

Communications, Engagement & Advocacy Strategy

2026-2029

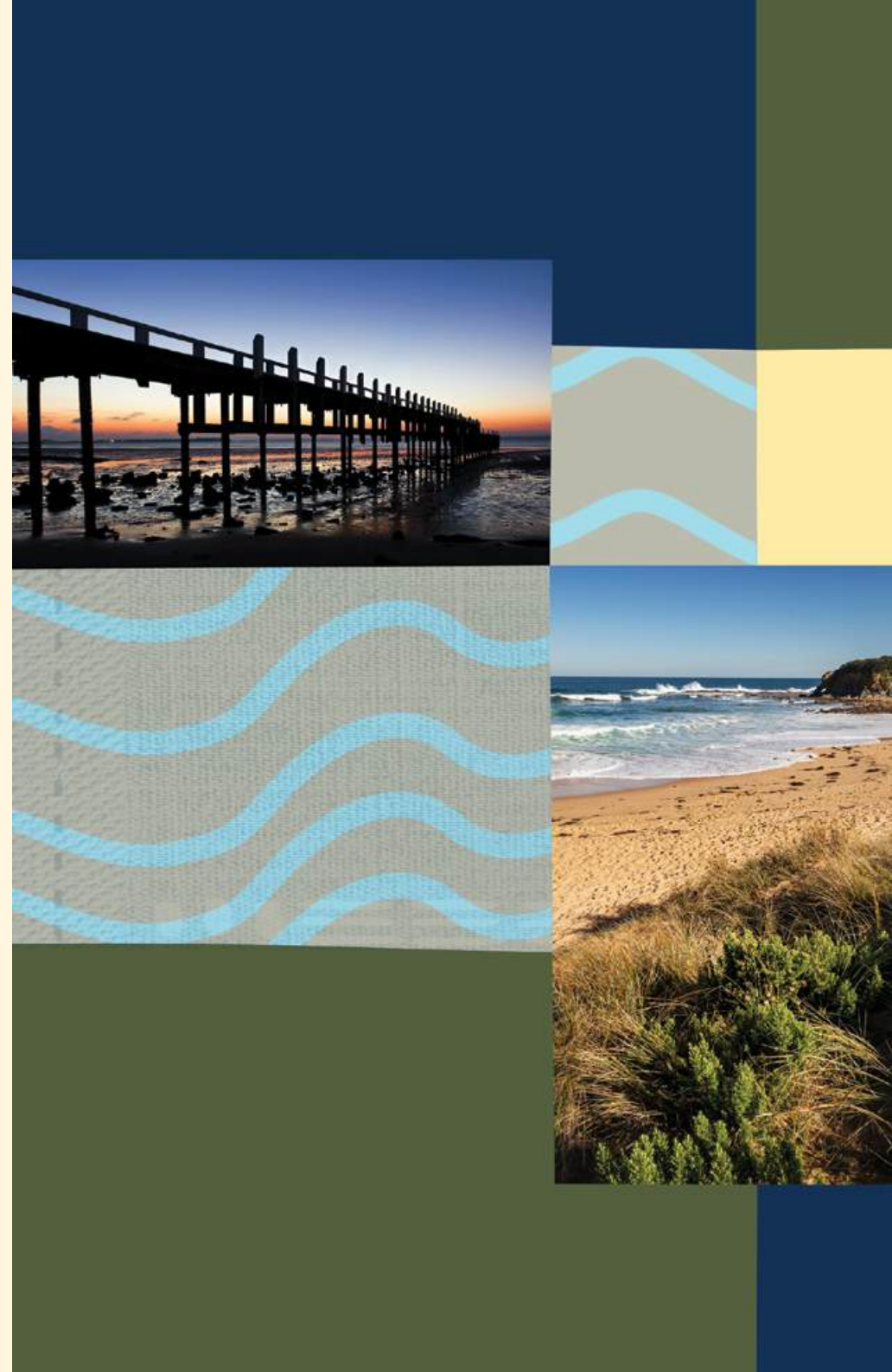


Acknowledgement of Country

Bass Coast Shire Council acknowledges the Bunurong as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waters, and pays respect to their Elders past, present and emerging, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and Lore.

