

KEY MESSAGE RESPONSES TO THE LGSA POLICY PLATFORM FOR MARCH 2007 STATE ELECTION

Autonomy and Inter-Governmental Relations: Local Government's role as a level of government, and the need for State and Local Government to work together to get better outcomes, should be clearly recognised. To achieve this outcome it is recommended that the State Government:

- Enter into an Inter-Governmental Agreement with Local Government.

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition has entered into an agreement with the LGSA to enter into an inter-governmental agreement on coming into government.

- Agree that local government areas need to be diverse and autonomous to meet the needs and wants of local communities and that councils should only be amalgamated by agreement.

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition agree that councils are autonomous, need to be autonomous and would continue to be autonomous under a NSW Coalition Government and that any amalgamation would only be by agreement between state and local governments.

- Conduct a review of red tape, which currently impacts on local government and reduces its capacity to provide services to local communities.

A NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition Government would work cooperatively with local government to reduce red tape in all areas which in turn would reduce cost to local government and improve services. Furthermore, the NSW Coalition is committed to cutting 'green tape'.

As part of making the development application process more flexible and beneficial to both councils and ratepayers, a NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition will commit to assisting local councils in cutting green and red tape that constrains their actions.

We plan to achieve this by examining ways of reducing green and red tape to allow councils to get on with their core business functions and to provide better services to their communities through streamlined administrative processes.

- Ensure that state, agency and local government plans driving policy setting, budgeting and program delivery complement and/or reflect one another to ensure that state and local government priorities are integrated and that services are provided as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition's Shadow Minister for Local Government has articulated to the LGSA at various conferences and meetings that the

NSW Coalition is committed to working partnership with local government and that partnership would include working in the manner set out in this subheading.

- Rule out additional red tape that would increase council costs by forcing council certifiers to get individual accreditation by the Building Professionals Board.

Council certifiers who are otherwise qualified should not have to go through a further registration when carrying out council work. This is on the basis that they are covered by councils' legal insurance.

- Cut red tape which currently requires landowners to get dual consent by Catchment Management Authorities and councils for native vegetation clearing works. Review the native vegetation regulations to address present difficulties facing Local Government in co-ordinating native vegetation management with the full range of its legislative responsibilities.

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition recognises the difficulties many landowners and councils are experiencing because of the current unworkable native vegetation regulations. We will make the regulations simpler and fairer to protect the environment while allowing farmers to work their land and reduce red tape.

- Guarantee timely and sensitive resolution of issues associated with the review of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983.

In government, the NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition will continue to conduct genuine and extensive community consultation in relation to the Aboriginal Land Rights Act to ensure appropriate outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Community well being: Local communities require a sense of identity, and 'community' facilities, services and activities to promote their physical and social health, welfare and wellbeing. To achieve this outcome it is recommended that the State Government:

- Secure the ongoing health of rural and remote communities, by collaborating with the Australian Government to deliver joint incentives to general practitioners and the health services that support them.

The NSW Coalition has developed several initiatives to give rural and regional communities the health services they deserve.

The NSW Coalition has developed an Action Plan to breathe life back into country NSW health care and increase the number of country doctors and other health professionals in regional areas.

We will reverse more than 12 years of under investment and neglect from the NSW Labor Government and invest \$53 million on a range of initiatives to get more doctors into regional and rural NSW.

The NSW Coalition's Action Plan includes initiatives to:

1. Attract more rural doctors by improving their conditions and opportunities.
2. Provide more training opportunities for rural doctors.
3. Increase local decision-making by rural doctors in relation to local health and hospital services.
4. Establish a new Rural Health Directorate to co-ordinate rural and regional health strategies.
5. Ensure country NSW gets its fair share.

For greater detail on the policy please visit Peter Debnam's website at www.peterdebnam.com.au.

In addition to the NSW Coalition's **Bringing Country Doctors Back** policy, we have committed to:

- **Improve the Isolated Patient Transport and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS) – *Supporting Country Patients*;**

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition will provide country patients with the choice of specialists that their city counterparts enjoy and will assist them with the financial burden of travel to and from specialist medical care.

The NSW Coalition's IPTAAS program will:

1. Provide patients with a choice of specialists and treatment centres to which they may be referred without jeopardising their eligibility for financial assistance for travel and accommodation.
2. Support the National Rural Health Alliance's call for a national review of various patients' travel and accommodation schemes throughout Australia.
3. Review anomalies between IPTAAS and the Home and Community Care (HACC) Community Transport Sub-Program.
4. Involve patients and rural health advocacy groups in a further overhaul of NSW IPTAAS.

The NSW Coalition will ensure new money is committed to the IPTAAS policy, including an additional \$4 million over four years.

- **Supporting Country Mothers – *Improving Maternity Services in Regional NSW.***

In government, we will allocate \$30 million in new funding for a range of initiatives to reverse Labor’s neglect of country maternity services, and give expectant parents better access and more choice.

- We will maintain existing obstetric units and surgical/anaesthetic services.
- We will re-open maternity units in smaller country hospitals, where qualified doctors and nurses can be recruited.
- Enhance funding for prevention/early intervention services such as community and youth work, neighbourhood centres and family support (including the funding of salary increases).

