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5 June 2023

Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee  
2022 Flood event Victoria  
Parliament House Spring Street  
East Melbourne, Vic 3002

Dear Committee Secretary,

The Committee for Greater Shepparton welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the 2022 flood events in the Greater Shepparton area.

### About the Committee for Greater Shepparton

The Committee for Greater Shepparton (C4GS) has almost 120 members from Greater Shepparton's business, not for profit and public agencies. C4GS seeks to provide an informed, constructive and influential voice for the Greater Shepparton region to all levels of government and decision makers and in doing so support our region to unlock its full potential.

### About Greater Shepparton

#### Key regional health, education and care services hub

Greater Shepparton is located about 180 kilometres north of Melbourne and sits at the heart of Victoria's Food bowl. It is one of Victoria's largest regional cities and the largest city on the Goulburn River. The city has a population of more than 70,000 residents and is the key services hub for a region that extends from the southern Riverina in NSW to the northern outskirts of Melbourne (approx. 135,000 residents).

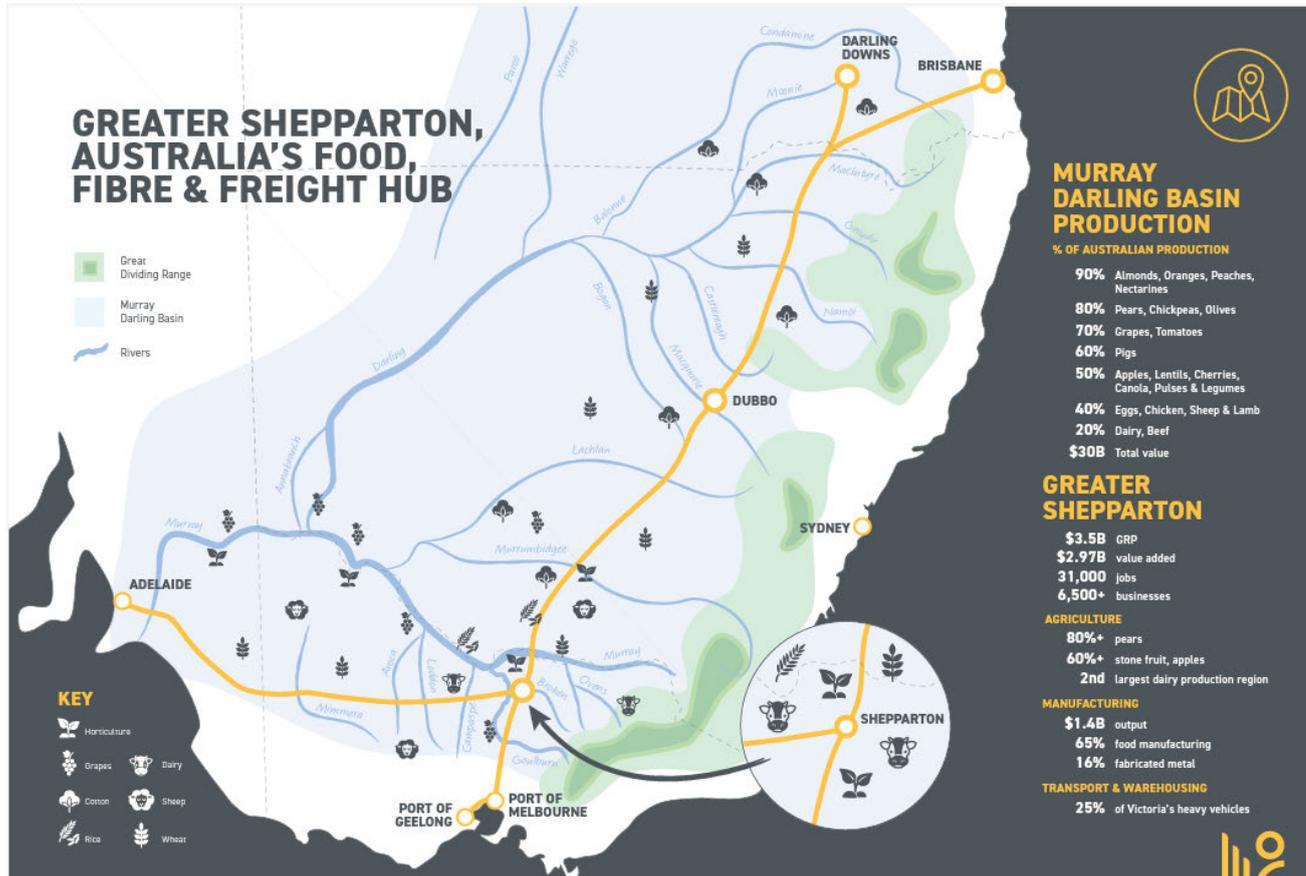
Shepparton is located on the eastern bank immediately below the points at which the Castle and later the Broken Rivers and Seven Creeks enter the Goulburn River (confluence). Greater Shepparton LGA includes several smaller towns and hamlets including Mooroopna on the western bank immediately across the river from Shepparton, and Tatura further west. The communities are inextricably linked and interdependent.

