

2 March 2011

Cr Keith Rhoades AFSM
& Cr Bruce Miller
Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW
GPO Box 7003
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Sirs

Thank you for writing to the NSW Liberals and Nationals about the important issues and policies facing your members.

We are pleased to respond to your survey and the issues you have raised. Please find our response attached.

The NSW Liberals and Nationals have a clear goal - **Making NSW Number One Again.**

We have a strong Five Point Action Plan for government:

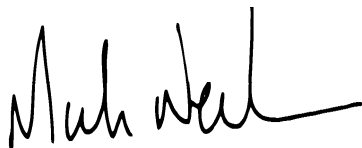
1. **Rebuilding the NSW economy:** through lower taxes and business growth;
2. **Returning quality services:** we will return quality services in areas such as health, transport, education and community safety;
3. **Renovating Infrastructure:** we will renovate the infrastructure that makes a difference to both our economy and people's lives;
4. **Restore accountability to government:** by giving people a say on issues that affect their lives; and
5. **Protect our local environment** and return planning powers to the community.

Throughout the election campaign we will be announcing further plans and policies to Make NSW Number One Again.

Find out more about our Action Plan at www.startthechange.com.au

Thank you again for providing the opportunity to outline our plans and policies.

Yours sincerely



Mark Neeham
Campaign Director - Liberals

Yours sincerely



Ben Franklin
Campaign Director – Nationals

Response to Local Government and Shires Association

1) Improved Local Government financial viability

The NSW Liberals & Nationals will rebuild the NSW economy through lower taxes and business growth.

The people of NSW deserve opportunities to shape their own future. A vibrant and strong economy generates the best opportunities for a fulfilling job, choice and financial security. A strong economy allows government to re-build services such as health care and education and to properly protect our environment.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals' first priority for NSW is unashamedly restoring economic growth and establishing NSW as the first place in Australia to do business.

The dividends of strong economic management are better services and infrastructure. Whether in transport, health, disability, homelessness, regional development or any other area of State Government responsibility, improved outcomes can only be delivered from a strong bottom line.

Many of us remember when NSW was unarguably number one in Australia - we were the 'Premier State', the financial capital, the leader in ideas and innovation. We were proud to say we were from New South Wales.

Over 16 years our reputation and performance has suffered as other states and nations became smarter and more competitive - and the NSW Government remained complacent.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals has announced its intention to undertake a full review of Local Government finances. The review will be conducted in consultation with Local Governments and the LGSA.

We are keen to work in partnership with Local Government and end the rampant cost-shifting which has been the hallmark of successive Labor Governments. The only way to do this is by treating Local Government as a partner, rather than a neglected poor cousin.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals will introduce a range of measures to help Local Government improve their financial planning abilities to be introduced in consultation with Local Governments and the LGSA.

In relation to a broad based property levy for funding emergency services, the NSW Liberals & Nationals will sit down with all stakeholders to review funding arrangements for emergency services while ensuring their funding streams are protected – unlike the Keneally Labor Government's botched the pre-Christmas bushfire levy on councils.

In relation to energy, a NSW Liberals & Nationals Government will establish a Special Commission of Inquiry into Labor's sale in order to get to the bottom of Labor's mess.

With powers similar to a Royal Commission it will call for documents and public submissions, hold hearings and cross-examine witnesses under oath. It will be tabled in Parliament and will determine the best way forward for NSW. NSW Liberals & Nationals will keep the 'poles and wires' in public hands.

2) Restore the balance to land use in planning

Local governance is a big issue for all of us – and I know that local councils feel the burden and the frustrations business and individuals also feel. We agree there is much to be done to improve the way we deliver local services and decision making – which is the heart of your proposition.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals have already outlined some ways we will deliver local power and responsibility to regions and local areas. We will push decision-making power as close as possible to the people those decisions affect, those who will live with those decisions and who will benefit directly from those decisions.

Making ‘localism’ work is less about where the lines are drawn on a map and more about the capability of the people and systems in those areas - and it requires State Government to be clear about what objectives it expects local areas to meet and the standards people expect – especially in planning.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals are committed to working in partnership with Local Government to ensure the best planning outcomes for all NSW residents. The Department of Planning will be required to work mutually and constructively with Local Government with particular emphasis on the regional offices in having a greater positive role and relationship between the Department and Local Government. In addition the NSW Liberals & Nationals will be seeking to engage other State agencies with Local Government in the planning processes and metropolitan and rural and regional strategies, including the State Plan.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals will rewrite the State’s planning laws. The *NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act* came into force more than 30 years ago. Since then it has become dysfunctional. The planning system does not provide the certainty that communities deserve and our economy needs. Most other Australian states have modernised their planning laws while ours have stagnated.

