



# Advocacy Update

April 2024



**ONE VOICE  
FOR COUNCILS**



Working in partnership across our sector we have collectively achieved some substantial wins.

Just over one year on from the NSW State Election, I'm pleased to provide an update on progress towards our **2023-2024 Local Government NSW advocacy priorities**.

Thank you to the councils that have amplified our campaigns (from cost shifting to the Emergency Services Levy), informed our advocacy agenda through motions submitted to our annual conferences, and joined in united advocacy on these critical matters for our sector and the communities we represent.

Yours sincerely



**Cr Darriea Turley AM**  
President



## ROADS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Asks	Outcomes
We asked for a boost to needs based <b>roads funding</b> to respond to unprecedented damage	 <p>Roads to Recovery funding has been doubled from \$500 million to \$1 billion each year, and annual Black Spot funding has seen a \$40 million increase. However, significant cuts to federal infrastructure funding are disappointing.</p> <p>In NSW, the new Regional Emergency Road Repair Fund has delivered \$390 million to rural and regional councils as at March 2024.</p>
We asked the NSW Government to protect local government ownership of council <b>water utilities</b> and invest in them to bolster water security.	 <p>In progress. In March 2024 the parliamentary inquiry into protecting water utilities from privatisation tabled its report recommending that the NSW Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consult extensively with councils to develop legislation to protect LWUs from privatisation, forced amalgamations and sell-offs.</li><li>• Fund the Town Water Risk Reduction Program beyond Phase 2, determining the next phase of workstreams in consultation with the local water utilities sector.</li></ul>

# FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Asks	Outcomes
<p>We asked for amendments to the <b>rate peg methodology</b> to prevent future financial shocks to the sector and to ultimately remove rate pegging.</p>	<p> IPART introduced a new methodology to more accurately reflect council costs, including an adjustment to fully cover the costs of any increases in the Emergency Services Levy. IPART has also advised it will consider whether there is a case for a special adjustment factor in a future rate peg for recent inflationary pressures.</p>
<p>We asked for the government to rebate increases in council <b>Emergency Services Levy</b> (ESL) contributions and replace the levy with a sustainable funding model.</p>	<p> In progress. While the NSW Government has ceased its rebates, councils now have a mechanism to recover the costs of any increase through the rate peg.</p> <p>Longer term, LGNSW is represented on the Treasurer's new taskforce seeking a sustainable funding model for funding emergency services beyond the ESL.</p>
<p>We asked for a <b>public inquiry into cost shifting</b> in NSW to address the financial sustainability of local government, with a view to ending cost shifting.</p>	<p> Following on from the release of <a href="#">LGNSW's cost shifting report</a>, the Minister for Local Government initiated a parliamentary inquiry into the ability of councils to fund infrastructure and services. The inquiry will consider the impact of cost shifting and rate pegging on councils, reflecting the NSW Government's acknowledgment that cost shifting is a real issue.</p>
<p>We asked for legislative amendments to make clear that Rural Fire Service mobile assets (<b>the 'Red Fleet'</b>) are vested in the Rural Fire Service.</p>	<p> In progress. The Opposition has introduced a private members bill into parliament in line with our advocacy. The Minister for Local Government has acknowledged the seriousness of our position by initiating a parliamentary inquiry into the assets and funding of the RFS.</p>
<p>We asked for fairness, transparency, integrity and certainty of <b>grant funding</b> to councils.</p>	<p> In progress. In May 2023 new legislation passed parliament aiming to bolster the integrity and transparency of NSW Government grant funding arrangements. The legislation will require most grant information to be made publicly available unless there is an overriding public interest against disclosure of the information.</p>

# RESILIENCE TO NATURAL DISASTERS

## Asks

We asked for increased funding for **betterment, early warning and monitoring and community recovery officers** in councils.

## Outcomes



The second round of the Australian Government's \$200m annual Disaster Ready Fund is now proceeding, after the success of round 1 which delivered millions in funding for council betterment and risk reduction projects.

The Australian Government's independent inquiry into Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements is also considering options for betterment, risk reduction and resilience and is expected to issue a final report in April. The level of need is vast, and we will continue to call for greater investment in betterment.

The Bureau of Meteorology will acquire, upgrade and integrate local and state government-owned rain and river gauges into its existing flood warning network.

Disaster impacted councils across NSW also continued to receive funding for community recovery officers following severe flooding.

We asked for proactive **strategies to respond to natural disasters and adapt** to climate risks.



The NSW Government has released its first State Disaster Mitigation Plan following close consultation with the local government sector. The plan includes a priority action for the NSW Government to investigate options to support resourcing and capability-building in councils by the end of this year. It also provides further detail on the first Disaster Adaptation Plans that are being developed in partnership with councils.



