

NSROC Submission on the New Directions for Local Government Position Paper

March 2007

This submission has been prepared by NSROC in response to the Positions Paper entitled "A New Direction for Local Government", dated October 2006. The Paper is one of three to be released by the Department which seek to shape the future strategic and operational functions of local government. The submission has been endorsed by the NSROC General Managers Group and the NSROC Executive.



WHAT IS NSROC?

Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (NSROC) is a voluntary organisation of local governments established to provide strong local government leadership; to work co-operatively for the benefit of the Northern Sydney region; and to effectively advocate on agreed regional positions and priorities. The councils under the NSROC umbrella are; Hornsby, Willoughby, North Sydney, Lane Cove, Ryde, Ku-ring-gai and Hunters Hill.

The NSROC councils are committed to the sustainable management of an area which covers nearly 700 square kilometres, and they serve a population of over half-a-million people. The region is home to a diverse collection of landscapes and communities, ranging from scenic waterways, bush land parks and areas of historical significance through to residential high-rise living and thriving commercial and retail centres.

NSROC recognises local government in New South Wales is under significant pressure due to a combination of legislative, funding and operational factors which have been well documented in the recent independent inquiry into the financial sustainability of NSW Local Government titled 'Are Councils Sustainable' (May 2006). The co-incidence of changing community expectations, rate-pegging, cost-shifting, declining grants revenue from the Federal Government and the introduction of new reporting and operational requirements from the state have collectively resulted in a difficult operating environment for many councils.

In response to these challenges the NSROC councils have embarked on a process of continuous improvement and reform across their entire range of service, governance and legislative requirements. Such reforms include changes to operational procedures, development of strategies and plans, entering into collective enterprises with other local government entities and private businesses, introducing cost recovery mechanisms, revised accounting procedures, the introduction of sustainability requirements, infrastructure auditing and expansive staff and councillor training activities. It should be recognised that the NSROC councils have been pro-active in this regard and that the majority of the easily achievable and highly beneficial reforms have already taken place.

In recognition of their stated aim of 'working together for a better region' the councils have also embarked on a collective exercise to ensure that the region is equipped to deal with future challenges and to encourage a strategic approach to solving the problems it faces now and into the future. In 2004/05 NSROC commissioned three reports which examined the threats to the on-going prosperity and well-being of the region. These are:

1. The Economic Contribution of the NSROC Region, CIE, December 2004
2. The Potential Impacts of Population Growth in the NSROC Region, Noonan, July 2005; and
3. NSROC Regional Social Report, Le Bransky, June 2005.

These reports not only document where and how the impacts of a growing population, declining revenue base and aging infrastructure will manifest themselves in the region, they also make a series of recommendations to try and address these issues. These important documents have been bolstered by the NSROC Strategic Plan which identifies 8 key directions for action on a regional basis; the annual production of a regional State of Environment Report which identifies threats and responses to environmental issues in the region from a regional rather than council specific basis; and through the completion of a

NSROC Regional Planning Strategy which identifies population and job growth scenarios over the next 30 years.

This activity demonstrates that the NSROC councils are already pursuing many of the proposals at the heart of the New Directions Paper. In addition there are a wide range of sub-regional activities also taking place where the focus is smaller and the benefits accrue to a smaller number of councils. These are identified in **Appendix 1**.

Comments on Section 1

While much of the introductory information in the position paper is common sense and beyond dispute there are some specific statements and themes which are strongly disputed by NSROC and which set up erroneous first principles which are then further developed in the body of the paper.

In a general sense the position paper does not bode well from the promises of partnership which have been readily espoused by the Minister and senior departmental staff. The position paper presents as being more of a directive to local government, rather than accepting that local government is an autonomous sphere of government, directly responsible to its electorate. Until there is an agreed statement of the roles and responsibilities of local government and an agreed belief in the virtues of grass-root democracy many of the problems of local government will not be resolved.