In recent years more and more approvals have been taken out of community view and decided by politicians – a recipe for collapse of public confidence in the system, and a blow to our reputation as a good place to invest.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals are committed to returning local planning powers to local communities (through their councils). We believe that local residents – through councils – are best placed to make local planning decisions affecting their suburbs. After all, it is local residents – not Macquarie Street planners – who have to live with the results of these planning decisions.

We will scrap ‘Part 3A’ – one of the wide-ranging powers NSW Labor has given its Planning Minister to override local communities and a factor that ICAC noted had contributed to corruption risks in the planning process.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals will commence an overhaul of the planning system soon after March 2011. We will remove the politics from planning decisions. Our review will:

- ensure our planning system centres on merit and the public interest and re-empowers local communities on local planning issues;
- create a system that enjoys public support – with a state government that respects people;
- create a system that is modern, takes into account sustainability, gives certainty to investors and makes NSW competitive again, including a reserve power for genuinely state significant developments; and
- deliver certainty about planning rules and decision making processes that are made transparently and in a timely way.

The review will be conducted by an independent expert panel, with the aim of enacting legislation around the middle of our first term.

This review will consider such issues you raise such as Joint Regional Planning Panels (JRPP).

In relation to the current Affordable Rental Housing SEPP, we believe it has extremely deleterious impacts on communities and is not reflective of a broader strategic planning approach which the NSW Liberals & Nationals intends to deliver.

3) Stronger support for communities

The NSW Liberals & Nationals will protect our local environment and return planning powers to the community.

Our homes and neighbourhoods are more than just 'places'. They are where we raise our children and make friends, where we volunteer and help those in need. We strive to make our streets safe and secure. It's time to give people back their sense of place and purpose and to make our neighbourhoods places of positive opportunities.

When communities have a real say on their local planning and environment, they are strongly motivated to take responsibility for other related issues that align with their preferences and local priorities.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals want to encourage this local energy and ownership. At a local level, interests range from planning issues, preservation of natural areas and the quality of the built environment and the value it adds to peoples' quality of life.

It is for this reason the NSW Liberals & Nationals will re-establish, modernise and make Neighbourhood Watch relevant for communities by:

- requiring every Police Local Area Command (LAC) to have at least one Neighbourhood Watch group;
- piloting ten Online Neighbourhood Watch Groups that allow people to discuss local crime trends and share information over the internet as well as allowing police to issue real time warnings to members; and,
- create a specialist team of Community Intelligence Information Officers based at Police Assistance Line locations to analyse crime data for Local Area Commands and Neighbourhood Watch groups.

Together we can reduce and prevent crime in our neighbourhoods through engaging our communities, encouraging commonsense crime prevention, and supporting frontline Police.

In relation to Home and Community Care, it will need to be dealt with as part of wider negotiations between the three levels of government, and between the NSW Government and the Federal Government in the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meetings. Our focus is on partnership and negotiation rather than directives and forced subordination.

A NSW Liberals & Nationals Government will focus on reducing the number of children in out-of-home care (OOHC) while increasing early intervention to help struggling families whose children are at risk of removal. We will closely monitor the *Keep Them Safe* initiative and revise where necessary, to better meet the desired outcomes.

In relation to public libraries, the NSW Liberals & Nationals are committed to a review of the funding allocated to our public libraries.

This will involve the community as we believe there is not a 'one size fits all' approach. As such we will involve and engage community stakeholders with a view to addressing the current state of Labor's underfunding and neglect.

In relation to a Local Government arts and cultural development fund, a NSW Liberals & Nationals Government will established the \$1 billion low-interest loan fund to allow Local Government (where it can) to borrow funds to develop infrastructure

In relation to local health networks, the NSW Liberals & Nationals remain committed to our policy *Making it Work*, released in March 2009, which outlined the introduction of smaller Health Districts to replace Labor's large and overly bureaucratic Area Health Services. We said we would appoint District Health Boards comprising local community and clinician representations. Boards would have real clout in making decisions and managing budgets, and the District Chief Executive would report to them. We will ensure that local communities, including Local Government authorities, have a real voice in these decision-making processes and we will be seeking further input from the community in determining administrative structures.

