

Country Mayors Meeting 5 March 2021

Local Government NSW update

This report seeks to brief the Country Mayors on the work of LGNSW since the last meeting and indicate opportunities for further collaboration where they might exist.

Lilliane Brady

It was with great sorrow that local government recently marked the passing of Cobar Mayor Lilliane Brady OAM – NSW's longest-serving female mayor, and a councillor with an unwavering commitment to the community she loved. Her advocacy on behalf of her community was legendary and continued right until her death, as she sought a new hospital, better infrastructure, and a fairer return of mining royalties. We welcomed the State Government agreeing to a State Funeral, and I was grateful to join many councillors, dignitaries, and community members from across NSW in Cobar on 19 February to mourn her passing and celebrate her magnificent life.

ADVOCACY WINS (December 2020 – February 2021)

- **Training for women in local government** – LGNSW welcomes the \$50,000 in NSW Government funding to the Australian Local Government Women's Association (ALGWA) to provide training that will equip more women to run for council, in line with our calls for government at all levels to better reflect the communities they represent. ALGWA's membership includes many experienced NSW councillors, including LGNSW board members, and this funding will support workshops in regional and metropolitan areas.
- **Dine & Discover NSW Voucher Scheme** - following LGNSW advocacy, the NSW Government has confirmed that council-run venues will be eligible to participate in the Dine and Discover NSW voucher scheme, which will provide each NSW resident aged 18 and over with four \$25 vouchers. Two of the four vouchers can be used for entertainment and recreation at cultural institutions, live music, and arts venues. With councils running so many of NSW's theatres, galleries and arts and cultural venues, this is terrific news for councils and their communities and will support artists, performers, and creatives across the state.
- **24-Hour Economy Commissioner** - this is a great outcome after a great deal of hard advocacy work by LGNSW and the NTECC, established in late 2016 by LGNSW and a range of Sydney councils. With everyone in our sector focused on rebuilding local economies in the wake of 2020's drought, bushfires and pandemic, it's especially terrific to get a win in this area – and LGNSW is committed to continuing our advocacy to extend the benefits to regional NSW as part of our push to support a locally led recovery.
- **Remanufacture NSW** – the NSW Government has committed \$35 million in funding to match Commonwealth and industry to support waste and recycling improvements, especially outcomes that see waste turned into re-usable product. This is in line with our Save Our Recycling Campaign.
- **Waste management funding** – the NSW EPA also announced a \$4 million investment to keep household and general waste out of landfill and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The money will go to commercial waste operators for R & D into alternative waste treatments. The Federal Government also announced a further \$4 million *Stop Food Waste Australia*, an initiative that will bring together the brightest minds in supply chain management, food waste NGOs and all tiers of government to tackle the problem.
- **Crown Land** – the NSW Government will provide a record \$51.7 million from its Crown Reserves Improvement Fund (CRIF) to maintain and upgrade Crown reserves and support about 345 projects across NSW and this year's stimulus boost will more than double the number of projects to 705.
- **Building Better Regions Round 5** - applications are now open for local communities across regional Australia for the fifth round (\$200 million) of the successful Building Better Regions Fund (BBRF).
- **Term of County Council Chairs** - the term of County Council Chairs will be changed to be on par with mayors, in line with our 2018 Conference resolution from Riverina Water County Council. Subsequently, the LG Minister wrote to County Councils on 13 January 2021 advising the NSW Government would address this matter in an amendment to the Act.
- **Campaign to encourage more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to run for council** - a plan to launch a campaign to encourage more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to run for council at next

year's council elections, in addition to the campaign to attract more women, following representations from LGNSW, Reconciliation NSW and the Local Government Aboriginal Network.

LGNSW WORK UNDERTAKEN

Rates reform

LGNSW has been meeting with the NSW Government, opposition and cross bench on the Local Government Amendment (Rates) Bill 2021. There are a range of amendments that we'd like to see as part of the Bill to ensure it provides greater rating flexibility for councils, helps councils deliver more equitable and efficient rating outcomes to their communities, facilitates rate harmonisation for the 17 amalgamated councils and relieves councils from the cost pressures of the Emergency Services Levy by decoupling the ESL from the rate peg. LGNSW also continues to oppose any changes to mining rates arrangements.

Remote meetings extension

In March last year the NSW Parliament passed the COVID-19 Legislation Amendment Bill 2020 which temporarily allow councils to meet remotely. This temporary amendment is due to expire on 25 March 2021 and the NSW Government is currently undertaking a review to assess if it should be extended or maintained permanently.

At the 2020 LGNSW annual conference in November, councils resolved to call on the NSW Government to amend the Model Code of Meeting practice for councils in NSW to permit attendance and participation of councillors at council and committee meetings by audio-visual link. LGNSW has written and discussed with the Minister, urging the Government to make these remote meeting provisions permanent.