The city's largest employment sectors are health and social services, manufacturing (80% food manufacturing), education and construction. The region is home to almost 20% of regional Victoria's manufacturing, 25% of Victoria's heavy vehicles (trucks), Victoria's largest regionally owned and operated aged care provider, and Goulburn Valley Health sits at the centre of a network of health services.

The surrounding region is home to a diverse mix of agriculture that is dominated by perishable produce including fruit, vegetables, and dairy, along with beef, sheep, and grains. The region's water resources for irrigated agriculture, industry and residents are underpinned by supplies from Lake Eildon that are delivered via the Goulburn River.

### Critical national and state freight and transport intersection

Greater Shepparton is one of Australia's major food, fibre, and freight hubs. It is located on the national freight route that runs from Queensland's Darling Downs, through the primary production corridor of NSW into Victoria and through to the Port of Melbourne.



In addition to the significant north-south transport activity, Greater Shepparton's strategic importance lies in its east-west connectivity. The city was founded as the punt crossing between Victoria's goldfields.

Today there are only four river crossings from Seymour to Echuca (approx. 140 km). The Peter Ross-Edwards Causeway (Causeway) at Shepparton is the busiest (approx. 40% more traffic than Hume Freeway crossing at Seymour). There are more than 32,000 traffic movements across the causeway each day, making it one of regional Victoria's busiest traffic routes and the critical road infrastructure connecting northern Victorian industry and communities on the east and west sides of Victoria's largest river.

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## October 2022 Floods in Greater Shepparton

The October 2022 floods followed significant rainfall across many Victorian catchments.

On Thursday 6 October 2022, Greater Shepparton City Council issued warnings for *Up to almost 100 millimetres of rain is forecast for Shepparton before this weekend. Rivers, creeks, and water storages are at, or over, capacity, as we warn Greater Shepparton residents to prepare for possible flooding across the region*<sup>1</sup>. The update also confirmed the SES as the lead agency and provided a range of resources and information links. The forecasts and warnings were reported widely in local media.<sup>2</sup>

Approximately a week later the combined flows reached Shepparton-Mooroopna and over the following days spread out either side of the river, while continuing to move downstream.

Considerable work continues to fully understand the precise impact of the flooding in Greater Shepparton. As an indication it is estimated that approximately 1-2% of houses in Shepparton-Mooroopna experienced above floor flooding and at the peak of the flood more there were more than 800 road closures across the Goulburn Murray region.

Many more houses (and residents) were isolated but not flooded, and large sections of Shepparton including its CBD, industrial and manufacturing precincts and health service providers were not directly impacted by flooding of their sites.

