



# Yarra Ranges Council Advocacy framework



### **Acknowledgment of Country**

We respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri People, as the custodians of this land. We also pay respect to all Aboriginal community Elders, past and present who have resided in the area and have been an integral part of the history of this region.



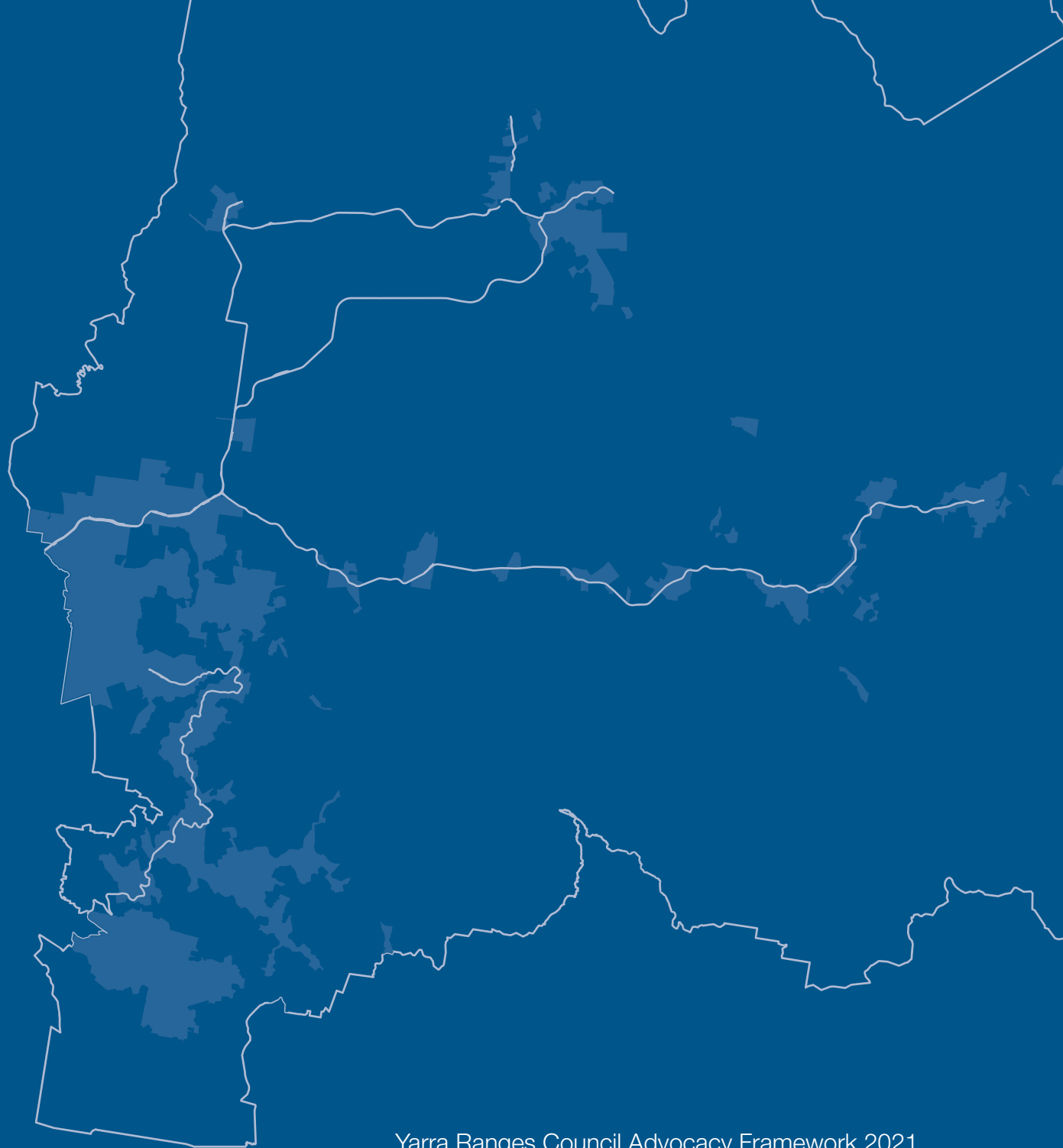
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# Background and purpose

Yarra Ranges Council is geographically and culturally unique. Our region is the largest local government area (LGA) by land size in metropolitan Melbourne, spanning 55 urban and regional townships with a vibrant and diverse economy, and steward to irreplaceable cultural, natural and heritage areas.

