

**Southern Councils Group**  
 Submission to the  
 Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Public Works

**INFRASTRUCTURE PROVISION IN COASTAL GROWTH AREAS**

**Introduction:**

The Southern Councils Group (SCG), formerly the Illawarra Region of Councils, is the peak organisation representing Local Government in the Illawarra and South Coast regions. Member Councils include Bega Valley Shire, Eurobodalla Shire, Kiama Municipal, Shellharbour City, Shoalhaven City, Wingecarribee Shire and Wollongong City Councils.

The Terms of Reference for the above Inquiry encompass issues of immediate and ongoing concern to all member Councils of SCG but in fact in the definition exclude Wollongong and Wingecarribee Councils.

While welcoming the current Inquiry for recognizing the necessity of addressing infrastructure provision in coastal growth areas, local government is somewhat dismayed at the plethora of studies, strategy developments, inquiries and reports (State, Federal, and Regional) that are currently examining similar issues to those raised by this Inquiry. They are fearful of neglecting to contribute to any of these in case it means their communities and interests are consequently overlooked.

**Terms of Reference:**

Local government is at the coalface of dealing with the growth faced in coastal areas. The major regional factors affecting SCG identified member Councils under the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry are:

1. *Key coastal population growth and urban consolidation trends in NSW*  
 More than 1 in 3 people on the South Coast will be over 65 by 2031. At the same time the median age and the dependency ratio for these areas is also alarming as illustrated by the following figures extracted from the DIPNR New South Wales Statistical Local Area Population projections 2001-20031 (2004 release)

<b>Council area</b>	<b>Aged 65+</b>	<b>Dependency ratio</b>	<b>Median age</b>
<b>Sydney</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>52.0</b>	<b>39</b>
Shoalhaven Part B ....	35.3%	96.3	56
Eurobodalla .....	37%	97.1	57
Bega Valley.....	34.9%	94.6	56

*Only the mid-north coast profile is comparable to that of the South Coast. The profile describes whole communities dominated by older people, with a heavy burden of care placed on the insufficient numbers of younger workers. This profile has enormous implications for delivery of services, both for the affected areas and for the regional service centres such as Wollongong, Queanbeyan, and Nowra. It begs the*

*question of whether these predictions should be accepted and planned for, or whether positive steps to reverse the trends should be put into place.*

*The current economic development strategies of our member councils are designed to ensure balanced sustainable growth takes place. These strategies seek to create attractive environments for investment and employment that complement the lifestyle opportunities available in the region and which may in turn retain and attract younger skilled workers. Should the State Government be doing much more to assist local government in this process?*

## **2. Short and long term needs for basic infrastructure**

The poor condition of the only major transport spine servicing the region is the major identified short and long term infrastructure need.

*The Princes Highway is the only transport link from the northern end of the Shoalhaven to the Victorian Border. There is no train line at all. The Highway has just been audited by the NRMA and is described as of the worst standard in NSW. ( see <http://www.mynrma.com.au>) The worst sections of road commence in the Shellharbour area. The social and economic considerations of this state of affairs are anecdotally catastrophic and SCG is working with its partner organizations in PHocus on the preparation of an economic analysis to confirm the impacts.*

*While the State Government has committed to a program of improvements by 2010, the current rate of expenditure will only see alleviation of the very worst sections. In the absence of any alternative routes or transport modes from Nowra to the Border, the Highway assumes greater significance than the Pacific Highway for example, which is mirrored by a rail line. Communities all along the route of the Princes Highway depend solely on it for import and export of goods and products, access to regional centres for employment health and education, and for connectivity with each other.*

**In addition, the rail infrastructure serving the region has acknowledged shortcomings.**

*These include*

- *lack of electrification from Kiama to Bomaderry (the northern end of Shoalhaven).*
- *the structural alignment of the South Coast line in the "Thirroul Tunnel" area.*
- *Recent advice from the Minister's Parliamentary Secretary suggests that there are "no plans at this stage to pursue further investigations for South Coast rail options" SCG would have expected that these studies would have formed part of the Coastal Strategies Transport Study currently being undertaken through DIPNR's Transport Planning Division.*

## **Water, Sewerage, Telecommunications and Energy infrastructure**

*As will have been noted in member Council individual submissions, constraints on this infrastructure are a major constraint on growth, as is being recognized all along the coast.*

*In addition the weather patterns, geology and geography of the South Coast contribute to substantially increased pressures from stormwater runoff, coastal hazard, wind storm events, intermitterntly opening and closing lakes and lagoons(ICOLLS) and recent drought conditions than may be a factor in other parts of NSW. These pressures increase LG prevention, clean-up, and management costs.*

### **Human Services Infrastructure**

Once again, the geographic layout of the South Coast places unusual stresses on the provision of regional human services infrastructure. The location of the major regional centre of Wollongong at the far north of the South Coast constrains service delivery and places increased pressures on the inadequate transport infrastructure. It also increases the burden of services demanded at sub-regional centres and within local communities who rightly expect a measure of equity of access.

3. *Coordination*
4. *Best Practice*
5. *Management*

Local Government in this area is leading the way in NSW in working to address its communities' needs by undertaking effective coordination, employing best practice approaches and managing social, environmental and economic considerations.

*Examples ...*

*SCG joint projects, info sharing and partnerships,  
Council commercial enterprises and partnerships such as airports, retirement villages, land development, environmental initiatives and  
recognized best practice approaches such as Eurobodalla's Integrated Water Cycle management, etc*

It is hampered by lack of resources, lack of infrastructure finance and perceptions in State and Federal Government central agencies that the NSW North Coast is more needy than the significant triangle between Sydney Melbourne and Canberra. This is despite significant evidence to suggest the need is at least as great if not greater in the South Coast.

*Examples.....*

**Lack of resources** ..*Cost-shifting, rate-pegging, increased planning costs, increasing asset maintenance etc.*

**North Coast Resourcing** ...*Commitments by State and Federal Governments to Pacific Highway*

*Pacific Highway duplication by rail line*

Paradoxically, coastal areas such as the mid-north coast and the far south coast of NSW are strongly partnered with other like affected areas around Australia to develop their case for competing with the major metropolitan areas of Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne for scarce State and Federal resources and in attracting major infrastructure out of already overloaded inner city locations for the benefit of all.

*Examples ...*

*Membership and participation in Seachange, SEATS,  
Illawara regional linkages with Newcastle re Ports,*

**Conclusion:**

SCG Member Councils welcome the Inquiry if it can result in better resources for them to undertake the initiatives that they are more than aware are necessary and if it alerts State Government to the need to address the deficiencies of current arrangements.

The community needs to be engaged in the debate about the current population profile forecasts and whether they are prepared to accept and plan for the "Brave New World" that these forecasts describe or be resourced to intervene.

This submission has been kept very brief as the Inquiry is referred to the significant body of study being undertaken at both local and regional levels around the issues it is examining.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lesley Scarlett', written in a cursive style.

Lesley Scarlett  
Executive Officer  
Southern Councils Group