

# New council can change the fortunes of Geelong

Kylie  
**WARNE**



THE function of a modern council must be more than roads, rates and rubbish. Underpinned by best-practice governance regimens and a strong and inclusive culture, councils must provide strategic leadership within the community as well as independent, apolitical representation across a diverse stakeholder landscape.

The dismissal of the City of Greater Geelong council provides an opportunity to set Geelong on a new course and unlock opportunities to drive Geelong forward economically, socially and environmentally.

The time is right for the future leaders of Geelong to emerge. Geelong needs fresh thinking and new ideas.

The Geelong region possesses a unique mix of attributes that, in totality, creates both competitive and comparative advantage.

Our assets include affordable housing, underpinned by healthy private development activity; a vibrant creative industry and cultural precincts; emerging sectors of health, personal insurance; world-class knowledge, innovation and research; positioning as a manufacturing centre of excellence in agribusiness, chemicals, engineering and textiles and; proximity to markets, customers and suppliers — interconnectedness by road, rail, sea, air and the burgeoning visitor economy.



**BUILDING MOMENTUM:** The dismissal of the Geelong council must be a catalyst for renewed focus on driving the city forward.

Picture: GLENN FERGUSON

However, Geelong has fallen victim to a lack of strategic direction. Inaction and an inward-looking focus have become the norm.

Geelong's economic growth is well below the state average, youth unemployment is high and pockets of entrenched socio-economic disadvantage continue to deepen. These challenges are painted against a backdrop of significant structural changes in the local economy.

The time has come to focus on achieving the best outcomes for the Geelong community. We need stability and strategic thinking, and strong and accountable administration to deliver

fresh, innovative leadership for the good governance of the municipal district and the local community.

Achieving excellence in culture, leadership and governance will position the council to welcome a new leadership team in 2017. The incoming councillors should be provided with a foundation to guide their leadership and the direction of council as a whole.

Rebuilding the community's trust and respect will be assisted by the administrators' achievement of the priorities set out in the report of the commission of inquiry, including: **DEVELOPING** a 20 to 30-year outcome-focused vision and

strategy for the council and the city; **RECALIBRATING** the city plan in the context of the council and city's long-term vision and strategy; **STRENGTHENING** the application of the Local Government Act; **SUPPORTING** the chief executive officer in restructuring departments and their physical location; **WORKING** with the chief executive to ensure appropriate resourcing for councillors is in place by the 2017 election, and; **WORKING** with the chief executive to undertake a complete governance review of council.

The sense of urgency must be balanced by the application of a strategic, methodical and scrupulous process to manage the extensive change required at all levels of council.

Geelong's economy has underperformed compared with similar regions, and the commissioners' report recommends the urgent development of a 20 to 30-year outcome-focused vision and strategy for the council and the city.

For Geelong to be known as a destination that welcomes and supports business and investment — from start-ups to large corporations — it is crucial that the administrators have a deep understanding of, and close relationship with, Geelong's business ecosystem.

Geelong's business community will be closely watching developments at City Hall, with an expectation that we are entering a new, business-friendly era that will provide for a sustainable future for the city and its community.

Kylie Warne is Geelong Chamber of Commerce president.