

NSW 2023 Election Issues Brief

WSROC has identified the following issues the NSW Government should address to increase Western Sydney's liveability, resilience and wellbeing. These issues matter to our councils and the people of Western Sydney but will also benefit NSW and Australia more broadly.

1. Waste management and resource recovery

Waste management is an essential service, critical for maintaining healthy environments, protecting community health and safety, and meeting NSW's emissions targets. While councils are responsible for delivering kerbside waste services and other local programs, the NSW Government has a critical role to ensuring the appropriate infrastructure and funding arrangements (e.g. the Waste Levy) are in place to allow councils to fulfill their role.

Since the introduction of the waste levy in 1971¹, a fee is charged on the disposal of waste to landfill. The Waste Levy serves as the Government's main economic instrument for waste management and resource recovery. While the Waste Levy has been effective in reducing waste to landfill, the rate of return of levy funds back into the resource recovery industry is historically low.

During the 2000's, funds from the Levy were diverted towards general NSW Government service delivery. A small proportion of levy revenue (on average 15%) was directed back into the waste industry for waste management and resource recovery.

Over the years, there has been a marked decline in funding available to local government with no guaranteed (non-contestable) funding made available to councils from 2022/23. At the same time, there is significant pressure on waste and resource recovery infrastructure in the Sydney metropolitan area and throughout NSW, with looming landfill shortages, and lack of processing infrastructure for the soon to be mandated food organic waste (FOGO green bin) collections, amongst other infrastructure shortfalls – investment in the waste sector has never been more urgent.

1.1 Return the Waste Levy to support waste initiatives

- Ensure Waste Levy funds collected for the purpose of diverting waste from landfill and supporting resource recovery are returned to councils to support delivery of waste and recycling services and waste avoidance initiatives, and to the wider sector to deliver critical waste infrastructure.

1.2 Support local government to reduce food waste emissions

- Support local government transition to household food organics garden organics (FOGO) services in the development of grants under carbon abatement and waste

¹ Regulated contribution under Section 88 of Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997, more commonly referred to as the waste levy.

reduction initiatives. Without additional financial support, councils will struggle to fund and deliver this service transition and resulting abatements.

1.3 Fund asbestos waste disposal

- Fund programs to support the disposal of legacy asbestos waste from households, to improve residents' asbestos related health outcomes and ensure safe and legal asbestos waste disposal.

2. Local government resilience

Local government funding has long been insufficient to deliver the services that communities need. This is particularly true in Greater Western Sydney where high growth areas mingle with suburbs that have a long history of deficient spending on social infrastructure. The demand for local government services and infrastructure far exceeds what current funding mechanisms provide. This situation is compounded by recent natural disasters which have created additional funding needs. Recent reviews by IPART into developer contributions, waste charges and rate capping, have done nothing to improve the financial resilience of local government.

2.1 Review local government funding and financing arrangements

- An expert panel be set up to investigate and report on the NSW Governments' financial relations affecting local government, with the remit of:
 - Providing recommendations for establishing a stable, reliable revenue base that allows local government to fund essential services and infrastructure into the future.
 - Investigating options for a fairer, more efficient, and reliable system of federal and state funding for local government.
 - Outlining a draft process for evaluating the financial impacts of state and federal policy changes on local government.
 - Examining how NSW councils and the NSW Government can work together to build a stronger economy, encourage reform across all three levels of government especially in the policy framework, and ultimately deliver better value for taxpayers/ratepayers.

2.2 Support councils in the timely delivery of more resilient infrastructure after disasters

- Ensure publicly accessible and owned community infrastructure, and local government waste, water and wastewater assets, are included under Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.
- Develop, implement, and properly fund programs to rebuild essential public infrastructure damaged in natural disasters to a more resilient standard, ensuring that the full costs of delivery including materials, consultancy fees and staffing costs to manage the rebuild are considered.
- Reduce barriers to timely funding delivery, so that communities can recover more quickly and build resilience to future events.

3. Housing

Australia's housing affordability crisis demands action. Sydney is widely recognised as one of the most expensive cities in Australia², however deterioration in housing affordability has been most obvious in lower income regions such as Western Sydney.³ More than 14.6% of Greater Western Sydney households are in mortgage stress, and a further 32.8% of households are in rental stress. In total this is almost half of all Greater Western Sydney households (47.4%)⁴. Social and affordable housing provision is also a significant challenge with Wentworth Housing and Western Sydney Community Forum estimating a shortfall of 67,000 social and affordable dwellings in Western Sydney in 2016⁵. More broadly, there is a need to ensure homes of all types are safe, healthy and affordable.