When the *Health Services Amendment (Local Health Networks) Bill 2010* came before the Legislative Assembly, we allowed its passage, however the NSW Liberals & Nationals expressed concern about the boundaries of the Central West LHN. We are committed to reviewing LHN boundaries, should we be elected to office, to ensure that the structures deliver the best outcomes for the people of NSW.

In relation to preventative health initiatives, the NSW Liberals & Nationals will focus on preventing illness and on helping people maintain a high level of wellness and well-being. Through preventative health initiatives and the promotion of healthy lifestyles, we can avoid unnecessary hospitalisation.

We will investigate and develop new models of care to allow the delivery of health services in the community and in non-acute settings, including the home. One example of this is the NSW Liberals & Nationals' recent commitment of \$2 million to establish a Telehealth Technology Centre, which will deliver benefits for people living with chronic illnesses who require medical monitoring and patients who live in isolated areas.

We are committed to community health programs and have announced \$10 million in funding for drug and alcohol programs, delivered through the government and non-government sectors, as well as community organisations. The NSW Liberals & Nationals have also committed \$10 million to pilot community and workplace health checks and improve management of chronic diseases through community pharmacies and other accredited providers. This is expected to dramatically improve the health of those who live with, or are at risk of conditions such as diabetes, asthma, obesity and cardiovascular disease. We will be releasing more community health policies before the election.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals recognise the importance of Local Government authorities in health promotion and preventative health initiatives, and will work with the sector to achieve population health outcomes for the people of NSW.

In relation to the Cancer Council's "Saving Life" Campaign, the NSW Liberals & Nationals have acknowledged and responded in detail.

A NSW Liberals & Nationals Government will support patients in isolated areas with transport and accommodation by boosting the IPTAAS by 50%, increasing the travel and accommodation rate for the average claim by approximately \$100. This represents an additional commitment of \$28 million over four years.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals support improved community transport by:

- providing an additional \$12 million to the Community Transport Program through the Ministry of Transport. This will extend services to thousands of transport-disadvantaged people;
- establishing a "one stop shop" for Community Transport providers within the Ministry of Transport to improve communication, efficiency and reduce unnecessary administration costs; and
- establishing an appropriate driver accreditation framework to ensure Community Transport providers can enhance their services and ensure utmost safety of volunteers, employees and clients.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals are committed to delivering quality cancer care services to the people of NSW, especially in rural and regional parts of the State. A NSW Liberals & Nationals Government will work with the Commonwealth in planning and delivering the six Regional Cancer Centres that have been promised for NSW, representing \$115.8 million of funding. Recently we supported the establishment of the cancer centre on the Central Coast; and if successful at the NSW election, we will oversee the planning for the New England and North West, North Coast, Shoalhaven, Illawarra centres and the Lismore patient accommodation facility.

A NSW Liberals & Nationals Government intend to consult closely with the Cancer Council in working towards the objectives outlined in the NSW Cancer Plan 2011-15, to reduce the incidence of cancer and to improve the quality of life and survival of people with cancer. The NSW Liberals & Nationals have a strong track record of supporting measures to minimise exposure to environmental tobacco smoke, which has serious health implications for those who are exposed to it. An example of this is our support for the prohibition of smoking in enclosed public places, including those in pubs, clubs and restaurants.

We support the right of Local Government authorities to prohibit smoking in public places and outdoor areas, in consultation with the community, and we have noted the view of the Cancer Council on further reform.

As part of our goal to minimise the prevalence of smoking, the NSW Liberals & Nationals will uphold and support the strict regulation of retail tobacco sales. These restrictions include the prohibition on displaying tobacco products, limiting sales to one place on each premises and prohibiting the automatic operation of vending machines. We will maintain the role of Environmental Health Officers in Public Health Units across the State, who have responsibility for monitoring compliance and investigating breaches of these provisions.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals are committed to supporting public awareness and education programs to help drive down the rate of smoking in NSW.