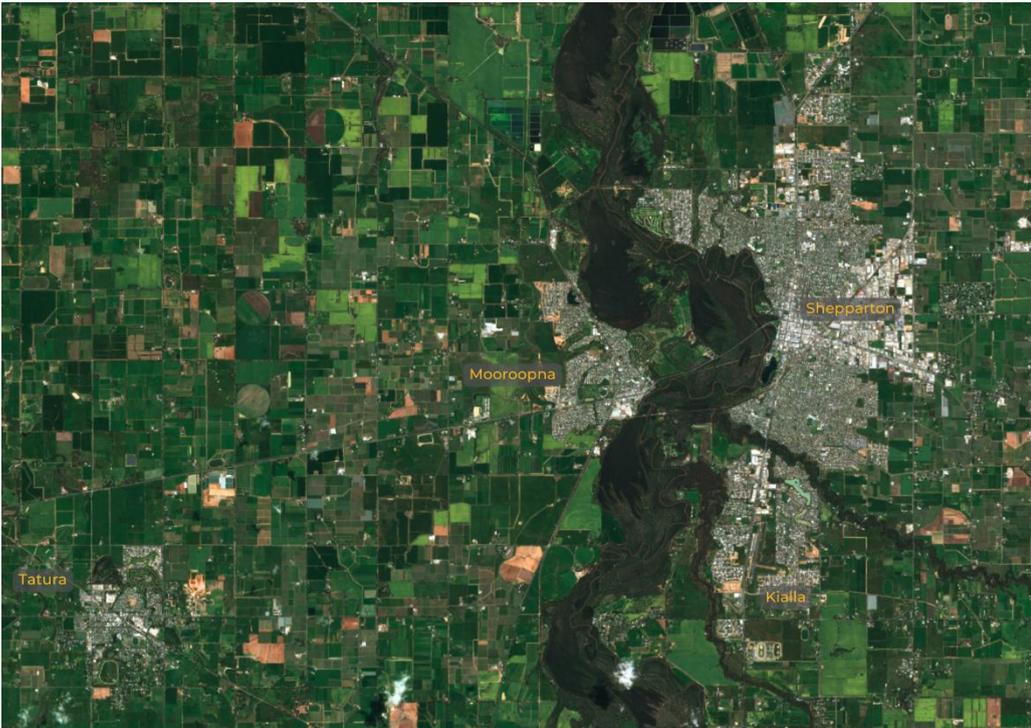
The following images have been sourced from Australian Government, National Map service for illustration purposes. The key purpose of these maps is to demonstrate the hardest hit locations, the large areas that were not impacted by property flooding and the obvious connectivity between Shepparton, Kialla, Mooroopna and out to Tatura – a community and economy that straddles Victoria's largest river.

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<sup>1</sup> Greater Shepparton City Council website <https://greatershepparton.com.au/whats-happening/news/news-article/!/456/post/flood-information-update-6-october-2022>

<sup>2</sup> Shepparton News 5 October 2022 <https://www.sheppnews.com.au/news/flood-warnings-flow-across-the-region-as-rain-continues-to-fall/>

**Greater Shepparton, 11 am 2 October 2022**



**Greater Shepparton, 11 am 17 October 2022 – approximately the peak of the flood in Shepparton.**



Source: Australian Government, National Map, <https://nationalmap.gov.au/#share=s-s1nGhsaWbwPB3bc8nufmsXWOZ8y>

Source: Australian Government, National Map <https://nationalmap.gov.au/#share=s-b9qfthxARWFAotd0DGc6i7l3Ss8i>

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## Understanding flood experiences in Greater Shepparton – What we heard.

In February 2023 C4GS convened a series of nine (9) sector specific roundtables with member organisations. Approximately 60 members participated in the following industry-based roundtables:

- Agriculture and Horticulture (including cool stores)
- Manufacturing
- Transport & Logistics
- Healthcare & Aged Care
- Health Support Services
- Finance and Insurance
- Education, including Early Childhood
- Retail, Arts & Recreation

Participants three key questions:

- What worked well during this emergency event?
- What were some of the challenges experienced, and
- What would we do differently for our next emergency response – what are the lessons learned?