The NSW Coalition strongly believes that prevention/early intervention is the best way to spend scarce resources and that adequate expenditure will bring about savings in the long term. The NSW Coalition is committed to enhancing its relationship with non-government organisations (NGOs) as well as entities such as councils in the area of community and youth work, neighbourhood centres and family support. It sees these organisations as possessing the necessary skills to provide much of the service needs for children, adolescents and adults in need of community services.

Furthermore, a NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition Government would invest \$35 million in the future of young people through an expansion of Police and Community Youth Clubs (PCYC) across NSW.

To support PCYCs in their fantastic work, a NSW Liberal/Nationals Government will provide an additional \$35 million over four years to:

- **Establish two new PCYCs per year** through joint venture programs with local councils, contributing up to \$1 million in capital funding and 2 additional PCYC Police Officers for each new PCYC (\$8 million over four years);
- **Provide an additional 20 Police Officers** to the Police Youth Clubs and CSG Police Command (\$8 million over four years);
- **Provide \$3.5m per year to fund civilian managers for all NSW PCYCs**, allowing Police Officers to focus on working directly with our ‘at risk’ youth rather than filling in paperwork (\$14 million over four years);
- **Establish the PCYC Institute** to deliver educationally-based, employment-focused programs for up to 100 ‘at risk’ youth giving them the opportunity to establish a career in the fitness and recreation industries, at a total cost of \$250,000 per year (\$1 million over four years);
- Have suitably **qualified Highway Patrol Officers assist PCYCs with driver safety** and awareness training;

- Provide a **capital grant of \$4 million towards a new South Sydney PCYC** as part of the Indigenous Land Corporation re-development of the former Redfern Public School site, with the funds to be recovered from the eventual sale of the existing PCYC Redfern site; and
- Establish a **working party between PCYC and NSW Police to determine the future relocation of the Parramatta PCYC.**
- Promote healthy and fit communities by supporting the establishment of contemporary sport and recreation facilities which reflect changing social and cultural trends.

The NSW Coalition believes more needs to be done to promote good health, to prevent illness and enhance well being and quality of life.

Increased levels of sporting participation, physical activity and general improved fitness levels within the community provide enormous preventative health benefits.

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition will introduce the following measures to increase fitness levels and improve the long-term health of the community:

A New Fitness Promotion Campaign

We will allocate \$6 million to develop a new fitness promotion campaign based on the hugely popular and highly successful “Life. Be in it.” campaign.

The campaign will encourage greater participation in community sporting activities with a focus on motivating young people to get involved.

The Premier’s Fitness Challenge in Primary Schools

As part of the fitness promotion campaign we will target primary schools with a new Premier’s Fitness Challenge, to encourage greater levels of physical activity among young people.

More Support for Sporting Clubs

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition will allocate \$10 million for a new Sporting Clubs Small Grants Program to assist sporting clubs to protect their existing membership base and attract new members.

Better Playing Fields

The drought and related water restrictions have resulted in the closure of many playing fields because they are unsafe for use.

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition will allocate \$40 million to upgrade playing fields across NSW, including:

- \$10 million to be allocated for grants to install lighting or carry out other upgrades at local playing fields across NSW.

- \$30 million for grants to install rainwater or stormwater harvesting equipment to enable watering of local playing fields across NSW, including the installation of rainwater tanks and irrigation equipment.

Cycleways

In government, the NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition will invest in cycling and strongly promote it as a viable active transport option for NSW by providing new and innovative infrastructure, incentives and institutions.

We recognise cycling as a viable active transport option for NSW that delivers a wide range of benefits to our society, including:

- More sustainable infrastructure usage and less overall traffic congestion;
- Improved urban amenity – more “liveable” communities;
- Improved personal and community fitness and health through active lifestyle;
- Reduced impacts on the environment, including negligible air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions; and
- Improved regional economic development through tourism.

On 19 February 2007 the NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition announced support for the Greenway project in Sydney’s Inner West, including a \$300,000 commitment to deliver a key part of the Greenway vision - the Parramatta Road underpass.

A completed Greenway will be the key cycleway between the southern and northern parts of the Inner West along the Hawthorne Canal and beyond. The poor state of the current underpass makes it both difficult and unsafe to ride. By building a safe underpass, we will significantly increase ridership from the Inner West to the City and to the Cooks River Cycleway.

The greatest risk to cycling in NSW is no change of government. The only way to deliver positive change for cycling is to change the government.

Police and Community Youth Clubs

Furthermore, a NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition Government would invest \$35 million in the future of young people through an expansion of Police and Community Youth Clubs (PCYC) across NSW.

(See the breakdown of the NSW Coalition’s early intervention PCYC policy set out in response to the LGSA’s prevention/early intervention policy platform.)

In addition to the initiatives set out above, the NSW Coalition intends to boost the current Capital Assistance Program and Regional Facilities Program of the Department of Sport and Recreation, which already provide local governments with opportunities for facilities enhancement in their council areas.

- Encourage older people and people with disabilities to maintain independence and contribute to the community by enhancing the Home and Community Care Program.

Independence and community contribution is the optimum aim for all people living in our communities, particularly when ageing or with a disability. All services must be focussed on enabling independent living with provision of services when required. To allow a person to maintain their usual lifestyle will enhance happiness and promote better health. The Home and Community Care Program is integral in the provision of age and ability-appropriate services.

