



# NSROC REGIONAL SOCIAL REPORT

## *Executive Summary*

June 2005



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## **Key Findings**

The process of drawing together the data about the current Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (NSROC) social profile and overlaying it with the demographic trend data available is a complex one and is prone to a large degree of uncertainty about the accuracy of forecasting. From the available evidence and data, it is possible to draw the following conclusions about the potential impact of Metropolitan Strategy within the Local Government areas that comprise NSROC.

### ***Social Profile***

1. The NSROC region can expect a total population gain over the 30 years from 2004 to 2034 of 122,500 persons. The growth trajectory will be steady at around 0.7 percent each year, but will not be uniform across the NSROC region.
2. The highest levels of growth are expected in the Willoughby, Hornsby and North Sydney LGAs while the lowest growth is expected in Hunters Hill and Ryde.
3. Population ageing will be one of the most significant influences on the demand and supply of social services. However, the LGAs in the NSROC region will not experience population ageing at the same rate and scale. Willoughby will experience the least impact of an ageing population and the elderly to child ratio will not be significantly altered in that LGA for at least 18 years.
4. The current housing stock is a key determinant of the social and age composition of each LGA in the NSROC region. It is likely that a change in the mix of housing options will increase the diversity of the community in terms of age, household type and socio-economic standing.
5. The NSROC region currently has high levels of labour force participation and a large proportion of workers in the region work in the same district as they live, or commute within the NSROC region.

### ***Community Values***

6. NSROC communities have a history of opposition to high density dating back to the 1950s.
7. Connection to the physical environment is a defining characteristic of NSROC communities. This may take the form of bushlands, low densities, urban heritage or the village atmosphere within a town centre. Residents are drawn to NSROC suburbs by the green leafy environments, perceptions of safety, quality housing stock and proximity to jobs, transport and schools.
8. Local Councils within the NSROC region share similar values, concerns and challenges. These include a strong desire to maintain a sense of community and local identity, the physical environment and amenity of the region, while at the same time unlocking the region's potential for economic growth.
9. A number of common, current issues for NSROC Councils emerged in the review of documents that are likely to be exacerbated by the effects of the Metropolitan Strategy. These are:
  - increases in the proportion of older Australians in the community;
  - shortages of child care places;
  - inadequacy of provision for young people;
  - ageing and obsolete community facilities;
  - affordability of housing;
  - critical shortages of key workers, and
  - poor intra-regional public transport access.

## ***Older People's Needs***

10. The review found that main impacts of an increased number of older people in the community are likely to be:
  - Local governance changes due to the expected reduction in Councils' revenue and rate base (from increased rate rebates, charges supplements and rate deferrals) and an ageing workforce within NSROC Councils.
  - The need to develop and maintain 'age-friendly' infrastructure and public domains. Particular considerations include maintaining footpaths, improved street lighting, lowering kerb heights, widening footpaths to accommodate additional numbers of mobility scooters, and addressing pedestrian safety.
  - The need to address housing choices for older people to achieve a better match between the housing occupied by older people and their housing need.
  - Potentially catastrophic shortages of HACC services in all NSROC LGAs.
  - A declining pool of voluntary labour and increasing numbers of older people living in private dwellings needing care, but without a primary carer.
  - Increased demand for modifications to transport services in terms of physical access, service frequency and coverage, and if these requirements are not met, increased pressure on community transport services to fill the gaps.

## ***Childcare Needs***

11. There are significant current shortages in all forms of childcare, most notably long day care. At present only 18.8 per cent of the population of 0-5 year olds (34,324) in the NSROC region have access to formal child care in either long day or family day care options.
12. Throughout the NSROC region, growth in the number of long day care places over time has been achieved through private sector provision. However, private providers have not met demand in the 0-2 years age cohort where demand is highest. This is due to the higher staff/child ratios that make provision less profitable.
13. In addition to shortages of child care places, the region is affected by a critical shortage of skilled child care workers.
14. The likely future scenario is that demand for new child care places will slow in all NSROC LGAs except for Willoughby, where the numbers of children and young people are expected to continue rising, but not at the same rate as other age groups.
15. Despite a reduction in the number of 0-5 year olds in the population, there will continue to be supply gaps. The extent of unmet demand is dependent on the degree to which current supply gaps are met by private providers and the completion of planned, new community-based centres in NSROC LGAs.

## ***Youth Needs***

16. The decline in the proportion of young people in the population should not be construed as a reduction in demand for youth services and facilities. This is because the absolute number of younger people is set to increase from 2001 levels in most areas.
17. The main service demands from young people are for additional recreational activities, 'youth friendly' spaces and enhanced library facilities, and addressing current critical shortages in services for young people with special needs.
18. A change in the socio-economic profile of the region brought about by the Metropolitan Strategy may increase utilisation of public schools in the region. This will put additional pressure on a system that is already strained. However, the new population of children and young people will not be at a level that is likely to generate demands for new schools to be built.
19. Based on a commonly applied benchmark of one major youth centre for every 20,000 residents, the NSROC may require 30 youth centres by 2031. However, this approach presupposes a service model that may not be best suited to young peoples' needs and does not take into account a more flexible usage of existing and new facilities.
20. Gaps in health and welfare services for young people have reached a critical level in the NSROC region. The scarcity of services is largely attributable to Government policies which direct the bulk of funding to areas with high need. Given the overall prosperity of the region, young people who need assistance tend to miss out on necessary services.
21. While the inflow of new population is not expected to have a huge impact on the overall levels of demand for youth services, there is already stress of the system. If unchecked, existing youth problems are likely to worsen and have a flow on effect to the rest of community.