As an interface council, we have diverse and passionate communities residing and working across the hills, urban and valley regions. Only 3% of our land is urban land use, compared to an average of 27% among other interface councils. Our agriculture industry contributes 3.5% of output generated by the state-wide sector, which is significant, while our heritage and cultural attractions are notable drivers of international and domestic tourism.



Our communities have needs that are specific to their interests, identities and localities, that are often divergent and require a sensitive and coordinated approach. Council must recognise and balance these interests in its advocacy – ensuring we deliver the broadest positive benefits possible, while managing the impact on Council's resources.

As Yarra Ranges communities continue to grow and evolve – and Council responds to crises including the COVID-19 pandemic and 2021 storm events – we must ensure that services are targeted, equitable and deliver the greatest impact to areas with the highest level of need. Strong relationships with state and federal governments and agencies are paramount for ensuring we can meet the changing needs of our community.

**To ensure the needs of our community are understood and heard, Council advocates to all levels of government, often working in partnership with local representatives, associations and other like-minded councils.**

Our advocacy efforts generate support for projects and policies to deliver the social, health, cultural, infrastructure, education and transport outcomes that our community deserves.

This document intends to **strengthen the planning, coordination and efficiency** of our advocacy activities to maximise Council's success and deliver the best outcomes for the Yarra Ranges community.

It provides a framework for assessing advocacy issues and opportunities in a way that is community-driven, evidence based, realistic, and shows consideration for long-term risk and sustainability of Council and our community's health, wellbeing and resilience.

Broadly, this framework lays out ways of thinking and working – guiding how we assess advocacy matters, identify effective strategies, channels and alliances, and the key activities that will ensure our priorities are firmly maintained on the political agenda.

These activities are all designed to influence and inform those with political or economic decision-making power.



**Through advocacy, Council and Councillors represent the interests of the community to decision-makers and other levels of government, to boost support for local programs and services.**

# Objectives

**The objectives of this framework are to:**



**Enable fair, equitable and strategic assessment and identification of advocacy issues, opportunities and priorities.**



**Improve coordination, monitoring and reporting of advocacy activity across the organisation.**



**Increase funding for and delivery of local programs, services and infrastructure.**



**Influence state and federal policy, legislation, standards and guidelines on matters impacting Yarra Ranges residents and businesses.**



**Provide transparency and enhance engagement with community on advocacy matters.**

# How we advocate

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Make representations to State and Federal Ministers, local MPs, government agencies, and election candidates

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Promote local services and programs requiring external funding through election periods, budget processes, grants etc.

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Seek provision of State and Federal programs locally e.g. level crossing removals, mental health services, education programs.

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Broker partnerships with other public, private and non-for-profit organisations to deliver priority projects.

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Participate in joint advocacy with strategically aligned partners, including peak bodies and councils in Melbourne's east.

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Make submissions to inquiries and other forums to influence policy, legislation, standards and guidelines.

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Elevate our advocacy priorities and amplify the concerns of our community through the media.

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# Guiding principles

**Yarra Ranges Council's advocacy will be guided by the following principles:**



**Community-centric** – our advocacy priorities reflect the needs, aspirations and expectations of our community. We are open and transparent about our advocacy objectives and strategic priorities. We communicate about our advocacy work in a community-centric and accessible way.



**Evidence-based** – our advocacy priorities are shaped by research and data, and policies and strategies adopted by Yarra Ranges Council, which are based on data and evidence of community needs and broader trends.



**Future-focused** – We take a strategic and coordinated approach, that values innovation and seeks to address multiple issues at once, achieving long-term positive outcomes and maximising benefits for as many segments of the community as possible.



**Transparent and strategic** – our advocacy priorities are linked to one or more of Council's strategic objectives. We advocate with a clear set of priorities and with a strong message that positions Yarra Ranges as a known and trusted council, and a partner that other agencies and government want to work with.



**Collaborative and non-partisan** – we work collaboratively with partners, individuals and organisations, whose interests and capabilities support our organisational objectives. We are apolitical in our advocacy, and work with all sides of politics to achieve strong outcomes for the community.