- Acknowledge the importance of public libraries to local communities and enhance funding to improve public library services.

The NSW Coalition will invest \$28 million over four years in public libraries. This represents an increase in funding of 20 per cent each year.

- Work in partnership with the Associations to help councils promote citizenship and cultural diversity through the implementation of cultural plans.

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition welcomes submissions from the Associations on measures to promote citizenship and cultural diversity in the community. The NSW Coalition has developed a plan to support all Australians, regardless of their background to have the opportunity to participate fully in our diverse society.

Commitment to Cultural Diversity

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition recognises that successive waves of migration from all parts of the globe have contributed to Australia's economic and social strength and stability.

This recognition resulted in the Greiner/Fahey Governments' groundbreaking policies in relation to ethnic communities.

The NSW Labor Party in both rhetoric and action has turned back the clock and watered down the NSW Government's commitment to cultural diversity.

Moreover the NSW Labor Party has handled the review of the Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Act 2000 inappropriately by failing to adequately consult relevant stakeholders.

A NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition Government will:

- Support the *Charter of Principles for a Culturally Diverse Society* adopted by the Fahey Government. These principles can be summarised as inclusiveness, awareness, accessibility and valuing multiculturalism.

- Ensure the mandatory review of the *Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Act 2000* is independent, transparent and allows for adequate community consultation.
- Work with the Federal Government to promote the rights and responsibilities that come with Australian Citizenship.
- Ensure consideration of diversity in relation to State Government appointments to Boards and other statutory bodies.

Supporting Culturally Diverse Youth

We recognise that youth from culturally diverse backgrounds face many challenges, and need additional assistance.

The NSW Coalition recognises the benefits that community involvement and education have in ensuring youth from all cultural and religious backgrounds have the opportunity to reach their full potential and to make a positive contribution to society.

A NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition Government will:

- Expand the *Circuit Breaker Program* (Later called the Tafe program), which was introduced by the former NSW Coalition Government to assist 15-24 year olds from culturally diverse backgrounds who risk being alienated from education, training and employment.

Rural and Regional Issues

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition recognises the specific opportunities and challenges faced by people in rural and regional NSW of culturally diverse backgrounds.

It is shameful that the NSW Labor Party has failed to ensure that the Regional Advisory Councils established under Section 10 of the *Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Act 2000* have actually met or reported any findings.

A NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition Government will:

- Ensure that the Regional Advisory Councils established under section 10 of the *Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multicultural Act 2000* actually meet on a consistent basis and report their findings.

Community Funding

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition recognises the important role played by the Ethnic Communities Council and regrets that since 1995 the Labor Government has slashed funding from \$240,000 to around \$70,000 in 2005/06 with no firm commitments about any funding moving forward.

A NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition Government will:

- Guarantee \$150,000 per annum of direct funding to the Ethnic Communities Council.
- Review the Communities Relations Commission Grants Program with a view to assisting community organisations providing critical services to people of a diverse cultural background, including support for Community Language Schools.
- Promote diverse and vibrant communities by establishing a cultural infrastructure investment pilot (including Commonwealth and private sector funding).

Please see response above.

- Roll out the successful Healthy Local Government Grants Program to promote the health of local communities, prevent chronic diseases including obesity, diabetes and skin cancer and contribute to community safety and injury prevention.

In government, the NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition will ensure a greater emphasis on the delivery of health services in rural NSW with a \$1 million commitment to establish a Rural Health Directorate.

This new Rural Health Directorate will:

- Coordinate rural and regional health strategies.
- Work with District Health Boards to develop practical solutions to local issues.
- Develop a plan to improve access to regional health care.

In addition to the Rural Health Directorate, the NSW Coalition has announced statewide initiatives to tackle diseases such as obesity and cancers:

- We have developed a **\$77 million** package of initiatives to encourage healthy eating and a greater level of activity within the community. We believe these preventative health measures will have a significant medium to long-term impact upon the general wellbeing of the community.
- We have developed a **\$60 million Cancer Action Plan**, which includes \$20 million to be provided to the Cancer Institute in addition to current funding to reduce the incidence of all cancers.
- Make a Local Government health protection regulation more efficient and cost-effective by rolling out the process for the Food Regulation Blueprint to other health protection roles.

The NSW Food Preparation Partnership's "NSW Food Preparation Partnership – A Blueprint" prepared in October 2005 made 27 recommendations for a model for a food regulation partnership between state and local governments.

The NSW Coalition will review the recommendations as set out in the Blueprint and we welcome further consultation with the Associations on this matter.

Environmental Well-being: Local and state government play a pivotal role in the improvement and maintenance of environmental quality and sustainability. The management of natural resources, waste management and resource recovery, air and water quality monitoring/ improvement and environmental regulation are all activities which are better achieved through well planned and resourced cooperative programs.

To assist in achieving this outcome it is recommended that the State Government commit to:

- Waste levy funded waste reduction programs.

In 1999, the NSW Labor Government promised the hypothecate 55 per cent of the waste levy to waste avoidance, reduction and reuse programs. However, in 2003 and 2004 the entire levy went into consolidated revenue. In 2005 the Labor Government abolished the Waste Fund altogether, at the same time raising the size of the waste levy very significantly.

