



Cover photo credits

Wahroonga Park Rotunda's Winter Wonderland

The Canopy, Lane Cove (Credit: Hamish McIntosh)

Outdoor event, Mosman (Credit: Ben William's Photography)

Aerial photo of Hunter's Hill

Chinese New Year, Chatswood



**Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils**

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I am pleased to present our annual report for the year ending 30 June 2021.

This year was challenging from both an operational and from a policy perspective.

The continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our operating environment required a keen focus on the safety and wellbeing of staff and community members. NSROC facilitated information exchange through weekly meeting of the General Managers to help councils manage in an exceptional and rapidly changing environment requiring compliance with public health orders.

NSROC provided a forum for member councils and their officers to share information and their experiences to ensure that councils were leading the way in responsible service delivery, as well as supporting employers and partners in our communities. Member councils maintained operations and delivered targeted support to various community groups through fee discounts and providing rent relief to many of our micro and small business tenants.

NSROC took a lead position to advocate for changes to the infrastructure contributions reform proposals of the NSW Government. If implemented as proposed, the reform will leave all our member councils worse off financially with flow-on impacts on their ability to deliver services and infrastructure that keeps pace with population growth and meets community expectations. This was a major activity led by NSROC who commissioned expert detailed modelling examining the impacts on each council and the region as a whole. NSROC undertook an intense advocacy effort targeting our local members, Local Government NSW and the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces. I and my colleagues on the Board expect this effort to be ongoing and we hope to arrive at reform settings that work for the benefit of our councils and the broader Northern Sydney community.

The NSROC Executive led advocacy and stakeholder engagement activities during the year. They met our local State and Federal representatives and ministers to apprise them of our infrastructure priorities for the region and on issues that we are facing collectively to grow and maintain the liveability values of our region.

Some other highlights of the 2020 – 2021 year in review are:

- Five of our member councils are progressing a food organics trial with selected households in low, medium and high-density areas and businesses to evaluate the effectiveness of a range of factors that could influence take-up of food organics recycling and potentially reduce the amount of waste going to landfill. This trial is expected to be completed in the coming year.
- Submissions on significant policy and funding reforms including IPART's review of the Rate Peg to Include Population Growth, Infrastructure Contributions Reform proposal and the Review of Temporary COVID-19 Measures.
- NSROC built on the infrastructure strategies for the Northern Sydney region: we have advocated for additional support from the NSW Government to deliver on our region's priority social and cultural infrastructure facilities while working towards continuing improvement in the management and operation of existing facilities.
- We are working with Transport for New South Wales, the Greater Sydney Commission and the Department of Planning through the Northern Sydney Transport Leadership Group to progress our transport infrastructure priorities. The Transport Leadership Group includes senior representatives from these three NSW Government agencies and from our member councils. Active transport priorities are being progressed. We are also working with the delivery agencies on ensuring that benefits of the major projects (NorthConnex, Beaches Link and Western Harbour Tunnel) flow to our communities by undertaking works in the surrounding roads network and realising place making opportunities arising from these projects.



- Community Recycling Centre, a flagship joint waste project of our region, continued operations during the pandemic and saw increased volumes of problem waste diverted and handled responsibly.

NSROC through its Professional Officers Groups (POGs) continues to facilitate improved services, share experiences and business intelligence and secure on-going professional development of staff in a complex fast changing business, regulatory and operating environment.

The audited Financial Statements for the year ending 30 June 2021 are enclosed in this report. They show that NSROC continues to run prudently and in a manner consistent with its articles of association.

NSROC welcomed Dr Meg Montgomery as Executive Director. She brings extensive experience of working in the NSW public sector which was put to immediate use as we responded to the infrastructure contributions reform proposals unveiled by the Government.

We farewelled Maxine Kenyon in early 2021. During her time with us, Maxine reviewed NSROC's administrative functions and processes, and initiated changes that have been continued by Meg.

The coming year will require our members to carefully pivot towards working and living with COVID-19 while they redesign service operations in a significantly altered operating environment. NSROC will assist in this change and will facilitate working with other Regional Organisation of Councils in metropolitan Sydney and the State and with Local Government NSW.