## ***Community Facilities***

22. Cost shifting by other spheres of government and more than 20 years of rate pegging have exacerbated the problem of capital works funding.
23. Community facilities in many parts of the NSROC region are ageing and require costly upgrades or replacement to meet the requirements of modern service provision.
24. The need to upgrade and expand library buildings has been emerging for some time and has begun to be addressed by NSROC Councils. New libraries are planned in Chatswood, Ku-ring-gai (site TBC), West Ryde and Ryde. An extensions is planned for Lane Cove Library. A rising trend is to incorporate library facilities within multi-purpose community centres with the capacity to accommodate a range of existing and new uses.
25. Demographic change will significantly increase demand for library services.
26. At a rate of provision suggested by Library Council of NSW benchmarks (9 sq m per 1000 people), the estimated 2031 population of 660,652 persons for the NSROC region will require approximately 6,000 square metres of library space. Assuming that 50 per cent will be newly built, building and fitout costs (calculated at \$2,500 per square metre, excluding land value) would cost NSROC Councils \$7.5 million at current values. Significantly higher costs will be incurred if Councils are required to purchase additional land.
27. Councils will need to increase the availability of community centre space in order to meet the needs of the current and incoming population.

28. According to the commonly used standard of one community centre of at least 750 to 1000 square metres per 10,000 to 20,000 residents, there is a shortfall of between five and 38 centres depending on how the benchmark is applied. The cost of meeting this need is significant, ranging from \$9.375 million to \$95 million at the upper end of the estimate.
29. A number of strategies may be employed to increase the feasibility of such a building program. These include consolidating current assets, such as small-scale single-purpose facilities, in order to build large-scale multi-purpose centres; re-zoning of Council owned lands currently classified as “community lands” (open-space) for operational uses; and partnerships with commercial interests, such as retail and residential developers. While there is a strong financial incentive to do so, there would be strong opposition from residents who oppose any diminution of open-spaces in their LGA, and land sharing with the private sector.
30. Given current high levels of provision of open space, the expected increase in population density is unlikely to significantly impact on demands in this area.
31. Current demand for outdoor sporting facilities in most parts of the NSROC region exceeds supply during in peak playing periods such as Saturdays. The expected population increase will exacerbate current supply problems. There is limited opportunity for future development of new outdoor sporting facilities within the NSROC region. This is due to existing urban development, prohibitive costs of purchasing new sites, topography, adjacent bushland and natural areas.
32. To meet the needs of the current and incoming population, NSROC Councils will need to better plan and design parks and open spaces as social venues and meeting places. The main requirements are to:
- enhance existing facilities to improve the general amenity, including toilet facilities, seating, shade and playground equipment;
  - improve safety and utilisation of parks and sporting facilities with upgraded lighting;
  - provide more picnic and barbecue facilities to suit couples and families living in apartments, and increasing numbers of residents from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds backgrounds;
  - provide non-traditional sporting facilities such as skate board ramps, off-road cycle tracks and BMX tracks for children and young people;
  - improve access for people with disabilities to and within outdoor recreational areas, and
  - improve safety of cycle and pedestrian links between housing areas and parks.
33. Additional population strengthens the justification for the development of major new cultural facilities sought in a number of NSROC communities but is unlikely to affect the scale of provision requirement. There are currently three facilities, two in Chatswood and one in Ryde. Based on the commonly used benchmark of one cultural music/drama facility per 50,000 to 100,000, this would mean that the current goal of one major cultural facility in most of the NSROC LGAs is realistic for the incoming population. It should be noted that while several NSROC Councils including Hornsby and Lane Cove have begun to address the issue, there are no concrete plans in place in either locality.

## ***Affordable Housing***

34. Affordability of housing is a growing concern for the NSROC region. The rising cost of housing in the region has meant that few low and middle income earners are able to live in the area. While job opportunities exist for unskilled and semi-skilled workers and in the lower paying professions such as child care, disability services and nursing, the available labour in the region falls well short of the demand.
35. While improvements to the transport system will increase opportunities to attract workers to employment in the region, it is unlikely to fully resolve labour shortages as there is little incentive to travel when the same jobs are readily available closer to home.
36. In December 2003, the Forum of Non-government Agencies set a benchmark for affordable housing. It suggests that 15 per cent of total housing units within new urban developments and renewal areas should be directed to social housing, low cost private rental and lower income home ownership. While such an objective would go some way to alleviating shortages of key workers, before establishing targets within its region, NSROC Councils first need to gain a better understanding of the unmet need. NSROC Councils would then be in a stronger position to lobby the agencies with historical responsibility for allocating social housing to develop funding approaches for meeting it.
37. In the absence of specific interventions, the property market will determine that the final social mix of the NSROC region. Given current high yields from property investment, it is unlikely the Metropolitan Strategy will deliver a more diverse range of income and household types in the region.

## ***Health Services***

38. The NSW Government has recently invested approximately \$490 million in upgrading health facilities in the NSROC region. The bulk of the funding was allocated to the redevelopment of the Royal North Shore Hospital. Expenditures in 2004-05 exceeded \$34 million.
39. Despite net gains in health facilities, continuing nursing staff shortages are likely to prevent services from working at optimum levels. Nursing staff shortages have caused bed closures across the Northern Sydney Health region and a reduction in operating room sessions.

## ***Local Transport***

40. While the Metropolitan Strategy has focused on delivering more efficient public transport systems by improving connections between centres and major transport hubs, there has been very little focus on improving transport systems within localities.
41. The NSROC region is thought to be poorly serviced by intra-regional transport, especially outside of peak periods, but specific data is not readily available. Consideration should be given to improving understanding of the depth of the problem and its social and economic ramifications.
42. Young people, older people and people with disabilities are most affected by poor frequency and coverage of transport services.
43. Access to rail stations and buses is expected to become a critical issue as the community ages.