

Submission to Treasury – February 2020

Treasury Law Amendment (2020 Measures No. 2) Bill 2020



Mornington Peninsula Shire Council's submission to Treasury Law Amendment (2020 Measures No. 2) Bill 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Bill which was presented to Mornington Peninsula Shire Council at their Ordinary meeting on **11 February 2020**. The minutes of that meeting may be viewed on the Shire's website www.mornpen.vic.gov.au. This submission is in accordance with the Council's resolution.

In summary, the Bill, in particular its Deductible Gift Category (DGR) status for Community Men's and Women's Sheds is supported and it is recommended that such status also be included for Community (Neighbourhood) Houses.

Mornington Peninsula Shire is a local government authority responsible for more than 70 services ranging from family and children's services, traffic regulation, open space, youth facilities, waste management and community building; to matters concerning business development, planning for appropriate development and ensuring accountability for Council's budget. This broad range of community services and infrastructure for residents supports the wellbeing and prosperity of our community.

Mornington Peninsula Shire is located at the fringe of Melbourne's outer southern suburbs, between 40 and 80 kilometres south of the Melbourne Central Business District. The Shire has a population of 165,822 and a land area of 72,328 ha¹, 70% of which is green wedge, boarded by 10% of Victoria's coastline. There are 42 townships and villages across the Mornington Peninsula Shire, with a \$7.4 billion economy that creates 52,600 jobs and welcomes 6.3 million visitors every year²

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Community Men's and Women's Sheds

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council is endorsing the inclusion of Community Men's and Women's Shed to Chapter 1, Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) Category – Community Sheds in the proposed Treasury Law Amendment (2020 Measures No. 2) Bill 2020.

The Shire has eleven (11) Men's Shed located across the peninsula in the townships of Mt Eliza, Mt Martha, two (2) in Mornington, Dromana, Main Ridge, Capel Sound, Sorrento and Baxter as well as two (2) Sheds in Hastings.

Willum Warrain located in Hastings currently has DGR status and operates as both a Men's Shed as well as a Community House offering the State Government's Neighbourhood House Coordination Programs (NHCP). The remaining ten (10) Community Men's Sheds do not have DGR status. Seven (7) of the Shire's Community Sheds are located in Council owned buildings with other sheds being managed by the Shire or supported by the Shire's Men's Shed network

¹ ABS ERP 2018

² The people behind Our peninsula, building a brighter future

which meets the eligibility for ACNC registration and DGR criteria proposed in the Bill.

Community Men's and future Women's Sheds located on the Mornington Peninsula 'undertake a range of activities, such as sharing hobbies and interests, as well as broader participation in community projects'. The dominant purposes of undertaking these activities is for Community Sheds to 'advance mental health and prevent or relieve social isolation'. Community Sheds on the Mornington Peninsula provide a welcoming environment for the community and assist social connections between members as well as provide referrals to health and community services for concerns relating to mental health³.

Ten (10) of the Shire's eleven (11) Community Sheds are managed by volunteer Incorporated Association Committees with the other, Rosebud Men's Shed in Capel Sound, is auspiced by the Seawinds Community Hub, a Community (Neighbourhood) House where they are co-located.

Addition to Treasury Law Amendment (2020 Measures No. 2) Bill 2020

Community (Neighbourhood) Houses

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council calls on the Federal Government to add to the Bill the inclusion of Community (Neighbourhood) Houses under Chapter 1 Deductible Gift Category.

Community Houses offer a range of activities, including sharing hobbies, interests and activities as well as provide numerous opportunities for people to volunteer. The dominant purpose of activities and programs offered at Community Houses providing the State Government's Neighbourhood House Coordination Program (NHCP) is to create social connections for the prevention and relieve of social isolation. Community Houses provide a welcoming environment for the general community offering up to 50 hours of programs weekly for all ages and abilities. Community Houses facilitate social connections and create a sense of belonging in their place-based areas⁴.

Mornington Peninsula Shire has thirteen (13) Community Houses located across the peninsula in Mt Eliza, two (2) in Mornington, Mt Martha, Dromana, Capel Sound, Rye, Sorrento, Crib Point and Somerville with three (3) houses in Hastings; Willum Warrain, Wallaroo and Hastings Community House. Community Houses operate in Shire owned facilities, provide outreach activities and facilitate broader community projects place-based in local areas.