I commend this report to you and look forward to continuing the collaborative work of NSROC into the future.

**Councillor Gail Giles-Gidney**  
**NSROC PRESIDENT**  
**Mayor of Willoughby City Council**

## ABOUT US

The Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (NSROC) assists member local councils to collaborate on key issues and activities to generate benefits – social, environmental and economic – for their communities and for the Northern Sydney region as a whole.

### Role of NSROC:

- Advocate agreed regional positions and priorities
- Work cooperatively for the benefit of the Northern Sydney region
- Provide strong local government leadership

### Directions and Objectives:

- *Advocacy & Leadership* - To position the region as a leader and strengthen the role of Local Government in the Northern Sydney region
- *Improved Urban Planning and Infrastructure* - To integrate transport, social and environmental infrastructure projects that support opportunities in the region to link with the North District Plan, and meet community and business needs into the future
- *Improved Service Delivery* - To improve the quality and efficiency of local government service delivery in the Northern Sydney region.

### Key Principles:

NSROC enables member councils to achieve their individual strategic community objectives through their commitment to the over-arching principles of:

- Sustainability
- Constructive Collaboration
- Working together for a better region

### Board and executive

NSROC is an Incorporated Association, and its members are:

- Hornsby Shire Council
- Hunter's Hill Council
- Ku-ring-gai Municipal Council
- Lane Cove Council
- Mosman Municipal Council
- North Sydney Council
- City of Ryde Council
- Willoughby City Council

## NSROC Board

NSROC Board sets the direction and exercises oversight of NSROC. Each member council is represented on the Board by the Mayor and a councillor.

In addition to the Annual General Meeting, the NSROC Board meets four times a year to consider matters of strategic importance and provide direction to NSROC.

## Board executive positions

Every year the Board elects a President and two Vice-Presidents. They form the Executive of the organisation. The Executive may be convened to consider matters of importance or urgency that arise outside the regular meeting schedule or where it would be impractical to call a full Board meeting to consider such matters.

The NSROC Executive members during the 2020-21 year were:

- Councillor Gail Giles-Gidney (President of NSROC, Mayor of Willoughby City Council)
- Councillor Penny Pedersen (Vice-President of NSROC, Councillor, City of Ryde)
- Councillor Carolyn Corrigan (Vice-President of NSROC, Mayor Mosman Council)

## General Managers Advisory Committee

The General Managers Advisory Committee (GMAC) is made up of the General Managers of the eight NSROC Councils. The Chair of GMAC during 2020-21 was Ms Debra Just (CEO of Willoughby City Council). Mr Ken Gouldthorp (General Manager of North Sydney Council) was the Treasurer.

## Professional Officers Groups

NSROC convenes a number of Professional Officers Groups (POGs) with representation from each of its member Councils. In 2020-21 the following POGs support the work of NSROC:

- Arts and Cultural Services POG
- Communications and Media POG
- Community Services POG
- Environmental Sustainability POG
- Financial Officers POG
- Sports POG

New POGs are established with the approval of GMAC.

There are also, on occasion, time-limited project specific working groups established.

During the year, the Waste Advisory Group provided advice on the NSROC Regional Waste Strategy. The Northern Planners Group provided significant advice and support on contribution reform impacts.

## KEY ACTIVITIES

During 2020-21 NSROC's activities were focussed on resilience, resource management and financial sustainability.

**Resilience:** NSROC supported its member councils to institute consistent and appropriate measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and facilitated the implementation of the Transport Infrastructure, Social & Cultural Infrastructure and Sportsground Strategies.

**Resource management:** NSROC continued to implement and progress initiatives that improve waste management outcomes for our communities.

**Financial sustainability:** NSROC led a significant regional response to the State Government's reform agenda on planning rules including proposed changes to the rate peg and infrastructure contributions.

## RESILIENCE

**COVID-19 pandemic:** was a dominant feature of the operating environment during the year. NSROC supported our member councils to implement consistent measures to comply with the applicable Public Health Orders – this required a common understanding of the Orders to tailor responses that recognised the operating requirements of facilities and services to ensure safety of staff, customers and stakeholders.

