



# 2026 Victorian election priorities

Rural Victoria plays a vital role in the state's economy, underpinning jobs, exports and food security, while also providing significant tourism, travel and cultural opportunities for Victorians.

Agriculture remains a cornerstone of rural Victoria, with primary production in turn supporting complex supply chains that employ thousands of people in processing, transport, logistics and retail.

Beyond agriculture, rural Victoria is a key driver of manufacturing and value-adding. Tourism is another significant contributor.

Rural Victoria also underpins statewide economic growth. Reliable regional supply chains ensure Melbourne and other urban centres have access to food, energy and raw materials.

Strong and growing rural communities also reduce pressure on metropolitan Melbourne by easing infrastructure and housing demands in the city.

**But the challenges and headwinds facing rural communities are significant.**

Infrastructure challenges persist. Many roads are in decay, despite sustained government investment. And population decline in some regions is hollowing out communities.

Local councils are on the frontline in rural areas, providing essential services and delivering key infrastructure projects. Our work turns towns into communities and helps sustain the high quality of life country people want.

**More Victorian Government investment and support is required.**

Rural Councils Victoria, as the peak body advocating on behalf of rural communities via local government representatives, urges all political parties to support our proposals to make rural Victoria stronger.

**Ahead of the 2026 Victorian election, Rural Councils Victoria will engage with all political parties and key candidates and independents to discuss our proposals for a better and stronger rural Victoria.**

# Victoria should establish a **\$1 Billion Rural and Regional Victoria Productivity and Growth Fund.**

This fund would comprise four streams designed to enhance productivity, liveability and investment. At least 25% of the fund would be guaranteed for rural Victoria.

1

## **Community wellbeing and local places renewal**

**Objective:** Renew ageing local assets that support participation, community resilience and growth.

**Examples:** Community halls/precincts, aquatic renewals, parks/play, libraries multiuse pavilions with equitable access.

2

## **Economic development**

**Objective:** Provide investment for rural councils and businesses to grow jobs, economic activity and local prosperity.

**Examples:** Precinct development plans, visitor economy projects

3

## **Council sustainability and system reform**

**Objective:** Address structural funding gaps and cost pressures on rural councils

**Examples:** Untied/needs based support for rural service obligations, renewal co-investment and cost reduction measures consistent with prior sustainability analyses.

4

## **Housing supply and enabling infrastructure**

**Objective:** Unlock rural housing with enabling infrastructure (like water, sewers and power), council developer support and risk mitigation, and deliver more rural housing capacity.

**Examples:** Infrastructure or capital works projects, council capacity programs, eg. Housing Brokers.

# Roads focus

Roads funding would sit *outside* the proposed Rural and Regional Victoria Productivity and Growth Fund.

RCV requests increased road funding in three priority areas:

## **Increased maintenance funding**

Increase the maintenance funding and standards for State owned roads across rural Victoria, addressing the diminishing quality and safety of the road network.

## **Roads and productive corridors**

Lift freight and visitor economy performance and safety on priority corridors; address bottlenecks and 'last mile constraints' affecting rural competitiveness.

## **Act local**

Extend and expand the Safe Local Roads and Streets Program. This successful \$210 million funding program is currently scheduled to expire in 2027.





# Building resilience to emergencies

## **Boost natural asset management**

Turbocharge programs to manage natural assets at fire risk, such as roadside grass, state forests and parcels of crown land.

## **Increase emergency supports**

Double current annual funding for the Municipal Emergency Resourcing Program, so councils can access annual grants of up to \$480,000 for emergency preparedness.

# Additional priorities

## **Use a rural lens**

The Victorian Government should order a Regulatory Impact Statement for all legislated changes that will directly impact rural communities or rural Councils, including meaningful engagement with the sector.

## **Establish Cost Index**

Promptly implement all the recommendations from the 2024 Inquiry into Local Government funding and services, including establishing a Local Government Cost Index to inform annual rate cap calculations.

## **Scrap the ESVF levy**

Abolish the Emergency Services Volunteer Fund levy or, at an absolute minimum, ensure Councils are not responsible for its collection.

## **Fund RCV to be a partner in reform**

Provide funding to Rural Councils Victoria to ensure they become a vital representative voice for rural communities and their councils in interactions with the government.

## **Boost council safety**

Include Local Government in official Workplace Protection Orders, set to be established in Victoria in 2026. These orders, modelled after the ACT's Personal Protection and Workplace Orders, will enhance the safety and rights of local government employees.

## **Upskill councils**

Allocate financial support to rural Councils, either directly or through RCV, to facilitate the training and development of Councillors and Executives.

