



# **ANNUAL REPORT**

**2024/25**

This document is to be presented at the SGC Annual General Meeting  
Friday 17 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 2024-25 financial year, the State Government meetings continued with the SGC Mayors/CEOs and formally referred to as the Upper Spencer Gulf Intergovernmental Group (USGIG). 3 meetings were held during the year. Representing the SA Government at these meetings as Chair, is the Hon. Tom Koutsantonis, holding the portfolios of Minister for Infrastructure, Mines and Energy, and the CE of the Department of Premier & Cabinet. The 3 Mayors and CEOs of the SGC are members along with the two local MPs, Geoff Brock and Eddie Hughes. The USGIG continues to have two advisory groups providing advice and guidance on Workforce/Skills and Housing.

The SGC Regional Partnership Priorities document, which guides our intergovernmental agenda, first adopted in September 2022, 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 and this review was completed in June 2025.

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.



Mayor Leon Stephens

**Chair**

# 2024-25 Summary of Achievements



## BOARD AND GOVERNANCE

### Spencer Gulf Cities Board

#### Port Pirie Regional Council

- Mayor Leon Stephens – Chair
- Proxy – Deputy Mayor Kendall Jackson until 28 November 2024; Deputy Mayor Alan Zubrick from 29 November 2024

#### Whyalla City Council

- Mayor Phil Stone
- Proxy – Deputy Mayor Tamy Pond until 18 November 2024; Deputy Mayor Peter Border from 19 November 2024

#### Port Augusta Council

- Mayor Linley Shine
- Proxy – Deputy Mayor Phillip Brown

#### In attendance at meetings were:

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 2024-25, 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 - \$81,220. This comprised the annual allocation of \$40,000 along with carryover funds of \$41,220 for projects related to:

- Regional Rebranding
- Social Impact
- Liveability

## ADVOCACY AND PROMOTION

### Upper Spencer Gulf Intergovernmental Group

During 2024-25, 3 quarterly meetings were held with the State Government chaired by Minister Koutsantonis on behalf of the Premier. 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.

Key issues discussed at USGIG meetings were:

- Housing Supply & Demand
- Skills & Workforce
- Social Impact
- SA Government Prosperity Projects
- Whyalla Steel Works

The USGIG two Advisory Groups have continued to meet during this period:

1. Housing: Chaired by CE, David Reynolds 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.
2. Workforce & Skills: 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.

Research into the housing needs of the area and financial support issues were undertaken to inform the work of the Housing Advisory Group along with gathering information on housing projects proposed over the short, long and medium term and issues that may impinge on the implementation of these projects. SA Water and Sewer planning and infrastructure support remains a key issue.

Thanks are extended to the Chair, Minister Koutsantonis for his support and engagement. Thanks are also extended to David Reynolds (CE, Department of Housing and Urban Development )and Cameron Baker, SA Skills Commissioner) who chair the Housing and Workforce & Skills Advisory Groups along with the members of these advisory groups for their engagement and support.

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.

## Federal Election

The SGC developed a Federal Election Statement targeted at candidates and parties in the 2025 election. A candidates session was held where the majority of candidates attended and spoke to their commitment to the matters raised in the document. Key issues highlighted were:

- Intergovernmental Partnerships
- Housing
- Workforce & Skills
- Social Impact
- Infrastructure
- Economic Development
- Environment
- Federal Government – Financial Assistance Grants

The Statement outlined the challenges and the commitments being sought by the candidates and political parties. It also included specific priority issues for each of the 3 cities.

## 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 for some time during this period.

### SGC Regional Partnership Priorities

The September 2022 Regional Partnerships Priorities document continued to underpin the intergovernmental work of the SGC during 2024/25 with an update occurring in June 2025. The document can be accessed via this link:

<https://upperspencergulf.com.au/download/121/planning-and-development/2288/regional-partnership-june-2025.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. In this review the SGC examined its role, and that of State and Federal governments and areas of collaboration.

Key areas featured in the Regional Priorities document are:

- Intergovernmental Partnerships

- Housing
- Social Impacts
- Infrastructure
- Land Use Planning
- Economic Development
- Environment

## **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).

The Master Plan for Port Pirie was completed in the 2023/24 year but not yet released. Master Plans for Port Augusta and Whyalla in key areas of need were also initiated by the State Government.

## **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.

Further research was undertaken to examine the financial and other challenges in supporting housing in the region.

The USGIG Housing Advisory Group continues to play a key role in supporting issues to be addressed for the Region. A dedicated resource for the USG has 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 continues to participate in the arrangements for the conduct of the Workforce Summits prior to the TACTIC Conference in July. The third Heavy Industry Summit was held this year with the SGC providing support with its delivery. A Health Care Sector Summit was also held for the first time. These summits provide critical guidance on tackling the skills and workforce issues in the region.

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 completed the "USG Workforce Strategy" which was released during the year. This document highlights key monitoring activities that the USGIG Workforce Advisory Group will have direct involvement with.

The Port Augusta Technical College was established and opened during this period and the SGC's advocacy for a Regional Manager to co-ordinate education and training responses for the region was appointed.

## **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 was 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.

Engagement has occurred with the Department of Premier & Cabinet which moved slowly. The announcement in May 2025 by the Premier for the development of SA's first Social Statement has seen a keener interest and engagement in the SGC project.

Workshops and engagement with the business sector, Councils, State/Federal Governments and the communities in the three cities have commenced. It is proposed that the project will conclude in December 2025 with a comprehensive resource outlining the scope of issues that are to be considered when proposing/responding to change in the cities.

The issue of children and youth has also been identified as a key area for activity with the cities of Port Pirie and Whyalla initiating projects in their cities which will be written up as case studies. These projects will be completed in December 2025 and are supported by LGA Regional Capacity Building Funding.

## **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 commenced during the year and will be completed by October. Funding from the LGA's Regional Capacity Building fund has been secured to run a promotional campaign during 2025/26.