Specifically the NSROC councils do not agree with the broad statements regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of local government, community views about local government and what is identified as "sufficient resources". It is noted that these statements are not attributed to any specific report or research but rather are presented as widely accepted fact.

Where dissatisfaction may be present within communities regarding the performance of local government, the community is even less satisfied with the other tiers of government on the grounds of efficiency and effectiveness, as the *Independent Inquiry into the Financial Sustainability of NSW Local Government*, May 2006, chaired by Professor Allan pointed out. This was more recently underlined with respect to environmental responsibilities by the community survey commissioned by the Department of Environment & Conservation NSW in 2006. All tiers of government need to work together on these issues rather than characterising the problem as one residing at the local level alone.

The position paper also suggests the local government is at a 'fork in the road' and that councils are confronting a choice of either contracting or expanding their service provision (page 8). The paper concludes that communities are unlikely to support councils reducing their services. NSROC concurs with this statement but adds the important point that the major impediment to such expansion is the inability of the NSROC councils to leverage the appropriate level of funding from their communities due to rate-pegging.

No other sphere of government or local government entity outside of NSW is handicapped in such a manner and it cuts to the heart of why councils are struggling to expand their service provision. The NSROC region is one of the wealthiest in Sydney, if not Australia, and yet councils struggle to maintain a moderate level of service provision predicated on traditional community expectations, let alone respond to new challenges such as security, global warming, water shortages, mental health, public transport and urban consolidation. As such the potential for duplication of services within local government is overstated and the constraints resulting from cost-shifting and rate-pegging simply not recognised.

Councils are a reflection of their communities and need to respond to changing needs over time. In recognition of this, the Councils Charter in the *Local Government Act 1993* is broad. Councils have embraced the broader role, and communities now expect the wide range of services from their local Councils. Communities generally do not want to see

services diminished. The reality is that communities have to be prepared to pay for the services they expect and want whether that be through rates or other fees for service.

The core components of a sustainable community identified the Paper are supported:

- social cohesion
- functional economy
- robust environment
- sound infrastructure

The core elements of 'strong and sustainable local government' are accepted. However rather than connectedness, community engagement is a more appropriate description of the link between Councils and their communities.

The statement that sustainable reform can only come from "new business models, enhancing community engagement and quality service delivery" is simplistic and leaves out the key element of insufficient resourcing. Whilst the principles of the new direction are accepted, and there can always be room for improved efficiency, the fact remains that local government in NSW is under-resourced for the work it has to do.

Further comments are made under the headings of the seven elements identified on the paper.

Section 2

ELEMENT 1: GOOD GOVERNANCE

Overall Comment:

The program of Promoting Better Practice Reviews is supported. It is noted that to date the majority of reviews have been undertaken in smaller rural and regional Councils, with a few in metro Sydney. Conclusions drawn may therefore be particularly relevant although not limited to smaller Councils. The current review of the Model Code of Conduct is supported, particularly the review of the operations of Conduct Committees, which have been problematic to date for many Councils.

Proposal 1.1 Peer reviews of Councils

The concept of self-assessment by Councils, and also peer reviews, is supported in general. However it should be clearly noted that councils are already significantly under-resourced and any additional imposts come at the cost of delivering core services. It should also be noted that charitable notions of free assistance to fellow councils runs contrary to the paper's emphasis on pragmatic efficiency. The impetus for such a process should be predicated on notions of self-determination and not as an additional regulatory exercise enforced by the department.

Proposal 1.2 Strategic Planning assistance for Councils

The provision of strategic planning assistance to Councils is supported, although it should be noted that the majority of the NSROC councils already do comprehensive strategic plans both individually and collectively as identified in the introduction to this submission. The recent comments by the Deputy Director General at recent workshops regarding the nature of possible support is of concern as it is unlikely to include grant funding but rather be limited to guidelines and web-site advice.

