

Opening statement, electric car charging infrastructure parliamentary inquiry.

Chair and Members of the Committee, my name is Tom Crook, Deputy Mayor of East Gippsland. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

East Gippsland is a large rural municipality with coastal, farming and tourism communities, higher levels of disadvantage, and an older population. **Reliable, affordable transport is essential to participation in our region.**

Five years ago, our community pushed for public electric-vehicle charging, particularly to close the major gap at Cann River on the Sydney–Canberra–Melbourne route. With no statewide plan in place, **our local government moved to fulfill this need.** Since then, we have helped deliver one of regional Victoria's strongest public charging networks through:

- council-owned fast chargers,
- private operators on public land, and
- privately owned chargers that are open to the public.

Sixteen public charging stations now operate across East Gippsland, complemented by destination chargers at hotels and visitor sites. They are well used and have been delivered through council investment, government programs and partnerships with Tesla, Evie Networks and NRMA. **Our experience shows clearly: if you build the network, people will use it.**

But this work has also shown that councils cannot keep expanding the public network on their own. **Providing charging infrastructure is not core business or a funded local-government role,** and we cannot guarantee equitable access as adoption grows without clear direction and resources.

Key Point 1: Regional rollout is essential for equity

In small and remote towns, **suitable public land is scarce,** electricity connection costs can be extremely high, and if one charger fails there is often no backup. Without policy intervention, private investment will concentrate in high-return towns, leaving places like **Omeo, Marlo, Swifts Creek and Nowa Nowa** at serious risk of missing out.

To avoid this, we need **deliberate regional coverage, fair pricing and reliability standards,** and a requirement that new infrastructure supports all communities. Standardising connection costs and adopting **cost-recovery pricing** would prevent regional drivers from paying more. **Daytime, solar-aligned tariffs** would improve affordability and reduce network impacts.

Key Point 2: Victoria urgently needs a statewide charging plan

Victoria cannot meet its emissions-reduction goals without a clear plan for charging infrastructure. Councils cannot be left to design their own networks independently.

A **Victorian Electric-Vehicle Charging Strategy** should set statewide coverage targets, site-selection principles, funding mechanisms and technical standards — and then break these down into **delivery plans for each local government area**. This ensures a coordinated rollout rather than a patchwork of market-driven outcomes.

The plan must also define **how public car parks and crown land are made available fairly**, through transparent processes and appropriate lease arrangements, and prevent excessive market concentration.

While fast chargers are essential on highways, **slower 7-kilowatt chargers** are the backbone of everyday use. We support grants for smart, solar-aligned chargers at council depots, community facilities, tourism operators and shopping centres, with **bi-directional capability** where possible. We also recommend that the Victorian Government directly install chargers at hospitals, schools, TAFEs, government buildings, train stations and major public car parks.

Key Point 3: Local government is a ready partner — but needs the right support

Councils are already managing competitive processes, land access, community engagement and operational issues with **very limited staff and no dedicated funding**. East Gippsland alone is more than 20,000 square kilometres — we understand regional realities and we want this transition to succeed. But **we need a genuine partnership**, with clear roles, sufficient resources and aligned incentives.

A simple example is **land tax**. Councils are currently absorbing land-tax charges for some charging sites on public land, which discourages further development. A time-limited exemption would make an immediate difference.

We also need to prepare for the full lifecycle of electric vehicles. By 2030, large volumes of batteries will reach end-of-life, and local governments will be managing many of them. We support a **battery recycling and stewardship framework** to ensure safe handling and that second-life applications are maximised.

In Closing

East Gippsland has shown leadership in building a diverse charging network across a vast rural region. But **We have taken this almost as far as local government reasonably can.**

To meet Victoria's transport-emissions goals fairly, we need:

1. **A deliberate regional rollout** that guarantees equity where private investment alone will not;
2. **A statewide charging strategy** with local-government-area delivery plans, standards and funding; and

3. **A formal State partnership with local government**, with fair pricing, consistent connection costs, removal of land-tax barriers and practical support for slower charging and battery stewardship.

Thank you for your time. I welcome your questions.