Bass Coast Shire Council celebrates the opportunity to embrace and empower the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island Communities in their diversity.

Bass Coast Shire Council will create opportunities for future recognition and respectful partnerships that will honour the Traditional Owners and Custodians, and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples.



Bass Coast Community Vision 2045

From its flowing hills to its coastal woodlands and wild unspoiled coastlines, the Bass Coast is a source of celebration for all who live in and visit the region.

Our townships are vibrant, rich with culture and full of life, each with its own distinct character. Drawing on our creativity, innovation and resilience we've created a thriving and diverse economy that supports sustainable agriculture and industry.

We live proudly on Bunurong Country and build on learnings from our First Peoples and their knowledge. We coexist in harmony with our environment and are prepared for future challenges and changes.

We are the people of the Bass Coast.
Experience our cultures and history and contribute to our story.

Diversity and Inclusion

Bass Coast Shire Council celebrates the diversity of our communities. We acknowledge and respect the skills, insights and life experiences of all community members irrespective of gender, ethnicity, ability, religious belief, sexuality or age.

Child Safe Statement

Bass Coast Shire Council is committed to child safety and wellbeing, actively working to prevent abuse by identifying and addressing risks early. This work is underpinned by Council's Child Safe Statement, which guides our commitment to ensuring the safety, inclusion and wellbeing of every child

Gender Impact Assessment

In accordance with the Gender Equality Act 2020, a Gender Impact Assessment was undertaken in developing this strategy, ensuring it reflects fairness, inclusivity and the diverse needs of our community.



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Executive Summary

This Communications, Engagement and Advocacy Strategy 2026–2029 sets out how Bass Coast Shire Council will communicate clearly with stakeholders, deliver meaningful engagement, and advocate for local priorities to deliver the Council Plan 2025–2029 and advance the Community Vision 2045.

Communications, engagement and advocacy are intrinsically linked and work together to achieve community outcomes. This strategy builds on our existing strengths and provides for new opportunities to evolve our approach while remaining adaptive and responsive to shifting public and political contexts.

Human Centred Design principles will underpin Council's communications, engagement and advocacy approach, helping ensure the way we communicate, involve and advocate for the community is shaped by people's needs, experiences and behaviours. This includes designing engagement processes that are accessible, inclusive and meaningful, using community insights to inform decisions, and continually improving how we connect with and respond to our stakeholders.

Aligned with Council's operating principle of being responsive, efficient, transparent and future-focused, this strategy supports Council's Strategic Objective of Visionary Leadership, particularly its priorities for the next 3 years:

- Driving innovation
- Effective communication and engagement
- Maximising alternative revenue
- Optimising partnerships
- Strong advocacy

This strategy has been developed with insights from:

- 'Towards a Better Bass Coast' engagement (July 2024 – May 2025)
- 2025 Annual Community Satisfaction Survey
- Sector benchmarking
- Community engagement

This strategy supports Council's commitment under the Local Government Act 2020 to transparency, community engagement and accountable decision-making.

Over the next four years, Council will:

- Improve clarity, accessibility and timeliness of information shared with the community
- Strengthen inclusive and purposeful engagement that demonstrably informs decisions
- Build coordinated, evidence-based advocacy that secures investment and policy outcomes for Bass Coast
- Enhance internal capability to deliver consistent and integrated communications, engagement and advocacy.

Success will be demonstrated through improved community understanding of Council decisions, sustained or increased community satisfaction, broader participation in engagement activities, and stronger advocacy outcomes aligned with community priorities.

This strategy positions communications, engagement and advocacy as core strategic functions that support better decisions, stronger relationships and improved outcomes for the communities of Bass Coast.

Connecting Communications, Engagement and Advocacy

Communications, engagement and advocacy are **deliberately integrated** to support better community outcomes.

Communications ensures that information that is important to the community is shared clearly, consistently and transparently.

Engagement helps us understand community priorities, values and lived experience.

Advocacy then uses this evidence and community voice to influence decision makers and secure outcomes for Bass Coast.



