

Managing Urban Growth in The Geelong Region 1965-2005

Barbara Norman

Environment and Planning
RMIT University

Email: Barbara.Norman@ems.rmit.edu.au

ABSTRACT

Over 80% of the Australian population lives in the coastal zone. A critical part of managing urban growth in this zone is planning for the expansion of our coastal-based cities. This is particularly challenging given the intergovernmental arrangements for the Australian coastal environment (Norman 2005). The theme of the paper is the governance of growing city regions located on the coast. The purpose of the paper is to gain an overall understanding of the history of regional governance of Geelong. The paper begins by exploring the influence of urban governance arrangements on the development of the Geelong region and the degree to which they have laid a foundation for managing future urban growth. Since the 1960's, the Geelong region has had a varied history in terms of urban governance including local councils, the Geelong Regional Planning Authority, the Geelong Regional Commission, the Greater Geelong Council and a more recent initiative in cooperative regionalism 'G21'. During the same period, the City of Geelong and its regional hinterland has experienced significant urban growth.

INTRODUCTION

The paper begins by exploring the influence of urban governance arrangements on the development of the Geelong region and the degree to which they have laid a foundation for managing future urban growth. Since the 1960's, the Geelong region has had a varied history in terms of urban governance including local councils, the Geelong Regional Planning Authority, the Geelong Regional Commission, the Greater Geelong Council and a more recent initiative in cooperative regionalism 'G21'. During the same period, the City of Geelong and its regional hinterland has experienced significant urban growth.

URBAN MANAGEMENT IN THE GEELONG REGION 1965-2005

Historically, the management of urban growth in the Geelong region has taken a regional approach, albeit in different guises. This distinguishes this area from many other coastal locations that have occasionally experimented with regional planning but not in such a sustained way. The Geelong region is defined to include the City of Greater Geelong and the Shires of Surf Coast, Golden Plains and the Queenscliffe Borough. The City of Greater Geelong comprises eight former local government areas amalgamated under the Kennett government during the early 1990's (Bellarine, Corio, Geelong, Geelong West, Newtown and parts of South Barwon, Barrabool and Bannockburn).

The City of Greater Geelong is Victoria's largest municipality with a population of 184,331 (ABS Census 2001). The wider Geelong regional population is 221,357. Between 1996 and 2001 population growth rates for Geelong City and the region have been 1.0% and 1.21% respectively

(City of Greater Geelong 2003). Since 2001, the growth rates have remained steady with the same estimated population growth rates in 2002-3. However, there is variation of population growth rates within the region for the period 2002/3-2003/4, with Surf Coast 2.2%, Golden Plains 2.6%, and the Borough of Queenscliffe –1.1%. The reasons for this are canvassed in more detail later, one principal reason being vacant coastal housing (City of Greater Geelong 2005:10).

Population in the Geelong Region 1991-2001

Location	1991	1996	2001	Growth rate % pa 1996-2001	Growth rate % pa 1991-2001	Estimated 2003
Urban Geelong	144962	146166	151851	0.77	0.47	162,835
Rural Geelong	27978	29243	32480	2.12	1.5	37,232
Total City of Geelong	172940	175409	184331	1.00	0.64	200,067
Surf Coast Shire	14147	16714	19629	3.27	3.33	22,098
Golden Plains Shire	12975	13158	14319	1.71	0.99	15,766
Queenscliffe Borough	3123	3193	3078	-0.73	-0.15	3,226
Geelong region	203,185	208,474	221,357	1.21	0.86	241,157
Victoria	4,244,221	4373520	4644950	1.21	0.90	4,917394

City of Greater Geelong: Economic Indicators Bulletin 2003/4.

A REGIONAL APPROACH TO URBAN MANAGEMENT

The benefits of a regional approach were first recognised as early as 1963 when eight of the municipalities cooperated to establish an approved planning scheme to cover the urban areas. This included the Cities of Geelong, West Geelong, Newtown, Corio and the Shires of Bannockburn, Barrabool, Bellarine, and South Barwon. This same group subsequently agreed to the establishment of the Geelong Regional Planning Authority (GRC) in 1969.

The region has been the subject of investigation as a growth centre for nearly 40 years. During 1967, the Victorian Town and Country Planning Board in its report 'Organisation for Strategic Planning' stated that 'Geelong merited investigation as a practical alternative to the further growth of Melbourne' (Planning workshop 1975:27). As a result of this report, the government determined to establish a regional planning authority together with a Statement of Planning Policy. In 1969 the Geelong Regional Planning Authority was subsequently established.

