

**Submission**

**No 32**

## **INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ACCOMMODATION IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Gosford City Council

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## **Submission to the Inquiry into International Student Accommodation in New South Wales by Gosford City Council**

Gosford City Council welcomes the inquiry into International Student Accommodation in New South Wales as it is one part of the complex issue of appropriate and affordable housing options for the entire community.

As suggested in the guidelines this submission will address each of the Terms of Reference of the Committee.

- 1. The objectives of the Private Member's Bill introduced by the Member for Ryde in the last Parliament (Environmental Planning and Assessment Amendment (Boarding Houses) Bill NSW 2010.*

In relation to the first suggestion of the Bill (Schedule 1, clauses 1 – 3), which would increase the powers of Local Government to enter a premises if they have reasonable grounds to suspect an illegal boarding house without a search warrant; the Bill states that this practice has been implemented in Victoria for a number of years. We would request that a thorough evaluation of the effectiveness and any challenges or barriers of the process would be undertaken before this change was considered in NSW as there are many implications for Council Staff if this was implemented.

In regard to the suggested changes in the Bill for increasing penalties and charges in relation to illegal boarding houses, the changes appear reasonable however these would need to be considered alongside other similar breaches for consistency.

The requirement in the Bill to have boarding houses register with the Department of Fair Trading thereby increasing the rights for tenants is positive and would ensure ongoing protection in line with other tenants across the state. We would see this as a positive change in protecting a group in the community who could be vulnerable and in potentially unsuitable accommodation.

- 2. Factors affecting the supply of and demand for affordable student accommodation and other accommodation used by students, particularly in relation to international students and implications for the export education industry.*

Given that the City of Gosford is pursuing a University in the CBD and, when successful, student accommodation will be a key priority for the area, we welcome initiatives to ensure that the suppliers of such accommodation have appropriate mechanisms in place to ensure the rights of students and the broader community are protected. It is imperative, particularly if students are moving from other areas or countries that the accommodation provided is safe, secure and good value. Practical strategies that can be implemented to protect both owner and tenant are imperative to the long term viability of Universities and the communities they are located in.

*3. The appropriateness of existing standards for affordable student and other accommodation used by students.*

Access to appropriate and affordable accommodation is a significant and growing issue on the Central Coast and appropriate student accommodation is one part of this discussion. As demand for affordable housing increases the opportunities for lower income groups within the community (including students) to be taken advantage of by unscrupulous operators also increases. People are often left with no choice but to live in sub standard conditions, therefore this needs to be part of a much bigger discussion around the availability of appropriate and affordable housing in the community.

*4. Appropriate or minimum standards for student accommodation, and the adequacy of current legislation in ensuring that such standards are achieved.*

Feedback on this issue has been addressed in point one however we would reiterate that reasonable protective processes to protect those that are most vulnerable in the community are a positive step. Getting the balance right between protection and reasonable expectations are a constant challenge and much debate and thought will be required to get this balance right.

*5. The current extent of unauthorised student accommodation operations in NSW.*

This discussion should be considered as part of a broader process that considers the appropriate use of housing as it was intended, approved and built. For example, an issue that faces coastal areas in regards to holiday lettings. This occurs when houses in residential areas are rented as holiday lettings, which is positive for the local tourist and business community until in some cases houses on weekends become party houses with many more people staying in the accommodation than intended. This issue impacts significantly on the quality of life of local neighbours and the amenity of communities.

*6. The appropriate framework for the on-going operation of affordable student accommodation and other accommodation used by students, including the adequacy of local government powers to identify unauthorised operations and enforce compliance with the relevant laws.*

A review of the powers of local government in relation to the identification of and compliance issues for student accommodation is a complex issue which the short timeframe for response to this Bill does not adequately provide for a detailed response. In investigating this issue further it would require a process of evaluation of successful models and consideration of the extra resourcing and training requirements that could be imposed on local government under a new system.