Together, these functions create a continuous cycle:

- **We listen** to understand community perspectives.
- **We communicate** to inform and build understanding.
- **We advocate** to achieve outcomes aligned with community priorities.

This integrated approach ensures that what we say, what we hear, and what we advocate for are aligned, strengthening trust with our community and increasing our impact with government and partners.

In practice, this means every major initiative will consider:

- **how we inform** (communications)
- **how we involve** (engagement)
- **and how we influence** (advocacy)

as part of a single, coordinated approach rather than separate activities.

Definitions

Communications How Council provides clear, timely and accessible information to the community, stakeholders and partners.

Engagement How Council listens to, involves and collaborates with the community to inform policies, projects and decision-making.

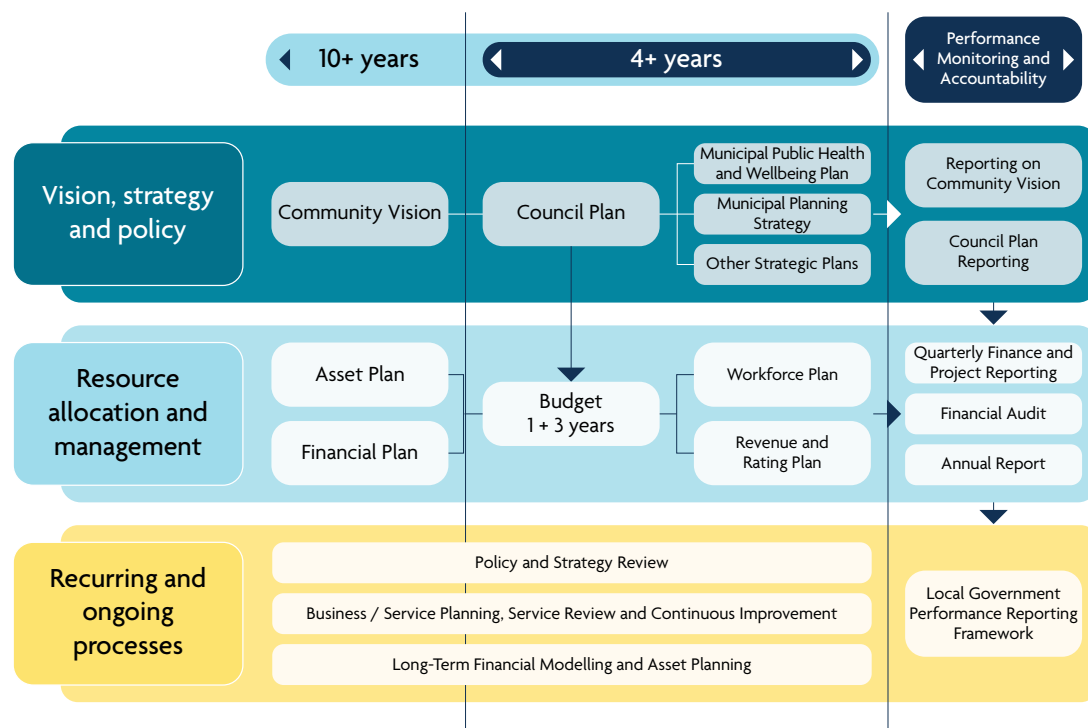
Advocacy How Council works to influence external decision-makers, including State and Federal government and partner organisations, to achieve outcomes that benefit the communities of Bass Coast.

Stakeholders Individuals, groups or organisations with an interest in, or affected by, Council decisions, services or initiatives.

An Integrated Approach to Communications, Engagement and Advocacy



Bass Coast Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework



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Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework guides Council's planning in accordance with the Local Government Act 2020.

It outlines how the Community Vision will be delivered through the Council Plan, the Annual Budget and other key Council plans and strategies. It also includes how reporting is undertaken to ensure accountability and transparency on Council's progress towards achieving the aspirations set in the Community Vision.