The NSW Labor Government has replaced the single purpose Waste Fund with a grab bag of environmental program under the City and Country Environment Restoration program. These include setting waste reduction targets for councils and providing financial incentives for those that meet or exceed them. This was NSW Coalition policy, announced at the Waste Management Conference in July 2005, so we support this plan – except that we doubt the Labor Government's commitment to implementing it. The Government will rake in \$1.3 billion from the waste levy fund over five years – two thirds of this will go into consolidated revenue.

A NSW Coalition Government will establish a four year Recycling Infrastructure and Markets Support program, to be know as RIMS, modelled on the very successful Infrastructure Grants run by Ecorecycle Victoria, now incorporated into Sustainability Victoria's Sustainability Fund. Grants will be available from this program for council as well as industry, and will support both alternative waste technology and industry projects. We also want to assist groups of councils to set up drop-off centres to better manage difficult wastes such as computers, televisions, batteries, paint and household chemicals.

- A significant increase in weeds funding, currently in the order of \$7M.

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition will provide an additional \$15 million over four years to noxious weeds control grants and other subsidies. Furthermore, we will reduce the red tape for the applications of noxious weed control grants which we are told can take up to 30 per cent of the final grant received.

- [Introducing legislation for deposits on beverage containers if the national packaging covenant fails to deliver on its targets by its mid-term review in 2008.](#)

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition does not support CDL, as we believe it will undermine the economics of kerbside recycling. The LGSA may estimate that the cost to the state government would be negligible but the cost to consumers and to the beverage industry would be very substantial. A 24 – pack of soft drinks, for example, would go up in price by \$2.40 at the checkout with a 10c deposit.

[State and local governments also share a common responsibility to ensure that the NSW community has access to safe and reliable water supplies. To assist in achieving this outcome it is recommended that the State Government:](#)

- [Undertake ongoing, comprehensive consultation on the Metropolitan Water Plan.](#)

The NSW Coalition agrees that there must be ongoing and extensive consultation on the proposals set out in the Metropolitan Water Plan and that further development of the Plan should reflect these consultations.

- [Match dollar for dollar Commonwealth and Local Government funding of programs to prevent water loss by non-metropolitan water authorities.](#)

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition is committed to making sure that country NSW gets its fair share. In government we will deliver a comprehensive Water Plan to drought proof country NSW. This includes:

- A recycling target of 50% for country NSW by 2015;
- A commitment to clear the CTWSS backlog plus an additional \$100 million to fast track recycling projects;
- \$100 million to enhance existing dams and investigate new dam sites;
- Introducing a rainwater tank rebate of \$1,500 for tanks that are plumbed to toilets and washing machines; and
- Regional Water Grids to better facilitate the sharing of water resources.

We also believe the long-term solution to our water crisis needs to be built on proper planning and community consultation.

In government we will host a three-day Country NSW Water Summit in the NSW Legislative Assembly. The outcome of this summit will be a 50 Year Country Water Plan that provides a long-term vision to guide NSW for the next half century and beyond.

- Assist water conservation and demand management in rural and regional areas by providing regional councils with information on education and awareness strategies.

Water conservation and management is the defining challenge of our time. A clear plan for securing the state's water supply is essential to the future prosperity of our economy and maintaining our quality of life.

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition has a comprehensive, multi-faceted plan to address the water crisis and drought proof NSW. After 12 years of inaction under the NSW Labor Government, dramatic action is needed to address the water crisis. We will **declare a state of emergency on water** to cut through the bureaucracy and free up funding for much-needed water infrastructure.

We have announced a \$1 billion **Drought Proofing NSW Infrastructure Fund**, which would be partially funded by the sale of NSW Lotteries¹.

The **NSW Coalition's Drought Proofing NSW Fund** will provide funding for projects across NSW including:

- large scale recycling;
- stormwater harvesting;
- dam enhancement; and
- regional water plans, including repairing ageing infrastructure, pipelines and dam enhancements to create regional water grids.

Specifically, these projects include:

Large Scale Recycling

Recycled Water to Secure Sydney's Water Future

A NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition Government will guarantee Sydney's future environmental, industrial and drinking water supplies through the construction of a \$949 million world's best quality purified water recycling system for Sydney.

This infrastructure will produce almost twice as much drinking water for Sydney at half the cost of NSW Labor's \$1.9 billion desalination plant.

Our water recycling plan for Sydney involves the construction of a world-class membrane and reverse osmosis water recycling system, which will produce new, safe, clean, high quality purified drinking water. The NSW Coalition's first priority is to replace drinking-quality water currently being used by industrial, agricultural and environmental purposes with this purified recycled water.

¹ Debnam, Peter MP, 'Drought Proofing NSW Infrastructure Fund to be part funded by sale of NSW Lotteries', *Media Release*, 11 December 2007.

In the event that dam levels fall to below 20 per cent, we will have the option to 'flick the switch' on the water recycling system to blend the purified recycled water at low dilution via Prospect Reservoir to supplement Sydney's drinking supply.

Part of the NSW Coalition's plan to secure the state's water future includes a commitment to spend \$6.7 million to support and encourage education and research into water management including the creation of a **Centre of Water Technology Excellence**.

Recycling Sydney's Ocean Outfalls

We will implement large scale recycling of the water currently being pumped through Sydney's ocean outfalls and use the water for industrial and agricultural use, as well as for environmental flows. We will recycle the output of at least one of Sydney's three, main ocean outfalls in our first term of Government.