Proposal 1.3 Red tape review

The removal of unnecessary red tape is supported however it is noted that such reviews are not new and have generally under-delivered against expectations in recent years. The documented propensity of legislatures (including NSW) to produce ever more red tape was a major point of the Business Regulation Action Plan for Future Prosperity (published by the Business Council of Australia in 2005).

Proposal 1.4 Clarification of roles

The Local Government Act 1993 provides a good outline of the respective roles of mayors, councillors and general managers. Further clarification is welcome but the underlying issue seems to be related more to a non acceptance of the defined roles as they are and a propensity to establish barriers.

Element 2: Representative Democracy and Community Support

Overall comment:

Democratically elected Councils should be reflective of their communities and have the mandate to make decisions on behalf of their communities.

Proposal 2.1 Develop principles for determining local representation

The idea of establishing principles for considering councillor numbers is generally supported. One principle is representation based on per head of population. Other principles may relate to geographic size of the council area, and complexity of the urban, natural and social/cultural environments. Councils should reflect the demographics of their communities, both in terms of the numbers of women elected and appointed to senior positions, as well as in terms of cultural diversity.

It may be appropriate to establish an independent panel to manage the process; however the overall emphasis should remain on ensuring that councils function effectively and are adequately resourced rather than quibbling over the semantics of councillor proportionality.

Proposal 2.2 Develop a kit to promote 'candidacy' in local government

A new kit for local government candidates would be useful however this in itself is unlikely to significantly address the issue. The major impediment to attracting candidates is the poor remuneration and long hours the position entails. It is counter-intuitive to suggest that councillors should be highly skilled, trained professionals with strategic planning ability, a strong comprehension of good governance and finely-honed business acumen and yet their positions should be occupied on a charitable basis.

Proposal 2.3 Promote flexible meeting times

Supported.

Proposal 2.4 Guidelines on community consultation and involvement

Local government is the level of government closest to the community, and is generally very accessible and responsive to its community. Community engagement is the "bread and butter" of Councils and is something that many Councils do well. However guidelines could be of assistance to some Councils, and the sharing of experiences between Councils would be useful.

Proposal 2.5 Workforce planning assistance

Most councils understand that there are skill shortages and that we have to plan for the workforce of the future. The NSROC Human Resource Managers already meet regularly and many have work force plans. Guidelines drawing on these existing strategies could be of value to those Councils that have not yet had the opportunity of developing their own. The Department could assist local government in workforce planning by assisting in developing a positive perception about careers in local government and about local government in general.

ELEMENT 3: SOUND POLICY

Overall Comment:

The Department of Local Government has a clear role in developing policies for the whole local government sector. This leads to consistency in approach across local government. These policies and the regular DLG circulars provide valuable assistance to Councils. However Councils must also develop and maintain policies, which make clear their position on local issues and to guide local decision-making.

Proposal 3.1 Develop a policy directory

A policy directory on the DLG website would be of assistance to Councils.

In addition, it would be useful for the Department to develop or collect model policies based on best practice in Councils on the wide range of areas where Councils are required to have policies. These could also be available on the DLG website. Examples include: Complaints Handling; Access to Information; Compliance and Enforcement. It would also be useful to have a Frequently Asked Questions section and supplementary explanatory notes on more complex policies.

ELEMENT 4: SUFFICIENT RESOURCES

Overall Comment:

It must be recognised that numerous reviews both at the State level and nationally have found that local government lacks the resources to fulfil its charter. This is particularly the case in NSW, as demonstrated by the *Local Government Inquiry into Local Government Financial Sustainability*, where three decades of rate-pegging have left Councils' revenues far behind those of Councils in other States.

The on-going impediment of rate-pegging is inevitably going to lead to a decline in the quality and quantity of service provision to the community. While rate variations and special levies have provided some relief, their application is neither transparent nor systematic. Without the certainty of an adequate income councils continue to make difficult choices on which services they can afford to provide to their communities, despite the ability of those communities, in many instances, to pay for them.

