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### **OPENING**

Local Government NSW (LGNSW) is the peak body representing councils in NSW. We support, promote and advocate for local government, empowering councils to build strong, liveable communities.

Collectively, NSW councils:

- **»** Employ around 60,000 people. Many of these jobs are in rural and regional NSW, where councils are often the single largest employer and underpin the local economy.
- » Spend more than \$12 billion each year
- » Manage and maintain infrastructure and land assets worth more than \$153 billion

The unique breadth of essential infrastructure and services delivered by local government to the people of NSW makes the sector a critical partner in the economic stewardship of the State.

### **BACKGROUND**

The NSW Government's leadership has helped ensure the economy has remained resilient in the face of repeated setbacks in the form of both natural disasters and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, although COVID-19 variants continue to destabilise public and business confidence. Uncertainty in the global economy and climate change-related impacts remain a threat for the foreseeable future. There can be no doubt the 2022-23 NSW Budget remains a critical tool in continuing to ensure that there is sufficient stimulus and support to help withstand and recover from the massive disruption caused by the Omicron wave, and any further system shocks which arise. Businesses and livelihoods depend on it.

Local government has been pleased to partner with the NSW Government in meeting the challenges posed by the pandemic and a succession of natural disasters. Councils have clearly demonstrated their capacity to effectively channel government funding directly into local community infrastructure and services, helping to create jobs and keep communities strong. This partnership between the two tiers of government has helped ensure communities in NSW receive the support they need, and our councils stand ready to help the NSW Government drive a locally led recovery.

LGNSW commends the NSW government on the \$45 billion it has committed to health, economic and social measures since the start of the pandemic in March 2020. However, there is still a long way to go and much more work needs to be done to ensure our communities can withstand future disruptions. While most businesses have been able to reopen and re-employ staff following extended periods of lockdown, the pandemic has taken a heavy toll. The emergence of Omicron has introduced new difficulties in terms of staff shortages and supply chain disruptions, and the bullish optimism expressed in the 2021-22 NSW Budget Half Yearly Review has been dealt a blow by this ongoing threat to the health system, the economy and social wellbeing. Economic activity, consumer spending and business investment are all experiencing a downturn, and we expect consumer spending and home buying to be impacted by the growing expectation of interest rate rises.

It is vital that the 2022-23 NSW Budget continues to reinforce and extend the health and economic support measures that have helped put NSW at the forefront of economic recovery. The Government must continue to resist the temptation to move into budget repair mode through the premature withdrawal of its current support and recovery programs. In many instances, these programs have addressed areas of previous budget neglect through investment in local roads, bridges, cycleways, footpaths and open space. We urge the NSW Government to maintain the policy direction set in the 2021-22 NSW Budget, thereby maintaining NSW's leadership as Australia's economic engine room.

### **OVERVIEW OF LGNSW'S SUBMISSION**

The following submission presents local government's budget funding priorities for the 2022-23 financial year and re-emphasises the need for continued State Government support to maintain employment, drive jobs growth and strengthen communities. The submission also emphasises the need to strengthen the resilience of our infrastructure, services and systems to cope with inevitable future disasters. The promise of economic recovery that we are experiencing should not be seen as an opportunity to reduce stimulus and support funding, but as an opportunity to refocus funding on building resilience. The priorities outlined in this submission align with the challenges and opportunities in the 2021 NSW Intergenerational Report, including the need to increase productivity and workforce participation, and address climate risks.

#### The 2022-23 financial year will be especially challenging for local government.

Like the NSW Government, local government will be impacted by the resurgent pandemic, with council revenue continuing to be reduced in line with the decline in economic activity while simultaneously being called upon to provide rate, fee and rent relief as part of support to local business and the community.

Demands upon councils continue to grow, yet have been dealt a major blow, with an unanticipated and historically low rate peg determination for 2022-23. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) shocked local government with a baseline rate peg of only 0.7% - the lowest in two decades and half the previous record low of 1.5% in 2017-18. It falls well short of the conservative 2% estimate most councils had factored into 2022-23 budgets and Long-Term Financial Plans and will result in a revenue shortfall of around \$80 million statewide. Individual shortfalls range between \$100,000 and \$2 million, at a time when councils face rapidly rising costs for fuel and construction materials, and 2% wage increases, locked in under the Award. Every council will now need to re-cast their 2022-23 budget projections and this will inevitably require cuts to infrastructure, services and jobs. This is an undesirable outcome for councils, the NSW Government and communities.