The feedback from all sectors was captured in the attached *Greater Shepparton 2022 Floods - What we heard* report and includes recommendations to strengthen emergency preparedness, response, relief and recovery in Greater Shepparton.

Our report has informed our responses to specific aspects of the Inquiry's terms of reference and the report is intended to be read in conjunction with this submission.

## Response to specific items within the Terms of Reference

### **(3) resourcing of the State Emergency Service, the adequacy of its response to the Flood Event and the adequacy of its resourcing to deal with increasing floods and natural disasters in the future;**

Greater Shepparton's floods coincided with floods in 63 of Victoria's 79 Local Government Areas (LGA) and one alpine resort (Falls Creek). This resulted in a wide range of experiences and flood behaviour across the state, and created significant simultaneous and widespread demand for resources, support, and expertise to assist response, relief, and the ongoing recovery.

C4GS members want local councils, SES and other front-line agencies to be adequately funded and resourced to maintain up to date Emergency Management Plans that reflect their local regions. Regional capacity and capability are increasingly important particularly with a view to the anticipated increase in frequency, scale and variety of natural disasters – and the challenges these create for the sharing and deployment of resources to regional areas.

The report identifies challenges experienced by members during the floods and some were linked to the perceived capacity of the lead agencies. However as evidenced in the report, many of these challenges could be addressed through:

- operational improvements to communications, planning, definitions of essential services/workers, and understanding of regional business operations,
- strengthening and expanding local emergency response capacity and capabilities by integrating local business and community organisations into the emergency response, and in doing so tap into the professional skills, trusted relationships, local knowledge, existing communication networks and local resources they can provide - particularly in a region like Shepparton-Mooroopna with its mix of industry, cultures, and services, or
- could be avoided if for example Greater Shepparton had access to a second river crossing.

The proposals outlined in the report (and below) are intended to work under, within and in some instances alongside the current overarching State and Municipal emergency response frameworks. It was suggested that the challenges such as scope, funding and legal liability could be addressed through place-based emergency plans and protocols and in some instances may benefit from more formal arrangements such as MOUs and pre-existing procurement arrangements.

- Partner with or outsource local emergency **support** functions to appropriately skilled and resourced local agencies and organisations. Examples may include engagement with CALD and first nations communities, sourcing and coordinating volunteers/volunteers register, a standing 'emergency relief workforce' that can be deployed regionally, sourcing and distributing food relief, preparing clients and residents in advance of an emergency e.g., to relocate or to 'stock the pantry', and specific relief centre operations and activities.

- Work with local industry to identify the **professional skills** required within ICC and other response agencies, and to identify local resources that can step into these roles if required. The roles may include logistics, communications, IT, translation/translator services and engagement with non-English speaking communities and would require familiarisation programs to appropriately prepare local resources.
- Streamline **procurement** of response, relief and recovery services from local business and agencies. Suggestions included identifying the training and capabilities required for local business to undertake emergency response and relief activities and provide training programs to accredit the businesses. Once accredited the businesses could be included on a local preferred provider panel for emergency related services. Ideally by fulfilling the requirements for local procurement opportunities local business would be well placed to participate in equivalent regional, state, or national procurement processes.
- While many proposed resources such as a volunteer register, a matrix of assets and services, and a community skills / capabilities matrix, it is recognised that maintaining these resources would involve considerable work. Instead, it is recommended that these be prepared when they are needed as part of emergency preparations, and in partnership with or by local industry, agencies, and member bodies. Integration of industry and agencies into emergency planning should simplify this process and improve understanding of requirements.

Support businesses and agencies to embrace shared responsibility.

