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CM035-09

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

20 July 2009

### **Re: Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework**

The Sydney Coastal Councils Group (SCCG) would like to take this opportunity to provide comment on Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework (Framework) Manual and Guidelines. This submission will focus on providing recommendations that will assist in the consistent delivery of social, economic and environmental services to all communities in NSW. To achieve this will require the provision of guidance and financial support from the NSW Government to assist the delivery of local programs with regional and state-wide benefits.

As the review process allowed for comments on the Draft Bill and Regulation in June and Draft Guidelines and Manual in July, the SCCG provided a brief submission recommending that the final Bill and Regulation 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.

In relation to the implementation of the Framework this submission will focus on the support provided to councils through the Manual and Guidelines. Overall the SCCG believes the intent of the Framework is sound. To enable regional and state-wide consistency in the development delivery and reporting through the Community Strategic Plan, Operational Plan and Annual Reporting processes will require addressing the following issues:

- Ongoing support for the development and implementation of plans;
- Guidance in selecting regionally significant themes and ensuring consistency in delivery;

- The provision of a standard monitoring and evaluation framework for State of the Environment reporting; and
- Partnerships with NSW and Australian Government Departments, Agencies and Authorities.

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](mailto:craig@sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W McMurdo', written in a cursive style.

Clr. Wendy McMurdo  
**Chairperson**

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## **Sydney Coastal Councils Group Submission: Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework**

### **1. Introduction**

If applied consistently by all Councils in NSW the Framework can assist in the identification, delivery and reporting of local strategic planning, asset maintenance and environmental management for regional and state-wide outcomes. For this to be achieved the newly established Department of Planning and Local Government must play an ongoing role in:

- Assisting councils deliver regionally significant programs and outcomes through local strategic planning activities and planning instruments;
- Providing ongoing frameworks and funding programs for the identification and prioritisation of maintenance and renewal works for regionally significant infrastructure; and
- Building and maintaining partnerships with state and regional stakeholders including State Departments, Agencies and Authorities as well as Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs).

The overarching aim of the Framework is to assist councils consolidate their existing plans and open the way for councils and their communities to have important discussions to plan for a more sustainable future. The Sydney Coastal Councils Group (SCCG) agrees that maintaining local character and having local communities set local aspirational goals and targets is essential.

Of equal importance is regional and state-wide consistency in the development, delivery and reporting of services and outcomes through local Community Strategic Plans, Operational Plans and associated Annual Reporting processes. These processes must be combined with accurate budget and resource allocations and delivered in a partnership between all three spheres of Government.

The SCCG believes there are significant opportunities for the Manual and Guidelines to assist councils in the identification and delivery of local goals and actions of regional significance. For this to be meaningfully achieved the NSW Department of Planning and Local Government must provide Councils with the necessary capacity building and financial support to ensure communities throughout NSW are provided with a standard level of service provision in the delivery of social, economic and environmental services.

### **Recommendations**

To ensure the consistent identification, delivery and reporting of local strategic planning, asset maintenance and environmental management for regional and state-wide outcomes through the Framework the NSW Department of Planning and Local Government must play an ongoing role in:

- Assisting councils deliver regionally significant programs and outcomes through local strategic planning activities and planning instruments;

- Providing ongoing frameworks and funding programs for the identification and prioritisation of maintenance and renewal works for regionally significant infrastructure; and
- Building and maintaining partnerships with state and regional stakeholders including State Departments, Agencies and Authorities as well as Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs).

## **2. Ongoing support for the development and implementation of plans**

A number of SCCG Member Councils have already amended their strategic planning and reporting frameworks to align with the changes recommended in the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework. For those councils who haven't already made the required changes, assistance in the form of templates and capacity building programs will be required. Therefore, it is recommended that implementation of the Framework is underpinned with the appropriate incentive and capacity building programs.

The SCCG recommends the NSW Government provide and fund, in an ongoing manner, capacity building and implementation support programs to ensure that services and outcomes are identified and delivered consistently by all councils in NSW. 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 and the resulting services and outcomes provided to communities in NSW varying considerably.

