

# Coalition for Local Government Reform



26 February 2013

ATT: Prof Graham Sansom, Chair  
Independent Local Government Review Panel  
Locked Bag 3015  
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By email: [info@localgovernmentreview.nsw.gov.au](mailto:info@localgovernmentreview.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Professor Sansom,

We welcome the release by the Independent Local Government Review Panel of its “Better, Stronger Local Government” paper. All the undersigned organisations believe that ‘good governance’ is at the heart of productivity and that inaction on improving local governance has had a serious impact on NSW and particularly Sydney’s global competitiveness.

Both as a title, and as a guiding principle, Better, Stronger Local Government crystallises the reform mandate across the sector – and the outcomes hoped for by councils, the community, developers and business groups. Change is both long overdue and essential if Sydney is to support sustainable growth that will ensure we can compete as a global city. Now is the time to shed the shackles of the past and re-imagine exactly a modern system of local government with governance systems and scale that can support the growth of metropolitan NSW.

The importance of this reform to the future prosperity and liveability of Sydney cannot be overstated. It has prompted our organisations to come together to identify a position of consensus. While the bodies we represent may hold differing views on the exact model that should be utilised in achieving reform of the sector, we share a common purpose in supporting a new system of local government that features:

- A strong strategic basis to enable big city decision making;
- A stronger, more collaborative and therefore productive partnership between the various tiers of government;
- An alignment between the service delivery functions of local government and functions delivered by other tiers of Government;
- Capabilities to provide both shared and contestable services;
- Deep and lasting cultural change marked by increased professionalism, greater accountability, clearer lines of authority and satisfactory appeal paths;
- Strong, vibrant and healthy local communities;

- An imperative to both support and facilitate growth; and
- Financial sustainability.

Although each of these features are important in and of themselves, all flow from the former - without a strong strategic basis, an effective local governance structure is simply impossible to achieve.

As a first step, it is clear that within Sydney a consolidation of local government areas must be undertaken. While such an undertaking will, by necessity, need to consider the boundaries of current councils, neither the Panel, nor the Government, should be blinkered from the new contexts that many councils now find themselves in. Accordingly, the Government on advice from the Panel must be prepared to completely recast new boundaries which reflect and align the geographic, social and economic contexts of councils with their strategic objectives.

Transport corridors, centres of economic activity, educational institutions, new growth areas and health facilities should all provide guidance on where boundaries should now be cast.

We await the revision of the Metropolitan Strategy for Sydney, which will identify sub-regional centres and projected areas for growth. But that plan will inevitably prompt an examination of whether the boundaries of existing LGAs align with the sub-regional boundaries and align with the strategic imperative of planning for and managing Sydney's growth.

As the strategic foundation for planning within Sydney, we believe the Metropolitan Strategy will provide the overarching evidence basis for the consolidation of Sydney councils in terms of their number and shape. With that said however, for the reason stated above, simply transposing the Metropolitan Strategy's sub regions to operate as new council boundaries will not automatically achieve the sort of strategic alignment required for a modern local governance framework for Sydney. Detailed examination and modification of the sub-regions will need to be undertaken in order to align strategic planning frameworks with council service delivery functions.

Although the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, in deliberating on the Metropolitan Strategy's sub-regions, cannot operate from a mind-set of a "clean slate" in terms of local government boundaries, the Local Government Review Panel can and should. The Panel needs to look at how sub-regions can be modified to ensure that the strategic capacity and service delivery capabilities of local government can be maximised. Once these boundaries have been identified and supported, transposition and alignment of local, state and federal planning and service delivery functions can flow as a result.

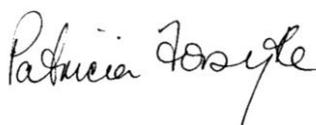
By building a new local governance structure which strategically reflects the geographic, social and economic realities of modern Sydney, the other features we have identified as part of a modern system of local government can be delivered as a consequence.

Our organisations will continue to support the panel in its work in delivering a better, stronger local government sector. We wish also to also note and acknowledge the open and consultative manner in which the process of review has been conducted so far and look forward to working with the Panel as the review progresses.

Yours sincerely,



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