The NSW Coalition's recycled water system will also reduce the volume of water being discharged through Sydney's ocean outfalls by up to 66 million litres.

Securing Water for the Future – The Country Towns Water Supply and Sewerage Program (CTWSS Program)²

The NSW Coalition will clear the backlog of water supply and sewerage service projects of local communities within the first two terms of government, and fund new projects.

We will:

- Commit **\$100 million a year** to the CTWSS budget; and
- Make the CTWSS priority list publicly available and transparent.

Stormwater Harvesting

Rainwater Tanks Rebate – *Use It. Don't Lose It.*

The NSW Coalition will increase and expand rainwater tank rebates to encourage the installation of more rainwater tanks in NSW. The increase and restructuring of the Sydney Water rebate will provide an incentive for people to plumb rainwater tanks to their toilets and/or washing machines.

A \$1500 Rainwater Tank rebate will be provided for all households who purchase a rainwater tank with a capacity of 2,000 litres or greater and plumb it to their toilet and/or washing machine

² NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition (2006), 'Securing Water for the Future- The Country Towns Water Supply and Sewerage Program', *Policy Document*, 17 August 2006.

Regional Water Plans

In Government, the NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition will deliver a comprehensive Regional Water Plan which includes:

- Holding a three-day Country Water Summit in the NSW Legislative Assembly;
- A recycling target of 50 per cent for country NSW by 2015;
- In addition to the \$100 million per year commitment to clear the backlog of projects on the CTWSS, and additional \$12.5 million a year to fast track recycling projects;
- \$120 million over 6 years to enhance existing dams and investigate new dam sites;
- Introducing a rainwater tank rebate of \$1500 for tanks that are plumbed to toilets and/or washing machines; and
- Major new pipelines and regional water grids.

Specifically, these regional water plans include plan to:

Drought Proof the Central Coast – Our Central Coast Water Plan

In addition to the Tillegra Dam, the NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition will deliver a comprehensive \$132 million central Coast Water Plan to drought-proof the Central Coast within three years.

Southern Tablelands Water Plan – A Strong and Clear Plan for Goulburn and the Region

As one of the areas worst affected by the water crisis in NSW, the NSW Coalition will commit \$109 million to a regional water plan for Goulburn and the Southern Tablelands. This plan includes a \$60 million commitment towards the completion of a **Queanbeyan/Southern Tablelands Regional Water Grid** through the construction of a pipeline to connect the City of Goulburn to the Googong Dam via Queanbeyan.

Drought Proofing the North West

We will drought proof the North West with an Action Plan to secure water supplies for Tamworth, Gunnedah and the surrounding towns.

Drought Proofing Queanbeyan and Monaro

The NSW Coalition will secure the water supply for Queanbeyan and Monaro with a \$70 million action plan. Key initiatives of the plan include an upgrade of Braidwood's Sewage Treatment Plant and a major recycling plant at Bungendore.

Drought Proofing Broken Hill

The NSW Coalition will drought proof Broken Hill through upgrades to the Menindee Lakes.³ This strategy will include the construction of a new 9,000-megalitre/day regulator from Lake Menindee into Menindee Creek and the Darling River.

Financial Sustainability: The financial sustainability of Local Government is essential to ensuring that the living standard of the people of NSW are maintained and enhanced. Making Local government financially sustainable requires a combination of fiscal measures, including increased borrowings, rate deregulation, increase State and Commonwealth grants, greater application of user pays and increased operating efficiencies.

To assist in achieving the financial sustainability of Local Government it is recommended that the State Government:

- Abandon or relax rate pegging to enable councils, in consultation with their communities, to set sufficient rates to address infrastructure backlogs and maintain and enhance core services.

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition will not commit to the abandonment of rate pegging at this time but will conduct a comprehensive, transparent review of rate pegging and rates legislation with consultation with stakeholders. This will be in tandem with the removal of rate pegging decision making from the Minister to a Board of IPART.

Clearly, after 30 years, a review of rate pegging is warranted and indeed overdue and in particular NSW is the only state in Australia to still maintain rate pegging.

- Inter-Governmental Agreement with Local Government include negotiation mechanisms (similar to those in the IGA on Local Government Matters between the Australian and state governments) concerning legislation or programs involving cost shifting.

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Local Government and Shires Association of NSW that we will enter into an intergovernmental agreement on coming to government.

The key points of the MOU include:

- Signing the Inter-Governmental Agreement;
- No forced amalgamations;
- Review rate pegging to ensure fair arrangement at arm's length from the Minister;
- Integrated planning, budgeting and program delivery; and

³ Stoner, Andrew MP, 'Stoner and Williams unveil Menindee water saving strategy', *Media Release*, 6 February 2007.

- Review the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act to ensure it reflects land use planning and developmental assessments and is jointly managed by state and local government.
- Support pensioner rate concessions but remove Local Government cross-subsidies.

The NSW Coalition cannot commit to this policy platform at this time but is prepared to work co-operatively with local government to look at the inequities that presently exist in this scheme on coming to government.

The NSW Coalition has committed to supporting pensioners by abolishing Labor's unfair CountryLink Pensioner Booking Fee for pensioners to make country public transport more affordable.

