



Unconfirmed Minutes Council Meeting

Tuesday 17 February 2026 at 6:00 pm

**Council Chambers (and by video conferencing)
East Gippsland Shire Council Corporate Centre
273 Main Street, Bairnsdale 3875**

Councillors

Jodie Ashworth (Mayor), Tom Crook (Deputy Mayor),
Arthur Allen (Online), Sonia Buckley, Barry Davis,
Joanne Eastman, Bernie Farquhar and Ian Trevaskis

Attachments referenced in these minutes can be located in the meeting agenda on East Gippsland Shire Council's [website](#).

Vision

To foster inclusive, connected, communities and places where all East Gippslanders prosper, and endeavour not to leave anyone behind.

Our Strategic Themes

1. Community Wellbeing and Social Responsibility
2. Prosperity
3. Making the Most of What We've Got
4. Managing Council Well

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1 Procedural

1.1 Recognition of Traditional Custodians

Mayor Cr Jodie Ashworth welcomed all to the Council meeting and acknowledged the traditional custodians.

East Gippsland Shire Council acknowledges the Gunaikurnai, Monero and Bidawel people as the Traditional Custodians of this land that encompasses East Gippsland Shire, and their enduring relationship with country. The Traditional Custodians have cared and nurtured East Gippsland for tens of thousands of years.

Council values their living culture and practices and their right to self-determination. Council pays respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in East Gippsland, their Elders, past, present, and future.

1.2 Apologies

Cr John White

1.3 Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Cr Ian Trevaskis declared a conflict of interest in relation to item 5.4.2 *Agriculture Sector Advisory Committee (ASAC) - Travel Allowance*, as a material interest due to a family member who sits on the committee.

1.4 Confirmation of Minutes

Motion

That the minutes of the Council meeting held Tuesday 16 December 2025 be confirmed.

Moved: Cr Bernie Farquhar

Seconded: Cr Barry Davis

Spoke for the motion: Nil

Spoke against the motion: Nil

Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook,
Cr Barry Davis, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Bernie Farquhar and Cr Ian Trevaskis

Against: Nil

Abstained: Nil

1.5 Next Meeting

The next Council Meeting is scheduled to be held on Tuesday 17 March 2026 at the Corporate Centre, 273 Main Street Bairnsdale commencing at 6.00 pm.

1.6 Requests for Leave of Absence

Nil

1.7 Open Forum

1.7.1 Petitions

Nil

1.7.2 Questions of Council

1.7.2.1 Social Media

Ms Juliette Khoo submitted the following question which were read out on her behalf by Fiona Weigall Chief Executive Officer:

Question 1: *“I understand that social media has been banned, but if a teenager’s parents are working late and it’s not safe for them to go out alone (for example, to the park), what safe alternatives does the Council suggest for young people during those times? (12 years old)”.*

Fiona Weigall Chief Executive Officer provided a response which is summarised below:

Response 1: The age restrictions on social media in Australia are Federal laws and as such sit outside Council’s control.

Council does recognise the importance of ensuring young people are engaged in their community and feel safe. We provide and support a range of youth-friendly spaces and services, including libraries (with online resources) and recreation facilities.

There are also many sporting and community groups offering organised programs.

Our Community Directory is a great place to start to find out more.

1.7.2.2 Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool

Ms Danielle H submitted the following questions which were taken on notice by Fiona Weigall Chief Executive Officer:

Question 1: *“No outdoor pool means no swimming carnival for schools, and if the ocean is unsafe to swim in, like a few years ago, what plan will our shire have to support our children if they don't reopen the pool?”.*

Question 2: *“Maintenance and staff seem to be an issue if it costs too much to fix. Why not build a new outdoor pool next to the indoor pool where the old junior secondary college is? Sale pool has theirs set up like this and you can go between the pools on your visit. Even a community fundraiser to support the extra cost the Council can't fund. As we live an area that wants to grow but don't have the support to grow”.*

The following response was provided by Chris Stephenson General Manager Place and Community:

Response 1: All affected schools worked directly with Council officers prior to Christmas to ensure students could continue to participate in school swimming events.

Council support included a total of up to \$50,000 in subsidies, along with free access to the Bairnsdale Aquatic and Recreate Centre (BARC) for schools to conduct swimming trials and student free-swim days, and support booking other neighbouring facilities.

Aquatic education sessions have not operated at the outdoor pool for some time and has therefore not been impacted by its closure.

Response 2: Following the motion passed by Council on 19 August 2025, Officers have commenced commissioning a new East Gippsland Aquatic Strategy (Strategy).

Developed with community input, the strategy will guide the future of aquatic facilities across East Gippsland, including Bairnsdale.

Updates on the Strategy will be available on the Council's projects page on [YourSay](#).

1.7.2.3 Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool

Ms Melissa Naidanovici submitted the following questions which were taken on notice by Fiona Weigall Chief Executive Officer:

Question 1: *“Why are you not willing to spend money to upgrade the outdoor pool? I don’t like using the indoor pool in summer, it’s too hot, stuffy and noisy plus it looks dirty around the water line”.*

Question 2: *“Why can’t you spend the money to heat the outdoor pool so it can be used all year round? I’d much rather swim outdoors and it’s a beautiful place to sit under the trees and picnic as a family”.*

The following response was provided by Chris Stephenson General Manager Place and Community:

Response 1: As noted in the report presented to Council on 19 August 2025, Council developed the East Gippsland Aquatic Strategy in 2015 to guide future investment in aquatic facilities. The strategy was unanimously adopted by Council on 2 February 2016.