Successful initiatives from 2023-2026

The Communications & Engagement Strategy 2023-2026 and Advocacy Strategy 2023-2026 saw meaningful advancements in how Council informs, engages, and advocates for its community. Highlights include:

- **Increase in subscribers** to Council's e-newsletter, Coastell
- **Increase in traffic and subscriptions** to Engage Bass Coast
- Council's **biggest ever community engagement** opportunity, Towards a Better Bass Coast
- **Increased engagement** across all social media platforms
- Greater focus on video content
- **Regular delegations** to Australian and Victorian Parliaments
- Coordinated visits from **Ministers, Shadow Ministers, and Members of Parliament** to showcase Bass Coast
- **Successful advocacy** for funding for Cowes Streetscape
- Impactful **Beach Safety messaging campaign** over two years and ongoing including partnerships with key agencies and communities in Bass Coast and our visitors
- Successful communications, engagement, advocacy and partnering resulting in **funding outcomes** for Coastal Management and Homelessness among others.

In recognition of the synergies between Communications, Engagement and Advocacy, these are now presented as a single, united strategy.





Some of our successful initiatives...



Our Audiences

Residents and
ratepayers

Young people,
families and older
residents

Volunteers, sporting
and community
groups

First Persons
Communities

Visitors and tourists

Local businesses
and traders

Developers, industry
and investors

Councillors and
Council staff

State and Federal
Government

Community partners
and agencies

Local, regional and
metro media

Advocacy
Bodies

Current State



What's working well

- Bass Coast Shire Council has performed above the Victorian average for Large Rural Shires for community satisfaction with communications and engagement.¹
- Council's online engagement platform, Engage Bass Coast, was established in 2022 and has grown to 2860 registered users.
- Council's social media channels enjoy a high rate of engagement, with roughly a third of the Bass Coast population following Council on social media.
- Strong internal capacity with engagement champions embedded within teams.
- Council enjoys strong relationships with elected representatives at both State and Federal level, including Ministers and Shadow Ministers, and regularly engages with relevant departments.
- Collaboratively responding to emerging priorities, for example, leading regional advocacy for the retention of the MotoGP– we act when we hear.
- An aligned communication, engagement and advocacy approach which ensures consistency between what we say, what we hear and what we advocate for on behalf of our communities.



The challenges

- Erosion of trust through misinformation and disinformation. Misinformation can be shared inadvertently; disinformation is deliberately spread to cause confusion and undermine trust in governments or institutions.²
- Bass Coast's population swells over peak tourism periods, bringing visitors to our community that are unfamiliar with Council's existing communication channels.
- Our changing and diverse communities have different preferences for how they want to engage with and receive information from Council.
- Online platforms are continuously changing and are vastly different to how they functioned in the previous iteration of Council's Communication and Engagement Strategy. It is likely that the platforms will further evolve during the lifetime of this strategy, requiring Council to adapt.
- Financial sustainability indicators are tending down across Victorian Councils.³ This means that the advocacy market is more crowded as Councils compete for funding commitments and grants.
- An increasingly financially constrained environment makes it more challenging for Council to deliver projects and services that meet the expectations of its communities.

¹Community Satisfaction Survey 2025 – Bass Coast Shire Council

²Australian Code of Practice of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation.

³Financial Management of Local Councils – VAGO Independent assurance report to Parliament 2025

Our Communications, Advocacy and Engagement Principles

This framework outlines a consistent, end-to-end approach to how we plan, deliver and strengthen our Communications, Engagement and Advocacy work. Built around six clear stages — **Define, Design, Deliver, Review, Report and Refine** — it ensures we are grounded in community needs, aligned with organisational priorities, and deliberate in how we connect, engage and advocate. By taking a coordinated approach, we can deliver clear messaging, meaningful engagement and targeted advocacy, while continuously learning from outcomes and feedback.

This cycle supports better decision making, builds trust with our community, and ensures our work remains responsive, effective and fit for purpose over time.

	Define	Understand the issue, context and desired outcomes by identifying community needs, organisational priorities and advocacy opportunities.
	Design	Plan a coordinated approach that brings together engagement, communications and advocacy — selecting the right methods, messages and timing to reach the right people.
	Deliver	Implement the plan through targeted engagement activities, selecting the right methods, messages, partners and timing to reach the right people.
	Review	Monitor progress and participation, capturing feedback, insights and emerging issues throughout delivery.
	Report	Share outcomes, insights and impact with decision-makers, stakeholders partners and the community to build transparency and trust.
	Refine	Apply learnings to continuously improve future engagement, communications and advocacy approaches, ensuring they remain effective, relevant and community-informed.

