

**INQUIRY INTO INTEGRITY, EFFICACY AND VALUE FOR
MONEY OF NSW GOVERNMENT GRANT PROGRAMS**

Organisation: Wollongong City Council

Date Received: 26 November 2020

Mr David Shoebridge MLC
Chair of the Public Accountability Committee
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Our Ref: Z20/248383
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2020

Dear Mr Shoebridge

Inquiry into integrity, efficacy and value for money of NSW Government grant programs

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Public Accountability Committee's inquiry into the integrity, efficacy and value for money of NSW Government grant programs. This submission relates to part 1a of the Terms of Reference of the inquiry and in particular the inability for Wollongong City Council to apply for the Regional Sports Infrastructure Fund, Regional Cultural Fund and most of the other programs under the Regional Growth Fund.

The NSW Government has previously advised Wollongong City Council that it "uses the Australian Bureau of Statistics definitions of metropolitan and regional centres as the starting point for eligibility in terms of regional programs, however eligibility for each program is based on the policy objectives of the program and the needs of the NSW community as a whole". This has produced inconsistent classification of Wollongong across funding programs, creating uncertainty and inequitable access to funding opportunities.

Wollongong City Council and local community organisations are often excluded from NSW Government funding opportunities due to our LGA being classified as metropolitan. This is unfortunate considering that Wollongong City Council, for example, auspices a number of regional facilities and programs which provide benefit to the Illawarra region, including the Illawarra Performing Arts Centre and Wollongong Regional Art Gallery. We have been ineligible for all but one of Regional Growth Fund programs (except Resources for Regions) and must compete against the large pool of Sydney Councils and Newcastle City Council for Restart NSW funds. Previous analysis found that just 0.22% of the revenue from the sale of NSW public assets had flowed to Wollongong - compared to the 2% share of the NSW economy represented by the LGA.

The Illawarra and the Hunter are the two largest regional economies in NSW and if we are to drive economic growth in these regions it is essential that the areas with the bulk of population and economic activity are not excluded.

Wollongong historically has contributed significantly to the State and National economy through heavy industry, logistics and metallurgical coal production. As a region the Illawarra, and more specifically Wollongong, has been pulling its weight without the corresponding recognition or investment.

It should be noted that Wollongong, Newcastle and Geelong have formed the Gateways Cities Alliance in a bid to capitalise on our shared characteristics and strategic assets. The Alliance recognises the

important contribution these cities make to the Australian economy and how they can play a key role in reducing congestion and enhancing productivity, due to lower housing and land costs, higher density skilled labour markets, city-like amenity and quality education, transport, health and social infrastructure.

The NSW Government is encouraged to reconsider how it classifies Wollongong and Newcastle when determining eligibility for funding programs. In reality both cities sit outside the definition of metropolitan or regional. Establishing a separate classification would recognise the economic and social contribution that each city makes to NSW and may produce a more equitable allocation of NSW government grants. This was discussed and supported at local government level during the Local Government NSW Conference on Monday 23 November.

If you have any further enquiries please contact _____, Executive Officer in the Lord Mayor's Office, on _____.

Yours sincerely

Lord Mayor
Councillor Gordon Bradbery AM
Wollongong City Council