The strategy identified that the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool (pool) would be at end of life within ten years. A decision was made to prioritise investment in upgrades at the Bairnsdale Aquatic and Recreation Centre (BARC) whilst operating the outdoor pool for as long as practicable, with no further major investment.

That said there has still been annual investment in the pool just to open every year, however this got to a point where we could no longer safely keep it open.

The Bairnsdale Indoor pool is thoroughly cleaned and meets all the standards set for indoor pools.

Response 2: As per above following the motion passed by Council on 19 August 2025, officers have commenced commissioning a new East Gippsland Aquatic Strategy.

Developed with community input, the strategy will guide the future of aquatic facilities across East Gippsland, including Bairnsdale.

Updates on the Aquatic Strategy will be available on the relevant projects page on [Your Say](#).

1.7.2.4 Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool

Ms Tiffany Vatcher submitted the following question which was taken on notice by Fiona Weigall Chief Executive Officer and summarised below:

Question 1: *“What alternative aquatic options exist for residents who cannot safely use the indoor pool environment for health reasons, and what consideration Council has given to the needs of those users.”*

The following response was provided by Chris Stephenson General Manager Place and Community:

Response 1: Council recognises that some members of the community are unable to safely use the indoor aquatic facility due to health or medical reasons, and we acknowledge the importance of ensuring equitable access to aquatic exercise and recreation opportunities.

While the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool (pool) remains closed due to safety concerns, Council officers have been working to support continued access to aquatic facilities through alternative options, where possible. This has included facilitating access to other Council-managed aquatic facilities within the Shire and supporting community groups and users to explore neighbouring facilities, where appropriate.

Council is currently undertaking two key pieces of work to better understand and respond to community needs, including those of residents with specific health requirements. These are the independent safety review of the pool and the development of a new East Gippsland Aquatic Strategy (Strategy). The strategy will be informed by community consultation and will consider accessibility, health and wellbeing outcomes, safety, and the needs of diverse user groups across the municipality.

This work will help guide future decisions about aquatic facilities and ensure Council is able to make informed, evidence-based decisions that balance safety, accessibility and long-term community benefit.

1.7.2.5 Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool

Ms Sophie Brown submitted the following question which was taken on notice by Fiona Weigall Chief Executive Officer:

Question 1: *“Has the Shire considered outsourcing the management of the Outdoor pool?”*

The following response was provided by Chris Stephenson General Manager Place and Community:

Response 1: Council's Aquatic facilities have been outsourced in the past, however recent operational reviews from external consultants have identified our current in house model is currently best suited for council to manage our Aquatic Assets.

1.7.2.6 Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool

Ms Kristy Keane submitted the following questions which were taken on notice by Fiona Weigall Chief Executive Officer:

Question 1: *“How do you see the future of our town, is the town going to become more populated or less?”*

Question 2: *“This is much bigger than just removing a pool, it's for the future of this town. Have you considered funding a fundraiser?”*

The following response was provided by Chris Stephenson General Manager Place and Community:

Response 1: The forecast is for modest growth, and growth data for our town will be used to inform the new aquatic strategy.

Response 2: Work is underway to understand the estimated cost to make the site safe. If it's a feasible option, Council will need to determine how to fund the required works.

We understand these are big decisions and that's why we need to have a robust strategy to guide future investment.

1.7.2.7 Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool

Ms Stephanie Buckland submitted the following questions which were taken on notice by Fiona Weigall Chief Executive Officer:

Question 1: *“How does closing the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool align with the Council Plan 2025-29 priorities for Community Wellbeing and Social responsibility?”*

Question 2: *“What measurable community benefit is achieved by closing the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool that cannot be achieved by upgrading it?”*

The following response was provided by Chris Stephenson General Manager Place and Community:

Response 1: The Bairnsdale Outdoor pool (pool) is closed at the moment as it is not safe and it would not be responsible for Council to open it in its current state. This aligns with both our Council Plan and the requirements of Occupational Health and Safety legislation.

Response 2: A decision to either upgrade or close the pool has not been made.

In line with other responses tonight, Council is embarking on two vital pieces of work to help inform a final decision. Those being the external safety review and the new aquatic strategy.

1.7.2.8 Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool

Mr Nathan Scott asked the following question:

Question 1: *“Why hasn’t sufficient long-term funding been allocated over the years to maintain, update, and keep the outdoor pool fully functional?”*

Chris Stephenson General Manager Place and Community provided a response which is summarised below:

Response 1: As noted in the report presented to Council on 19 August 2025, Council developed the East Gippsland Aquatic Strategy in 2015 to guide future investment in aquatic facilities. The strategy was unanimously adopted by Council on 2 February 2016.

The strategy identified that the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool (pool) would be at end of life within ten years. A decision was made to prioritise investment in upgrades at the Bairnsdale Aquatic and Recreation Centre (BARC) whilst operating the outdoor pool for as long as practicable, with no further major investment.

That said, there has still been annual investment in the pool just to open every year. However, this got to a point where we could no longer safely keep it open.

1.7.2.9 Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool

Ms Andrea Savage asked the following questions:

Question 1: *“We as a Community have seen contractors working on the outdoor pool to complete the independent safety inspection. Has this report been completed and if so when can the Community access the report?”*

Question 2: *“How does asset removal align with Council’s strategic theme of “making the most of what we’ve got”, under the Council Plan 2025-29?”*

Chris Stephenson General Manager Place and Community provided a response which is summarised below:

Response 1: The independent safety report is in its final stages of drafting and will be brought to Council for briefing. The community will be advised of the outcomes of the report.

Response 2: Council’s strategic theme ‘making the most of what we’ve got’ includes making good financial decisions including the decision to maintain or renew existing assets, or to remove an asset.