- Commit to a comprehensive review of rate exemptions and concessions with the objective of ensuring that rates apply to all properties being used for residential and commercial purposes.

A NSW Coalition Government will, in conjunction with its undertaking to review rate pegging conduct a comprehensive review of rate exemptions and concessions that presently exist.

The NSW Coalition takes the view that where government agencies are using council resources for commercial undertakings, they should be subject to council rating.

- Remove the Fire Services Levy on councils and fund metropolitan and rural fire services by a broad based tax.

The NSW Coalition recognises that this is an ongoing issue for local governments and we remain committed to working in partnership with the Local Governments and Shires Associations to ensure their ongoing financial sustainability.

Infrastructure: Local and state government should serve the needs and priorities of the community within the agreed role of Local Government. Such infrastructure should be of a satisfactory standard by providing services in a relevant, functional, safe, reliable and cost efficient manner.

The recent inquiry into the financial sustainability of NSW Local government has clearly demonstrated that there is a major infrastructure deficiency with a renewals backlog of \$6.3 billion and an ongoing annual renewals gap of \$500 million. To achieve the desired outcome it is recommended that the State Government provide increased state grants for Local Government infrastructure. Specific examples include:

- Reinstatement of the Regional Roads Timber Bridges Program postponed in 2004 and adjusted in real terms.

In government the NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition will commit the resources needed to clear the backlog of timber bridges needing replacement. We will invest \$60 million over four years in the Country Timber Bridge Replacement Program.

The NSW Coalition will seek the assistance of the Associations to provide matching funding to allow us to clear the maintenance backlog within two terms of government.

The NSW Coalition will also provide local councils with the transparency and certainty they need to properly manage their forward budgets and deliver high quality, timely outcomes for their communities. Funding will be given directly to local councils, in the same way as *Roads to Recovery* under Auslink.

Within six months of being elected to government we will conduct an audit of all NSW timber bridges to identify the most immediate priorities based on both safety and economic criteria.

We will work closely with the Associations to administer the Country Timber Bridge Replacement Program and allocate the funding available for our first four year term.

- [Ensuring that rural and regional citizens have access to drinkable water and basic sewerage facilities by continuing the Country Towns Water Supply and Sewerage Program.](#)

A NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition Government will clear the backlog of Country Towns water Supply and Sewerage Program (CTWSS) projects within our first two terms of government and fund new projects.

We will:

- Commit \$100 million a year to the CTWSS budget; and
- Make the CTWSS priority list publicly available and transparent.

We understand that local governments need and deserve certainty of funding. Within six months of the election we will openly and transparently allocate funding for our first term of government.

- [Increasing existing Regional Road Block grants to ensure that State and regional roads transferred to Local Government under the road classification review are commensurately funded.](#)

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition will consider increasing Regional Road Block Grants in light of the completion of the current re-classification of NSW roads. Pending the outcome of this process, we will immediately begin reviewing current funding arrangements.

- [Restoration of the Local Government Bicycle Way Grants funding to 2004/05 levels.](#)

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition has developed a comprehensive plan to support and promote cycling in NSW.

Cycling Targets

- An increase in cycling usage up by 100 per cent by 2011, particularly by growing the number of regular cyclist commuters.
- A 10 per cent reduction in cycle-related accidents by 2011, particularly through the provision of improved infrastructure

Cycling Institutions

Some of the institutions to be developed and/or revitalised under the NSW Coalition's plan to support cycling include:

- Establishing the Cycling Unit in the Transport portfolio to promote the interests and benefits of cycling on a “whole of government” basis across agencies, and including local government.
- Reviewing and revitalising the Bicycle Advisory Council – linked to the Cycling Unit – as a key advisory and strategic group consisting of external experts and stakeholders.
- Encouraging and facilitating Local Government Area Bicycling Plans for councils in NSW.
- [Provide financial assistance for the sustainable supply and maintenance of water and sewerage schemes to all Aboriginal communities facing severe socio-economic disadvantages.](#)

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition has developed a series of regional water plans to secure water and water infrastructure for rural and regional NSW. Complementing the NSW Coalition's regional water plans, is our commitment to clear the backlog of water supply and sewerage service projects of local communities. Many of these projects will directly affect Aboriginal communities with projects such as the Tamworth Sewerage Augmentation Scheme and the Parkes Water Supply project to be addressed after being neglected for years under the Labor Government.

- [Commit to a State and Local Government Partnership to implement a State, regional and metropolitan planning strategy.](#)

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition has, on a number of occasions, made it clear it will formulate a working partnership with local government across NSW. The NSW Labor Government's attitude toward local government has been one of conflict.

Nowhere has this been more evident than during the development of the Sydney Metropolitan Strategy and supporting planning instruments. Section 3A of the EP&A Act, especially, is designed to circumvent local government at every stage of the planning approval process.

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition is determined to establish a clear framework for state government – local government relations including the development of criteria under which state significant projects are assessed.

The State Government must have a role in planning but it should be in a transparent form and relate to major State projects. The present system which allows Minister Sartor to be planning dictator is undemocratic and in the long term, unworkable.

