

Our ref: R09/0012 Out-31180

3 September 2020

The Hon. Gladys Berejiklian MP
Premier

By email: [REDACTED]

Dear Premier

Ensuring COVID-safe beaches for communities across NSW

Thank you again for your stewardship of NSW during this difficult time.

We write on behalf of councils across NSW to call on the NSW Government to support council efforts to keep open spaces including beaches and popular outdoor recreation areas COVID-safe.

To prevent a reoccurrence of community concerns about the management of Sydney beaches, ***LGNSW convened a roundtable with Mayors whose local government areas cover the major Sydney beaches, NSW Police and Surf Life Saving NSW*** in order to establish what is needed to ensure that, together, we best manage these important public spaces during the continuing COVID pandemic as the weather continues to warm and community use increases.

Sydney's beaches and open spaces will be an increasingly popular and vitally important resource for communities across the state. We acknowledge ***local government has a critical role in supporting communities to be COVID-safe as managers of beaches alongside so much of the open space in NSW; but require cooperation and partnership from the NSW Government in doing so.***

As a result of this meeting, local governments, NSW Police and Surf Life Saving NSW will work better together to share real time information about beach capacity, and share local government management plans across the beaches to ensure, where possible, there is clear and consistent decision authorities and rules for actions required. Specifically, we will aim for operational communication across and between beaches to be coordinated via Surf Life Saving NSW under the councils' direction.

As you would know, the Office of Local Government has advised councils that ***it is a matter for each council to determine whether or not to open any outdoor spaces for which they are responsible and to establish conditions that apply to their use***¹. However, we cannot manage transport and access to these spaces, and do not have powers or resources for enforcement when public spaces, such as beaches, become overcrowded. As the pressures

¹ Office of Local Government, Public Health (COVID-19 Restrictions on Gathering and Movement) Order (No 4) 2020 – local government FAQs, 29 July 2020, available at: <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Public-Health-Order-guidance-for-councils-29-July-2020.pdf>

on these spaces increase over the coming months, councils seek two specific actions from the NSW Government to ensure the safety of our communities.

Firstly, we request that the **NSW Government develop and fund a Beaches and Open Spaces Communications Strategy and Campaign, in consultation with councils, NSW public service agencies and Surf Life Saving NSW**. A state led campaign is needed to raise public awareness of the need to be COVID-safe at beaches and popular public spaces, aware of public health order requirements that apply and conscious that they should not attend locations that are already at or nearing capacity.

Materials from the Communications Strategy would be used by local governments, Surf Life Saving NSW, NSW Police and other NSW public service agencies to promote public awareness of how Public Health Orders apply to our beaches, and what we can all do, together, to keep these public spaces open for longer as the weather warms and COVID continues.

As part of this, there is a strong desire for an 'App' to allow the public to easily see which beaches are crowded and/or closed to further visitors. The meeting agreed that the suitability of the SLSNSW App as a tool for communicating beach crowding and capacity to the public on a large scale basis should be considered. Government investment in providing an App or helping to modify the SLSNSW app would be appreciated, and it may be an area where Service NSW could assist.

Consistent communication about the state's beaches and improved understanding and compliance by the public would reduce the need for NSW Police to intervene and enforce Public Health Orders on our beaches, and support councils and Surf Life Saving NSW to best manage these spaces in high demand times, allowing them to remain open. It would also support Transport for NSW to reduce overcrowding on transport routes to and from Sydney's beaches and, most importantly, would reduce the risk of a COVID outbreak in these vital public spaces. The engagement of Transport agencies in a 'whole of system' approach to managing crowding at beaches and popular locations is vital in achieving a COVID-safe outcome.

Secondly, we request that the **NSW Government fund councils with significant beaches to employ COVID-safe marshals to assist with encouraging compliance with Public Health Orders** at beaches and open spaces and escalating non-compliance to the NSW Police Force as appropriate.

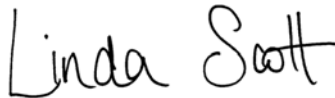
Already, we see councils across NSW building on their public community safety role, particularly through working with local food businesses that need assistance to comply with COVID-safe requirements. However, councils have expressed concern that their already stretched specialist environmental health officers do not have capacity to continue to undertake this additional COVID role along with their existing and very important food safety regulatory responsibilities. It is essential that the NSW Government acts to prevent this cost shifting burden on councils growing further, by ensuring councils are supported through funding to employ COVID-safe marshals for beaches and open spaces.

Premier, will you please commit to:

- 1. a NSW Government funded COVID Communications Strategy and Campaign for our NSW beaches and open spaces?**
- 2. Funding to support COVID-safe marshals in local government areas with major beaches?**

We would also welcome an opportunity to meet with you to discuss this matter further. Could you please have your staff contact Ms Kelly Kwan, LGNSW Executive Manager Advocacy on [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely



Cr Linda Scott
President



George Shales OAM
President
Surf Life Saving NSW

Cc: The Hon. Dominic Perrottet, Treasurer
The Hon. Brad Hazzard MP, Minister for Health and Medical Research
The Hon. Rob Stokes MP, Minister for Planning and Public Spaces
The Hon. David Elliott MP, Minister for Police and Emergency Services
The Hon. Shelley Hancock MP, Minister for Local Government
Commissioner Michael Fuller APM, NSW Police Force