It can also include rationalising under-utilised assets and promoting collocation of user groups where it can work, rather than exclusive use.

Any consideration to remove an asset such as the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool would only occur through a formal and transparent process, such as the East Gippsland Aquatic Strategy. This process ensures meaningful community engagement and enables Council to make a considered, evidence-based decision with all relevant information available.

1.7.11 Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool

Master Flynn Taylor asked the following questions:

Question 1: *“Why did you shut the pool?”.*

Question 2: *“Why can’t we have a 50-metre pool to practice in? A 50-metre pool would help us practice racing the full length instead of the short 25 metre pool.”.*

Chris Stephenson General Manager Place and Community provided a response which is summarised below:

Response 1: Council shut the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool (pool) due to significant safety concerns for pool users and the staff required to run the facility. So, safety was the primary reason for shutting the pool.

Response 2: As mentioned in response 1, Council can’t allow the pool to be used in its current state due to safety reasons. The new aquatic strategy will help determine what facilities we need into the future, including 50m pools.

1.7.2.12 Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool

Ms Annie Gleeson asked the following questions:

Question 1: *“Why did the Council let the pool fall into disrepair when they knew it needed maintenance?”.*

Question 2: *“Why has the pool of one of the highest populated towns in the shire been let go when much smaller towns outdoor pools are being boosted and well maintained?”.*

Chris Stephenson General Manager Place and Community provided a response which is summarised below:

Response 1: As noted in the report presented to Council on 19 August 2025, Council developed the East Gippsland Aquatic Strategy in 2015 to guide future investment in aquatic facilities. The strategy was unanimously adopted by Council on 2 February 2016.

The strategy identified that the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool (pool) would be at end of life within ten years. A decision was made to prioritise investment in upgrades at the Bairnsdale Aquatic and Recreation Centre (BARC) whilst operating the outdoor pool for as long as practicable, with no further major investment.

Response 2: Council invested significant operational funding to keep the pool operating. Officers worked hard to get the pool up to operational standards each year. However, continuing with year-by-year maintenance is no longer sustainable and does not provide a safe environment for staff or the community.

Bairnsdale continues to have a 25m indoor pool which is open all year.

1.7.2.13 Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool

Ms Dianne Phillips asked the following question:

Question 1: *“How do Council plan to engage the whole community in the development of the strategy, and not just the eight members of the Project Reference Group?”.*

Chris Stephenson General Manager Place and Community provided a response which is summarised below:

Response 1: The Project Reference Group is only one part of the consultation process. All community members will have opportunity to engage in consultation via a number of methods. This will be confirmed once a consultant is engaged, which will occur over the next few weeks.

1.7.2.14 Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool

Ms Anne Daffy asked the following questions:

Question 1: *“Given this, does Council recognise that community facilities such as public pools play an important role in addressing these socioeconomic and health challenges?”.*

Question 2: *“Further, does Council acknowledge that assessing the value of these facilities solely in monetary terms fails to capture their broader health, wellbeing, and social inclusion benefits for the community? Finally, has Council considered whether removing access to such facilities could raise compliance issues under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992?”. A simple 2-part question: - What works are currently being carried out and - What works are planned to ensure that there is no further detention to the outdoor pool complex prior to the 26/27 season?”*

Chris Stephenson General Manager Place and Community provided a response which is summarised below:

Response 1: Council understands the role community facilities provide to our community and we are certainly clear on the role they play in the overall health and wellbeing of our residents.

This is why it is important that our investment is strategic and meets the future needs of our community.

Response 2: Council doesn't only assess the monetary value of facilities. They are assessed on many factors such as usage, health and wellbeing requirements, safety compliance and in the overall context of our asset base.

Council will consider any access issues for our community, including those with a disability.

Council is currently undertaking an independent safety and condition review of the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool to clearly identify the extent of safety risks and the works required to address them.

Once the independent review is completed, Council will have a clearer understanding of what works would be required to make the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool complex safe and fit for use. Any proposed works, including the

scope, timing and funding required to prevent further deterioration of the facility and to consider potential reopening prior to the 2026/27 summer season, would need to be assessed and decided by Councillors.

This process will be informed by the outcomes of the safety review and the development of the new East Gippsland Aquatic Strategy, which will guide future decisions about aquatic facilities across the municipality. The community will be advised of outcomes and next steps once this work has been completed and considered by Council.

1.7.2.15 Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool

Ms Genevieve Wilks asked the following questions:

Question 1: *“Will Council consider allocating funds in the upcoming budget planning to complete the necessary repairs to the pool so it is open for the 2026/27 Summer period?”*

Question 2: *“What modelling has Council undertaken on long-term health costs associated with reduced aquatic exercise opportunities for children, youth, older adults, and people with disabilities?”*

Chris Stephenson General Manager Place and Community provided a response which is summarised below:

Response 1: Work is underway to understand the estimated cost to make the site safe. If it's a feasible option, Council will need to determine how to fund the required works.

This is a decision that Councillors would need to make based on the information we are gathering.

Response 2: Council has good data on usage patterns across its aquatic facilities and is actively working to offer services for all parts of our community. The new aquatic strategy will take into consideration the health and safety benefits of aquatic activities for all of the East Gippsland community.