Member councils undertook a range of steps to help staff, community groups, micro and small business clients by providing support such as counselling, leave arrangements, reductions and postponement of fees, and offering hardship provisions for payment of rates. These measures were designed by individual councils and shared with other NSROC members as a way of collaborative learning as all councils pivoted towards assisting their communities in a novel and never experienced before operating environment.

To better understand the impacts of COVID-19 restrictions, NSROC commissioned a survey of our principal stakeholder groups, such as business, community members and NGOs. This research survey was used as an input by councils in their planning to limit the downside of the restrictions and to assist with ameliorating the impacts of restrictions on stakeholders and to support them in returning to normal operations as the COVID-19 impacts reduced over time.

**Improved urban planning and infrastructure:** Land-use planning legislation has a huge impact on our communities through impacts on local amenity, economic activity and liveability of the region. During the year, NSROC's urban planning and infrastructure initiatives covered housing strategies, affordable housing proposals (Draft State Environmental Planning Policy (Housing), Employment Lands Zones Reform package, Short term rental accommodation framework and the Public Spaces Legacy Program

NSROC also made a submission on the Explanation of Intended Effect for a new Housing Diversity State Environmental Planning Policy.

## RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

During the year NSROC pursued a range of initiatives for improved waste management in the region. These included both policy and program initiatives. Some of these were:

**Community Recycling Centre:** Use of the Northern Sydney Community Recycling Centre (CRC) in Artarmon saw an increase of 12% over last year, with 25,000 residents dropping off 240 tonnes of electronic waste and 220 tonnes of difficult to recycle waste. Surveys conducted by the EPA indicated that 100% of users were fairly or very satisfied with the service. Despite COVID-19, the CRC was open for most of the year. Extra measures were put in place to ensure the safety of CRC staff and the community.

**Food Organics Pilot:** NSROC is coordinating a Food Organics pilot involving five member councils to investigate diversion of food organics from the municipal solid waste stream. The pilot is collecting data about the amount of food waste presented for collection and correctly segregated when residents are provided with equipment allowing source separation and collection of food organics. Representative

samples of single dwellings, low rise developments, high rise developments and businesses will be nominated and collections will run for 15 weeks in the coming year. The trial will enable an assessment of the effectiveness of the member councils' current waste management approach compared to a separate food waste service. The results of the pilot are expected to be available in the 2021/22 year.

**Textile Waste and the Textile Action Plan:** NSROC is collaborating with SSROC, WSROC and the Australian Circular Textiles Association to develop a Textiles Recovery Action Plan for Sydney Councils. This is the first metropolitan plan to address textile waste in Australia. The Plan will outline focus areas and actions over the next five years to reduce textile waste in the region.

**Better Waste and Recycling Fund Projects:** NSROC along with member councils implemented five projects under the EPA *Better Waste Recycling Fund*. These included the *Bower Collection and Rehoming Service*, the *Hang on to the Bag* campaign and the CRC service. In 2020/21 about 400 residents across the region utilised the Bower Service and diverted 32 tonnes of reusable goods. Recognising that plastic bags are the main contaminant in yellow and blue bins, advertisements on buses from the Ryde and Willoughby bus depots reminded residents to keep plastic bags out of kerbside recycling.

## FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

**Infrastructure Contributions reform:** The NSW Government unveiled its proposed reforms to the infrastructure contributions regime during the year. The adverse impact of the proposed reforms would be felt severely by all member councils.

NSROC was a driving force supporting its member councils in ensuring that Government appropriately considers the impact of proposed infrastructure contribution reforms on local councils. NSROC asked for meaningful consultation on the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Amendment (Infrastructure Contributions) Bill 2021* and a guarantee that no council is left worse off as a result of the operations of the provisions of this Bill.

To assist with this effort, NSROC commissioned expert modelling of the impacts on each of our councils, which was shared with the NSW Government and other stakeholders. As part of the advocacy and leadership effort, NSROC made submissions to the NSW Productivity Commission, the Office of Local Government, IPART and the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry.