- [Commit to the investment and maintenance of infrastructure to support the metropolitan and regional strategies and reflect population pressures resulting from changing demographics including the phenomena of 'sea change and tree change'.](#)

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition has long argued against residential development without infrastructure. The NSW Labor Government has been quick to develop regional strategies for areas around NSW that include increased residential development (increased population) without appropriate infrastructure.

The result has been an increasing number of areas around NSW where the level of infrastructure cannot even cope with current population levels, let alone increased population levels.

The Labor Liberal/Nationals Coalition has actively engaged with local government in areas around NSW to develop infrastructure targets for different regions.

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition will ensure planning strategy is accompanied by appropriate infrastructure strategies. The NSW Coalition is especially aware of the rapid growth in coastal areas and also the demand for rural lifestyle choices. These can only proceed effectively if accompanied by necessary infrastructure. NSW is paying a heavy price for 12 years of Labor's ignorance of this planning fundamental.

- [Develop and implement a freight infrastructure strategy that encourages greater use of ports such as Newcastle and Port Kembla as an alternative to the expansion of Botany Bay.](#)

The Labor Government's Ports Growth Plan was issued as a two-page press release in 2003. It was conceived after little or no consultation with industry or the many local government groups it would impact on.

Sydney requires greater ports capacity at Port Botany for the city to grow. However, the expansion has been pushed through without a proper integrated

planning strategy and without due consideration as to how this will impact on councils and residents.

While the Labor Government is prepared to set goals, it is not willing to spell out its strategy. One example is that while it states it will get 40 per cent of freight off road and on to rail, councils have been left in the dark as to how they will be affected.

There are also great opportunities to develop the ports outside of Sydney. Creating the building blocks of a successful economy through infrastructure will be at the core of the NSW Liberal/Nationals plans in government.

As part of a wider infrastructure plan, we will develop and implement a freight infrastructure strategy that encourages and facilitates greater use of ports such as Newcastle and Port Kembla. It is important that this is done with the necessary integrated planning in order to make sure these growing regions can absorb the additional capacity.

Resourcing and Supporting Communities: Significant challenges which make it harder for councils to provide services as efficiently and effectively as possible include skills shortages, sparsely populated regional and rural areas, and the phenomenon on 'sea change and tree change'. To help local communities face these challenges it is recommended that the State Government:

- Roll out an asset management program by funding the development of an asset management tool and building the capacity of council to apply it.

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition supports robust financial management mechanisms and will cooperate with the Local Government and Shires Associations in developing asset management tools to ensure local governments financial sustainability.

- Roll out programs for expanding Aboriginal people's access to mainstream Local Government professional and technical careers (e.g. Elsa Dixon Program).

The NSW Coalition supports the Elsa Dixon program with its very positive outcomes and will continue to support local government and other community efforts to ensure expanded Aboriginal engagement in local government and technical careers.

- Work with the Associations to implement a voluntary (not compulsory) training program to build on and enhance the skills of councillors.

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition supports voluntary training programs to further enhance the skills of councillors and we are aware of the significant programs that the LGSA already has in place in this regard.

- Express a preference for locally based and controlled not-for-profit organisations providing services (including women's, youth, children, aged, family and Aboriginal services).

It is essential that services are available (where practicable) in the areas where people live and work. The services must be culturally appropriate as well as be able to accommodate a broad spectrum of beliefs and priorities. The NSW Coalition believes that not-for-profit organisations are usually experts in their particular area and there is no need to introduce duplication in services.

- Ensure that young people in regional and rural areas get the same access to cultural services and programs offered by the major NSW cultural institutions to children in metropolitan areas.

Young people in rural and regional areas deserve their fair share of the cultural services and programs offered to their metropolitan counterparts.

The NSW Coalition has committed to:

Investing in our Public Libraries

The NSW Coalition will allocate more resources to local communities to improve quality and accessibility of public library services.

The NSW Coalition will invest \$28 million over four years in public libraries. This represents an increase in funding of 20 per cent each year over those four years and will bring the total state funding for public libraries by the year 2010/2011 to \$52.6 million.

Greener Playgrounds

The NSW Coalition will implement a 'Greener Playgrounds' program to link community environmental mentors with schools interested in 'greening' their playground environments.

\$800,000 will be allocated to the program over 4 years.

Funding of up to \$2,000 per school will be available for the purchase of plants, and other equipment.

A further \$2,500 will be available per school towards the purchase of rainwater tanks and related equipment for water conservation purposes.

- Guarantee all preschool children access to preschool education in the year prior to school.

There is widespread agreement about the benefits of preschool for children yet after over a decade of neglect NSW has the lowest preschool participation rates and the highest fees in Australia.

The NSW Coalition believes that every child should have an opportunity for a preschool educational experience. A NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition Government will help provide a better start for children in NSW by investing more in quality early childhood and preschool services.

We will commit \$362 million over four years to significantly boost affordability and access to NSW preschools for families including:

- A \$217 million injection of funding for pre-schools currently funded through the Department of Community Services;
- \$115 million to boost preschools' capacity to enable more 4 years olds to attend preschool at least 2 days per week to raise the participation rate to nearer the 95 per cent of other states; and
- \$30 million for capital upgrades to improve the quality of pre-school facilities in NSW with funds to be distributed in consultation with the pre-school sector.

In addition to this extra funding we will transfer responsibility for regulation of NSW preschools from the Department of Community Services to the Education portfolio.