# Advocacy networks

Yarra Ranges Council advocates both as an **individual council**, and through **joint advocacy** at a sub-regional (e.g. outer east), regional (Eastern Metropolitan Region) and state and national level.

Individual advocacy allows Council to represent issues of concern for our region and position ourselves effectively in a competitive environment.

Joint advocacy involves building partnerships around a shared concern or opportunity, which enables the delivery of a stronger message, grants access to a bigger pool of resources, and boosts cut-through with key decision-makers. Joint advocacy can be undertaken on the basis of a shared concern regarding a specific issue (e.g. maternal child health, social housing), locality (e.g. Eastern Region Group of Councils), classification (i.e. Interface Councils), or sector (e.g. Municipal Association of Victoria), or a combination of these factors (e.g. Eastern Transport Coalition).

In most cases, Council's joint advocacy efforts are led by peak bodies and coalitions. However, Council may also choose to establish and lead joint advocacy on issues of interest, where several councils hold mutual concern and are not adequately supported by an existing peak body or other joint advocacy effort.

## The decision to advocate individually or collectively should consider:

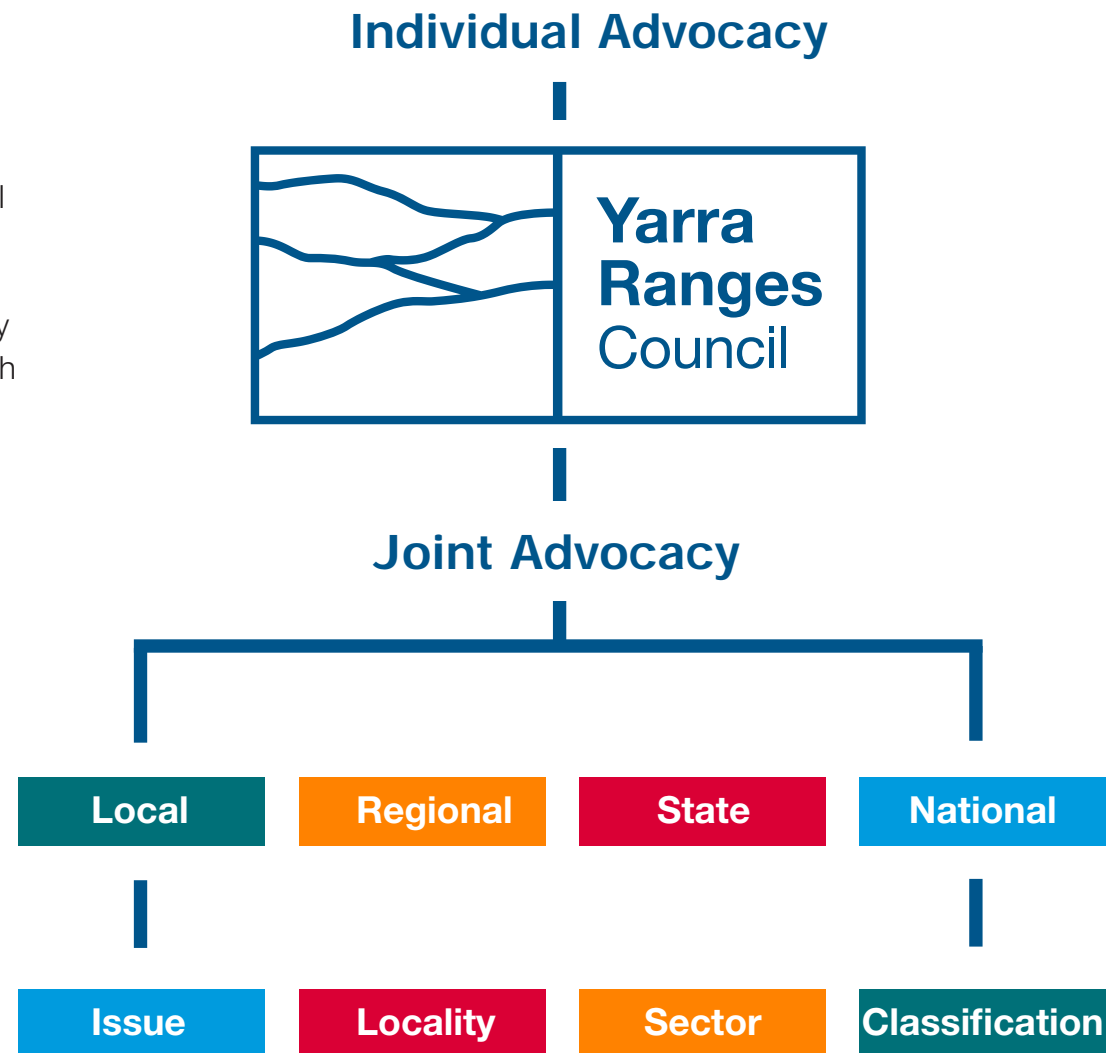
- ▶ the relevance of the issue or opportunity at regional, state or federal levels
- ▶ the alignment of priorities with prospective partners and allies
- ▶ efficiency and effectiveness (influence and resources of advocacy partners)
- ▶ political attention achieved through an activated broad community across municipalities