We will maintain the NSW Quit Campaign, coordinated by NSW Health, and work with the Cancer Institute NSW in an effort to further reduce smoking prevalence and minimise the significant harms associated with exposure to tobacco smoke. This strategy will include careful consideration of the need to address smoking in some CALD communities, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, people with mental illnesses, young people and socially disadvantaged groups.

In relation to the Murray Darling Basin Plan, the NSW Liberals & Nationals have taken a strong position in support of regional communities and industry in the Murray Darling Basin. The bottom-line of our policy is that any future water reform in the Murray Darling Basin must be in accord with the triple bottom line of the 2004 National Water Initiative. That is, equal consideration and treatment of environmental, agricultural and socio economic needs within the Basin.

The Federal Labor Government's approach to water reform has been uni-directional, to purchase as many water licenses as possible and to return them to environmental flows. These purchases have taken no account of the impact of the loss of water on the regional communities.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals want to see a broader multifaceted approach that places emphasis on all methods of water saving including infrastructure improvements and increased efficiency in water handling with voluntary buybacks being only a part of the solution.

In relation to population growth and economic development in regional and rural areas, the NSW Liberals & Nationals have a *Regional Kick Start* package will ensure we build the infrastructure, create the jobs and bring the people back to regional NSW. The plan includes:

- building the Infrastructure: 30 per cent of *Restart NSW*, the NSW Liberals & Nationals capital fund to fix NSW will be earmarked for regional NSW.
- creating the Jobs: 40,000, or 40 per cent, of the new jobs targeted for NSW under the NSW Liberals & Nationals Jobs Action Plan will be prioritised for regional NSW.
- bringing the People: the NSW Liberals & Nationals will introduce a Regional Relocation Grant of \$7,000 to encourage individuals and families to move from Sydney to regional NSW communities.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals believe in regional NSW and have a strong plan to give it the kick-start it deserves.

In relation to strategic planning to address social justice and inclusion, the NSW Liberals & Nationals believe social housing should be available and affordable for those in the community that require assistance. The NSW housing affordability crisis is a product of Labor's punishing development levies, paralysed planning system, high property taxes, and 'Sydney is full' mantra which has seen land supply down to a trickle – and this as a result impacts rents and rental availability.

Under the Keneally Labor Government, the housing waiting list has increased by 10 per cent from 39,484 in 2009 to 43,335 in 2010. The 10 per cent increase in the waiting list has come at a time when NSW has received unprecedented Federal Government funding to deliver additional social housing. The NSW Liberals & Nationals recognise the importance of delivering adequate public housing and driving down the state's waiting list.

In relation to the sale of alcohol at pubs and clubs, the NSW Liberals & Nationals believe that people have the right to enjoy a good night out. They should not feel scared by the threat of alcohol related violence and crime.

A NSW Liberals & Nationals Government will implement a plan to tackle alcohol-related violence and crime to make our streets safe again by:

- strengthening 'Move On Powers' so they can be used for individuals. Currently they can only be used for groups of three or more;
- introduce the new offence of 'drunk and disorderly' under the *Summary Offences Act* with a maximum penalty of 6 penalty units or an on-the-spot fine of \$200; and
- pilot three 'Sobering Up Centres' in NSW. One will be in Sydney City covering the entertainment precincts taking in Kings Cross, George Street and The Rocks, another in a Sydney suburb and a third in regional NSW.

All existing measures including lockouts, shot limits, plastic cups and time out periods will remain. Statistics relating to alcohol related violence will continue to be monitored and published to ensure the effectiveness of these measures.

In relation to mental health services, the NSW Liberals & Nationals believe there must be an emphasis on transitioning patients from inpatient services to community care, a step-up step-down approach for improved mental health outcomes.

As part of a reformative approach to mental health, the NSW Liberals & Nationals set-up the *Restoring Mental Health Taskforce* with the aim of developing new policy for improved mental health outcomes to:

- examine best practice mental health models nationally and internationally as part of its strategic planning agenda;
- engage in consultation with the wider mental health community including non government organisations, carers, consumers and mental health service providers; and
- provide policy direction and leadership for an integrated NSW mental health service.