3.1 Invest in social housing to ensure a more stable life for communities

- The NSW Government commit to clear, transparent delivery of more social housing dwellings.
- Support calls for the Australian Government to develop a National Housing Strategy which outlines a national vision and a well-resourced Data Hub to help stakeholders across Australia make data-informed decisions.

² Greater Sydney Commission. (2018). A metropolis of three cities: Greater Sydney region plan.

³ Bangura, M., Lee, C. L. (2019). The differential geography of housing affordability in Sydney: a disaggregated approach. *Australian Geographer*, 50(3), 295 – 313.

⁴ McIntyre, S., Sankovic, B., Nance, T., Gerencer, E., Wun, C., Morris, B., Cahill, T. (2019). *Home in Western Sydney: Housing affordability and homelessness insights*.

⁵ McIntyre, S., Sankovic, B., Nance, T., Gerencer, E., Wun, C., Morris, B., Cahill, T. (2019). *Home in Western Sydney: Housing affordability and homelessness insights*.

- Accelerate processes for upgrading and retrofitting social housing dwellings to ensure safe, liveable conditions that protect tenants from the worst impacts of climate and energy stress.

3.2 Increase affordable housing delivery through strong policy and direct investment.

- Integrate clear affordable housing targets into state environmental planning policies to ensure contributions are made across all relevant development types.
- Enforce measures that ensure affordable housing stock remains affordable in perpetuity.
- Increase direct investment in affordable housing by the NSW Government.
- Promote and celebrate best practice affordable housing designs to increase understanding of this type of housing and the social benefits it provides.
- Recognise affordable housing as infrastructure to ensure associated borrowing mechanisms are activated.

3.3 Holistically address cost-of-living by expanding the scope of housing policy

- Ensure housing affordability policies consider and address lifecycle ongoing running costs of a dwelling to reduce cost-of-living pressures, particularly for renters.
- Review minimum standards for rental housing to require facilities that support thermal comfort and ensure thermal safety of occupants.

3.4 Review tenancy laws to achieve more balance between landlords and tenants

- Improve the ability of tenants to negotiate reasonable rental agreements with their landlords without fear of reprisal this might include:
 - Property repairs or minor modifications (e.g. installation of ceiling fans)
 - Accommodation of family pets.
- Establish and enforce the responsibility of landlords, as service providers to provide a safe, healthy, energy efficient homes for their tenants.

4. Climate change and resilience

Climate change impacts are already being felt across Australia. Western Sydney residents have been particularly impacted by extreme heat, flood and bushfires over the past three years, and predictions indicate the region will suffer some of the greatest impacts of climate change.

- **Western Sydney is expected to experience an additional 5-10 days over 35°C by 2030** (up from 37 days per year in summer 2020)⁶.
- **Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley has the highest flood risk in Australia.** By 2071, increased rainfall intensity would increase 1 in 100 (1%) year flood levels by 1 metre by 2071 in some areas⁷.
- **Blue Mountains World Heritage Area is one of the most bushfire prone areas in the world,**⁸ with frequency and scale of bushfires projected to increase under climate change⁹.

Western Sydney councils are committed to reducing emissions and adapting to the impacts of climate change and seek leadership from the NSW Government to help implement mitigation and adaptation plans. Support is needed at the local level to address practical challenges of climate change including essential service and asset management, local jobs and economies¹⁰, as well as community health.

4.1 Support councils and communities via climate mitigation and adaptation programs

- Work with councils and communities to help Western Sydney adapt to a changing climate and implement policy and programs to achieve its emission targets.
- Introduce support programs to accelerate rooftop solar uptake and household batteries, with dedicated initiatives to support lower income households and renters.
- Map future workforce needs for emerging renewable energy industries, establish clear strategies to address gaps, and focus new job opportunities in areas experiencing a decline in traditional energy industries.
- Provide dedicated funding programs to upgrade community infrastructure and facilities and make them more sustainable and energy efficient.

⁶ NSW Office of Environment and Heritage. (2014). *Metropolitan Sydney: Climate impact snapshot*.

⁷ Infrastructure NSW. (2019). *Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley Regional Flood Study: Overview*.

⁸ Chapple R. S., Ramp D. R., Kingsford R. T., Merson J. A., Bradstock R. A., Mulley R..C. & Auld T. (2011). Integrating science into management of ecosystems in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, Australia. *Environmental Management*, 48(4), 659-674.

⁹ AdaptNSW. (2015). *Climate change impacts on bushfire risk in NSW*.

¹⁰ Wood et al. (2021). *An indicative assessment of four key areas of climate risk for the 2021 NSW Intergenerational report*, NSW Treasury.

