



**SYDNEY COASTAL
COUNCILS GROUP**

SCCG Position Statement

2027 NSW State Elections

Sydney Coastal Councils Group Inc.

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Introduction

The Sydney Coastal Councils Group (SCCG) is a Regional Organisation of Councils representing eight councils in the Sydney region. Together these Councils are working collectively to strengthen the resilience, sustainability and liveability of our coastal and estuarine environments. Our shared vision is for:

Resilient and healthy coastal and estuarine environments that are protected, conserved and managed in a manner consistent with the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

Achieving this vision requires stronger collaboration, leadership and long-term support from the NSW Government. Councils are carrying a disproportionate burden in responding to accelerating coastal risks, despite Sydney facing some of the most complex and technically demanding coastal management challenges in the state.

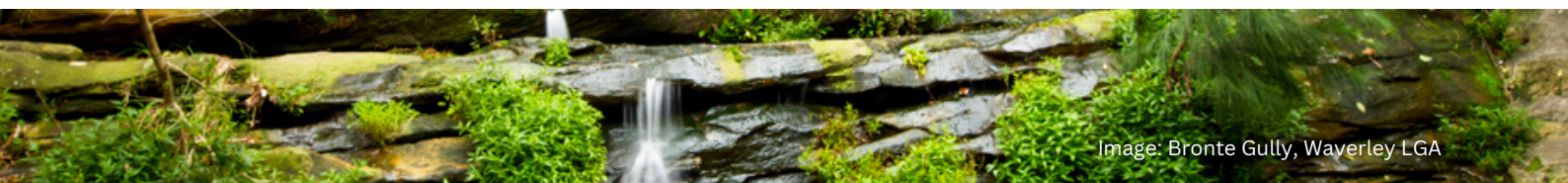
The SCCG's vision is for resilient and healthy coastal and estuarine environments that are protected, conserved and managed in alignment with the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

Ahead of the 2027 NSW State Election, the SCCG has identified seven priority areas requiring urgent State government attention. These priorities reflect the challenges facing Sydney's coastal and estuarine councils in managing escalating risks due to climate change, growing expectations for safe and accessible swimming locations, NSW Audit Office's findings on weaknesses in the coastal management framework, and growing scientific evidence and community support for stronger marine protection.

These priorities are:

1. Guarantee access to implementation funding for certified Coastal Management Program actions across Sydney
2. Prioritise the development and delivery of a Greater Sydney Disaster Adaptation Plan
3. Finalise and implement a Sydney Marine Park to address significant conservation gaps in the region
4. Allocate dedicated State funding for sand nourishment at Regionally Significant Beaches
5. Strengthen Sydney Water accountability and investment to protect swimmers and waterway health
6. Strengthen catchment-scale governance arrangements
7. Strengthen public safety partnerships to manage shark risk in Sydney Harbour, a regionally significant recreation asset

The SCCG urges all political parties contesting the 2027 NSW State Election to commit to these priorities and work collaboratively with councils to secure a resilient, sustainable and thriving coastal future for Greater Sydney.



1. Guarantee access to implementation funding for Certified Coastal Management Program actions across Sydney

Certified Coastal Management Programs (CMPs) provide councils with the statutory framework to manage Sydney's coast in accordance with the NSW Coastal Management Act 2016. They set out long-term, evidence-based strategies grounded in detailed risk assessments and community aspirations, and they formalise collaborative actions between state and local governments.

Once certified, CMPs should unlock the funding and statutory protections required to deliver coastal resilience in a changing climate. However, the [NSW Audit Office's recent review of the Coastal Management Framework](#) identified major deficiencies, most critically, no assurance that actions in certified CMPs will be funded. The Audit found that the Coastal and Estuary Grants Program lacks the resources needed to deliver actions already certified, let alone those still in development.

Sydney councils face a structural disadvantage under the current funding model. Metropolitan CMPs are larger, more complex and often require multi-council coordination, resulting in longer preparation times and higher implementation costs. With 11 CMPs currently in development across Greater Sydney, there is a material risk that available funding will be exhausted before these programs are certified, jeopardising the delivery of statutory and community-endorsed coastal management actions.

"Councils are doing the work to prepare Coastal Management Programs, but without guaranteed implementation funding, these plans risk becoming unfunded mandates."

Councillor Korzy, Northern Beaches Council

The SCCG calls for:

- A ring-fenced, long-term implementation fund dedicated to certified CMP actions in Greater Sydney.
- Multi-year funding commitments aligned with CMP action timeframes.