The Statement of Planning Policy for the Geelong region noted that:

The region centered on Geelong shall be promoted and planned as a location for large-scale urban growth including business, industry and housing. The region shall be planned to accommodate a greatly increased share of the expected growth in the Port Phillip area to the optimum limits determined by regional planning studies. The planning of the region shall ensure that acceptable environmental standards are achieved and shall have regard to the high quality of the environment generally and the coastal areas in particular and the need to preserve established recreation opportunities' (Planning Workshop 1975:28).

On March 8 1972, the Minister for Planning requested that the planning studies be expanded to include:

' a) Advising on ways and means by which the future population of Melbourne can be contained to a figure well below that envisaged in the current Melbourne and Metropolitan Master Plan now on exhibition;

- b) The means and measures which should be adopted to attract as much as possible of this population to areas outside the metropolis and the Port Phillip district, and
- c) The role which Regional Planning Authorities can play in assisting towards this objective' (Planning Workshop 1975:27).

During the early 1970's there was also much interest by the Commonwealth Government in the Geelong region. During October 1972, the Federal Government established the National Urban and Regional Development responsible to Prime Minister McMahon, replaced by the Cities Commission after the change of government in December 1972. An external Advisory Committee to NURDA and then the Commission advised on proposed growth centres - four metropolitan growth centres and nine regional cities, Geelong being one of the metropolitan growth centres.

In its report *Review of Matters Considered by the Cities Commission Advisory Committee December 1972- August 1975* it stated in 1973 that:

'Geelong had many advantages which favoured its development as a systems city. These advantages included a varied and broad economic base, a rich hinterland, transport facilities and attractive recreational opportunities' (Cities Commission 1975:16).

Similarly the Cities Commission in its Second Annual Report stated that 'The Cities Commission report to the Australian Government of June 30, 1973 reinforced the Victorian Government's view that the accelerated growth of the Geelong region could make a major contribution to a better distribution of population in the Port Phillip region' (Planning Workshop 1975: 29). During this period, the Federal Government provided financial assistance for planning studies and commitments to the CSIRO Animal Health Laboratory and the establishment of a fourth Victorian University at Geelong.

This was confirmed in the 1974/5 *Urban and Regional Development Budget paper no.8* circulated by Tom Uren MP then Minister for Urban and Regional Development. It states:

'The Australian and Victorian Governments have agreed that Geelong will be established as a growth complex to accommodate accelerated growth and so become an important element in the structuring of future urban growth in the Port Phillip region. Following strategy studies undertaken in the region over the last 18 months, the Governments have agreed to a further phase of more detailed studies and the establishment of a development organisation to undertake the planning and development of the growth complex. Financial assistance will be provided when a formal agreement has been concluded' (AGPS 1974: 29).

The Geelong Regional Planning Authority was the first of the regional planning bodies established in Victoria during the 1970's along with the Westernport Regional Planning Authority and the Upper Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges Authority. Essentially these organisations had regional planning powers but were not like a Commission with development powers. The GRPA provided much of the early strategic planning studies establishing a strong policy foundation for its replacement, the Geelong Regional Commission.

GEELONG REGIONAL COMMISSION

After much political debate, the Geelong Regional Commission Act 1977 established the Geelong Regional Commission (GRC). Its responsibility was to 'encourage, co-ordinate and assist in the development of the Geelong Region.' Importantly, it had powers to invest in industrial and commercial land. The Geelong region was defined in the Act as including the Cities of Geelong,

Newtown, South Barwon, Geelong West, Corio, Barrabool and Bannockburn and the Rural City of Bellarine and the Borough of Queenscliffe (as under the Geelong Regional Planning Authority).

The GRC comprised five people appointed by the Governor in Council on the nomination of the Minister of Manufacturing and Industry Development, after consultation with the Minister administering the Planning and Environment Act 1987, and one Councillor appointed by each municipal council within the Geelong region. Of the five Governor in Council appointees, one was appointed as full time Chairman for a period not exceeding 5 years, and others were part time for a period not exceeding 3 years.