In view of these challenges, it is critical that the NSW Government maintain and extend funding programs that support locally led recovery. This submission presents LGNSW's council-determined budget priorities with the potential to create more than 60,000 jobs in NSW, many of them in regional NSW.

Unsurprisingly, the biggest ticket budget items for local government relate to the construction and maintenance of roads, footpaths and cycleways. Local government is responsible for 90 per cent of these vital and costly assets. However, this category of local infrastructure is far from the only area of investment in which State and local government can work in partnership.

Investment in water projects, climate change mitigation actions, affordable housing, accessible infrastructure, waste and recycling management and skills development are all ways to generate jobs, support businesses and simultaneously deliver public good and the achievement of state outcomes. Funding for pressing social priorities in the areas of health, including mental health, domestic violence, Aboriginal communities, building regulation and community services delivers similar benefits, while helping to prevent future remedial expenditure.

To date, NSW has led the nation in managing the economic and social impacts of consequential crises, both natural and otherwise. The 2022-23 NSW Budget is a prime opportunity to further cement this leadership, via collaborative and constructive partnerships between all levels of Government.





<b>Areas of Council</b>
Funding Need -
I GNSW Priorities

#### State Budget Outcomes

#### **ROADS**



- Allocate at least a further \$250 million in annual funding to support the government's commitment to deliver on the transfer of up to 15,000 km of regional roads.
- Continue to accelerate the funding for the \$1.1 billion Fixing Local Roads and Fixing Country Bridges program to help address the estimated \$1.7 billion road maintenance and infrastructure backlog faced by councils in regional NSW.
- Increase Road Block Grant funding by at least the historical index of 2.0%. LGNSW estimates that this should result in an estimated allocation of at least \$162.3 million for the 2022-2023 financial year.
- Allocate targeted funding of at least \$20 million in 2022/23 to support councils in modernising, harmonising and capturing road and related infrastructure asset condition data.

The 2021-22 NSW Budget allocated \$250 million to help kickstart the Regional Road Transfer Program. The priority roads identified for the first round of the transfer amounted to just 353.7km. With road replacement costs per kilometre at up to \$400,000 on regional roads, it would appear that the government's initial allocation is already half exhausted. Therefore, it is essential that the government allocates at least a further \$250 million on an annual basis over the next several years. Cost shifting from previous governments has led to councils being in a position where they cannot afford to attend to their local roads while also maintaining regional roads previously transferred without

**Supporting Case** 

The Fixing Local Roads and Fixing Country Bridges programs have helped to drive a locally led economic recovery from the pandemic and a sequence of natural disasters. Continued acceleration of program funding, along with a further allocation of up to \$500 million, is required just to address road maintenance issues. This does not include funding to address upgrades needed to improve freight access on the local and regional road network.

funding support.

Road Block grants remain a vital source of recurrent road funding for councils and with the backlog in road maintenance on local and regional roads estimated to be at least \$1.7 billion, increasing the Road Block allocation by a minimum of 2% is warranted.

Many councils in regional and rural NSW have limited resources, capacity and the budget to fully understand and capture the full state of their road network assets. Funding to support councils to achieve this will support the evidence base for road maintenance and upgrade funding while also yielding improved freight access.

#### State Outcomes

- Connecting our customers' whole lives
- » Successful places for communities
- » Sustainable transport systems and solutions that enable economic activity

**Jobs**: 10,200

<b>Areas of Council</b>
Funding Need -
<b>LGNSW Priorities</b>

#### **Supporting Case**

#### **State Budget Outcomes**

#### **WATER**



- Commit a further \$1 billion over five years to renew funding for the Safe and Secure Water Program
- » Invest at least \$1 billion in the development of the next tranche of dam projects outlined in the WaterNSW 20-year Infrastructure Options. Upgraded water infrastructure in regional and rural communities, as highlighted in the NSW Water Strategy, will help ensure water security for communities in regional and rural NSW.

The 2017 allocation of \$1 billion to the Safe and Secure Water Program is close to being fully expended. Without significant further investment we risk leaving communities across the State vulnerable to running out of water as it did in the last serious drought. Recent high rainfalls are not cause for complacency about the risk of drought

Regional and rural NSW remains very vulnerable to the effects of severe drought despite the curent La Nina conditions in NSW. When the cycle inevitably returns to an El Nino pattern, systemic underinvestment in dams through regional and rural NSW will leave communities vulnerable to running out of water.

