

MRGC Terms of Reference

As agreed by MRGC, 5 December 2024

Terms of Reference

1. Introduction

This Terms of Reference document sets out the agreed aims, purpose and operating framework for the Murray River Group of Councils (MRGC).

2. Background

The MRGC was established in 2006 by six local councils in northern Victoria who identified issues shared by their communities across the region, sought to improve the effectiveness of their advocacy by working collaboratively.

Councils recognised that they could advocate on behalf of their communities more effectively by working together than each member Council can do individually.

Since then, MRGC has provided members with a forum for informed discussion on issues of regional importance. The Group's size and well established relationships mean common issues can be articulated quickly and shared positions can be reached and agreed upon.

MRGC has developed a reputation as a reliable partner with a track record of putting the interests of its regional communities first.

MRGC is committed to working constructively with the State and Federal Governments and other stakeholders across the region, to find solutions to the challenges facing our towns, natural environment, industries and communities.

3. Vision

"A strong voice for a vibrant region"

4. Mission Statement

To grow the prosperity and liveability of our communities by being a respected advocate.

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5. Purpose

The primary purpose of the Murray River Group of Councils is to advocate effectively on behalf of and in the interests of northern Victorian communities with clear agreed positions on issues of regional importance to help grow the prosperity and liveability of the region.

To do this, the Murray River Group of Councils specifically:

- provides a forum for informed discussion on issues of regional importance to member Councils
- advocates strongly to State and Federal Governments with an agreed single voice on these issues in the interests of their communities
- acts as a single point of engagement and contact for governments, Councils and other stakeholders to disseminate information, discuss and respond to issues and initiatives on a regional or shared basis
- is a reliable partner that works constructively with Governments and other partners to find solutions to the issues facing our communities and our region
- supports member Councils for the good of the region
- appoints representatives to other bodies as and when required
- works to build partnerships with other Councils, Groups of Councils or regional stakeholder organisations where it is of clear benefit to both parties

6. Membership

Membership of the MRGC comprises:

- Mildura Rural City Council
- Swan Hill Rural City Council
- Gannawarra Shire Council
- Loddon Shire Council
- Campaspe Shire Council
- Moira Shire Council

Each Council is represented by the Mayor and the CEO and has one vote on matters where voting is required.

Member Councils are requested to provide an appropriate authorising environment to enable Mayors to make decisions about and agree advocacy positions and other applicable other matters related to the MRGC.

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Membership is by agreement of the Group and is open to northern Victorian Councils with shared interests. Applications for membership will be considered by the Group and requires a unanimous vote of the members. .

Any new member admitted to the Group will be subject to this Terms of Reference.

Should a member council vote to withdraw from the MRGC, the Executive Officer shall be notified in writing and this shall be tabled at the next Mayors and CEOs meeting.

The Council withdrawing from the MRGC shall be liable for its financial commitments for 12 months from the time of notification as per the financial formula set out in these Terms of Reference.

Should the membership of the MRGC change the financial formula shall be recalculated accordingly.

Should the members of the MRGC chose to discontinue the Group, the members shall be entitled to a portion of any net assets held by the lead agency and these shall be distributed in accordance with the formula.

7. MRGC Chair

The Chair of the MRGC will be the Mayor of the Council which holds the Chair for that year. This rotates between member Councils at the first meeting after the conclusion of all member councils mayoral elections – currently the December meeting - progressing from east to west in the following order:

- Moira Shire Council
- Campaspe Shire Council
- Loddon Shire Council
- Gannawarra Shire Council
- Swan Hill Rural City Council
- Mildura Rural City Council

Or otherwise by agreement and resolution of the Group

The role of the Chair is to:

- Lead the MRGC for the year
- Chair Mayor and CEO meetings according to the agenda
- Represent the MRGC publically
- Be the principal spokesperson for the MRGC

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- Advocate the agreed MRGC priorities
- Lead MRGC delegations meetings
- Approve correspondence, briefing notes, media releases, joint submissions, agendas and minutes

The Chair will provide a report on the year's activities to the September meeting of the Mayors and CEOs.

The role and responsibilities of the Chair are further described in detail in the MRGC agreed Role and Responsibilities of the Chair document (Appendix 1)

8. Meetings

MRGC will hold meetings on the first Thursday of each month except January, with Mayor and CEO meetings quarterly and CEO meetings in the intervening months.

8.1. MRGC Mayor and CEOs Meetings

The Mayors and CEOs will meet together regularly throughout the year as the primary forum for decisions and consideration of all matters by the MRGC.

MRGC Mayor and CEO meetings will be held quarterly on the first Thursday of March, June, September and December or at such alternative agreed times and intervals throughout the year that best suits all members, in accordance with a meetings calendar agreed annually.

