



MOUNT BARKER
DISTRICT COUNCIL

5 June 2023

Media Release

Mount Barker excluded from \$600m grants scheme

Mount Barker District Council has questioned why it does not qualify to apply for funding from the new \$600 million Growing Regions program introduced by the Australian Government, while larger metropolitan cities such as Geelong and Gold Coast are eligible.

The new program offers grant funding opportunities for vital infrastructure and community projects across regional and rural Australia, but according to its mapping tool, Mount Barker has been classified as a “Major City” in the Greater Adelaide area and is not on the list of eligible local government regions.

Mount Barker Mayor David Leach expressed concern about the council's ineligibility for the Growing Regions program, stating, “This omission denies our rapidly growing community the chance to benefit from the significant projects we could submit for grants under this program.”

The Growing Regions program supports local government entities and not-for-profit organisations as eligible applicants for grants ranging from \$500,000 to \$15 million. The Government says this program is merit-based and aims to fill infrastructure gaps and contribute to socio-economic outcomes in regional and rural Australia.

Mayor Leach stressed the regional nature of the Mount Barker district, despite its relative proximity to Adelaide.

“While Mount Barker is located 35km from Adelaide, we are not an outer metropolitan suburb, but very much a regional area,” Mayor Leach said.

“We face the same challenges and pressures experienced by all regional areas, including managing isolated communities, fostering local employment, and ensuring access to crucial services and community infrastructure.

“Mount Barker is a regional centre providing vital services and facilities to approximately 100,000 people across the Adelaide Hills, including communities from council areas which have not been excluded from funding eligibility.”

The district’s population is estimated to reach 55,000 by 2036 and ultimately between 75,000 and 80,000, requiring significant investment in infrastructure and services to support this rapid population growth. Poised to become the second-largest city in South Australia over the next decade, the council has been actively investing in infrastructure,

particularly in the areas of wastewater, transport, and recreation and sport. Further investment, in excess of \$100 million, is planned over the coming years.

“Our ineligibility is particularly disappointing given that larger cities such as Geelong and Gold Coast are considered eligible,” Mayor Leach said. “We need to understand why Mount Barker, an area of considerable growth and development, has been excluded from this program.”

With support from Regional Development Australia Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island, the council will be voicing its concern and disappointment to the Minister for Regional Development, Kirsty McBain. The council is urging the Australian Government to reassess the criteria for the Growing Regions funding, which opens for expressions of interest on 5 July, to make sure that Mount Barker is eligible to apply.

As noted by Regional Development Australia Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island, a similar issue occurred when the now defunct Building Better Regions grant funding program was launched. This was eventually resolved following strong advocacy, resulting in substantial grants for significant local projects, such as stage 1 of the Summit Sport and Recreation Park.

Projects that could be submitted for funding under the Growing Regions program include the Mount Barker City Centre project, expansion of the recycled water network, and creation of infrastructure for recycled water provision to townships throughout the district.

“Council is hopeful that its advocacy will result in a change to the current eligibility arrangements, enabling it to apply for each of the two program rounds,” Mayor Leach said.

“Given the significant boost to the socio-economic outcomes of the region these projects would provide, it is essential for Council to be deemed eligible from the first round of funding.

“Such funding is vital for the development and prosperity of our district, and we believe we meet the intent of this program. We look forward to collaborating with the government to bring crucial infrastructure to our community.”

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Mount Barker District Council Communications Manager, Ian Hildebrand
P: 0410 274 600 | (08) 8393 6470 | E: ihildebrand@mountbarker.sa.gov.au

Michael Owen | +61 400 042 214 | michael@owenmediarelations.com.au