#### **State Outcomes:**

- » Sustainable secure and healthy water resources and services
- Stronger and cohesive regional communities and economies
- » Productive and sustainable land use

**Jobs**: 16.000

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING



over the next 10 years to build 5,000 additional units of social housing each year, to drive economic recovery and address the homelessness and housing affordability crisis right across NSW.

Currently in NSW there are almost 50,000 people who are waiting for social housing, with wait times of up to 10 years. Populations movements sharpened by the COVID pandemic have resulted in plunging vacancy rates in many regional areas with severe housing pressures and extremely limited social housing availability.

Lack of housing is having serious impacts on community wellbeing and economic recovery, particularly as many employers cannot fill roles in areas in which affordable housing is so scarce.

A NSW Government commitment to set minimum targets and fund more social housing would stimulate the NSW economy, result in jobs growth and deliver enormous social and economic dividends, while contributing to the Premier's Priority to reduce street homelessness across NSW by 50% by 2025.

#### State Outcomes:

- » People have a safe and affordable place to live
- Stronger and cohesive regional communities and economies
- Create a strong and liveable NSW

**Jobs**: 21,000 p.a

<b>Areas of Council</b>
Funding Need -
I GNSW Priorities

#### **Supporting Case**

#### **State Budget Outcomes**

# HEALTH INCLUDING MENTAL HEALTH



- Establish a \$5 million annual local government rural and regional health reimbursement scheme
- Provide \$2 million per year to establish and maintain a joint taskforce representing local, state and federal governments to formulate a model for improving access to healthcare in rural and regional areas.
- Commit \$15 million over four years to establish two new drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres in regional NSW.

Council expenditure to attract and retain suitably qualified health practitioners to regional and rural communities includes health infrastructure, health scholarships, subsidising running costs of medical facilities and providing housing and accommodation incentives for the medical workforce.

This cost shifting of health responsibilities onto local government means already stretched councils are having to divert funds from much needed local infrastructure and community services.

A local government health reimbursement scheme would allow councils to invest in important community infrastructure and services.

A collaborative approach by the State and Federal Government, in consultation with local government, is necessary to address the critical shortage of medical and allied health specialists in rural and regional NSW.

The announcement in 2020 of a new rehabilitation centre in Dubbo is welcome, yet much of regional and rural NSW remains too distant from this essential community infrastructure. The establishment of new centres will help improve community health and wellbeing, return more people to the workforce and relieve labour shortages while boosting employment in these regions during construction and operation.

#### **State Outcomes:**

- People receive high quality, safe care in our hospitals
- » People can access care in out of hospital settings to manage their health and wellbeing
- » Stronger and cohesive regional communities and economies

Jobs: 220

# ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES



Allocate \$20 million annually for four years to establish a local government Closing the Gap grant program Councils work in partnership with other spheres of government and Aboriginal communities to drive Closing the Gap outcomes. Council initiatives that are place-based and adapted to local need will be key in achieving these outcomes, but councils must be supported by the NSW Government to make this important contribution.

A grant program for councils will ensure local government can contribute to the success of Closing the Gap and the NSW Implementation Plan.

#### State Outcome:

Empowering Aboriginal communities

**Jobs**: 230 p.a.

<b>Areas of Council</b>
Funding Need -
LGNSW Priorities

#### **Supporting Case**

#### **State Budget Outcomes**

# ACCESSIBLE & INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES



- » Allocate \$2 million in 2022/23 for a council grant program to expand the Lift & Change adult changing facilities program.
- Invest \$3 million in 2022/23 to support councils to develop and implement age friendly strategies

Accessible adult changing facilities promote inclusive tourism and community wellbeing as more members of the community are enabled to participate and engage.

The development of age-friendly communities is a growing need and a goal of all councils but is limited by the level of resources available for planning and delivery. Funding would also allow for an update and increased uptake of the Integrated Age-Friendly Planning Toolkit for Local Government to help promote healthy ageing in communities.

#### State Outcome:

Active and inclusive communities

Jobs: n/a

## WASTE & RECYCLING



Reinvest the \$750 million NSW Waste Levy to:

- Fund the delivery of priority infrastructure as outlined in the Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy.
- Provide a sound regulatory framework and financial supports to encourage investment and innovation in circular economy opportunities.
- Fund and deliver state-wide education campaigns which focus on broad priority areas and concurrently provide funding to support councils with undertaking targeted community education.
- Work with the Federal Government to introduce producer responsibility schemes for those items included on the Ministers Priority List.

The amount of Waste Levy collected by the NSW Government each year is increasing substantially as waste generation increases. State waste and resource recovery targets are not being met and the amount allocated to waste management and resource recovery by the government is reducing.