**Rate Peg to include population growth:** NSROC engaged with IPART through all the stages of the Tribunal's Review of the Rate Peg to include population growth.

## ADVOCACY AND LEADERSHIP

During the year advocacy efforts were focussed on:

- Infrastructure Contribution Reforms unveiled by the State Government,
- policy settings for incorporating population growth in the rate peg. and
- Securing support from local members of parliament for regional infrastructure strategies for sportsgrounds, social and cultural infrastructure, transport infrastructure and waste management,

The efforts were spearheaded by the NSROC Executive with support from member council Mayors, councillors and General Managers.

The NSROC Executive met local members, ministers and Shadow ministers to promote our regional infrastructure priorities and our shared positions on the reform of infrastructure contributions. NSROC also worked with other metropolitan Regional Organisation of Councils, Local Government New South Wales (LGNSW) and the City of Sydney to put forward a constructive agenda of reform that meets the needs of the collective metropolitan community.

## SUBMISSIONS

Potential and eventual Ministerial Order on Deferred Contributions

Minister for Planning and Public Spaces

Submitted on 29 July 2020.

Review of Infrastructure Contributions in NSW.

NSW Productivity Commission

Submitted on 5 August 2020.

NSROC feedback to the State Strategic Plan – A Vision for Crown Land Discussion Paper

Crown Land, NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

Submitted on 5 August 2020

Feedback to Office of Zali Steggall MP, Warringah on

Federal Parliament package of The Recycling and Waste Reduction Bill 2020

Emailed on 1 September 2020

Explanation of Intended Effect for a new Housing Diversity State Environmental Planning Policy

NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

Submitted 9 September 2020

Feedback to LGNSW on General Manager and Senior Staff Contract

Industrial Relations Unit, LGNSW

Submitted on 7 October 2020

Local Council Domestic Waste Management Charges Discussion Paper

Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART)

Submitted on 14 October 2020

Toward a Fairer Rating System

Office of Local Government

Submitted on 5 February 2021

Small Cell Infrastructure Co-location Expression of Interest

Telstra

Submitted on 15 January 2021

Right to Repair – Issues Paper

Productivity Commission

15 February 2021

Review of temporary COVID-19 planning measures

Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

Submitted on 24 February 2021

Energy from Waste – Draft policy statement

NSW Environment Authority

Submitted on 30 April 2021

Review of the Rate Peg to include population growth – issues paper

Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART)

Submitted on 06 May 2021

## PROFESSIONAL OFFICERS GROUP (POG) REPORTS

### Communications and media POG

The Communications POG held one face-to-face meeting over Zoom during the year and worked collaboratively on media monitoring. In a COVID-19 impacted operating environment, Communications Officers discussions were mainly focussed on member councils' responses to the pandemic, media coverage in local newspapers and leveraging the findings of the NSROC commissioned COVID-19 survey into the impact on various stakeholders in local communities especially small and micro businesses.

### Arts and cultural services POG

The Arts & Cultural Services POG held three meetings during the year.

The group shared information on member council's arts and cultural activities and the impact of COVID-19 on council programming was a major focus. The Group discussed the challenges and mechanisms to pivot delivery of arts and cultural services to meet customer needs while complying with the public health orders. Some of the initiatives considered were:

- The potential for an online regional Artist Register.
- Developing a Culture Map framework based on the Northern Beaches Council Project.
- Online Arts Grants Information Session led by the City of Ryde in partnership with Australia Council for the Arts and co-hosted by Lane Cove Council, Willoughby City Council, North Sydney Council, Hornsby Shire Council and Ku-ring-gai Council. The session was attended by 24 staff members and the session was subsequently hosted on YouTube where it has been viewed 1,870 times.

### Sports POG

The Sports POG met four times during the year.

The COVID-19 pandemic saw continual updates to the NSW Public Health Orders through the year and the Group worked together to present a consistent approach to the management of parks and sportsgrounds throughout the Northern Sydney region.