### **Recommendations**

Implementation of the Framework is underpinned with the appropriate incentive and capacity building programs.

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.

### **3. Guidance in selecting regionally significant themes and ensuring consistency in delivery**

Through the Framework councils will need to identify overarching principles and objectives for local social, environmental, economic and civic leadership issues in the Community Strategic Plan. In doing this councils and their communities must also consider issues of regional and state-wide significance as articulated in documents including but not limited to the NSW State Plan, relevant NSW Acts, Policies and Regional Strategies as well as Catchment Action Plans.

Traditionally the application of section 117 directions through the *NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act* has been used as the mechanism for achieving this through local Environmental Planning Instruments. In practice section 117 directions have not provided councils with the necessary guidance and support to ensure that local actions supporting regional strategies or outcomes have been identified and delivered consistently or at all.

To address this, the Department Planning and Local Government should assist councils and their communities in the development of consistent principles and objectives for relevant state or regional policies, plans and strategies. One mechanism for this could be the provision of the following information to be considered by Councils:

- A complete list of regionally relevant policies, strategies and plans for consideration in the Community Strategic Plan; and
- Standard regional objectives for social, environmental, economic and civic leadership issues identified in the relevant state and regional plans and policies.

This would ensure that when councils consult with their communities the information presented provides a regional context for residents to identify locally specific principles, objectives and actions. Therefore, assisting with the consistent regional and state-wide delivery of social, economic and environmental services as well as assisting to identify the necessary Local, State and Australian Government partnerships required to deliver local activities of regional benefit.

#### **Recommendation**

The Department Planning and Local Government provide the following information for consideration by Councils prior to the preparation of their Community Strategic Plan:

- A complete list of regionally relevant policies, strategies and plans for consideration in the Community Strategic Plan; and
- Standard regional objectives for social, environmental, economic and civic leadership issues identified in the relevant state and regional plans and policies.

### **4. Assistance with asset management**

The Independent Inquiry into the Financial Sustainability of Councils found that:

- Only 20% of NSW councils have adequate asset management systems; and
- The present infrastructure renewal backlog in NSW for council managed assets is \$6.3 billion.

(NSW Local Government and Shire Association (2006) *Are Councils Sustainable? Final Report: Findings and Recommendations*)

Based on these findings it is essential that councils, with support from the NSW Government, adopt adequate asset management and financial management systems in place to identify and address infrastructure needs.

The introduction of long term asset management and financial planning is an essential component of the Framework. For this to be achieved meaningfully and consistently, technical and financial support must be made available for councils struggling with asset maintenance and renewal.

The SCCG supports the position of the NSW Local Government and Shires Association that councils in NSW should be assisted by the NSW Government in adopting asset management systems and practices that are consistent with the national framework for financial sustainability and asset management as well as IPWEA's International Infrastructure Management Manual. Once effective asset management systems are introduced and applied consistently by all councils the maintenance and renewal of individual assets can be prioritised based on local, regional and national needs and delivered in partnership with the necessary financial assistance from all spheres of government.

**Recommendation**

Councils in NSW be assisted by the NSW Government in adopting asset management systems and practices that are consistent with the national framework for financial sustainability and asset management as well as IPWEA's International Infrastructure Management Manual.

**5. The provision of a standard monitoring and evaluation framework for State of the Environment reporting**

At present in NSW the necessary natural resources data and information collected by councils to monitor and report the health of the NSW environment lacks coordination and as a result is inconsistent and contains many gaps. Without the appropriate provision and analysis of this data, measuring the achievement or progress towards local or regional outcomes is very difficult. Additionally, the Manual and Guidelines observe that one of the difficulties of previous State of the Environmental monitoring programs was that data collected at a local level was not used to inform environmental reporting at regional, state and national levels.

To address this, the SCCG recommends the NSW Department of Planning and Local Government in partnership with the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) and Department of Environment and Climate Change develop the following to assist in reporting local and regional environmental outcomes through State of the Environment reports:

**Indicators:** Standard indicators for the environmental themes councils are to consider in identifying priorities when developing their Community Strategic Plan.