Community Men's and Women's Sheds & Community (Neighbourhood) Houses Reducing Social Isolation and improving Mental Health

Men's Sheds located across the Mornington Peninsula Shire provide a safe place for men and women to socially connect, engage in activities, interests and shared hobbies as well as support a number of community projects which benefit the broader community. Men's and Women's Sheds facilitate activities that reduce social isolation and provide the opportunity for referrals to both health and community services to improve mental health.

³ Treasury Laws Amendment (2020 Measures No. 2) Bill 2020.

⁴ Treasury Laws Amendment (2020 Measures No. 2) Bill 2020.

Community Houses provide a welcoming environment for all members of the community. The Shire's Community House Review undertaken recently found that people attend a community house to participate in a social group or to participate in a program or activity. The benefits for individual participants was to spend time with other people, meet new people or make friends.

Conversations with the community conducted at each site during the Community House Review highlighted the importance of Community Houses to the broader community with overall responses of people coming to a community house to:

- Connect socially isolated people in a safe and welcoming place;
- Create new relationships; and
- Provide opportunities to 'give back to the community' through volunteering in local projects.

The Australian Loneliness Report identifies loneliness as a growing health concern and highlights that "one in four Australian adults are lonely" with "lonely Australians having significantly worse health status (both physical and mental) than connected Australians⁵

- Around 13% of peninsula residents actively seek help for mental health each year,
- Almost a quarter of residents have experienced depression or anxiety,
- Services aimed at young people cease once they reach 25, often with no follow on,
- Not enough is done to follow up on people who have been discharged from hospital after an acute mental health episode⁶.

In vulnerable communities across the peninsula there is a demonstrated impact on mental health through:

- Isolation – poor public transport and an ageing population
- Housing - lack of affordable housing and housing insecurity
- Extreme intergenerational disadvantage in the Shire's vulnerable communities as well as pockets of disadvantage

Economic costs of social isolation

Social isolation is gaining prominence internationally. "There is now substantial evidence documenting that being socially connected significantly reduces risk for premature mortality, and lacking social connection significantly increases risk". "Social isolation and loneliness may be particularly important among older adults. Chronic exposure to either protective or risk factors will be more pronounced as individuals age"⁷.

"Over 9 million adults are often or always lonely and 50% of disabled people will be lonely on any given day" and for "3.6 million people aged 65 television is the main form of company".

⁵ Source: 'The Australian Loneliness Report', Australian Psychological Society and Swinburne University 2018.

⁶ Source: Mornington Peninsula Shire's Submission to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System 2019.

⁷ Source: 'The Potential Public Health Relevance of Social Isolation and Loneliness: Prevalence, Epidemiology, and Risk Factors', Holt-Lunstad, Robles & Sbarra, 2017

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Research has found that “loneliness cost UK employers £2.5 billion per year” whilst “disconnected communities could be costing the UK economy £32 billion every year”⁸.

Benefits to local Not-for-Profit Charities towards Sustainability

The success of any Community House and Community Men’s and Women’s Shed is contingent on the commitment, capacity, skills and hard work of volunteer Committees of Management and the volunteers at each Community Shed and Community House.

Included in the success of Community Houses and Men’s Sheds is the ongoing support from Local Government through strengthening:

- Volunteering;
- Good governance practices;
- Place based planning for community services that address community needs;
- Facilitating partnerships and enabling collaborative work; and
- Supporting a community development approach to building programs.

Community (Neighbourhood) Houses and Community Men’s and Women’s Sheds are essential places for communities that engage people in social activities to increase social connections to create a sense of belonging in their local communities.

With volunteer Committees managing small Not-for-Profit Charities or Incorporated Associations. The change in legislation enabling Community Men’s and Women’s Sheds as well as Community (Neighbourhood) Houses to apply for DGR status will provide the opportunity for small Not-for-Profit Charities to diversify funding streams to improve their financial sustainability so they can continue to provide welcoming places and activities that increase social connections for our local communities.

Submission on behalf of Mornington Peninsula Shire Council

Sam Hearn
Mayor

Mornington Peninsula Shire acknowledges and pays respect to the Boon Wurrung/
Bunurong people, the traditional custodians of these lands and waters.

⁸ Source: The Jo Cox Loneliness Commission, ‘*Combatting Loneliness one conversation at a time*’ 2017