Communications Principles

Our communities expects communication that is clear, accessible and transparent, and available in the places they already go to for information. They want to feel confident that they can quickly understand what Council is doing, why decisions are being made, and how those decisions may affect them.

They have also told us they value communication that is clear, timely and transparent, helping them stay informed about projects, services, opportunities and issues across Bass Coast. Community members want information presented in plain language, without unnecessary complexity, and delivered through a mix of digital and traditional channels so it reaches people of different ages, abilities and levels of digital access.

Importantly, our communities want to see the positive work happening across our region, understand how Council is investing in their community, and feel a sense of connection and pride in where they live.

In response, Council's communication approach will prioritise clarity, accessibility, transparency and reach, ensuring information is delivered in ways that are inclusive, consistent and easy for our community to engage with.

Transparent	We explain decisions and constraints so our communities understands what Council is doing and why.
Timely	We lead the conversation by communicating early and proactively, ensuring our community hears our story first where possible. We respond in good time.
Informative	Ensuring our community knows about the services, projects, decisions and opportunities that affect them.
Reach	We use accessible and inclusive communication channels to connect with the broadest possible cross-section of the community.
Accuracy	We provide reliable and up-to-date information people can trust.
Civic Pride	We celebrate our people, places and achievements to strengthen community connection and pride in Bass Coast.
Customer at Centre	We design our information and services with accessibility and user experience in mind.
Innovative	We embrace new and innovative approaches to communication to improve how we connect with our community.

How We Communicate

Council's communications are delivered across a mix of owned, earned and digital channels, ensuring information reaches the broadest cross-section of our community. Our approach is guided by a commitment to clarity, timeliness and accessibility, and is designed to meet people where they already are.

Council follows a consistent approach to communications planning, ensuring messages are clear, coordinated and connected to broader strategic objectives.

We commit to follow best practice and support 6 stages to define, design and deliver Council communications:

	Define	Identify the communications purpose, audience and key messages for each initiative
	Design	Select the most effective channels and formats for the audience, including accessible and non-digital options where needed
	Deliver	Publish and distribute content that is accurate, plain language and on brand, ensuring alignment across teams
	Review	Monitor community response and feedback across channels
	Report	Track reach, engagement and overall effectiveness
	Refine	Apply insights and learnings to strengthen future communications

Effective communications is a shared responsibility. The Communications team provides guidance, tools and templates to support all areas of Council to communicate consistently and confidently.



Engagement Principles

Engagement is not just about gathering feedback. Engagement is a strategic function that improves decision-making, strengthens community trust and supports effective advocacy. Council engages to understand community perspectives and ensure decisions are informed by lived experience and local knowledge.

By engaging early and meaningfully, we ensure community perspectives are understood, considered and embedded, positioning Council to make decisions with community front of mind and advocate with confidence and credibility.

Our community has told us they want to be heard, to understand how their input is used, and to see the impact of their contribution. They value engagement that is genuine, inclusive and transparent, and that is clear about what can be influenced and how feedback will be used.

In response, Council's engagement approach will prioritise authenticity, clarity and impact ensuring our engagement is purposeful, inclusive and clearly connected to decision-making.

Purposeful	We engage with clear intent, ensuring every consultation has a defined purpose and a genuine opportunity for community to influence outcomes.
Transparent	We are open about what is being asked, what can be influenced, what cannot and how decisions will be made.
Inclusive	We create opportunities for a diverse range of voices to be heard, with a focus on reaching under-represented and harder to reach community members.
Respectful	We value the time, input and lived experience of our community, ensuring engagement is safe, considered and accessible.
Impactful	We use community input to inform decisions and clearly demonstrate how feedback has shaped outcomes.
Coordinated	We plan and deliver engagement across Council in a consistent and intentional way, reducing duplication and avoiding engagement fatigue.
Connected	We ensure engagement insights are shared across Council and used to inform communications, advocacy and future planning
Adaptive	We will try new approaches, learning from each engagement and continuously improving how we connect with our community.

