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CM031-09

Integrated Planning and Reporting
Department of Local Government
Locked Bag 3015
Nowra NSW 2541

June 10 2009

Re: Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework

The Sydney Coastal Councils Group (SCCG) would like to take this opportunity to provide comment on the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework (the Framework). If delivered consistently and supported by the necessary resources and capacity building programs, the Framework can assist in improving the integration of the statutory planning and reporting processes undertaken by councils.

As the review process allows for comments on the Draft Bill and Regulation in June and Draft Guidelines and Manual in July this correspondence will provide a brief submission outlining the view of the SCCG on the intent and application of the Bill and Regulation. Following this the SCCG will provide a more extensive submission on the implementation, resources and reporting of the Framework through the Guidelines and Manual in July.

In finalising the Bill and Regulation for the Framework the NSW Government must recognise:

- The maintenance of good governance and local democracy through democratically elected Councillors setting the long term strategic direction of their Local Government Area is essential;
- The financial, information and staff capacity of councils throughout NSW to adopt and integrate the Framework into their planning and reporting activities varies considerably; and
- That the new Framework must not result in any unnecessary duplication of reporting or strategic planning activities.

Therefore, any amendments to the *Local Government Act 1993* (the Act) resulting from the *Local Government Amendment (Planning and Reporting) Bill 2009* (the Bill) must not limit the role of elected representatives in setting local policy or place unreasonable or onerous demands on the already stretched resources of Councils in NSW.

Maintaining good governance and local democracy

The SCCG supports the view of the NSW Local Government and Shires Association that the roles and responsibilities of Councillors under the Act should be strengthened and more clearly articulated. Through Sections 232, 226 and 335 of the Act the functions of Councillors, Mayors and General Managers are defined. In reality implementation by councils of the intent of these sections has proven difficult for many.

Therefore, to assist in the maintenance of good governance and local democracy through democratically elected councillors setting the long term strategic direction of their Local Government Area, the Bill and Regulation must ensure that the Framework:

- Enables councillors to provide strategic guidance for the council and effective oversight of management to facilitate community visions and desires for local areas; and
- Further clarifies the respective roles and responsibilities of the mayor, councillors and senior management in order to facilitate councillor and staff accountability to the community.

Building the capacity of all council in NSW to implement the Framework

It is important that the amendments proposed in the Bill do not place unreasonable or onerous demands on the already stretched resources of Councils in NSW. The Independent Inquiry into the Financial Sustainability of NSW Local Government concluded that the NSW Government needed to financially support structural reforms undertaken by Local Government. Therefore, it's essential that implementation of the Framework is underpinned with the appropriate incentive and capacity building programs. The Bill and Regulation should state that funding will be provided by the NSW Government to councils who are able to demonstrate that they require assistance in implementing the Framework.

The SCCG recommends the NSW Government provide and fund, in an ongoing manner, capacity building and implementation support programs. These will be particularly important over the first 2-3 years of the Framework implementation and when new Councillors have been elected following Local Government elections.

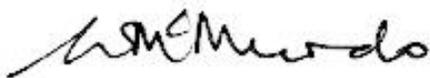
Any capacity building program to assist implementation of the Framework should provide:

- A clear framework for the integration of direction and information within existing NSW Government Plans and Strategies including the NSW State Plan and relevant regional strategies;
- Workshops and case studies providing information on the integration of the framework with Environmental Planning Instruments including Local Environment Plans and relevant Development Control Plans;
- A consistent process for data collection, management and reporting; and
- Provision of templates and associated electronic tools for maintenance of asset management registers as well as financial, social and environmental reporting.

In the absence of such support programs and tools many councils in NSW may not have the capacity to effectively and consistently implement the Framework. This may result in the Framework being implemented in a piecemeal and ad-hoc manner.

I trust that the information provided in this submission will receive the appropriate attention. If you wish to clarify any matter in this correspondence or require further information, please contact SCCG Senior Coastal Projects Officer, Craig Morrison on (02) 9246 7702 or craig@sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au.

Yours sincerely,



Clr. Wendy McMurdo
Chairperson