Image: Coogee Beach, Randwick LGA

2. Prioritise the development and delivery of a Greater Sydney Disaster Adaptation Plan

Disaster Adaptation Plans (DAPs) are the primary delivery mechanism for the NSW State Disaster Mitigation Plan (2024). They identify and prioritise actions to reduce disaster risk before it occurs, particularly risks intensified by climate change. Unlike Coastal Management Programs (CMPs), which focus specifically on coastal hazards, DAPs address a broader range of multi-hazard risks including bush-fire, flooding and urban heat. The two frameworks are complementary, and together provide a comprehensive approach to risk reduction.

DAPs do not replace CMPs. Instead, DAPs are becoming critical to funding and implementing CMP actions that address the specific risks of coastal erosion, inundation and sea-level rise. The establishment of a new NSW Mitigation Fund means that, increasingly, priority actions will be delivered through DAPs.

“Without a Greater Sydney Disaster Adaptation Plan, councils are locked out of the funding needed to reduce escalating coastal risks.”

Councillor Magner, Randwick Council

Despite this, the NSW Reconstruction Authority has advised that a Greater Sydney DAP is not currently a priority, and no regional DAPs are being progressed beyond the Hawkesbury–Nepean flood-focused DAP. This leaves Greater Sydney councils without access to the primary mechanism for disaster-risk investment.

In the absence of a Greater Sydney DAP, councils remain reliant on the Coastal and Estuary Grants Program to mitigate risks in the coastal zone. However, the NSW Audit Office has found this grant program to have limited capacity, significant constraints, and provides no assurance of funding for certified CMP actions. This gap exposes Sydney’s coastal communities to escalating climate-driven risks and undermines the delivery of statutory coastal management actions.

The SCCG calls for:

- Immediate commencement of a Greater Sydney Disaster Adaptation Plan.
- Integration of CMP actions into DAP funding pathways to ensure coastal hazards are properly addressed.
- A multi-hazard, place-based approach that reflects the unique coastal risk profile of Greater Sydney.



Image: Mantly Cove, Northern Beaches LGA

3. Finalise and implement a Sydney Marine Park to address significant conservation gaps in the region

In 2012, the Independent Scientific Audit of Marine Parks in NSW identified a significant conservation gap in the Hawkesbury Shelf marine bioregion, which includes the Sydney region. In response, the NSW Government committed to improving marine biodiversity protection and, in 2018, released a proposal for a Sydney Marine Park for public consultation. Before consultation closed, the proposal was withdrawn. No decision has been made since, and the conservation gap remains unresolved despite growing scientific evidence and stronger community support.

The SCCG supports the establishment of a Sydney Marine Park, including strengthening the existing aquatic reserves. Current marine protected areas in Sydney are small, fragmented and, in most cases, allow extraction of marine life. The few areas that prohibit fishing demonstrate significantly higher biodiversity compared to similar habitats without protection, reinforcing the ecological value of sanctuary zones.

There is extensive evidence that marine protected areas are essential for rebuilding fish stocks, safeguarding biodiversity and providing climate refuges for species under increasing environmental stress. Community support for stronger protections continues to grow, with several sites including Parsley Bay, supported by Woollahra Council, calling for enhanced protection and fishing bans.

“Community support for stronger marine protection is growing — the policy settings need to catch up”

Councillor Frazer, Waverley Council

Member councils are increasingly concerned that current governance and decision-making arrangements for marine protected areas are impeding ecologically sound and community-supported outcomes in metropolitan waters. Recent NSW Government policy directions, including the Draft NSW Recreational Fishing Action Plan and the establishment of an additional recreational fishing body, prioritise increased fishing activity without addressing the need for sanctuary zones to rebuild fish stocks. Reviews of marine parks and aquatic reserves continue to be delayed and deprioritised.

Meanwhile, the Commonwealth has committed to protecting 30% of Australia’s marine environments by 2030. Expanding marine sanctuaries in Sydney is essential to meeting this commitment and ensuring the long-term ecological, social and economic benefits that healthy marine ecosystems provide.

The SCCG calls for:

- Finalisation and implementation of a Sydney Marine Park to address long-standing conservation gaps in the Hawkesbury Shelf marine bioregion.
- A review of governance arrangements for marine protected areas, with a view to returning primary responsibility to an environment-focused portfolio.
- Removal of institutional and policy barriers that are constraining the establishment, review and effective management of marine protected areas.

4. Allocate Dedicated State Funding for Sand Nourishment at Regionally Significant Beaches

Sydney's beaches deliver substantial local, regional, state and national benefits. They support tourism, recreation, public safety, cultural identity and coastal protection. Despite this, the responsibility for sand nourishment, essential to maintaining beach amenity and protecting public and private assets, falls disproportionately on local government.

