



# ANNUAL REPORT

**2023/24**

This document was presented at the SGC Annual General Meeting  
Friday, 4 October 2024.

## **CHAIR'S REPORT**

The Upper Spencer Gulf Common Purpose Group (trading as 'Spencer Gulf Cities') provides a forum for the cities of Port Pirie, Port Augusta and Whyalla to come together with a strong, united voice on issues of strategic importance. Spencer Gulf Cities, comprising the Mayors (and Deputy Mayors as proxies), supported by the CEOs of the three Councils, maintains a strong focus on political advocacy, supporting regional economic transition and fostering strong local government collaboration.

The three cities have worked in partnership for many years in recognition of the geographic, broader role (each being both a regional centre and provincial city) and industry commonalities. Whilst it is noted that each Council highly values its interaction with neighbouring areas and with strategic partners on issues of key interest, the ongoing close alignment of the three cities remains imperative.

SGC recognises the role that the three cities each play in supporting both delivery of economic growth and in supporting the smaller surrounding areas to prosper and grow. SGC is however very mindful of the capacity of the Councils to collectively play an active role to support industry, community, and economic growth and of the importance of effective collaboration with State and Federal Governments.

As such, SGC works collaboratively across all levels of government, industry, and community and with other regional local government associations across South Australia, with Regional Development Australia organisations in the region and with the South Australian Region Organisation of Councils (SAROC). These relationships allow SGC to leverage available funding and resources to maximise both economic and community development outcomes for the region.

A key focus for SGC remains on establishing and utilising strong intergovernmental relationships, recognising the importance of the region to the state economy and achievement of key state targets.

During the 2023-24 financial year, the State Government quarterly meetings continued with the SGC Mayors/CEOs and formally referred to as the Upper Spencer Gulf Intergovernmental Group (USGIG). Representing the SA Government at these meetings was the Hon Geoff Brock, Minister for Local Government and a representative for the CE of the Department of Premier & Cabinet, Damien Walker. 3 meetings were held during 2023-24. In April 2024, Geoff Brock MP, resigned as Minister for Local Government and the SGC Board resolved in June to seek the Premier to consider his replacement to be a member of the State Government's Hydrogen and Upper Spencer Gulf Task Force, a subcommittee of Cabinet. This was resolved recently, with Minister Tom Koutsantonis taking up the role with portfolios in Transport, Infrastructure and Energy and Mining as being key portfolios relevant to growth in the Region.

The SGC Regional Partnership Priorities document, which guides our intergovernmental agenda, was adopted in September 2022 and has informed the work of our Intergovernmental Group. This document was subject to comprehensive consultation with key stakeholders across the region and with the three Councils. The SGC Board has resolved to review this document in the 2024-25 period.

The Board membership has remained the same during the year with Mayor Linley Shine (Port Augusta) and Mayor Phil Stone (Whyalla) continuing as members. I would like to thank Mayors Stone and Shine for their commitment to the work of the SGC board.

While our Council CEOs are not Board Members they, along with our Executive Officer, Wendy Campana, attend Board meetings and progress issues outside of these meetings on behalf of the Board. I take this opportunity to thank them for their contributions during the year.

A summary of achievements over the last year is attached.

I thank you for your ongoing support of this important and long-standing alliance.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Stephens', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mayor Leon Stephens

**Chair**

# 2023-24 Summary of Achievements



## BOARD AND GOVERNANCE

### Spencer Gulf Cities Board

#### Port Pirie Regional Council

- Mayor Leon Stephens – Chair
- Proxy – Deputy Mayor Kendall Jackson

#### Whyalla City Council

- Mayor Phil Stone
- Proxy – Deputy Mayor Tamy Pond

#### Port Augusta Council

- Mayor Linley Shine
- Proxy – Deputy Mayor Mark Meyers

#### In attendance at meetings are:

Peter Ackland (CEO, Port Pirie)

Justin Commons (CEO, Whyalla)

John Banks (CE), Port Augusta)

Wendy Campana (Executive Officer, SGC)

6 Board meetings were held during the year.

### Executive Officer

Spencer Gulf Cities continues to be supported by a part-time Executive Officer (approximately 15 hours per week), Wendy Campana of Wendy Campana Consulting Pty Ltd. This base level of support is supplemented by grant funding and use of consultants to deliver additional projects from time to time.