4.2 Support Western Sydney's EV transition¹¹

- Support the development of an EV charging infrastructure master plan to facilitate a coordinated public EV charging network across Greater Western Sydney, address gaps and barriers (including blackspots) to ensure community needs are met and provide clarity for providers.
- Support local governments' transition to fleet electrification.
- Support advocacy for National action on electric vehicle transition including:
 - The introduce mandatory fuel efficiency standards. The introduction of mandatory fuel efficiency standards is a big opportunity to increase electric passenger vehicle sales and decarbonise the passenger vehicle fleet.
 - Fast-tracking improvements to petrol quality standards.
 - Ease supply constraints by providing policy certainty for manufacturers and incentives for establishing supply of electric vehicles in Australia.
 - Introduce federal low emissions vehicle purchase incentives.

4.3 Make heat resilience a Premier's Priority

- Enact a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to reducing heat risk¹² including:
 - Urban planning
 - Integrate urban heat island mitigation measures across state environmental planning policies to ensure measures are enacted across all development types¹³.
 - Update BASIX and Sustainable Buildings SEPPs to ensure new homes are designed to keep people safe in future climates and when the power goes out. This includes:
 - Updating climate files to reflect today's climate.
 - Assessing new homes against future climate scenarios.

¹¹ WSROC (2022). *Western Sydney Electric Vehicle Roadmap 2022 – 2030*. Available from: <https://wsroc.com.au/media-a-resources/reports?task=download.send&id=317&catid=3&m=0>

¹² WSROC. (2021). *Heat Smart Resilience Framework*. Available from: <https://wsroc.com.au/media-a-resources/reports?task=download.send&id=310&catid=3&m=0>

¹³ WSROC. (2021). *Urban Heat Planning Toolkit*. <https://wsroc.com.au/projects/project-turn-down-the-heat/turn-down-the-heat-resources-2>

- Introduce thermal safety and thermal autonomy standards – model the performance of homes in no-power scenarios to ensure homes are safe for all occupants.
- Health
 - Enact systems to measure the impacts of heat on human health including but not limited to:
 - Allowing 'heat' to be coded into emergency department admissions across all NSW Hospitals.
 - Allow 'extreme heat' to be included as a cause of death by the coroner.
 - Enact community education campaigns to ensure communities understand their heat-health risks and how to manage them.
- Infrastructure
 - Develop adaptation plans to ensure transport infrastructure supports safe travel in hotter climates.
 - Review operational thresholds of critical infrastructure to understand likely outages and disruptions in heatwave scenarios.
- Energy
 - Support the transition to a renewable, decentralised power system with backup capacity.
- Emergency management
 - Identify a lead agency for heat risk reduction in NSW.
 - Update and expand the Heatwave Sub Plan to bring it in line with other hazard plans:
 - Include arrangements for heat risk prevention.
 - Include arrangements for heatwave preparedness.
 - Include arrangements for practical response in the event of a heatwave disaster.
 - Fund and deliver community education campaigns to ensure communities understand their heat risks and how to manage them.

5. Transport

Western Sydney has long experienced a backlog in transport infrastructure, particularly public transport infrastructure. Recent investments in public transport including the Parramatta Light Rail and North West Metro welcomed, but significant shortfalls remain. Investment in Western Sydney's public transport network, including links between the region's existing centres, is essential for addressing cost-of-living pressures associated with fuel and tolls, supporting the development of local economies, improving access to services for vulnerable groups, as well as meeting NSW's Net Zero target.

5.1 Outline, plan and deliver an end-state public transport network that ensures Western Sydney residents have access to the same level of service as other parts of the city. This should prioritise:

- Accelerated delivery of the North South/Western Sydney Airport Line from Hawkesbury to Campbelltown, not just St Marys to the Western Sydney Airport.
- Completion of the Leppington Line to Western Sydney Airport.
- Public transport linking the satellite cities of Penrith, Blacktown and Liverpool including a Smart Transport Corridor from the airport to Liverpool City.
- Increasing the frequency and reliability of Western Sydney's local bus networks, so that public transport becomes a viable alternative to driving.

5.2 Outline clear package of environmental and noise mitigation treatments (and controls) to be completed before the opening of the Western Sydney Airport.

6. Health services

Since its Beds for the West campaign in the 1970s, improving the availability of public health services in Western Sydney has been a key focus for WSROC. The NSW Government has made significant investments in health infrastructure over the last decade, yet, Western Sydney's rate of population growth, combined with higher rates of chronic disease mean many people are waiting far too long to access essential medical care. There is a need to both improve access to primary and allied care services as well as addressing the underlying factors that drive higher rates of chronic disease.

6.1 Ensure planning and implementation of health infrastructure and services is timely and based on population projections to reduce wait times for medical services.

6.2 Invest in preventative health campaigns to reduce rates of preventable, lifestyle-related illness in Western Sydney, South Western Sydney and Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health Districts.

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