Road Maintenance Council Contracts and Regional Roads Transfer and Road Classification Review

I recently met with Minister Toole to reiterate the importance of RMCCs to councils across NSW and seek assurances that RMCCs will continue to be retained by councils and that all other general road maintenance works also be offered to councils in the first instance. We know that over many years, councils have demonstrated the ability to deliver these types of road works efficiently and effectively. We also discussed the road classification review and the need to ensure that councils will be better off financially at the conclusion of the review and transfer process.

Dividing Fences Amendment Bill

I recently met with Robert Borsak and Michael Banasiak from the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party to reaffirm our opposition to their proposed Dividing Fences Amendment Bill. If this Bill were to pass Parliament, councils would become liable to pay for dividing fencing work along road corridors, reserves and parks and this would result in a significant unfunded financial exposure for councils.

Rural, regional and remote health inquiry

LGNSW has made a [draft submission](#) to the Parliamentary inquiry into health outcomes and access to health and hospital services in rural, regional and remote New South Wales.

LGNSW received feedback from more than 20 councils in developing this submission, building on positions supported by councils across NSW through resolutions of the LGNSW Annual Conference.

Our submission highlights multiple examples of the tireless work of councils in supporting the health and wellbeing of their communities when state and federal governments do not meet their healthcare responsibilities.

LGNSW's submission includes 22 recommendations and notes the need for the NSW Government to involve local government in finding locally relevant solutions to improving the provision of medical services in rural, regional and remote NSW, and calls for urgent action from the NSW and Australian Governments to adequately and fairly fund the provision of healthcare across NSW. Hearings are expected to take place in the coming months.

Local Land Service Bill Inquiry

The Local Land Services Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill ('LLS Bill') was introduced to Parliament in mid October 2020 as "an Act to amend the Local Land Services Act 2013 in relation to native vegetation land management, allowable activities, private native forestry and core koala habitats; and for other purposes". There was no public consultation or consultation with local government preceding the Bill's introduction. The Bill was passed by the Legislative Assembly on 21 October.

LGNSW wrote to key MPs, MLCs and cross-benchers expressing our concerns with the lack of consultation and the Bill's contents, seeking a delay in the Bill's progression. On 19 November 2020 the Bill was referred to Upper House Portfolio Committee 7 for inquiry and report. Public feedback was sought by 5 February 2021, and LGNSW lodged a submission. Hearings are expected to occur in late March 2021.

LGNSW's submission outlines that the Bill pre-empts the outcomes and recommendations of a number of key reviews undertaken in recent years that should inform changes to both the Koala SEPP and any required amendments to the LLS Act 2013, and therefore is not supported in its current form. LGNSW notes that the development of a revised Koala SEPP needs to be comprehensive, based on scientific evidence and be consistent with the findings of the 2019 NSW Upper House inquiry into koalas and koala habitat, 2019 findings of the NSW Audit Office, the independent review of the land management framework conducted by the Natural Resources Commission in 2019 and the Private Native Forestry Review.

Registration of Engineers

LGNSW made a [submission](#) on building regulation reforms in January 2021 which contains three recommendations in relation to the registration or professional engineers. LGNSW has indicated in principle support for the registration of professional engineers but is advocating a phased transition and a range of options to ensure councils have flexibility to attract, retain and share the employment of engineering professionals. The new legislation will commence in July 2021. LGNSW consulted councils and JOs for input to this submission.

Infrastructure Contributions System Review

In 2020, two reviews of the infrastructure contributions system were undertaken:

1. The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) exhibited proposed changes to five specific aspects of infrastructure contributions; and
2. The NSW Productivity Commissioner undertook a comprehensive review of the infrastructure contributions system, delivering its final report to NSW Government in December 2020.

LGNSW made [submissions](#) to both these reviews. One of LGNSW's recommendations to the Productivity Commissioner was to increase the current s. 7.12 contributions levy of 1%. LGNSW welcomed the Productivity Commissioner's recommendation to increase baseline s7.12 charges to 3%. LGNSW wrote to the Minister for Planning and Public Places in December in response to the Productivity Commissioner's final report, and we are anticipating the government's response to the report in coming weeks.

Research and Innovation Fund

The Research and Innovation Fund supports new areas of research, policy development and innovation for the advancement of local government in NSW.

For Round 3 of the Fund, LGNSW has partnered with the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment to allocate a total of \$52,350 in seed funding for applied research that drives innovation in the transition to net zero emissions. LGNSW member councils, Regional Organisations of Councils and Joint Organisations were eligible to apply for this funding to support applied research projects that will help drive actions to transition to net zero emissions and meet NSW's emission reduction targets. Three (3) projects from Bathurst Regional Council, Campbelltown City Council and Lake Macquarie City Council were awarded in December 2020.