The paper is silent on this matter and others, such as the decline in federal assistance, cost-shifting, and infrastructure renewal. It is worth noting that the Deputy Director General has encouraged support for this position paper and the associated 'Planning a Sustainable Future' paper on the basis it will assist local government in making a case for additional funding to the state and federal government. This ignores the fact that the evidence already exists in documents such as the above mentioned Inquiry and that no amount of new plans or efficiency statements can be a substitute for adequate resourcing provided by, and determined by, local communities without unnecessary state intervention.

Proposal 4.1: Asset Management Plans

The requirement for Councils to have a long term asset management plan linked to a long term financial plan is supported. The NSROC Councils are already working to develop and standardise asset management plans across the region. It is noted that at present there is considerable variability across councils in the development of such plans however there is consistency in the fact that many assets have been under-funded in order to bridge the funding gap that rate-pegging has created. Asset Management Plans will highlight a Council's revenue, expenditure and any infrastructure funding gap.

Proposal 4.2: Efficiency Statement

This proposal is based on the assumption that local government is not efficient at present. As stated above NSROC does not agree with this assumption. A problem in dealing with productivity in local government is that we deliver both 'hard' (relatively easy to measure) and 'soft' (relatively difficult to measure) services. Balancing resource allocation between core infrastructure and service provision is at least as important as the question of efficiency and too much emphasis on the latter may divert attention from the former.

The UK Audit Commission has undertaken productivity studies in local authorities measuring improvements against central government guidelines. Difficulties were encountered in comparing minimal improvements in well performing authorities as against substantial improvements in poorly performing authorities. There must be care shown in ensuring that this experience is not repeated.

Program like Victoria's "Local Government Improvement Incentive Program" could be considered for NSW Councils. This program was linked to payments which were available to Councils for infrastructure improvements. Payments were determined at the State level in regard to each local government's compliance with the requirements of National Competition Policy, Best Value reporting and the development of asset management plans.

Providing yet another reporting requirement for councils does not assist councils in addressing their resourcing issues.

ELEMENT 5: MEANINGFUL PLANNING

Overall Comment:

It is agreed that planning should not be done merely to meet statutory requirements. It is for this reason that the statutory requirements should facilitate rather than restrict Council planning.

Proposal 5.1: Integrate planning and reporting

Comments will be provided in more detail in the submission on the *Integrated Planning and Reporting Options Paper*. However in brief, the proposal for a new planning and reporting regime replacing the existing one is supported. The current system does not encourage long-term or strategic planning; there are many different requirements for plans with varying timeframes. An integrated strategic and operational planning system, with meaningful annual reports will be more effective for Councils and their communities.

However in endorsing this proposal it is paramount that the efficiencies gained from reworking the current planning and reporting system are significant and demonstrable. The Deputy Director General has made it clear during the current round of local government workshops that the department will not be providing financial assistance for councils to do strategic planning. It is therefore imperative that the additional impost from doing a strategic plan with additional community consultation be offset by a reduction in other planning and reporting requirements. A whole-of-government response is required in which the Department works with other state agencies to streamline reporting and planning processes.

ELEMENT 6: CONNECTEDNESS

Overall Comment:

The NSROC councils are already connected in a meaningful way – through NSROC itself. As identified in the introduction to this submission and as illustrated in the appendix of regional projects, committees and reports, the NSROC councils have been working in an intimately connected fashion for over 20 years. The dividends of these relationships are not always readily quantifiable because they include experience sharing, intellectual property sharing, and uniform policy development which creates efficiencies over long periods, sometimes in subtle ways.

The reason ROCs exist and function so effectively is that they are created, managed and owned by councils. They work on an appropriate geo-spatial level which sits between the council entities themselves and the state wide representative body, the LGSA. NSROC has a number of functions, not least being collective procurement and project management. However the function of the ROC as a lobbying and advocacy tool is not to be underestimated. ROCs are recognised, if at times reluctantly, by all state agencies and departments; a significant and recent example being the inclusion of ROC boundaries in the recently released Metropolitan Strategy.