Councils are responsible for maintaining coastal and estuarine beaches within their local government areas, yet these highly valued assets are increasingly vulnerable to periodic and ongoing erosion driven by large ocean swells, storm events, tidal processes and changing climatic conditions. As a result, many Sydney beaches require regular nourishment, and a single severe storm can remove years of accumulated sand in a matter of hours.

The State Government must recognise the limitations of councils in responding to these escalating challenges. Effective sand nourishment requires long lead times to identify suitable sand sources, assess feasibility, process and stockpile material, secure approvals, and align supply with the intermittent and ongoing needs of councils. Improved coordination across state agencies is also essential to deliver long-term, sustainable solutions that enhance the longevity and effectiveness of nourishment works.

"The NSW Government has completed major offshore sand studies - now we need the funding model to match."

Councillor Kasim, Bayside Council

The NSW Government has completed a large-scale beach nourishment feasibility assessment of offshore sand resources, including priority sites such as Lady Robinsons Beach and Collaroy-Narrabeen. However, the findings have not been publicly released, and no funding model or implementation pathway has been provided.

Without state leadership and investment, councils cannot deliver the scale of nourishment required to protect Sydney's iconic beaches and the communities that depend on them.

The SCCG calls for:

- A state-led funding program for the planning, approvals and delivery of sand nourishment at regionally significant beaches.
- Public release of the NSW Large-scale Beach Nourishment Feasibility Assessment to support transparent decision-making and implementation.
- Securing public tenure over offshore sand resources in key locations along the coast for coastal protection and beach nourishment.
- A clear cost-sharing model that reflects the regional and state-wide benefits of beach nourishment.

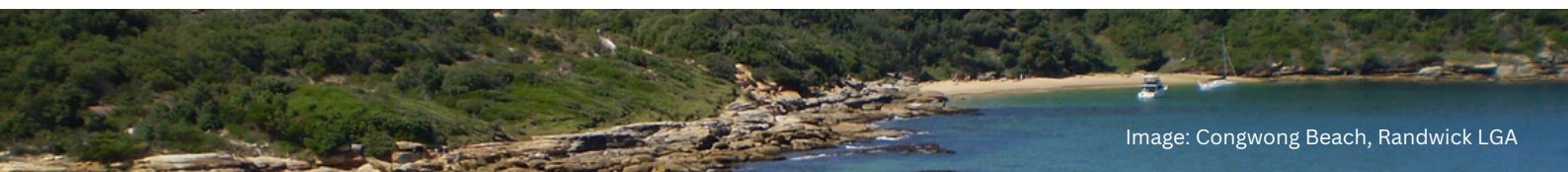


Image: Congwong Beach, Randwick LGA

5. Strengthen Sydney Water Accountability and Investment to Protect Swimmers and Waterway Health

Sydney's coastal and estuarine swim sites are increasingly vulnerable to pollution from stormwater, sewage overflows and ageing wastewater infrastructure. Councils are often the first to receive community complaints, yet many of the root causes sit squarely within Sydney Water's asset base and operational responsibilities.

Member councils have reported that when raising pollution concerns with Sydney Water, they are frequently advised that IPART funding constraints prevent Sydney Water from addressing issues, even when public health, amenity and environmental outcomes are at stake. This is creating a growing gap between community expectations for safe, swimmable waterways and the level of investment Sydney Water is able or willing to make.

The recent 'debris ball' incidents across Sydney beaches during the 2024-25 Summer further highlighted systemic weaknesses in pollution response, communication and clean-up coordination. Councils were left managing community concern and beach closures while seeking clarity from Sydney Water on the source, scale and management of the incident. These events demonstrated the need for stronger NSW Government leadership, clearer accountability, and improved incident response protocols to protect beachgoers and restore public confidence.

"Sydney Water's investment settings are not keeping pace with community expectations for safe, swimmable waterways."

Councillor Welch, North Sydney Council

At the same time, community demand for new swim sites and improved waterway health is increasing as temperatures rise and population grows. Without adequate investment in wastewater, stormwater and pollution-prevention infrastructure, Sydney Water cannot meet these expectations and councils cannot deliver the safe, accessible waterways their communities are calling for.

A more transparent, better-resourced and accountable framework is needed to ensure Sydney Water's investment decisions align with public health, environmental protection and the delivery of swimmable, liveable waterways across Greater Sydney.