## Regional partnerships and alliances

Yarra Ranges Council is a member of several groups that engage in joint advocacy on regional interests, and issues of shared importance e.g. climate change, social and affordable housing.

The following page presents a non-exhaustive list of key partners and allies that Yarra Ranges Council works with to advocate in the communities' interests – noting that Council also advocates to many of these stakeholders, particularly government and political stakeholders, to elevate the interests of our community.



### Local

- ▶ Local businesses, including traders associations
- ▶ Resident and community groups, including township networks, advisory committees, community panels
- ▶ Sporting clubs and associations
- ▶ Special interest groups e.g. bicycle networks, environmental groups
- ▶ Volunteers

### Regional

- ▶ Eastern Region Group of Councils (ERG)
- ▶ Interface Councils (IFC)
- ▶ Eastern Metropolitan Partnership
- ▶ Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance
- ▶ Regional Local Government Homelessness and Housing Charter
- ▶ Eastern Transport Coalition
- ▶ Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action
- ▶ Yarra Ranges Tourism

### State

- ▶ Local MPs, Ministers and Premier
- ▶ Agriculture Victoria
- ▶ Department of Jobs, Precinct and Regions
- ▶ Department of Education and Training
- ▶ Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
- ▶ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- ▶ Department of Health
- ▶ Bicycle Network Victoria
- ▶ Creative Victoria
- ▶ Parks Victoria
- ▶ Department of Transport
- ▶ VicTrack
- ▶ Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA)
- ▶ Local Government Victoria (LGV)
- ▶ Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV)
- ▶ Melbourne Water
- ▶ Aboriginal Victoria
- ▶ Sport and Recreation Victoria
- ▶ Victorian Planning Authority
- ▶ Level Crossing Removal Authority

### National

- ▶ Local MPs, Ministers and Prime Minister
- ▶ Australia Local Government Association (ALGA)
- ▶ Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
- ▶ Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications
- ▶ Department of Health

# Elements of our advocacy: roles and responsibilities

There are four key elements to effective advocacy. Each component should function in tandem with others to plan, deliver, evaluate and refresh our advocacy priorities, approaches and tactics.

Research and policy development			
Role		Responsibility (internal)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Planning for long-term need and impact on community and environment</li><li>➤ Building an evidence base of what is needed, and the predicted outcomes (problems, solutions and recommendations)</li><li>➤ Assessing policy landscapes (state and federal)</li></ul>		Coordination / facilitation:	Subject matter expertise:
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Strategy and Transformation (incl Advocacy unit)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Managers</li><li>➤ ELT</li><li>➤ EOs and Officers</li></ul>
Community and partner engagement			
Role		Responsibility (internal)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Understanding community sentiment and aspirations</li><li>➤ Engaging communities, and activating and collaborating with key groups for campaigns</li><li>➤ Developing partnerships with aligned organisations and agencies, sharing resources and information</li></ul>		Planning / facilitation:	Delivery:
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ All Council officers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Councillors</li><li>➤ ELT</li><li>➤ EOs and Officers</li></ul>

## Communications

### Role

- Delivering campaigns
- Amplifying messaging through media and marketing
- Monitoring and influencing public conversation
- Managing brand and reputation

### Responsibility (internal)

Planning / facilitation:

- Communications and Engagement
- Advocacy unit

Spokespeople

- Councillors
- ELT

## Government relations

### Role

- Engaging directly with key decision-makers and government agencies
- Understanding priorities and concerns
- Nurturing long-term positive relationships

### Responsibility (internal)

Political stakeholders: MPs, Ministers, election candidates

- Councillors
- ELT

Both / coordination:

- Advocacy unit

Government agencies:

- Managers
- EOs and Officers

# Strategic context

Our advocacy priorities are informed by a range of factors, including our existing strategies and the evidence and data underpinning them.