In relation to collaboration with Local Government to ensure the Australian Government provides more funding for aged care and for ageing, it is one of the top goals for the NSW Liberals & Nationals at the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals believe it is important to **address the moral and increasing urgent challenge of providing for our ageing population by simplifying Australia's labyrinthine aged care arrangements.**

- 1) In addition, the NSW Liberals & Nationals have five real changes to make life easier and better for seniors in NSW:
- 2) increasing funding for Community Transport;
- 3) delivering free photo ID for self-funded retirees and pensioners;
- 4) providing incentives to safe drivers;
- 5) standardising retirement village contracts; and
- 6) giving carers the recognition they deserve and a voice in government.

In relation to NSW Police Force recruitment, the NSW Liberals & Nationals will undertake an audit of all police stations and police positions in the Police Force.

The community deserves to know what Stations are open, their condition and when they are open. They also need to know where these 'record' numbers of police are and what they are doing.

Getting police out from behind desks and into local communities will be a priority under the NSW Liberals & Nationals. It is clear the current Local Area Command model is continuing to fail some communities in rural and regional areas by concentrating police in stations in large population centres at the expense of towns. Our commitment to an audit of police numbers and stations is about pursuing measures that will provide towns with the police resources needed.

4) Greater natural environment protection

The NSW Liberals & Nationals want to encourage this local energy and ownership. At a local level, interests range from planning issues, preservation of natural areas and the quality of the built environment and the value it adds to peoples' quality of life.

Issues such as water management, air quality and waste management should be considered with community input and ideas. On national and global environmental issues, we will lead by example where possible to promote and support innovations in transport-related emission technology, planning to encourage public transport and bicycle use and measures to encourage renewable and lower-carbon energy technologies.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals will act to constrain politics in decision-making, including on environmental and planning issues and ensure our policy approaches on any issue are backed by evidence and are sustainable.

In relation to the waste levy, a NSW Liberals & Nationals Government will work with industry to undertake a review of the waste levy and its operation. We believe that it requires reform. The NSW Labor Government has already spent the revenues from future waste levies well into the future, locking in future Governments so that returning the whole levy is unviable.

In relation to the NSW Climate Change Action Plan, disappointingly the Keneally Labor Government has reneged in its 2008 promise to produce and release the NSW Climate Change Action Plan and emptied the Climate Change Fund so that there are no funds to implement it.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals are also committed to reviving the renewable energy sector in NSW through:

- a Solar Summit to determine the true cost of Labor's bungled solar bonus scheme and establish a sustainable future for the NSW solar industry.
- appointing a Parliamentary Secretary for Renewable Energy.
- developing a 2020 NSW Renewable Energy Plan to aim for a 20% renewable energy target by 2020.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals is committed to supporting Catchment Management Authorities – and will announce further details in the coming weeks.

5) Enhanced infrastructure provision and maintenance

We are determined to get the politics out of infrastructure decision making.

A NSW Liberals & Nationals Government will establish *Infrastructure NSW* to ensure infrastructure is delivered according to need, on time and on budget, and remove political interests from infrastructure decisions.

Infrastructure NSW is built on the successful *Infrastructure Australia*, *Partnerships UK* and *Partnerships Victoria* models and will:

be overseen by an expert board, and independent Chair; with a highly qualified professional CEO (who is also the NSW Co-ordinator General), and executive staff drawn from the very best of the public and private sectors; and ensure infrastructure is delivered on the basis of need, expert advice and world best practice – not the political demands of marginal seats or a looming election.

Infrastructure NSW will:

- be accountable to the Premier;
- prepare a 20 year State Infrastructure Strategy (SIS), detailed 5 year Infrastructure Plans funded in Budget forward estimates and sectoral State Infrastructure Strategy Statements for approval by the Premier and Cabinet Infrastructure Committee. The SIS will be tabled in Parliament and debated;
- advise on project procurement, contractual arrangements, best practice, delivery and funding modes and create a project pipeline; and
- maximise NSW's funding opportunities from Infrastructure Australia.

The lack of a long-term strategic plan for infrastructure is the greatest infrastructure problem facing NSW. Without a clear, long-term strategy to address emerging bottlenecks, the impact of population growth and changes in land use and employment patterns, poor decisions will inevitably be made.

We will encourage the best ideas and solutions from the private sector and a greater level of private sector investment and participation in projects, with rigorous planning and costing to deliver the highest standards of public value – and confidence to investors and the community.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals will unlock up to \$1 billion in funds for local councils to upgrade urban and economic infrastructure for roads, community halls, libraries, parks, sports grounds and water. In order to rebuild NSW and clear this infrastructure backlog, we recognise government needs to partner with councils who play such an important role in maintaining local amenities.