The GRC's planning objective was 'to maintain a strategic and statutory framework for the beneficial economic, environmental and social development, enhancement and conservation of the region'. In hindsight this could be viewed as an early approach to what would be now termed a 'triple bottom line' framework to land use planning. Much of the GRC's focus during the late 70's and 80's was to regional development and urban planning.

The early work of the GRC culminated in the Regional Strategic Plan for Geelong published in 1988- *Directions: The Geelong Region Development Strategy*. It had three key documents in its development:

- Urban and Township Development Strategy
- Regional Economic Development and
- Human Services Initiatives for the Region

The Regional Strategic plan formed part of that then State Government Economic Strategy 'Victoria: The Next Step: 1984 and 1987. It comprised of a ten -year vision supported by a rolling five year implementation plan. The Regional Development Strategy defined its purpose as:

- Providing a lead for new investment
- Providing a link between regional priorities and Commonwealth/State government programs
- Providing a forum for community interest in the unfolding of the plan (GRC1988: 21).

During this period, 25% of the region's workforce was in manufacturing and its population was 179,427 (1986 census) (GRC 1988:5). The Regional Development Strategy outlined a 10 -year vision with a regional goal:

'To increase the capacity of individuals within the community to exercise choice, principally through the generation of wealth in the regional economy, and the optimum development of community resources.'(GRC1988: 43).

The regional strategy provided a practical model of delivering an integrated approach between economic development, urban and regional planning and the environment. While promoting and facilitating economic development on the one hand through innovation, skill development and land assembly, it also implemented urban containment policies and coastal and rural land protection strategies.

In parallel with the regional initiatives, the GRC worked closely with the Geelong City Council to revitalise the Geelong Central area. It was recognised that as part of its economic revitalisation, works were required to physically improve the amenity of the environment and projects such as Geelong- City by the Bay. Much of the initial work in fact commenced during the late 1970's and in 1978 a strategy plan for the redevelopment of the Geelong central area was prepared and publicly exhibited. In 1979, the Geelong Central Area Strategy was released as the 'preferred strategy' and

identified four objectives: economic, access, social and amenity. In 1982 the Cain government confirmed this as a project of 'special significance'.

A City by the Bay foreshore development zone was foreshadowed with the land along the edge to be reserved for open space (Geelong – City by the Bay: 1). The results of such actions during the 1970/80's are evidenced by the very successful outcomes along the Geelong waterfront including the urban design improvements and initiatives such as placement of Deakin University on the waterfront,

A hallmark of the GRC's contribution appears to be its success in cross-sectoral and intergovernmental coordination and program delivery. The directions of the GRC for the 1990's (as it turned out to be its last) were clearly stated in the GRC 1992-95 Corporate Plan. In relation to urban management, the Corporate Plan stated:

'A strategic approach to land use on a regional basis is essential to ensure effective and efficient use of land and infrastructure and to protect or enhance the environment. A regional strategic approach provides the basis of the economic, social and environmental development of the region (GRC 1992:3).

Interestingly, the corporate plan goes on to stress that a requirement is:

'A highly skilled and professional in house town planning staff with extensive experience in strategic and statutory land use management, with access to external specialists as required and supported by in-house drafting, economic development and research units. (GRC 1992:15)

The early 1990's commenced a new round of activity by the GRC to secure a new economic future for the region. This was a period of economic recession with centres such as Geelong 'facing severe falls' in employment (Troy 1995:206). During 1992, the GRC made a submission for funding to the Federal Government under Prime Minister Paul Keating. The list of funding requests included major infrastructure works such as the upgrading of the Princes Highway, the national standard gauge railway line from Melbourne to Adelaide, the establishment of a manufacturing skills centre at the Gordon Technical College, a Geelong campus for Deakin University, extension of the new enterprise incentive scheme in Geelong, and an environment protection program (GRC 1992:9).

The great strength of the Geelong Regional Commission was its ability to connect regional economic development with urban management and environmental protection. It had a clearly defined purpose supported by a representative board and a skilled organization. It delivered regional strategies supported by structure plans for the townships. Its legislation gave it 'teeth' and its ability to attract significant federal and state funding meant it could deliver its policies. The inherent value of a regional organisation with a capacity to draw the 'threads together' and through well - considered and supported submissions, attract federal funds should not be underestimated.

