

# ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

2023





**Local Government NSW acknowledges and pays respect to the past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation.**

We celebrate the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and their rich contribution to Australia.

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# PRESIDENT'S FOREWORD



The 2023-2024 financial year is shaping as pivotal for the local government sector, with councils facing challenges not of their making.

The financial model for councils is almost at breaking point due to continual cost shifting from other levels of government, and a defective rate peg system that is not representative of the inflationary times in which we live.

Nonetheless councils continue to lead the recovery effort for our communities to rebuild roads and infrastructure from repeated natural disasters of the past two years.

Inflation is placing great strain on council budgets, compounded by the dual pressure of an increasingly expensive Emergency Services Levy (ESL) and being compelled to carry responsibility for the depreciation costs of Rural Fire Service (RFS) equipment and fleet on council books.

LGNSW believes a new funding model must be found for the ESL and that the NSW Government should take responsibility for all RFS equipment costs.

All of the advocacy priorities that we have set out in this document outline how better outcomes for communities can be achieved by ensuring local government is equipped with the appropriate resources and support that we require.

Crucially, these priorities include measures that are not just critical to our short-term future, but also for the benefit of future generations as we face shifting demographics and a changing climate.

They place an emphasis on the need to strengthen the resilience of our infrastructure, services and systems.

A new state government gives us an opportunity for greater cooperation between state and local government, which will ultimately benefit the entire NSW community.



**Cr Darriea Turley AM**  
LGNSW President

# OVERVIEW OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SECTOR



Local government in NSW **employs 55,000 people**



Local government in NSW looks after more than **\$177 billion of community assets**



Local government in NSW spends more than **\$2.2 billion each year on caring for the environment**, including recycling and waste management, stormwater management and preserving and protecting native flora and fauna



NSW has more than **350 council-run libraries** that attract tens of millions of visits each year, and **more than 400 public swimming and ocean pools**



Local government in NSW is responsible for about **90% of the State's roads and bridges**



NSW councils manage an estimated **4 million tonnes of waste each year**



NSW councils own and manage more than **600 museums, galleries, theatres and art centres**

# ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

## FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The financial sustainability of councils has been undermined by rate-pegging, cost shifting onto local government, and State and federal funding arrangements that are no longer fit for purpose.

This has been exacerbated by the cumulative financial impact of successive natural disasters and the pandemic.

With the appropriate financial support, councils can provide the infrastructure and services our communities expect and deserve.

1. Amend the rate peg methodology to prevent future financial shocks to the sector and to ultimately remove rate pegging.
2. Rebate increases in council Emergency Services Levy (ESL) contributions and replace the levy with a sustainable funding model.
3. Hold a public inquiry into cost shifting in NSW to address the financial sustainability of local government, with a view to ending cost shifting.
4. Legislate to make clear that Rural Fire Service mobile assets are vested in the Rural Fire Service.
5. Commit to fairness, transparency, integrity and certainty of grant funding to councils.

## RESILIENCE TO NATURAL DISASTERS

Local government is central to driving a locally led economic recovery from a series of natural disasters.

The sheer scale of these disasters demands a far greater emphasis on resilience and adaptation, to ensure communities are better prepared for future events.

1. Increase financial support and funding for restoration, remediation and betterment of local community infrastructure, including water and sewerage assets, as well as early warning and monitoring systems, both in advance of disasters where the risks are identified and in the recovery stage.
2. Permanently embed State and federal government funded Community Recovery Officers into councils across NSW in recognition of the increasing frequency, scale and long recovery timeframes of natural disasters.
3. Commit to proactive strategies to respond to natural disasters and adapt to climate risks.





## ROADS & INFRASTRUCTURE

Local government must be appropriately funded to maintain roads and essential infrastructure.

Adequate support must also be provided to strengthen the resilience of the road network and other infrastructure if it is to withstand extreme weather events in the future.

1. Boost needs-based road funding significantly to respond to unprecedented damage (washaways, potholes).
2. Protect local government ownership and management of council water utilities and invest in them to bolster water security.

## HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

Access to secure, affordable housing is a basic human need and key to a prosperous and equitable society.

A lack of affordable housing compounds intergenerational inequality and harms social cohesion.

The NSW Government must do its part to ensure everyone – and especially the most vulnerable members of the community – has access to a safe and secure home.

1. Build 5,000 additional units of public and social housing each year for the next 10 years to contribute to addressing the homelessness and housing affordability crisis right across NSW.
2. Minimum targets of 5-10% public, social and affordable housing across NSW and 25 per cent for government-owned land.
3. Establish a ministry solely dedicated to addressing homelessness and the housing crisis.





# ENVIRONMENT AND THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

LGNSW continues to call for greater investment in initiatives that will improve environmental outcomes.

This includes urgent action to address the climate crisis, better policies to reduce waste and fit-for-purpose protections for biodiversity of native habitats.

1. Introduce policies and programs to achieve the 2030 greenhouse gas emissions reduction target of 50% and the 2050 net zero emissions target.
2. Reinvest 100% of the waste levy to fund the delivery of priority infrastructure and programs as outlined in the Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy, particularly zero waste solutions that address impending climate and environmental threats.
3. Amend the Biodiversity Offsets Scheme so that it is fit for purpose, delivers offsets in the areas experiencing impacts, improves the quality assurance of accredited assessors, and addresses issues of over and under-regulation.
4. Protect koalas and their habitats and end logging in NSW native forests.



# RURAL, REGIONAL AND COMMUNITY HEALTH

Access to health services in rural, regional and remote areas is a critical issue for communities.

Improved funding for councils to operate youth centres and funding other health services will help ensure this access is provided at an appropriate standard.

1. Implement in full the recommendations of the parliamentary inquiry into rural and regional health services.
2. Increase funding for specialised and appropriate youth and community wellbeing and mental health services to bolster resilience, particular following disaster.

## STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Equitable access to essential infrastructure and services is the cornerstone of a democratic society, and councils must be supported in their critical efforts to ensure no communities are left behind.

1. Introduce a local government Closing the Gap grant program to ensure councils can contribute to the success of Closing the Gap.
2. Invest in community safety and crime prevention, including through funding for the Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Toolkit for local government.
3. Commit to council-run early childhood education and care facilities being eligible for all new funding opportunities and grant programs for the early childhood education sector.
4. Distribute arts and culture funding equitably across NSW.





# SKILLS & LABOUR SHORTAGES

Councils and communities across NSW are suffering from the impacts of skills and labour shortages.

This is hampering the economic recovery and hindering the ability of councils to deliver the level of services their communities require.

## PLANNING

Successive State governments have gradually diminished the ability of councils and communities to determine what and how development occurs in their own area. Councils must be supported with a planning system that enables them to determine local and regional planning processes according to the needs and expectations of their communities.

1. Commit to democratically elected councils being empowered to make decisions about development that affects their communities.
2. Pledge that local government will not be worse off under any future infrastructure contributions reforms.
3. Urgent improvements to address issues with operation of the Planning Portal and commit to ongoing funding to councils to implement it.
4. Address the issue of 'zombie developments' whereby the delayed implementation of decades-old development consents results in development proceeding that is out of step with contemporary planning and environment standards.
5. Adopt new accessibility standards for housing that have been recently inserted into the National Construction Code (in line with other states and territories across Australia).

1. Invest in training to support para-professional, trades and entry-level pathways to employment in local government and to upskill councils' workforces in response to new and emerging jobs and work.
2. Allow for greater flexibility/overcoming barriers to accreditation/registration of professional and trades employees.
3. Ensure all areas of need have equitable access to VET and tertiary courses and educational institutions – including face-to-face training – and consult with councils in identifying needs.
4. Drive local economic recovery through initiatives to address labour shortages impacting primary producers, businesses and councils across NSW.
5. Commit to incentives (such as scholarships, cadetships, wage subsidies) to address critical local government skills shortages.





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