NSW Councils play a lead role in waste management and should be closely involved in helping identify worthy projects for funding.

A greater investment in waste and recycling infrastructure will not only preserve the environment but also boost the economy and create new jobs.

#### State Outcome:

Create a strong and liveable NSW

**Jobs**: 6,000 p.a.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & ACTIVATION



» Double existing CBD Revitalisation Program funding to \$100 million and open eligibility to cities and towns statewide. The CBDs Revitalisation Program is a fund for activations and incentives to encourage people back into CBDs across Greater Sydney and surrounds and boost the state's economic activity. LGNSW calls on the NSW Government to ensure regional and rural cities and towns can also benefit from the economic activity and vibrancy these activations and incentives will bring.

#### State Outcome:

A strong, resilient and diverse economy

**Jobs**: 530

<b>Areas of Council</b>
Funding Need -
I GNSW Priorities

#### **Supporting Case**

#### **State Budget Outcomes**

#### **PLANNING**



- » Commit \$40 million to assist councils to fund the development and implementation of integration platforms between the NSW Government Planning Portal and local government document management and application systems, provide staff training and community awareness.
- Enact additional funding mechanisms to enable local councils to properly fund their expanding compliance responsibilities.

The mandated council use of the NSW Planning Portal requires integration of councils' document management and application systems and the NSW Planning Portal. Upfront development costs of up to \$250,000 per council are exacerbated by ongoing costs of more than \$30k for annual licensing fees, staff/ specialist training, community awareness education and system maintenance. Facilitating a smooth implementation of e-planning will increase productivity, improve assessment timeframes and contribute to economic recovery.

Council officers undertake the important task of educating the community and stakeholders and ensuring developers meet their environmental obligations and building standards, to protect public health and safety. Councils need a mechanism, for example development application compliance levies, to properly and fairly recover the costs of their compliance activities.

#### State Outcoms:

Create a strong and liveable NSW

Jobs: 420

#### BUILDING REGULATION & COMBUSTIBLE CLADDING



Commit \$600 million in 2022/23 to fix combustible cladding on private residential buildings, including:

- » Financial support for individual unit owners
- Funding to contribute to the cost of councils' regulatory activity related to cladding compliance programs and legal challenges
- » Additional engineering, building and fire safety specialists.

Funding a wider and more comprehensive cladding removal program would help reduce the significant financial stress and risk posed by non-compliant combustible cladding on public and privately owned buildings and provide economic stimulus by encouraging swift completion of this work.

The costs to remediate each of the 225 residential buildings on the Government's high-risk combustible cladding list is estimated to be in the millions, with individual unit owners required to pay as much as \$15,000 to \$25,000 each.

These buildings are only a fraction of all the buildings that require remediation. There is no assistance for owners and councils in dealing with these many other affected buildings. The technical and legal resourcing costs incurred by each council to investigate, assess and regulate remediation of multiple buildings with external combustible cladding in their local areas is in the hundreds of thousands of dollars and will take years.

#### State Outcome:

Create a strong and liveable NSW

**Jobs**: 4,800

<b>Areas of Council</b>
Funding Need -
LGNSW Priorities

#### **Supporting Case**

#### **State Budget Outcomes**

# SKILLS & EMPLOYMENT



- Allocate \$10 million over four years, to a Skills Development Fund targeted to rural and regional councils to support education and employment in occupations experiencing long-term skills shortages.
- » Invest \$150,000 over four years for a dedicated resource in LGNSW to collate data on workforce trends and council strategies, develop workforce policy responses for state and federal governments and implement innovative solutions to address skills shortages, including building on and integrating the work of Careers at Council with Careers NSW.

In addition to the long-term skills shortages reported by councils in engineering, planning, building surveying, environmental health, IT, water and community services, Infrastructure Australia has recently projected critical shortfalls in infrastructure-related occupations over the next three years.

A Skills Development Fund, covering approved VET and tertiary educational expenses (up to four years), along with an in-training wage subsidy, would incentivise job seekers and those transitioning their careers, to take up roles in demand in NSW councils, particularly in rural and regional areas.

A dedicated resource within LGNSW would improve council collaboration on initiatives to address skills shortages and better inform policy advice to State and Commonwealth Governments.

