

Geelong Regional Library Corporation Submission to City of Greater Geelong Draft Budget

24 May 2023

Introduction

Geelong Regional Library Corporation was established in 1997 and is a shared service model delivering public library services for our five member councils.

Our core purpose is to provide a thriving public library service that boosts our communities' health, prosperity, connectedness and belonging.

Geelong Regional Library Corporation (GRLC) requests that City of Greater Geelong (CoGG) provide the required funding of \$762,000 for the 2023/24 financial year to operate Boronggook Drysdale library for one year.

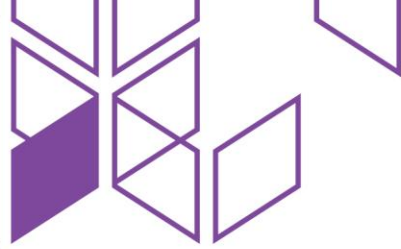
GRLC further requests that Biyal-a Armstrong Creek and Boronggook Drysdale Libraries are included in the CoGG's Strategic Resource Plan (2025 – 2027) to ensure libraries continue to stay open. This includes funding for all Greater Geelong library services for 2024/25, including funding of \$1.804m for the full financial year for both Biyal-a Armstrong Creek and Boronggook Drysdale Libraries.

The provision of the requested and agreed upon funding to run new libraries has always been part of funding arrangements between GRLC and member councils. These funds have always, without exception, been provided in previous CoGG budgets (Lara, Geelong Library and Heritage Centre, Waurin Ponds and Leopold). These arrangements are part of a long-standing, positive relationship between council and GRLC; working together to provide Greater Geelong communities the library services they love and expect.

We request that Council continue with the funding model that has worked well for decades, and provide operating funds for the new Geelong libraries, allowing GRLC to deliver an essential service to the community. If the required funding is not provided, GRLC will be severely compromised in its ability to deliver quality library services to the Greater Geelong community now and into the future.

Background

The Geelong Regional Library Corporation (GRLC) 2023/24 preliminary budget was developed following consultation with all member Councils in November 2022. It was presented and noted by the GRLC Board (which



is made up of Councillors from all our member councils) in February 2023, and then presented to the CoGG Councillor Briefing in March 2023.

After CoGG's draft budget meeting on 26 April 2023, GRLC were advised by CoGG that not all funding requested would be provided. While CoGG's draft budget included a 2% increase on the 2022/2023 GRLC funding as requested, it did not include vital funds totalling \$1.118m to operate two new Geelong libraries, Boronggook Drysdale Library (opened April 2023) and Biyal-a Armstrong Creek Library (opening 2024).

The following day, 27 April 2023, the draft GRLC budget was tabled for endorsement prior to community consultation, at the GRLC Board meeting. However, it was decided that a revised draft budget would be required as a result of the omission of \$1.118m and an extra GRLC Board meeting was called for 11 May 2023.

The City of Greater Geelong confirmed that the omission of the requested budget was not specifically related to the running of Boronggook Drysdale and Biyal-a Armstrong Creek libraries. Instead that GRLC needed to find other ways to make up the shortfall.

With this timing and lack of warning, there was no opportunity to discuss this shortfall, possible responses and a solution with council, as is the usual process with preliminary and draft budget discussions. There was also no opportunity to properly engage with our staff or the Greater Geelong community.

All other member councils have confirmed that the requested funding for GRLC to operate their library services on their behalf is in their draft budgets.

At the GRLC Board meeting on 11 May 2023 a revised draft budget was presented. The Board was provided with two scenarios to save the equivalent of \$1.118m in 2023-24 – use cash reserves or apply operational changes to service levels across CoGG libraries and the Board voted for the latter. The service level impacts included the proposed closure of three libraries: Barwon Heads, Geelong West and Highton libraries and the transition of Chilwell Library to an unstaffed model. Further proposed impacts included all Greater Geelong libraries closing earlier on Saturdays and not opening on Sundays (except Geelong Library), along with a reduction in services at kim barne thaliyu (Geelong Heritage Centre).

GRLC's priority has always been our community and our people. As a result of the significant and widespread community support and feedback to keep all libraries open, GRLC agreed not to close any libraries despite the funding shortfall.

On Friday 19 May, the Acting CEO of CoGG informed the CEO of GRLC that Biyal-a Armstrong Creek Library will not open before 1 July 2024, and therefore this requested operating funding (\$356,000) will not be required in the



2023/24 budget. However, GRLC will not receive the \$762,000 that was requested to operate the newly opened Boronggook Drysdale Library.

The GRLC draft budget was updated to reflect that the Barwon Heads, Geelong West and Highton libraries will remain open, and Chilwell Library will continue as a staffed library.

There is still a significant budget shortfall of \$762,000 in Council's 2023/24 draft budget for library operation and therefore in the GRLC draft budget too. This would result in significant service reductions at Geelong Regional Libraries including but not limited to:

- There would be no libraries in Greater Geelong open Saturday afternoons except Geelong Library
- There would be no libraries in Greater Geelong open on Sunday except Geelong Library
- There would be no libraries in Greater Geelong open during the evening except Geelong Library on Wednesdays
- There would be a reduction in opening hours at Kim barne thaliyu/Geelong Heritage Centre
- Existing staff vacancies may not be filled

CoGG Draft Budget amendment required

That CoGG increase funding to GRLC in the 2023/24 budget year by an amount of \$762,000, which represents the amount to operate Boronggook Drysdale library for one year.

That Biyal-a Armstrong Creek and Boronggook Drysdale Libraries are included in CoGG's Strategic Resource Plan (2025 – 2027) to ensure libraries continue to stay open. This includes funding for all Greater Geelong library services for 2024/25, including funding of \$1.804m for the full financial year for both Biyal-a Armstrong Creek and Boronggook Drysdale Libraries.