1.7.2.16 Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool

Master Cooper Sampson submitted the following question which was taken on notice by Fiona Weigall Chief Executive Officer:

Question 1: *“The indoor pool has recently been closed, and with the current closure of the outdoor pool, there has been no other local aquatic facility for Bairnsdale residents to go to. Elderly people require exercise, and aquatic recreational activities are the best for them. Younger people have had nowhere to go after school and during the weekends, especially with the hot summer weather. This includes families as well. When the indoor pool was closed, it also took away the opportunity for the East Gippsland Waterdragons squad swimmers to train locally. Athletes were then forced to go to Lakes Entrance which made life and training difficult to manage. With these reasons, I ask: When will the outdoor pool be re-opened?”*

The following response was provided by Chris Stephenson General Manager Place and Community:

Response 1: Council understands the significant impact that the closure of both the indoor and outdoor aquatic facilities has had on the Bairnsdale community, including older residents, families, young people and local sporting groups such as the East Gippsland Water Dragons. We acknowledge the important role that aquatic facilities play in supporting physical activity, health, wellbeing and community connection.

The Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool (pool) was closed due to serious safety concerns, and Council cannot reopen it until it is confirmed safe to do so. An independent safety review is currently being finalised to identify what works would be required.

The Bairnsdale Aquatic and Recreation Centre closure was due to Council needing to address issues in the roof infrastructure that posed a significant health and safety hazard to areas of the facility where community have access. The works were scheduled with a focus on ensuring closures had minimal impact to the community. Works that impacted community access to the pool hall have now been completed and were finished on schedule with the pool being re-opened immediately.

At the same time, Council has commenced a new East Gippsland Aquatic Strategy to guide future decisions. Once this work is complete, Councillors will consider the next steps, and the community will be kept informed.

1.7.2.17 Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool

Ms Naomi Gordon submitted the following question which was taken on notice by Fiona Weigall Chief Executive Officer:

Question 1: *“Being that the review of safety and maintenance/renovate report that our rates contributed towards, the outdoor pool have been completed, when will we be able to see what information has been provided in this report. If we the community are to be fully informed, then this report will provide details in relation to options and costs?”*

The following response was provided by Chris Stephenson General Manager Place and Community:

Response 1: Council understands the community’s interest in the independent safety and condition review of the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool. The report is currently in its final stages of drafting and will be brought to Council for briefing once complete.

After Council has considered the report, the community will be advised of the outcomes, including information that can be shared about options and indicative costs. This will help inform next steps alongside the development of the East Gippsland Aquatic Strategy.

1.7.2.18 Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool

Ms Jenny Toy submitted the following question which was taken on notice by Fiona Weigall Chief Executive Officer:

Question 1: *“Given the warm climatic conditions we have been experiencing and the incredibly hot days we have endured, the community want some relief from the heat. The river is often dirty & who knows how safe it is to swim in given run-off, etc. The aquatic centre is already under stress from use & needs to be twice the size. We live in a low socio-economic area, and not all people can afford to travel to Orbost or Sale to swim or train.*

Is there an opportunity for the State Government and Local Governments to apply for funding to upgrade this beautiful precinct, to include the tennis club as well as the pool, with a new kiosk providing enhanced food and beverage offerings and making it a desirable recreational hub for many to use?”

The following response was provided by Chris Stephenson General Manager Place and Community:

Response 1: Council recognises the community’s need for accessible and affordable places and the importance of well-planned community facilities in Bairnsdale.

Council regularly explores funding opportunities with State and Federal Governments for community infrastructure. Any potential upgrade to the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool precinct, including broader recreational or shared-use facilities, would need to be considered through a formal and strategic process.

The development of the new East Gippsland Aquatic Strategy will help inform future options, including funding pathways and partnerships, and the community will be kept informed as this work progresses.

1.7.3 Public Submissions

1.7.3.1 Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool

Ms Genevieve Wilks addressed Council on the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool.

1.8 Items for Noting

Nil

2 Notices of Motion

Nil

3 Deferred Business

Nil

4 Councillor Delegate Reports

4.1 Cr Arthur Allen

17/12/25 - I represented Council at the Orbost P12 presentation night, an uplifting night and a credit to the principal and staff.

19/12/25 - The Mayor and I attended a site briefing with the Bairnsdale Basketball Association, who outlined their need and plans for two additional courts.

12/01/26 - The Mayor, Cr Farquhar and I met with the Slipway Collective and Float who outlined their current use of the slipway site and their plans to increase its patronage.

21/01/26 - I joined the Mayor and other Councillors for the annual East Gippsland Shire Australia Day Community Awards, held on the beach adjacent to the Surf Club at Lakes Entrance. The event was well attended, and some great community people and events were recognised.

23/01/26 - I attended the Citizenship Ceremony along with the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Cr Eastman and Cr Farquhar at St Marys Parish Centre. With 24 candidates, it was, as always, an uplifting event.

26/01/26 - I attended the Twin Rivers Lions Australia Day event and awards at Swan Reach Oval. A good turnout was rewarded for the Twin Rivers Lions who have persevered in hosting the event in various locations before finding the successful venue.

30/01/26 - I attended the pre-opening trial of the new Good Brew coffee drive through in the Main Street, Bairnsdale. That evening, my wife and I attended the opening of an exhibition at the East Gippsland Art Gallery.

05/02/26 - The Mayor and I attended the Marina Consultative Committee meeting at the Shire Chambers.

09/02/26 - Along with other Councillors, I attended the Mandatory Training Session with Darrin Ray.

11/02/26 – I attended with the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Cr Eastman the 2026-27 Council Budget – Community Information Session at the Bairnsdale Library.

13/02/26 - I attended the Rail Freight Alliance Annual General Meeting and ordinary meeting at the Docklands, Melbourne.

The Annual General Meeting, the first as an incorporated association was held. Michael Carr (Chair), Katrina Rainsford (Deputy Chair) and Grahame Milln (Treasurer) being the only nominations, were elected. The members were informed that Katrina's nomination was valid having been received before her current suspension was imposed. She may not participate in meetings until her suspension of three weeks is served.