The thrust of this section seems to be administrative and service delivery efficiencies achieved through business partnerships. This fails to recognise the efficiencies achieved through the overarching strategic policy setting and advocacy roles that ROCs provide. Demonstrable outcomes are just a likely to be a hospital saved, a ferry service retained, a green space created or an inappropriate development proposal defeated as they are to be reaping financial dividends. It also fails to recognise that efficiencies are not always to be gained when a council is already of sufficient size and placed within a competitive urban context. NSROC has gone to the market on many purchasing, service delivery and infrastructure issues only to find that there are no financial benefits to be achieved or that the financial benefits accrue at the expense of flexibility, dedicated servicing and tailored solutions. Recent examples include the NSROC Regional Waste Tender and approaches made to financial institutions based on a joint investment strategy.

The disconnect, where it exists, is principally between the state government and local government. While professing a desire for partnership and co-operation, too often the relationship between the state and local governments is one of master and slave. This has been clearly demonstrated by the range of planning reforms recently introduced by the current Planning Minister which were introduced without appropriate consultation with local government, provide for greater ministerial discretionary powers and disconnect both councils and the communities they represent from the assessment process on major projects.

The move to establish an Intergovernmental Agreement between State and local government in NSW is a good idea but any IGA has to be meaningful and lead to tangible outcomes. The Strategic Alliance network is also a good initiative, but needs to itself produce tangible results.

Proposal 6.1: Benchmarks

The development of a number of key indicators and benchmarks for measuring and assessing Councils' performance is fully supported. The current LG Comparative Data Report is useful, but leads to comparisons of non-comparable Councils with faulty

conclusions being drawn. The Comparative Data also appear far too late to be a true reflection of Councils' current performance.

Proposal 6.2: Regional/Cluster indicators

As discussed previously, NSROC is already working across a range of sectors, in some cases as business clusters, in others as policy bureaus or advocacy mechanisms. As a general principle, resource-sharing and the establishment of business clusters are supported where they do produce efficiency gains and provide for the effective delivery of quality services to the community. Communities do need to be satisfied that they are getting value for money in the services being provided by their Councils. Communities will however not be satisfied if they believe that they are subsidising, through their own rates, the activities of another Council.

A number of the NSROC councils are also working with other councils outside of the NSROC alliance, through twinning arrangements, sister cities and sectoral specific business ventures. It should be remembered that councils work in a risk-averse environment and can not embark on a range of business activities which are subject to the normal risk associated with start-up business ventures in the open market.

The assumption that any number of councils can and should join together to manage their 'back-of-house' operations such as administration, information technology, records, development assessment processing does not recognise the nature of size efficiencies that exist in local government but also challenges the nature of localised democracy. Specific communities require specific services, and while efficiencies might be achieved by pooling those services with other councils, this might compromise the nature of those tailored services.

There is no evidence provided to suggest that the people of NSW are unsatisfied with the number and operational efficiencies of local government in this state. While there is some potential for joint business clusters these should not be viewed as the 'magic bullet' for the long term sustainability issues of local government. As stated previously, the lifting of rate-pegging, the end of cost shifting, and a dramatic decrease in state government intervention and micro-management of local government affairs would be of far greater benefit.

Proposal 6.3: General Manager contracts to enable working with neighbouring councils

The proposal is generally supported although it already occurs through the General Manager's participation in NSROC and the NSROC Strategic Plan. It is noted that the contributions of General Managers toward "the betterment of the whole system" always need to add direct value to their council otherwise their rate payers are not getting full value for money.

Proposal 6.4: Resource sharing guidelines

The preparation of guidelines and models for how to set up business clusters would be of benefit to all Councils however they should not be compulsory.