### Funding

In 2023-24, in addition to the \$38,000 contribution from each of the three Councils, SGC received from the Local Government Association SA, Regional Capacity Building Allocation - \$67,650. This comprised the annual allocation of \$40,000 along with carryover funds of \$27,650 for projects related to:

- Economic Investment Profile
- Regional Rebranding
- Regional Workforce Plan / Strategy
- Housing Strategy

## ADVOCACY AND PROMOTION

### Upper Spencer Gulf Intergovernmental Group (USGIG)

During 2023-24, 2 quarterly meetings were held with the State Government initially chaired by the then Minister for Local Government and following a review of the Terms of Reference of the Group, jointly chaired by the Minister and the SGC Chair. The CE of the Department of Premier & Cabinet was generally not able to attend meetings due to other commitments and provided proxies while his staff worked outside of meetings with the SGC Executive Officer to pursue a number of issues. The April meeting was cancelled due to the resignation of Geoff Brock MP from the Cabinet.

Key issues discussed at USGIG meetings were:

- Housing Supply
- Skills & Workforce
- Social Impact
- SA Government Prosperity Projects

The USGIG also endorsed the joint preparation of a "Primed for Growth" document as a tool to promote investment, business development and job opportunities and highlight aspects of the Upper Spencer Gulf to attract workers and families. This document was finalised in July. Access to this document is via this link [https://upperspencergulf.com.au/download/125/key-documents/2177/final-usg-primed-for-growth-sa\\_upper-spencer-gulf-2024.pdf](https://upperspencergulf.com.au/download/125/key-documents/2177/final-usg-primed-for-growth-sa_upper-spencer-gulf-2024.pdf)

The USGIG formed two Advisory Groups during this period:

1. Housing: Chaired by CE, David Reynolds from the then Department of Trade and Investment, later named after the Cabinet reshuffle, Department of Housing & Urban Development. Membership of the Advisory Group includes the CEOs of the SGC Councils and representative from Renewal SA, Office of Regional Housing, SA Housing Trust (previously called SA Housing Authority), PLUS staff. 3 meetings were held during the period.
2. Workforce & Skills: to meet for the first time in September 2024 with two sessions prior to the meeting where training/workforce providers will provide feedback on key issues followed by a small group of project and businesses. The Group will be chaired by SA Skills Commissioner, Cameron Baker. Members of this Group are drawn from Department of State Development, Department of Education, TAFE, Port Augusta Technical College, Uni Hub Spencer Gulf, RESA, Workforce Australia (Federal Government, Department of Employment & Workforce Relations), Construction Industry Training Board, SA Industry Advocate, TACTIC, a representative to address Aboriginal Employment/Skills issues from Workskil Australia, Employment & Community Services and the 3 CEOs of the Councils.

A Housing Survey was conducted by the SGC to inform the work of the Housing Advisory Group and is referenced later in this report.

In April 2024 the Chair, then Minister Brock, resigned from the Cabinet and the SGC worked with the Premier and new Minister for Local Government to realign the Chair role with the Cabinet's Hydrogen and Upper Spencer Gulf Sub Committee. This matter has now been resolved with Minister Koutsantonis (Minister for Infrastructure & Transport and Minister for Energy & Mining) taking up the Chair role.

Thanks are extended to the Hon Geoff Brock MP for his role as chair of this group upon its formation by the Labor Government and continued involvement as one of the Region's local MPs.

The Executive Officer of the SGC provides the administrative support for the USGIG and the Housing and Workforce Advisory Groups.

Below are further references to the work that the USGIG has contributed to, or had regard to, in carrying out its functions.

### **State Government's State Prosperity Project**

In February the State Government released its "SA Prosperity Project" and conducted Individual meetings in each city (February 2024) to inform the communities of the projects and respond to questions. The Premier and key Ministers were in attendance at all these sessions with over 600 community persons attending.

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT COLLABORATION**

### **South Australian Coastal Councils Alliance**

SGC continues to support the South Australian Coastal Councils Alliance. The Alliance provides an informed, coordinated advocacy voice for issues impacting on the 34 Coastal Councils in SA and a forum for information sharing and networking on coastal management issues. Mayor Stone is the SGC representative on the Alliance.

### **Spencer Gulf Cities – Representation to LGA**

Mayor Leon Stephens and Mayor Linley Shine are the SGC representatives on the LGA SAROC. Mayor Stephens was Chair of this Group during this period.

### **SGC Regional Partnership Priorities**

The September 2022 Regional Partnerships Priorities document continued to underpin the intergovernmental work of the SGC during 2023/24. The document can be accessed via this link: [https://upperspencergulf.com.au/download/key\\_documents/Spencer-Gulf-Cities-Regional-Partnership-Priorities.pdf](https://upperspencergulf.com.au/download/key_documents/Spencer-Gulf-Cities-Regional-Partnership-Priorities.pdf)).

The purpose of the document is to align our advocacy efforts and collective resources to key priority actions and outcomes that can increase the capacity of the region (economic, social and environmental) to support forecast growth.