MRGC Mayor and CEO meetings provide the forum for strategic discussion, information sharing and consideration of key issues and advocacy positions. They provide the forum for the agreement of advocacy priorities, positions and strategies.

They provide a mechanism for building, strengthening and maintaining relationships between member Councils and with key stakeholders.

Key stakeholders will be invited to participate in meetings where their presence will facilitate discussion, engagement and will further MRGCs priorities.

Where a member (Mayor or CEO) is unable to attend a meeting a relevant delegate from that Council (eg: a Councillor for a Mayor, a Director for a CEO) may attend in that member's place.

Quorum for meetings will be a simple majority of all members (Mayors and CEOs).

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In the absence of the Chair, the meeting will select a Chair from among the Mayors present for the duration of the absence.

Decisions will be made by consensus wherever possible. Where consensus cannot be reached simple majority will resolve the issue with each Council having one vote. The Chair will have the authority of a casting vote if required.

Mayor and CEO meetings will be hosted by each member Council with the meeting venue rotating from east to west in the following order (unless varied by agreement):

- Moira Shire Council
- Campaspe Shire Council
- Loddon Shire Council
- Gannawarra Shire Council
- Swan Hill Rural City Council
- Mildura Rural City Council

An annual schedule of meetings will be agreed by the Group and distributed to members in advance of the new Mayoral term.

The Chair may convene extraordinary meetings or alter the meeting timing or venue where necessary or where requested by members.

8.2. MRGC CEOs Meetings

MRGC CEOs will meet regularly to progress the work of the MRGC.

CEO Meetings provide a forum for partnership building between member Councils, policy development, consideration of potential advocacy positions, and management of MRGC business.

MRGC CEO Meetings will take place on the first Thursday of the alternate months to the Mayor and CEO meetings: February, April, May, July, August, October and November or at such alternative agreed times and intervals throughout the year that best suits all members, in accordance with a meetings calendar agreed annually.

The CEO meetings will be chaired by the CEO of the Council holding the chair for that year (The Lead CEO)

Where a CEO is unable to attend a meeting a relevant delegate from that Council (eg: Director) may attend in the member's place.

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Quorum for meetings will be a simple majority of CEO members.

In the absence of the Chair, the meeting will select a Chair from among the CEOs or delegates present for the duration of the absence.

Decisions will be made by consensus wherever possible. Where consensus cannot be reached simple majority will resolve the issue with each Council having one vote, and the Chair having the authority of a casting vote.

8.3. Ground Rules for MRGC Meetings:

- MRGC meetings start on time and finish on time
- Agenda Papers will be distributed 7 days prior to the meeting to enable them to be read in advance of the meetings for informed discussion
- Members will all participate and contribute – each member is given opportunity to voice their opinions
- Members will actively listen to what others have to say, seeking first to understand, then to be understood
- Members will follow-up on actions assigned to them , complete them on time and report back as required
- MRGC meetings are a forum where feedback is given and received openly, honestly and respectfully in a constructive manner
- MRGC will use data to make decisions (whenever possible)
- MRGC is open to continually improving meeting processes and is open to member suggestions for change

8.4. Meeting Secretariat

The MRGC Executive Officer will provide secretariat support to the MRGC with support from staff at the member Council holding the Chair that year.

The Executive Officer assist the Chair with meeting arrangements, correspondence, information management any other arrangements related to the operations of MRGC meetings.

The chairing Council will provide support to the Executive Officer including administrative and communications / media support if required.

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Executive Officer employment arrangements are a matter for the Group and will be arranged in such a way as best suits and supports the operation of the Group at the time.

8.5. Meeting Records

A record of all meeting proceedings will be kept and made available to all members.

Agenda papers for all meetings will be circulated one week in advance of the meeting.

Draft Minutes for all meetings will be reviewed by the Chair and then circulated to the Group within one week of the meeting.

Draft Minutes will be agreed at the next meeting and signed or otherwise recorded as being the final record of the meeting and made available to all members.

9. Advocacy

MRGCs advocacy priorities, will be agreed by the Mayors and CEOs either at a quarterly or special meeting of the MRGC or approved by email.

Any member may propose an advocacy topic for discussion by the Group. Advocacy topics shall be issues of regional importance, shared by all or a majority of member councils or their communities.

All advocacy activities are supported by the Executive Officer and by additional member Council resources where deemed appropriate and agreed by members

All political engagement meetings and advocacy delegations will be held in accordance with MRGC's agreed Guidelines for Formal Delegations document (Appendix 2)

10. Finances

The MRGC is not an incorporated entity and as such, one member Council will act as the lead agency for employment, procurement, contracting and financial

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management. Each Council will make financial contributions to the operation of the Group according to the following agreed formula.