Notable results and issues considered during the year were:

- North Sydney Council shared the outcomes of a hybrid turf trial at some of its high use areas on sporting fields.
- Further input was provided into the Sports fields reconfiguration project which assisted in discussions with the State Government on identifying funding for the projects to augment sports field capacity in the region.
- Fees and charges of member councils were discussed with steady progress being made towards consistency of fees for use of Sportsgrounds and Parks across the NSROC region.
- Facilitating Disc Golf to secure locations to establish infrastructure for their growing sport. Disc Golf is currently trialling a course at the North Ryde Common in the City of Ryde for a 12-month period.

### Financial services POG

The Financial Services POG met twice during the year.

Members considered a range of accounting and Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) reporting matters and addressed issues of interpretation with a view to promote consistent practice across the Northern Region.

The ongoing impact of COVID-19 on the region, impact of changes to the Code of Financial Reporting and Accounting Practice and Australian Accounting Standards amendments, as well as the implications of several IPART proposals, such as the impact of including population growth in the rate peg and their review of domestic waste management service charges were examined by the Group.

Some other issues considered were:

- The Local Government Rating Reform, *Towards a Fairer Rating System*, in relation to its impact on council operations and issues for implementation.
- Working effectively with the NSW Audit Office, especially managing delays and digital access issues.
- NSW Audit Office Reports including the Report on Local Government and Procurement Management.
- Ongoing financial management: Asset management systems, credit card use, responding to cyber security threats, and planning for the future of electronic invoicing.

### Community Services POG

The Community Services POG met four times during the year and in addition held an out-of-session meeting to consider operational issues arising from COVID-19 related public health orders. Community services operations were highly impacted by the pandemic and member councils also observed flow-on impacts of the pandemic on their stakeholders and communities they serve. Many non-government agencies were impacted financially while at the same time they experienced an increase in demand for their services.

Matters considered by the POG were:

- Homelessness.
- Providing links to and signposting information on various grants on offer by all tiers of government.
- Addressing youth mental health issues.
- Sharing strategies and approaches to community services in the context of public health orders ensuring staff and client safety.
- Providing expert views on the implementation of the Northern Sydney Social and Cultural Infrastructure Strategy.

### Environmental Sustainability POG

The Environmental Sustainability POG met four times during the year. The Group is an active forum for the exchange of ideas, market intelligence and professional development of staff in the environmental sustainability space.

During the year, the Group evaluated matters in the areas of renewable energy, building standards, Local Environment Plan clauses and resilience. Some of these were:

- Renewable energy procurement, facilitating adoption of solar energy generation by households through a bulk buy program and a community battery solution for solar energy.
- Extending BASIX as part of the proposed Design & Place State Environmental Planning Policy.
- Power purchase agreements to source renewable energy.
- Electric vehicle infrastructure, including market business models as a collective to encourage the market and facilitating and expanding Northern Sydney EV charging network.

## Northern Planners Group

The Northern Planners Group meet on at the end of each month and have been sharing information on current planning issues and reforms. Also, in attendance at the meetings are senior staff from the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and the Greater Sydney Commission's Eastern City District and North District Commissioner.

The Planners also provided planning advice on issues raised by GMAC, and assisted NSROC in the preparation of submissions to various consultative initiatives of the State Government relating to planning rules.

Some of main issues that have been discussed at the meeting are:

- Councils' Housing Strategies
- Impacts of Local Government Rates and infrastructure contributions reform
- Compliance levy reforms – Building legislation amendment Bill
- Draft State Environmental Planning Policy (Housing)
- Employment Lands Zones Reform package
- EP&A Regulation - submission on the EP&A regulation
- Standard Conditions of Consent for residential development
- Inquiry into the Heritage Act - NSW Legislative Council
- Short term rental accommodation framework
- Public Spaces Legacy Program
- Flood Prone Land Package – commences 14 July and affects Planning Certificates and LEP clauses
- Transport for NSW Active Transport Toolkit for Councils
- Pulse of Greater Sydney

**2020-21 NSROC Annual Report**

18 November 2021