Proposal 6.5: Regional context for Special Variation applications to exceed the rate cap

While it is recognised that Councils need to become more efficient this proposal is not supported due to the subjective nature of describing the efficiencies achieved through resource sharing. In particular this proposal contradicts proposal 4.1 which indicates that

special rate increases will be subject to the guidelines of the asset management framework.

The success of an application should be based on justifying the reasons for the application (e.g. maintenance of ageing infrastructure) and what measures they have taken to fund this from existing resources and other options they have explored. The reasons and urgency for a special variation for a council may have little connection with the potential for regional resource sharing. As stated above, resource sharing is not the panacea for all the ills of local government.

ELEMENT 7: STRONG LEADERSHIP

Overall Comment:

There are many strategies which could improve the attractiveness of local government to people wanting to be elected as Councillors and people wanting employment. Not least of these is for state ministers to publicly recognise the invaluable and largely un-paid role councillors play in governing local communities and the unsurpassed connectedness local government has with its communities.

The image of local government is certainly important, and people need to feel that local government is fulfilling an important role and making a difference to the communities that they serve. Providing training for Councillors is important, but the varied existing skills of councillors also need to be recognised. Attracting employees to local government through the provision of scholarships is sound, but there needs to be a broad-ranging strategy of measures, which will portray local government as an employer of choice.

Proposal 7.1: Accreditation for councillor learning and development

Recognition or accreditation of Councillor learning and development programs is supported.

NSROC Project Clusters

NSROC Regional Procurement

The NSROC Councils pursue a wide range of collective purchasing arrangements to save costs and ensure efficient service delivery for individual councils and their communities. Individual councils also avail themselves, from time-to-time of discounted purchasing through the Department of Commerce, State Contracts. It is anticipated that Local Government Procurement will provide another scale for regional purchasing in the future.

Current regional purchasing agreements are;

- Asphalt
- Hardware
- General Stationery, Copy Paper, Printer Toners, Printed Envelopes
- Provision of Pesticides and Herbicides
- Supply and Supply and Lay of Cultivated Turf
- General Signs and Traffic Control Products
- Street Name Blades and Associated Hardware
- Provision of Tree Services
- Provision of Road Line Marking
- Cleaning of Gross Pollutant Traps

Whilst actual savings are difficult to quantify they are known to be significant and are predicated on the following;

1. Cost saving efficiencies from collective advertising and tendering.
2. Cost saving through the combined purchasing power of seven councils.
3. Efficient use of purchasing officer's time and expertise and sharing of intellectual property.

The difficulty in quantifying savings stems from variability across a wide range of items and specifications; however, it is estimated to be within the vicinity of 2% – 5% across the portfolio. NSROC is currently developing procedures to enable an accurate assessment of cost savings on all future purchasing arrangements.

Employment – Regional Aboriginal Heritage Officer

The role of the Aboriginal Heritage Officer, (which is a joint initiative by six Councils), is to monitor Aboriginal Sites on a day to day basis and long term management reports are developed to ensure their preservation and protection. An important part of the role is to communicate with schools and other groups, and teach children an ethos of understanding to appreciate the unique culture of the Aboriginal people.

Shorelink

Shorelink is a computer network that links the five Lower North Shore Council Libraries; North Sydney, Lane Cove, Willoughby, Mosman and Manly – the network was established in 1983. The member Councils continue to demonstrate their commitment to the Network through their financial support, acknowledging that cooperation delivers both economic benefits and quality services.

Shorelink is renowned for innovation and excellence in the provision of library information technology and is recognised as an outstanding example of local government cooperation.

Metro Pool

Metro Pool is a Co-Operative Self Insurance Scheme established to help stabilise insurance premium costs, achieve significant cost savings and long term benefits for member Councils through effective risk management. Metro Pool members have a long term view of the advantages of pooling and seek to benefit through excellent risk management and prudent financial strategies.