# ENVIRONMENT AND THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Asks	Outcomes
<p>We asked for policies and programs to achieve the 2030 greenhouse gas emissions reduction target of 50% and the 2050 <b>net zero emissions target</b>.</p>	<p>✔ In progress. The Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Act, which commenced in December, enshrines whole-of-government climate action to deliver net zero by 2050.</p> <p>The NSW Government is aiming to establish a Net Zero Commission in the first half of 2024.</p>
<p>We asked for reinvestment of 100% of the <b>Waste Levy</b> to funding priority infrastructure and waste programs</p>	<p>✖ While we are yet to see action on reinvestment of the Waste Levy, the NSW Government has foreshadowed a review of the Levy will take place this year, presenting a key advocacy opportunity for our sector.</p>
<p>We asked for amendments to the <b>Biodiversity Offsets Scheme</b> to make it fit for purpose and address issues of over- and under-regulation.</p>	<p>✔ In progress. The NSW Government is now considering its response to the review of the Biodiversity Conservation Act. Many of the recommendations of the review aligned with LGNSW's advocacy, and the NSW Government response is expected in coming months.</p>
<p>We asked to <b>protect koalas and their habitats</b> and end logging in NSW native forests.</p>	<p>✔ In progress. The NSW Government has committed to creating a Great Koala National Park on the mid north coast, with \$80 million in funding.</p>



# SKILLS AND LABOUR SHORTAGE

## Asks

We asked for investment in **skills, training, professional development and cadetships** to support current and future local government workforce needs.

## Outcomes



In progress. Some good initiatives have been rolled out, including grants for 74 councils for cadetships for the next generation of council planners, and fee-free training for councils and Joint Organisations to upskill and reskill staff in water operation roles.



# RURAL, REGIONAL AND COMMUNITY HEALTH

Asks	Outcomes
We asked for full implementation of the recommendations of the parliamentary inquiry into <b>rural and regional health services</b> .	 In progress. The NSW Government has committed to implementing the recommendations in full. A series of further parliamentary inquiries are monitoring progress.
We asked for increased funding for specialised <b>youth and community wellbeing and mental health</b> services to bolster resilience, particularly after disaster.	 In progress. The new State Disaster Mitigation Plan includes an action to develop a framework for social infrastructure and cohesion with a focus on natural hazard risk, which will detail funding needs.



# STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Asks	Outcomes
<p>We asked for a local government <b>Closing the Gap</b> grant program.</p>	<p>✔ In progress. The role of councils in has been recognised through LGNSW being invited as a signatory for the new NSW Partnership Agreement for Closing the Gap. However, council contributions have not yet been accelerated with NSW Government funding support.</p>
<p>We asked for investment in <b>community safety and crime prevention</b>.</p>	<p>✔ In progress. The NSW Government has announced \$12.9m for crime prevention initiatives such as expansion of youth action meetings in nine police districts and justice reinvestment grants. The NSW Government has also initiated an inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities.</p>
<p>We asked for council <b>early childhood education and care</b> services to be eligible for all new funding programs for that sector.</p>	<p>✔ Council services have been eligible for new funding programs, including \$12 million for workforce skills and training for the early childhood sector.</p>
<p>We asked the equitable distribution of <b>arts and culture</b> funding across NSW.</p>	<p>✔ In progress. The remit of the NSW 24 Hour Economy Commissioner has been expanded beyond greater Sydney to the whole of NSW.</p> <p>The NSW Government has released a new Arts, Culture and Creative Industry Policy for NSW. While a promising start that makes multiple mentions of partnering with local government, the policy does not yet have associated funding.</p>



# HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Asks	Outcomes
<p>We asked governments to build 5,000 additional units of <b>public and social housing</b> each year for the next 10 years to contribute to addressing the homelessness and housing affordability crisis right across NSW.</p>	<p>— Disappointingly, NSW is yet to see substantial investment in public and social housing after decades of neglect.</p>
<p>We asked for <b>minimum targets</b> for public, social and affordable housing.</p>	<p>✓ NSW Government has committed that any properties on surplus government land will be subject to a mandatory minimum of 30% social and affordable housing.</p>
<p>We asked for a <b>ministry</b> solely dedicated to addressing homelessness and the housing crisis.</p>	<p>✓ In progress. NSW now has a Minister for Housing and Homelessness, and a new agency (Homes NSW) to bring together maintenance, tenant services and homelessness support.</p>



# PLANNING

Asks	Outcomes
<p>We asked the NSW Government to commit to councils being empowered to make <b>decisions about development</b> that affects their communities.</p>	<p> LGNSW remains concerned that the NSW Government is not working in genuine partnership with councils and communities to deliver density done well. Councils want to support housing growth in locations where their communities have been consulted and there is a plan for enabling infrastructure in place to support it.</p>
<p>We asked for local government not to be any worse off under future <b>infrastructure contribution reforms</b>.</p>	<p> The NSW Government amended legislation for state infrastructure contributions, again committing not to make changes to local contributions collected by councils. At the same time, the reforms established a grant funding stream of up to \$1 billion over ten years for councils to deliver local infrastructure.</p>
<p>We asked for urgent improvements to address issues with the <b>planning portal</b>.</p>	<p> In progress. While significant challenges remain, the NSW Government has prioritised addressing a backlog of issues, moved to limit the schedule of major changes to the Portal to reduce operational impact on councils and established new reference groups with councils to inform continuous improvement of the portal.</p>
<p>We asked for the government to address the issue of <b>'zombie developments'</b> (delayed implementation of decades-old development consents).</p>	<p> In progress. The NSW Government has initiated a parliamentary inquiry into historical development consents, which will also consider policy and legal solutions to address concerns.</p>
<p>We asked for adoption of new <b>accessibility standards</b> for housing that have recently been inserted in the national construction code.</p>	<p> Disappointingly, NSW remains one of just two states that have not adopted the new standards.</p>

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT NSW

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