- Alongside the appetite to bolster local emergency response, many participants felt the ideas of shared responsibility as outlined in the State Emergency Management Plan such as 'expecting to be self-sufficient for the first 72 hours after an event' would have helped clarify their responsibilities and resource needs to prepare their business, employees, clients/customers and communities.
- In some instances, participants recognised the need for accommodation for key workers onsite at their facilities or the need for alternate, appropriately designed relief accommodation for carers and clients. Others saw the opportunity to step up community preparations including encouraging relocation to family and friends, 'stocking the pantry' and understanding emergency warnings and resources like the GBCMA's flood maps.
- In each case funding assistance or reimbursement protocols were identified as a valuable way to encourage investment and provide certainty for organisations providing these services.

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**(6) Flood Event as a whole, including but not limited to, the catchments and floodplains of the —  
(e) Goulburn River;**

The experiences of Greater Shepparton business and community during the 2022 Floods are detailed in the report and include several positive highlights:

- the incredible spirit, generosity and cooperation demonstrated by our local community, business, and agencies including the SES, police and council;
- the accuracy of the GBCMA's flood mapping;
- the success of council's planning controls in recent housing developments;
- the many ways apps and social media connected industry and community; and
- the leadership demonstrated by individuals and organisations.

In response to Greater Shepparton's experiences and with an expectation that there will be more frequent and erratic natural events in the future, several improvement ideas have been identified.

**Content, delivery and understanding of emergency communications.**

Greater Shepparton is one of Victoria's most diverse and culturally rich communities with many residents having very different experiences of flooding based on media reports or time spent living in others part of Australia or overseas.

Given the flood behaviour varies so much, greater community education to improve the understanding of floods in the local catchment and key terminology such as 'river levels' is important. Both were referenced in public communications and assumed a level of local knowledge.

Communications that prioritise simple language, less jargon and shorter length, that are delivered earlier via existing networks, distribution channels and trusted voices – ideally as part of the preparing phase of the event – are key to improving the content, delivery and understanding of emergency communications.

These recommendations also recognise the increased use of small devices (phones and tablets), embrace the capabilities, trust and reach of apps and social media, and recognise the inevitable reliance of translations generated by apps such as Facebook and Whatsapp.

**Climate-proof critical national and local freight and transport networks beginning with a second river crossing at Shepparton-Mooroopna**

As evidenced in the Report, the majority of Greater Shepparton's economic, social and emergency response challenges experienced during the floods would not have occurred if an alternate local river crossing was available. This was consistent across all sectors from freight and agriculture, to health, education and aged care, and emergency response and the report highlights these challenges:

- Local health, aged care and social services staff were available to work but unable to get to site – or were adding a four hour round trip each day to travel what is normally less than 10 km.

- Local residential and care providers with operations/facilities on both sides of the river were unable to deliver meals, medications and support.
- Local businesses were forced into partial and in some cases complete shutdowns as 60 to 85% of their workforce were unavailable.
- Local transport operators spoke of transport schedules falling apart as trips of 100km became 400km, or directing suppliers to dump their milk and cancelling pickups because they were unable to guarantee the safe movement of their drivers and vehicles.

Planning for a future with more frequent erratic and extreme weather events, must prioritise investments in infrastructure like a second river crossing at Shepparton-Mooroopna.

**Improve communication of protocols for the movement of staff and freight within, through and to the region during an emergency - especially via critical road infrastructure.**

It is foreseeable that future natural disasters (floods, fires) will disrupt access to critical road infrastructure notably the causeway and the GV Highway.

As described in the report, increased engagement with industry and service providers to identify and plan for the safe movement of critical staff and freight, and to define and communicate 'essential industry and essential worker' arrangements would improve business preparedness and planning and improve emergency response.

**Protect existing energy infrastructure and accelerate investment in local renewable energy generation, storage, and distribution, transmission.**

As detailed in the report, the loss of power to business and residents in Mooroopna and Tatura had significant financial and operating consequences for industry, residents and emergency services.

Sourcing generators is not a viable response for large energy users, and especially in a region that is home to almost 20% of Victoria's regional manufacturing that is dominated by the processing of perishable food products.

Emergency response is increasingly dependent on digital connectivity to reach impacted residents and business, and to coordinate relief, as a result reliable energy supplies are critical to emergency response capabilities. Community members cannot engage with relief services if energy disruptions take out communications capabilities.