In the ordinary meeting, Reid Mather began by officially launching the Rail Freight Alliance Policy Strategy, which has been developed over the past year in conjunction with all member Councils. Reid expressed disappointment that some Councils declined to sign the letter to the Premier regarding the Sunshine Rail Crossovers and expressed his appreciation to those who did. He especially mentioned East Gippsland Shire Council as a Council that strongly supports the Alliance on issues that may not directly affect them but do so in support of those Councils that are affected. Reid intends to visit all member Councils, as well as Federal and State politicians in the coming weeks to promote the newly launched strategy.

16/02/26 - I attended the 2026-27 Council Budget – Community Information Session at Lakes Entrance Library.

4.2 Cr Joanne Eastman

Period 17/12/25 – 17/02/26

Our first Citizenship Ceremony for the year had 33 new citizens from 15 different countries. It is a deeply meaningful and happy day for all involved and it was great to see both our Federal and State Members of Parliament in attendance.

The Australia Day Awards at the Lakes Entrance Foreshore were a great success, attracting a very large crowd of locals and tourists. Many commented on how wonderful it was to be able to participate in the event. The Awards are a fantastic way to acknowledge the work of volunteers who make communities right across East Gippsland so special. Holding the Regional Awards earlier than the 26th January allows nominees and winners to attend events in their own communities.

I was honoured to give the Australia Day address at the Omeo Australia Day Event and present awards on behalf of Council. Once again, the Omeo Lion's Club organised the event which attracted a good crowd. Organisers had a very difficult time selecting between nominees and jointly awarded Citizen of the Year to Trudy Anderson, Tracey AhSam and Stephen Credlin, Young Citizen of the Year to Sarah Connley and event of the year to the Omeo Region Emergency Services Day. The day was made extra special in having very young locals, Bronte and Huxley, raise the flag.

I attended the first round of community engagement for the Bairnsdale Show. After the disappointment of having to cancel last year's show, the Committee is working very hard to put the event on this November. Local shows are very important to local communities across Australia, which can contribute one billion to the economy annually. They can bring in tourism dollars, allow businesses to reach new audiences and for showcasing home produce, arts and crafts, and provide a wonderful opportunity for young people to enter competitions such as animal handling or to display artwork and learn a bit more about agriculture. The committee is holding another planning session on 23 February 2026 and is calling on people to come along and volunteer their time to help keep the show tradition alive.

I attended the first Youth Ambassadors' meeting for the year where a group of old and new members were getting to know each other and enthusiastically planning their team building camp and other activities for the year. The Youth Ambassador Program is open to people from 12 to 25 years of age who live, work or study in East Gippsland and are passionate about creating positive change. The program offers them ample opportunities to develop leadership skills, contribute to their communities and raise issues affecting young people with Council staff. I look forward to seeing the contributions of our current cohort of participants to help provide opportunities for fun and growth for other young people across East Gippsland this year, and to the contributions they make to discussions about issues affecting our youth.

4.2 Cr Tom Crook

January – February 2026

Overview:

Alongside my ongoing Deputy Mayoral responsibilities, supporting the Mayor, attending Councillor Briefings, and undertaking statutory governance duties, I have represented Council at a wide range of community, professional and regional events. The start of 2026 has been notably active, with strong community engagement, sector advocacy, and participation in training essential to effective local leadership.

21/01/26 – Community Awards Celebration (Lakes Entrance)

I attended the annual Community Awards Celebration, joining residents, volunteers, and community leaders in recognising outstanding contributions across East Gippsland. The event highlighted exceptional service in areas including volunteerism, youth leadership, environmental stewardship and community resilience. The evening reinforced the strong civic spirit in our region and provided an opportunity to meet with award recipients and discuss emerging community priorities.

23/01/26 – Citizenship Ceremony

I attended and supported the first Citizenship Ceremony of 2026, welcoming 33 new Australians, more than double the number at the equivalent ceremony in 2025. The ceremony celebrated inclusion and offered opportunities to speak with new residents about engagement and access to services.

02/02/26 – Meeting with East Gippsland Ratepayers and Residents Association

I met with the East Gippsland Ratepayers and Residents Association (EGRRA) to discuss the draft budget, engagement practices, forest and land-use management and road maintenance. Reinforced the need for all parties to adhere to Council's Mutual Respect Charter to ensure constructive, solutions-focused dialogue.

05/02/26 – Extreme Heat Preparedness Forum (Master Ceremonies)

I served as Master of Ceremonies at the "Beat the Heat" public forum aimed at increasing community awareness around extreme heat risks. Facilitated discussions with emergency services and health organisations, highlighting preparedness planning and Council's role in emergency management.

09/02/26 – Australian Coastal Councils Association Meeting

I represented Council and Victorian local government at the national meeting. Key discussions included climate-related risks to coastal infrastructure, financial exposure for Councils and the need for a nationally coordinated adaptation and disaster response framework.

09/02/26 – Councillor Team Building Workshop

I participated in the Councillor Team Building Workshop as part of mandatory professional development. The session focused on strengthening collaborative decision-making, understanding communication styles, and reinforcing behaviours that support good governance. The workshop also covered conflict-resolution tools to enhance Councillor cohesion

11/02/26 – Victorian Local Government Association Advanced Media Training

I attended media training alongside the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer focusing on high-stakes communication, dealing with media scrutiny and crisis messaging. Strengthened communication capability for representing Council on complex matters.

11/02/26 – Community Budget Discussion

I participated in the budget engagement session at Bairnsdale Library. Roads, resourcing remote communities and expectations around connectivity were key themes raised by residents.