In the document, SGC has identified its key priorities and has assessed its role and capacity to deliver on those priorities. Below are the key actions and outcomes being pursued by SGC, aligned to six regional priority areas of focus. SGC roles are focused on advocacy and facilitation. A truly collaborative approach is needed between SGC, all three levels of government, industries and the community sector to deliver the initiatives outlined. SGC has worked with key stakeholders to align efforts and collective resources to collaboratively achieve these aims. Set out below are the key actions and achievements:

<b>Economic Development</b>	<b>Housing</b>	<b>Workforce, Education &amp; Skills</b>	<b>Infrastructure</b>	<b>Image &amp; Liveability</b>	<b>Environment</b>
<p>SGC Investment Profile <u>(Achieved – Primed for Growth Document adopted)</u></p> <p>Regional rebranding / public relations media campaign <u>(Further work required)</u></p> <p>Renewable Energy Centre of Excellence / Education &amp; Skills Hub <u>(Still under consideration)</u></p>	<p>SGC Housing Strategy <u>(Referred to the Housing Advisory Group)</u></p> <p>SGC Housing Taskforce <u>(Achieved - Advisory Group formed in lieu of a Taskforce)</u></p> <p>Project Case Management Resources <u>(Occurring on some projects via ORH)</u></p> <p>Common Infrastructure Funding Models <u>(Options pursued relative to each project)</u></p> <p>Public Housing <u>(Further work required)</u></p>	<p>Workforce, Education &amp; Skills Advisory / Working Group <u>(Achieved - Group formed)</u></p> <p>SGC regional workforce plan / strategy <u>(Achieved - Dept of State Development undertaking the development of the strategy)</u></p>	<p>State Planning Commission Regional Plans <u>(Working with PLUS)</u></p> <p>Regional Transport &amp; Infrastructure Plan 2030 <u>(Achieved – Plan adopted by SGC)</u></p> <p>Water and electricity need analyses <u>(Still to be achieved)</u></p>	<p>Social Services <u>(Work underway with Dept of Premier and Cabinet and funding for a project through LGA Regional Capacity Building Fund – Social Impacts. Liveability Project underway with LGA Regional Capacity Building funds)</u></p>	<p>Climate Change / Environment Discussion Paper <u>(Preliminary work undertaken by Councils – further work required)</u></p>

The Board has resolved to review the document, as a number of the matters have been addressed or progressed. The review will be undertaken in close consultation with governments and other key stakeholders.

### State Government Regional & Master Planning

The South Australian Government, State Planning Commission is undertaking key planning processes that will influence and support delivery of future growth for the USG region and for each of the three regional cities.

The regional priority setting process undertaken by SGC will inform future growth planning for the region by the State Planning Commission including the development of an Upper Spencer Gulf Structure Plan that will describe the vision and infrastructure needed to support growth. This work will also inform State Planning Commission preparation of new Regional Plans for the Eyre and Western, Far North and Mid-North and Yorke Planning Regions (noting each of the three cities is in a different planning region).

During the year the Master Plan for Port Pirie was completed but not yet released. Master Plans for Port Augusta and Whyalla in key areas of need were also initiated by the State Government with consultation occurring with the Councils.

## **SUPPORTING ECONOMIC & POPULATION GROWTH**

### **Housing**

Tackling the shortage of housing both for workers engaged in infrastructure builds and those seeking to secure ongoing employment, and access to local labour and construction trades are key to unlocking future growth.

Utilising funding from the LGA Regional Capacity Building Fund, the SGC along with the 3 RDAs, Uni Hub, RESA and TACTIC conducted a survey (February 2024) with Major Project Providers to ascertain their housing needs over a 10 year period. The Initial Findings were released in July 2024 and are available through this link:

<https://upperspencergulf.com.au/download/139/housing/2178/final-housing-survey-initial-findings-july-2024.pdf>

Key highlights from the survey were:

- Over 1,000 workers, including labourers, tradespeople and professionals are currently being housed
- Current housing needs are being largely met through hotel/motel accommodation, cabins/caravan parks, rental/leasing arrangements, and as some project proponents are entering into build projects, this is impacting on current availability for tourism and local housing.
- There are clear “peaks and troughs” over the 10 year span included in the survey.
- Housing needs exist across labourers, tradespeople, and professionals/executives – this will necessitate multiple housing types - for both temporary workers as well as permanent workers
- The majority of respondents believe that the provision of housing is a key to attracting employees to the region.
- Interest is being highlighted to enter into arrangements (lease/build) by project proponents with private developers to meet current, proposed and ongoing needs.
- Some of the numbers of housing provision required will necessitate temporary camps.
- Assistance is sought to secure housing needs – both temporary and ongoing.
- Employers are interested in providing suitable housing solutions to support attraction and retention of skilled workers/professionals.