How We Engage

Council follows a structured approach to engagement, ensuring consistency and best practice across all projects. This approach supports the full lifecycle of engagement from defining purpose through to reporting outcomes and applying insights.

We commit to follow best practice and support 6 stages to define, design and deliver public engagement:

	Define	Identify the purpose of the engagement, what we already know, and where the community can influence outcomes
	Design	Work with internal stakeholders to develop an appropriate, inclusive engagement approach
	Deliver	Undertake genuine, inclusive and respectful engagement
	Review	Analyse and interpret engagement data and insights
	Report	Close the loop by sharing outcomes and demonstrating how feedback has been used
	Refine	Apply insights to inform decision making and improve future engagement and communications



Advocacy Principles

Advocacy is how Council works to influence decision makers and secure outcomes that benefit the Bass Coast community.

Effective advocacy is both strategic and opportunistic. It requires us to be clear on our priorities, while also being ready to respond to emerging opportunities whether through government funding, policy shifts or election commitments.

Bass Coast brings a strong and united voice to advocacy. Councillors, officers and community all play a role in shaping and supporting our advocacy efforts. This shared commitment, combined with a genuine passion for our region, strengthens our ability to influence and achieve meaningful outcomes.

While we work together, effective advocacy requires clearly defined roles. Councillors provide leadership as elected representatives and community advocates. Council officers coordinate advocacy activity, provide evidence and maintain strategic relationships. Community and partners contribute local voice and legitimacy, strengthening Council's advocacy case.

Our advocacy is most effective when it is coordinated across communications, engagement and advocacy ensuring we are building awareness, capturing community voice and presenting a strong, evidence-based case to decision makers. This approach ensures Council's advocacy remains focused, evidence-based and aligned with community priorities while maintaining flexibility to respond to emerging opportunities and changing government contexts.

Strategic	Focussing our efforts on clearly defined priorities that align with Council's strategic direction and community need, ensuring our advocacy is targeted and purposeful.
Opportunity Led	Ready to act when opportunities arise aligning our advocacy with government priorities, funding cycles and decision-making moments to maximise impact.
Community Informed	Our advocacy reflects the voices, experiences and priorities of our community.
Coordinated	We take an integrated approach across communications, engagement and advocacy, ensuring our efforts are aligned, visible and positioned for impact.
Elevated	Actively raising the profile of Bass Coast, ensuring our priorities are well known, clearly understood and front of mind for decision makers.
Evidence Based	We advocate with confidence, using data, local insight and community input to support a compelling and credible case.
Adaptive	Remaining responsive to emerging issues and shifting contexts, ensuring we are ready to act when opportunities arise.
Outcome Focused	We are focused on securing meaningful outcomes for community and continuously improving our advocacy based on outcomes and results.

How We Advocate

Council's advocacy is guided by Council endorsed Advocacy Priorities, which are aligned to the Council Plan to reflect community need, strategic direction and opportunity. These priorities are structured across two tiers:

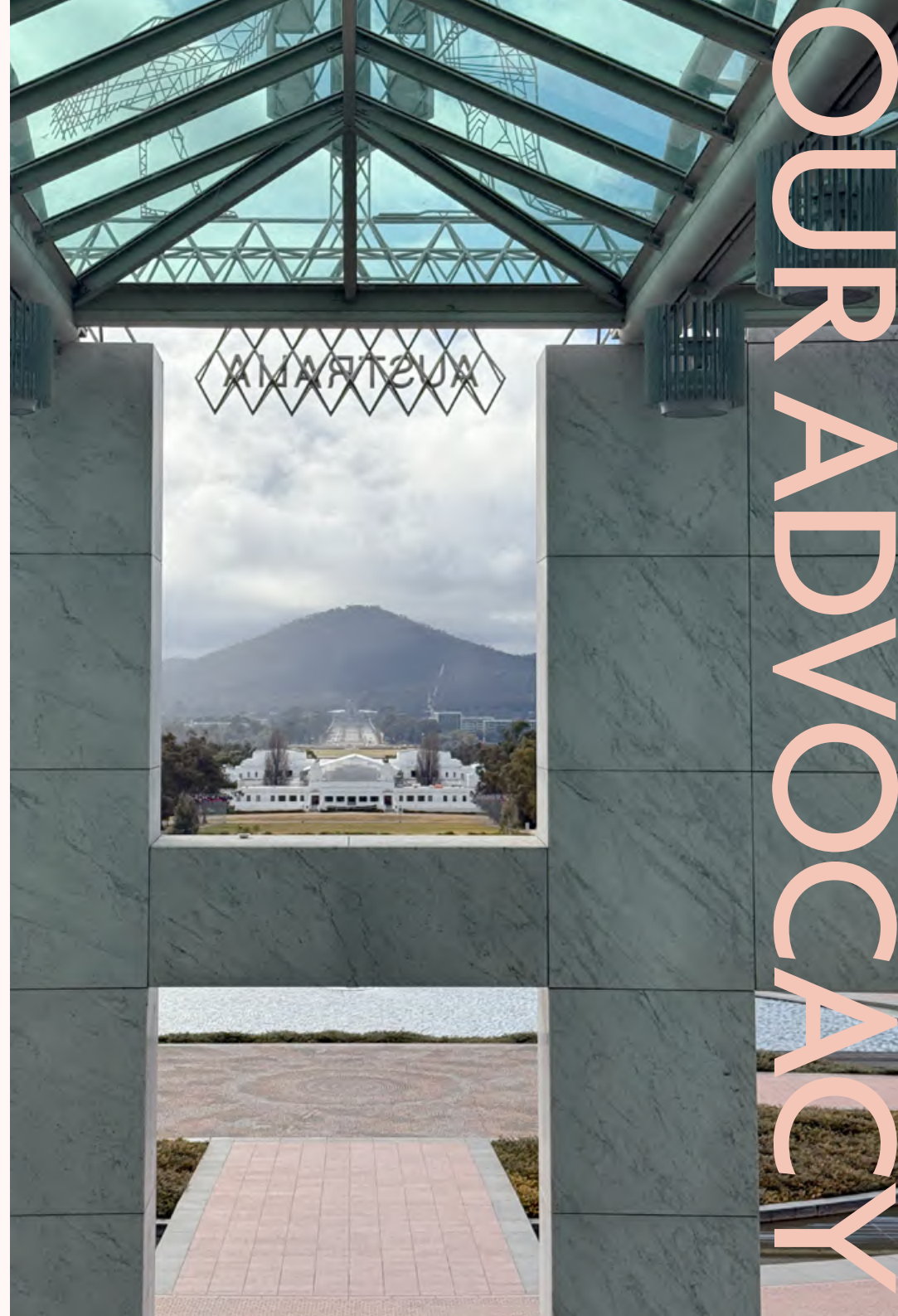
Tier 1 priorities represent Council's highest advocacy focus. These are significant, strategic projects that are resourced accordingly and supported by detailed advocacy plans. These plans take a coordinated approach across communications, engagement and advocacy to maximise visibility, support and impact.

Tier 2 priorities represent important areas of advocacy that are progressed as opportunities arise, ensuring Council remains responsive and able to advocate across a broad range of community needs.

Where new advocacy priorities are identified, including those raised by Councillors, these will be progressed through appropriate Council processes (such as Notice of Motion or formal briefings) and considered through Council's advocacy framework to support an evidence based, community aligned and broadly endorsed approach.

This approach keeps Council's advocacy focused, coordinated and positioned to deliver the greatest impact for the Bass Coast community while still allowing a timely response to emerging opportunities.

Advocacy priorities are reviewed and refreshed over time to ensure they remain relevant, achievable and best represent the needs of our community.



