



ANNUAL REPORT

2025/26

This document is to be presented at the SGC Annual General Meeting
Thursday 8 October 2026.

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 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 the 3 Regional Development Australia organisations in the region and with the LGA's 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 2025-26 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 Premier at these meetings as Chair, is the Hon. Tom Koutsantonis, holding the portfolios of Treasurer and Minister for 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 completed a review of this document in June 2025. The document is accessible via this link: <https://upperspencergulf.com.au/download/121/planning-and-development/2288/regional-partnership-june-2025.pdf>

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 'LS', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mayor Leon Stephens

Chair

2025-26 Summary of Achievements

BOARD AND GOVERNANCE

Spencer Gulf Cities Board

Port Pirie Regional Council

- Member: Mayor Leon Stephens – Chair
- Proxy: Deputy Mayor Alan Zubrick

Mayor Stephens who was a candidate at the 2026 State Election took a leave of absence and Deputy May Alan Zubrick represented the Council.

Whyalla City Council

- Member: Mayor Phil Stone
- Proxy: Deputy Mayor Peter Border until November 2025
- Proxy: Deputy Mayor Tamy Pond from November 2025

Port Augusta Council

- Member: Mayor Linley Shine
- Proxy: Deputy Mayor Phillip Brown

In attendance at meetings were:

Peter Ackland (then CEO) and Chris Davey taking up the role of CEO of Port Pirie Regional Council on 13 October 2025

Justin Commons (CEO, Whyalla)

John Banks (CEO, 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 2025-26, in addition to the \$40,000 contribution from each of the three Councils, SGC received from the Local Government Association SA, Regional Capacity Building Allocation - \$57,515. This comprised the annual allocation of \$40,000 along with carryover funds. Key projects for the year were:

- A social media campaign to attract workers and families to the region building on previous funding for short videos promoting the region and councils;
- Review of the SGC Waste Management Strategy
- Social Impact Assessment – Resource Document

ADVOCACY AND PROMOTION

Upper Spencer Gulf Intergovernmental Group

During 2025-26, 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
- Whyalla Steel Works
- Port Pirie Smelter

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 a representative from Renewal SA, Office of Regional Housing and SA Housing Trust. This group met on 2 formal occasions throughout the year.
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. This group met on 4 occasions throughout the year.

Thanks are extended to the USGIG 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 (respectively) 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.

State Government Election

The SGC provided its regional priorities document to all candidates and political parties as a reference to the key issues for the 3 Councils. Individual Councils promoted both these regional priorities and individual projects and priorities.

Post the election letters were sent to local successful MPs, the Premier and Leader of the Opposition, new and continuing Cabinet Ministers, Leaders of the minor parties and members of the Legislative Council.

During the election, Mayor Stephens, who was a candidate took a leave of absence from the SGC Board.

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.

SGC Regional Partnership Priorities

The June 2025 Regional Partnerships Priorities document continued to underpin the intergovernmental work of the SGC during year and 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.

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 adopted in January 2026 the regional plans for the Eyre & Western, Yorke & Mid North and Far North regions that cover the 3 councils.

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 and remain incomplete at this time.

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.

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 identified and are being incorporated into a "Housing Enabling Infrastructure, Funding and Sustainability Action Plan" which is addressing:

- Housing demand projections – reviewing projections
- State/Local Government Partnerships – how projects can be advanced through better collaboration
- SA Government Land Release – removing barriers to land release
- SA Water – incorporating water capacity/security, water pressure and sewer
- Native Vegetation – seeking to align the needs of regional cities with that available to metropolitan councils related to removal of trees
- SA Housing Trust – upgrading out-dated stock and increasing housing availability
- Financing – removing barriers of financial institutions for developers and others and also supporting the offset of additional costs to builds in regions

Skills and Workforce Development

Continued economic growth for the region is dependent on access to a suitably skilled workforce. The 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 fourth Heavy Industry Summit was held this year. 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 2025. This document highlights key monitoring activities that the USGIG Workforce Advisory Group will have direct involvement with. Reporting on progress with the implementation of the strategy has been a key issue promoted by the group.

The Port Augusta Technical College continues to be actively supporting the region.

The Advisory Group has reviewed during this period its key areas of influence as a group reporting to the USGIG, given that its membership spans the key local, regional and government (state/federal) that influence the delivery of training and workforce/skills development in the region. Its key areas of activity have been identified as:

- Ensuring its membership, meetings and reporting arrangements are appropriate;
- Implementation and monitoring of the USG Workforce Strategy and the role of various stakeholders and agencies responsible for the delivery of elements of the strategy;
- Housing support for workers;
- Transport – attaining appropriate licenses and enhancing transport for workers in the region, through support to a regional project;
- Childcare – availability for workers and their families;
- Addressing long term intergenerational unemployment;
- Attracting workers to the region – through promotion of jobs/opportunities;
- Undertaking programs that enhance local employment and skills development.

- Collaboration and information sharing among employers, training providers and government agencies
- Ensuring appropriate levels and types of resources are available to the region
- Reviewing and enhancing grant programs so that they are “fit for purpose” in the region

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 received from the LGA's Regional Capacity Building Fund to progress the preparation of a 'scoping document' and 'checklist' to ensure areas of assessment and responsible partners are identified and engaged.

Engagement occurred with the Department of Premier & Cabinet throughout the project. The announcement in May 2025 by the Premier for the development of SA's first Social Statement saw a keener interest and engagement in the SGC project. This statement has not yet been released.

Workshops and engagement with the business sector, Councils, State/Federal Governments and the communities in the three cities were undertaken. The project was completed in December 2025 and the resource developed was released in January 2026 and is available from this link:

<https://upperspencergulf.com.au/download/121/planning-and-development/2333/social-impact-assessment-resource-document-january-2026.pdf>

The document was tabled before the USGIG and it was resolved to distribute it to all agencies. The SGC also wrote to all Ministers and the Premier alerting them to the document. All involved in the project and a broader networking list were provided with the document.

Image & Liveability in the USG

During the year a social media campaign, with funding support from the LGA's Capacity Building Fund, with financial and “in kind” support from the Councils has been rolled out. The Liveability Videos previously developed with funding from the LGA's Regional Capacity Building Fund were also linked to the social media campaign.

The SGC website is promoted as a resource to prospective persons taking up work and residence (short and long term) to gain information relevant to living in the region with their family and friends. A link to the resources is available here:

<https://upperspencergulf.com.au/liveability-project/>

The social media campaign concludes later this year.

SGC Waste Management and Recovery Strategy 2020-2025 Review

This project involved the preparation of a discussion paper to inform the development of a renewed regional waste, resource recovery and circular economy strategy for the Spencer Gulf Councils and the Spencer Gulf Cities Board.

Tony Lawson of Tony Lawson Consulting was engaged to undertake the review and prepare the Discussion Paper with funding support from the LGA's Regional Capacity Building Fund. A Project Steering Group of member Councils was formed to support and guide the project.

The discussion paper provides a shared evidence base of issues in the region, identifies emerging opportunities and challenges, and outlines strategic recommendations for consideration.

The paper considers how changes in the region, state policy settings, market conditions, infrastructure needs and circular economy opportunities should shape the next phase of regional waste and resource recovery planning.

The paper will be considered at the October 2026 meeting of the SGC Board.