



Institute of  
Public Works  
Engineering  
Australia  
(NSW Division)

8 May 2007

Mr. Ross Woodward  
Deputy Director General  
Department of Local Government  
Locked Bag 3015  
NOWRA NSW 2541

Dear Ross

**Planning a Sustainable Future - Options Paper  
IPWEA (NSW) Submission**

The Department of Local Government published an options paper "Planning a Sustainable Future" in November 2006.

The Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia - IPWEA is a not for profit membership based professional organisation representing engineers and others involved in the provision of public works and services predominantly in the local government sphere.

The Institute's NSW Division, IPWEA (NSW), has prepared this submission on behalf of its members working in the 152 local councils in this State.

The IPWEA (NSW) has reviewed the three options outlined in the paper. IPWEA (NSW) has a preference for Option 3. This option takes a more holistic approach to strategic planning and provides for the impacts of environmental issues, land use planning, infrastructure management and social needs to compete with and complement each other in determining the best allocation of resources to meet community needs.

As one of these options is adopted, the IPWEA (NSW) is willing and keen to participate in implementation through its Board, Staff and member resources. In particular, the Institute can offer support in the mentoring process or as part of a liaison team. The IPWEA also has training packages and publications to assist in the implementation of strategic planning and Asset management plans. These are detailed in the attached submission.

The principal contacts for this submission are:

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For further information in relation to the submission please do not hesitate to contact either Mr Savage or myself.

Yours faithfully



Mark Turner  
**Executive Manager**  
**IPWEA (NSW)**

## Feedback Form



### Integrated Planning and Reporting Options Paper

Organisation Institute of Public Works Engineering (NSW)

Contact Person Mark Turner

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Preferred Option:

Option 1

Option 2

Option 3

Comments: As attached.

## **PLANNING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE - A DLG OPTIONS PAPER IPWEA (NSW) SUBMISSION**

The Department of Local Government published an options paper "Planning a Sustainable Future" in November 2006.

The Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia - IPWEA is a not for profit membership based professional organisation representing engineers and others involved in the provision of public works and services predominantly in the local government sector.

The Institute's NSW Division, IPWEA (NSW), has prepared this submission on behalf of its members working in the 152 local councils in this State.

The Institute is committed to reform and change to ensure a sustainable Local Government sector. This is evidenced by our recent submissions to the following inquiries:

- Independent Inquiry into the Financial Sustainability of NSW Local Government (Allen Report).
- Provision of Infrastructure in Coastal Councils Inquiry.

Subsequent to these contributions, IPWEA is now actively involved in the LGSA "Strengthening Local Government Taskforce " and the various working groups of the taskforce.

IPWEA (NSW) has also made a submission on the Department of Local Government's Position paper "A New Direction for Local Government".

The Institute is also committed and involved in the Department of Local Government's Infrastructure Taskforce and Skill Shortages Taskforce.

Having reviewed the options outlined in the paper, IPWEA (NSW) supports the implementation of Option 3. Our comments, detailed hereunder, are confined to the questions posed in the paper.

## **Key Questions**

This section provides responses to the specific questions raised at the end of the Options Paper. The responses are an amalgam of information provided by many sources: Direct contact with staff from a variety of councils, the combined experience of IPWEA (NSW) Directors and staff and information gained from involvement in a wide variety of committees and meetings.

## **Concepts**

IPWEA (NSW) holds the view that the existing planning and reporting framework is not working and therefore cannot be supported as a future model.

Option 2 adds a 10-20 year Strategic Plan to the existing structure but does not provide for true integration of the planning and reporting framework. It is certainly an improvement on the existing framework but does not encourage strategic planning as a whole of council undertaking.

Option 3 takes a more holistic approach to strategic planning and provides for the impacts of environmental issues, land use planning, infrastructure management and social needs to compete with and complement each other in determining the best allocation of resources to meet community needs. Properly managed, this approach should result in a much more responsive organisation to meet community expectations.

We would suggest that further consideration be given to the connection between the LEP and the Community Strategic Plan. Councils have recently been required to prepare new LEPs in response to planning reforms. Therefore many of these will be completed, or substantially completed, by the time the Community Strategic Plan process would commence for many councils. The opportunity to integrate the two plans during their development is therefore not provided, and in fact the Community Strategic Plan process may be compromised or constrained by the foregoing LEP process.

IPWEA acknowledges that given the current statutory arrangements it would not be easy to integrate the two processes. However we would argue that if the strategic planning process were to be reformed then it would be preferable to include all elements of the plan in a single process. If that cannot be achieved in the short term, it is suggested that Government articulate a way forward so that such a goal can be achieved through legislative amendments at an appropriate future time. The LEP process could be greatly enhanced by being directly linked to a councils holistic planning, rather than being isolated as a land use planning instrument.

To achieve the key element of providing sound infrastructure for a sustainable community, IPWEA strongly suggests that the Community Strategic Plan has a specific requirement to include asset management plans prepared on the basis of a minimum twenty year planning horizon and supported by appropriate long term financial plans.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### *Mayor and Councillors*

The Mayor and Councillors should be responsible for:

- Assisting the General Manager and staff in developing the Community Strategic Plan.