Land Use Planning – St Leonards Strategy

A joint planning initiative between three of the NSROC Councils; Lane Cove, North Sydney and Willoughby – to plan for the future growth of St Leonards, identified as a regional centre in the Metropolitan Strategy. The Strategy was devised with \$200,000.00 from the Planning Reform Fund and administered the by the Department of Planning.

Sydney's North 2030

Sydney's North 2030 has been developed to ensure business viability in a dynamic, socially responsive and ecologically sustainable manner for the Sydney North region.

ID Profile

The NSROC Community Profile is an on-line ABS statistical software tool designed to inform community groups, Council, investors, business, students and the general public on demographic information relevant to the region. The tool presents data in simple, clear tables and charts with concise factual commentary. The NSROC councils collectively negotiated the construction and licensing arrangements for the software at a significantly discounted price. Councils that do not have the system would be budgeting for at least one person for 6-12 months to extract the raw data and turn it into information of benefit to council. The NSROC Councils collectively purchased and maintain the software tool at a significant cost saving per council.

NSROC Strategic Planning and Reporting

The seven NSROC councils have come together across a range of issues to commission studies, reports, research and plans to assist in the effective management of the region. Whilst direct cost-savings are difficult to quantify in most cases the exercises would have been significantly more expensive if commissioned individually and provide for a more effective and therefore more efficient management framework for the region. All of these documents are available at www.nsroc.org.

Northern Sydney Sub-Regional Planning Strategy (Draft)

The councils of Hornsby, Ryde, Ku-ring-gai, Hunter's Hill, Lane Cove, North Sydney and Willoughby have jointly contributed to the preparation of a Sub-Regional Planning Strategy covering the NSROC group of Councils. The main Strategic Plan elements are:

1. Strategic Planning Policies underpinning the Strategic Plan for the management of land uses and infrastructure improvements;
2. A Sub-Regional Structure Plan to 2034 indicating the planned changes in population, dwellings and employment as well as major infrastructure improvements that are necessary to respond to the planned changes.
3. A series of plans showing the projected key changes for the years, 2014, 2024 and 2034 along with the progressive infrastructure phasing that will be required to match the new planned changes.

NSROC; Environmental Impacts of a Substantial Population Growth in the Northern Region of Sydney

A comprehensive analysis of the potential environmental impacts of the population increase expected to occur over the next 30 years within the NSROC boundaries in the northern sector of Sydney.

NSROC Regional Social Report

This report was undertaken to develop a better understanding of the social issues and constraints that the NSROC Councils face in the region and to plan for future social infrastructure.

Economic Contribution of the NSROC Region

This report was commissioned by the NSROC Councils to provide an understanding of the region's activity and contribution, in perspective to the Sydney, New South Wales and national economies.

NSROC Regional State of the Environment Reports

The seven councils of the Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (NSROC) recognised that unnecessary duplication could be avoided by producing one regional SOE report each year and that there would be the additional benefits of knowledge sharing, data uniformity, cost savings and better reporting on broad environmental issues. In 2005 the first NSROC regional SOE report was produced at a cost of saving of approximately 60 staff working weeks and \$62,000.

NSROC Regional Tree Management Policy

This Policy was developed as trees are a vital component of the green infrastructure of our cities. They provide a crucial ecological, environmental and amenity resource in the urban environment. It is of fundamental importance to urban society that this natural asset is protected, nurtured and enhanced in order to make our cities sustainable and pleasant places in which to live - both now and for future generations.

Regional Aboriginal Social Plan

The development of a regional Aboriginal Social Plan provided an opportunity for local councils to work in a coordinated way with State and Commonwealth government departments to address the social needs of Aboriginal people living in Northern Sydney.

NSROC Regional Profile

The report was undertaken to provide an understanding of the population characteristics of the NSROC region. This information is necessary for many of the planning and developments issues undertaken by each Council within the region, and is an essential part of its every day business.

