delivery, that champions flexibility and innovation, will go some way to addressing key educational outcome measures. Matching economic development with a more skilled and aspirational cohort of learners will provide greater opportunity and stability for those seeking to build a future within East Gippsland.

On behalf of East Gippsland Shire Council, thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback to this review of the current service delivery model to drive economic development in the regions.

Council looks forward to seeing the results of the review and the improved outcomes this should bring for a wide range of stakeholders.

Yours sincerely

Gary Gaffney

**Chief Executive Officer**