



Goulburn Mulwaree Council 2025 Federal Government Election **Advocacy Plan**

APRIL 2025

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Goulburn Mulwaree
LGA

Introduction

Goulburn Mulwaree Council is a local government area located in the Southern Tablelands of New South Wales, about 200 kilometres south-west of the Sydney CBD, and 95 kilometres north-east of the Canberra CBD. Goulburn Mulwaree Council encompasses the city of Goulburn and the villages of Marulan, Tarago, Towrang, Tallong, Parkesbourne, Windellama, Bungonia, Lake Bathurst and Middle Arm. The Council area estimated resident population for 2023 was 32,710, with a population density of 10.16 persons per square km.

Recent years have been challenging for local government in NSW with Goulburn Mulwaree Council experiencing financial pressure. Compounding factors including: rate pegging determinations by IPART; high inflation rates; increases in operating expenses; increased costs in the delivery of infrastructure and maintenance projects; energy price increases and shortages of skilled employees have had a significant impact on council.

Goulburn Mulwaree Council is an organisation that strives for continuous improvement in our service delivery to the community. Our mission is to advocate and lobby on relevant Federal Government issues by working with the Federal Government to further the priorities of our community.

This document articulates the seven highest priority areas requiring action from the Federal Government. Within this document, Goulburn Mulwaree Council have listed real positive solutions that will, if actioned, make meaningful generational change. These priority areas are not in any order and include:

Financial Assistance Grants

Transport Infrastructure Funding

Caring for our Community:
Health, Aged and Early Childhood Services

Large Scale Development and Training
Opportunities

Housing: Social, Affordable and Affordability

High Speed Rail Stop for Goulburn

Maintaining Heritage Assets and Regional
Arts and Culture

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Financial Assistance Grants

ISSUE

The Federal Government Financial Assistance Grant, aside from rates, is the major source of discretionary revenue for Councils outside of the metropolitan area. For Goulburn Mulwaree Council, the Financial Assistance Grant accounted for 8.5% of our operating revenue for the financial year ended 30 June 2024 (12.9% for the year ended 30 June 2023).

Financial Assistance Grants to Local Government were initially set to the equivalent of 1% of Australian taxation revenue. This amount has gradually declined to nearly half that. Added to this, the distribution amongst the states has also changed. This reduction is extremely inadequate given the current economic climate faced by Councils across the country.

The advance payment system, originally implemented by the Government following the Global Financial Crisis, was suspended and then reintroduced several years ago. This is causing issues for Councils knowing how much or when funding may be received each year. The determination of the advanced payments is not made until extremely late in the Financial Year causing uncertainty for any Councils who have limited unrestricted cash available. This also causes anomalies in the reported revenue in Council's annual financial statements. In 2024 Goulburn Mulwaree Council recognized \$6.169M in Financial Assistance Grants a reduction of \$1.934M from the \$8.103M recognized the previous year. The reduction was due to the reduction in the "advanced" payment. This has the flow on effect of greater fluctuations in Council's operating result from year to year and does not give the users of Council's financial statements an accurate account of Councils ongoing operating performance.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

Council proposes that the Financial Assistance Grants to Local Government be restored to 1% of Australian taxation revenue. This is consistent with the recommendation made by the Country Mayors Association's submission to Local Government Sustainability (29 May 2024). Council supports a compromise of a stepped increase, such as 0.75% initially with the return to 1% per year the following year.

Council would also propose that the advanced payment system for the Financial Assistance Grants be phased out over the next 3 years to provide certainty to Councils' budget preparations and allow better management of annual cash flows, taking away the uncertainty over any advanced payment that may, or may not be received in late June each year.

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Transport Infrastructure Funding

ISSUE

Council has a road infrastructure network that includes 800km of sealed roads and 380km of unsealed roads. The road network within the Goulburn Mulwaree region has experienced significant degradation and deterioration over the past decade through flooding events and increased traffic through increased car and truck movements.

Deterioration has been accelerated on key transport routes including the Windellama, Bungendore and Cullulla Roads from increased traffic between the ACT and eastern coastal hubs like Nowra and Batemans Bay.