- Working with the General Manager and Senior Staff to determine community needs through an extensive consultative process.
- Signing off on the Community Strategic Plan.
- Allocation of resources in accordance with the Community Strategic Plan and
- Monitoring the performance of the organisation against the Plan.
- Generally they should act as a Board of Directors, accepting responsibility for the outcomes

#### Mayor

The Mayor should be responsible for:

- Ensuring that adequate training and education is available for all Councillors as required to carry out their functions,
- Generating involvement and commitment of all Councillors in the process,
- Working with the GM to implement the Community Strategic Plan in accordance with the needs of the local community.
- Communication of the vision and direction of the Strategic Plan to the community.

#### General Manager

The role of the General Manager in the planning process should be to:

- Provide the key link between Councillors and Council Staff
- Manage (in consultation with the Mayor) the strategic planning process,
- Implement and manage the community consultation process,
- Provide factual and timely data and advice to Councillors to allow sound policy development
- Arrange training and education for Councillors in consultation with the Mayor
- Review the Draft Strategic Plan for completeness and compliance

#### Community Input

The key to accommodating differing points of view from individuals across the community lies in using a robust and transparent community consultation process. The community must be engaged in an honest and meaningful way so that a shared vision can be developed.

The discussion paper "A New Direction for Local Government" identified the complexity of meaningful community engagement. The papers proposal 2.4 suggested a need to develop tools to assist councils in engaging with their communities. This proposal is supported and its relevance to the strategic community planning process is recognised as being very important.

#### Councillors / Council Staff

The successful development of a Community Strategic Plan requires the development of a team approach between Councillors and Council Staff. The elements necessary to achieve this outcome have been dealt with earlier and include Councillor training and education, the availability of sound technical and financial data, a sound community consultation process and an honest approach to solving what is a complex problem.

### Professional Council Staff

The comments made in relation to Councillors and Council Staff are also applicable to the interaction between social, environmental land use planners and asset managers. In the past, specialists in these areas have seen themselves competing for the allocation of limited resources. This competition can compromise teamwork and lead to dysfunctional behaviour. This approach has also led to joint projects having multiple benefits across council functions not being seriously considered.

To overcome these problems there needs to be a wider understanding of the functions of councils and a trust between professionals in determining the best allocation of resources to meet the communities expectations. Different approaches to meeting this challenge might include the creation of multi-disciplinary teams to deliver consultative decision making. The strategic focus of the community planning process should assist in this issue.

### New Councillor Assistance

IPWEA's submission to the discussion paper "A New Direction for Local Government" strongly supported the proposals in regard to elected member training. IPWEA is also of the view that formal strategic planning training is important to assist elected members to be able to effectively contribute to a process such as preparing a Community Strategic Plan.

IPWEA recently developed and produced a DVD and training program entitled "Sustainable Communities: Critical Insights". This DVD was prepared for elected members and focuses on the their stewardship role in regard to community planning and long term infrastructure management. The Department is encouraged to use this resource and others to assist in the development of elected members and council staff.

## **Reporting**

### Streamlining the Annual Report

Reporting is the mechanism through which the Council can inform its local community of the progress made towards completing both the Operational Plan and the Delivery Programme. The requirements should therefore be to simply report on the Council's progress in each of the items in the Operational Plan and the Delivery Plan.

The Annual Report should effectively be a quadruple bottom line report showing the Council's implementation of the Community Strategic Plan. This report should be directly aligned with the Operational Plan and the Delivery Programme and should include sections on financial, environmental, social, and governance performance.

### Catchment Management Authorities

IPWEA (NSW) supports the view that Councils should engage Catchment Management Authorities as part of their community consultation process. Councils and Catchment Management Authorities share common problems and have separate resources, which could be applied much more effectively on a joint venture basis.

### Delivery Programme Reporting

This is effectively dealt with under the heading Streamlining the Annual Report above. As a minimum, the Annual report should include a report on the progress of each item in the Delivery Programme and an indication of the likelihood of the programme being fully completed in the life of the current Council.

### Streamlining of Local Government Act

IPWEA (NSW) concurs with the proposal to remove some of the prescriptive reporting requirements of the Act. To be effective, however, we believe there will need to be the development of a set of industry guidelines.

IPWEA has developed the International Infrastructure Management Manual and is currently developing the National Infrastructure Financial Management Guidelines, which together should form an essential part of any reporting system.

### **Implementation**

#### Adapting the Existing Framework

IPWEA (NSW) supports the view that initial implementation of Option 3 should be by combining the planning and reporting mechanisms (Budget, State of Environment, Social Plan) into a single coherent process. We consider this initial integration will require some additional resources but will free future resources through not having to maintain a number of parallel planning and reporting processes.

#### Training / Information / Assistance

As indicated earlier in this submission and in our submission to the "New Directions for Local Government" paper, IPWEA strongly supports the need for training and information to assist in the sector. In fact that is of course a primary function of the IPWEA.

IPWEA therefore has the expertise and experience to assist the Department of Local Government and the sector generally in a wide range of Council learning and development tasks, particularly in relation to service delivery and infrastructure management.