13/02/26 – Orbst and District Stakeholder Meeting

I met with local residents and community groups to discuss regional concerns including economic development, service access and community safety. Insights will support ongoing advocacy and guide how we continue to work with Orbst and surrounding areas.

13/02/26 – Parliamentary Inquiry into Electric Vehicle Charging

I represented Council and presented to the Parliamentary Inquiry on Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure. Delivered an opening statement emphasising equitable regional rollout, the unique challenges of dispersed communities and the importance of integrating tourism routes and evacuation corridors into planning. I was disappointed to learn the state government is yet to develop an electric charging infrastructure roadmap or strategy. Something I made very clear needs to happen.

Summary:

The first months of 2026 have involved active representation across civic, community, and regional settings. These engagements continue to inform Council's strategic direction and support strong relationships with East Gippsland's diverse communities. Through professional development, sector advocacy and consistent presence across the Shire, I remain committed to transparent, responsible and community-centred representation.

If you have any questions about my activities, please feel free to ask.

4.3 Cr Jodie Ashworth

16 December 2025 - 17 February 2026

17/12/25 – Site Visit – Quest Bairnsdale

17/12/25 – Australia Day Awards – Judging Panel Meeting

19/12/25 – Site Visit – Bairnsdale and District Amateur Basketball Association

22/12/25 – Meeting with Community Member

06/01/26 – Meeting with Bairnsdale Business Owners

07/01/26 – Met with Dr Patrick Kinsell – Australia Day Ambassador

12/01/26 – Lakes Entrance Slipway

13/01/26 – Meeting with Bairnsdale Traders

14/01/26 – Municipal Association Victoria's (MAV) Fire Response and Recovery Priorities

I attended an online MAV meeting that was convened with Mayors and CEO's from the 18 councils impacted by bushfires.

This meeting was to hear and collate the experiences of the councils affected by bushfires so MAV could provide the state and federal government advocacy priorities on the immediate & short-term needs for the sector.

15/01/26 – Meeting with Tom McIntosh Member of Parliament (MP)

Our discussion focused on local impacts, response coordination, and recovery considerations including the impact on our community and heightened level of anxiety in our region following the 2019–2020 Black Summer fires.

21/01/26 – One Gippsland Forum

I attended the One Gippsland Forum following its decision to provisionally participate in the International Urban and Regional Cooperation (IURC) Program, an EU-funded initiative running from 2025 to 2027.

Gippsland is one of only three Australian regions participating in the program. The forum was led by Professor Bruce Wilson – Director, European Union Centre of Excellence who provide an opportunity to:

- explain why One Gippsland has joined the IURC programme;
- provide a clear overview of what participation means for Gippsland; and
- outline how regional stakeholders can become involved as the program moves into its delivery phase in 2026 and 2027.

This forum was to provide a comprehensive introduction to the IURC program, discuss the areas relevant to Gippsland, and the proposed approach to governance and participation, including the establishment of a regional Steering Committee.

21/01/26 – East Gippsland Australia Day Awards

I attended the East Gippsland Shire Australia Day Community Awards held in Lakes Entrance with Deputy Mayor Cr Crook, Cr's Trevaskis, Allen and Eastman along with the CEO, ELT, and the Comms team.

I had the pleasure of introducing our Australia Ambassador Dr Patrick Kinsella and got to present awards to community members.

The event was a meaningful celebration of the outstanding contributions made by individuals and groups across our community.

Thank you to all the councillors that attended and helped with the awards presentations.

23/01/26 – Citizenship Ceremony

I attended my first Citizenship Ceremony as Mayor, where I had the honour and privilege of welcoming 32 new Australian citizens to Australia and to East Gippsland.

It was a memorable occasion marked by many happy faces. I also had the pleasure of talking to our newest residents from all over the world including Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, England, Germany, India, Indonesia, New Zealand, Philippines, Scotland, South Africa, United Kingdom and Vietnam.

Thanks to Deputy Mayor Crook, Cr's Eastman, Farquar and Allen for attending and assisting with handing out special gifts.

Great to see both Darren Chester and Tim Bull in attendance also welcoming our new citizens to East Gippsland.

26/01/26 – Paynesville Australia Day Community Awards

I attended the Paynesville Australia Day Community Awards and delivered the opening address. It was a great day celebrating and recognising local residents for their significant contributions to the Paynesville community.

The event was well attended with music from local identities, free breakfast from the Paynesville Lions Club and was organised by the Paynesville Sea Scouts.

28/02/26 – Audit and Risk Committee Induction Session

28/02/26 – MAV Delegates Induction

29/02/26 – MAV Mayors Masterclass – The Mayor’s Role in Councillor Dispute Resolution

02/02/26 – East Gippsland Ratepayers and Residents Association Quarterly Meeting

02/02/26 – MAV Regional Meeting for Gippsland

03/02/26 – Councillor Briefing Session and Workshop

04/02/26 – Meet and Greet with CEO Employment and Remuneration Committee Chair

05/02/26 – Marina Consultative Committee Meeting with Cr Allen

06/02/26 – Mallacoota Stakeholder Meeting. First meeting for 2026, it was great to meet and talk to local representatives from community organisations who are passionate about Mallacoota.

The business and Tourism association advised that the bushfires has impacted community with a 10–15% decline in trade over the busy summer period due to some media reports showing footage and images of the 2019–2020 bushfires.

This was not the only reason though, some visitors to the area left due to coming from fire impacted areas around the state and were keen to get home.

The feedback about the streetscape was overall very positive with a few issues in relation to the location of a pedestrian crossing and more clear signage needed.