In addition to protecting existing infrastructure, we are keen to explore how local renewable energy generation, storage and distribution/transmission could strengthen local supply and energy security – from farms, warehouses and residential facilities to our large manufacturers.

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**(8) the implications for future planning decisions including —**

**(a) how the Victorian planning framework can ensure climate mitigation is a consideration in future planning decisions;**

**(b) how corporate interests may influence decision-making at the expense of communities and climate change preparedness;**

As detailed in the report, not one house in Greater Shepparton's newer residential developments was flooded, in contrast a number of homes predating contemporary mapping, controls and design remain uninhabitable with little prospect of a speedy rebuild.

The success of the newer estates is attributed to the accuracy of the GBCMA's flood mapping, Greater Shepparton City Council's planning controls that build on the GBCMA's work, and the investment by developers to meet these requirements through contemporary design and engineering.

The performance of these estates during the 2022 floods clearly demonstrates how the public and private sectors can work together to achieve excellent outcomes for communities and enhance climate change preparedness.

It is vital the GBCMA and Council continue to have access to funding to maintain their flood mapping, studies and planning schemes and to expand coverage to existing residential areas and to areas identified for future development. The process of review and updating is key to ensuring emerging or changing climate risks are modelled and addressed.

It is also important to recognise the role flood mapping plays in community and industry preparedness for flood events. The GBCMA's [Community Flood Intelligence Portal](#) provided an invaluable source of trusted information and reassurance to the community leading into and during the October 2022 floods. It also allowed volunteers under the guidance of Council to doorknock and engage with community members most at risk of flooding to assist their preparations including relocation.

C4GS encourages policies and incentives to assist homeowners incorporate contemporary climate resilient design into the rebuild of flood impacted properties. However, unlocking new residential lots with up-to-date flood mapping and planning controls is also important to Greater Shepparton's recovery and resilience to future floods and natural disasters. With a chronic housing shortage and limited land currently available for development, there is no capacity for property owners and residents to relocate from the worst hit areas and for these older sites to be redeveloped from the ground up to contemporary standards or retired.

There are currently three Precinct Structure Plans in development that together will unlock up to 3,000 new lots and their release is a key step in supporting the city's housing recovery and future resilience.

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**(9) any other related matters.**

*Greater Shepparton 2022 Floods - What we heard* report provides a wide range of experiences and insights from individuals and businesses in Greater Shepparton.

This submission highlights key findings as they are relevant to the Inquiry's terms of reference. We encourage the Committee to read the full report alongside this submission to understand the many and varied matters that may relate to the Committee's deliberations.

**Conclusion**

We welcome the Committee's intention to visit Greater Shepparton on 13 September 2023 to hear from local community members, business and agencies.

The Committee for Greater Shepparton would welcome the opportunity to be a part of this process, to speak to this submission, and to provide opportunities for local members to also share their ideas in person.

As the community moves on from the events of October 2022, the urgency to capture and lock in possible improvements increases. In Greater Shepparton there were many positive outcomes that provide a platform for immediate action.

Greater Shepparton City Council is undertaking its municipal review and recovery planning processes. The Committee is a participant and is pleased to be able to share the report and members perspectives as part of these processes.

Other areas and concerns are more complex and will require greater consideration and expertise to understand both the options and any unintended consequences.

In all cases we urge working with the community of Greater Shepparton to ensure transparency and to identify opportunities for co-design with a community that continues to demonstrate immense capacity, capability, and good will.

C4GS also encourages a place-based approach to the design of emergency response. An approach that taps into the demonstrated local, state and federal emergency management expertise, and also provides opportunity for local communities to bring their professional and community strengths to a stronger, well defined and well-resourced local emergency response capability.

Yours sincerely,

**Leigh Findlay**  
**Board Chair**  
**Committee for Greater Shepparton**

**Linda Nieuwenhuizen**  
**CEO**  
**Committee for Greater Shepparton**