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Via email to: [infrastructure@sa.gov.au](mailto:infrastructure@sa.gov.au)

## Re: 20 Year Infrastructure Strategy Discussion Paper – Alexandrina Council Submission

Alexandrina Council is one of the State's largest regional Councils, as well as one of the State's fastest growing communities. We believe a focus on infrastructure by all three levels of government is essential to both the wellbeing of our community, but also the prosperity of the State; and we ask that particular attention be given to the 'regions', particularly growing regions like ours, in any strategy development. We also encourage the promulgation of partnerships across government so the burden of infrastructure development is not borne by ratepayers alone in modest, regional communities.

The following table provides a snap shot of Alexandrina Council and what our district contributes to the Fleurieu region and the State of South Australia.

### ALEXANDRINA AT A GLANCE ...

- Federal Electorate of Mayo
- Home of 'Storm Boy' and the Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth
- One of the largest regional Councils in SA with approximately \$50 million annual turnover
- \$1 billion local economy driven by agriculture, tourism, health and social services
- Strong social capital with 28% volunteerism rates
- State Electorates of Finnis, Heysen, Hammond and Mawson
- Home of the SA Wooden Boat Festival at the iconic Goolwa Wharf
- Population of 27,000 residents at average growth rate of 1.3% (sea change and tree change impacts)
- Ageing region with a median age of 51 years (being 11 years above the State average of 40 years).
- High seasonal visitation to pristine natural attractions and appealing destinations

### *Summary of Alexandrina's 20 Year Infrastructure Needs*

To demonstrate the importance and criticality of infrastructure to Alexandrina's future, we have summarised our imminent, priority infrastructure needs below (a few of which are already supported by the State Government, such as an aged care precinct in Strathalbyn).

#### **HEALTH**

- Co-designed Aged Care Precinct in Strathalbyn
- Career ambulance stations in Goolwa and Strathalbyn

#### **TRANSPORT**

- Overtaking lanes:
  - Strathalbyn to Goolwa Road
  - Goolwa to Mount Compass Road
- Middleton Bypass – South Coast Freight Route
- Duplication of Victor Harbor Road
- Park & Ride facilities at Strathalbyn and Mount Compass supported by improved public transport access

#### **TOURISM/EVENTS**

- A strategic focus on Murray River Tourism in particular the development of a Visitor Information / Interpretive space at the mouth of the Murray River (Sugars Beach)
- Re-development of the Goolwa Wharf Precinct to showcase the Lower Murray River, Coorong and Murray Mouth geographical areas, in particular, the connection to country, heritage value and environmental protections afforded to the area.
- Goolwa Beach Tourism Precinct
- Investment in Tourism Infrastructure in National Parks in particular Lawari Conservation Park on Hindmarsh Island
- Development of a state-wide Wayfinding & Information Strategy for tourism on state highways that includes:
  - Review of Regularity signage
  - Provision of Regional Information and directions to destinations
  - Provision of linkages to Digital Strategies and platforms.

#### **ARTS**

- The development of Arts & Cultural precincts in regional areas
- Continue investment in showcasing South Australia's Iconic Artists such as the Hans Heysen Gallery at Hahndorf with the establishment of a David Dryden Art Gallery in Strathalbyn

#### **EDUCATION**

- A State High School is required in Goolwa
- Support for Eastern Fleurieu School initiatives and infrastructure needs

#### **SPORT/RECREATION**

- Bike Trails – South Coast Touring Route
- Continued investment in Sporting Infrastructure including the Goolwa Sports Complex and Strathalbyn Sport and Recreation Precinct

#### **WASTE**

- Materials Recycling Facility South of Adelaide to cater for the Fleurieu Peninsula, Onkaparinga, Southern Metro Suburbs

## ENVIRONMENT

- Climate Change Adaptation Programs to ensure infrastructure is developed to deal with Climate change
- Adaptation pathway developed for the future of the Barrages in agreement with Basin governments
- Establishment of a Lower Lakes wetland ecology research centre

*Proposed question: What strategies should the Government adopt to ensure the necessary infrastructure is in place so our regions can thrive?*

We note the importance of the regions in South Australia, particularly those experiencing strong and consistent population growth, such as Alexandrina, and should be factored into any 20 Year Infrastructure Strategy (as well as Adelaide itself).