These initiatives will help reduce fees for parents, increase participation for children and improve the quality of facilities in NSW preschools

- [Develop programs to promote regional and rural communities.](#)

Regional NSW makes an invaluable contribution to the economic and social fabric of NSW. It deserves a government that believes in its potential and who will fight for its future.

In government, we will have a goal of seeing an additional 100,000 people make a 'tree change' and move to country NSW in the next eight years.

In government, the NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition will have a strong regional development agenda based on a commitment to decentralisation. This is underpinned by a **\$122 million Regional Development Plan**, which includes commitments to:

- Create more jobs and better services in country NSW by increasing regional frontline services and decentralising elements of the NSW Public Service.
- Establish a Real Regional cities Taskforce that focuses on major regional centres;
- Establish a \$120 million *Regions Working Together* Program that resources local communities to implement home grown solutions; and

- Establish an Independent Cross-Border Commission to find solutions to cross border problems.

The **Regional Development Plan** is in addition to NSW Coalition's commitments to improve services and infrastructure in regional areas to both retain and attract more people to regional NSW including:

- Small School Staffing Program – *Investing in Country Education*;
 - Improve the Isolated Patient Transport and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS) – *Supporting Country Patients*;
 - Supporting the Next Generation – *The FirstFarmers' Assistance Scheme*;
 - Securing Water for the Future: *The Country Towns Water Supply and Sewerage Program*;
 - Bridging the Divide – *Rebuilding Country Infrastructure through the Country Timber Bridge Replacement Program*;
 - Preparing Farmers for the Future: *Boosting the AAA FarmBis Program*;
 - Supporting Country Mothers – *Improving Maternity Services in Regional NSW*; and
 - A comprehensive Water Plan to drought proof country NSW
- [Develop programs to address skills shortages.](#)

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition recognises the need to adopt policies that are relevant to improving the skills base at the school level, the apprenticeship and traineeship level, and for mature aged workers.

Addressing the skills shortage in this State will help reverse our lagging economic growth whilst addressing the issue of an ageing and retiring workforce.

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition has developed a \$73 million nine point plan to address the skills crisis and build a stronger economy, including the following initiatives:

1. A new Apprenticeship Incentive Scheme to deliver an additional \$1000 incentive to NSW apprentices to continue their training.
2. The introduction of standard three-year competency-based apprenticeships.
3. Exempting Employers from Workcover Premiums for Apprentices.
4. The permanent extension of vocational education and training opportunities to students in years 9 and 10 in our high schools.
5. An information campaign in high schools to promote skills-based career options.

6. A \$2 million package of measures to promote mathematics, science and engineering studies and ongoing employment in the NSW defence industry.
7. A formal bid to host the 2013 WorldSkills 'Skills Olympics' in NSW.
8. A closer relationship between TAFE NSW and industry.
9. Industry representation on the NSW Skills Council.

For greater detail on the NSW Coalition's **Hands On – Nine Point Plan** to address the skills shortage please visit Peter Debnam's website at www.peterdebnam.com.au.

- [Create specific identified Aboriginal positions in the Department of Local Government to deal with Local Government Aboriginal affairs.](#)

The prerequisites of any appointment to positions within local government are capacity, expertise and knowledge – including an understanding of the Ethnic Affairs Priorities Statements. Where possible, positions involving an understanding of aboriginal culture would be more logically allocated to people of Aboriginal heritage. The NSW Coalition is committed to working with Aboriginal communities to ensure that there are candidates to fulfil such positions.

Transparency and Accountability: While to a large extent the public must rely on the good faith and integrity of public office holders, it is equally important that the public trust is enhanced through transparent and robust accountability measures necessary to safeguard good government and public administration. To achieve this outcome it is recommended that:

- [The Environmental Planning and Assessment Act be amended to repeal recent changes that enable to State Government to take over a council's planning powers without justification.](#)

The NSW Coalition has, on a number of occasions, detailed its disagreement with the Government's introduction and use of Section 3A of the EP&A Act. We opposed the legislation when it was originally introduced.

The NSW Coalition is committed to reforming major projects legislation in NSW. We believe planning and development are best achieved through a partnership of State and Local Government with appropriate community consultation. A system whereby a Minister with no technical planning expertise is given individual control over all major planning decisions is bound to fail.

- [The Inter-Governmental Agreement with Local government include transparent negotiation, consultation and cost/benefit analysis mechanisms concerning legislation or programs affecting local communities.](#)

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition has signed a memorandum of understanding to introduce an inter-governmental agreement as drawn by the LGSA, which includes the conditions of transparent negotiation, consultation and cost/benefit analysis mechanisms concerning legislation or programs affecting local communities.

- Councils be free to choose whether to conduct their own Local Government elections and not be forced to cross-subsidise the costs of the State Electoral Office.

The NSW Coalition welcome submissions from the LGSA on the viability of councils holding such elections and their ability to adequately fund them.

- The transparency and accountability of the remuneration of councillors be enhanced by consideration and determination by the Parliamentary Remuneration Tribunal.

The NSW Coalition supports the separate tribunal system as presently exists.

- The State Budget Papers report on joint State/Local government programs and funding provided to Local Government.

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition supports this policy platform and is committed to the end of cost shifting as presently occurs under the NSW Labor government between state government and local government.