06/02/26 – Meeting with Mallacoota and District Recovery Association (MADRA)

While in Mallacoota we presented the Mallacoota Youth and Sports Club with a certificate for their Community Impact Grant 2025 – \$16,500 which was for the deep clean and maintenance coat of main hall playing surface, post building renovations.

We stopped at Genoa to present a certificate to the Genoa District Community Group who received a Community Impact Grants 2025 – \$10,000 which will be used at the Genoa History Park–Heritage site for Interpretation displays and Signage.

We then stopped at the Noorinbee Reserve and presented a certificate to the group who received a Community Impact Grants 2025 – \$3,020 for their Autumn Harvest event. Councillors might want to “save the date” for this event on Saturday 28 March from 11am.

Representatives from all the groups were not only excited about receiving the grants but very grateful to Councillors for their interest in their projects and the support they had received from Council.

09/02/26 – Mandatory Professional Development Session

09/02/26 – Youth Ambassadors Meeting

This was the first meeting of new 2026 group of youth leaders in our community who received an induction to the program and started discussing their ideas and plans for the upcoming year.

I welcomed the youth ambassadors and thanked the group for stepping into the leadership space in East Gippsland and talked about our community awards day, in particular the Young Citizen of the Year. Thanks to Joanne for also attending and supporting our youth ambassadors.

10/02/26 – Councillor Briefing Session

11/02/26 – Mandatory Professional Development Session – Advanced Media Training (Mayor and Deputy Mayor)

11/02/26 – 2026–2027 Council Budget – Community Information Session (Bairnsdale)

12/02/26 – Australian Local Government Women’s Association (ALGWA), online masterclass focusing on navigating the CEO–Councillor relationship, roles, boundaries and effective governance dynamic.

13/02/26 – MAV Mayors Masterclass – Speaking with Impact Workshop
The session focused on leadership presence, clear messaging, and effective engagement in both Council and community settings.

15/02/26 – Victorian Masters Open Championship

Cr Farquhar and I are attending the Victorian Masters Open Championship to deliver a short address and present trophies. This event provides an opportunity to support a significant statewide sporting event and acknowledges the achievements of participants.

16/02/26 – 2026–2027 Council Budget – Community Information Session (Lakes Entrance)

5 Officer Reports

5.1 Chief Executive Officer

5.1.1 Community Engagement Policy Review Adoption

Authorised by Chief Executive Officer

Motion

That Council:

- 1. adopts the updated Community Engagement Policy provided at Attachment 1; and*
- 2. notes the intent to also release a concise, easy-to-read, two-page summary of the policy that clearly outlines its key points, provided at Attachment 4.*

Moved: Cr Tom Crook

Seconded: Cr Sonia Buckley

Spoke for the motion: Cr Tom Crook and Cr Sonia Buckley

Spoke against the motion: Nil

Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook,
Cr Barry Davis, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Bernie Farquhar and Cr Ian Trevaskis

Against: Nil

Abstained: Nil

5.2 Assets and Environment

5.2.1 CON2026 1737 Construction of Church St Pedestrian Crossings, Lakes Entrance

Authorised by General Manager Assets and Environment

Confidentiality Notice

The information contained in **Confidential Attachments: 1 (CON2026 1737 Contract Award Summary)**, and **2 (Tender Evaluation Process)** are confidential under section 3(1) of the *Local Government Act 2020* because it relates to: (g) Private Commercial Information, being information provided by a business, commercial or financial undertaking that—(i) relates to trade secrets.

Pursuant to section 66(5)(b) of the *Local Government Act 2020*, if released, the information discussed or considered in relation to this agenda item would unreasonably expose the business, commercial or financial undertaking to disadvantage, by disclosing financial information to competitors.

Motion

That Council:

- 1. accepts the tender submitted by Fulton Hogan Industries Pty Ltd for CON2026 1737 Construction of Church St Pedestrian Crossings, Lakes Entrance for the Contract amount specified in the CON2026 1737 Contract Award Summary provided at Confidential Attachment 1;***
- 2. authorises the General Manager Assets and Environment to approve variations to CON2026 1737 Construction of Church St Pedestrian Crossings, Lakes Entrance up to the contingency amount specified in the CON2026 1737 Award Summary provided at Confidential Attachment 1, subject to the conditions specified in that summary;***
- 3. authorises the Chief Executive Officer or delegate to finalise the terms and to execute the necessary contract documents;***
- 4. notes that the successful tenderer and contract amount will be published on Council's website following execution of the contract documents and after unsuccessful tenderers have been formally notified; and***
- 5. resolves that the Confidential Attachments to this report and all discussions relating to them remain confidential.***

Moved: Cr Arthur Allen

Seconded: Cr Tom Crook

Spoke for the motion: Cr Arthur Allen and Cr Tom Crook

Spoke against the motion: Nil

Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook,
Cr Barry Davis, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Bernie Farquhar and Cr Ian Trevaskis

Against: Nil

Abstained: Nil

5.2.2 CON2023 1473 Cleaning of Nominated Buildings - Contract Extension

Authorised by General Manager Assets and Environment

Motion

That Council:

- 1. approves the contract extension to the existing CON2023 1473 Cleaning of Nominated Buildings for a period of 24 months to 26 February 2028, for the tendered schedule of rates to Almerly Pty Ltd ATF Velios Family Trust;***
- 2. authorises the Chief Executive Officer or delegate to finalise the terms and to sign the contract in the form proposed; and***
- 3. authorises the Chief Executive Officer or delegate to exercise the second and final extension option of up to 24 months, subject to satisfactory performance and assessment that the extension is in Council's interest.***

Moved: Cr Sonia Buckley

Seconded: Cr Tom Crook

Spoke for the motion: Cr Sonia Buckley and Cr Tom Crook

Spoke against the motion: Nil

Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook,
Cr Barry Davis, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Bernie Farquhar and Cr Ian Trevaskis

Against: Nil

Abstained: Nil

5.3 Business Excellence

5.3.1 Council Meeting Resolution Register

Authorised by General Manager Business Excellence

Confidentiality Notice

The information contained in the confidential attachments are confidential under section 3(1) of the *Local Government Act 2020* because it relates to: (h) Confidential Meeting Information, being the records of meetings closed to the public under section 66(2)(a).

