



10 December 2020

The Hon. Rob Stokes MP
Minister for Planning and Public Spaces
GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY 2001

Dear Minister,

Submission on the Draft Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Plan 2041

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the *Draft Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Plan 2041* (the Plan).

For the purpose of this submission I have highlighted a number of state government projects that are essential to support the *Objectives* identified in the Plan. I urge the Government to focus on collaboration between state agencies, local government and communities to ensure timely progress of these key projects.

Roads

The *Draft Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Plan* sets clear Objectives to grow Regional Cities, activate Port Kembla and the region's harbours for increased international connectivity and capitalise on growth in Western Sydney. To support these Objectives the Government must maintain progress towards upgrading road infrastructure in the region.

Recent announcements by the Government to upgrade Picton Road, Mount Ousley Interchange and the Princes Highway are welcome however they come after many years of advocating by local stakeholders, Councils and private industry attempting to shine a light on this vital freight and corridor between the Illawarra, South Coast and Greater Sydney.

I urge the Government to ensure the announcements are quickly followed by real action to commence planning and construction of these critical upgrades to support growth in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven.

Benefits can also be gained by progressing the extension of Memorial Drive to increase the flow of traffic north out of Wollongong and maximise connectivity to southern Sydney.

I recommend drawing on case studies in the northern suburbs of Wollongong in terms of traffic congestion, traffic light sequencing, parking and clearways along the Princes Highway and Lawrence Hargrave Drive. Lessons learned from the challenges faced in these communities could maximise the road efficiency and assist in balancing the needs of residential, business and visitor traffic in a coastal context.



Rail connectivity

To support *Objective 3: Grow the Port of Port Kembla as an international trade hub* and related objectives the development of the Maldon Dombarton rail link to South West Sydney, otherwise known as the SWIRL, should be thoroughly examined. Freight moving out of the Port currently relies on a road transport corridor that is heavily utilised and rapidly reaching capacity. State and Federal Governments must collaborate without delay to address the growing problems that exist due to competition between heavy vehicles and motorists at peak times on what is one of the busiest corridors in NSW.

A focus on fast rail in the region is long overdue and is essential to give integrity to the Plan in terms of growing Regional Cities and activating Port Kembla for trade and developing a diverse visitor economy.

The Government's focus on fast rail has traditionally placed the Sydney to Wollongong-Bomaderry route at the lowest priority against the northern and western routes and in order to deliver on the objectives in the Plan this would need to be reviewed. The commitment by the Government to now work with the National Faster Rail Agency to develop a business case for the Sydney to Bomaderry Corridor is noted, welcome and long overdue.

Commuters out of the Illawarra and Shoalhaven are still subject to trips far longer than one hour each way to and from Sydney on irregular and overcrowded services. This route should be the highest priority for network improvements to increase speeds for commuters.

Emergency services and bushfire preparedness

The horror bushfire season of 2019-20 highlighted the vulnerability of communities living on the fringe of our natural environment including statutory protected areas. The Plan points to resilience in the community and upskilling for community led adaptation plans for disaster preparation and relief. The need for a focus on improving our region's readiness to respond to major disasters and extreme weather events cannot be overstated.

A stronger stance is required on emergency services preparedness with a focus on government investment in procurement of specialist equipment based in NSW, training and upskilling of firefighting professionals and communications across agencies and all levels of government.

The Illawarra Escarpment has not experienced a significant bushfire event since 1968 and the community is painfully aware that the natural landscape that visually defines our region also poses a bushfire threat if management activities are not adequately resourced.

Clean energy - jobs growth and local procurement

As the region is positioned as a hub for clean energy I encourage the Government to ensure all opportunities to establish local procurement, employment and training for the Illawarra Shoalhaven community are explored and maximised. This will support a number of Objectives in the Plan including *Objective 4: Activate Regionally significant employment precincts to support new and innovative economic enterprises*.

Amendments to the Government's energy sector reforms advocated by Illawarra Labor MPs have helped to ensure local content requirements and local procurement will be part of the future investment in renewable energy technology and infrastructure. This initiative should serve as a model to design and deliver new renewable energy projects here in the region, employ local people and engage with local suppliers.

Social Housing

The Illawarra and Shoalhaven region has a substantial need for an increase in investment in social and affordable housing. The region's housing waitlist continues to be a substantial indicator of the lack of social housing in the area.