Further information is available on the Innovation page of [LGNSW's website](#).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

Local Water Utilities and Water Policy

LGNSW has now formed a Local Water Utility and Water Policy network with JO Executive Officers. The network facilitates information sharing and provides a conduit for council and JO input into LGNSW policy and advocacy. For more information contact Shaun McBride (shaun.mcbride@lgnsw.org.au) or Sanjiv Sathiah (sanjiv.sathiah@lgnsw.org.au).

LGNSW supports the position of the CMA on the Government providing respite from NSW Government imposed costs. For example, LGNSW has made representations to the Minister and Department strongly objecting to the imposition of a Dam Safety Levy on councils.

LGNSW also agrees that it is critical that councils are closely engaged in State and Federal Government infrastructure investment programs. Consultation with councils is particularly important with investment in water security.

Emergency Management Funding and Reform

LGNSW fully supports the CMA's call for the extension of rental support for those who lost their primary dwelling to bushfire. It is evident that a great many people who lost their homes to the fires are still displaced.

LGNSW has responded to the Royal Commission National Natural Disaster Arrangements supporting the key recommendations, particularly in relation to supporting local government and the development of emergency management structures, for the future management of natural disasters.

The 2020 LGNSW Annual Conference adopted a resolution that Local Government NSW advocates to the NSW Government, specifically Resilience NSW to transfer responsibility for emergency management (from local government) to the NSW Government.

Significant Increases in RFS Contributions

LGNSW recognises the seriousness of the problem with the ESL and it remains one of our top advocacy priorities and we have ramped up our advocacy on this issue over the past year. While LGNSW appreciates the \$33 million provided by the State Government to partially offset the ESL increases for the 2020/21 financial year, this temporary relief does not address the fundamental problem of the ever-escalating ESL burden on councils, particularly rural and regional councils with small rate bases and a large RFS component.

LGNSW has long advocated that the ESL on both councils and insurance policies be replaced by a broad-based property tax, as is the case in other States. As part of the rate reform bill we are calling on the Government to relieve councils from the cost pressures of the ESL by decoupling the ESL from the rate peg. We have also called on the Auditor General to conduct a performance review of the financial impacts of the ESL on councils.

Electoral Districts Redistribution

Resolution 20 of the 2020 LGNSW Annual Conference calls for the NSW Government to undertake a formal review of the electoral district redistribution process in NSW, seeking to ensure that regional/rural areas west of the Great Dividing Range are represented adequately into the future.

LGNSW has written to the Special Minister of State, the Hon. Don Harwin MLC on this matter. LGNSW is also updating its [Policy Platform](#) to reflect this and other resolutions of the 2020 Annual Conference. The revised Policy Platform is scheduled to be considered by the LGNSW Board at its April 2021 meeting.

Financial Assistance Grants

LGNSW's current policy position is that the Federal Government increase Financial Assistance Grants (FAGs) funding to 1% of Commonwealth tax revenue, prior to any changes to the formula. This was reaffirmed by resolution of the 2020 LGNSW Annual Conference. A further resolution at the 2021 Annual Conference would be required to change this policy position.

Agricultural Land Use Strategy Discussion Paper

The recently appointed NSW Agriculture Commissioner (and Department of Primary Industries) is consulting on an agricultural land use strategy (largely around land use conflict, right to farm etc). LGNSW and councils have participated in a series of webinars in February 2021. LGNSW made 7 recommendations in a preliminary submission on an Issues Paper in September 2020 and is consulting councils for input to a further submission due in late February. To provide input please contact Susy Cenedese (Susy.Cenedese@lgnsw.org.au) or Jane Partridge (Jane.Partridge@lgnsw.org.au).

Waste & resource recovery

LGNSW continues to advocate for reinvestment of the waste levy to fund regional waste planning and infrastructure, education and support for procurement, as outlined in the [Save Our Recycling campaign](#). LGNSW is part of the EPA's Local Government Advisory Group (along with reps from JOs and councils), which has been consulted on elements of the Government's upcoming 20-year waste strategy. A draft strategy is anticipated to be released for consultation in March/April.

The next meeting of LGAG is on 19 March, and LGNSW will work more closely with other local government representatives to represent the sector's concerns and communicate back to the sector on LGAG's discussions (which go beyond waste and across all aspects of EPA activities). To provide feedback please contact Susy Cenedese (Susy.Cenedese@lgnsw.org.au).

LG representation on the National Cabinet

LGNSW, ALGA and our interstate Associations continue to advocate for a seat at the National Cabinet. We are receiving great support so far from a range of councils and other stakeholders across the state and country and welcome any additional support that Country Mayors and their councils can offer.

