**Murrindindi Shire Council Motion**

**Name**

Review of Victorian Grants Commission Funds Allocation Methodology

**Motion**

That the methodology used by the Victorian Grant Commission in determining the allocation of Commonwealth Financial Assistance Grants be reviewed to place greater emphasis on the impacts on rural councils of natural disasters and climate change, the limited alternate revenue options, the increased costs associated with cultural heritage management plans *(CHMPs)*, and the increased demands of heavy transport and tourism impacting local roads.

**Rationale**

* Rural areas are disproportionately impacted by the worsening effects of climate change, affecting agricultural production and nature-based tourism, which are highly sensitive to a changing and increasingly volatile climate. Rural shires bear the brunt of more frequent and intense climate-driven disasters, including bushfires, floods, and droughts.
* Ageing infrastructure and rural roads are ill-equipped to handle these extreme climatic events, leading to increased deterioration. Climate change vulnerability, combined with the demands of heavy transport and tourism, creates extra burdens on rural Council services and road infrastructure, making funding increasingly difficult.
* Many floods, storms, and fires do not meet the threshold for government funding, leaving councils to cover these costs. Rural councils are more susceptible to these frequent emergencies and face additional challenges due to rate capping and limited ability to raise alternative revenue, unlike larger urban councils.
* A study by Rural Councils Victoria (2022) concluded that rural councils' new or 'boutique' revenue sources are unlikely to generate sufficient income to improve local government finances. The solution likely requires improved access to national tax revenues.
* Rural councils also contend with the high costs of CHMPs for capital works due to the prevalence of undisturbed land.
* Consequently, rural councils are least likely to generate surplus funds to address these demands, as evidenced by having the largest relative underlying deficits among Victorian Councils.

We call for a review of the VGC's methodology in determining the allocation of Commonwealth Financial Assistance Grants to recognise the increased financial pressures and lack of alternative income streams for rural councils.

**Hume Region Local Government Network (HRLGN) Motions**

**Name**

Retaining the Country Character of Rural and Regional Townships

**Motion**

That the MAV seek a commitment from the Minister for Planning to recognise and retain the character of rural and regional townships through the creation of appropriate Planning Scheme controls, with these controls set to keep the country character of our small towns and localities.

That this commitment provide for planning controls that recognise local constraints and fit the size, character, and location of our rural townships, avoiding local policy being over-ridden by policy and regulations more appropriate to Metropolitan Melbourne.

**Rationale**

The character of the natural and built environments across the Hume Region varies significantly among the different municipalities. "Neighbourhood character" refers to the cumulative impact of every property, public place, or piece of infrastructure, whether great or small. This interplay forms the basis of a place’s unique character. It is important to ensure new development feels like it belongs and reflects local values and features. Applying metropolitan-based controls risks the loss of unique character in rural municipalities.

Rural areas are one of the region’s greatest assets, significant for both agricultural production and natural landscapes that promote tourism and attract visitors. Many rural valleys are recognised for their unique landscape qualities and are worthy of protection. The scenic value of mountains, foothills, valleys, and cleared grazing country is intrinsic to the region's landscape.

Towns such as Mansfield, Benalla, Wangaratta, Beechworth and Marysville are known for their unique character and distinct features. Preserving their charm and appeal, even while supporting population growth, is essential to avoid becoming generic urban sprawl.

Rural Town Character

Towns across the Hume Region, such as Mansfield, Benalla, Wangaratta, and Marysville, are known for their unique and distinct features. Mansfield has wide streets, large lots, and heritage buildings that should be protected. Benalla's charm lies in its lake, botanical gardens, and artistic heritage. Wangaratta is defined by its rivers and vibrant arts culture, necessitating preservation of natural landscapes and public river views. Marysville, with its lush gardens and proximity to national parks, focuses on maintaining green spaces and eco-tourism.

Lakeside settlements like Goughs Bay, Howqua Inlet, and Macs Cove feature dwellings designed for water views, dense vegetation, and a holiday atmosphere. Rural villages, often near national parks, are characterised by significant vegetation and scenic views through settlements. Alpine approaches, such as Merrijig and Alpine Ridge, offer expansive mountain views that need protection, especially along key highways.

**Name**

Enhancing Road Safety, Renewal, and Disaster Recovery for Victoria's Regional and Rural Roads

**Motion**

1. That MAV advocate for better road funding at both State and Federal level, with particular focus on the following:-
   1. An immediate 10% increase in FAGS roads funding by the Federal Government and maintained in real terms thereafter;
   2. State Government funding for Regional Roads Victoria must be increased to keep all Victorian regional roads at acceptable service levels;
   3. The process for accessing disaster recovery funding must be simplified and streamlined;
   4. Disaster recovery funding to incorporate provisions for betterment to enable enhancements to road infrastructure alongside repair efforts thus ensuring that funding not only restores infrastructure but also enhances its resilience to withstand future events;
   5. Road maintenance standards across the State are improved;
   6. Increased funding dedicated to road safety initiatives; and
   7. Increased accountability for Regional Roads Victoria for renewal of the regional road network through performance indicator reporting similar to the Local Government Performance Reporting Framework.
2. That MAV acknowledges and welcomes the increase in Roads to Recovery funding for the next 5 years from the Federal Government.

**Rationale**

Regional and rural roads in Victoria urgently need support to ensure community safety. Required interventions include:

1. Increased funding via Financial Assistance Grants and Roads to Recovery.
2. Simplifying access to disaster recovery funds.
3. Providing adequate betterment funding.
4. Increasing funding for road safety improvements.

Victoria's rural and regional roads are deteriorating due to insufficient maintenance funding. Federal and State underfunding has strained councils managing aged infrastructure amid climate changes and transport needs. Neglect has jeopardised road safety, hindering regional growth.

Challenges:

1. Funding Gap: Federal and State underfunding, especially in Roads to Recovery, fails to meet rising costs and community needs. This gap exacerbates road deterioration, increases accidents, and stunts economic and social connectivity. The Grattan Report underscores the need for an additional $1 billion annually.
2. Disaster Recovery Process: Complex funding processes delay storm damage repairs. Bureaucratic hurdles leave infrastructure vulnerable for extended periods. Inadequate support for betterment leaves rebuilt roads susceptible to future disasters, straining council budgets.

Proposed Solutions**:**

1. Increased Funding Allocations: Call for boosted Federal and State funding to meet maintenance needs. Increase support through Financial Assistance Grants and Roads to Recovery, indexed for inflation. Recent Roads to Recovery funding increases are welcomed. State funding for Regional Roads Victoria must also rise.
2. Streamlined Disaster Recovery: Simplify funding access with streamlined assessments. Immediate funding upon application, based on estimates, with audits post-payment, enhances efficiency and trust.
3. Integration of Betterment: Include betterment in disaster funds to enhance road resilience and better cope with more contemporary weather patterns. More appropriate infrastructure replacement, without necessarily increased service standards, prevents future damage through appropriately targeted resilience and therefore lowers long-term costs.
4. Enhanced Maintenance Practices: Improve maintenance standards to maximise resource efficiency and infrastructure longevity.
5. Road Safety Funding: Increase funding for proactive safety measures to reduce accidents and ensure road user safety.
6. State Government Accountability: Implement performance reporting for Regional Roads Victoria to track network renewal progress.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive strategy. By tackling funding gaps, improving disaster response, integrating betterment, enhancing maintenance, and boosting road safety, we ensure resilient infrastructure for future generations.