As part of our positive, practical plan a NSW Liberals & Nationals Government will provide Local Government with interest rate subsidies to encourage them to borrow sustainably to improve the State's neighbourhoods by:

- conduct a council-by-council audit of the local infrastructure backlog, so there is better information on where investment is needed;
- require NSW Treasury to provide an annual benchmark assessment of the appropriate gearing level for each council based on an audit of their finances;
- establish a Local Infrastructure Renewal Scheme that will provide interest subsidies to local councils to assist in the cost of debt;
- require NSW Treasury to assess and approve applications for funding under the Scheme, including appropriate repayment schedules; and
- request grants or loan guarantees from the Commonwealth Government for those councils with existing moderate to high debt levels.

Borrowing will be limited to the building or renewal of economic and urban infrastructure projects and only where Local Government is able to responsibly manage those borrowings. The interest rate subsidy will be equivalent to 50% of NSW Government bond rate at a cost of \$70 million over four years. Both IPART and the Allan Review supported increased responsible Local Government borrowings.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals are committed to recognising the need to ensure that major regional centres have secure and potable long term water supplies, with a vision of 50 to 100 years ahead. We will review the mechanism for setting prices for bulk water with a view to considering whether it would be appropriate to continue with the existing system or introduce an alternative system.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals are committed to supporting the voluntary merger of water utilities in Regional NSW where a significant benefit will accrue to customers. However, we are opposed to forced amalgamations and believe that ownership of utilities should remain a function of Local Government and/or regional alliances.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals are committed to funding existing projects that have already been budgeted in forward estimates and to review remaining applications under the Country Town Water and Sewerage Supply (CTWSS) program with a view to prioritising funding for the most important and needy projects. We will retain the CTWSS but review its operation and the levels of financial support.

In relation to the Aboriginal Communities Water and Sewerage program we have no plans to change this program.

In relation to the Timber Bridges Partnership Program, it is due to conclude in June 2011 at which time the NSW Liberals & Nationals will reassess the program to ensure that people living in coastal and country NSW receive the high-quality road infrastructure they deserve.

In relation to funding for flood mitigation works, the NSW Liberals & Nationals have announced the creation of a \$1 billion low-interest loan fund to allow Local Government (where it can) to borrow funds to develop infrastructure.

In relation to investment in freight rail infrastructure and in public and active transport in NSW, the NSW Liberals & Nationals plan for an Integrated Transport Authority (ITA) will ensure there is co-ordination between the transport modes and deliver major transport infrastructure projects in the short, medium and long term. The ITA will be oversighted by an independent board to ensure major projects are delivered on time and on budget. The ITA will also ensure a central focal point for freight rail.

6) Better local governance

The NSW Liberals & Nationals believe in better governance across all levels of government. We want to restore confidence in our public institutions and government, give people back the power to control their own lives and environments, and restore trust and civility into governance in NSW.

We believe in a clear demarcation between state and Local Government responsibilities. If there is any agreement between state and Local Government on additional responsibilities for local councils, there will be an appropriate funding contribution by the NSW Government.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals endorse the proposal from the Australian Local Government Association for a referendum to amend the Australian constitution to give the Australian government the power to fund Local Government and to enshrine people's rights to democratically elect their councils.

In relation to councils to run their elections locally, the NSW Liberals & Nationals will amend the relevant legislation to permit council general managers to be responsible for the administration of Local Government elections, whilst maintaining the option of sub-contracting the administration to Elections NSW. Their responsibilities will include the appointment of suitably qualified independent returning officers and managing the relevant election costs. An independent returning officer could be sourced from a neighbouring council. Not only will this substantially reduce the costs of council elections but will also result in more prompt reporting of the results of the elections.

In relation to the establishment of an Intergovernmental Commission for Future Local Government and the establishment of a mentoring program, this will be considered as part of a review of the *Local Government Act*.

In relation to NSW Government agencies incorporating local community strategic plans in State planning processes, the NSW Liberals & Nationals will work to ensure there is cooperation and communication between State Government Departments and local government. A new emphasis on strategic planning will require a collaborative approach between the Department of Planning, other State Government agencies, and Local Government.