It is proposed that the next steps in the analysis and discussions of the Survey Results will include:

- a) consideration by the various partners, including the Housing Advisory Group established by the Upper Spencer Gulf Intergovernmental Group;
- b) further work with respondents to the Survey to clarify some aspects of the data and exploring a program for updating information as projects progress, including with those not responding to the initial survey;



- c) facilitation of discussions between project proponents and potential housing providers to align project needs with potential housing projects/providers to address challenges now and into the future;
- d) discussions with the Office of Regional Housing regarding project support and/or delivery of housing initiatives, in association with the Councils in the Upper Spencer Gulf, including timeframes for delivery of initiatives and links to government employee housing and/or other projects;
- e) consideration being given to the demographic profile (worker taxonomy) required for both new and current jobs in the region, that will influence the “housing type” required.
- f) Continuing to pursue options for release of suitable land to the market for housing and development of associated key service infrastructure needed to support housing developments.

The USGIG Housing Advisory Group is playing a key role in supporting key issues to be addressed for the Region. A dedicated resource for the USG has recently been determined in the DHUD. Key issues of interest to the Group have been:

- Land availability, including identifying the needs for code amendments to facilitate housing projects
- Projects, with the potential to align builds with State Government employee needs in the region
- Addressing water and sewer infrastructure
- Collaboration with the Office of Regional Housing and private developers, including the community housing sector

This matter has been a key issue for discussion at the USGIG quarterly meetings which has revealed the need for the SGC and the State Government to confirm the number and nature of housing required in the region and the timing of these requirements.

### **Skills and Workforce Development**

Continued economic growth for the region is dependent on access to a suitably skilled workforce. Key to providing that workforce and addressing existing social disadvantage, is the capacity to deliver meaningful and targeted workforce and skills programs.

SGC continues to advocate for increased efficiencies and targeting of the provision of regionally based resources and funding that enables development and delivery of workforce, education and skills programs, projects and support aligned to identified regional job opportunities, skills gaps and barriers to employment. Of particular importance is to secure longer term funding for inter-generational unemployment in an environment where multiple job opportunities can work towards reversing this trend.

The SGC has provided support to a program developed by regional providers entitled Goal 1000 that seeks to put in place more formalised arrangements to address needs and support workers and businesses to employ skilled workers.

The SGC continues to participate in the arrangements for the conduct of the Workforce Summits prior to the TACTIC Conference in July. The second Summit was held this year with the SGC Executive Office, facilitating the one day event, attended by over 130 people.

In addition, the Executive Officer works closely with the network of providers from Uni Hub, RESA, Local Jobs Programs (Federal Government), Regional Development Boards and TACTIC to keep abreast of key issues and provide support to engage with governments, as necessary.

The Department of State Development should be releasing the “USG Workforce Strategy” shortly, having conducted a series of workshops in the region.

This continues to be a matter discussed at the USGIG quarterly meetings and the newly formed Workforce Advisory Group, meeting for the first time in September 2024 will focus these discussions.

### **Social Impact Assessment**

The social impact of growth in the Upper Spencer Gulf is a key issue of interest and concern to the SGC Board. Funding has been received from the LGA’s Regional Capacity Building Fund to progress the preparation of a ‘scoping document’ and ‘checklist’ (working titles) to ensure areas of assessment and responsible partners are identified and engaged.

More direct work on this project is being progressed through the Department of Premier & Cabinet via the USGIG along with other key agencies working in the community development, housing and land use areas.

The issue of children and youth has also been identified as a key area for activity and support and the Eyre Peninsula LGA and the SGC organised a joint forum with the Commissioner for Children & Youth to identify key issues and actions for the collaboration. Outcomes of this session will be progressed during the coming year.

### **Image & Liveability in the USG**

Funding has been secured through the LGA Regional Capacity Building Fund to support work being undertaken to develop promotional materials to attract new residents and workers to the Region. This project is commencing later in 2024.

### **Investment/Attraction to the USG**

An outcome of a previous USGIG meeting resulted in the endorsement of an “investment attraction” type document that would also attract potential workers to the region. This document was developed in consultation with the Investment Attraction Division of the Department of Investment and Trade and finally titled “Primed for Growth”. Its preparation was supported by funding from the LGA Regional Capacity Building Fund.

[https://upper-spencergulf.com.au/download/125/key-documents/2177/final-usg-primed-for-growth-sa\\_upper-spencer-gulf-2024.pdf](https://upper-spencergulf.com.au/download/125/key-documents/2177/final-usg-primed-for-growth-sa_upper-spencer-gulf-2024.pdf)