But this was not to last. During 1990, a review of local government was conducted culminating in the *Geelong Region Local Government Review December 1990 Consultants Report*- an independent review of local government of the Geelong region. As a result of its recommendations to the State Government, on the 18 May 1993, the Greater Geelong Council was formed comprising the former Bellarine rural city, Corio shire, Geelong city, Geelong West city, Newtown city, South Barwon city and parts of Bannockburn and Barrabool shires. The creation of the Greater Geelong council saw the abolition of the Geelong Regional Commission 1977-93 (previously the Geelong Regional Planning Authority 1969-77). The new council was the first of the municipal amalgamations under the Liberal National Party State Government (6 October 1992).

THE GREATER GEELONG COUNCIL AND ITS REGION

As noted earlier, the creation of Greater Geelong Council brought together eight municipalities focused on Geelong, the largest regional city in Victoria and Australia's eleventh largest urban centre (City of Geelong 2005:4). The estimated population of the Greater Geelong Council for 2003/4 was 200,067 compared to the Geelong region of 241,157. Greater Geelong is a major commercial and industrial centre, continuing its traditional manufacturing base (including automotive parts, transport equipment, aerospace activities, timber products, petroleum, chemicals, textiles and food items), as well as developing its service sector in tourism, hospitality, education, aquaculture and biotechnology (City of Geelong 2004: 4).

The Geelong Economics Indicators Bulletin 2003/4 indicates strong building activity overall in the region with an increase of 19.3% on the previous year. Over the last ten years since the Greater Geelong Council was created, the City and the region have experienced continued overall growth. During 2003/4, a substantial amount of 'non -residential construction of \$189.4 million was recorded for the region, a 30.6% increase on the previous year' (City of Geelong 2005:5). During the same period, the Bulletin states that in residential building activity, 'a record 2,800 approvals with a value of \$505.2m were issued for new residential homes throughout the region during 2003/4 (City of Geelong 2005:5). However, the data also shows this has not been evenly spread nor has it necessarily translated into economic performance.

Despite all the construction activity being recorded for both the city and the region overall, the 2003/4 unemployment rate was 8.4% for the Geelong region plus Colac -Otway compared to the State at 5.5% (ABS). This was an increase from 5% for 2003 (Geelong Council 2005:5). The Geelong Council speculates that the increase in unemployment for the region could be twofold: firstly, that 'inward migration is placing additional pressure on the local labour market and secondly, the continuing local buoyant labour market is encouraging people back into the workforce' (Geelong Council 2005:6). It is suggested that at this stage it is too early to tell whether the increase in unemployment is a continuing trend but it does raise the question whether the sea change phenomena of population growth necessarily leads to sustained regional economic development.

Residential activity has been strong but is significantly different in parts of the region as well as the coast. Overall, the City of Geelong contained 70% of the residential building approvals, clearly remaining the dominant centre. Within the City, 44.5% of all new residential building approvals were in the southern suburbs, and 8.1% were in established areas, with the remainder on the urban fringe to the north towards Melbourne. Residential growth outside the City of Geelong continued strongly with an increase of 11.5% in Surf Coast Shire and 18.3% in the Golden Plains Shire, reflecting sustained coastal and inland growth since 2001.

The final point on residential activity is illustrated by the experience of the Borough of Queenscliffe. In this highly valued scenic coastal location, the median house price increased per annum by 11.6% between 1994 and 2003. New building approvals for Queenscliffe have accounted for 1.6% of new building approvals. However, despite continuing growth and demand for property, the Borough during the same period has experienced a net loss of population (-1.1% 2002/3). The risk for Queenscliffe with this scenario is that while a Borough of wealthy absentee landowners may have its benefits, this is not necessarily the basis for sustained regional development. It also begins to raise some of the social considerations in terms of a sustainable or as sometimes-termed 'resilient community'.

In summary, pattern of urban growth suggests that Geelong continues to be dominant and the direction of growth is towards the coast and away from the adjacent metropolis of Melbourne. Building activity has been strong in both the residential and non -residential sectors but this is not necessarily translating into high economic growth as indicated by an increase in unemployment. In the wider region, building activity has also continued strongly but has not been confined to the coast but also inland and has in parts led to increased population growth but not universally as illustrated by Queenscliffe.

This suggests that when devising planning strategies for the region, many more factors need to be considered than would traditionally come under the purview of regulating development approvals through the statutory planning systems. Peak bodies including industry, local government and community groups have come to the same view, and during the last two years have developed the Geelong Alliance – G21 – a regional approach to governing Geelong, a community based initiative.

