



Rural Councils Victoria Federal Election Platform

About Rural Councils Victoria

Rural Councils Victoria (RCV) is an incorporated body representing 33 small rural councils across country Victoria.

Our membership does not include regional councils, so our focus is on issues relevant to smaller rural areas, many of which are isolated or sparsely populated.

Our members' experiences will also reflect those of many smaller rural and remote areas of Australia. One in nine Victorians live in rural communities and are served by a rural council. In Victoria, 38 of the 79 councils are classified as 'rural', including a number on the urban fringe.

Victoria's rural councils are responsible for 79% of Victoria's land area and have a combined population of approximately 836,000 (ABS 2020) accounting for 12.5% of Victoria's population and 62% of Victoria's local roads network.

The impact of a dispersed and small population spread over a large geographic area presents several challenges for rural councils in meeting the needs of their communities. Not least being that rural councils have small rate bases and little access to substantial or helpful levels of 'own source' income.

Despite these challenges rural Victoria is a significant contributor to the national economy.

- Victoria's gross value of agriculture production (GVAP) reached a new record high of \$20.2 billion in 2021–22.
- In 2021–22, Victoria accounted for 23 per cent of Australia's GVAP, making Victoria Australia's second largest agricultural producer after New South Wales (26%)

Rural Councils Victoria looks forward to working with the Federal Government and being part of the solution to issues such as housing and cost of living.

Federal Local Government Commissioner

Canberra is a long way from rural Victoria and for RCV members and for rural councils around the country getting issues on the agenda is hard.

Our members struggle to find a way to communicate with the federal government, have their problems addressed and to be connected with the government to deliver key services to their communities.

Rural Councils Victoria is calling for the establishment of a Federal Local Government Commissioner. The office of the commissioner will have the appropriate resources to be able to help rural councils from across Australia navigate the federal government.

Specifically, the Commissioner would:

- Collaborate with and assist councils to connect with federal government programs and departments.
- Work to streamline processes, in particular, to simplify the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) reducing red tape to facilitate quicker and more effective disaster response and recovery efforts.
- Provide funding to local government organisations like Rural Councils Victoria to conduct research, deliver training and facilitate greater collaboration between the sector and the Federal government.

Financial Sustainability

The financial sustainability of local government is a pressing issue for our membership.

Over many years, local governments across the country have been facing a situation where their capacity to raise revenue is not matching the expectations and needs of their communities.

Recently this has intensified with many rural councils facing multiple pressures. These pressures include: changing populations with increased service needs; ageing facilities that require maintenance or upgrading; the pressure of natural disasters; and inflationary pressures rapidly pushing up construction and maintenance costs. This situation needs to be addressed.

To ensure the long-term viability of rural councils, we advocate for:

- **Increased untied funding:** Provide increased untied funding to councils, particularly those with limited revenue sources, enabling them to deliver essential services and maintain infrastructure without financial constraints.
- **Restoration of Financial Assistance Grants (FAGs):** Increase FAGs back to 1% of Commonwealth tax revenue.
- **Dedicated Infrastructure Funding:** Secure untied infrastructure funding specifically for rural local governments to support service delivery and the development of critical infrastructure.
- **Capacity and capability:** Targeted funding streams for rural councils and communities to be able to develop local capacity for project development and delivery. Have a specific focus on making business case funding available to rural councils and greater support for project planning and implementation to occur locally.



Future focused rural development

Rural councils and the communities they represent are an important part of Australia's economy and identity. More needs to be done to ensure future-focused development in rural areas.

We are calling for:

- **Rural Housing:** Rural communities need more housing and there needs to specific programs and funding streams for rural communities to build the enabling infrastructure like roads and sewerage to be able to attract developers and build more houses. Refer to RCV's [Rural Housing Action Plan](#).
- **Workforce development:** Implement workforce development programs focused on local industries, enhancing skills and employment opportunities for residents. Facilitate visa and immigration processes to attract skilled workers to rural areas, providing support services and housing to ensure their long-term settlement. Greater support for training placements across a range of sectors to occur in rural areas.
- **Rural innovation:** Encourage innovation in rural development through grants and incentives for local businesses and entrepreneurs focused on sustainable practices and technologies.
- **Community infrastructure:** Introduce specific funding programs and funding streams to support community infrastructure in rural areas. Particularly focusing on increasing worker and affordable housing and childcare availability across rural Victoria.
- **Transitioning to renewables:** Greater support, collaboration and consultation with the rural communities at the forefront of this transition. Including guarantees that benefits flow to communities, in particular training and job opportunities are kept local and accessible and that benefit programs focus on legacy infrastructure.



About Rural Councils Victoria

***RCV is the only statewide and national voice
for rural Victorian communities***

Rural Councils Victoria represents rural communities across the state's 33 rural local government areas.

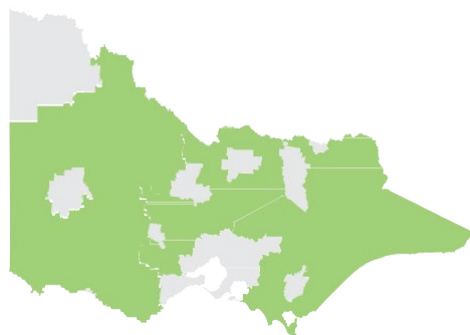
RCV supports and promotes sustainable, liveable, prosperous rural communities.

Rural Councils Victoria

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Content: The Agenda Group – theagendagroup.com.au