The total annual operating budget will be agreed each year by the Group. 1/3 of the total budget will be apportioned equally to each member Council. The remaining 2/3 of the budget will be apportioned on a per capita basis as follows:

- Moira Shire Council 18%
- Campaspe Shire Council 24%
- Loddon Shire Council 5%
- Gannawarra Shire Council 6%
- Swan Hill Rural City Council 13%
- Mildura Rural City Council 34%

Member Councils will be invoiced on a quarterly basis in advance by the lead agency.

At the time of these Terms of Reference, Loddon Shire Council acts as lead agency for the MRGC and as host Council for the Executive Officer position.

The Executive Officer will present a quarterly financial report to the MRGC and will complete an annual financial statement that will be reviewed by the Mayors and CEOs and a proposed annual budget that will be agreed by Mayors and CEOs.

11. Conflict of Interest

Members are expected to manage any conflicts of interest under the terms of the Local Government Act 2020

12. Amendments

The terms of reference may be reviewed periodically as required. They may be altered at any correctly convened Mayor and CEO meeting to ensure they meet the current needs of the MRGC.

These Terms of Reference (version 3 – December 2024) were considered and approved at the meeting held on 5 December 2024 at Echuca.

APPENDIX 1 – Role of the Chair

The Role of the Chair

The Chair of the Murray River Group of Councils (MRGC) is the Mayor of the lead council.

The Group rotates the lead council each year in accordance with the agreed Terms of Reference.

The Chair leads and co-ordinates the efforts of the MRGC so that the Group continues as a respected regional advocate and presents a strong, unified voice on regional issues to Governments.

At the commencement of the Chair's term, the Chair will agree the scope of work for the year including potential meeting topics, guests, advocacy activities – meetings, media campaigns, events and tours, and any other activities aligned with the Group's priorities.

The Chair will be supported by and will engage regularly with the Executive Officer and lead CEO to progress the work of the MRGC.

Chairing Meetings

The MRGC Chair will chair the quarterly Mayor and CEO meetings in accordance with the agreed Terms of Reference and MRGCs Ground Rules for Meetings.

The Chair is responsible for setting Mayor and CEO meeting agendas in advance, directing the selection of topics and guests to align with member councils' interests and the Group's agreed priorities, and approving the agenda papers prior to distribution.

The Chair ensures relevant agenda papers are prepared, agreed and distributed in advance that inform members to support good decision making.

In meetings, the role of the Chair is to keep discussions on topic, respectful, productive, and aligned with the agenda. The chair will ensure meetings adhere to the agenda and are conducted in a timely manner.

The Chair will facilitate good decision making by ensuring members views are heard, debate is constructive, and decisions are made by consensus or by majority agreement. Where necessary the Chair will cast a deciding vote based on their judgement of the best interests of the MRGC region and our communities.

APPENDIX 1 – Role of the Chair

The Chair will ensure that actions agreed by the Group are relevant, realistic and clearly articulated and recorded.

Spokesperson for the MRGC

The Chair is the primary spokesperson for the MRGC throughout their term, acting as the focus for all advocacy efforts.

Throughout their term, the Chair will lead all delegations to meet with Ministers or other key stakeholders, conduct all media interviews and appearances, approve media releases, position papers, briefing notes and will be the signatory to MRGC correspondence.

The Chair will represent the Group in campaigns, public hearings, inquiries and consultations, presenting a unified voice on behalf of the Group.

Supported by the lead CEO and Executive Officer, the Chair will engage with MRGCs key stakeholders, building on the Group's existing relationships and reputation to amplify the group's advocacy efforts and create broader support for MRGC's positions.

GUIDELINES FOR FORMAL DELEGATIONS

The principles of effective political engagement	
BE STRATEGIC	
Be clear about what it is that we seek from the delegation	
Understand what constraints the other party works under	
Tailor our message to deliver what we seek	
Build trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be concise • Be consistent • Stay on message • Deliver what we promise • Be professional
Strengthen our brand	
Secure our reputation	
Be non-political in all our dealings	
Always seek the best outcomes for our region	

The practice	
Agree on the message – 3 points maximum	
1. Prepare for the meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene immediately prior to the meeting to prepare • Agree on who is speaking, including for any spur of the moment issues • Agree on who says what • Ensure that each speaker reinforces the message (and nothing else) • Understand what the other party may want • Anticipate what questions the other party may raise, and have answers prepared • Consider how to present our case in a way that meets the needs of the other party
2. Have an agreed agenda circulated prior to the meeting	
3. A one-page briefing note should be prepared to provide to the other party and any advisers, summarising the points for the meeting	
4. All documents produced must be on MRGC paper	
5. The MRGC Chair must approve all documents to be handed up as part of a delegation	
6. Brief any other parties joining with the delegation about these guidelines to ensure all members adhere to the principles	
7. MRGC Chair must lead the delegation and be the focus of the other party's attention. Have a back-up plan in case the Chair is unable to attend at the last minute.	