



14 February 2024

Early Childhood Education and Care
Productivity Commission
Locked Bag 2, Collins Street East
MELBOURNE VIC 8003

To whom it may concern

Re: Submission – Early Childhood Education and Care Public Inquiry

I write to you on behalf of the Coorong District Council which covers a region of 8,832 square kilometres in the southeastern part of South Australia and proudly serves a population of 5,576* people.

We welcome the opportunity to provide input and wish to advise that Council is in support of the recommendations outlined in the inquiry, as it complements and echoes Council's work on supporting increased access to childcare and early education services.

In terms of increased access to childcare and early education services, Council proudly advocates for the following:

- Quality, inclusive and accessible early education and childcare for all children and families in rural communities
- Increased sector funding to support and address:
 - Infrastructure requirements
 - Better wages and conditions for ECEC
 - Flexible and responsive care arrangements outside of traditional hours
 - Training and education opportunities for ECEC providers
- A unified system that supports universal access to quality education and care

Council also acknowledges and supports the work undertaken by the South Australian Government's Royal Commission into [Early Childhood Education and Care](#) and the recommendations to improve the quality and connectivity of early childhood education and care.

Similarly, Council acknowledges a report undertaken by Regional Development Victoria into [Enabling Early Childhood Education & Childcare in Rural Areas](#) for the Loddon Mallee RDA Committee, Loddon Campaspe Regional Partnership and Mallee Regional Partnership echoes challenges like any small rural town in Australia.

Communities within the Coorong District Council are faced with inequities surrounding access to childcare and early education, placing themselves at a disadvantage

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compared to their metropolitan counterparts. Families in the district (through Council) are seeking to gain greater and improved access to these services.

Local options are limited or non-existent, leaving families dependent on other family members for childcare or are required to travel great distances to locations such as Keith and Murray Bridge, and often an 80km round trip (or more).

Access is one of many barriers rural communities are faced with, and our district is no different. Located in what is considered a 'Childcare Desert', our communities are grossly underserved due to:

- Remoteness
- Less advantaged and lower socioeconomics
- First nations children
- Attracting and retaining qualified workers
- Housing availability and affordability
- Workers shortage in the sector, underpaid staff and lack of qualifications

Mainly the challenges associated with access to childcare are attracting and retaining qualified educators, infrastructure requirements and the costs associated with running childcare centres in communities where large populations do not exist. Council is working with local education, childcare providers, and the State Government to establish a framework compatible with our community and the future needs of population growth and childcare and early education demands.

With Adelaide being recognised as one of the most liveable cities in the world, with current projections show that by 2051 an additional 670,000 will choose Adelaide to live. The South Australian Government's [Greater Adelaide Regional Plan](#) will address how and where we accommodate this future population growth, and jobs associated with that growth.

As surrounding regions also become desirable places to live, work and play, local government's role in tackling issues such as social equality, community resilience, housing choices, housing affordability and affordable living is addressed through the development and implementation of individual regional growth strategies.

As a growing region, with access to affordable land, and one that could be considered peri urban to Adelaide, Tailem Bend will benefit from the growth in surrounding towns such as Murray Bridge. As a result of these factors, growth is inevitable within the Coorong district as it caters to the overflow from those seeking lifestyle changes and affordable land and housing opportunities.

Councils' own growth strategy [Coorong Growth Strategy](#), acknowledges the positive flow on effects of the Greater Adelaide Plan and addresses population growth and service sustainability. It identifies a growth target of 2,449 over 15 years will be instrumental in guiding Council decision making and investment. The Strategy will allow Council to implement key actions of the Vision Plan by setting a 30-year growth strategy for the region.

In support of future growth Coorong District Council is not placed to fund or establish early learning and childcare centres across the district. It is however prepared and willing to advocate and work with industry and stakeholders to improve the level of services available. This ultimately in turn will see an increase in labour force participation, particularly in women, and improvements in child development and health and wellbeing.

In closing, Coorong District Council appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission and supports the recommendations contained within the Early Childhood Education and Care Public Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Mayor Paul Simmons
COORONG DISTRICT COUNCIL

Coorong District Council Community Profile



- **Area 8,832 square kilometres**
- ***Total Population = 5,576**
 - **4,407 people aged 18+**
 - **2,415 total households**
 - **423 Family households** with children under the age of 15
 - **1,358 people employed full time.**
 - **823 people employed part time.**
- **6%** of the region's population are **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander**
 - 29% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are under the age of 15 and 10% under the age of 5 years.

- **1,057 children** are under the age of 17
 - Babies and pre- schoolers (0 to 4) = 245
 - Primary schoolers (5 to 11) = 458
 - Secondary schoolers (12 to 17) = 354
- **532 student enrolments** in 5 Schools
 - 3 x Area Schools R-12,
 - 1 x Primary School R-6
 - 1 x Aboriginal Primary School R-6

It is estimated that 36% of students attend school outside of the Coorong District Council

- **54 available** childcare placements available with only 4 providers
- Birthrate of **60 newborns** on average each year over the past 4 years
- **1,011 people** (22.1% of people aged 15+) **provided unpaid care to children.** Of these, 346 people were caring for children other than their own
- **SEIFA Index** of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage for the Coorong District Council in 2021 was **939**