#### **State Outcomes:**

- A skilled and employable workforce
- Create a strong and liveable NSW

Jobs: n/a

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



Invest \$12 million over four years to:

- Establish a grant fund for councils to implement the Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Toolkit for Local Government (\$2.8 million per year for four years).
- Domestic and Family
  Violence Prevention Officer
  in LGNSW to build the
  capacity of councils across
  the state, in line with similar
  successful positions in the
  Victorian and Queensland
  Local Government
  Associations (\$200,000 per
  year for four years).

The 2020 House of Representatives inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence called for a dedicated domestic violence prevention officer in every state and territory local government association. As demonstrated in Victoria and Queensland, a dedicated officer in the state local government association has made an enormous difference in increasing the capacity of councils in those States to counter domestic and family violence at the local level through targeted, ongoing

The Inquiry also recommended additional resources for local government to take a more active role in preventing and responding to family, domestic and sexual violence.

#### State Outcome:

Children and families thrive

Jobs: n/a

#### Areas of Council Funding Need – LGNSW Priorities

## Budget Funding Recommendation

#### **Supporting Case**

#### **State Budget Outcomes**

## **CLIMATE CHANGE**



- » Invest \$5 million annually for three years to support regional councils build urban tree canopy across regional urban centres.
- Invest \$2 million per annum to implement actions that address climate risks to improve the resilience of council's \$178 billion worth of assets and increase the community resilience to respond to climate risks.
- Invest \$3 million per annum to assist regional and rural councils transition to net zero emissions and drive local economies.

Regional and local communities are on the frontline when dealing with the risks and impacts of climate change, and councils are best placed to help manage these risks.

Local government has demonstrated it can work in partnership with the NSW Government to deliver highly-effective climate change projects that can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and also greatly assist the community to be better prepared and better able to adapt to future climatic conditions.

Funding is needed for regional councils to increase urban tree canopy. This investment will reduce urban heat, improve air quality, provide shade, and build resilience to climate change to create healthy connected communities.

More than \$24 million has been invested in urban tree canopy over three years in the Sydney Metro region, while no support has been provided to regional centres, which also have significant urban heat issues and sharply increasing populations.

Council programs supported by the Climate Change Fund are coming to a close. Additional funding for programs such as the Increasing Resilience to Climate Change program would continue to improve the resilience of local government assets and services.

Regional councils have greatly benefited from access to the Sustainable Communities program that has addressed skills and capacity constraints in implementing emission reduction.

#### State Outcome:

Create a strong and liveable NSW

Jobs: n/a

#### EMERGENCY SERVICES LEVY



 Fund the increase in the ESL on councils in 2022-23. The NSW Government implicitly recognised the negative impact of the ESL by providing rebates to assist councils with large increases in 2019/20 (\$14 m), 2020/21 (\$32.8 m) and 2021-22 (\$4.9 m).

By continuing the rebate, the NSW Government will prevent the contraction of local economies across NSW and continue to protect the jobs that will underpin not only economic recovery, but future resilience and growth.

#### State Outcome:

A sustainable fiscal environment enabling delivery of outcomes

Jobs: n/a



#### CONCLUSION

LGNSW commends the NSW Government on the health and economic responses to the successive and compounding impacts of drought, bushfire, flood and the devastating COVID-19 pandemic to date. Local government is also to be commended for council work on the frontline of response and recovery at the local level. Our partnership with the NSW Government has helped protect local economies and drive a locally led recovery, channelling stimulus and recovery funding to or through councils to maintain and generate jobs growth.

LGNSW warns against winding down support programs in response to green shoots of economic recovery, particularly given the uncertainty around the Omicron wave and potential future variants. The recovery remains tentative and fragile, so it is vital that the NSW Budget reinforces and extends the economic stimulus measures that have helped put NSW in the vanguard of economic recovery. The Government must resist the temptation to move into budget repair mode and withdraw these programs prematurely. To do so would put job recovery and growth at risk.

Recovery provides the opportunity to focus on investment in building the resilience of our infrastructure, services, and systems to better enable us to cope with inevitable future disasters. It will generate employment in the construction stage but also reduce risks and encourage private investment, creating more jobs in the future.

LGNSW seeks to strengthen the partnership between Local and State Government in driving the recovery in NSW and building resilience against future natural disasters and pandemics. Local government is well positioned to play a major role, providing an effective conduit for delivering assistance and economic stimulus to support local business and employment.

Beyond the responses to the current crisis, LGNSW also seeks to be closely engaged in longer-term economic reforms to promote investment and growth in the NSW economy. This includes engagement in the current tax and fiscal relationships reform conversation. A comprehensive review of State taxation must include all taxes, including those imposed by or impacting on local government. This includes the local government rating system and the emergency services levy on local government.

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