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LGSA NSW Election priorities

1. Improved financial viability

To improve Local Government financial viability, the LGSA request that the incoming NSW Government:

a Abolish rate pegging.

The Greens support ending rate pegging as an important part of balancing responsibilities between the NSW State and local government.

b Cease the practice of cost shifting and enact legislation that requires Local Government's agreement to take on additional responsibilities. If taken on, provide corresponding funding or allow adequate revenue raising capacity.

The Greens support the creation of a binding memorandum of understanding between NSW local and State Government setting out responsibilities, appropriate financing and a commitment to cooperation and consultation. This would include a clause requiring local government agreement where responsibility is shifted to it and only allowing the shifting of a responsibility in the absence of agreement in urgent or compelling circumstances.

c Provide \$6 million to improve Local Government's capacity to undertake financial planning and asset management to support Community Strategic Planning.

The Greens support increased funding to local government to support long term financial planning, asset management and community strategic planning. There have been substantial new responsibilities placed on local councils to implement these long term planning initiatives without any additional resources to allow councils to undertake them.

d Implement a broad based property levy for funding emergency services. If a broad based property levy is rejected, allow councils to recover their contribution through a corresponding increase in their council rates.

The Greens support a broad based property levy for emergency services. It is equitable, universal and sustainable. If a levy cannot succeed politically then allowing the recovery of

costs associated with emergency services, which are vital local services, is a common sense solution supported by the Greens.

e Introduce competition, transparency and accountability, in providing and costing energy for general electricity and street lighting.

The Greens support changes to increase competition, transparency and accountability for electricity and street lighting costs. At present Councils are held hostage to the costs and practices of monopoly providers who have no incentive to reduce power costs or minimise energy use in street lighting and general electricity.

f Allocate a share of mining royalties to Local Government through a system that provides funding to all councils, with additional funding for councils impacted by the mining industry.

The Greens support, in principle, a method for allocating a share of the royalties to local governments and specifically to the councils in the communities that are affected. It would however need to be a more balanced scheme than the present Royalties for Regions scheme in place in WA.

While the LGSA propose that such money is set aside for infrastructure renewal and impacts generated from mining, the Greens would also argue for some of this money must be allocated to energy efficiency measures and increased use of renewable energy technologies in communities.

2. Restore the balance to land use planning

To restore the balance to land use planning, the LGSA request that the incoming NSW Government:

a Undertake a major review and rewrite of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act (NSW) 1979* to restore the balance in the NSW planning system, and recognise that councils and the NSW Government each have a role to play in planning for and managing the sustainable development of local communities.

The Greens NSW support the wholesale rewriting of NSW planning laws and particularly the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act (NSW) 1979*. Key considerations in this process will include the need for local councils to determine, in most instances, what is appropriate for their community. There is also a significant need to remove direct discretionary power from the Minister in the form of Part 3A of the Act. Equally directions from the Department of Planning, for instance in relation to the LEP Standard Instrument, should be decided in full and frank discussion and collaboration with councils.

Local communities particularly have been sidelined by the current operation of the EPA which ostensibly entails consultation but often ignores responses which are unfavourable to projects.

The Greens firmly believe that councils and local communities, working in collaboration, are best placed to make decisions about the sustainable development of their communities.

b Repeal Part 3A and similar provisions such as the Major Projects SEPP, and in close consultation with Local Government devise and implement a genuine test for matters of state significance.

The repeal of Part 3A has been a commitment of the Greens since it was first introduced, over Greens opposition, in 2005.

Part 3A is widely and correctly viewed as corrupt and corrupting of the planning process because it allows for ad hoc, discretionary, and unaccountable decision making, and contains no clearly defined environmental, social, economic or health outcomes.

We will continue to pressure any new government to repeal these provisions.

However not only must Part 3A be repealed, there must also be clear articulation of what any party proposes to replace it with. Clearly there will always be some projects of genuine state significance, which should be determined at a State level. This includes major infrastructure and other very large developments that have more than a local impact.

The Greens are on record of supporting an Independent State Planning Commission, whose membership is ratified by a 75% majority vote of each house of parliament to ensure state planning matters are decided by a genuinely non-partisan planning body.

In addition any future state significant planning assessment must be performed in accordance with all the local, regional and state planning laws that apply to other developments in the area. This is not presently the case with Part 3A and has led to perverse incentives for developers to over develop land in order to have their project assessed under the more lax Part 3A provisions.

c Abolish Joint Regional Planning Panels (JRPPs).

The Greens have a clear policy to abolish the State appointed Joint Regional Planning Panels and return their decision-making power to local government.

d Revise the Affordable Rental Housing SEPP to include additional assessment provisions relating to consultation, council involvement, access to public transport, residential character, density, site suitability, accessibility and payment of appropriate development contributions.