THE GEELONG ALLIANCE – G21

The City of Geelong and its region has had a long history of regional governance particularly in relation to urban planning, continuing now with the creation of the Geelong Alliance covering an expanded region i.e. the Geelong Region plus the adjacent Shire of Colac- Otway.

G21 is an alliance of five neighbouring Councils, community and business agencies forming one region with one vision. The five Councils include the Borough of Queenscliffe, the City of Greater Geelong, Colac Otway Shire, Goldens Plains Shire and Surf Coast Shire (i.e. the GRC region plus Colac-Otway). It covers an area of 8, 946 kilometres and is located 75 kms south -west from Melbourne. Its estimated residential population at 30 June 2003 was 262,473 with an overall growth rate of 1.1%.

Almost 10 years after the abolition of the Geelong Regional Commission and a decade of conservative government and emphasis on planning efficiency and competitive local governance, the communities of the Geelong region began to search for something different. As outlined earlier, the region was experiencing significant physical development but with variable outcomes (economic, social and environmental) and a desire was expressed at a community meeting for a more regional approach to planning in the broadest sense. On February 28, 2002 a community forum was held at the National Wool Museum in Geelong with 60 community and business leaders. A detailed chronology of the development of G21 is available on the organisation's website (www.G21.com.au).

In essence over a period of two years, the alliance has developed from an initial gathering of interests to the recent establishment of a company limited by guarantee supported by a Constitution, a Board Charter and a Memorandum of Understanding. All five councils have now signed up. The Board comprises five council nominated directors, five elected directors, the option for two appointed directors and an independent chair. The first meeting was held on June 24, 2005. It is another interesting chapter in the governance of Geelong and during July 2005 the G21 received the Federal award for Local Government in the category of Innovation in Regional Development.

G21 received initial financial support from the Commonwealth Government through the Regional Area Consultative Committee's (RACC) program, and the State regional development program. As the concept of G21 has developed, through considerable community discussion, and with that its governance arrangements, its funding base has strengthened but is by no means secure in the long run. On May 15, 2004, the Greater Geelong Council adopted the recommendation to fund G21 for 4 years and support it becoming a company.

The stated purpose of the G21 is to: *'lead and support activities and projects that benefit the well being of the communities of the Barwon region.'* This will be achieved by working together to:

- Develop, approve and communicate a **Geelong Region Strategic Plan**
- Ensure regional plans and projects are **implemented**
- Develop and communicate an annual **Geelong Region Strategic Report**
- Ensure the development, management and reporting of **Regional Performance Indicators** and
- Ensure the long -term success and sustainability of the **Geelong Region Alliance**. (G21 2005)

It is clear from the above that the driving force behind the G21 was the community's need for a new regional plan for Geelong. As elsewhere in Australia, much of the focus in Australian planning during the 1990's was on local government reform and regulatory efficiency. Geelong was in need of some new strategic planning. The regional planning expertise in the Geelong region was largely decimated with the demise of the GRC. The legacy of no regional planning and a little local government strategic planning was being felt by both industry and community sectors. A practical planning example is the recent design of the Geelong road bypass with no connection to the Port of Geelong.

During 2005, some 12 years after the GRC, it was realized that local councils could not rely on the structure plans of the GRC any longer and a significant increase in funding by the Greater Geelong council was announced in the 2004/5 budget for strategic planning. In a budget statement, the Chairman of the Council Planning Committee announced on the 30 May 2005, that one of the key themes of the City's 2005-2006 Budget was the promotion of sustainable growth:

"In the last few years the municipality has experienced unprecedented pressure as the result of a dramatic increase in residential and commercial development applications," Cr Saunderson said. "While the growth is welcome the City is working to ensure that development is done in such way that it does not detract from the qualities that make Greater Geelong such an inviting place to live in the first place," he said. "Developing planning policies that foster appropriate development is one of the principal objectives of the City's planning department, the other priority is processing applications," Cr Saunderson said. "The 2005-2006 budget helps address both these aims by providing additional resources to the planning department. "The budget provides funding for additional planning staff in response to the record numbers of planning scheme amendments in the City of Greater Geelong," Cr Saunderson said.