How We Advocate

We commit to follow best practice and support 6 stages to define, design and deliver our advocacy work:



Define

Identify the issue, clarify the advocacy ask, and assess priority using agreed tools



Design

Tailor strategies and tactics to the initiative, including phase and tone



Deliver

Implement advocacy actions, aligning efforts and responding to changing circumstances



Review

Monitor progress, context and effectiveness, adapting approach as needed



Report

Provide regular updates through quarterly reporting and the Annual Action Plan



Refine

Evaluate outcomes annually to strengthen future advocacy and ensure accountability



What we will do

Priority	Action	2026	2027	2028	2029
Effective communication and engagement	Review and update Council's Social Media Policy		•		
	Review all content on Council's website to ensure it is current, transparent and written in accessible language	•		•	
	Partner with teams to simplify complex and technical information to ensure our communications are easy to understand for our communities	•	•	•	•
	Deliver a new Bass Coast Shire Council website	•			
	Ensure policy positions and long documents of community interest are summarised with accessible website content		•	•	•
	Deliver media and social media training for Councillors		•	•	•
	Implement new ways for Council to inform community of decisions made in Chamber		•		
	Partner with internal project delivery teams to ensure a consistent and informative approach to how we communicate projects		•		
Driving Innovation	Increase internal communications to ensure alignment across Council operations	•			
	Refresh Council's intranet to ensure internal information is clear and accessible and support operational efficiencies		•		
	Review and explore tactics to support communication of seasonal and emergency messaging to visitors of Bass Coast		•		
	Explore development of a sub-brand focusing on lifestyle, culture, advocacy, economic development and investment, distinct from core corporate communications		•		

How we will measure our impact

Strategic indicators will be reported annually in the Bass Coast Shire Council Annual Report.

Indicator of success	Baseline	Target	Data source
Community satisfaction with informing community	TBD 2026	Maintain or increase	Customer Satisfaction Survey
Grow digital newsletter subscribers	1155 subscribers	Increase	Internal Data
Grow reach across social media platforms	1.9 million views for last 12 months	Increase	Internal Data
Website unique visits	642k unique visits	Increase	Internal Data

What we will do

Outcome	Action	2026	2027	2028	2029
Effective communication and engagement	Review and update Council's Community Engagement Policy	•			
	Review all content on Engage Bass Coast to ensure it is current, transparent and written in accessible language		•		
	Increase internal engagement capability through internal communication, staff toolkits and re-establishment of an internal engagement network		•		
	Clearly articulate to community how their feedback has influenced a project, service or program	•	•	•	•
	Undertake a desktop review of best practice approaches to better engage under-represented groups		•		
	Encourage and support Councillors to engage with their communities directly	•			
	Co-design deliberative engagement to inform the next Council Plan			•	
Driving Innovation	Develop methods to capture community sentiment outside of formal project engagements		•		

How we will measure our impact

Strategic indicators will be reported annually in the Bass Coast Shire Council Annual Report.

Indicator of success	Baseline	Target	Data source
Community satisfaction with our consultation and engagement	51	Maintain or increase	Customer Satisfaction Survey
Visits to Engage Bass Coast website	94,707	Increase	Internal Data
Subscribers to Engage Bass Coast website	2860	Increase	Internal Data

What we will do

Outcome	Action	2026	2027	2028	2029
Optimising partnerships	Take an active role in sector and regional advocacy forums to strengthen relationships and ensure Bass Coast is well represented	•	•	•	•
	Develop a simple advocacy toolkit to support community and partners to advocate alongside Council		•		
Strong advocacy	Build internal advocacy capability through clear communication, practical tools and cross-Council working groups		•		
	Following the development of the Council Plan, Develop and implement Councillor-endorsed advocacy priorities, supported by clear action plans	•			•
	Respond to emerging advocacy priorities as they arise, utilising the advocacy framework to determine hierarchy and appropriate treatments	•	•	•	•
	Review advocacy priorities annually to ensure they remain relevant and effective		•	•	•
Maximising alternative revenue	Identify grant opportunities that support Council's advocacy priorities, and support timely, evidence-based applications	•	•	•	•
	Strengthen internal capability in grant identification and application development		•		
Driving Innovation	Develop and trial digital advocacy tools to improve how decision-makers and community engage with Council priorities	•	•	•	•

How we will measure our impact

Strategic indicators will be reported annually in the Bass Coast Shire Council Annual Report.

Indicator of success	Baseline	Target	Data source
Community satisfaction with lobbying on behalf of community	TBD 2026	Maintain or increase	Customer Satisfaction Survey
Annual Partner Satisfaction Survey	TBD 2026	Maintain or increase	Internal Data