Clearly there is an urgent need for affordable housing to be constructed in NSW and the Greens support specific planning rules that facilitate such development. However the current SEPP does not achieve the right balance between encouraging affordable housing and community consultation.

The Greens agree that provisions need to be enacted which will improve consultation, consideration of public transport access and so on relating to affordable rental housing.

The Greens remain committed to State-wide planning provisions being put in place through amendments to the Act or by disallowable Regulation and not by unreviewable SEPPs.

e Treat Local Government as a partner in future reviews of the Metropolitan Plan for Sydney (2036), Regional Strategies and the State Plan.

The Greens believe that the best way to plan for the future of NSW is by genuine consultation between local and state government on relevant legislation and programs. This would further include the production of a local government impact statement to allow for well informed consultation.

In terms of any review of the Metropolitan Plan, the Greens are committed to seeing local government a partner in this review. Unfortunately the current plan was undertaken with only token consultation with Local Government and as such certain of the targets are unachievable in local communities.

3. Stronger support for communities

To provide stronger support to communities, the LGSA request the incoming NSW Government:

a Guarantee continuing Local Government management of Home and Community Care (for those councils presently involved) in the transfer of control from the NSW Government to the Australian Government. A guarantee of improved local service levels in all areas is also sought.

The Greens support the retention and improvement of Home and Community Care by local councils who are often best placed to respond to the need for this in their communities.

b Provide a \$20 million enhancement to NSW recurrent funding for those councils presently involved in prevention and early intervention services for children.

The Greens believe that local government is uniquely situated to provide services to the local community given their understanding of the unique circumstances of each Local Government Area. Modest spending on early intervention services for children provide enormous benefits in children's later life and significant ongoing costs savings to local governments.

While the Greens cannot specifically commit to the \$20 million requested without more specific details on how and where it would be allocated, the Greens do support significant increases in funding in this area and will work with local government to achieve that.

c Increase funding for public libraries by \$5.2 million each year for five years to reach a new recurrent target of \$51.5 million per year by 2015/16.

Providing library services is one of the core responsibilities of Local Government. The Greens support a call for the State Government to properly fund the upgrading of Libraries to provide the whole state with lively, vibrant and well-resourced places that not only service the community but enrich it.

Libraries are now far more diversified in the services they deliver. An increase in funding is required to recognise this.

A significant increase in funding is required for this, particularly focusing on rural and regional areas where libraries face particular challenges.

d Create a Local Government arts and cultural development fund, with a key objective being to improve arts infrastructure outside the Sydney CBD.

The Greens uphold the right of all Australians to ready access to the arts, both as audience and as participants. Age, financial, physical or cultural differences or difficulties or geography should not stop any Australian from engaging in, or enjoying, the arts.

The Greens support making community development and community access essential parts of all government-funded arts, cultural and educational institutions.

One possible method of improving Arts infrastructure outside of the Sydney CBD is in the form of a local government fund.

A specific commitment the Greens have made for Arts in Western Sydney is to support the retention of the Old Kings School Site on the banks of the Parramatta River in public hands and for it to be used as a Western Sydney Arts hub.

e Scale down the size of the Central West and Murrumbidgee Local Health Networks and give local councils a seat on the governing councils of all country Local Health Networks.

The Greens support the inclusion of local clinicians, nurses and allied health workers on the governing councils of the local health networks as well as the increased presence of patient and community representatives. Local council representatives are among those that this could include.

f Provide a \$10 million increase to NSW recurrent funding for those councils presently involved in preventative health initiatives.

Preventative health programs can result in significant overall savings with minimum initial expenditure in many cases.

The Greens in principle support providing funding to those councils who engage in preventative health initiatives where these councils meet certain established criteria.

g Work in collaboration with Local Government to ensure the Australian Government carries out proper socioeconomic analysis in developing the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, and provides early, well-targeted mitigation and transition measures to help communities adapt to the final Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

The Greens support these goals in the development and management of the Murray Darling Basin plan. Clearly this must ensure the environmental sustainability of the river system as without a healthy and sustainable river system there will be no viable future for the communities and economies that depend upon it.

h Strengthen programs to support population growth and economic development in regional and rural NSW (including programs such as, or similar to, Evocities and PORTS).

The Greens recognise that the potential environmental, economic and affordability benefits of increased population density can only be achieved where urban consolidation is accompanied by:

- a. restrictions on the loss of ecological values and farmland caused by urban growth
- b. improved access to infrastructure, especially public transport infrastructure, in Sydney and throughout regional NSW
- c. high quality public open space;
- d. reduced housing prices;
- e. environmental benefits such as improved air quality and lower resource use;

A full copy of our regional development policy can be found at www.nsw.greens.org.au

i Set new requirements for Government strategic planning to address social justice or social inclusion.