**Data Collection processes and management:** Strategies and tools for the collection and maintenance of environmental monitoring information. This should include minimum standards for issues such as scale, information collected and periods when information is to be collected.

**Reporting templates:** Templates that assist the consistent reporting of environmental management outcomes as well as trends in environmental quality and health. This would assist in establishing regional values as well as enabling the use of the information collected at regional, state and national levels.

**Data Collection processes and management:** Strategies and tools for the collection and maintenance of environmental monitoring information. This should include minimum standards for issues such as scale, information collected and periods when information is to be collected.

**Reporting templates:** Templates that assist the consistent reporting of environmental management outcomes as well as trends in environmental quality and health. This would assist in establishing regional values as well as enabling the use of the information collected at regional, state and national levels.

#### **Recommendation**

To address this, the SCCG recommends the NSW Department of Planning and Local Government in partnership with the Natural Resources Commission and Department of Environment and Climate Change develop the following:

**Indicators:** Standard indicators for the environmental themes councils are to consider in identifying priorities when developing their Community Strategic Plan.

**Data Collection processes and management:** Strategies and tools for the collection and maintenance of environmental monitoring information. This should include minimum standards for issues such as scale, information collected and periods when information is to be collected.

**Reporting templates:** Templates that assist the consistent reporting of environmental management outcomes as well as trends in environmental quality and health. This would assist in establishing regional values as well as enabling the use of the information collected at regional, state and national levels.

## **6. Partnerships with relevant NSW and Australian Government Departments, Agencies and Authorities.**

The range of social, economic and environmental services delivered to all communities in NSW are provided individually or in partnership by all three spheres of Government. Therefore greater emphasis in the Manual and Guidelines must be placed on the value of the NSW Government identifying and facilitating the necessary partnerships to ensure that social, economic and environmental services are delivered consistently to communities and by the sphere of Government best suited and most equipped to do so.

One area where this action is required is the relationship between councils and CMAs. The Manual and Guidelines note that councils should engage with their local CMAs and other relevant organisations to come up with a system of monitoring, evaluation and reporting that involves collaboration across local, regional and state levels. This is not appropriate or efficient. There are 152 Councils in NSW and 13 CMAs and it would be more effective for Councils to be provided the following information from all 13 CMAs in coordination with the NRC and relevant NSW Government departments:

- Systems for monitoring, evaluation and reporting that are consistent throughout NSW;
- Timeframes for integration of environmental reporting with CMA and NSW Government reporting processes;
- The information required from Councils to assist in the NRC auditing of Catchment Action Plans; and
- The roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in contributing the necessary information to a state-wide environmental monitoring and evaluation program.

**Recommendation**

All 13 CMAs in coordination with the NRC and relevant NSW Government departments provide councils the following information:

- Systems for monitoring, evaluation and reporting that are consistent throughout NSW;
- Timeframes for integration of environmental reporting with CMA and NSW Government reporting processes;
- The information required from Councils to assist in the NRC auditing of Catchment Action Plans; and
- The roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in contributing the necessary information to a state-wide environmental monitoring and evaluation program.

**7. Conclusion**

The introduction of the Framework presents an opportunity to ensure the identification and delivery of council plans, services and reporting is achieved consistently throughout NSW and aligned with regional and statewide plans and targets. In making this submission the SCCG has attempted to make recommendations that assist in the consistent delivery of local actions resulting in regional benefits or outcomes.

To achieve this, the NSW Government must play an on ongoing role in ensuring the Bill, Regulation, Manual and Guidelines provide the necessary capacity building and financial support to councils. Overall the SCCG believes it is essential that the NSW Department of Planning and Local Government must play an ongoing role in:

- Assisting councils deliver regionally significant programs and outcomes through local strategic planning activities and planning instruments;
- Providing ongoing frameworks and funding programs for the identification and prioritisation of maintenance and renewal works for regionally significant infrastructure; and
- Building and maintaining partnerships with state and regional stakeholders including State Departments, Agencies and Authorities as well as CMAs.

Yours sincerely,



Clr. Wendy McMurdo  
**Chairperson**