Council's local roads are also used by at least four State Significant-scale quarrying operations that supply key construction materials for the Sydney basin, including the north-west and south-west growth centers, and the Western Sydney International airport. A further mining development is about to commence operation that will utilise the East West Freight link to transport material to Port Kembla for export. This freight link is of regional, state and national importance. The East West Freight link is a new Heavy Vehicle Freight Route which aims to eliminate the requirement for a 15t weight limit, to improve safety and enable an alternative route for heavy vehicles across the Illawarra Escarpment – linking Nowra to the Hume Highway at Goulburn and Nowra to Queanbeyan. This is listed as a priority project with the South East Australian Transport Strategy Inc (SEATS) and an emerging priority in the Illawarra and Southern Tablelands Transport for NSW transport plans. This road link is of National interest through the transport of materials for export. Further details on the project can be found at <https://seats.org.au/east-west-freight-link/>.

Locally controlled roads are used for the transport of waste to privately owned waste facilities within the Goulburn Mulwaree region are also causing significant degradation to the region's road network. While Sydney's waste is primarily transported by rail, waste from surrounding Council's is transported into the region by Road, causing further degradation to these local roads.

Council cannot afford to fund the continued maintenance required to maintain our roads to a safe and satisfactory condition with this increasing demand.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

- That the Federal Government commit to significant and regular funding of both the State controlled and Council controlled road network within the region.
- That the Federal Government commit to funding towards current pinch points in the Network of both the State controlled and Council controlled road network within the region.

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Large Scale Development and Training Opportunities

ISSUE

Goulburn Mulwaree is strategically located at the heart of Australia's busiest corridor connecting Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne, with excellent road and rail links between these cities and other major centres. Access to airports, a rail freight hub and well-established links to Port Kembla and Port Botany are driving economic growth and industry.

Manufacturing and extractive industries are major contributors to the economic sustainability of both Goulburn Mulwaree and New South Wales. With 6 state significant projects currently operating and more in various stages of approval within the region, this contribution and their requirement for skilled workforce will continue to grow.

The Woodlawn Eco precinct is a major facility within the local government area accepting waste from Sydney and surrounding Councils. Veolia are currently working through their project amendment for public exhibition for an Energy from Waste facility at their Tarago site. It is proposed that this facility will divert 380,000 tonnes of waste from landfill each year. This development, if approved, will require significant construction and operational staff.

The Goulburn Mulwaree LGA currently also has had significant interest from other large scale developments that include a number of proposed solar farms.

It is essential that training infrastructure is in place to provide industry specific training that will not only meet the current skill shortages but will also increase the longevity of these industries and the sustainability of services within our Local Government Area.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

- Establish a nationally networked TAFE Centre of Excellence in Goulburn Mulwaree strengthening the capability and capacity of the VET system to provide high-quality training for the critical and emerging industries stated above.
- Leverage off the existing tertiary education facilities within the region to expand this network to include the provision of VET services.
- Goulburn TAFE has a long and proud history within our community. By expanding and extending the current service offering, we will increase opportunities to alleviate skill shortages in high-demand sectors and ensure Goulburn Mulwaree and NSW has the skilled workers to drive the future growth of our economy.



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Caring for our Community: Health, Aged and Childcare Early Childhood Education Services

ISSUE

As a growing regional city, Goulburn and its surrounds rely heavily on the health, aged and early childhood education sectors. However, each of these sectors is currently impacted by significant staffing shortages. These areas face significant challenges accessing skilled workers that is impacting on the viability of the sectors which is further exacerbated by population growth and an aging demographic. The key drivers behind these shortages are affordability of accommodation and a lack of education opportunity.

This is compounded by a reduction in the unemployment rate from 3.2% to 2.8% which is significantly lower than the state (3.3%) and national (3.9%) averages (June 2024). For example, 20% of all advertised job positions in March 2024 were in the healthcare and medical sector alone. To compound this, approximately 38% of the median income within the medical and health care sector goes towards rent or accommodation, well above the accepted recommended maximum of 30% of the after-tax income.