This must be done.

j Introduce new restrictions on the sale of alcohol at pubs and clubs across NSW as proposed in the *Last Drinks* campaign.

The Greens believe that evidence based policy and programs are required to reduce the toll of violence, adverse health impacts and neighbourhood disruption associated with excessive alcohol consumption.

The Greens support enforcement against pubs and clubs which do not fulfill their legal obligation to not serve alcohol to intoxicated persons.

Also important is the development and funding of appropriate transportation options which allow patrons of licensed venues to return home without having to wait around for extended periods in public spaces.

The Greens also support reviewable planning consents for licensed venues to allow for ongoing monitoring of DA conditions for licensed premises.

k Give due consideration to the five issues for future NSW Government action to reduce the impact of cancer on all NSW communities (as outlined in the Cancer Council of NSW “Saving Life” Campaign).

The Greens support consideration of each of the five issues proposed by the Cancer Council of NSW in their Saving Life Campaign.

In particular the Greens recognise that local councils often lead the way in regulating for smoke-free dining and drinking and should be supported in this when required.

We will gladly work with local councils to achieve these goals.

l Provide additional recurrent funding to NGOs offering mental health services in rural areas.

Significant additional funding is required across NSW to deal with mental health issues. Currently mental health problems account for approximately 12% of all health conditions suffered by NSW residents but accounts for only 6% of the public health expenditure. This disjunct must be remedied over time.

NGOs play a particularly important role in rural and regional areas in helping communities and individuals deal with mental health problems.

However additional funding of the public health system to deal with mental health service deficiencies across the state is also needed.

m Work in collaboration with Local Government to ensure the Australian Government provides more funding for residential aged care and for ageing in regional and rural NSW.

The Greens support increased collaboration between all levels of government on all shared responsibilities. Given the complexities of residential age care this is one area where this should particularly be employed.

n Reform NSW Police recruitment, transfer and sick leave policies to ensure all regional, rural and remote stations are always staffed at authorised operational levels.

The Greens support ensuring adequate staffing of police stations in regional, rural and remote communities. Operational staffing at appropriate levels in these areas will be best assured by allowing policies to be adjusted to ensure that police who work in these areas are not disadvantaged.

4. Greater natural environment protection

To provide greater natural environmental protection, the LGSA request the incoming NSW Government:

a Fully hypothecate the waste levy so councils can use alternative waste technologies, joint ventures and education to reduce the waste stream.

The Greens support this and other programs that seek to reduce overall waste and promote technologies which are more environmentally, socially and financially beneficial.

b Endorse the *NSW Climate Change Action Plan* and provide resources to councils to address the significant environmental, economic and social impacts of climate change.

The Greens support the intention of the NSW Climate Change Action Plan however believe that a greater emphasis on renewable energy is required and far more effort required to end NSW's reliance on coal fired power.

c Increase funding allocated to weed management to \$20 million and commit to an ongoing role of Local Government in weed management.

The Greens support the involvement of local government in the management of weeds and the provision of appropriate funding for local government to fulfill its role.

The Greens will also support funding for community education programs on the significance of the State's biological diversity and the threats it faces particularly in relation to noxious plants, feral animals, agrochemicals and pesticides.

While the Greens cannot specifically commit to the \$20 million requested without more specific details on how and where it would be allocated, the Greens do support significant increases in funding in this area and will work with local government to achieve that.

d Fund a "City and Country 2" Environment Restoration Program, including a significant funding allocation to Local Government.

The Greens support funding programs which are intended to assist councils to develop sustainability policies and programs. This includes the City and Country program and a further iteration of it.

e Review the NSW Building Sustainability Index (BASIX) to establish whether it is meeting its goals, where improvements can be made (including whether it can be extended to commercial premises) and whether it can be converted to a minimum rather than maximum standard.

The Greens support a review of BASIX to determine its effectiveness in reducing energy use. The Greens believe that BASIX should be applied to all building forms – particularly apartment blocks, high rise developments and 'mobile' homes in residential parks.

The Greens also propose that BASIX be reformed to increase environmental standards and allow individual local governments to develop planning controls that exceed BASIX minimums.

f Support the continuation of Catchment Management Authorities, reviewing their role with the aim of improving their autonomy and enhancing their funding.

Catchment Management Authorities must be retained and indeed given greater powers in terms in assessing impacts of large developments in catchment areas including mining and coal seam gas exploration.

5. Enhanced infrastructure provision and maintenance

To enhance local infrastructure provision, and maintenance, the LGSA request the incoming NSW Government to:

a Create a \$1 billion Local Government Infrastructure Fund.

The Greens support funding for improved access to infrastructure, especially public transport infrastructure, in Sydney and throughout regional NSW.