The key priority driving government investment in infrastructure should be the sustainable creation of ongoing employment opportunities which harness the unique strengths and demographic service needs of the regions. This can be achieved through a number of areas such as education, health services, affordable housing, investing in transport routes and public transport options, and key infrastructure projects that will promote tourism, jobs and private sector investment. Investment is also needed to help industry and communities adapt to, and harness the opportunities associated with, a changing climate.

Regional councils build and maintain a significant amount of infrastructure including roads, wastewater schemes, open space and playgrounds as examples. Many of these regions also need to service two to three times their population during peak holiday periods. This adds significant pressure to these facilities with respect to maintenance and maintaining a balance in the provision of services for residents and visitors. Statistical data extrapolated from the census, from which a lot of external funding is based, is gathered outside of these peak periods and therefore for councils with high, second-home ownership, having absentee land owners that are not accounted for in the census data is extremely problematic.

In 2018-19, Alexandrina Council received \$1.424m in financial assistance grants, similar to a number of metropolitan Councils. To compare, as a regional Council, Alexandrina has obligations that metropolitan Councils do not (such as maintaining local roads, waste water management and stormwater) – which ultimately affects the bottom-line burden for the ratepayer. In addition, the high seasonal visitation (which is not taken into account in formulas based on per capita) means that the Alexandrina ratepayer must fund additional capacity in infrastructure to cope with ‘spikes’ in population growth. The net effect is that metropolitan Councils have a greater ability to offset rate increases with Financial Assistance Grants. This often leads to confusion and complaints from ratepayers with property in Alexandrina and metropolitan Adelaide who cannot understand why their rates are higher in a regional Council with a perceived reduction in services.

Council has also been part of a group of Councils within the Mount Lofty Ranges seeking to obtain World Heritage Listing to acknowledge the systematic colonisation story of the region and how that has influenced the settlement patterns and agricultural activities evident today. It has been identified that through this listing significant economic returns can be achieved particularly through marketing and branding of products and tourism.

Our regional areas are where a significant proportion of our food is produced. For Alexandrina Council, primary industries are the second biggest employer with premium food and wine experiences central to our tourism offering. Investment in roads and transport routes are critical to the ongoing viability of these enterprises for not only freight but for farm machinery and tourists to easily and safely travel through the area. Appropriate planning policy is vital to protecting our food bowl, promoting economic development and retaining the unique features which attract residents and visitors to our region.

Ultimately the priorities that are set need to be targeted within a whole of government policy approach that should be informed by regional strategies such as these. The focus should therefore be on those areas that will assist in sustaining communities into the future. Connectivity through road infrastructure and technology are areas that will enable good accessibility for those living and working within the regions and to better service visitors through the regions. Opening up good education opportunities provides all age demographics with options but in particular can encourage younger people to stay within their region.

Government plays a key role in supporting and funding regional infrastructure. This can be achieved through partnership funding programs which work particularly well within the health sector providing holistic benefits to not only the individual but communities as a whole. Other funding through grant programs and financial assistance that is accessible to the public and private sector enables key infrastructure projects to be achieved such as aged care facilities. There may also be opportunity to explore other incentives for attracting investment into the regions through offering land tax or payroll tax relief.

Government should also take a lead role in setting policies where there needs to be a state and national approach in such areas as water security and climate change. Although this can be addressed at a local level there needs to be a state and national commitment to help drive programs. If not addressed, communities will continue to be vulnerable to the impacts of climate change particularly the Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth and coastal localities as well as industries critical to our economic wellbeing such as agriculture and tourism.