Pursuant to section 66(5)(b) of the *Local Government Act 2020*, if released, the information discussed or considered in relation to this agenda item could undermine the integrity of Council decision-making processes, disclose sensitive discussions or deliberations, or reveal personal, legal, or commercial information that may prejudice Council or third parties.

Motion

That Council receives and notes this report and all attachments pertaining to this report.

Moved: Cr Tom Crook

Seconded: Cr Barry Davis

Spoke for the motion: Cr Tom Crook and Cr Barry Davis

Spoke against the motion: Nil

Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook,
Cr Barry Davis, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Bernie Farquhar and Cr Ian Trevaskis

Against: Nil

Abstained: Nil

5.3.2 Annual Insurance Renewal 2026-27

Authorised by General Manager Business Excellence

Motion

That Council:

- 1. approves an exemption from the market engagement requirements of the Procurement Policy for the 2026–27 Annual Insurance Program, including the JMAPP Discretionary Trust Industrial Special Risk Policy (Asset Protection) and the MAV Liability Mutual Insurance (Public Liability and Professional Indemnity Insurance), on the basis that the insurance policies are procured through established insurance brokerage services and collaborative procurement arrangements that undertake market testing on Council's behalf; and***
- 2. notes that Councillors will receive a Councillor Briefing Report outlining the final insurance program and premium outcomes following completion of the renewal process.***

Moved: Cr Arthur Allen

Seconded: Cr Tom Crook

Spoke for the motion: Cr Arthur Allen and Cr Tom Crook

Spoke against the motion: Nil

Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook,
Cr Barry Davis, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Bernie Farquhar and Cr Ian Trevaskis

Against: Nil

Abstained: Nil

5.4 Place and Community

5.4.1 Planning Scheme Amendment C159egip - Update Erosion Management Overlay Schedule

Authorised by General Manager Place and Community

Motion

That Council:

- 1. having formally considered all written submissions received to Amendment C159egip, notes the issues raised by the submissions and the officer's response to those issues, as outlined in Attachment 3;*
- 2. adopts Amendment C159egip with post exhibition changes, as outlined in Attachments 1 and 4, in accordance with section 29 of the Planning and Environment Act 1987;*
- 3. authorises the Chief Executive Officer or delegate to submit the adopted Amendment C159egip, being Attachment 1, together with the prescribed information, to the Minister for Planning for approval, in accordance with section 31 of the Planning and Environment Act 1987; and*
- 4. authorises the Chief Executive Officer or delegate to advise those persons who made written submissions to Amendment C159egip of Council's decision.*

Moved: Cr Ian Trevaskis

Seconded: Cr Tom Crook

Spoke for the motion: Cr Ian Trevaskis, Cr Tom Crook, Cr Arthur Allen, and Cr Sonia Buckley

Spoke against the motion: Cr Joanne Eastman

Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook, Cr Barry Davis, Cr Bernie Farquhar and Cr Ian Trevaskis

Against: Cr Joanne Eastman

Abstained: Nil

5.4.2 Agriculture Sector Advisory Committee (ASAC) - Travel Allowance

Authorised by General Manager Place and Community

Attendance

Cr Ian Trevaskis, having declared a conflict of interest in relation to 5.4.2, left the meeting at 7.28 pm and was absent during the discussion on this item.

Motion

That Council:

- 1. approves payment of a travel allowance to the appointed industry members of the Agriculture Sector Advisory Committee;*
- 2. approves amendments to Agriculture Sector Advisory Committee Charter (Attachment 2) to reflect the approved travel allowance provisions; and*
- 3. notes that external advice is currently being sought regarding the appropriate and consistent management of conflict of interest in the engagement and appointment of community members across Council advisory groups, and that once received, all relevant Terms of Reference, including the Agriculture Sector Advisory Committee Charter, will be updated as an administrative change to reflect that advice.*

Moved: Cr Tom Crook

Seconded: Cr Barry Davis

Spoke for the motion: Cr Tom Crook, Cr Barry Davis and Cr Joanne Eastman

Spoke against the motion: Nil

Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook
Cr Barry Davis, Cr Joanne Eastman and Cr Bernie Farquhar

Against: Nil

Abstained: Nil

Attendance

Cr Ian Trevaskis returned to the Council Chamber at 7.34 pm

5.4.3 Agriculture Sector Advisory Committee (ASAC) - Minutes of Meeting (6 November 2025)

Authorised by General Manager Place and Community

Motion

That Council receives and notes the Unconfirmed Minutes from the Agricultural Sector Advisory Committee (ASAC) meeting held on 6 November 2025.

Moved: Cr Ian Trevaskis

Seconded: Cr Barry Davis

Spoke for the motion: Cr Ian Trevaskis and Cr Barry Davis

Spoke against the motion: Nil

Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook,
Cr Barry Davis, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Bernie Farquhar and Cr Ian Trevaskis

Against: Nil

Abstained: Nil

6 Urgent Business

Nil

7 Confidential Business

Nil

8 Close of Meeting

Mayor Cr Jodie Ashworth declared the Council Meeting closed at 7.38 pm.