(31 May 2005 www.geelong.vic.gov.au)

A number of recent strategic planning initiatives by the City of Geelong include the Bellarine Peninsula Strategic Plan, the Recreation and Leisure Needs Study, the Barwon Heads Urban Design Framework, the Aboriginal Planning Protocol and new structure plans for Lara and Leopold. Throughout the region, each municipality has also undertaken strategic planning projects for their own jurisdictions but there continues to be the absence of any overall regional strategy to bring the plans together.

During 2005, the State Government provided significant financial support for the development of a Geelong Regional Strategic Plan. This was following a 12 month planning process by the five councils culminating in the statement of *ten pillars* of relevance to the region's wellbeing - Arts, Culture and Heritage; Community, Safety and Security; Economic Development; Environment; Health and Wellbeing; Lifelong Learning; Research; Sport and Recreation; Telecommunications; and Transportation. The pillar process during 2003/4 identified four foundation projects including the development of:

- A regional community strategy
- A regional growth strategy
- Regional Indicators and
- A Regional Marketing Strategy.

This is reminiscent of the strategic approach outlined earlier in the paper commenced by the GRC, 30 years earlier. Superficially, the origins appear different but upon reflection not so dissimilar, remembering the early initiative to create a regional ordinance in 1963. A multi-sectored regional approach coordinated by a company that any organisation can be a member of, is clearly different. A significant challenge will be to secure a continuing base for funding, not just from local government.

Funding by the State government of Victoria has enabled both the commencement of the regional growth strategy during 2005 and progress on the G21 regional plan overall, including funding for the community engagement process. The timeframe for the completion of a regional plan is by mid 2006 followed by an implementation program primarily by State and local governments.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has outlined changes in the governance arrangements for managing urban growth in the Geelong region. It has explored the contributions of the Geelong Regional Planning Authority and the Geelong Regional Commission, the Greater Geelong Council and the Geelong Alliance G21. The timeframe spans the last 40 years beginning with a regional planning ordinance created for part of the Geelong region during 1963. The purpose of the paper was to gain an overall understanding of the history of regional governance. A more detailed analysis of each organisation is warranted as well as the influence of other jurisdictions including the State and Commonwealth governments and private enterprise. The role of strong community leaders such as Colin Atkins as Chairman of the GRPA and GRC also requires further exploration. At this stage, the following conclusions are made:

First, one of the most interesting aspects is the fact that over the last 40 years, regional governance in one form or another has persisted in the Geelong region. There is clearly a strong community identity with the region, demonstrated by the initiative to create G21. There appears also to be a strong understanding of the inherent value of obtaining a regional perspective on issues such as transport, telecommunications, economic development, land use planning and the environment. In Geelong, it is not the argument of whether we need a regional approach but how to achieve it to deliver sustainable outcomes for the region.

Second, the legacy of the Geelong Regional Commission (formerly the GRPA) is felt strongly, particularly its ability to combine urban planning with economic development within a clearly defined settlement strategy. The success of the GRC at bringing the players to the table and winning significant Federal grants for economic development is well documented. Likewise, the fact that many of the GRC's structure plans are still in use is testimony to its contribution to land use planning. Innovation was also a key attribute with the location of Deakin University on the waterfront and later the redevelopment of the Geelong foreshore with the Geelong City Council. The GRC not only had a strong understanding of the need to deal with structural change in the manufacturing sector and diversify its economic base but also recognised that this had land use planning implications for providing appropriate commercial and industrial space. The ability of the GRPA and the GRC to plan and coordinate at a regional level over a period of 25 years has had a positive impact on the Geelong region in terms of its settlement pattern, infrastructure investment and environmental protection.

Third, governance arrangements for the Geelong region lie principally in the hands of local and state government. The role of the Commonwealth Government is intermittent with specific purpose grants such as the seed funding for the G21 regional plan. The G21 initiative is bold and appears to be widely supported by the community and councils but has no long term funding arrangement to secure its future. The establishment of a company by limited guarantee is innovative. The development of the new regional urban growth strategy will be critical to Geelong's future. The process highlights the absence of any mechanism for regional urban management at both the Federal and State level, even when there is community and industry support for this to happen.

This initial analysis suggests that a strong regional ethos has laid a sound foundation for managing urban growth, principally provided by the GRC. The new regional initiative G21 requires tangible support to deliver the next regional framework for a sustainable future. The question often proffered by the Treasury officials is 'can we afford this extra layer of governance?' Perhaps the real question is can we afford not to make such a strategic investment for a region located on the edge of a metropolitan Melbourne and on the Victorian coastline?

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