The two major projects as outlined in the *Draft Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Plan 2041* has identified 100 new social and affordable homes. An investment of only 100 new social and affordable homes is substantially under what the region requires and will not even make a dent in the waiting list. Wollongong City S015 zone has 1298 applicants alone waiting 5 to 10 years for social housing. It is evident the plan for the Illawarra region lacks the foresight or investment to meet the increased demands for social housing.

Considering that one in five social housing properties are now 50 years old the existing infrastructure is dated and will require increased maintenance to keep properties habitable and in acceptable living conditions. The older style of social housing being a detached cottage of three to four bedrooms now struggle to meet the growing needs of the community and our aging population.

It is imperative that any plan for the region applies significant investment into the social infrastructures of our community for future generations and economic growth. The plan must include investment in more social and affordable housing with realistic targets, meeting the needs of the community and providing housing security to vulnerable individuals.

Productive and Innovative region

Objective 5 talks about creating a diverse visitor economy and one of the key assets we have in this regard is our picturesque Illawarra Escarpment. For some years now I have been working with National Parks and Wildlife Service, local Aboriginal groups and Wollongong City Council on progressing mountain bike riding on managed tracks across the escarpment. I am pleased that this work is progressing with a network of trails now in the planning and assessment stage and this will need to continue to be a priority both in terms of attracting economic activity to the region whilst at the same time protecting the environmental value of the escarpment and educating visitors and locals about its importance in Aboriginal culture and history.

Objective 14 talks about enhancing and connect parks and open spaces and bushland with walking and cycling tracks. One of the other areas of opportunity is to enable a continuous walking/trail running course across the entire escarpment that can enable locals and visitors to experience running and/or walking in a spectacular natural environment. One of the challenges to do this at the moment is the private ownership of land by Wollongong Coal that to date has restricted access to around 7km worth of track along the Lower Escarpment Trail. I believe Government needs to enter into discussions with the mine operator to enable safe, managed access to this area and by doing so opens up the Illawarra to hold world class trail running events attracting visitors from across the globe.

Health infrastructure

The plans to upgrade the Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital and surrounding medical precinct have been promised for some time however the absence of a start date for the project will significantly undermine the achievement of *Objective 2: Grow the Regions Regional Cities*.

The existing hospital is already under significant pressure with shortfalls in emergency in mental health beds and staffing. The NSW Government investment of \$434 million must be fast tracked to realise the potential benefits of attracting investment and economic development to achieve Nowra City Centre's growth potential, and reduce the reliance on Wollongong Hospital.

Substantial investment in Wollongong Hospital is essential both in terms of opening up wards to allow for the increased demand but also what is critically needed is additional health workers, nurses and doctors to keep up with a growing community. The Bureau of Health Information has recently reported that in the last quarter the waiting time at Wollongong ED was the longest in NSW and the wait for elective surgery is also substantial.

I have also made it clear that any funds from the disposal of land from the old Bulli Hospital site should be directed back into the Illawarra Shoalhaven Health District to ensure additional and enhanced services can be delivered across the community.

Schools infrastructure

Despite a massive boom in population of at least 50,000 expected for West Dapto in the coming decades the Plan does not indicate any new schools are planned in the area.

The nearest existing local primary school Dapto Primary is already under pressure operating out of demountables and with more than 700 enrolled students before many of the surrounding land releases are complete. I consider this a significant oversight in the Plan and urge the Government to review this decision and the likely impacts on the community in the future.

Pest management to support environmental asset protection

Objective 11: Protect important environmental assets would benefit from the integration of a rigorous pest management strategy focussing on a well-resourced deer management plan. Local Land Services run a multi-stakeholder program for pest management in the region which has suffered from being under-resourced particularly for wild deer management.

The efforts of local Councils to manage this destructive pest are undermined by a lack of investment at state level. The Plan needs to reflect the role of the state government in leading on local pest management plans and driving investment to protect environmental assets.

Deer populations are especially troublesome along the Illawarra Escarpment where significant damage is caused to the natural environment and residents face hazards on local roads. As deer and other pest populations push further south the need to prioritise pest management in the Illawarra Shoalhaven becomes more urgent.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft Illawarra Shoalhaven Strategic Plan 2041. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss any aspect of this submission further.

Yours sincerely,



Ryan Park
Member for Keira
Shadow Minister for Health
Shadow Minister for the Housing and Homelessness
Shadow Minister for the Illawarra and South Coast