

MEDIA RELEASE



Inquiries: Geoff Turner, Executive Officer: 0419 030 314

LOCAL SOLUTIONS TO NATIONAL CONCERNS

Wednesday, 18 June 2025

Some of the most critical issues facing Regional Australia will be raised by the Murray River Group of Councils at the nation's premier Local Government forum.

The Murray River Group – made up of Mildura, Swan Hill, Gannawarra, Loddon, Campaspe and Moira Shire Councils – has had seven motions accepted for discussion by the National General Assembly of the Australian Local Government Association to be held in Canberra 24 – 27 June 2025.

The National General Assembly provides a national platform for Local Government to address national priorities and advocate to the Federal Government on critical issues facing the sector.

This year's theme is National Priorities Need Local Solutions, and the Murray River Group has focused on seven key areas – housing, energy, water, roads and bridges, resilient infrastructure, swimming pools renewal and Local Government financial sustainability. The Murray River Group motions are:

- 1. Housing** – This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to provide multi-year, regional housing development infrastructure funding for investment into essential trunk infrastructure such as sewerage, water, drainage, electricity, roads and communications, to facilitate residential housing development in regional and rural towns where the market is not delivering the needed housing opportunities.
- 2. Energy** – This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to ensure that communities hosting new energy generation, transmission and distribution infrastructure required for Australia's energy transition, directly benefit from new investment to support job growth and in infrastructure upgrades ensuring that the regional communities directly impacted by it are not left behind in the race to transition our energy grid.
- 3. Water** – This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to put Basin communities at the heart of Basin Plan delivery and future water



Mildura Rural City Council



SWAN HILL
Rural City Council



GANNAWARRA
Shire Council



LODDON
SHIRE



Campaspe
Shire Council



moira
SHIRE

reform by ceasing the damaging water purchase programs in our irrigation districts that will lead to job losses, put food production in our region at risk and will add to the cost of living crisis and instead engaging with communities and Local Governments to deliver a long term sustainable future for food growing and manufacturing in the Basin, and to ensure improved environmental outcomes for all the Basin's valued riverine and floodplain ecosystems.

- 4. Roads and Bridges** – This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to provide an additional road maintenance and restoration fund that invests directly in Local Government to fund the road infrastructure repair deficit road and allow local councils to catch up on the road and bridge repair backlog facing councils across the Country.
- 5. Resilient Infrastructure** – This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to establish a regional infrastructure resilience fund that will provide local councils with dedicated funding to identify and invest in resilient local infrastructure to ensure communities are better protected and connected even in the face of increasingly severe and frequent weather events.
- 6. Swimming Pools** – This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to establish a dedicated national fund to support Local Government to replace and upgrade public swimming pools by providing financial assistance to local councils for the repair, replacement, and upgrading of aging public swimming pool facilities.
- 7. Financial Assistance Grants** – This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to increase the Financial Assistance Grants to Local Government in even increments over the next ten financial years until the total funding to Australian amount is restored to 1% of the Australian Government tax revenue by the 2035/36 financial year.

Murray River Group chair Cr Dan Straub, Mayor of Loddon Shire Council, said the motions highlighted critical issues in Local Government with national implications – which are issues affecting communities in northern Victoria and so were in line with current Murray River Group advocacy priorities.

“Wherever you go in Australia you'll find these issues in one form or another being grappled with and debated at a Local Government level and across our own communities this is no exception,” Cr Straub said.

“We are focused on practical, solutions to these problems that will make a difference locally.

“A lack of housing availability is stifling job growth and business expansion in our region according to employers across our council areas.



"Across the Murray River Group region energy projects and transmission line upgrades will impact our communities substantially over the next few years while much of the benefit will accrue to those living in the critical load centres of our capital cities – it is essential our communities don't miss out.

"Open market, non-strategic, water buy backs are a blunt instrument that will increase the pressure on irrigation districts and on irrigators, inevitably pushing up the cost of living for all Australians, especially with the current dry conditions.

"Despite increases in the Roads to Recovery federal funding, long term consistent underfunding of Local Government means that there is a significant backlog of road maintenance across the country affecting safety and productivity.

"Increasing frequency and severity of weather events across Australia means fire and flood recovery is a fact of life for councils. A funding stream that provides local councils with the resources to construct to a quality that will be resistant to damage will protect our local communities and will save the Commonwealth and State Governments – and ultimately all Australian taxpayers – millions of dollars in repair bills.

"The 1956 Olympics left a legacy of swimming pools across Australia that left an indelible impression on our national identity, but these pools are reaching the end of their effective lives and many require urgent investment while Local Government has for many years now wrestled with unaffordable running costs and ongoing maintenance."

"30 years ago, Federal Financial Assistance Grants to Local Government were worth 1% of total tax revenue. No, it is down to less than half of one percent. Councils are faced with having to cut services even as our community need is growing. Increasing Local Government grant funding would enable us to deliver local solutions and the services our communities rightly expect.

As well as raising the motions during the National General Assembly, the Murray River Group will also meet with Federal Local Government Minister the Hon. Kristy McBain.

"We look forward to meeting with the Minister and continuing the discussion around issues that concern our communities," Cr Straub said.

"As the closest level of government to local communities, it is vital that we continue to hold these conversations with both Federal and State governments so we can continue to successfully advocate for those communities."

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Mildura Rural City Council





The Murray River Group of Councils will be heading to Canberra to advocate for local solutions to national problems at the Australian Local Government Association National General Assembly, 24 – 27 June 2025.



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