In a constrained funding environment, public infrastructure spend should seek to achieve holistic and cross-functional outcomes wherever possible. Infrastructure design should give genuine consideration to community wellbeing and environmental sustainability as well as economic prosperity. A multi-objective design ethos can make each dollar work harder thus maximising value for money and making efficient use of the taxpayer and ratepayer contribution.

*Proposed question: What challenges and opportunities does South Australia have in supporting our cultural, sporting and tourism activities to ensure our global competitiveness and vibrancy as a location?*

One of the key issues for those regions that are key tourist destinations such as Alexandrina Council is the sustainability of businesses outside of peak tourist periods. Without a strong permanent population base, businesses can struggle through the winter months. If they are unable to stay open this takes some services away from local people who then have to access them elsewhere. To that end Council always ensures that it has a number of 'shovel-ready' projects that are designed to help promote year-round population growth, business and tourism within the area. This includes:

- Improved tourism and boating infrastructure which capitalises on our status as the gateway to the iconic Lakes and Coorong region. Current investment-ready projects include revitalising Goolwa Wharf, creating an iconic tourism destination at Sugars Beach, increasing capacity of the Goolwa Beach Tourism Precinct, creation of the Alexandrina Business Enterprise Centre plus a number of foreshore upgrades at Clayton Bay.

- Streetscape, parking and traffic improvements which improve productivity, safety and/or liveability. Current investment-ready projects include the sealing of Dry Plains Road, extension of the Encounter Bikeway along Knightly Road in Goolwa, upgraded access to the Goolwa Waste & Recycling Depot, scoping of a Middleton Freight Bypass and construction of Stage 2 of the River Angas Shared Use Path in Strathalbyn.
- Improved sporting and recreation facilities. The purpose of these projects is to encompass activities for all ages, support and attract new and existing residents, and enhance tourism appeal for visitors to the region. Current investment-ready projects include the Goolwa Sporting Complex, Strathalbyn Town Hall and Strathalbyn Dog Park.

With an existing reputation as a leader in renewable energy, and an emerging Green Adelaide brand, climate resilience could also become, with targeted investment, a key South Australian competitive advantage for attracting greater overseas and city-to-regional tourism and migration. This is of particular relevance to the Fleurieu Peninsula, where our favourable climate, proximity to Adelaide and unique coastal/agrarian lifestyle is likely to increase our status as a location of choice for residents and tourists alike, in contrast to other areas of the State where liveability is likely to suffer more dramatically in a changing climate. In this context, a focus on climate ready infrastructure could help deliver affordable living for our citizens, make our liveability a drawcard for tourists, students and skilled workers, and attract investment in emerging and disruptive sectors like renewable energy and the circular and purpose economies.

*Proposed question: What options are there to establish a reliable, affordable decarbonised energy system in South Australia?*

State Government could consider investment in regional community energy hubs as a model to (1) unlock the potential of community energy projects to address energy equity, reliability and affordability, (2) providing energy education and services to households and business and (2) drive investment in low carbon, climate ready development. The Resilient Hills & Coast Climate Adaptation Partnership have been investigating a regional community energy model for the Hills and Fleurieu region.

### **Summary**

Ultimately, what Alexandrina seeks from State and Federal government is co-investment in infrastructure which will drive and support regional visitation, population growth and economic development, all of which have far-reaching benefits for regional communities. Our top priorities with respect to infrastructure investment are aged care facilities, roads, and project funding for public infrastructure which will facilitate local population, business and tourism growth.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comment and look forward to reviewing the outcomes of the consultation.

Yours sincerely

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**Glenn Rappensberg**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

cc: Mr David Basham MP, Member for Finnis  
 Mr Josh Teague MP, Member for Heysen  
 Mr Adrian Pederick MP, Member for Hammond  
 Hon Leon Bignell MP, Member for Mawson