NSROC Regional Policy Clusters

NSROC manages a wide variety of projects and issues on behalf of the region. Major projects and issues are managed by specific committees or professional officers groups (POGs) which meet on a regular basis to achieve outcomes, develop strategies and policies, and exchange information.

NSROC Supply Management Group

The formation of the Supply Management Group was to implement purchasing agreements, which would produce savings to member councils both in the real cost of products which were being commonly purchased throughout the region, and the reduction in the duplication of effort occurring by each council entering into their individual agreements.

NSROC Waste Management Group

Effective waste management is a crucial responsibility of councils in the NSROC region. Collectively, the NSROC councils generate over 114,000 tonnes of putrescible waste and 40,000 tonnes of green waste. The Waste Management Professional Officers Group meets regularly to achieve outcomes, develop strategies and policies, and exchange information, and ensure best practice is promoted throughout the region.

NSROC Environmental Officers Group

Environmental issues are extremely important in the NSROC region, as pressure on natural resources intensifies and the population of the NSROC community continues to expand. The Environmental Officers Group meets to consider a more consistent approach to addressing environmental and sustainability issues as the NSROC Councils recognises many environmental concerns do not correspond with individual council boundaries. The POG also develop regional Grant Funding applications and recently received a \$50,000 Urban Sustainability Grant to complete a Regional Sustainability Plan.

NSROC Planning Professional Officers Group

Planning in the NSROC region has assumed great importance as the rapidly growing population seeks to manage development within their communities. The Planners Group meet monthly to exchange technical planning information, review new planning policies and prepare submission on planning reforms.

NSROC Transport Officers Group

In order to better deal with transport issues and effectively lobby state government for change, the NSROC Transport Group was created to develop a Regional Transport Strategy, identify innovative solutions to community transport needs, and to participate in the transport reform process initiated by State Government.

NSROC Human Resources Officers Group

Council staff is the most valuable resource any council has. Each of the NSROC councils is committed to providing a professional and efficient service through its staff, and this requires ongoing training, resourcing and supervision. This group meets on an irregular basis to address Human Resource issues.

NSROC Finance Professional Officers Group

The Northern Sydney Financial Managers Group which meets quarterly, to discuss financial issues and investigate joint projects and purchasing possibilities which would provide significant benefits to the member councils.

NSROC Sportsfield Professional Officers Group

The Sportsfield professional Officers Group was formed to consider and improve sustainable provision and management of sportsfields within the NSROC community.”

NSROC Infrastructure Professional Officers Group

The purpose of the NSROC Infrastructure Group is to work collaboratively in identifying opportunities to improve asset management and in developing a consistent asset management framework.

NSROC Media Professional Officers Group

The Media Professional Officers Group's focus is:-

1. Information exchange and networking
2. Sub-Regional Issues – collectively target specific outcomes and media entities
3. Identifying Key issues for the region (e.g. transport – bus and rail) – regional media/communication approach

NSROC Community Services Professional Officers Group

The Community Services Group's role is to:-

1. Improve the quality of and access to human services and facilities.
2. To improve resource efficiency and effectiveness in order to provide improved service delivery.
3. To promote an integrated human services planning forum on a 'whole of government basis at a regional level

Regional Youth Services Activities

ShoreShocked

Shoreshocked is a Youth Festival held annually for the last 15 years. Over the years it has grown from hosting a few rock bands and attracting a couple of thousand people to currently showcasing a Rock Stage, a Hip-Hop Tent, a Dance Tent and attracting 10 000 plus fun loving young people.

It is the only free, large scale Youth Entertainment option in the Lower North Shore area, and is the original, pioneering event to allow young unsigned local acts to play on stage with popular headlining bands.

It also gives young people a chance to learn the myriad of skills required in event management.

Lower North Shore Youth Inter Agency

This organisation meets once a month to provide networking opportunities for Local Government Youth Officers.

Northside Ride

A Skate Board Competition hosted by several NSROC Councils.

ArtStart

An education and training programme hosted by NSROC Councils.