## Strategic inputs

- ▶ Council and Community Plan
- ▶ Organisational strategies, frameworks and policies
- ▶ Community needs studies and social planning data
- ▶ Business cases and feasibility studies
- ▶ Capital Expenditure Program
- ▶ Legislation and policy landscape
- ▶ State and Federal strategies and plans
- ▶ Government relations
- ▶ Risk assessment framework
  - Financial
  - Regulation and compliance
  - Environment and assets
  - Business interruption
  - Health and safety (employees and community)
  - Project loss
- ▶ Community sentiment
  - Community panels
  - Advisory groups
  - Surveys
  - Social media
  - Anecdotal feedback



# Prioritisation

## Criteria

The five criteria below have been developed to reflect the guiding principles outlined in this framework.

Applied, the criteria should allow us to define our core advocacy platform – that is, the priority ‘asks’ for the duration of the current councillors’ terms. It should also enable the identification of gaps and actions that would enable more effective advocacy on any given issue. For example, areas requiring deeper research and community engagement in order to develop a clear and persuasive case that can be pitched to government.

The criteria can be applied to a live list of advocacy issues and opportunities, that can be refreshed on a regular basis and during dynamic periods that may see notable shift in community need and political environments e.g. natural disasters, public health crises, leadership changes, cabinet shuffles and new ministerial appointments etc.

<b>Evidence and clarity</b>	<b>Political alignment</b>	<b>Community needs and aspirations</b>	<b>Strategic links and legislative requirements</b>	<b>Risk</b>
The advocacy ‘ask’ is clear – based on a defined program or service need and backed by evidence. (A strong business case exists)	The advocacy ‘ask’ aligns with state and federal strategies, priorities, agendas and concerns.	There is strong, evident need in the community. There is potential for high impact on social and economic wellbeing, and strong alignment with community aspirations and expectations of council.	The issue/opportunity aligns to council’s role (including obligations under the Local Government Act), and strategic priorities.	There is significant and increasing risk posed to the community, environment and infrastructure, or Council as an organisation, if no action is taken.

# Tiers of impact

Council works across many important issues. However, we cannot advocate on all things equally, or at the same time.

Defining our advocacy priorities means we can elevate a clear and achievable set of key 'asks' consistently and persuasively, channelling resources into the areas that require it most.

By using our resources in this strategic way, we can increase the likelihood of cut-through with decision-makers, and in turn, demonstrate to the community that we understand and act upon their key concerns, and deliver results.

	Description	Resourcing
<b>Tier 1</b> 4-6 opportunities	High impact issue/opportunity; with clearly defined asks at a project (funding/policy) level and significant measurable impact on community. Strong political alignment.	Requires high level of strategic support from advocacy unit, warrants a focused advocacy plan, including stakeholder mapping, community engagement, comms and key messaging, issues/reputation management.
<b>Tier 2</b>	High level impact issue / opportunity. Broad asks at project level, and broad sense of community impact. Good political alignment.	Requires advisory support from advocacy unit; potentially executive support on government relations, partnership liaison, comms and community engagement.
<b>Tier 3</b>	Moderate level impact issue / opportunity. Broad sense of community impact. Some or low political alignment.	Requires guidance from advisory unit; coordination on government relations, comms and community engagement.

# Evaluation

The outcomes of this framework will be assessed and reported each year and Council's advocacy priorities will be reviewed to address evolving matters in our social and political contexts.

## **Each year, an annual review will entail:**

- ▶ A summary of Council's advocacy activities and campaigns, and what has been achieved
- ▶ An assessment of key barriers to success and recommendations for improvement
- ▶ An assessment of new and emerging issues and opportunities
- ▶ A review of key priorities, taking into consideration new evidence, data and insights

This will be reported each year through Council's Annual Report.

We will also maintain a register of advocacy issues and opportunities, and assess these with consideration of the criteria outlined in this document, and with regard to changing state of our community and our organisation's operating context.

Our advocacy priorities will address community and partner feedback, and actively seek to maintain dialogue with our community in line with Yarra Ranges Community Engagement Policy.