After years of cost shifting and rate pegging Local Government needs access to a stable funding source to enable the repair of rapidly aging infrastructure and the creation of new infrastructure as required.

The Greens are not in a position to commit to a stand alone \$1 billion fund for local government infrastructure.

In large part the removal of rate pegging should enable Councils across most of NSW to obtain financial sustainability including ensuring infrastructure backlogs can be addressed.

b Quarantine town water supplies from the application of sustainable water diversion limits set by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority.

The Greens recognise that town water represents a tiny fraction of water use in the Murray darling basin and must be secured before commercial uses of water are considered. Indeed there is a strong case for ensuring town water is the first priority in determining the SDL for any river system.

c Ensure Local Government retains ownership and control of council owned and operated local water and sewerage utilities in regional NSW.

The Greens oppose the privatisation of public utilities, services and other essential infrastructure. Public ownership protects the public interest, especially in natural monopolies such as water and sewerage systems.

d Continue to provide capital funding for council owned and operated local water and sewerage utilities in regional NSW, including a remote communities water and sewerage program. Also commit to funding new infrastructure necessary as a result of impacts of climate change on water supplies.

The Greens support the continuing provision of capital funding to councils for the operation of public utilities. The Greens support forward planning to accommodate the effects of climate change, and more importantly, forward planning to minimise the impacts of climate change by reducing carbon emissions.

e Continue the Aboriginal Communities Water and Sewerage Program and widen the program by adding adequate funding for capital works required to upgrade water supply and sewerage systems in Aboriginal communities.

The Greens support the continuation and expansion of this program.

f Work with Local Government to develop long term solutions for funding community infrastructure requirements in both greenfield and infill areas.

The Greens support collaborative approaches between State and local governments as well as communities to determine appropriate development strategies and solutions. The current approach of partial recovery under s94 and s94A is unworkable for local communities.

g Improve road funding assistance to Local Government, with special emphasis on regional roads and timber bridges

The Greens support providing funding allocations to local government for work on regional roads to maintain the safety of the local community. However we believe that there is a more urgent need to invest in public transport across NSW, particularly in regional and rural areas. Significant funding for public transport will also alleviate some pressure on the roads and limited road funding.

The Greens recognise the historical importance of timber bridges in regional NSW and also acknowledge that the costs of maintaining these important parts of our history must be borne by both State and local governments.

6. Better local governance

To provide better local governance, the LGSA request the incoming NSW Government:

Further develop and implement the NSW and Local Government Intergovernmental Agreement

a to establish a mechanism that will determine which sphere of government should deliver a particular service in a given scenario. Also ensure that the sphere of government which is given the responsibility is also given corresponding adequate funding or revenue raising capacity.

The Greens support the rational allocation of services to the appropriate level of government. It is difficult to conceive of a foolproof mechanism to do this other than a return to political common sense. Of course if there is a shift in terms of which level of government will provide a service, it must also come with adequate funding to deliver it. Local government knows only too well that this has not been the case in the past.

b Support the national Local Government campaign to recognise Local Government in the Australian Constitution, to ensure the Australian Government can directly fund Local Government nationwide.

The Greens support recognition of Local Government in the Australian Constitution.

c Create the option for councils to run their elections locally, with an independent returning officer, to save money and restore local confidence.

Subject to stringent probity checks the Greens support allowing local councils to run local council elections locally. To ensure independence this would continue to be under the overall direction of the NSWEC, while allowing councils to use their local knowledge to get the best value and best located polling booths and such like.

d Set up an Intergovernmental Commission for Future Local Government involving representatives from all levels of Government, the LGSA and independents. The aim of the Commission would be to guide a comprehensive program to strengthen Local Government for the coming term and future 40 years, as outlined in the outcomes of LGSA' *Modernising Local Government Initiative*.

The Greens support ongoing intergovernmental structures to set the best path for local government into the future.

e Provide legislation or Premier's directive for NSW Government agencies to incorporate local Community Strategic Plans in state planning processes.

The Greens support a clear direction being given to State government agencies and departments to consider the impact of their strategic decisions on local government.

f Provide funding for a significant long-term mentoring program aimed at improving the diversity of councilors (\$600,000 per year for eight years).

The Greens support measures to encourage and mentor councilors to encourage more diverse representation on local governments.

g Remove the concept of a 'body politic' from the *Local Government Act (NSW) 1993*.

There needs to be ongoing review of the legal status of councils. The Greens recognise that the decision to make councils "body politics" rather than corporations was to avoid the negative consequences of John Howard's WorkChoices legislation. Efforts to clarify the legal status of local councils while retaining them in the NSW Industrial relations system would be supported by the Greens.

Tony Hickey

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