

Thank you for the opportunity to present on the review of the NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022. The Act's primary objectives of disaster prevention, preparedness, adaptation, recovery, and reconstruction are crucial for building community resilience across New South Wales. As the Manager of Infrastructure Strategy and Planning for Wollongong City Council, I am here to share the experiences and challenges faced by our community, particularly in light of the cumulative impacts of natural disasters over the past five years.

Wollongong has endured seven Natural Disaster Declarations in this period, including the significant rain event on April 6, 2024. The support provided by the NSW Reconstruction Authority during these times, especially in facilitating Recovery Centres and engaging with relevant state agencies, has been invaluable. However, while the Act's provisions for recovery and reconstruction have proven effective, there is a pressing need for a stronger emphasis and funding on disaster prevention, preparedness, and adaptation.

Wollongong's unique geography—bounded by the escarpment and Royal National Park to the west and north, and vulnerable to coastal and tidal inundation to the east and south—places us at high risk of natural disasters, including bushfires, floods, and landslips. The reactive asset management necessitated by these frequent disasters is unsustainable. Our \$7.05 billion infrastructure portfolio, encompassing over 182,000 assets, is under constant threat, leading to a cycle of repair and replacement that does not adequately address future risks.

Wollongong City Council has robust planning studies completed or being prepared, which can significantly inform a comprehensive Disaster Adaptation Plan for Wollongong. This plan would allow us to move from a reactive to a proactive stance, fast-tracking support for vulnerable communities and implementing resilient infrastructure that anticipates and mitigates the impacts of future disasters.

Current funding arrangements, particularly the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA), limit our ability to enhance infrastructure to contemporary standards that reduce future risks.

Therefore, we advocate for revisions to the funding guidelines to support not just the replacement of like-for-like infrastructure, but the investment in hardened, resilient assets that align with our local and state planning informed by the latest climate data. Furthermore, we seek streamlined processes and revised guidelines to reduce the administrative burden on councils, enabling us to act swiftly in disaster recovery and preparedness asset management.

The NSW Reconstruction Authority Act has provided a solid foundation for disaster recovery, enhancing its focus on prevention and adaptation, coupled with more flexible and forward-looking funding mechanisms, will better equip communities like Wollongong to withstand and recover from the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters. We stand ready to collaborate with State agencies to development and implement these necessary changes for the resilience of our community.