Industrial Relations

The new Local Government (State) Award 2020 was made by consent for a three year term and commenced operation on the first pay period to commence on after 1 July 2020. The Award variations included an agreement to commence a thorough review of a range of adverse working and conditions related allowances during the term of the Award and consultation with members in this regard will commence shortly.

LGNSW Destination and Visitor Economy Conference in Port Macquarie

Plans are now underway for the LGNSW Destination and Visitor Economy Conference, formerly known as the LGNSW Tourism Conference. The conference will be co-hosted by Port Macquarie-Hastings Regional Council and we are pleased to announce a new and exciting program with many changes based on feedback from previous attendees and stakeholders. Registration will open in early March and accommodation options and travel information will shortly be available on our website.

LGNSW have a number of rooms blocked for the conference and has arranged special rates at Sails Resort so we encourage you to book as soon as possible so as not to miss out.

Where: Sails Resort, Port Macquarie

When: 26-28 May 2021

For further information, email the [LGNSW Events Team](#) or call 02 9242 4000

LGNSW Water Management Conference 2021

After 2020's Water Management Conference went online due to covid-19, LGNSW worked closely with Narrabri Shire Council to secure new dates and remain with them for 2021. The program is in a draft form with speaker call for presentation proposals open until 26 February, 2021.

The conference and dinner will be held at The Crossing Theatre in Narrabri. Accommodation throughout hotels and motels within the town will be utilised and are currently posted on the LGNSW website. LGNSW have all rooms booked at The Adelong Motel for speakers and staff.

Registration will open early May.

Where: The Crossing Theatre, Narrabri

When: 7-9 July 2021

For further information, email the [LGNSW Events Team](#) or call 02 9242 4000

Submissions (December 2020 – February 2021)

Topic	Submitted to	Date
Right to Repair Inquiry	Productivity Commission	February 2021
Local Land Services Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill Inquiry	Parliament of NSW	February 2021
Rapid Assessment Framework	Department of Planning, Industry and Environment	February 2021
Design and Building Practitioners Regulation 2020	NSW Department of Customer Service	January 2021
Draft Local Character Clause and Overlay	Department of Planning, Industry and Environment	January 2021
Children's Guardian Amendment Bill	Office of the Children's Guardian	January 2021
Parliamentary inquiry into health outcomes and access to health and hospital services in rural, regional and remote NSW	Draft submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry Portfolio Committee No.2 - Health	December 2020
Inquiry on Climate Change Bills 2020	Draft submission to the House of Representatives, Standing Committee, Environment and Energy	December 2020
Review of the Education SEPP	Draft submission to Department of Planning Industry and Environment	December 2020
Review of the Infrastructure SEPP – health services facilities	Draft submission to Department of Planning Industry and Environment	December 2020
Dendrobium Extension Project	Submission to the Independent Planning Commission NSW	December 2020
Draft Social Impact Assessment Guideline for State Significant Projects (PDF, 207KB)	Draft submission to the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment	December 2020

All LGNSW submissions are available on the LGNSW website at <https://www.lgnsw.org.au/>.

Local Government Management Solutions – New Service Offerings

1. Workplace Analytics: Finance and Economic Metrics

Local Government Management Solutions' (LGMS') suite of workplace analytics which includes council staff and general manager remuneration and HR metrics has been expanded to offer an additional two data sets; finance and economic metrics.

2. Service Level Reviews

LGMS has investigated opportunities to expand its executive management services to include offering members a 'service level review' service. LGMS is now able to offer a series of interactive online 'service review' workshops in order to reduce delivery costs to councils and make the training as accessible as possible.

3. Remote Skills Service

Many members, particularly rural and regional councils at times find it difficult to attract specialised skills to their organisation. This creates additional workloads on existing staff which in turn can create burn out and low staff morale, and potentially lower or compromised service levels for local communities.

To link organisations in need with employees possessing specialist skills, LGMS will be offering a service recruiting a number of highly qualified technical and professional persons to provide short-term services to members during the times when internal resources or suitable skills are not available. These industry professionals work predominantly from the metropolitan region or large regional centres where the skills are readily available.

4. Careers at Council website

Careers at Council is a website designed to attract, inform and connect candidates to jobs in local government. After launching 12 months ago, Careers at Council now features the jobs of 127 councils nationally (24% of all councils), including 52 in NSW, 6 subscriber councils in the NT, Qld and WA and all SA councils. Jobs from LGNSW Management Solutions and LGAQ's Peak Services are also advertised on Careers at Council. The website also promotes sector employment opportunities to retiring veterans.

For more information on these services visit the [LGMS webpage](#).