The SCCG calls for:

- A review of Sydney Water's investment and regulatory settings, including IPART determinations, to ensure sufficient and prioritised funding for pollution prevention, wastewater upgrades and swimmable-waterway outcomes the protection of designated swim sites.
- Clear NSW Government leadership and accountability for major pollution incidents, including improved communication protocols, rapid response mechanisms and coordinated clean-up responsibilities.
- A strengthened incident reporting and notification framework, ensuring councils receive timely, accurate and actionable information during pollution events.
- A dedicated Sydney Water investment program focused on improving water quality and public safety at existing and emerging swim sites, aligned with community demand and NSW Government commitments to swimmable, liveable waterways

6. Strengthen catchment-scale governance arrangements

Sydney's estuaries are under increasing pressure from threats that cannot be effectively addressed by individual councils acting alone. Marine litter, stormwater pollution, sewage overflows, and poor land-use decisions in upstream catchments all contribute to declining waterway health. These are system-scale challenges that require integrated, catchment-wide planning and coordinated management of land, water and biodiversity.

NSW currently lacks a formal, statutory catchment-scale governance framework for metropolitan regions. In Sydney, this gap is being partially filled by organisations such as the SCCG, Cooks River Alliance, Parramatta River Catchment Group and Georges Riverkeeper, each operating under different mandates, governance structures and resourcing arrangements. The result is fragmented oversight, inconsistent delivery and limited capacity to address cumulative impacts.

Coastal Management Programs (CMPs) are structurally constrained in addressing catchment issues because funding streams require a primary focus on the coastal zone. While CMPs can identify catchment-based actions, these actions cannot be funded through the NSW Government's Coastal and Estuary Grants Program, leaving councils unable to address the upstream drivers of coastal degradation.

"Sydney's catchment governance is too fragmented to meet the scale of emerging climate risks. A unified, catchment-wide governance model is now essential."

Councillor Dodds, Willoughby Council

"The NSW Government's [Water Quality Governance Roadmap \(2024\)](#) committed to developing an integrated catchment management reform package, but no framework or interim arrangements have been released. Meanwhile, pressures on Sydney's estuaries, including Sydney Harbour and Botany Bay, are intensifying due to climate change, population growth, and ageing stormwater and sewer infrastructure. At the same time, communities are calling for more local swim sites and improved recreational access as temperatures rise.

To meet community expectations and deliver meaningful improvements in waterway health, the State Government must formalise catchment entities with clear mandates, authority and funding. This will significantly strengthen the delivery of CMPs and improve coordination across agencies and councils. Given its national and international significance, Sydney Harbour warrants a dedicated manager to ensure its long-term ecological and cultural values are protected.

The SCCG calls for:

- A statutory catchment governance framework for Greater Sydney.
- Dedicated funding for catchment-scale actions that support Catchment Management Program outcomes.
- Clear roles, responsibilities and coordination mechanisms across agencies and councils.



Image: Manly Beach, Northern Beaches LGA

7. Strengthen Public-Safety Partnerships to Manage Shark Risk in Sydney Harbour, a Regionally Significant Recreation Asset

Sydney Harbour's water quality has improved significantly due to long-term investment in catchment management, stormwater treatment and pollution reduction. As waterway health improves, more people are swimming, paddling and recreating along the Harbour's foreshores.

However, improved water quality is also likely to be contributing to increased shark presence and risk, particularly for bull sharks, which favour estuarine environments such as Sydney Harbour. Councils are responding to community expectations by providing netted swimming enclosures, lifeguard services, and foreshore activation programs, but these services are costly and facilities are expensive to build, maintain and replace.

The NSW Government's Coastal and Estuary Grants Program, already identified by the NSW Audit Office as having "limited capacity, significant constraints, and no assurance of funding for certified Coastal Management Program actions," does not currently support shark-mitigation infrastructure.

"Sydney Harbour is becoming cleaner and more accessible – and that means more people in the water. Councils want communities to enjoy the Harbour safely, but shark enclosures are costly and current grants don't cover them. The NSW Government should partner with councils to build and maintain these essential public safety assets."

Councillor Parmegiani, Woollahara Council

The NSW Government's Coastal and Estuary Grants Program, already identified by the NSW Audit Office as having "limited capacity, significant constraints, and no assurance of funding for certified CMP actions," does not currently support shark-mitigation infrastructure.

This leaves councils without a viable funding pathway to maintain essential public safety assets used by regional and state-wide communities. As demand for safe swimming locations grows, councils face escalating costs and rising community expectations without adequate State support. Without intervention, Sydney Harbour communities will face increasing exposure to shark risk, and councils will be unable to deliver the safe, accessible swimming environments the public is calling for.

SCCG Calls For

- Expansion of the Coastal and Estuary Grants Program to include shark-mitigation infrastructure such as netted enclosures.
- Dedicated State funding for the construction, renewal and maintenance of shark enclosures in Sydney Harbour.
- Support for councils to deliver lifeguard services and other operational safety measures at high-use swim sites.
- Partnerships with councils to develop modern shark-risk monitoring, including real-time detection technologies and public information systems.
- Recognition of Sydney Harbour as a regionally significant swimming and recreation asset, requiring shared responsibility for public safety.