The worker shortage extends into the childcare space. There are currently 832 accredited childcare spaces within the LGA, with approval for another 823. There are also proposals for other centres. However, the likelihood of many of these spaces becoming a reality into the near future remains low due to the ability to adequately staff the existing facilities.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

Long-term solutions require a collaborative effort between all levels of governments to ensure appropriate training, wages and resources are available to support staffing requirements for these sectors. The support in developing and implementing local programs to provide training to the community in order for skills to be gained locally in those key areas is essential.

By combining immediate measures (such as wage increases and subsidies) with long-term strategies to include training programs and infrastructure investment, we can build a robust system that meets the needs of community and supports economic growth.

- **Regional Incentives:** Government incentives such as relocation allowances, or housing subsidies for critical workers to relocate to regional areas.
- **Improve Wages and Conditions:** Increase wages across the sectors and ensure job security.
- **Expansion of Training Programs:** Invest in local education and upskilling opportunities for regional residents in health, childcare and personal and aged care.
- **Leverage Migration:** Develop targeted skilled migration pathways for regional roles.
- **Invest in Infrastructure:** Upgrade facilities to improve working conditions and attract workers to the region.

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Housing: Social, Affordable and Affordability

ISSUE

There is a significant deficiency of rental properties available within the region limiting the ability to meet the needs of not only those intending to move to the area, but also those already residing here. This also will impact the construction phases of large-scale State Significant Development projects (e.g. wind farms, solar farms, Hume Link and quarries).

Social housing demands continue to increase due to the lack of appropriate social housing stock. Existing social housing stock is no longer fit for purpose and does not match Goulburn's social housing demographic. Approximately half of Goulburn's social housing tenants are single occupants, whereas at least 80% of housing stock contains 2+ bedrooms. Additionally, over one-third of social housing tenants require their home to be accessible.

Covid restrictions and adaptations allowing remote working, together with lifestyle opportunities and affordability relative to the Sydney and Canberra markets has seen residential growth outpacing infrastructure development, such as in Marulan, which is currently awaiting the development of a new wastewater treatment facility. This has flow-on effects in reducing capacity for new commercial and industrial developments

PROPOSED SOLUTION

- Agencies such as NSW Land and Housing Corporation require additional State and Federal investment to deliver additional fit for purpose and the efficient distribution of tenancies.
- State Significant Development proposals must be required to better demonstrate how their proposals will minimise impacts on the local housing market prior to gaining consent.

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High Speed Rail Stop for Goulburn

ISSUE

There have been many proposals over an extended period of time regarding the development of a high-speed rail network along the east coast of Australia connecting the major cities. Goulburn is well placed to be serviced by a high-speed rail line with trains running between Sydney and Canberra and Sydney and Melbourne currently stopping at Goulburn. A high-speed rail network would provide greater connectivity for our region to larger centres and improve the livability of the region more broadly.

With Goulburn Mulwaree and the Southern Highlands experiencing high growth predictions, and major urban growth already underway in the Menangle-Wilton corridor, there is merit in prioritising the Sydney to Canberra rail upgrades to high-speed rail infrastructure. There will also be increased demand from Western Sydney Airport passengers.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

- A staged upgrade of the Sydney – Canberra rail corridor to accommodate high speed rail infrastructure as an alternative to the initial implementation of the Sydney – Newcastle line.
- That Goulburn be designated as a stop on any proposed or future high speed rail network.



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Maintaining Heritage Assets and Regional Arts and Culture

ISSUE

Goulburn, Australia's first inland city, is a city rich with heritage and character. Council has a large heritage conservation area identified within central Goulburn as well as in South Marulan and Bungonia. Our heritage is conserved, and actively adapted where appropriate.

Goulburn Mulwaree is one of only a few local government areas with three regional arts bodies located in our Local Government area - The Hume Conservatorium of Music (part of the Association of NSW Regional Conservatoriums), the Goulburn Regional Art Gallery and Southern Tablelands Regional Arts are all located in Goulburn. The Goulburn Performing Arts Centre also showcase artists for our community.

Combined with many heritage sites of significance, these facilities are a unique selling point in marketing our destination for both residents and businesses

PROPOSED SOLUTION

That increased funding be allocated within the Arts sector to support and preserve the long-term financial sustainability of these resources to increase the liveability and wellbeing of the broader community and ensure the preservation of the physical assets that deliver these important services.

